

## NT 123C: A Survey of the New Testament

### Lesson 1

Read: *New Testament Survey* by Gromacki, pp 1-66. Supplemental material included with this lesson. Matthew chapters 1 through 14.

A knowledge of the Bible is an integral part of a basic education. A student should never consider himself educated until he has a good knowledge of the Bible. Never should a survey course be undertaken without the reading of the primary and most important source—the New Testament itself. You are encouraged to read the entire New Testament during this study as well as the textbook—*New Testament Survey* by Gromacki.

In a survey of the New Testament the student should be exposed to information concerning the literary, political, social and economic world of the first century.

The New Testament was written over a period of sixty-five years—approximately A. D. 30-95. The word “testament” means an arrangement made by one party with the understanding that it can be accepted or rejected by another party. Once it has been accepted, however, both parties are bound by its terms. 1)

In the New Testament, God has chosen to reveal His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and in Him the reader can have redemption through His precious blood. Jesus Christ reveals God’s love and holiness for fallen humanity and He shows how depraved man can finally have fellowship with this loving and holy God. The New Testament consists of twenty-seven “books” written by eight or nine different authors. These books are biographical, historical, doctrinal, personal and prophetic in character.

The books in the New Testament are not arranged in chronological order (written according to time) (see: textbook, page 47). The first four books give a biography of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Acts of the Apostles relates the history of the early church. Romans through Jude are epistles (letters) written either to individuals or churches. The final book (Revelation) deals with the future and is highly symbolic in style. All of the books of the New Testament were written in Koine Greek. This was the language spoken by the common people of Jesus’ day.

### Why Study the New Testament?

1. An intellectual and moral reason - so much of mankind’s culture has been influenced by the principles of the Savior and the apostles that no one can be well-educated without a knowledge of the New Testament.

2. A theological reason - in the New Testament, man can find the divinely inspired account of Jesus’ redemptive mission for lost mankind. Contained therein is the standard of belief and practice for the Church.

3. A devotional reason - the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, uses the New Testament to bring lost man to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the Bible contains the prescription for living and growing in the knowledge and wisdom of God through His Son, Jesus Christ, 2).

## **The World Into Which Jesus Came**

Jesus did not make His appearance in a vacuum but rather into a world that had been in existence for four thousand years or more. He came into a world steeped in paganism, a world that was undergoing political unrest, and a world that needed redemption.

### **Paganism**

The Gentiles were animists; that is, they worshiped gods of their own making. They saw a god in everything. They personified the forces of nature with which they had to deal. There were gods of the field, forest, harvest and the various businesses. These all received homage from the farmer and the city dweller as well. Within the Greek culture there were deities in the Pantheon - Jupiter, Juno, Poseidon, Pluto, Neptune and others. The Romans worshiped and deified their rulers. This paganism ran counter to the worship of the Lord Jesus Christ and in some cases there was a conflict between Christianity and paganism.

### **Occultism and Philosophies**

Some of the people were very superstitious. There were widespread beliefs in magic, augury, astrology, and exorcism. The various philosophies introduced into the culture were epicureanism, stoicism, cynicism and skepticism.

### **Judaism**

The worship of one God, Jehovah, had its roots and foundation in the Old Testament. It was unique in that the worshipers of Jehovah God were definitely monotheistic; that is, they worshiped God exclusively. No other worship was tolerated by Jehovah God. As the basis of their beliefs, these worshipers accepted the writings of Moses and the prophets. In fact Christianity is the child of Judaism, so some understanding of Judaism is necessary in order to be well-versed on the subject of Christianity and the New Testament.

The synagogue, the place where Christianity was introduced to the Jewish people, had its probable beginning during the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity. A typical synagogue service included an antiphonal recitation of the Shema, prayer, singing of psalms, readings from the Hebrew Old Testament (law and prophets), a sermon (commentary on the Scriptures) and a benediction. 3)

Within Judaism there were a number of sects: Pharisees, who were the "Puritans" of their day; Sadducees, the priestly cast; the Essenes, who were an ascetic brotherhood; and the Zealots, a group of nationalists who had as their main goal the overthrow of Rome.

### **Political Unrest**

The world during Jesus' day was under the dominion of the Roman government. Going back several hundred years, however, the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Greeks had greatly influenced civilization. During that period called the "silent years" when no Scriptures were written and God's prophets were silenced, Alexander the Great was busy seeking new territories to conquer and was in the process of spreading his Greek culture and language throughout the known world. This Greek trade and colonization was known as Hellenism or Hellenization. It was during this period that the Greek language became popular and it was spoken by most of the civilized world. God had been overseeing the world and preparing it for the coming of the New Testament which was to be written in the common language of the people.

With the fall of the Greeks under Alexander's successors, the Romans were able to subdue all opposition and install their form of control over the land of Palestine and other countries of the Middle East. The chart of Roman rulers that were in power during the first century is found on page 14 of the textbook. These Roman rulers permitted vassals to rule the various provinces and the most prominent to rule the land of Palestine during Christ's time was Herod the Great. It was he who ruled during Jesus' birth (from 37 to 4 B.C.). His successors Herod Philip, Herod Antipas, and Archelaus figure prominently in the history of Christianity.

## The World in Need of Redemption

Under the “boot” of Greek and Roman domination, it is no wonder that the Jews were looking for a Messiah, someone who could lead out in the overthrow of the oppression which they had experienced for many years. During periods of unrest, various Jewish zealots would arise and command a following since they were looking for a deliverer; these men arose claiming to be the Messiah, but they were usually murdered or met death in other ways.

It was into this culture that the Lord Jesus Christ came seeking to show the people who Jehovah God was and what He was like. One of the reasons that Jesus was not accepted as the Messiah by the majority of the Jewish people, was the fact that He did not set up a literal kingdom and rule while He was on earth. This seems to be one of the reasons for Jesus’ betrayal by Judas. Judas was looking for a literal, reigning Messiah and Jesus disappointed him. Of course, he was selfish and desired to rule and reign with Jesus in His kingdom.

## The Text of the New Testament

Not only does the conservative scholar believe that the Bible is inspired of God, but he must also believe that in some way Jehovah God supervised and guided the early church in its evaluation of the various books of the Bible. Those that were inspired of God were placed in the canon of Scripture. Generally speaking, those books that were written by individuals who had first hand knowledge of Jesus or those who associated very closely with the apostles and disciples of Jesus were accepted as inspired of God. “Most readers who will compare the sub-apostolic writings and the New Testament apocrypha with the canonical books of the New Testament will heartily endorse the critical judgment of the early Christians.” 4)

Matthew, John, Paul and Peter were apostles while Mark was an associate of both Peter and Paul. Luke was a companion of Paul while James and Jude were half brothers of Jesus Himself and associates of the apostles soon after Jesus’ crucifixion.

The Old Testament was originally written in the Hebrew and Aramaic while the New Testament was written in Greek. Although none of the original manuscripts are now in existence, one can be reasonably sure, based upon the early versions or translations and upon the quotations in the writings of the early church fathers, that the text has not been profaned. Most of all, one can accept the fact that Jehovah God has superintended the translations to some extent.

Many translations of the New Testament were written before it came down to us in the English form. John Wycliff translated from the Latin into the English in 1382. William Tyndale translated the New Testament into English from the Greek in 1525. The King James (or Authorized) Version was translated in 1611. Since that time many other versions and translations have come down to us - the English Revised Version (1881), the American Standard Version (1901), the Revised Standard Version (1946), the New English Bible (1961), and the New American Standard Bible (1963).

## Reference Notes

- 1) Merrill C. Tenney, **New Testament, An Historical and Analytic Survey**, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, p. 21.
- 2) Robert H. Gundry, **A Survey of the New Testament**, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, p. xvi.
- 3) Gundry, op.cit. p. 41.
- 4) Ibid, p. 56