

Introduction to the New Testament

The last 27 books of the Bible are called the “New Testament.” “Testament” is the translation of a Greek word that means “covenant.” At one time “testament” referred to a covenant between God and man (compare the KJV with NASB in passages such as Luke 22:20 and 1 Corinthians 11:25, “this is the new testament/covenant in my blood”).

“Covenant” refers to a relationship. “Old Testament” refers to the relationship that existed between God and men *before* Jesus Christ, whereas “New Testament” refers to the relationship God now has with men *through* Jesus Christ.

“New Testament” refers back to the “new covenant” of Jeremiah 31:31. There God reveals four aspects of the new covenant that He will establish with Israel. Today, all who trust in Jesus Christ participate in three of those aspects: they know and obey God, have forgiveness of sins, and have the Holy Spirit indwelling them.

We do have a biblical basis for referring to two sections of the Bible as “testaments.” In 2 Corinthians 3:14 Paul says that when Jews read “the old covenant” their minds are blinded to its truths because they do not believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

God gave His Word in written form through men, protecting them from error and guiding them so that every word they chose was exactly what God wanted written. This Word from God is *inspired*, meaning “God breathed.” As time progressed God’s people recognized the character of these writings and welcomed them as God’s Word, a process called *canonization*. Because the New Testament was originally written in the Greek language and Christians needed God’s Word, it was copied and *translated* into thousands of languages and thus *transmitted* to Christians.

As Christians, we know that the 27 books of the New Testament are the Word of God because the Holy Spirit has taken away the hostility toward it we had as unbelievers and has replaced that hostility with a love, certainty, and conviction that the Bible is from God and is His truth.

Because the New Testament is *God’s Word* Christianity is rightly called “a religion of the Book.” We do not worship the ink and pages, but the statements of truth conveyed by that ink on those pages tell us about the one true God so that we can worship Him in spirit and truth. Some may criticize our attention to and faith in the written Word of God, but the Bible is no mere human book, it is the very Word of God!

Why do we have the New Testament? What is its purpose? Why was it written? Answering these questions can be challenging as each book of the New Testament is unique, having its own characteristics and purpose for being written. However, as we look at all 27 books we are able to see that the purpose of the New Testament is to give the church God’s written revelation of Christian doctrine and practice. The New Testament tells us what believers in Jesus Christ should be convinced of and how they should live.

As we consider the entire New Testament, we are able to see two basic sections or divisions. The first section provides the basis for and growth of Christianity and consists of the four Gospels and the book of Acts. The Gospels provide the basis of Christianity—the person and work of Jesus Christ and Israel’s rejection of Him as their Messiah. Acts provides the birth and growth of Christianity throughout the then known world.

The second section of the New Testament sets forth the doctrine and practice of Christianity and consists of what are called *epistles* or letters, the books from Romans to Revelation. *Doctrine* is truth that believers in Christ must know and base their *practice* on. In the New Testament, issues of lifestyle, church life, and even petty problems are dealt with in light of God’s truth.