

Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Session 2, History and Hellenization Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 2, History and Hellenization, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Mathewson's lecture introduces the historical context of the New Testament, emphasizing that its writings emerged from specific historical, political, and religious circumstances. He explains that understanding the New Testament requires recognizing the events leading up to and during its creation. The lecture clarifies the term "New Testament" itself, explaining it refers to God's new covenant relationship with his people established through Jesus Christ, rather than a legal document. It further notes that the Old Testament anticipates this new covenant, which is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Mathewson also addresses the arrangement of the New Testament, which is logical rather than chronological, and overviews the political climate of the time, including the influence of Alexander the Great, Hellenization, and Roman rule.

2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 2 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Major Prophets → Daniel).



**Mathewson_NTLit_S
ession02.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 2, History and Hellenization

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided lecture excerpts, including relevant quotes:

Briefing Document: New Testament Literature - Hellenization

Main Theme: Setting the historical, political, and cultural context for understanding the New Testament. The lecture emphasizes that the New Testament was written within a specific historical context, deeply influenced by preceding and contemporary events, particularly Hellenization and Roman rule.

Key Ideas and Facts:

1. The Nature of the New Testament (Testament = Covenant):

- The term "Testament" should be understood as "covenant" (from the Greek *diatheke*), not simply as a "last will and testament."
- "By New Testament, we mean a group of writings that testify to God's new covenant relationship with his people established through Jesus Christ."
- The Old Testament anticipates a new covenant, and the New Testament proclaims that this covenant has been inaugurated through Jesus Christ.
- The terms "Old" and "New" should be understood as "promise and fulfillment," not as "inferior and superior." The Old Testament anticipates the fulfillment in Jesus Christ.
- "The New Testament is to be seen as the ultimate fulfillment and climax of God's revelation that was already begun and anticipated in the Old Testament writings."
- Hebrews 1:1-2 illustrates this: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets...but in these last days, God has spoken to us by his son."

1. Arrangement of the New Testament:

- The New Testament is arranged *logically*, not chronologically. "the New Testament is arranged primarily not chronologically, but it is arranged logically."
- The Gospels come first because they provide a "natural bridge" between the Old and New Testaments and relate the life of Jesus Christ.

- Acts logically follows, demonstrating the spread of Christianity beyond Jerusalem.
- Paul's letters then follow Acts, generally arranged by length.
- The General Epistles (letters from other Christian leaders) follow Paul's letters.
- Revelation concludes the New Testament, depicting the climax of God's redemptive plan. "Revelation plays a fitting role at the end of the New Testament."

1. Manuscript Appreciation

- The original manuscripts would have been written entirely in capital letters.
- There were no divisions between words or letters
- There was virtually no punctuation, no periods, commas, or question marks.

1. Political Climate: Hellenization and the Rise of Rome:

- **Alexander the Great and Hellenization:** Alexander's conquests (starting around 336 BC) led to the widespread "Hellenization" – the spread of Greek language and culture.
- "Hellenization refers to the spread of Greek language and culture, and that's what Alexander did."
- This influenced everything, including Jerusalem. The Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) arose partly due to the prevalence of Greek.
- **Successors to Alexander: Seleucids vs. Ptolemies:** After Alexander's death, his empire was divided. The Seleucids (Syria) and Ptolemies (Egypt) struggled for power.
- Israel was initially under Ptolemaic rule (generally positive) but later came under Seleucid rule (more oppressive).
- **Antiochus Epiphanes IV:** A Seleucid ruler who desecrated the temple in Jerusalem, sparking the Maccabean revolt.
- **Maccabean Revolt:** Led by Judas Maccabeus, the Jews revolted against the Seleucids and briefly gained independence (approx. 80 years). This event is celebrated during Hanukkah.
- **Rise of Rome:** In 63 BC, Rome took control of Israel, and the entire New Testament is written within the context of Roman rule.

- "So, the entire New Testament is written to God's people living in places under Roman rule."
- **Roman Administration:** Rome divided its territory into provinces, sometimes using "client kings" for governance.
- One of those client kings I have referred to in your note as a cruel king, that man's name was Herod the Great.

1. **Effects of Roman Rule:**

- **Common Language:** Greek became the lingua franca, facilitating communication and commerce.
- **Pax Romana (Peace of Rome):** Rome offered peace and protection in exchange for compliance.
- **Advanced Transportation and Communication:** Roman infrastructure enabled easier travel and communication throughout the empire.

1. **Herod the Great:**

- A "cruel king" and client ruler over Judea during the birth of Jesus.
- Herod was known for his heavy taxation of the Jewish people, and mainly to fund his building projects, such as the temple that he built in Jerusalem."
- His actions in Matthew 2 (the killing of baby boys) are consistent with his known character.

1. **Living as God's People Under Roman Rule:**

- Christians were initially tolerated as a sect of Judaism. "as long as Christians in the first century, as long as they were able to be viewed as just another version of Judaism, of the Jewish religion, basically they were tolerated."
- Problems arose when they were perceived as distinct and subversive.
- Persecution was more sporadic and often came from local levels, not consistently from the Roman Empire itself.
- A central question for Jews and Christians was: "To what extent can we give allegiance to Rome and to Caesar, yet still maintain our distinct identity as God's people?"

1. Theological Implications:

- The Jews were wrestling with the apparent contradiction between God's promises (a Davidic king, a restored kingdom) and the reality of foreign oppression.
- "What does it mean to live as God's people when it seems that God's promises are not being fulfilled? In fact, God's promises appear to be contradicted by the present political situation in the first century."

Overall Significance:

The lecture emphasizes that understanding the historical context of the New Testament – the influence of Hellenization, the political realities of Roman rule, and the theological questions these raised – is crucial for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the New Testament texts. The New Testament writers were responding to specific situations and wrestling with specific challenges faced by God's people in a particular time and place.

4. Study Guide: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 2, History and Hellenization

New Testament Backgrounds: Hellenization Study Guide

Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What does the word "Testament" mean in the context of the Old and New Testaments?
2. Why is the term "Old Testament" sometimes considered pejorative, and what alternatives have been suggested?
3. How does the book of Hebrews (1:1-2) describe the relationship between God's revelation in the Old Testament and the New Testament?
4. Explain why the New Testament books are arranged logically rather than chronologically.
5. Why do the Gospels come first in the New Testament?
6. What role does the book of Acts play in the structure of the New Testament?
7. Why is understanding the historical and cultural context important for interpreting the New Testament?
8. Who was Alexander the Great, and what was his significance in the context of the New Testament?
9. What is Hellenization, and how did it impact Jewish culture and the development of the New Testament?
10. What was the Pax Romana, and how did it affect the spread of Christianity?

Quiz Answer Key

1. In the context of the Old and New Testaments, "Testament" refers to "covenant," signifying the agreement or relationship God establishes with his people. The New Testament, therefore, signifies a new covenant relationship established through Jesus Christ.

2. The term "Old Testament" can be viewed as negative because it can imply something outdated or inferior. Some suggest using "First Testament" instead, emphasizing the idea of promise and fulfillment rather than obsolescence.
3. The book of Hebrews states that God spoke to our ancestors through prophets (Old Testament) but has now spoken through his son, Jesus Christ (New Testament). This emphasizes the fulfillment and climax of God's revelation in Jesus.
4. The New Testament books are arranged to provide a logical flow of information, beginning with the life of Christ and the foundation of Christianity. The arrangement is designed for understanding the overall narrative and theological progression.
5. The Gospels come first in the New Testament because they serve as a bridge between the Old and New Testaments and because they introduce Jesus Christ. Their focus on the life of Jesus, the founder of Christianity, establishes the foundation upon which the rest of the New Testament builds.
6. The book of Acts logically follows the Gospels in that it describes the spread of Christianity beyond its initial geographical and cultural context. It shows how the events of the Gospels led to the expansion of the Christian movement throughout the broader Roman world.
7. Understanding the historical and cultural context is crucial for interpreting the New Testament because the texts were written within specific circumstances that influenced their meaning. The New Testament did not arise in a vacuum. The historical context significantly shaped the writers and original audiences.
8. Alexander the Great was a Macedonian king who conquered a vast empire in the 4th century BC. His most important impact for the New Testament was the spread of Hellenization.
9. Hellenization is the spread of Greek language, culture, and thought. It significantly impacted Jewish culture by introducing Greek ideas and language, which eventually led to the translation of the Old Testament into Greek (the Septuagint).
10. The Pax Romana was a period of relative peace and stability throughout the Roman Empire. It facilitated the spread of Christianity by providing a safe environment for travel, communication, and the exchange of ideas.

Essay Questions

Answer each question in essay format.

1. Discuss the significance of the concept of "covenant" in understanding the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. How does the New Testament present itself as a fulfillment of the Old Testament covenants?
2. Analyze the political climate during the time of the New Testament, focusing on the impact of Roman rule on Jewish life and the early Christian community.
3. Explain the process of Hellenization and its effects on Jewish society. How did Hellenistic influences contribute to both challenges and opportunities for the development of early Christianity?
4. Explore the role of key figures such as Alexander the Great, Antiochus Epiphanes, and Herod the Great in shaping the historical context of the New Testament. How did their actions and policies impact the Jewish people and the rise of Christianity?
5. Assess the extent to which the New Testament addresses the tension between allegiance to God and obedience to earthly rulers, particularly in the context of Roman domination. How do different New Testament texts approach this issue, and what solutions or strategies do they offer?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Testament (Diatheke):** From the Latin *testamentum*, translating the Greek *diatheke*, meaning "covenant," referring to the agreement or relationship God establishes with humanity.
- **Old Testament:** The first part of the Christian Bible, corresponding to the Hebrew Bible, which contains the sacred writings of the Jewish people.
- **New Testament:** The second part of the Christian Bible, containing writings about the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as well as the beginnings of the Christian church.
- **Hellenization:** The spread of Greek language, culture, and ideas, particularly during and after the reign of Alexander the Great.
- **Septuagint:** The Greek translation of the Old Testament, produced in Alexandria, Egypt, during the Hellenistic period.
- **Alexander the Great:** A Macedonian king who conquered a vast empire in the 4th century BC, spreading Greek culture and influence throughout the region.

- **Seleucids:** One of the major Hellenistic dynasties that ruled a large part of Alexander's former empire, including Syria and parts of Mesopotamia.
- **Ptolemies:** Another major Hellenistic dynasty that ruled Egypt after the death of Alexander the Great.
- **Antiochus Epiphanes IV:** A Seleucid king who persecuted the Jews and desecrated the temple in Jerusalem, leading to the Maccabean revolt.
- **Judas Maccabeus:** A Jewish leader who led a successful revolt against the Seleucids, restoring Jewish independence and rededicating the temple.
- **Hanukkah:** The Jewish festival commemorating the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem during the Maccabean revolt.
- **Romans:** The people of the Roman Empire, which came to dominate the Mediterranean world during the time of the New Testament.
- **Pax Romana:** The "Roman Peace," a period of relative peace and stability within the Roman Empire, which facilitated trade, travel, and communication.
- **Client King:** A local ruler appointed by and subject to the authority of the Roman Empire.
- **Herod the Great:** A client king of Judea during the time of Jesus' birth, known for his cruelty and building projects.
- **Synagogue:** A Jewish house of worship and community center.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 2, History and Hellenization, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ about the New Testament Context

1. What does the term "New Testament" mean in its original context, and how does it relate to the "Old Testament"?

The term "New Testament," as originally used by Tertullian, refers to the "new covenant" established by God with his people through Jesus Christ, rather than a "last will and testament." It signifies the fulfillment of the promises and expectations found in the Old Testament, representing the climax of God's revelation through his Son. The Old Testament anticipates this new covenant, while the New Testament testifies to its establishment and fulfillment in Christ. The relationship between the two is promise and fulfillment, not inferiority and superiority.

2. Why is understanding the historical and political context important for interpreting the New Testament?

The New Testament was not written in isolation but emerged from specific historical, political, religious, and cultural circumstances. Understanding these factors, such as Roman rule and Hellenization, provides a deeper insight into the context in which the New Testament authors wrote and the issues they addressed. This understanding allows us to grasp the full meaning and significance of the texts.

3. How is the New Testament arranged, and why is it not in chronological order?

The New Testament is arranged logically rather than chronologically. The Gospels come first because they provide a natural bridge between the Old and New Testaments, and they relate the life of Jesus Christ. Acts follows, demonstrating the spread of Christianity. Paul's letters are arranged generally by length. Finally, the book of Revelation is last because it details the climax of God's redemptive plan. This logical arrangement emphasizes the unfolding narrative of God's plan of salvation.

4. What was Hellenization, and how did it impact the world of the New Testament?

Hellenization was the spread of Greek language and culture throughout the empire of Alexander the Great. It significantly impacted the world of the New Testament by creating a common language (Greek) and culture that facilitated communication and interaction across diverse regions. This also led to the translation of the Old Testament into Greek (the Septuagint), making it accessible to a wider audience.

5. What was the political climate like in Palestine during the time the New Testament was written?

The political climate was dominated by foreign rule. After a period under the Ptolemies and Seleucids, Palestine came under Roman rule in 63 BC. The Romans often governed through client kings like Herod the Great, creating tensions and questions about Jewish identity and allegiance to God versus Caesar.

6. Who was Herod the Great, and what was his significance in the context of the New Testament?

Herod the Great was a client king appointed by Rome who ruled over Judea during the time of Jesus' birth. He was known for his cruelty and heavy taxation. His actions, as depicted in the Gospels, reflect the volatile political atmosphere and the challenges faced by God's people under foreign rule.

7. What was the "Pax Romana," and how did it affect the spread of Christianity?

The "Pax Romana" was the Roman peace, a period of relative peace and stability within the Roman Empire. This facilitated trade, travel, and communication, which aided in the spread of Christianity. The Roman Empire provided an advanced transportation system and a common language, making it easier for early Christians to travel and share their message.

8. What were some of the challenges faced by Jews and early Christians living under Roman rule?

Living under Roman rule presented several challenges for both Jews and early Christians. They had to grapple with the question of how to maintain their distinct religious and cultural identity while complying with Roman laws and customs. The tension between allegiance to God and allegiance to Caesar was a central issue, and they often faced sporadic persecution, not always from the Roman empire directly, but also locally.