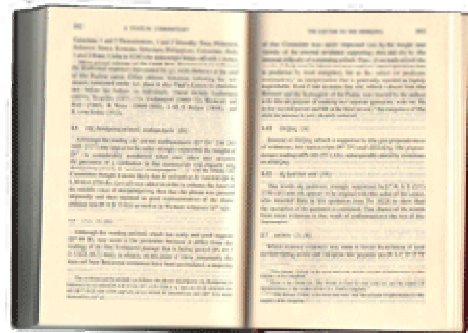


## Neos and Kainos

### νέος και καινός

While I am far from being a Greek scholar, I love looking at the original words that underlie our translations of the New Testament because there is often a richness that escapes our language. This is the case, for example, for the words "love" (see ET&N 58 *How Do I Love Thee*) and "time" (see ET&N 81 *Paul in the School of Hillel*). This issue of *ET&N* examines the deep significance of two words for "new" - νέος (neos) and καινός (kainos).

In a few days, most of us will be replacing our old calendars with a new one as 2007 begins, recognizing one of the divisions of time we human celebrate. There is something special about a new year, unlike both shorter and longer periods. Who wishes others a "happy new month" or a "happy new decade"? A year represents an entire transit around our sun, together with the cycle of the seasons. Many use the changing of the calendar as a time for re-assessment and the adoption of new goals (resolutions) that will often be abandoned or forgotten within a few days or weeks.



Chronological newness is expressed in the Greek word **neos**, as when Paul told Christians in Colossae not to let others pass judgment on them based on the observance of "*a festival or a new [neos] moon or a Sabbath*" (Colossians 2:16). Newness, in the sense of time, is unavoidable. Time passes regardless of human activity, although undeniably, many of us wish it wouldn't. It is part of the natural order of things that God created when he invented time at Creation. Without time, there could be nothing **neos**.

By the same token, nothing old (Greek, **archaios**) can become **neos** again. I could bang out all the dents in my car, apply a fresh coat of paint, even rebuild the engine, but my reliable old 1996 Subaru would not suddenly become **neos**. It might appear **neos**, but it would still be ten years old and have 172,000 miles.

In America, we worship the **neos**. Every Christmas brings commercials offering the outrageous suggestion that a new Lexus is an appropriate Christmas gift. Many products are built for obsolescence - probably not so much because they couldn't be made more durable, but because manufacturers know we want a **neos** version regularly.

In addition, we are a distinctly youth- (another meaning of **neos**) oriented culture. Advertisements bombard us with words and images disingenuously promising us **neos** by appealing to our innate vanity. Miracle cosmetics, chemical injections, facelifts, tummy tucks, and hair dye might make us look **neos**, but time cannot be deceived. Foolish older men discard their **archaios** wives for "trophy" models,

seeking to feel younger. But they're still **archaios**, often only looking even older by contrast to the **neos** woman on their arms. No human effort produces any kind of meaningful newness to the individual. People may *look neos*, but they are still the same **archaios** individuals in the same hopeless state they started in.

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There is, however, another kind of newness used more prominently in the New Testament. Unlike **neos**, **kainos** is not a chronological change, but a qualitative one, and it is the kind of newness that can only come from God. When the believer takes on Christ, an internal process begins that is not the result of any human effort. The degree to which we submit our lives to God's loving care can enhance or detract from the internal work of the Holy Spirit, but we cannot make ourselves **kainos**. Paul clearly describes that process: "*But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration [paliggenesia, to be reborn] and renewal [anakainōsis, to be made qualitatively new again] of the Holy Spirit*" (Titus 3:4-5).

Paul also distinguished between **neos** and **kainos**: "*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away [we cannot make it neos], our inner nature is being renewed [anakainōō] (by God) day by day*" (2 Corinthians 4:16). When we submit ourselves to the process of **anakainōsis** through Christ, we are "*a new [kainos] creation. The old [archaios] has passed away; behold, the new [kainos] has come*" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

This is why the New Testament is a **kainos diathēkē** (new covenant). The promises God fulfilled through Christ Jesus are not **neos**, they are qualitatively different than those of the old covenant. In the words of the Hebrews writer, "Jesus (is) the guarantor of a better (**kreittōn**, literally, *stronger*) covenant (Hebrews 7:22). It is **kainos** and **kreittōn** because it is the free gift of God, offering us a way to be something other than what we are by nature. Through that covenant, we have a high priest whose single sacrifice is sufficient for all time to make all who follow Him completely what God intends for us to be (Hebrews 10:14). His sacrifice is not like those under the old covenant, which only offered temporary, superficial newness. For humanity, the end result of the **kainos diathēkē** is that God "*will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more*" (Hebrews 10:17).

Now **that's** really being made new, which brings me to my all-time favorite passage of Scripture:

*"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new [Greek, **prosphatos**, recently made] and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near"* (Hebrews 10:19-25).

I am not one for New Year's resolutions, but if I were, I'd draw directly from this passage and resolve to:



- Draw nearer to God,
- Hold fast to hope,
- Be a model of love and good works,
- Share more time with brothers and sisters, and
- Be a source of encouragement

Χαρά Καίνοσ Έτοσ!

In that spirit, dear subscribers - brothers and sisters - I wish each of you a joyous Καίνοσ Year - one that is not just the chronological successor of the past, but something qualitatively different that allows you to experience more fully the newness of life in Christ.



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## **NEXT ISSUE: Early Church Fathers: Polycarp (Nov 28)**

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