

The New Testament

Review:

The Bible is in two big sections: Old and New Testaments.

Testament: The word testament means covenant. More precisely it refers to a very one sided treaty, such as a strong nation would make with a weaker nation.

The Old Testament: “The” Old Testament is the treaty made at Mount Sinai between Jehovah God and the ancient Israelites (not Gentiles, not Christians and not modern Jews). Moses was the mediator. It contained over 600 laws, including the 10 commandments.

Today we’ll begin an overview of the New Testament.

Arrangement of New Testament Books

Sections: What are the big three sections of the Old Testament? The three sections are history (17 books), poetry (5 books) and prophecy (17 books). It is no accident that it is laid out in this way. The early church did that for us.

The New Testament is laid out in a similar fashion (i.e.: grouped according to the type of literature that it is). Look at your table of contents for the New Testament (turn to it in your Bible). Just like there are three big sections to the Old Testament, so also there are three sections of the New Testament.

The 1st Section (5 books)

Look at the first 5 books in your table of contents. This is easy! What type of literature are they?

Just as the 1st section of Old Testament contains the historical books, so too the 1st section of the New Testament is composed of historical books.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John = history of Jesus. Each Gospel is named after the person who wrote it.

Acts = history of early church/history of apostles

The 2nd Section (13 books)

Now, next section is a little harder to figure out. Look at your table of contents. The second section runs from Romans through to Titus. **What do all these books have in common?** They were all written by the Apostle Paul. They are called Paul’s epistles.

What is an “epistle”? **Joke:** We all know that Noah’s wife was Joan of Arc (ark). Similarly, an epistle is the wife of an Apostle ~ not! Epistle is just another word for “letter.” However, theologians say “epistle” instead of “letter” to make them sound Big and Important (!).

So, the second section is all the stuff Paul wrote.

Two Parts: This 2nd section with Paul’s writings has **13 books** and can be divided into **2 parts:** a & b.

2a. Part 2a goes from Romans to 2 Thessalonians (9 epistles). Read the names of the books together with me aloud: **ROMANS, 1 & 2 CORINTHIANS, GALATIANS, EPHESIANS, PHILIPPIANS, COLOSSIANS, 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS.**

Trick Question: Are these the names of people, or places? These are all people named after the place they live. Paris is a city; a Parisian is a person who lives in Paris. Rome is a city; a Roman is a person who lives in Rome. Paul wrote to the church in each of the places (all are cities but one, Galatia). Thus the first section is Paul's letters to entire churches.

2b. Part 2b contains the next 4 books: **1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.**

Did Timothy, Titus and Philemon write these four letters or did they read these letters? Whereas Matthew wrote the Gospel of Matthew, Titus only read Titus. These four letters were written *to* these three specific men. The 4 letters in 2b are to particular *individuals*. The previous letters (in 2A, Ro - 2Th) were written to entire *churches*.

Summary: The 2nd section of the New Testament contains all of Paul's writings.

Part 2a = To specific churches, such as the church in Rome or Corinth.

Part 2b = To specific individuals: Timothy, Titus or Philemon.

Fun Fact: Each book in Paul's collection is arranged from longest to shortest; coincidence? I do not know, but it is true!

The 3rd Section

The 3rd section of the New Testament starts with Hebrews and through to the last book, Revelation. Look at your table of contents and say the names of these books with me: **HEBREWS, JAMES, 1 PETER, 2 PETER, 1 JOHN, 2 JOHN, 3 JOHN, JUDE, REVELATION.***

* Look at the name of the last book in your Table of Contents. **Is it singular or plural?** It is not the book of Revelations (plural), it is Revelation (singular). It is *the* revelation of Jesus Christ.

Puzzle: This 3rd section is a little harder to figure out. Hebrews is an ethnic group, and James, Peter, John and Jude are different people. **Was the book of James written to James (like the book of Timothy was written to Timothy), or was James the author of the book?** James wrote it.

How about Peter: Author or Reader? Peter wrote 1 & 2 Peter.

John: Author or Recipient? John was the author.

Jude: Did he write it or read it? Jude wrote this book that bears his name.

So, unlike the 2nd section, these books do not have a common author. They must have something else in common. . . . Paul was an apostle (missionary) to non-Jews. Accordingly, most of his writings are to Gentile believers. But these other guys (Peter, James, Jude, John) worked mainly among the Jewish Christians, much in their letters are Jewish in flavor and perspective.

The book of Hebrews was clearly written to Jewish believers. Who did James and Peter and John and Jude write to (Who were their readers)? See *James 1:1, 1Peter 1:1*. Both wrote to Jewish Christians outside Judea, scattered all over the Roman Empire (called the “dispersion”). Jude makes many references to the Hebrew Scriptures and even the Apocrypha. Revelation is arguably God’s divorce papers against apostate Judaism.

1. This section contains all the letters that were not written by Paul.
2. Further, this 3rd section has a heavy emphasis on Jewish believers. For example, look at the first book’s name: *Hebrews*.

Section Summary: The New Testament has 3 parts:

1. History, 5 books
2. Paul’s letters, Gentile believers.
3. Everybody else’s letters, Jewish believers.

Another way to look at it is like this:

1. History, 5
2. Apostle’s writings/letters, 21 books
3. Prophecy, 1 book (Revelation)

The New Covenant Predicted

******Our study of the New Testament needs to start in the Old Testament. What did the LORD declare that He would make (Jeremiah 31:31-32)?** He declared that He would make a “new” covenant, 31:31.

With whom would this new covenant be made (Jer 31:31)? The text states that it will be with Israel and Judah, 31:31b (whoever that is; more below).

At the time of Jeremiah’s prophecy, to what did Israel and Judah (Jer 31:31) refer? See *2 Chronicles 10 & 11*. This was a reference to the northern (Israel — ten tribes) and southern (Judah — two tribes) Hebrew kingdoms. When Jeremiah wrote this (around 550 B.C.), the northern kingdom of Israel was no longer in existence. It had long ago been destroyed by the Assyrians (in 722 B.C.). In New Testament times the geographical area that comprised former Israel was known as Samaria (the name of Israel’s destroyed capitol city). Also, it is likely that by the time Jeremiah wrote chapter 31 Judah had already been defeated by the Babylonians (Jer 29:1-2). Thus, Jeremiah’s use of these terms would seem to be an idealized way of referring to God’s people in general, since both nations had ceased to exist as national entities.

Insight: On the surface, this sounds as if the new covenant would be yet another Hebrew centric affair (with no involvement of Gentiles). However, God’s expressed purpose had always been to eventually include Gentiles in His family. Thus God promised Abraham:

ESV **Genesis 12:3** . . . in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

The New Covenant started out with Hebrew believers, but quickly spread to include the Gentile believers.

ESV **Romans 1:16** . . . I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Application: What matters is that you are a spiritual descendant of Abraham (having the same faith Abraham had). In this sense the church is spiritual Israel, the true Israel, made up of those with Abraham's faith, regardless of ethnic heritage.

According to Jeremiah 31:32, what will this new covenant *not* be like? See *Exodus 19:1-6*. It will not be like the covenant made at Mount Sinai.

According to 31:32, what had the people done to the covenant? They had broken it.

What does the name "new" (31:31) imply about the broken covenant (31:32)? The adjective "new" implies discontinuity. Jeremiah specifically stated that the new covenant is "not like" the broken covenant. This is a new deal. It is radically different. There is covenantal discontinuity but redemptive continuity (God's people have always and only been saved by faith).

What's In A Name? The Sinai covenant is old in contrast to the new one predicted by Jeremiah. Hence the name, "old" covenant (as in Old Testament). Scripture goes on to repeatedly refer to the things of the Sinai covenant as the "old." For example, when speaking of unbelieving Jews reading the Law of Moses, Paul wrote:

ESV **2 Corinthians 3:14** . . . they read the old covenant . . .

Thus it is quite biblical to state that the Bible is in two big sections: The Old Testament and the New Testament.

******Based on Jeremiah 31:33, what would be different about the new covenant?** God's law would be written on their hearts. We know this as the law of Christ (1Co 9:21, Ga 6:2).

Where had the old covenant's law been written (Jer 31:33)? See *Exodus 24:12*. God's law had previously been engraved on tablets of stone, where it had often been ignored by the Hebrews.

******Based on Jeremiah 31:34, what else that would be different about the new covenant?** Everyone in the New Covenant would **1)** know the Lord and **2)** his sins would be forgiven.

How was it possible to be involved with the old covenant and yet not know the Lord (31:34)? The Sinai covenant was a national covenant made with the whole nation. A person could be a citizen of the nation and subject to its laws, without actually knowing the Lord, just like a person can be a citizen of the United States without believing in capitalism or the private ownership of property.

Unlike the old covenant, the new covenant would be made with individual believers rather than an entire nation. It is not possible to be party to the new covenant without knowing the Lord.

Review: In Jeremiah 31:34b, what other blessing does the new covenant offer that the old one never did? Unlike the old covenant, the new covenant will offer the forgiveness of sins.

ESV **Romans 3:20** . . . by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

ESV **Acts 13:38-39** . . . through . . . [Jesus] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

Summary: What did we learn about the prophesied “new” covenant (Jer 31:31-34)?

- Made with Israel and Judah (descendants of Abraham?).
- “Not like” the old covenant (“new” implies discontinuity).
- Law of New Covenant written on hearts, not stone.
- Everyone in covenant will know the LORD (individual, not national).
- Promises the forgiveness of sins.

The New Covenant Fulfilled

****** At the Last Supper, what did Jesus say the bread and the wine represent (Luke 22:19-20)?**
Jesus said the bread represents His body and the wine represents the “new” covenant in His blood.

The covenant Jesus made on the cross was the fulfillment of Jeremiah 31. Referring to them as the first covenant and the second covenant, Hebrews 8 quotes Jeremiah 31 and applies it to Jesus’ death on the cross.

Purpose: The purpose of the New Covenant is to make the forgiveness of sins possible (just as Jeremiah had said).

ESV **Matthew 26:28** . . . this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

How can you become party to the New Covenant? How can you get your name on the contract? Good News: You don’t have to be Jewish (it has nothing to do with your ethnic heritage)! All you have to do is have the same faith that Abraham had.

ESV **Genesis 15:6** [Abraham] believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

ESV **Romans 1:16** . . . I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes . . .

ESV **John 3:16** . . . God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Each biblical covenant had a sign to remind people of their covenant obligations (rainbow, circumcision, Saturday Sabbath). What in Luke 22:19 indicates that the Lord's Supper is the sign of the new covenant? The purpose of a covenantal sign is to cause a remembrance of the covenant, as in Genesis 9:16. Thus, since the eating of the Lord's Supper is to serve as a "remembrance," the Lord's Supper is the sign of the new covenant. (Water baptism is an initiation rite into the new covenant community).

The New Covenant: A Last Will & Testament

*******In what sense is the new covenant actually the last will and testament of Jesus (Hebrews 9:15-17)?** A will only goes into effect when the person who made it dies. So too the new covenant only went into effect when Jesus died.

The word covenant is found in Hebrews 9:15 and the word will is found in 9:16. How is a covenant (9:15) different from a will (Heb 9:16)? Both are legal documents:

a) Generally speaking, a covenant is a contract between two parties. The contract reflects each party's will. For instance, if you draw up a sales contract for a house, it basically says that if I give you my money you will in exchange give me your house.

b) A last will and testament is the expression of only one person's desire or will. Notice that the word "will" is in the singular; it is not wills (plural) but rather will (singular). That's why it is called a will (singular). A last will and testament is unilateral (BAGD, p. 183; NBD, p. 240). It is a legal document representing one person's will; it is not dependent of the consent of the heirs.

Teacher's Note: Both "will" and "covenant" are from the same Greek word, *diathéké*. A will is an extreme version of a *diathéké*. This word (*diathéké*) was used commonly throughout the Roman Empire to refer to a person's last will and testament (Bruce, *Hebrews*, p. 211).

What's In A Name? The New Covenant is called new in contrast to the old and in fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy. We also refer to it not simply as the new covenant but the New Testament because it is a true Testament: the last will and testament of Jesus. It is a rather one sided treaty. God had made us a deal we can't refuse!

The word inheritance is found in 9:15. What is an inheritance? An inheritance is something that is left to you when someone else dies. The new covenant is also like a will in that it has an "inheritance" (9:15). The benefits of the New Testament are free (you don't have to work for an inheritance).

What is the inheritance of the New Testament? What is it that we inherit? Jesus' death gave us the inheritance of eternal life, the forgiveness of our sins.

ESV **Romans 5:9** . . . we have now been justified by his blood . . .

ESV **Ephesians 1:7** . . . we have redemption through his blood . . .

ESV **1 John 1:7** . . . the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin

Based on Hebrews 9:15, who is qualified to receive the promised eternal inheritance? Upon his death, Jesus left the promised eternal inheritance (9:15) to those who are called (that is, His heirs). Only those who have been called may receive the inheritance. You have to be named in the will.

The Arminian view is that your faith causes you to be named; you determine if you are named or not. They posit that God looked ahead in time to see who would believe and based on what He saw He named them in the will.

The Calvinist view is that you will not believe unless you are named; God alone determines who is named. The person named in a will usually has no say in the matter what so ever. Jesus alone determines who is and who is not named in the will. And, unlike a covenant between two parties, the New Testament is one-sided. The terms of the will are going to be fulfilled without any requirement on the part of those named as heirs. God sovereignly works to bring to faith those who have been “called” (9:15).

So What?

15. What is the promise/purpose of the new covenant? The promise of the new covenant is the forgiveness of sins.

16. Who are the parties to the new covenant? Jesus is the mediator and anyone He has “called” as an heir of salvation (anyone who has the faith of Abraham). The new covenant is thus individualistic, not nationalistic.

17. Is the new covenant conditional or unconditional? Why? It is a covenant of grace and is totally unconditional. It is based on promise not law. If there is any condition, it is that of faith. However, depending on your view of predestination, it could be seen as totally unconditional if even faith is the result of grace. (**The issue is simple:** Does a person receive grace because he has faith or does he have faith because he received grace?)

18. What is the sign of the covenant? Arguably it is the Lord’s Supper because the Supper is to serve as a reminder.

19. What is the duration of the new covenant? It is eternal (eternal life is offered, not ten year life, not fifty year life). The inheritance is everlasting (Heb 9:15).

2. In what sense was the new covenant made with Israel and Judah (Jer 31:31)? See *Matthew 15:24, Romans 1:16, 4:9-12, Galatians 3:7, 28-29*. The new covenant has distinctive ethnic Hebrew roots. Jesus Himself was, of course, Jewish; the twelve apostles were Jewish, for decades the early church was composed almost totally of Jewish believers; the readers of the letter to the Hebrews were Jewish. Jesus said:

ESV **Matthew 15:24** I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Paul said:

ESV **Romans 1:16** . . . the gospel . . . is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Even though almost all the initial converts to Christianity were Jewish, when writing to Gentile Christians, the apostle Paul clarified that any person, from any ethnic background, who had the same faith as Abraham was his true descendant (**Ro 4:9-12, Ga 3:7, 28-29**). When it comes to the new covenant, what matters is your faith, not your biological lineage. The new covenant is made with spiritual Israel and spiritual Judah, which ultimately has nothing to do with literal genealogy.

ESV **Romans 4:11** (Abraham is) “the father of all who believe without being circumcised . . .”

ESV **Galatians 3:7** . . . it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

ESV **Galatians 3:28-29** There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring . . .

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03/22/2017