

# The Meaning of “New” In the New Testament

By Michael Kerns

## Value of Words

Words matter because through them others communicate their ideas. In today’s culture, words do not seem to matter as much because corrupted, slang-filled, profane language has imprecise communication and is used to intimidate or confuse the listener. Although the New Testament writers chose the everyday language of Koine (common) Greek, they had precision in their choice of words as the Holy Spirit moved them along (2 Peter 1:21). The New Testament usage of the common vernacular of the day made it accessible to those of any class in society. That precision requires us to find out what the words meant to them in that Koine Greek language. This brief paper looks at the words for “new.”

## The English Bible Translates “New” from Four Greek Words

### The Four Words in the Greek New Testament for “New”

- *καινός* (*kainós*) 42 times in NT Greek text
- *νέος* (*néos*) 24 times
- *ἄγναφος* (*agnaphos*) twice: in Matthew 9:16 and Mark 2:21
- *πρόσφατος* (*prospatos*) once: in Hebrews 10:20

### Primary Meaning Of the Words for “New”

- *καινός* (*kainós*) New = Fresh, unused, novel (Strongs NT #2537)
- *νέος* (*néos*) New = Youthful, fresh (Strongs NT #3501)
- *ἄγναφος* (*agnaphos*) New = Unprocessed, unshrunk (Strongs NT #46)
- *πρόσφατος* (*prospatos*) New = Freshly slain (Strongs NT #4372)

The Scotch commentator Barclay wrote: “Suppose there is a machine for turning out lead pencils. The millionth lead pencil is new in the *néos* sense, although it is the same as the 999,999 that went before it. On the other hand, *kainós* means new in quality, new in *character, unfamiliar, fresh, introducing something which has not been there before.*” (William Barclay, *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology*, Eerdmans, 1978, 74)

The writers of this article from the “Theological Dictionary” wrote, “In secular usage, *kainós* denotes that which is quantitatively new as compared with what has existed until now, that which is better than the old...” “The NT [New Testament] also follows the secular usage of *kainos*.” (Colin Brown, Ed, 1967, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Zondervan, II: 670)

Of these four Greek words, only *kainós* appears to carry the idea of “new” as something “brand new” or something “not seen before.” The Appendix lists the four Greek words and their use in the New Testament. The two examples below reflect the importance of knowing exactly what the New Testament writers said, before we interpret what they meant.

### Example #1: The Church Came As a New Entity

Replacement theology teaches that Israel failed and God uprooted the nation and supplanted it by the Church, the New Israel, which now assumes Israel’s promises and obligation. Paul’s use of *kainós* identifies the church (*ekklesia*) as a new entity and not a replacement for Israel. “*by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace*” (Ephesians 2:15).

The apostle in the next chapter reinforces this new entity of the church as “new” when he calls it a previous mystery until the Lord birthed her by His Spirit. “*By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ*” (Ephesians 3:4), “*that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel*” (Ephesians 3:6). The church, the *ekklesia*, the gathering of the saints, stands as a completely different divine organism than the covenant nation of Israel.

## Example #2: The New and Future Earth Will Not Be This Present Earth Where We Now Reside

The following quote reflects the common teaching about the future of this present earth. “The language of ‘new’ in Scripture often implies renewal and transformation rather than total annihilation.”

(biblestorieshub.com) The author of this quote defines “new” as refreshed, which the text of the book of Revelation clearly denies, as does Peter:

- Revelation 21:1, *Then I saw a new (kainós) heaven and a new (kainós) earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.*
- 2 Peter 3:13, *But according to His promise we are looking for new (kainós) heavens and a new (kainós) earth, in which righteousness dwells.*

The hope of the Lord God Almighty offers complete change, not just in the elimination of sin but an elimination of an earth that now groans. If John the Apostle wanted to report about a renovated or fresh new earth, he could have used the Greek word ἀναπαύω (*anapaúō*), which means “to rest, to refresh, to give rest.” (Strong’s NT #373) Note its use below:

- Philemon 1:7, *For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.*
- Philemon 1:20, *Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.*

## Summary of “New” In the New Testament

The New Testament employs four Greek words that are usually translated “new.” The Holy Spirit moved apostles to choose particular words for us to have a precise meaning such as *καίνος* (*kainós*). 2 Peter 1:21, *for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.* Words matter, since they carry ideas and, certainly in Scripture, significant life-changing ideas. Without correct understanding, interpretation fails, and application goes astray.

## Appendix

### Verses for the Four Words for “New”

#### I. πρόσφατος (*prosphatos*) #G4372

Hebrews 10:20, *by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,*

#### II. ἄγναφος (*agnaphos*) #G46

Matthew 9:16, *No one puts a piece of unshrunk (“new” in KJV, Darby) cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made.*

Mark 2:21, *No one sews a piece of unshrunk (“new” in KJV, Darby) cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made.*

### III. Νέος (*néos*) #G3501 (with its different forms)

1. Matthew 9:17, *neither do people put new wine into old wine skins*
2. Matthew 9:17, *they put new (néos). wine into new (kainós) wineskins*
3. Mark 2:22, *no one puts new wine into old wineskins*
4. Mark 2:22, *new (néos) wine goes into fresh (kainós) wineskins*
5. Luke 5:37, *no one puts new wine into old wineskins*
6. Luke 5:37, *otherwise the new wine will burst the skins*
7. Luke 5:38, *But new wine must be put into fresh (kainós) wineskins*
8. Luke 5:39, *no one drinking the old wine desires the new*
9. Luke 15:12, *The younger of them said to his father*
10. Luke 15:13, *the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey*
11. Luke 22:26, *but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest*
12. John 21:18, *when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever*
13. Acts 5:6, *the young men got up and covered him*
14. Acts 16:11, *following to Neapolis [new town]*
15. 1 Corinthians 5:7, *clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump*
16. Colossians 3:10, *and have put on the new self who is being renewed*
17. 1 Timothy 5:1, *appeal...to the younger men as brothers*
18. 1 Timothy 5:2, *and the younger women as sisters*
19. 1 Timothy 5:11, *But refuse to put younger widows on the list*
20. 1 Timothy 5:14, *I want younger widows to get married*
21. Titus 2:4, *encourage the younger women to love their husbands*
22. Titus 2:6, *Likewise urge the younger men to be sensible*
23. Hebrews 12:24, *Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant*
24. 1 Peter 5:5, *you younger men likewise be subject to your elders*

### IV. καινός (*kainós*) #G2537

1. Matthew 9:17, *new (néos) wine into fresh (kainós) wine skins*
2. Matthew 13:52, *a head of a household brings out of his treasure new and old*
3. Matthew 26:28, *this is the blood of my new testament*
4. Matthew 26:29, *I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom*
5. Matthew 27:60, *and laid it in his own new tomb*
6. Mark 1:27, *What is this? A new teaching with authority!*
7. Mark 2:21, *the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results.*
8. Mark 2:22, *new (néos) wine must be put in new (kainós) wine skins.*
9. Mark 14:24, *this is my blood of the new covenant*
10. Mark 14:25, *I drink it new in the kingdom of God*
11. Mark 16:17, *they will speak with new tongues*
12. Luke 5:36, *no one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it on the old*
13. Luke 5:36, *otherwise, he will both tear the new*
14. Luke 5:36, *and the piece from the new will not match the old*
15. Luke 5:38, *new (néos) wine must be put in new (kainós) wineskins*
16. Luke 22:20, *this cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood*
17. John 13:34, *a new commandment I give to you*
18. John 19:41, *and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid*
19. Acts 17:19, *may we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming*

20. Acts 17:21, *spend their time in nothing others than telling or hearing something new*
21. 1 Corinthians 11:25, *this cup is the new covenant in my blood*
22. 2 Corinthians 3:6, *who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant*
23. 2 Corinthians 5:17, *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature*
24. 2 Corinthians 5:17, *behold new things have come*
25. Galatians 6:15, *neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation*
26. Ephesians 2:15, *in Himself He might make the two into one new man*
27. Ephesians 4:24, *and put on the new self*
28. Hebrews 8:8, *I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel*
29. Hebrews 8:13, *When He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete,*
30. Hebrews 9:15, *He is the mediator of a new covenant*
31. 2 Peter 3:13, *according to his promise we are looking for new heavens*
32. 2 Peter 3:13, *and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells*
33. 1 John 2:7, *I am not writing a new commandment to you*
34. 1 John 2:8, *On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you*
35. 2 John 1:5, *not as though I were writing to you a new commandment*
36. Revelation 2:17, *I will give him a white stone, and a new name*
37. Revelation 3:12, *the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem*
38. Revelation 3:12, *which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name*
39. Revelation 5:9, *they sung a new song*
40. Revelation 14:3, *And they sang a new song before the throne*
41. Revelation 21:1, *Then I saw a new heaven*
42. Revelation 21:1, *and a new earth*
43. Revelation 21:2, *And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven*
44. Revelation 21:5, *Behold I am making all things new*