

NEW TESTAMENT III

New Testament III: Syllabus

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CLASS #1:

- I. Course Introduction.
- II. The Prison Epistles (Letters).

CLASS #2:

- III. The Pastoral Epistles.
- IV. The Second Generation Church: Introduction.

CLASS #3:

- IV. The Second Generation Church. (cont.)
- V. Later Christianity Among Jewish Believers.

CLASS #4:

- VI. The Rise of Persecution and Gnosticism.

CLASS #5:

- VI. The Rise of Persecution and Gnosticism. (cont.)
- Exam.

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Possible 20 Point Questions

- 1) Explain how the Prison Epistles are related to each other (p. 376).
- 2) Explain what happened in 70 A.D. and its repercussions (p. 384).
- 3) Discuss gnosticism: what is it and why is it a problem? (pp. 387,389)

Possible 10 Point Questions

- 1) Give one possible outline for the book of Ephesians (pp. 376,377).
- 2) What does “Onesimus” mean and who was he? (p. 378)
- 3) What are the major themes of the Pastoral Epistles? (p. 379)
- 4) What is the nature of the book of James? (pp. 384)
- 5) What is the nature of the book of Hebrews? (pp. 385)
- 6) What is the main theme/key verse of 1 Peter? (p. 390)

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I. Course Introduction.

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The New Testament Series of Courses:

As with the Old Testament series of courses, we are not be able to study the entire New Testament in a series of three brief courses. Our goal is to survey the contents of the New Testament, organize them, and study general themes, as well as some selected specific topics.

After completing these three courses, we should be able to communicate a general understanding of the N.T. We should also be able to communicate on a deeper level, about certain specific parts and topics of the N.T.

Our goal is to promote further N.T. studies by establishing a framework of understanding for the 27 books of the New Testament canon, as a whole unit and as individual parts.

The Three New Testament Courses:

New Testament I: The Gospels and Jesus Christ. This includes Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

New Testament II: Birth of the Church. This category includes the study of Acts, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians and 1 & 2 Thessalonians.

New Testament III: Advance of the Church. This category includes the Prison Epistles, the Pastoral Epistles, the General Epistles and Hebrews.

The courses have been developed as a series. If you do not finish all the materials from the first course, then start course #2 from where you left off in course #1. The same is true for starting course #3 (for this reason course #3 contains less material as some “runover” from the first courses is expected).

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A. Contents of This Course.

1. This course provides a survey of the advance of the New Testament Church, as it existed and functioned in the Roman world.
2. We will study the following categories:
 - a. The “prison epistles or letters” (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon).
 - b. The “pastoral epistles or letters” (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus).
 - c. The second generation Church.
 - d. Later Christianity among Jewish believers (James, Hebrews).
 - e. The rise of persecution and gnosticism (1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, 3 John, Jude and Revelation).

Author’s Comment:

Because this is the third course in a series, this course should begin where you ended in the previous New Testament course.

In anticipation that there would be some materials not yet covered from the previous two courses, this course has been made somewhat shorter than the previous two New Testament courses.

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II. The Prison Epistles (letters).

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A. Paul's Arrest and Imprisonment.

1. Paul's arrest (see Acts 21:27-36).
 - a. Paul was arrested in Jerusalem after completing his third missionary journey.
 - b. He was accused of bringing a Gentile into the temple area that was for Jews only.
 - 1) This incident led to a riot.
 - 2) It was probably promoted by the same Jews who persecuted Paul in Asia Minor (see Acts 20:16-19).
 - 3) Most certainly, the accusation was motivated by Paul's reputation for having a liberal attitude toward Gentiles (see Acts 21:17-26; Gal 2:1-10).
 - 4) Paul was trying to break down the walls that separated Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:14; Gal 3:28).
2. Paul's imprisonment (see Acts 23:23-26:32).
 - a. After Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, he was taken to Caesarea where he was a prisoner for two years Acts 24:27).
 - b. Paul was then sent to Rome and put under house arrest for two years (Acts 28:16, 30, 31).

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B. The Common Relationships Among the Prison Epistles.

1. All of the letters were written from prison (although it is possible that they were written during Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea, the evidence seems to point to the Roman imprisonment) (see Eph 4:1; 6:20; Phil 1:12-14; Col 4:10, 18; and Philemon 1, 9, 10, 13, 23).
2. The same companions were with Paul in all the letters.
 - a. Mark, Demas, Aristarchus, Luke, Epaphras (Col 4:10, 14; Philemon 23, 24).
 - b. There was a common carrier of the letters (Tychicus) (see Eph 6:21; Col 4:7; Philemon 10; and Col 4:9).
3. Similar content is found in the books (especially in Ephesians and Colossians).
 - a. Christ the Head (Eph 1:22, 23; Col 1:18, 19).
 - b. Putting off and putting on (Eph 4:22-25; Col 3:5-14).
 - c. Instructions concerning domestic relationships (Eph 5:21-6:9; Col 3:18-4:1).

C. The Book of Ephesians.

1. A General outline of Ephesians.
 - a. Privileges (authority) of the Christian (chapters 1-3).
 - b. Responsibilities of the Christian (chapters 4-6).
 - c. These two sections can also be described as theoretical (chapters 1-3), and practical (chapters 4-6).

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2. A detailed outline of Ephesians (based on Watchman Nee's organization of the book).¹

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- a. The secret of "Sit" (chapters 1-3).
 - 1) The position of authority.
 - 2) We have been resurrected with Christ.
 - b. The secret of "Walk" (Eph 4:1-6:9).
 - 1) The action of righteousness.
 - 2) Christ lives in us (see Gal 2:20).
 - c. The secret of "Stand" (Eph 6:10-24).
 - 1) The manifestation of authority.
 - 2) Our struggles are spiritual, and so our power and authority is spiritual.
3. The main theme of Ephesians - the process of living a Christian life in an ungodly world.
4. Secondary theme of Ephesians - The ungodly world is not based on people, but on the wicked forces that influence people (for example in 2:2, "according to the prince of the power of the air").

D. The Book of Philippians. (A general outline of Philippians.)

- 1. Section 1 - Address and greeting (Phil 1:1,2).
- 2. Section 2 - Thanksgiving and prayer (Phil 1:3-11).
- 3. Section 3 - The positive results of Paul's imprisonment (Phil 1:12-26).
- 4. Section 4 - Instruction and challenge (Phil 1:27-2:18).
- 5. Section 5 - Explanation of sending others to them (Phil 2:19-30).

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6. Section 6 - Continued instruction and challenge (Phil 3:1-4:9).

7. Section 7 - Postscript: Response in appreciation for gift (Phil 4:10-19).

8. Section 8 - Choosing (Phil 4:20-23).

NOTE: The main theme of Philippians is joy in Christ,
in the midst of suffering.

E. The Book of Colossians.

1. A general outline of Colossians.
 - a. Greeting and prayer (Col 1:1-14).
 - b. The Lordship and ministry of Christ (Col 1:15-2:23).
 - c. Exhortation to live according to the Lordship of Christ (Col 3:1-17).
 - d. Family relationships (Col 3:18-4:1).
 - e. Final instructions and information (Col 4:2-18).
2. The main theme of Colossians - Jesus Christ: Lord and Redeemer.

F. The Book of Philemon.

1. The name “Onesimus” means “useful or profitable”. Note how Paul uses a pun (he uses his name and the meaning interchangeably) in vs.10, 11.
2. The cultural norm and law of that time was to crucify a runaway slave when he was found.
 - a. We must read Philemon with this understanding.
 - b. We can see that Philemon is actually a letter of intercession.

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Discussion Point

Discuss ways in that you could use Philemon to do a bible study of the concept of intercession.

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III. The Pastoral Epistles.

Author's Comment:

1 & 2 Timothy and Titus have been called the “Pastoral letters” because of their focus on instructions and duties of pastors (leaders of local churches).

A. Themes of the Pastoral Letters.

1. Along with the general “pastoral” theme are the themes of guarding against false doctrine and guarding against worldliness in the church.
 - a. False doctrine (see 1 Tim 1:3-11; 3:14-4:5; 6:3-10; 2 Tim 3:1-17; 4:1-4; and Titus 1:10-16).
 - b. Worldliness (see 1 Tim 4:1-5; 6:17, 20; 2 Tim 2:16; 3:1-4; 4:10; and Titus 2:11-13; 3:9)

B. The Book of 1 Timothy.

1. A general outline of 1 Timothy.
 - a. Greeting and introduction (1 Tim 1:1-20).
 - b. Exhortations and instructions (1 Tim 2:1-6:19).
 - 1) Prayer (1 Tim 2:1-8).
 - 2) Women (1 Tim 2:9-15).
 - 3) Overseers and deacons (1 Tim chapter 3).
 - 4) Apostasy (1 Tim 4:1-5).

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- 5) Discipline and reputation of a minister (1 Tim 4:6-16).
- 6) Widows (1 Tim 5:1-16).
- 7) Elders (1 Tim 5:17-25).
- 8) Ministers (1 Tim 6:1-16).
- 9) Rich people (1 Tim 6:17-19).
- c. Conclusion (1 Tim 6:20, 21).
- 2. The main theme and the key verse of 1 Timothy.
 - a. The main theme - encouragement and counsel to a young minister concerning the order of the church and the personal conduct and work of a minister.
 - b. Key verse- 1 Tim 3:15, “Meditate on these things, give yourself entirely to them, so that your progress may be evident to all.”

Discussion Point

Discuss how 1 Tim 3:15 is to be used as the key verse to summarize the book of 1 Timothy.

D. The Book of 2 Timothy.

- 1. A general outline of 2 Timothy.
 - a. Greeting and introduction (chapter 1).
 - b. Encouragement and instructions (chapter 2).
 - 1) Commitment and perseverance (2 Tim 2:1-13).
 - 2) Personal counsel (2 Tim 2:14-26).

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- c. Predictions and preparations (chapter 3).
 - d. A solemn charge to preach (2 Tim 4:1-8).
 - e. Personal information (2 Tim 4:9-22).
2. The main theme and the key verse of 2 Timothy.
- a. Main theme - a more personal continuation of encouragement and counsel to a young minister.
 - b. Key verse - 2 Tim 4:5, "Be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

Discussion Point

Discuss how 2 Tim 4:5 is to be used as the key verse to summarize the Book of 2 Timothy.

E. The Book of Titus.

- 1. A general outline of Titus.
 - a. Greeting (Tit 1:1-4).
 - b. Instructions (Tit 1:5-2:15).
 - 1) Choosing elders (Tit 1:5-16).
 - 2) Specific instructions to specific groups (Tit 2:1-15).
 - c. Final instructions to live godly lives (Tit 3:1-11).
 - d. Personal information (Tit 3:12-15).

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2. The main theme and the key verse of Titus.
 - a. Main theme - counsel and encouragement with respect to ministerial responsibilities and living a godly life.
 - b. Key verses - Tit 1:5; 2:11; 2:15; 3:8, "Speak these things..."

Discussion Point

Discuss how Tit 1:5, 2:1, 2:15, and 3:8 can be used to summarize the Book of Titus.

IV. The Second Generation Church.

A. Historical Context.

1. Before considering any general study of the later New Testament books, we must establish the historical context.
2. By the time such books as 1 Peter and 1 John were written, the first generation of Christian believers was giving way to the second generation.
 - a. The first generation was marked by great enthusiasm, energy, and power. Everything was fresh and pure.
 - b. The second generation began with certain different variables that changed the focus and emphasis of the life of the church. We want to briefly study these differences and their effects.

B. The Final Separation of Christianity From Judaism.

1. The Christian Church began as a Jewish Church. The gospel was taken primarily to the Jews. In the Roman world, early Christianity was probably considered a sect of Judaism.
2. The first generation church adapted Jewish customs and struggled with allowing the church to become universal (see Gal chapter 2). The struggle was in how to incorporate itself into Judaism.

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3. The second generation church became more and more universal.
 - a. It came against a new struggle. Instead of seeking the way in which to incorporate itself into Judaism, it sought a way to distinguish itself from Judaism (see Phil 3:2).
 - b. With this new struggle came another more serious struggle. The new universal church introduced new problems associated with worldliness.

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C. The Beginning of Roman Persecution.

1. The first century church received most of its persecution from the Jews. The Roman world saw the church as a Jewish sect and was not intimidated or bothered by it.
2. In the second generation, the church became universal. It began to intimidate and bother the universal powers and authorities.
3. Once the second generation church began to invade the Roman world, the Roman world began to fight back. This was the beginning of a larger persecution of the church.

D. The Death of the Apostles and “Pillars” of the First Generation Church.

1. The first generation church had a natural level of authority. Its leaders walked and talked with Christ. They were eyewitnesses of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.
2. As the majority of these people died, it became easier and easier to distort the truth. Heresy became an increasingly serious problem. The threat of false doctrine became more and more real.

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E. The Destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

1. The first generation Christians enjoyed the privileges of being associated with Judaism. The official Roman position in those early years provided a level of freedom of religion.
2. As the second generation church began to develop its own identity, it encountered persecution from Rome. This persecution was intensified when the Roman position of favor towards the Jews began to deteriorate.
3. Finally, Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed.
 - a. Although this increased the spread of the gospel (by scattering the Christians), it may have also contributed to the increase of false doctrines especially in the area of eschatology (the end times).
 - b. Many Christians were waiting for the immediate return of Christ. They associated His return with the destruction of the temple. When He did not return after this event, it promoted confusion, doubt, and error, which lead to false doctrine.

V. Later Christianity Among Jewish Believers.

A. The Book of James.

1. The nature of the book of James.
 - a. The book of James is one of the most general of the New Testament epistles. It is general in the sense of who it is written to. However, like Hebrews, it seems to be addressed to Jewish Christians (see Jms 1:1).
 - b. The book of James is also one of the most practical of the N.T. epistles. It focuses on works that are done through faith. It emphasizes the practical results of a pure theology (see Jms 1:27).

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2. A general outline of James.

- a. This letter is a collection of thoughts that do not fall into a clear outline. However, the theme is clear. The letter emphasizes the difference between true Christianity and false Christianity.
- b. Thus we will divide the book according to these two topics.
 - 1) True religion.
 - 2) False religion.

3. The main theme and key verses of James.

- a. The main theme - a practical faith manifests and proves itself by works. A false religion is characterized by a profession of faith that does not include the appropriate actions.
- b. The key verses - Jms 1:27 and Jms 2:26; "Faith without works is dead."

Discussion Point

Discuss how Jms 1:27 and 2:26 are to be used to summarize the Book of James.

B. The Book of Hebrews.

1. The nature of the book of Hebrews.

- a. Like James, Hebrews seems to be a letter written to Jewish Christians (see Heb 1:1).
- b. The main emphasis of the book is the superiority of the New covenant relative to the Old covenant. The word "better" is used at least 11 times in this context.
- c. The "better" covenant should be more desired. The book seeks to make that clear as it encourages Jewish Christians to move ahead in Christ and not to fall back into Judaism.

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2. A general outline of Hebrews.
 - a. Christ is superior and is the head of a better covenant (Heb 1-10:18).
 - 1) Introduction (Heb 1:1-4).
 - 2) Various ways in which Christ is “more excellent” (Heb 1:5-7:28).
 - 3) Various ways in which the New covenant is “better” than the Old covenant (Heb 8:1-10:18).
 - b. The practical life of faith (Heb 10:19-13:17).
 - 1) Descriptions and examples (Heb 10:19-12:4).
 - 2) Christian discipline (Heb 12:5-11).
 - 3) Christian conduct and life (Heb 12:12-13:17).
 - c. Conclusion (Heb 13:18-25).
3. Main themes and key verses of Hebrews.
 - a. Main themes of Hebrews.
 - 1) Suffering (Heb 2:9-18).
 - 2) Rest (Heb 4:1-11).
 - 3) The priesthood (Heb 3:1-11; 5:1-10; 7:1-8:6).
 - 4) The superiority of Christ and the new covenant (see above).
 - 5) Faith (chapter 11).
 - b. Key verses - Heb 1:1, 2; 3:1; and 8:6; “He is mediator of a better covenant...”

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Discussion Point

Discuss how Heb 1:1,2, 3:1, and 8:6 are to be used to summarize the book of Hebrews.

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VI. The Rise of Persecution and Gnosticism.

A. The Biggest threats in the later years of the N.T. church were Persecution and Gnosticism.

1. Persecution.

a. Official Roman persecution.

1) Under Nero (64-68), Rome formed an official policy of persecution against Christians.

a) Nero blamed the Christians for the fire that burned Rome in 64 A.D.

b) Christians were tortured, crucified, and used as “human torches” at night to light Nero’s gardens.

2) Under Domitian (in the 90’s).

b. Increased Jewish persecution.

1) Jewish persecution grew as the success and spread of the Christian faith grew.

2) Judaism and Christianity grew further and further apart.

3) Jews despised Christians who did not participate in the war against the Romans (66-70).

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c. General persecution.

- 1) During the time of the second generation church, Christians were hated by everyone. Persecution and suffering were common parts of the Christian life.
- 2) Thus, in the final books of the N.T. there is a recurring theme of suffering for Christ. Explanation, justification, and encouragement related to suffering is given in many parts of these books.

2. Gnosticism.

a. Description of Gnosticism.

- 1) Gnosticism emphasizes “knowledge”.
- 2) It says that through a form of mystical revelation a person can receive knowledge that will result in spiritual freedom and oneness with God (salvation through knowledge of man’s divine nature).
 - a) Usually, the process of receiving knowledge began in a secret initiation.
 - b) Gnosticism focuses on what is known through mystical revelation. It understands faith to be inferior to “knowledge”.
 - c) Gnosticism formed elite, secret groups of people who called themselves Christians and introduced many false doctrines into the church.

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- 3) Gnosticism emphasizes the inherent wickedness of all that is physical.
 - a) It believes that the creation of the world was a mistake and that the God of the Old Testament is different than the God that Jesus referred to as His Father.
 - b) Thus, although Gnostics professed Jesus Christ as a sort of Savior (that is, salvation through His teachings), they did not believe in the Incarnation since God could not be associated with anything physical.
 - c) Atonement, for a Gnostic, came through knowledge. It did not come through the cross.

b. The Gnostic problem.

- 1) The problem was that certain Gnostic ideas were being mixed with Christian doctrine. Many Gnostics called themselves Christians.
- 2) We see in many of the latter N.T. books obvious references to gnosticism (see 1 Pt 3:18; 1 Jn 1:1; 4:2; 2 Jn 7). These books seek to expose gnosticism and to warn Christians about its deception.

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B. The Books of 1 & 2 Peter.

1. There are seven precious things referred to by Peter in these letters.
 - a. The precious trials of faith (1 Pt 1:7).
 - b. The precious blood of Christ (1 Pt 1:19).
 - c. The precious living stone (1 Pt 2:4).
 - d. The precious corner stone: Christ (1 Pt 2:6).
 - e. The precious gentle and quiet spirit (1 Pt 3:4).
 - f. The precious faith (2 Pt 1:1).
 - g. The precious promises (2 Pt 1:4).
2. 1 Peter.
 - a. The main theme of 1 Peter.
 - 1) Victory in the midst of suffering.
 - 2) The word suffering is repeated at least 15 times.
 - b. The key verse of 1 Peter - 1 Pt 4:1, “since Christ suffered for us...”

Discussion Point

Discuss how 1 Pt 4:1 is to be used to summarize the Book of 1 Peter.

3. 2 Peter.
 - a. The main theme of 2 Peter - a warning against false teachers and Gnostic influences.
 - b. The key verse of 2 Peter - 2 Pt 2:1, “there will be false teachers among you...”

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Discussion Point

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Discuss how 2 Pt 2:1 is to be used to summarize the Book of 2 Peter.

C. The Books of 1, 2, 3 John and Jude.

1. 1 John.

a. The main theme of 1 John .

- 1) An attack on the influence of gnosticism through the promotion of real knowledge and the establishment of tests to distinguish between what is true and false.
- 2) John offers four different purposes for writing the letter (see 1 Jn 1:4; 2:1; 2:26; 5:13).

b. The key verse of 1 John - 1 Jn 2:21, “no lie is of the truth...”.

Discussion Point

Discuss how 1 Jn 2:21 is to be used to summarize the Book of 1 John.

2. 2 John.

a. The main theme of 2 John - a warning against false teaching.

b. The key verse of 2 John - 2 Jn 7, 8, “Many deceivers have gone out into the world...”

Discussion Point

Discuss how 2 Jn 7, 8 is to be used to summarize the Book of 2 John.

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3. 3 John.

- a. The main theme of 3 John - Christian hospitality.
- b. The key verse of 3 John - 3 Jn 8, “We ought to receive such (strangers)...”

Discussion Point

Discuss how 3 Jn 8 is to be used to summarize the Book of 3 John.

4. Jude.

- a. The main theme of Jude - another warning against false teachers and gnosticism.
- b. The key verse of Jude - Jude 3, 4, “Certain (ungodly) men have crept in unnoticed...”

Discussion Point

Discuss how Jude 3, 4 is to be used to summarize the Book of Jude.

D. The Book of Revelation.

- 1. The main theme of Revelation - the reality of spiritual battles and the coming of the end of the age.
- 2. A selected study of Revelation.
 - a. There is so much that could be studied in this book. This is not the place to enter into a detailed study of Revelation.
 - b. Instead we will offer, as a conclusion of the N.T. series, a teaching on the significance of the seven Churches that are described in the beginning of the book.

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Discussion Point

Use the following diagram to discuss this aspect of the great revelation that was given to John (note: the category called “History” reflects only one of the many ways in which this passage can be interpreted).

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Verses	Name of the Church and Description	Positive Points	Negative Points	Promise to Overcomers	History
2:1-7	Ephesus: The orthodox church	Good deeds; perserverence; hatred of evil	They have left their first love	Eternal life in paradise	The late apostolic age
2:8-11	Smyrna: The poor but rich church	Perserverence	None	They would not be hurt by second death; Crown	Persecution of the First centuries
2:12-17	Pergamum: The church with bad influences	Commitment; Dedication; Perserverence	Tolerance of false teaching; Immorality	Spiritual food; A new name	The age of Constantine
2:18-29	Thyatira: The church that tolerates the spirit of Jezebel	Good Deeds; Love; Service; Perserverence	Tolerance of any evil influence that leads to immorality	Authority; The morning star	The age of Papal apostasy
3:1-6	Sardis: The church that has a name but is dead	Some members have remained pure	Formalism; Hypocrisy	Clothes of righteous; Recognized in Heaven	The middle ages
3:7-13	Philadelphia: The loyal church	Loyalty; Some Power; Perserverence	None	High position in Heaven	The Reformation
3:14-22	Laodicea: The rich but poor church	None	Lukewarm; Pride	Sit on the throne with Jesus	The last days

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Course Conclusion:

This concludes New Testament III, which surveyed several themes and topics regarding the Advance of the N.T. Church. This survey included the prison letters (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon), the pastoral letters (1 & 2 Timothy, and Titus), the second generation church, later Christianity among Jewish believers (James and Hebrews), and the rise of persecution and gnosticism (1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, 3, John, Jude and Revelation).

This also completes the New Testament series of courses. Hopefully, this survey provided a general awareness and understanding of the New Testament Content.

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New Testament III: Endnotes

¹Watchman Nee, Sit, Walk, Stand (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1979).

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