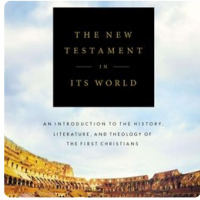


# OpenTheo

## How do we live out the New Testament?

March 23, 2021



### Delving Into The New Testament In Its World - Eternity News

Welcome to the sixth and final part in a series delving into the benchmark book The New Testament In Its World.

Co-author Michael Bird takes us through the text he wrote with N.T. Wright, this episode focusing on the practical application of the New Testament to 21st-century life. What does an understanding of its historical context do to help us live out the New Testament? Mike demonstrates the divisions between the Old Testament and the New, explains how it alters our world view as believers and draws out the mission implications from life in the 1st century.

On the chopping block are important questions like,

\* Isn't the New Testament ultimately a revision of the Old Testament - the followers of God used to do things that way, now we do them this way?

\* What does reading the New Testament do to our worldview?

\* How does understanding the New Testament affect our pilgrimage to Heaven - are we in fact 'going' anywhere?

You can buy a copy of The New Testament In Its World [here](#).

If you're following along with The New Testament In Its World, this episode covers key issues in Part IX: Living the story of the New Testament:

1. Bringing it all together
2. Making the New Testament matter for today

## Transcript

The New Testament In Its World With Mike Bird It's reading the New Testament with the spirits leading, the spirits prompting. Did I say the spirits illumination? They will help us

hopefully ask the right questions and come to the right answers as to how we live out New Testament faith today. Welcome to The New Testament In Its World, a super series based on the brilliant book by the same name.

My name is Mark Hadley and I will be leading us through the brain of one of the authors, Dr Michael Bird, who is a lecturer in theology at Australia's Ridley College. Along with Tom Wright, Mike has written The New Testament In Its World but he has plenty of credibility in his own right with 30 books in the fields of the Septuagint, Historical Jesus, the Gospels, some Paul, biblical theology and systematic theology. But before we get to any of that, we'd just like to ask a much more important question.

What sort of tea are we drinking this morning, Mike? I've got Russian Caravan tea, which is quite good. It's got the smell of mud from Moscow, but it's not actually a bad taste. It's not actually, I know Russian Caravan tea.

I always think of the camels walking through that particular mud every time I smell its aroma. It's not something you go for the smell. You've got to get over the smell.

It's not going to taste like the way it smells otherwise it's okay. Let's move ourselves into something else, ancient and somewhat muddy. We're going to have a look at The New Testament World and this time we really want to know how we can live out the lessons of The New Testament World in real life.

So isn't The New Testament ultimately a revision of The Old Testament? The followers of God used to do things this way and now they're going to do it that way? Or is there something more to it than that? Well, to quote Luke Skywalker, every word you said was just wrong. No, it's not the case of Old Testament bad, New Testament good. Or as if the Old Testament was kind of like Windows 95 and now we've got the latest thing on our Mac if you like.

Probably wouldn't put it quite in that stark. It's more like God's purposes and promises, a non-C.A. in the Old Testament have been brought forward and in some sense realized, but it's still being carried forward by Jesus and the Church. I think that's probably a better way than I would put it.

Well, I hope that's at least useful to your listeners. And is there a significant change in behavior, for example, from The Old Testament to The New Testament? I know our theology changes or it doesn't so much change or it's fulfilled, but do we see a new sense of living out? A little bit. Yeah, I mean, one thing you've got to remember is that one of the most frequently quoted parts of The Old Testament is actually on the ethical side, which is Leviticus 19:18.

Love your neighbor as yourself. That's one of the most frequently quotes from The Old Testament and it's used obviously when it comes to Christian ethics. So Christian ethics,

the love command, is largely based on Old Testament ethics.

So at one level, there's a big strong similarity there. But there is, you might say, new content because God has done a new thing in Christ. You know, Jesus has come.

He's lived his life. He's taught. He's begun gathering around him the nucleus of a restored Israel that becomes the network of churches, which are meant to do what Israel was supposed to do, which is to be priests and kings of creation, to project God's saving purposes in the world, to be a light to the nations, a kingdom of priests, a city on a hill, that type of thing.

And they go promoting faith in the God of Israel through his Davidic Messiah, Jesus. And further proof of that infirmative fulfillment of what's promised in The Old Testament is the giving on the spirit, but not on the Sadducees, not on the Pharisees, but it's given on all flesh, Jew and Gentile. And this means those promises of given to Abraham that you'll be the father of many nations.

That sort of multinational, multi-ethnic family is coming through in the followers of Jesus as they are diffused and spread throughout the world. Well, speaking of the world, what does the New Testament do to my worldview? Actually, let's go one step back for do I even have a worldview? Everyone has a worldview. It's basically the way you organize things around you.

It's the way you understand your own identity. It's the way you understand the various stories and sub stories which are around you. So, you know, what the New Testament helps us to have, I believe, is among other things, a Christian worldview.

And you could say worldview is really trying to answer several questions like, who are we? How did we get here? What is the problem? And where are we going? OK, so the New Testament kind of helps us understand those questions. Now, that can be questions posed for a church, for an individual, if you like. And the other thing I think the New Testament helps us with is, and this is a bit of a buzzword at the moment, is our own sense of identity.

You know, who are you? I mean, what does it mean to be a human being? What does it mean to be a follower of Christ? And given those two things, how do I incorporate all the other things I have? Like, in my case, you know, being male, being a father, you know, whether you work in business or a vocation, if you're a school teacher, doctor, secretary, engineer, accountant. How do I organize those various sub identities into one you might call a meta identity of being a Christian? So much of the New Testament, especially Paul's part, seemed to be a reflection of the mission work that's going on in time, in its writing. How does that play into my life now? Well, mission is a big part of the New Testament.

You could actually argue that this is really the proceedings of the various missionary activities that are going on at the time. I mean, the Gospels are largely about the mission of Jesus to Israel. It's not like Jesus is going to Israel, offering them first spite of the pie, knowing that they'll say no, then the real mission to the world can go underway.

No, Jesus comes to Israel because God's purposes are always intended to come to and through Israel and then extend to the world. And then obviously you've got the emission of the apostle Paul and all the complexities and all the, dare I say, the argy-bargy that took place as he undertook that. But even in the other parts of New Testament, the Catholic letters, you've got the same thing.

You've got kind of the encouragement, the debates, the divisions that are going on, the challenges that they're facing in Asia Minor, in Greece, in Rome, in Palestine and all of that. So this is really about, you could have a good example would be like saying, it's kind of like live tweeting the ongoing mission, the ongoing church planning, the projects and the problems that they're facing are kind of being like live tweeted. If you like through these letters, as a leader is giving us, well not tweets, but kind of like letters or sermons or encouragement, rebukes, which are going on at that time.

So looking at that then provides a way, well, what about us? You know, what's our mission in the world today? Are we just content to sit around and get on with things waiting for the Lord Jesus to come back, waiting for Christianity to decline? Or, you know, what do we do? But no, we're meant to have our own part in the mission of God. You know, we're meant to be making disciples of all nations. We're meant to be building up people in the most holy faith.

We're meant to be continuing that thing of being salt and light in the world. Now, you raise an interesting point when you bring the worldview associated with Judaism into the picture. What does that do for our worldview of Judaism today? Do we still have a particular relationship with that faith? Or has that faith completely just transmuted into Christianity? How do we even see Judaism as Christians today? Oh, that's a very big topic.

How do Christians relate to the Jewish people? There's a number of things we have to say. First of all, you've got to recognize that Jesus was Jewish, all of the apostles are Jewish, and the church is, I think, predominantly Jewish, certainly up until about the 60s, 70s of the 1st century. And certainly, it's not till after, I think, 70 AD, where you really get this huge increase in the number of non-Jews or gentiles coming to faith in Christ and joining the church.

And eventually, of course, Christianity does become a gentile movement. Now, along the way, you end up with a lot of sectarian division, a lot of, as we'd say in Australia, Argy Baji, a bit of smack talk between Jewish Christ believers and Jews who don't believe in Jesus. Now, you see that in Jesus' own day.

I mean, he kind of antagonizes some of the Pharisees, the Herodians, the Sadducees. Paul was a Jew who is persecuting fellow Jewish Christians, and then he goes on the attack and kind of reverses. I mean, he's got some real choice words to say about the Jews who persecute Christians, and even about other fellow Jewish Christians.

And then, out of that, sadly, there does develop quite a lot of antagonism between Christians and Jews, certainly in the second century, and then into the fourth, fifth, all the way through to some of the various medieval persecutions of Jews, and then climaxing tragically, horribly, horrifyingly, in the Holocaust that we had in the 20th century. So there's quite a lot of, shall we say, murky and dark water that's gone under the bridge that is really hard Jewish-Christian relations. So how do then we relate to the Jewish people? And I'd say there's a certain things that we don't do.

There's a certain things we don't do. We don't say, well, the Jews had their bite of the pie, and now they've been voted off the island. I mean, they had their chance.

They saw the Messiah in the flesh. He walked around with them. He preached in his tort, and they said, "No, thank you.

We're not interested." Okay. I don't think that's what we should think, as if God has kind of washed his hands with them and say they're done. On the opposite side, the Roman Catholic Church's position is that you no longer share the gospel with Jews.

You don't evangelize with them. You pray with them. You don't pray for them.

Okay. Not in the sense of their salvation, and that is to say, the Roman Catholic Church's position is that Jews are fully saved under the terms of the Old Covenant, and Jesus is really just for Gentiles, for non-Jews. That's kind of the opposite extreme, which I think you get.

And it's probably got a lot more owing to a certain proclivity towards religious pluralism. So the Jews are fine with Moses. They don't need Jesus.

I would have dropped more of a middling position, one that I think that is championed by Paul and some of the other apostles and the wider trend of the Christian tradition, just to say that all salvation is of Christ, both for the Jew and for the Gentile. I mean, that's what Paul says. The gospel is for the Jew first and for the Gentile or the Greek also.

And there is obviously a place for Jews and the family of the Messiah. In fact, I would say to claim that there's no place for Jews and the family of the Messiah is probably the most anti-Jewish thing you could possibly say. Okay.

So I definitely believe there is a place for them. But the fact is we do have to acknowledge that the vast majority of the Jewish people have not believed in what I would regard as their own Messiah. But we hope, pray, and dare I say even work for the

day where they will embrace their own Messiah.

That's something I think Paul believes in Romans 11 is going to happen in the future. So that's something I do look forward to the day that the Jews embrace what I believe is their own Messiah, Jesus the Christ. And we just pray and work and hope and to hasten that day.

Okay. Well, let's take ourselves back to the Christian Church as we know it. In reading the New Testament, we're kind of reading the start of the Christian story, which is in fact our story.

So how does our understanding of the New Testament affect our personal pilgrimage to heaven? Yeah, well, there's a number of things to say there. I like the language of pilgrimage. I like the idea of us all being in a pilgrimage port.

The writers of the Hebrews kind of uses that language on a pilgrimage to the New Jerusalem. But I would probably change it and say, don't think of it just as going to heaven. Think of it on the way to the new creation.

Because as my co-author Tom Wright says, "Heaven is a great place, but it's not the end of the world." Okay. So heaven is not our final destination. Our final destination really is going to be living, rejoicing and reigning with Christ over the new creation.

And our Christian life is a pilgrimage towards that. And there's some great language in the book of Hebrews on that very topic. We're going to the Mount of the Lord, the place of our salvation.

And I think what the New Testament does is it equips us with some of the tools we need, some of the exhortations we need to hear. It also gives us some of the questions that we need to keep wrestling with. What does it mean to be faithful in this context? How do I discern between what is cultural and what is Christian? Which is the question we have in every age.

Am I doing, do I believe this because I'm a strain or because I'm a Christian? That type of a thing. The New Testament also helps us to understand our own place in God's story. Okay.

What does it mean for me to live out my faith with my family, in my work environment, at my stage of life? Okay. There's lots of good stuff in the New Testament that can help us in that. Whether you're beginning high school or you're a retiree, that type of thing.

So that's where I think the New Testament helps us live out our faith and adopt this kind of pilgrimage as we are at different stages of the journey ourselves. From ancient Israel to second temple Jews and on into early Christianity, there was always a sense of where are we in the story. From the Christian point of view, we are living in the time of

fulfillment, the time when God's kingdom has already been decisively launched on earth as it is in heaven, through the work of Jesus himself, and yet before all things, including death itself, are subjected to his reign.

This is the fifth act of the cosmic five-act play that began with creation, continued with human rebellion, saw the call of Abraham and his family, and then saw this bare ultimate fruit in Jesus. The Spirit-led church is called to live the genuinely human life, anticipating in the present the life of the age to come, freed from the power of evil, which has been launched through Jesus' death and resurrection. So we know that we should be doing what you're describing because we're the torchbearers of the New Testament faith, if you like.

We're picking that up and carrying it on, which is a significant burden though, isn't it? So what powers our ability to actually do that? How does the New Testament inform us on our ability to actually carry that torch? Well, I would say the New Testament doesn't give us the ability per se. It gives us kind of like some map or some guidelines. I think what really empowers us in that task is the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is given there to keep us in the truth, to guide us in the truth, to remind us that we are united with Christ, to help us in our prayers when we don't know what to pray for. And it's reading the New Testament, I think, in light of the Spirit, with the Spirit's leading, the Spirit's prompting. Dare I say, the Spirit's illumination that will help us hopefully ask the right questions and come to the right answers as to how we live out New Testament faith today.

And of course, the basis of our understanding of the Holy Spirit is in fact the New Testament. Yeah, I think that the New Testament teaches a lot about the Spirit. I mean, there's some very important passages.

You've got the farewell, the scores in John's Gospel. There's a whole bunch of stuff in the Book of Acts. You've got some great things in places like Romans 8 as well.

So that there's a lot of really good concrete teaching, not just about what the Holy Spirit is and who the Holy Spirit is, but the type of ways that the Holy Spirit leads us and nourishes us in the faith. Is the Holy Spirit a New Testament phenomenon? No, there is definitely the Spirit in the Old Testament. You've got in the Book of Genesis, the Spirit hovering over the waters.

You've got a lot of references to the Spirit giving life in the Old Testament or the Spirit of the Lord can come and empower people for a certain thing. What is new in the New Testament or in the New Covenant is not the fact of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit can become a permanent and personal indwelling. That is what is new in the New Covenant.

That's the kind of the more radical thing that takes place in Pentecost. And indeed, whenever and wherever anyone comes to faith, they experience their own kind of miniature Pentecost where they receive that same permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. That's the bit that's new in the New Covenant.

So in the New Testament, what is it that you want us to hang on to for living it out? If you have one thing to leave us with, what would that be, that key factor? Yeah, that's a good question. If you take all of the New Testament writings, if you take the Gospels, Acts, Paul's letters, the Catholic Epistles, the Revelation of John, what would be one way to sum up the exhortations for us today? I would have to say is keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. I mean, that's to use the language of Hebrews, but that's something I think all of the evangelists, Paul and all the Catholic writers would whole hardly agree on.

Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and keep on following him in the race. Michael, we'd like to thank you just straight off for your entire contribution of the last six episodes on explaining the New Testament in its world to us, not that it actually needs a huge amount of explanation. As a book, it's very accessible and one would actually give us a lot of information about how we're going to not only understand it as a text, but also apply it to ourselves.

If you would like more information about the New Testament in its world, we're going to provide them the show notes, additional information about how to actually live it out in this world and also how to access that book for yourself. Michael, once again, thanks very much for all of your contributions. Well, thank you, Michael, for having me and thank you to all the listeners for listening.

If you haven't had a chance to dig back into this series yet, if this is the first time you've been encountering this podcast, there are five more fantastic episodes that delve into the nature of the New Testament and we'd encourage you to dig back into those and also enjoy the elements of the show notes that will also be there for your advantage. Mike, once again, we'll see you, I guess, on the next podcast. Thank you very much, Mark.

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