

The NEW TESTAMENT For *DUMMIES*

Session One / Wednesday, March 22, 2006

The NEW TESTAMENT For Dummies

Wednesday, March 22 – “Between the Testaments”
Sunday, March 26 – “The Gospels”
Wednesday, March 29 – “Acts and Romans”
Sunday, April 2 – The Pauline Epistles (Letters from Paul)
Wednesday, April 5 – The Other Epistles
Sunday, April 9 – Revelation

Galatians 4:4

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son....

1. The NEW TESTAMENT is a collection of 27 documents.
2. The word “testament” means “covenant” or “settlement.” The new covenant is the new order inaugurated by the death of Jesus:

1 Cor. 11:25

After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

Prior to Jesus’ death, man’s sin question had to be dealt with at the altar in front of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness or the Great Temple with an animal being killed. But as John the Baptist introduced Jesus,

John 1:29

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

3. Jesus' atoning death on the cross was the reason for the Old Testament to be so known:

Hebrews 8:6

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

4. The order in which the 27 documents appear in our present day New Testament is an order of subject matter, rather than a chronological order.

G First come the four Gospels (or more properly, the four records of the one and only Gospel) which narrates Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection.

G These are followed by the Acts of the Apostles, which takes up the Gospel story with Jesus' resurrection and shows how, over the next 30 years, Christianity spread along the road from Jerusalem to Rome. This book was originally written as the continuation of one of the four Gospels - Luke's. *These five books, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts constitute the narrative section of the New Testament.*

G The next 21 documents take the form of letters written to communities or individuals. Of these 13 bear the name of Paul as writer, two the name of Peter, one of James, one of Jude. The others are anonymous.

G The last book of the New Testament bears the name of "Revelation."

5. But our theme tonight is the roughly 400 years of time that occurred between the book of Malachi (the last writing of the Old Testament) and Matthew (Mark perhaps was the first Gospel written so it would be more proper to say "between Malachi and Mark.")

The time between the close of Old Testament history and the beginning of the New Testament period has often been called "the four hundred silent years." That simply means there was no revelation of God during those centuries as the Creator/Father did not communicate in any tangible way to mankind. However, to the historian, those centuries were anything but silent. To the student of ancient history, names like Cyrus, Darius, and Alexander the Great make this period one of paramount importance. The Jew notes during these centuries the development of synagogue worship, the successful Maccabean revolt, and the emergence of those political parties (i.e. Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians) within Judaism which have set the pattern for Jewish life and thought for the past 2,000 years.

A BRIEF TIMELINE OF THE HISTORICAL PERIOD BETWEEN MALACHI AND MARK

THE PERSIAN PERIOD - Iran

From Daniel, about 540 BC:

Daniel 5:1-31

A number of years later, King Belshazzar gave a great feast for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. [2] While Belshazzar was drinking, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver cups that his predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem, so that he and his nobles, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. [3] So they brought these gold cups taken from the Temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. [4] They drank toasts from them to honor their idols made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

[5] At that very moment they saw the fingers of a human hand writing on the plaster wall of the king's palace, near the lampstand. The king himself saw the hand as it wrote, [6] and his face turned pale with fear. Such terror gripped him that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way beneath him.

[7] The king shouted for the enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers to be brought before him. He said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever can read this writing and tell me what it means will be dressed in purple robes of royal honor and will wear a gold chain around his neck. He will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom!" [8] But when all the king's wise men came in, none of them could read the writing or tell him what it meant. [9] So the king grew even more alarmed, and his face turned ashen white. His nobles, too, were shaken.

[10] But when the queen mother heard what was happening, she hurried to the banquet hall. She said to Belshazzar, "Long live the king! Don't be so pale and afraid about this. [11] There is a man in your kingdom who has within him the spirit of the holy gods. During Nebuchadnezzar's reign, this man was found to have insight, understanding, and wisdom as though he himself were a god. Your predecessor, King Nebuchadnezzar, made him chief over all the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers of Babylon. [12] This man Daniel, whom the king named Belshazzar, has a sharp mind and is filled with divine knowledge and understanding. He can interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means."

[13] So Daniel was brought in before the king. The king asked him, "Are you Daniel,

who was exiled from Judah by my predecessor, King Nebuchadnezzar? [14] I have heard that you have the spirit of the gods within you and that you are filled with insight, understanding, and wisdom. [15] My wise men and enchanters have tried to read this writing on the wall, but they cannot. [16] I am told that you can give interpretations and solve difficult problems. If you can read these words and tell me their meaning, you will be clothed in purple robes of royal honor, and you will wear a gold chain around your neck. You will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

[17] Daniel answered the king, "Keep your gifts or give them to someone else, but I will tell you what the writing means. [18] Your Majesty, the Most High God gave sovereignty, majesty, glory, and honor to your predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar. [19] He made him so great that people of all races and nations and languages trembled before him in fear. He killed those he wanted to kill and spared those he wanted to spare. He honored those he wanted to honor and disgraced those he wanted to disgrace. [20] But when his heart and mind were hardened with pride, he was brought down from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. [21] He was driven from human society. He was given the mind of an animal, and he lived among the wild donkeys. He ate grass like a cow, and he was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he learned that the Most High God rules the kingdoms of the world and appoints anyone he desires to rule over them.

[22] "You are his successor, O Belshazzar, and you knew all this, yet you have not humbled yourself. [23] For you have defied the Lord of heaven and have had these cups from his Temple brought before you. You and your nobles and your wives and concubines have been drinking wine from them while praising gods of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone — gods that neither see nor hear nor know anything at all. But you have not honored the God who gives you the breath of life and controls your destiny! [24] So God has sent this hand to write a message.

[25] "This is the message that was written: Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin. [26] This is what these words mean — Mene means 'numbered' — God has numbered the days of your reign and has brought it to an end.

[27] Tekel means 'weighed' — you have been weighed on the balances and have failed the test.

[28] Parsin means 'divided' — your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

[29] Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was dressed in purple robes, a gold chain was hung around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

[30] That very night Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, was killed. [31] And Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of sixty-two.

THIS WAS THE BEGINNING OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE - The Bible narrative concerned primarily the Achaemenid Dynasty, from Cyrus to Darius.

1. The Jews fared well under Persian rule. King Cyrus gave them permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple. Under oppression from locals, the Jews successfully rebuilt it, but never to the grandeur of Solomon's Temple - or later, that of King Herod.
2. During this rebuilding, Ezra and Nehemiah were greatly used of God in vital leadership roles.
3. Persia was eventually under threat from the emerging GREEK Empire to the west. When Xerxes could not defeat the Greeks in a major naval battle at Salamis in 480 BC. Persian King Xerxes (Ahasuerus in the Book of Esther) watched from a distance as his ships outnumbered the Greek vessels four to one. But the Greeks utilized strategy and speed and annihilated the Persian navy. Xerxes slunk back to his Persian summer palace at Shushan and threw a drunken feast where he lost his wife Vashti and began the beauty pageant that resulted in Esther's becoming Queen. The Greek defeat of the Persians encouraged other nations such as Egypt to throw off Persian rule. The Persian Empire began to crumble and was shortly followed by the Greek Empire.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND THE GREEK EMPIRE

1. **Alexander's** impact on Israel was profound, not only during his lifetime but afterward through one of his successors, **General Ptolemy I**.
2. Alexander was more than a power-mad conqueror. He was a brilliant young man, well schooled in the philosophy of Aristotle. He believed Greek culture could unify the known world.

In 333 B.C. he passed from Macedonia (northern Greece) into Asia Minor (Turkey) and defeated the Persian armies stationed there. Then he moved south through Syria and Israel.

NOTE: Many secular history books will tell you that Alexander moved south from Turkey into "Palestine." That is not possible since there was no such place as Palestine until after the bar Kochba-led Jewish rebellion put down by the Romans in 132 AD. Historically, the name "Palestine" was applied by the Romans to Judea after they crushed the rebellion. It was intended as a punishment signifying that the Jews would never live there again. **PALESTINE DID NOT COME INTO EXISTENCE FOR THE LAND OF ISRAEL UNTIL THE SECOND CENTURY AD.**

3. The current Lebanese city of Tyre and the Gaza area each offered stubborn resistance to Alexander but could not deter him. Alexander never made war against the Jews when Jaddua, the High Priest in Jerusalem, came to meet Alexander and quoted Daniel's chapter 8 prophecy that the Greek army would one day be victorious.

From the Daniel commentary by W. A. Criswell: "Alexander is prominent in the visions of Daniel. There never lived another quite like Alexander. He was born in 356 B.C. and died in 323 B.C. at 33 years of age. He was the son of Philip, King of Macedon (Philippi, where Paul suffered, was named after Philip.) When Alexander was sweeping over the civilized world, he thought he was doing the work of his own choice. Actually, he was doing no other than filling out the outline sketched by the Lord God in the prophecies of Daniel. God gave him just so much space, he occupied just so much time, and when that space was filled, and when that time was passed, he was broken as the Scripture said he would be: Daniel 8:8 'When he was strong, the great horn was broken.'"

"Jesus and Alexander died at 33 / one lived and died for self, one died for you and me /
The Greek died on a throne / the Jew died on a cross /
One's life a triumph seemed / the other but a loss /
One shed vast armies forth / the other walked alone /
One shed a whole world's blood / the other gave His own /
One won the world in life and lost it all in death /
The other lost His life to win the whole world's faith.

"Jesus and Alexander died at 33 / One died in Babylon and one on Calvary /
One gained all for self / and one Himself He gave /
One conquered every tongue / the other every grave /
The one made himself God / the other made Himself less /
The one lived but to blast / the other but to bless /
When died the Greek, forever fell his throne of swords /
But Jesus died to live forever Lord of lords.

"Jesus and Alexander died at 33 / The Greek made all men slaves, the Jew made all men free
One built a throne on blood / the other built on love /
The one was born of earth / the other from above /
One won all this earth / to lose all earth and heaven /
The other gave up all / that all to Him be given.
The Greek forever died / the Jew forever lives /
He loses all who gets / and wins all things who gives."

– Charles Ross Weede

4. Alexander permitted the Jews to observe their laws, granted them exemption from tribute (taxes) during Sabbatical Years, and, when he built Alexandria in Egypt (331 BC), he encouraged Jews to settle there and gave them privileges comparable to those of his Greek subjects.

5. At the age of 33, Alexander died in Babylon. His four main generals succeeded in dividing the Empire among themselves. The historian W. W. Tarn wrote that Alexander “so changed the world that nothing after him could be as it was before.”

THE PTOLEMIES

1. Judea and Jerusalem came under the thumb of General Ptolemy I, surnamed “Deliverer.” He dealt kindly with the Jews.

Interesting fact: Under Ptolemy II, the Alexandrian Jews translated their Old Testament into Greek. It was known as the Septuagint.

THE SELUCIDS

1. This Syrian dynasty was founded by Seleucus I (Nicator), one of Alexander’s generals. His dynasty waged war against the Ptolemies and in 199 B.C. wrested control of Judea (and Israel) from them. While the Ptolemies had been tolerant of Jewish institutions and religion, the Selucids were not and were determined to enforce Hellenism (Greek culture) on the Jews.

2. The crisis came under the reign of ANTIOCHUS IV, SURNAMED EPIPHANES. This man actually found Jews - primarily Jason, who became the High Priest, largely by politically buying the office - an incredibly repugnant fact to the Jews.

Jason encouraged the Hellenists (Greeks) and a gymnasium was built in Jerusalem (oftentimes, the Greeks used the gym while being nude, a repellant thing to Judaism.) Antiochus finally decided to remove all traces of orthodox Jewish faith and a bearded image of Jupiter was erected on the Temple altar. There he offered swine as sacrifices. He forbade circumcision, Sabbath observance and the celebration of Jewish feast days. Copies of the scripture were destroyed. The laws were enforced with unbelievable cruelty. An aged scribe named Eleazor was flogged to death because he would not eat pork. The animosity was growing daily.

3. West of Jerusalem about 15 miles lies the city (still in existence) of Modin. There was an aged priest there named Mattathias. When he was called upon to sacrifice a pig on the altar, he refused and a frightened Jew came forward to perform the act. The

enraged priest approached the altar and killed both the apostate Jews and the official emissary of Antiochus. With his five sons, Mattathias destroyed the heathen altar and then fled to the hills to avoid arrest and death. Others began to join them and a guerilla band was formed, determined to drive out the Greeks. The old priest hero Mattathias died shortly after and one of his sons, Judas “the Maccabee” (the hammer) became the leader. The guerilla band grew in both number and strength until it began defeating Greek outposts. Finally they took Jerusalem itself except the Greek citadel. They cleansed the Temple from all pagan rigging. BEGINNING WITH THE 25TH DAY OF KISLEV (DECEMBER) THEY CELEBRATED AN EIGHT DAY FEAST OF DEDICATION, KNOWN AS HANUKKAH, THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS. It required some more time before the Maccabean victory was complete. The new Jewish leadership was known as THE HASMONAEANS. A man named JOHN HYRCANUS BECAME THE HEREDITARY HEAD OF THE JEWISH STATE.

THE HASMONAEANS

1. John Hyrcanus died in 104 BC (just one hundred years before Christ was born). Within the country grew a group of Jews who had been somewhat in favor of Hellenism. They now became known as Sadducees. They were not pro “the faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” and were more of a political group.
2. Another party of Jews who were very religious was the Pharisees. About the only thing these two parties could eventually agree upon was the destruction of Jesus.
3. Now a struggle for leadership developed among the sons of Hyrcanus. The oldest son, Aristobulus, emerged the victory and cast his brothers into prison, two of whom are believed to have starved to death. Aristobulus called himself a king; however, his life was cut short by drink, disease and a fear of being overthrown. Others followed, Alexander Jannaeus, a brother, and even Salome Alexandra, his wife. The Jewish leadership led to more and more confusion until finally THE ROMANS entered the scene and, under Pompey, came into control.

THE ROMANS

1. In the meantime, Roman strength was growing. POMPEY suspected the Hasmoneans of planning to fortify themselves against Rome and besieged Jerusalem. After three months, he breached the fortifications, entered the city, and reportedly slaughtered 12,000 Jews. Jerusalem was made tributary to the Romans and the last vestige of Jewish independence vanished (until total victory in the 1967 Six Days War).

2. A man from Idumaea, named Antipater, began to take a great interest in Israeli politics. The more powerful he grew, the more the Jews in general loathed him. Although the Idumaeans had been incorporated into Jewish affairs under John Hyrcanus, they were never assimilated and ancient rivalries going clear back to the Exodus were not forgotten.

3. Now a major event in world history took place: the Ides of March (March 14, 44 BC) in which Julius Caesar was assassinated in the Roman Senate. Antipater and his sons (including Herod) showed loyalty to Cassius (one of the assassins) until Mark Antony defeated both Cassius and Brutus (another assassin) at Philippi. Herod saw a new day coming and changed his loyalty and bribed his way into favor with Anthony. When Octavian (later known as Caesar Augustus) came into power, Herod continued in favor and became known as “King of the Jews.” Herod’s rule spanned the eventful years from 37 BC to 4 BC.

4. Herod was called “the great” because of his building achievements, not because of his character. He built whole cities....Samaria became Sebaste in honor of Augustus....Straton’s Tower became Caesarea with a protected harbor. He built fortress palaces at such places as Masada and Machaerus. In the 18th year of his reign, he began the work of building the great Temple. *While the construction started about 20 BC, the surrounding work around the Temple was not completed until just 8 years before the Romans destroyed the entire city of Jerusalem - and much of Israel, just as Jesus predicted.*

FINAL NOTE FOR TONIGHT: The next five pages contain a world timeline (taken from the internet) showing a microcosm of world history for the next 1,000 years. In outline form, it is a continuation of tonight’s study. To get a pretty solid overview of history, I highly recommend that those who use the web look up “world timelines” or something similar to that. Remember in studying history, it is not the dates that are so important, it is the people! History is the story of the most outstanding - good or bad - people who have ever lived on this planet. The greatest of them all, and Who still lives, was Jesus Christ.

Next week: THE GOSPELS

1–999 (A.D.) World History

1–49

Birth of Jesus Christ (variously given from 4 B.C. to A.D. 7). After Augustus, Tiberius becomes emperor (dies, A.D. 37), succeeded by Caligula (assassinated, A.D. 41), who is followed by Claudius. Crucifixion of Jesus (probably A.D. 30). Han dynasty in China founded by Emperor Kuang Wu Ti. Buddhism introduced to China.

50–99

Claudius poisoned (A.D. 54), succeeded by Nero (commits suicide, A.D. 68). Missionary journeys of Paul the Apostle (A.D. 34–60). Jews revolt against Rome; Jerusalem destroyed (A.D. 70). Roman persecutions of Christians begin (A.D. 64). Colosseum built in Rome (A.D. 71–80). Trajan (rules A.D. 98–116); Roman empire extends to Mesopotamia, Arabia, Balkans. First Gospels of St. Mark, St. John, St. Matthew.

100–149

Hadrian rules Rome (A.D. 117–138); codifies Roman law, rebuilds Pantheon, establishes postal system, builds wall between England and Scotland. Jews revolt under Bar Kokhba (A.D. 122–135); final Diaspora (dispersion) of Jews begins.

150–199

Marcus Aurelius rules Rome (A.D. 161–180). Oldest Mayan temples in Central America (c. A.D. 200).

200–249

Goths invade Asia Minor (c. A.D. 220). Roman persecutions of Christians increase. Persian (Sassanid) empire re-established. End of Chinese Han dynasty.

250–299

Increasing invasions of the Roman empire by Franks and Goths. Buddhism spreads in



Roman Aqueduct Montpellier,
France

Tina Diodati



Christ

China. Classic period of Mayan civilization (A.D. 250–900); develop hieroglyphic writing, advances in art, architecture, science.

300–349

Constantine the Great (rules A.D. 312–337) reunites eastern and western Roman empires, with new capital (Constantinople) on site of Byzantium (A.D. 330); issues Edict of Milan legalizing Christianity (A.D. 313); becomes a Christian on his deathbed (A.D. 337). Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) defines orthodox Christian doctrine. First Gupta dynasty in India (c. A.D. 320).

350–399

Huns (Mongols) invade Europe (c. A.D. 360). Theodosius the Great (rules A.D. 392–395)—last emperor of a united Roman empire.

Roman empire permanently divided in A.D.

395: western empire ruled from Rome; eastern empire ruled from Constantinople.

400–449

Western Roman empire disintegrates under weak emperors. Alaric, king of the Visigoths, sacks Rome (A.D. 410). Attila, Hun chieftain, attacks Roman provinces (A.D. 433). St. Patrick returns to Ireland (A.D. 432) and brings Christianity to the island. St. Augustine's *City of God* (A.D. 411).

450–499

Vandals destroy Rome (A.D. 455). Western Roman empire ends as Odoacer, German chieftain, overthrows last Roman emperor, Romulus Augustulus, and becomes king of Italy (A.D. 476). Ostrogothic kingdom of Italy established by Theodoric the Great (A.D. 493). Clovis, ruler of the Franks, is converted to Christianity (A.D. 496). First schism between western and eastern churches (A.D. 484).

500–549

Eastern and western churches reconciled (519). Justinian I, the Great (483–565), becomes Byzantine emperor (527), issues his first code of civil laws (529), conquers North



Celtic Cross
Renée Scott



Mayan Pyramid at
Chichén Itzá
Renée Scott

Africa, Italy, and part of Spain. Plague spreads through Europe (542 *et seq.*). Arthur, semi-legendary king of the Britons (killed, c. 537). Boëthius, Roman scholar (executed, 524).

550–599

Beginnings of European silk industry after Justinian's missionaries smuggle silkworms out of China (553). Mohammed, founder of Islam (570–632). Buddhism in Japan (c. 560). St. Augustine of Canterbury brings Christianity to Britain (597). After killing about half the population, plague in Europe subsides (594).

600–649

Mohammed flees from Mecca to Medina (the *Hegira*); first year of the Muslim calendar (622). Muslim empire grows (634). Arabs conquer Jerusalem (637), conquer Persians (641).

650–699

Arabs attack North Africa (670), destroy Carthage (697). Venerable Bede, English monk (672–735).

700–749

Arab empire extends from Lisbon to China (by 716). Charles Martel, Frankish leader, defeats Arabs at Tours/Poitiers, halting Arab advance in Europe (732). Charlemagne (742–814). Introduction of pagodas in Japan from China.

750–799

Charlemagne becomes king of the Franks (771). Caliph Harun al-Rashid rules Arab empire (786–809): the "golden age" of Arab culture. Vikings begin attacks on Britain (790), land in Ireland (795). City of Machu Picchu flourishes in Peru.

800–849

Charlemagne crowned first Holy Roman Emperor in Rome (800). Charlemagne dies (814), succeeded by his son, Louis the Pious, who divides France among his sons (817). Arabs conquer Crete, Sicily, and Sardinia (826–827).



Japanese Pagoda
Erik Hjortshoj



Viking Ship (c. 900)

850–899

Norsemen attack as far south as the Mediterranean but are thwarted (859), discover Iceland (861). Alfred the Great becomes king of Britain (871), defeats Danish invaders (878). Russian nation founded by Vikings under Prince Rurik, establishing capital at Novgorod (855–879).

900–949

Beginning of Mayan Post-Classical period (900–1519). Vikings discover Greenland (c. 900). Arab Spain under Abd ar-Rahman III becomes center of learning (912–961). Otto I becomes King of Germany (936).

950–999

Mieczyslaw I becomes first ruler of Poland (960). Eric the Red establishes first Viking colony in Greenland (982). Hugh Capet elected King of France in 987; Capetian dynasty to rule until 1328. Musical notation systematized (c. 990). Vikings and Danes attack Britain (988–999). Otto I crowned Holy Roman Emperor by Pope John XII (962).