

Our Daily Bread Christian University
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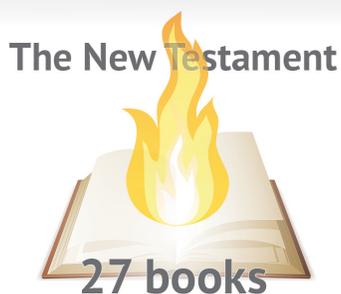


The New Testament completes the story begun in the Old Testament. It tells about the coming of Jesus Christ, the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. Even though He didn't write a word of it, the New Testament is His book. It records His teachings and the story of His life, death, and resurrection. His followers claimed to write and speak with an authority granted by God. This book has had a more profound and controversial impact on the world than any other book ever written.

Millions Have Loved It. Down through the centuries, people imprisoned by sin have found life and freedom through faith in the One the New Testament was written to proclaim. Those who have been held captive by bars and walls, such as Fyodor Dostoevski in Siberia and the inmates of concentration camps, have found freedom of mind, heart, and soul through its words. People enchained in broken bodies, or shackled by physical suffering, or tortured by the unseen enemy, or enslaved in spiritual darkness, or bound by relentless legalism, or crippled by a fearsome self-doubt have responded by faith to its message of freedom. They have stepped into the light of God's liberating, never-changing love, as expressed in the New Testament.

Millions Have Hated It. Emperors like Nero and Diocletian tried to destroy the New Testament. Philosophers like Voltaire have proclaimed it to be a dead book of lies. Social scientists have scoffed at the solutions to man's problems set forth by the humble Galilean. Modernists and futurists have labeled its morals as hopelessly outdated and proclaimed it to be a book for the past—a book without the power to make an impact on the world in the 21st century.

Even so, the New Testament lives on. The same burning message that conquered the Roman world, lit the fires of the Reformation, and ignited the great revivals of the 19th century continues to burn with liberating brightness.



Why is this collection of 27 books written in the last half of the first century by a few zealous followers of the Jewish Messiah having such an impact? Because it is part of the Bible, the one book in all the world that can bring us to God. The gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to break every chain that binds us. Yes, the New Testament brings God to us and it can bring us to Him. Through it, we can know Him in a personal, liberating, growing way.

The Background of the New Testament

God had been silent for 400 years. The devout of Israel had waited in vain for God to speak again and for their anticipated Messiah to come. But nothing had been revealed since the prophet Malachi put down his pen, finishing the Old Testament. Then in sudden, bold, broad-sweeping strokes, God revealed Himself in two ways: (1) through the coming of Jesus Christ, His Son, and (2) through the writing of the New Testament.

The world had changed greatly during those 400 years of silence. Palestine itself was vastly different from those struggling days when Jewish zealots returned from Babylon to reconstruct their temple and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

To understand the impact of Christ's coming and the background of the New Testament, we need to acquaint ourselves with political, social, economic, and religious forces that were alive in the world into which the Lord Jesus was born.

The Roman World. Rome was the dominant force in the first-century world. Its armies had marched with power and precision across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, bringing nation after nation under its control. Palestine had fallen to General Pompey in 63 BC. Though taxed heavily, Israel benefited from Roman rule:

- **Peace.** The world was at peace in the days of the New Testament.
- **Government.** The emperor had the power to force reigning governors to rule well. In many cases this kept them from amassing great private wealth at the expense of the people.

- **Travel.** Because of the Roman peace, people could travel freely from country to country.
- **Communication.** The flow of information was the best the world had ever known. Because of these factors, Christianity got a firm foothold and grew rapidly under Roman rule.

Greek Influence. Although the Greek Empire had collapsed before New Testament days, it was still a powerful world influence in the following ways:

Language. Alexander the Great's lightning-fast conquests (331–322 BC) made Greek the dominant language of the civilized world. When the Romans conquered territory, they encouraged its continued use. This benefited Christianity because: (1) a common language made the spread of the gospel easier, and (2) the New Testament was written in Greek and could be understood by everyone.

Culture. The Greek mind confronted basic questions about man, life, and the supernatural. The Greek poets, dramatists, and philosophers had thereby prepared the way for the satisfying answers Christianity brought to a searching and dissatisfied world.

Jewish Background. The Jewish background of the New Testament was important because: (1) Christianity was born in a Jewish environment, and (2) Christianity was rooted in what God had already made known to His people through the Old Testament.

When Christ was alive, Judea was governed by officials appointed by Rome. Even so, the Jews were left to run their own internal affairs. They did so through the Sanhedrin, a ruling body of 70 whose leader was the high priest.

The religious life of Israel was centered in two institutions. The first was the temple, which had recently been rebuilt by Herod the Great. It was a magnificent structure, constructed to appease the Jews. Old Testament rituals were elaborately carried out by devout Jews from all walks of life. The second, the synagogues, were centers of worship and instruction scattered throughout

The Temple in Jerusalem



The Synagogue in Capernaum



By Gidon Goren (INEICC) CC BY-SA 3.0 http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Capernaum_Synagogue.jpg

the land. Their services were simple, consisting of prayer, Scripture reading, and explanation. Jewish boys were educated in synagogues, and their learning was primarily religious. It was into this combination of Roman rule, Greek thought, and Jewish tradition that Jesus was born and Christianity took root.