Using biblical examples and textual support, discuss why knowing the cultural context of the New Testament is important for understanding the message of the New Testament documents. Likewise, your initial prompt should address the Old Testament as the primary historical background to the New Testament.

**Why Understanding the Cultural Context of the New Testament is Important**

When reading a text like the bible it is crucial to understand the cultural context from which the authors were writing. The authors were not just writing about God they were writing about God with the context of the things around them. So without understanding what the context was it makes it nearly impossible to understand the depth of their writing.

Some of the cultural context that I found important was that the bible was written over 1000 years. So, it is important to remember that the books are not consecutive in the sense that they come right after each other. Also, it is important to know that Greek was being spoken nearly everywhere in the known world because of the rule of Alexander the Great.1 This understanding can help the reader know why missionaries were able to spread the word.

Additionally, understanding the Roman rule and how that also affected the lives of the apostles is another aspect of cultural context that is important to understanding the New Testament. Under Roman rule, which started in 63 BC, the Romans started collecting a tax called the “pax Romana”, meaning Roman peace. This tax was used to strengthen the military and get rid of pirates and bandits.2 With this tax, traveling was safer and easier for all of the early Christian missionaries.

1 Kimbrough, M. (2022). [Influences on the New Testament World](https://ref.ly/res/LLS:PPRCHNGNWSTDNTS/2021-12-23T22:03:30Z/153262?len=84). In *Approaching the New Testament: A Guide for Students* (p. 11). B&H Academic.

2 Kimbrough, M. (2022). [Influences on the New Testament World](https://ref.ly/res/LLS:PPRCHNGNWSTDNTS/2021-12-23T22:03:30Z/166816?len=242). In *Approaching the New Testament: A Guide for Students* (p. 19). B&H Academic.

Cultural context is crucial to understanding what was happening in that time and why it was happening at that time in history. For example, the Romans made the waters safe so one of the apostles could travel the waters to spread the word. Also at the time, the Roman roads were created so which allowed missionaries to spread the word. Use the Cartwright and McClendon (Ch. 1)

Importance of Cultural Context in Understanding the New Testament

**Why Knowing the Cultural Context of the New Testament Is Essential for Understanding Its Message**

The Old Testament stands as the primary historical and theological background for the New Testament, shaping its language, symbols, and expectations. Without a clear grasp of the Old Testament’s narratives, laws, and prophetic traditions, the message of the New Testament remains incomplete. For instance, the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, initiated in Deuteronomy 7:9 and repeatedly referenced throughout Scripture, provides the necessary framework for comprehending Jesus’ fulfillment of the Law and promises (Deuteronomy 7:9; John 1:17, English Standard Version). As noted in *Approaching the New Testament: A Guide for Students* (McClendon & Cartwright, 2022), “the Old Testament is not just background; it is foundational. The New Testament authors consistently assume its patterns, promises, and language when making sense of Jesus and his movement” (McClendon & Cartwright, 2022, pp. 25–27).

Understanding the cultural context of first-century Judea is equally crucial. New Testament texts emerged in a world marked by Roman political dominance, Hellenistic culture, and the diversity of Second Temple Jewish religious practice. Social structures—such as the patriarchal family, the power of the Sanhedrin, and temple-centered worship—shaped interactions and expectations. Key religious groups like the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots each brought distinct interpretations of the Law and hope for deliverance, contributing to the debates Jesus encountered (Matthew 22:23; Acts 23:6–8). As *Approaching the New Testament* explains, “Jesus’ ministry cannot be separated from the debates and aspirations of Second Temple Judaism” (McClendon & Cartwright, 2022, p. 31). For example, Jesus’ reading in the synagogue (Luke 4:16–21) directly cites Isaiah 61—a prophetic utterance rooted in Israel’s exile and restoration—demonstrating his self-understanding within Jewish hope for liberation and renewal.

Furthermore, the pervasive use of the Old Testament in the New highlights the importance of historical context for interpretation. The Gospels frequently quote or allude to the Hebrew Scriptures, whether presenting Jesus as the new Moses (Matthew 5:17–18) or as the Suffering Servant from Isaiah (Matthew 8:17; John 12:38). According to research, direct quotations and allusions from the Old Testament number over a thousand instances in the New Testament (see also Luke 24:27, 44; Matthew 1:22–23; Blue Letter Bible, 2025; McClendon & Cartwright, 2022). These references are not arbitrary; they serve to place the message of Jesus within Israel’s larger story. The author of Matthew, for example, frames Jesus’ birth, ministry, and passion as “fulfillments” of prophecy—claims which only make sense against the backdrop of established Jewish expectations (Matthew 1:22, 2:15, 4:14; see also McClendon & Cartwright, 2022, pp. 50–52).

Additionally, language and literary features must be considered. The New Testament was written in Koine Greek, the lingua franca of the eastern Mediterranean. This choice of language enabled the message of Christ to transcend local boundaries (John 1:1, English Standard Version; McClendon & Cartwright, 2022, p. 14). However, many Greek terms—such as “logos” used in John’s prologue—carried nuanced philosophical and Jewish meanings, shaping how Christ was presented and understood. The ability to interpret idioms, parables, and metaphors in their original context prevents modern readers from misreading or oversimplifying the intended message (*Approaching the New Testament*, pp. 13–19).

In sum, understanding the Old Testament background, as well as the social, religious, and linguistic contexts of the first century, is indispensable for sound interpretation of the New Testament. These contexts illuminate not only what the New Testament writers proclaimed but *why* their claims carried transformative significance both then and now. As McClendon and Cartwright (2022) conclude, “Interpreting the New Testament apart from its contexts risks distorting its message and missing its relevance for both the first audiences and for readers today” (p. 23). Grounded in its cultural and historical world, the New Testament’s message emerges with greater clarity, theological depth, and enduring relevance.

**References** Deuteronomy 7:9, English Standard Version John 1:17, English Standard Version Luke 4:16–21, English Standard Version Matthew 1:22–23, 2:15, 4:14, 5:17–18, 8:17, 22:23; John 12:38; Acts 23:6–8; Luke 24:27, 44, English Standard Version McClendon, A., & Cartwright, J. (2022). *Approaching the New Testament: A Guide for Students*. B&H Academic