



New Testament Theology

A comprehensive study of theological themes and perspectives found throughout the New Testament writings, exploring how God's divine action unfolds through Christ and the early church.

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Introduction to New Testament Theology

What is New Testament Theology?

New Testament theology is not necessarily expressed in terms used by the New Testament authors themselves, but is implicit in what they wrote. Everything they say is based on their understanding of God's ways.

The New Testament writers were not composing complete theological treatises, but were focused on the needs of the Christians they were addressing. Their writings emerged as a consequence of the reality they lived.



The Foundation of New Testament Faith

God Acted in Christ

Behind all these books lies a profound conviction - the profound theological conviction that God acted in Christ. There is theology behind all New Testament texts.

Occasioned Writings

We cannot write a theology of Peter, James, or even Paul, because in no case do we have sufficient material or indication that the writer is giving us what he considers most important for Christian theology.

Guided by Theology

All these writings were occasioned, but they are oriented by theology. It is good for us to take seriously the ideas expressed or implied in them.



Understanding New Testament Context

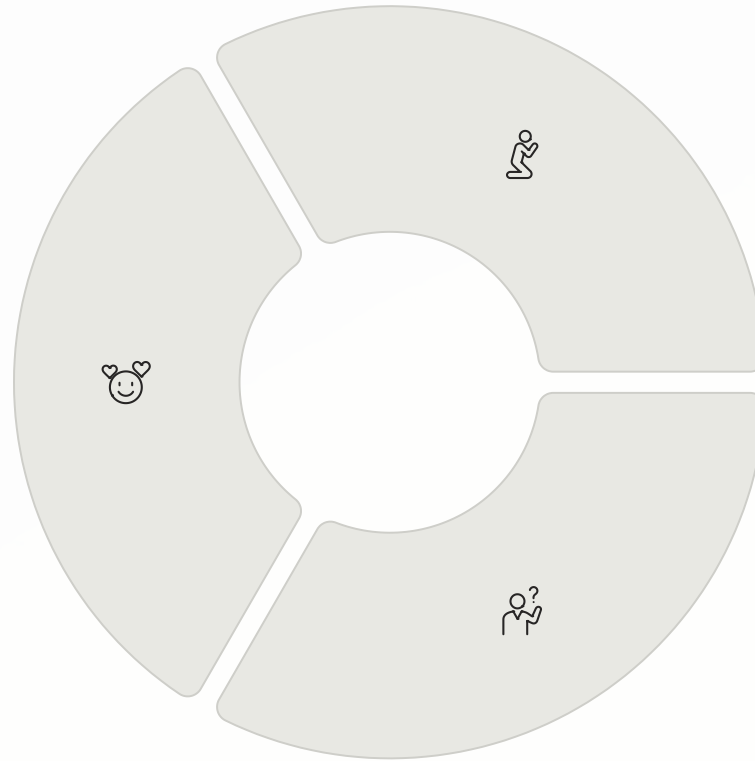
The theologian must have some concern with history. The New Testament documents emerged at a specific time and specific culture, both distant from us. We must return to that time and ask our questions from the perspective of that culture if we want to understand the meaning of the documents.

New Testament theology is concerned basically with the final product and not with detailing the steps along the way. It analyzes what distinguished the first Christians from what Judaism or Hellenism of first-century society believed in general.

The Uniqueness of Christian Faith

God's Action in Jesus

There was consensus among Christians that God had acted in Jesus of Nazareth, especially in his death and resurrection.



Faith Response

There was consensus that what God had done required from them an attitude of trust (the word they used was "faith").

Life of Service

This faith led to a consequent life of service - service rendered to their God and to other people.



Unity in Diversity

Notable Authors and Thinkers

There are notable authors and thinkers in the New Testament, but however great their differences, we must be aware that they were members of the same community of faith. They had not emerged from some desert without any religious conviction.

They had all been shaped by contact with Christ, but also, to some extent, by the community to which they belonged.

Christian Teaching

What they wrote is Christian teaching, however individual its expression. And all wrote under the tutelage of the same Holy Spirit.

This doesn't mean that all ways of expressing the Christian position are acceptable. Paul complained of "another gospel, which is not another" (Gal. 1:6-7).

The Central Message



The Cross

Throughout the New Testament there is a strong emphasis on the cross and resurrection: the gospels lead us to them as their climax.



The Resurrection

The other books look back to them as their foundation. Christianity points us to a great act of God that converges on the cross.



The Call to Salvation

This challenges us to embrace "salvation," which means abandoning the old way of life and following in a new one.



The Theology of Matthew's Gospel

Throughout the long history of the church, perhaps no gospel has been as influential as Matthew. Many thought it was the first to be written, and its first place in the order of the gospels gave it prominence.

Matthew's Distinctive Features

Teaching Focus

Matthew included almost all of the second gospel in a text one and a half times longer than Mark, and much of the added material is teaching.

- The Sermon on the Mount (5-7)
- The sending of the Twelve (10)
- The parables of the kingdom (13)
- Life in the Christian community (18)
- The parousia (24-25)

Reverent Tone

Matthew is somehow more reverent than Mark. He omits some references to Jesus' anger and the statement that Jesus was beside himself.

He is also gentler with the Twelve, sometimes omitting references to their ignorance or perplexity.



Matthew's Jewish Character

Jewish Flavor

This gospel has a "Jewish flavor," as seen in Matthew's emphasis on the fulfillment of Scripture. Matthew makes reference to Jewish matters like the temple tax and phylacteries.

He speaks of the validity of the law and says that the teaching (but not the example) of the scribes and Pharisees should be followed.

Five Great Divisions

His five great divisions of discourses invite comparisons with the five books of Moses.

For Matthew, as for the other evangelists, the gospel, not the law, is the center of the Christian system. However, Matthew certainly sees the importance of Jesus' teaching.

The Beginning of Matthew's Gospel

Unique Introduction

Matthew's introduction is unique; there is nothing like it in any of the other gospels. With its enigmatic title and long genealogy, it may seem unattractive to today's Western reader.

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"Book of Genesis"

He begins with: "Book of the genesis of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham." The meaning of genesis is not obvious - it can mean "beginning," "origin," or clearly "birth" as in 1:18.

Strategic Naming

Matthew uses "Jesus" 150 times and "Christ" 17, making clear he prefers the personal name to the title. The title "Son of David" indicates the Davidic Messiah, while reference to Abraham points to the origin of the Jewish nation.

3

The Women in Matthew's Genealogy

Matthew's inclusion of four women is surprising, because women were not normally included in genealogies. Three have dubious reputations: Tamar had a child with her father-in-law, Rahab was a prostitute, and Uriah's wife was an adulteress.

We must also observe that the four women were Gentiles in a Jewish genealogy! Matthew was well aware that the gospel of salvation is for everyone. The genealogy reveals this to readers who have eyes to see.



John the Baptist

The Forerunner

Matthew tells us that John the Baptist came before Jesus and prepared his way. John was a strict ascetic and, in this same line of conduct, his disciples were accustomed to fasting.

He was a prophet who called people to repent. For John, repentance was not just lamenting sins, but also producing what he called "fruits worthy of repentance."



John had certainty that after him would come another, greater than he, "whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (3:11).

John's Message of Judgment



Coming Wrath

John's prophecy is permeated with the theme of judgment. He spoke of the "wrath to come" and expressed its imminence with the allusion to the axe laid at the root of the tree.



Winnowing Fork

John stated that the one who was coming had a winnowing fork in his hands, which preceded the storing of wheat in the barn, while the chaff would be burned with "unquenchable fire."



Critical Time

Jesus' coming marks the critical moment. All of John's greatness mattered little when compared to being part of the kingdom. The kingdom of heaven replaces the splendor of the previous revelation.



Teaching About God

Matthew reveals a powerful God, always active in implementing his sovereign will - the living God. More than 60 times the evangelist appeals to the fulfillment of Scripture, and each fulfillment naturally means that God planned something, spoke about it through his servants the prophets, and now executed it.

This sovereign God makes demands on his worshipers. People are warned that they cannot serve both God and wealth. All must do God's will, abandon the broad path that leads to destruction and enter through the narrow gate.

Divine Judgment and Grace

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Final Judgment

Matthew always looks to the final judgment. In it all will be classified according to their deeds. The "weeds" will be gathered for destruction. Several times Matthew refers to outer darkness and weeping and gnashing of teeth.

2

Divine Love

The central teaching about God is that he is full of grace and love. Matthew refers to God as "Father" 44 times - more than any other case in the New Testament except John.

3

Care for Creation

God's care extends to all creation, for he feeds the birds and clothes the plants. Not a sparrow dies without the Father's will. The Father gives good things to those who ask him.

Jesus as Son of God

2X

Divine Voices

Only twice does Matthew record a divine voice, and in both God calls Jesus "Son" - at baptism and transfiguration

44X

"Father" References

Matthew refers to God as "Father" 44 times, showing the intimate relationship Jesus had with God

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Unique Relationship

Jesus enjoyed great intimacy with God that no one else possessed, referring to "my Father" throughout the gospel

Jesus often referred to "my Father," and it is obvious that he, more than anyone, enjoyed great intimacy with God. The command to love even enemies has this purpose: that we might be children of the heavenly Father.



The Person of Jesus

This gospel is dominated by the teaching of Jesus and teaching about Jesus. Matthew focuses totally on the greatness of his Lord. It is the emphasis on Jesus as the Lord of his people that Matthew has in mind.

Several times, Matthew records the fulfillment of prophecies in Jesus' life. This appears right at the beginning and continues throughout the gospel. Jesus is not someone subject to the Law, but the one to whom the Scriptures as a whole point.

Jesus the Miracle Worker

Signs and Wonders

Matthew sees Jesus as one who performed "wonders." He records about 20 miracles, three-quarters of which are healings. He seems more interested in their theological meaning than in their attention-getting properties.

His miracles fulfilled prophecies, and this means they were more than spectacular deeds. They were part of God's plan.

Divine Recognition

When Jesus walked on water and called Peter to come to him, the episode reaches its climax when the disciples, worshiping Jesus, declare: "Truly you are the Son of God!"

Those who witnessed the miracles should perceive in them the hand of God. Here was someone greater than any prophet, king, or priest.

The Son of Man

Authority in Ministry
The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins and is lord of the sabbath



Suffering and Death

The Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected, and be killed

Future Glory

The Son of Man will come in glory with his angels at the end of times

All references to "the Son of Man" deal with either his rejection and suffering or his exaltation in glory. There is great emphasis on suffering as the purpose of the Son of Man's coming. However, we must not miss the other side - he will come in the glory of his Father with his angels.



The Christ - The Messiah

Matthew uses the title "Christ" five times in the gospel's introduction. From the beginning it is clear that Matthew is writing about the Christ, the Messiah. For Matthew, "Christ" is clearly a title meaning "the Anointed One," "the Messiah."

Matthew records Jesus' question to the Pharisees: "What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is he?" This led to a discussion about the Son of David. The Christ, despite being Son of David, is actually Lord of David.

The Son of David



Royal Heritage

David was the great king of Israel, the man after God's heart. "Son of David" became a title of high honor and messianic indication.



Cries for Help

Matthew presents the expression in the mouths of others, mostly in requests for help: "Have mercy on us, Son of David!"



Triumphal Entry

When Jesus entered Jerusalem triumphantly, among other things the crowd exclaimed: "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

The Kingdom of Heaven

Present Reality

The kingdom arrived with Jesus. God was present in Jesus, working wonders, teaching spiritual realities, reconciling the world to himself.

This coming transformed everything.

Future Consummation

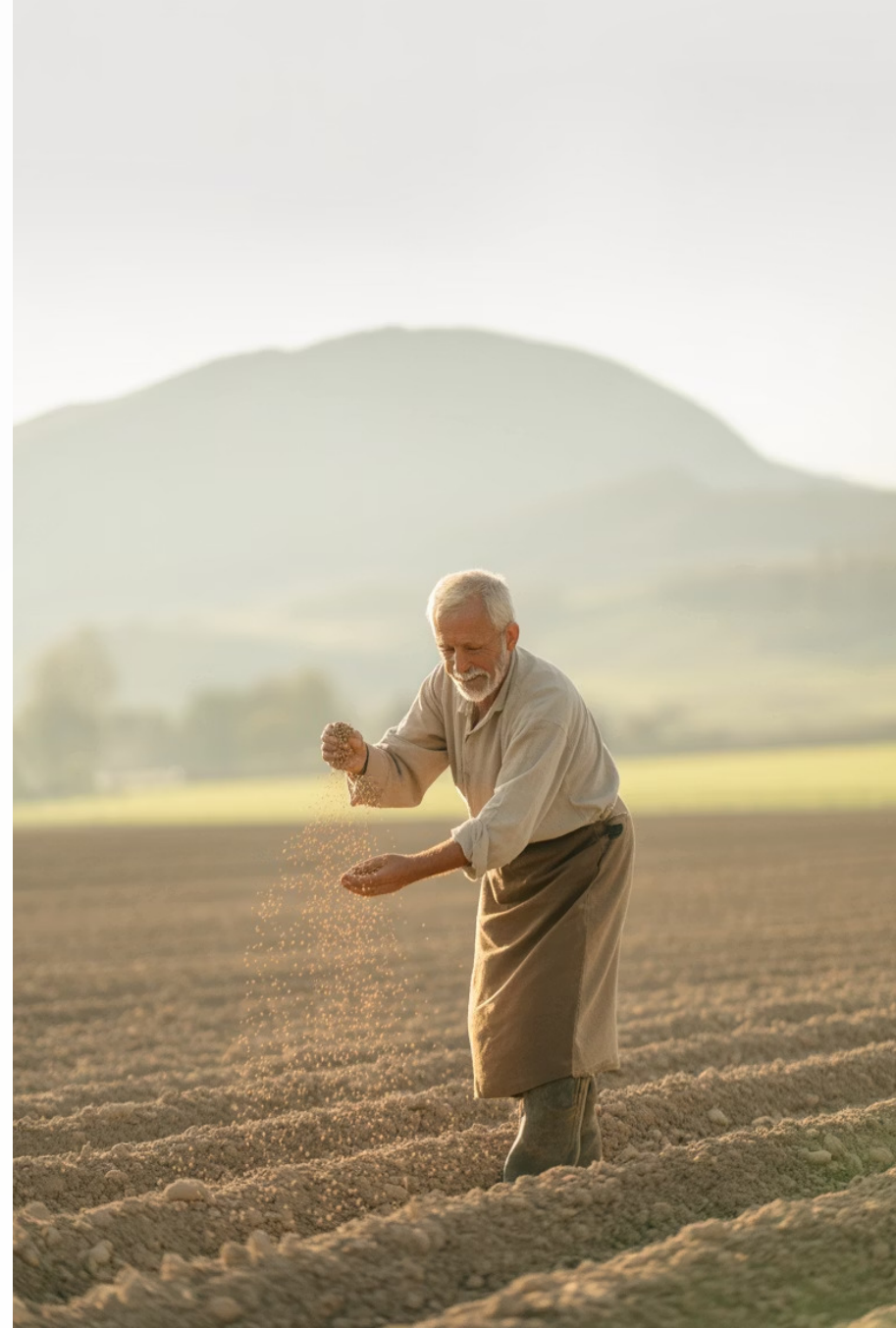
In another equally important sense, the kingdom is still future. It will come when Jesus returns. The kingdom is both present and future.

Matthew uses "kingdom of heaven" 32 times, preferring this expression over "kingdom of God." The kingdom cannot be obtained by our own works; it is a gift to which we must give the greatest value.

Parables of the Kingdom

One of the characteristic aspects of the synoptic gospels is Jesus' use of parables as a means of instruction. Parables make up more than a third of the records of Jesus' teaching.

Matthew has a group of special importance called "parables of the kingdom." Eleven times Matthew records this formula: "The kingdom of heaven is like..." These parables use all the resources of dramatic illustration to help people see that God is confronting them with his kingdom, power, and glory.



The Value and Growth of the Kingdom



Precious Pearl

The merchant who sold everything to buy one special pearl shows the invaluable worth of the kingdom



Hidden Treasure

The man who sold everything to get treasure hidden in a field demonstrates we must be resolute regarding the kingdom



Mustard Seed

The grain of mustard seed indicates the certainty of growth while God executes his purpose



Leaven

The parable of the leaven shows the kingdom has vital power and will grow without stopping



Grace and the Kingdom

Workers in the Vineyard

The parable of the workers in the vineyard shows that the way to enter the kingdom is by grace. It doesn't seem fair that those who worked hard in the heat of the day receive no more than those who worked only one hour in the cool of the evening.

Divine Justice

Jesus is brilliantly demonstrating the great truth that we do not deserve our salvation because of our hard work. God saves us because he loves us, not because we are good.



The Theology of Mark's Gospel

Mark doesn't waste time telling us his purpose. His opening words are: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God." He demonstrates an uncommon interest in the gospel and actually uses the term "gospel" seven times.

The Gospel Message



God's Perfect Timing

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has drawn near" - the gospel arrived at God's right time



Call to Repentance

"Repent and believe in the gospel" - Jesus calls for radical reordering of whole life, not just minor adjustments



Universal Scope

This gospel must be "preached to all nations" - it demands life transformation for the whole world

Mark knows the news is good because Jesus brought it from God. The gospel is not something obvious, of common knowledge among religious people. It originated in God and requires a response of repentance and faith.



Conflict with Evil

What God is doing through Jesus implies a conflict with evil. Immediately after Jesus' baptism, the Spirit drove him into the wilderness where he was tempted by Satan. Mark sees that God also has a purpose with the temptation.

For Mark, the opposition of evil did not end there. Satan doesn't receive prominence in this gospel, but Mark emphasizes Jesus' ongoing conflict with evil. Eleven times he speaks of "unclean spirits" that faced Jesus. Mark always conveys the thought that Jesus triumphs - he always expels the spirits.

Jesus the Man

Human Nature

In Mark's gospel, there can be no doubt about the human nature to which Jesus submitted. The people of Nazareth, perplexed by his wisdom and "mighty works," asked: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?"

Mark records very human emotions of Jesus, including indignation, anger, and sadness. Near the end of his gospel, Mark says that Jesus did not know when the parousia would occur.

Focus on the Cross

Most important of all is the emphasis on Jesus' death. Mark dedicates about one-fifth of his gospel to Christ's death and resurrection. He records the cry of despair: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

We will not understand what Mark is doing until we see that he is writing mainly about the cross. In a certain sense, he is a theologian of the cross.

The Son of God

Opening Declaration

Mark begins his gospel with a reference to Jesus Christ as the "Son of God" (1:1)

1

2

Divine Voices

Only twice does he record a divine voice, and both times God calls Jesus "Son" - at baptism and transfiguration

Demons' Recognition

Unclean spirits recognized Jesus, prostrating before him and crying: "You are the Son of God!"

3

4

Final Testimony

The climax comes when the centurion at the foot of the cross said at Jesus' death: "Truly this man was the Son of God"

The Son of Man

1

Authority on Earth

The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins and is lord of the sabbath - displaying divine prerogatives

2

Suffering and Death

The largest group of references speaks of the Son of Man's suffering - it was necessary that he suffer many things

3

Future Glory

The Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with the holy angels - triumphant return in majesty

The genius of this gospel lies in uniting and emphasizing both aspects. Jesus is supreme above all, but his greatness is not seen in power and majesty - it is seen in his death to save sinners. This is the great truth at the center of this gospel.

The Theology of Luke-Acts

Today there is practically unanimity in affirming that the same author wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. This makes him a very important figure in any study of the New Testament, as the two writings combined make up more than a quarter of the total.



God's Universal Plan of Salvation

God's Action in Christ

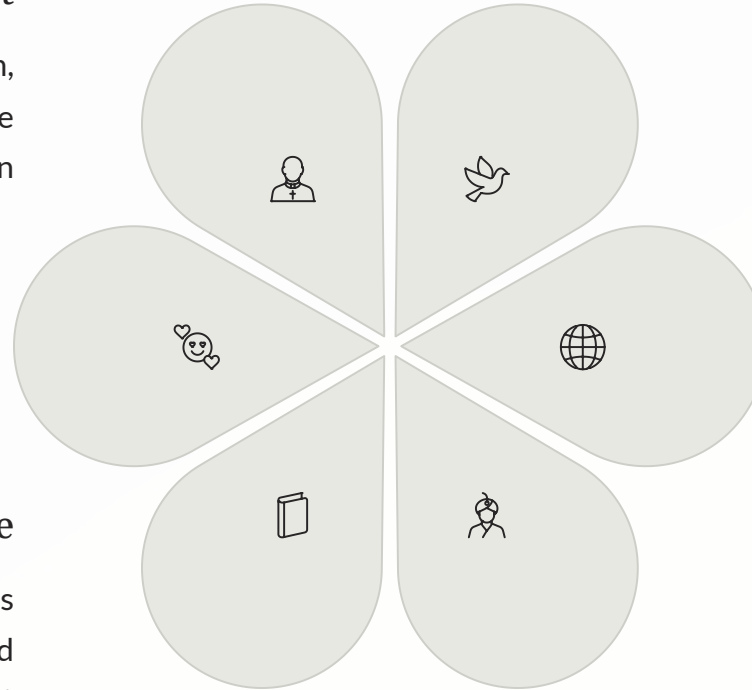
The central truth that in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus we see nothing less than God's action

Call to Discipleship

Following Jesus requires total commitment, leaving everything behind to serve God and others

Fulfillment of Scripture

Everything happens according to God's predetermined plan as revealed in the Old Testament



The Holy Spirit

The Spirit's vital role from Jesus' conception through Pentecost and the early church's mission

Salvation for All

The gospel extends to all people - Jews and Gentiles, men and women, rich and poor, young and old

The Kingdom of God

God's sovereign rule established through Jesus Christ and continuing through the church

Luke wrote about what God accomplished in Jesus and what he achieved in the beginnings of the church. His basic concern is theology, not history, no matter how much we owe him for the historical information he transmitted.