

The New Testament: A Collection of Jewish Testimonies Concerning the Christ

I. **UNDERSTANDING THE PURPOSE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITINGS**

- A. As 21st century, gentile believers much can be overlooked as we embark upon reading the New Testament. It is important for us to at least have a little bit of background and context for what we are reading in the gospels, epistles and the Revelation given to John on the isle of Patmos.
- B. Understanding the purpose and context for why something was written helps you to notice several aspects of that gospel you may have never noticed before. This handout is designed to help give you some of that context and purpose.

II. **THE NEW TESTAMENT**

- A. The New Testament took approximately 50 years to complete and consists of 27 separate documents. It is how we have any detailed record of the life of Jesus and it is the most studied book in Western History.
 - 1. 4 Gospels- Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
 - 2. 1 Narrative on the Establishment of the Early Church- Acts of the Apostles
 - 3. 21 Letters written to the newly established churches- Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John, and Jude.
 - 4. 1 Apocalypse- The Book of Revelation

III. **THE WORLD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT**

A. **Political Background**

- 1. Israel also known as Palestine was called Judea during the time of Jesus. Before the Israelites arrived and settled there it was called Canaan. The capital of the Israel was in Jerusalem, the city that was home to the Jewish temple. They believed that this is where God actually rested and where His throne dwelt.
- 2. Israel was at first governed by judges. Then the people cried out for a king and Saul son of Kish was set in as their first king. His heart departed from the Lord and so the Lord set over them another King named David, the son of Jesse, whom God said was after His own heart. Saul, David and David's son Solomon (King Solomon built the first temple in Jerusalem) ruled the united kingdoms of Israel.
- 3. After the reign of Solomon, and under his sons Rehoboam and Jeroboam the kingdom was into a Northern Kingdom called Israel and a Southern Kingdom called Judah. Of the twelve tribes of Israel, 10 dwelt in the north and 2 in the south.
- 4. It was at this point in Israel's History that they began to be oppressed by the gentile nations, which surrounded them. This was due in large part to the fact that they continually

wandered from the covenant their father's had made with Yahweh.

(1) The Assyrians: conquered the Northern Kingdom in 721 B.C.

(2) The Babylonians: conquered the Southern Kingdom in 586 B.C.

(a) captured Jerusalem and completely destroyed the temple. They also deported several of the Jews in leading cities and this began Israel's 70 years of captivity

(3) The Persians: conquered Babylon between 539 B.C.

(a) allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

(4) The Greeks: took control of all of Judea in 332 B.C.

(a) Alexander the great began his evangelism of the nations in Greek culture. We call that process "Hellenism" in which Greek beliefs are imposed upon the culture.

(b) Aristotle was Alexander's tutor and through Alexander's conquest Platonism was spread throughout the western world. The spread of the Greek language was a major achievement.

(5) The Syrians: took control of Judea in 198 B.C.

(6) Romans defeated the Syrians in the Syrian War and this led to the establishment of Emperors, Governors, and Herod's (client kings to rule Judea). In 63 B.C. Pompeii entered Jerusalem. The only governor we hear of in NT is Pontius Pilate

(a) Augustus- was ruler of Judea at the birth of Jesus

(b) Tiberius- was ruler of Judea during Jesus' ministry

(c) Nero- early persecutor of the early church

(f) Domitian- later persecution of the church at the time of John's revelation

(i) Herod the Great: ruled 37 B.C. to 4 B.C.. He massively rebuilt the temple which had been destroyed by the Babylonians. He was the king during Jesus' birth.

(ii) Herod Antipas: He beheaded John the Baptist

(iii) Herod Agrippa I: Beheaded the Lord's brother James, the apostle.

(iv) Herod Agrippa II: heard Paul's defense in the book of Acts

(7) Brief Period of independence under Roman Rule 167-164 (Maccabean Revolt)

(a) 167 B.C. Antiochus Epiphanes sacrificed idols in the Temple of

Jerusalem and tried to completely abolish Judaism.

(b) A man named Judas Maccabeas rose up and revolted against this. Because of His rebellion the land of Judea would now be operated by "client kings" known as the Herods.

B. Religious Background

1. Within 1st Century Judaism:

- a. Monotheism- belief in one God; this is what set them apart from everyone else in the ancient world.
- b. Election- they were God's special people chosen by Him and locked into a God initiated covenant. Therefore they did not believe in syncretism or intermarriage with gentiles. Samaritans were considered "half breed" because they were half Jewish and half gentiles born to Jews who had been deported in the Babylonian invasion. Jews did not accept them.
- c. Law- because of the destruction of their temple the only thing the Jews had to cling to was the law, it was portable and its commands set them apart from the nations in regard to circumcision, Sabbath and food. This preoccupation with law led to the construction of Synagogues, which were devoted to the deep study of the law.
- d. Temple- this was the center of Jewish nationality and life. Everything centered around the temple. The temple was what kept the sacrificial system, priesthood and festivals in place. The only problem with Herod's temple was that Rome chose its high priests.
- e. Eschatology- by the first century Jews believed in a catastrophic end of the world scenario. They believed in the "restoration of Israel which was to be brought about by the Messiah/Christ which means "anointed". Their messiah would be a political and military ruler who would overthrow the cruel Roman Empire.
- f. Personal Piety- each individual was to express devotion and worship to God.

C. Cultural Background

1. Within 1st Century Judaism

- a. Scribes: They were committed to making every Jew personally responsible for keeping the whole law. They attempted to extract a detailed code from the Law that would govern daily life. The scribes were trained experts that studied God's word for a living.
- b. Pharisees: They were a sort of religious political party. They held to and attempted to hold others to an oral code as well as the written one. They instituted a lot of traditions and instituted a practice called "fencing the Law"; which was creating a stricter code of Laws around the original law so as not to break it. They were very influential leaders in Judea.
- c. Sadducees: These were wealthy and influential aristocrats who were Jewish yet did not believe that the Law had any application to politics. They rejected the oral traditions of the Pharisees and did not believe in the resurrection. They were leaders of the Temple in a political way.

- d. The Herodians: Those in the land that were loyal to King Herod, they would do anything to further his government.
- e. The Sanhedrin : It was sort of the senate of Jewish politics. It was comprised of the elders, the chief priests and the scribes.
- f. The Common People: These were those tax collectors and sinners, carpenters and fishermen far removed from the filthy political and religious corruption that surrounded the aforementioned groups. They were waiting for the Consolation of Israel and these were those who, for the most part responded to Him.

D. **Literary Background**

1. Within 1st Century Judaism

- a. The Torah- the old testament was the "bible" of Jesus and the early church b. The Septuagint- the greek translation of the old testament
- c. Inter-testamental writings:
 - (1) Apocrypha: writing that the Protestant Christian Church considered useful but not divinely inspired .
 - (2) Psuedopigraha: literally false writings when someone would write in the name of someone who could have possibly written it. This continued even into the Christian Era.
 - (3) Dead Sea Scrolls: these were ancient scrolls hidden in 64 of 68 AD because of Jewish revolts. They were hidden in jars in some caves because they feared that the romans were coming. They were discovered in 1947 and were 1,000 years older than the oldest manuscripts they had at the time. They were hidden by the Essenes in the caves of Qumran.
- d. Flavius Josephus: He was a jewish historian of the 1st century AD. He wrote '*Antiquities*' and '*Wars of the Jews*'. Other than the new testament itself it is our chief source of information and even mentions the death of Jesus.

IV. **HOW DID WE GET THE NEW TESTAMENT?**

- A. The New Testament is the best supported writing from the ancient world. Yet, the problem is that we don't have any "autographs". An autograph is an original copy of one of the documents in the New Testament.
- B. However we do have what are called "manuscripts". These are existing copies that were made from the originals. When we find differences in these "manuscripts " we call them textual variations. Examination of these differences is called textual criticism.
 - 1. Textual Criticism is the task of finding what the text originally said. Some causes of Textual Variation are as follows:
 - a. Fatigue
 - b. Misunderstanding of reader by copyist

- c. Mispronunciation by the reader
 - d. Mistaking one letter for another
 - e. Misspellings, Omission, repetitions
 - f. Deliberate Alterations (
 - 1) to harmonize
 - (2) to adjust texts to the copyists' theology
 - (3) stylistic adjustments
- C. During the 2nd century Canon was developed. The word canon means "measuring stick". Originally there were 27 separate documents that were brought together into one compilation.
- D. The process of canonization was the process by which the early church decided which documents would be authoritative and which wouldn't. The concern to close the canon arose in response to:
- 1. The death of original witnesses
 - 2. Heresies arising within Christianity
 - 3. The need for distinct Christian literature to continue Christian teaching
- E. No one person or group was responsible for fixing the canon. It arose gradually by consensus of the church as a whole. The books were not considered authoritative because they were in the canon, rather they are in the canon because they were judged authoritative.
- B. In 367, a man named Athanasius who was the bishop of Alexandria wrote a letter and in it wrote the documents he believed should be in the canon. These books, though he did not list them in the order we now have them are what remained undisputed by early church fathers.
- C. The Criteria for Canonicity
- 1. Apostolic Authority: did an apostle or a close associate of an apostle write it?
 - 2. Relevance: is it relevant to the church as a whole?
 - 3. Orthodoxy: does it agree with the teaching of the apostles as contained in the gospels, letters and old testament?
 - 4. Use in Worship: Can it be used alongside the OT for the purpose of worship?
 - 5. Inspiration: Is this breathed of and inspired by the Holy Spirit?

V. THE FOUR GOSPELS

- A. The Gospels were written because of the need for Historical, Instructional, Liturgical, Exhortive Theological, Apologetic, and Evangelistic reasons. There was a need for a faithful and authoritative record of the words and deeds of Jesus. They were written to instruct new converts in how to live and worship. They were written to strengthen and encourage new believers in the midst of persecution and attack. They were also written to settle internal disputes within the church such as the rise of Gnosticism.

- B. Originally the story of the life of Jesus was conveyed orally, then that oral tradition was written down the it was canonized.
- C. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are what we considered to be called the gospels, because they tell of the "good news" of the Christ revealed in Jesus of Nazareth .
- D. Three of the four gospels are referred to as synoptic c gospels , which means, "to see alike". Because of the similarity in style and events included these three are much more related than John is.
- E. Most scholars believe that Mark 's gospel was written first, because 90% of it is repeated in Matthew and Luke's gospel. Mark seems to have a lot more detail and does not include anything from Luke or Matthew . Wherever Luke departs from Mark 's storyline Matthew stays with it and vice versa. Most scholars agree that Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source and one other source. These three are the synoptic gospels.
- F. Each gospel was written to provide a unique perspective on Jesus' life identity and work. Each author writes from a different vantage point and for a different purpose , but all are writing that you may behold the Christ in their narrative and be brought to belief and faith in Him.

2. **The Gospel of Mark: *What Jesus Did***

Emphasis: "Power"

The Son of Man Crucified:

- a. Written c. AD 50, Mark's gospel is the shortest gospel account. I like to think of Him as being "rushed " as He writes His account. I imagine that there was so much going on at the time His gospel was recorded in the way of desire from converts to hear from peter about Jesus' life as well as heresies concerning Jesus; they wanted to get down an authoritative account of all that Jesus had done quickly.
- b. John Mark was a close disciple of the apostle Peter. It is likely that he was around at the time of the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus. He wrote down Peter's preaching on the life of Jesus. As a boy He would have seen Jesus but was never a huge part of the unfolding events. He served as a personal assistant to Barnabas, Paul and Peter. He was Peter's personal assistant when He moved to Rome after Paul did and translated Peter's into Latin. Mark's gospel can also be referred to as the gospel of Peter since it is Peter's account of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus.
- c. Like none of the other gospels, Mark doesn't mention anything about the Lord's birth. This is because Peter tells the story from the point at which He meets Jesus. He doesn't meet Jesus until He is baptized.
- d. Mark's gospel is most likely written for a Roman gentile audience to come to faith in Jesus. Namely because He explains each reference to Jewish customs. He does include as many parables, but includes a lot of miracles and places a ton of emphasis on the power of Jesus to heal etc. Hence the usage of the term "immediately".

2. **The Gospel of Matthew: *What Jesus Said***

Emphasis: Jesus is the King of the Jews

The Son of David

- a. Written c. 55 AD, Matthew also known as Levi, was a disciple of Jesus. He is the Tax Collector whom Jesus asked to come and follow. I love Matthew's gospel because to the Jews in his day he was a traitor ...no longer a Jew. He worked for Rome as a tax collector and thus had "sold out" to work for the gentiles. After he encounters Christ, he becomes the prominent proclaimer of how the Jewish expectation was realized in Jesus. He is a Jew, writing to Jews about the King of the Jews. Jesus took a sell out and made him a witness of the Jewish Messiah! How humbling and rewarding this must have been for Matthew.
- b. Matthew's gospel was written to new believers as a testament that Jesus came and fulfilled the scriptures concerning the Messiah. Most of the new believers were converted Jews.
- c. Matthew spends a lot of time in the beginning of His gospel declaring that Jesus is the Son of David and the Son of Abraham. The number 14 in Jewish numerology refers to the messiah. Matthew chooses to craft His genealogy in groups of fourteen.

3. **The Gospel of Luke: What Jesus Said**

Emphasis: "Good News to the Poor"

The Savior of the World

- a. Written c. AD 59 Luke's gospel is unique for two reasons: 1. He is the only gentile author who wrote a gospel and 2. it is the longest gospel. Luke is clearly written with a particular interest on people on the fringes of society. I like to think of Luke's gospel as being the ultimate factual account of the life of Jesus. It is the smart guy writing to the other smart guys about how much God cares about the dumb outcast.
- b. Luke was a gentile doctor, which is why so much detail is given from Mary's angle of the birth of Jesus; a doctor would care about swaddling cloths and where she laid him etc. He was called the beloved physician by the apostle Paul in His letter to the Colossians.
- c. He was a historian and writer, he undoubtedly interviewed all the eyewitnesses that were alive to compose His gospel. His gospel is written with a very polished Greek that only Hellenistic historians would use in that day.
- d. He talks about Zaccheus, Martha and Mary, the Good Samaritan, and mentions 13 women by name. He makes mention of angels more than any of the synoptic gospels as well as the work of the Holy Spirit more than Mark and Matthew.
- e. Luke's gospel is written to someone named Theophilus, which means "Mr. God Friendly". Scholars argue as to whether Theophilus was Paul's defense attorney before the Romans or just a generic term written to anyone inquiring about Jesus.
- f. In his gospel it seems like Luke is trying to explain to His readers how this new religion called Christianity got started and who founded it and later, in his second volume, how did Paul become a propagator of it.

4. **The Gospel of John: Who Jesus Is**

Emphasis: The Divine Identity of Jesus

The Son of Man

- a. Written c. AD 90, John's gospel is the spiritual gospel. He is writing to declare that Jesus is the divine Son of God. He includes several references to statements that Jesus makes about Himself.
- b. John and His brother James were successful fishermen at the time of Jesus' invitation to discipleship. Of the twelve James, John and Peter were singled out and among those three, John was Jesus' closest friend. It was John that leaned on Jesus' chest, followed Jesus all the way to the cross, took in His mother and referred to himself as the one whom Jesus loved.
- c. John's gospel is clearly written by someone who was very close to Jesus. The style of His gospel is more reflective while the synoptic gospels are more descriptive.

VII. GOING FORWARD

- A. Hopefully this handout will help you to encounter Jesus in the gospels from a more informed position as you read its pages.
- B. What happened two thousand years ago in the little land mass of Judea had profound impact on the rest of the entire world. Jesus' ministry was not very big, compared to the ministries of our day. He never even left the region of Judea. Yet, His story has been preserved and documented and has found its way to us. As you read the pages of this glorious gospel, may you find, as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John found, that this also your story.
- C. God's plan to redeem humanity, which started with His son Jesus in Galilee, will finally find its end with you.

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. **Hebrews 12***

Popular Black Religions:

Rastafarianism- Social Benefits and Political Freedom/Disengagement

Rastafari is an Abrahamic belief which developed in Jamaica in the 1930s, following the coronation of Haile Selassie I as Emperor of Ethiopia in 1930. Its adherents worship Haile Selassie I, emperor of Ethiopia (ruled 1930-1974), much in the same way as Jesus in his Second Advent, or as God the Father. Most adherents see Haile Selassie I as Jah or Jah Rastafari, an incarnation of God the Father, the Second Advent of Christ "the Anointed One", i.e. the Second Coming of Jesus Christ the King to Earth. Many elements of Rastafari reflect its origins in Jamaica and Ethiopia. Ethiopian Christianity traces its roots to the Church of Alexandria, founded by St Mark, and its 5th-century continuation in the Coptic Church of Alexandria.[3][4] Rastafari holds many Christian beliefs like the existence of a triune God, called Jah, who had sent his divine incarnate son to Earth in the form of Jesus (Yeshua) and made himself manifest as the divine person of Haile Selassie I. Rastafari accept much of the Bible, although they believe that its message and interpretation have been corrupted.

Five Percent Nation of Gods and Earth (NOGE)- Blackness, Empowerment and "Special" Knowledge

The Five-Percent Nation, sometimes referred to as NGE or NOGE, the Nation of Gods and Earths, or the Five Percenters is an American organization founded in 1964 in the Harlem section of the borough of Manhattan, New York City, by a former member of the Nation of Islam named Clarence 13X (born Clarence Edward Smith and later known as "Allah the Father"). Clarence 13X, a former student of Malcolm X, left the Nation of Islam after a theological dispute with the Nation's leaders over the nature and identity of God.

Members of the group call themselves Allah's Five Percenters, which reflects the concept that ten percent of the people in the world know the truth of existence, and those elites and agents opt to keep eighty-five percent of the world in ignorance and under their controlling thumb; the remaining five percent are those who know the truth and are determined to enlighten the rest. The Nation of Gods and Earths teaches that black people are the original people of the planet Earth, and therefore they are the fathers ("Gods") and mothers ("Earths") of civilization. The Nation teaches that Supreme Mathematics and Supreme Alphabet, a set of principles created by Clarence 13X, is the key to understanding humankind's relationship to the universe.

Hebrew Israelites: Blackness and Jewish Tradition

Black Hebrew Israelites are groups of African Americans who believe they are descendants of the ancient Israelites. Black Hebrews adhere in varying degrees to the religious beliefs and practices of mainstream Judaism. They are not recognized as Jews by the greater Jewish community unless they undergo a certified conversion. Many choose to identify as Hebrew Israelites or Black Hebrews rather than as Jews to indicate their claimed historic connections.

Many Black Hebrew groups were founded in the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, from Kansas to New York City, by both Americans and West Indian immigrants. The beliefs and practices of Black Hebrew groups vary considerably. The differences are so great that historian James Tinney has suggested the classification of the organizations into three groups: Black Jews, who maintain a Christological perspective and adopt Jewish rituals; Black Hebrews, who are more traditional in their practice of Judaism; and Black Israelites, who are most nationalistic and furthest from traditional Judaism.

Nation of Islam- Blackness, Empowerment and Knowledge

The main belief of the NOI and its followers is that there is no other God but Allah. They teach that their founder, Master Fard Muhammad is the Mahdi. The NOI teaches that black people constitute a nation and that through the institution of the Atlantic slave trade they were systematically denied knowledge of their history, language, culture, and religion and, in effect, lost control of their lives. Central to this doctrine, NOI theology asserts that black people's experience of slavery was the fulfillment of Bible prophecy and therefore, black people are the seed of Abraham referred to in the Bible

Summary

What you will find in most of these religions is that while there are positive aspects and legitimate concerns which went unanswered and even caused by the western church—these religions form inside a vacuum. There was a severe lack of clear biblical understanding and teaching that celebrated the empowerment, education and value of black people. Thus a white Jesus found in a New Testament that was used to condemn oppress and subjugate black people is beyond the ability of a lot of black people to believe. Out of a place of real hurt and anger and serious questions about the treatment religions that suited our ears began to form. Because blacks can see more of a parallel within Israel's story most of these religions rely on the Old Testament narrative and place themselves there and disregard the New Testament.

However, if you are black and Christian you rely heavily on the New Testament and may find that you have difficulty answering questions and objections with some of your peers. Here is a simple way to describe why you believe the bible and more specifically why you place your faith in Jesus and live your life based upon the writings of the New Testament.

Why Believe the Bible?

2 Peter 1, Luke 1, 1 Corinthians 15

I choose to believe the bible because it is a reliable collection of historical documents written by eyewitnesses at the time if other eye witnesses they report supernatural events that took place in specific fulfillment of prophecy who claim that their writings are divine rather than human in origin.

We are not here to prove the bible or defend it. God can speak for himself he doesn't need our help. However you can explain to people why you choose to believe it. Part of that reason is because as Christians we believe that the bible is the highest authority.

A reliable collection of historical documents

How is it different than other holy texts?

The bible is a collection of writings written by over 40 different authors. Not one individual making a claim. It was written on 3 different continents. Africa, Asia and Europe. It was written in 3 languages. Hebrew Greek and Aramaic. 66 volumes covering hundreds of topics written over 1500 years.

Written by eye witnesses at the time of other eyewitnesses

The same source spoke to each person it was not telephone.

No we don't have originals but the oldest document is from 120 AD. A few decades after the writing.

There are over 6,000 manuscripts of the NT. This is astonishing when you deal with ancient writing. At best of ancient writing you get within a 1000 years of the original and about a dozen are in existence.

If da Vinci code is true those monks would have had to find all 6000 change them all the exact same way with no mistakes and never get caught and you'd have to tell that lie in three different languages. Then you'd have to deal with the early church fathers who wrote commentaries on the NT and change those to match what you changed.

They report supernatural events that fulfill specific prophecy

Not a bunch of rules about religion

Isaiah 53 was written 700 years before Jesus and Isaiah 22 was written 1,000 years before Jesus

You don't use the scientific methods to corroborate historical events. Because the scientific method says that observable measurable and repeatable, history is not those things. You use the evidentiary method which includes - reliability of sources, corroboration of sources, internal and external evidence that supports the sources. Those are the questions you can bring to the bible.

That claim their writings are divine rather than human in origin.

The biblical authors claim that their writing is inspired by the Holy Spirit of God and that they are merely recording the things they heard and saw from God Himself. 2 Timothy 3:16-17