



A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT



STUDY GUIDE

Michael D. Taylor

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1 INTRODUCTION

Six ways this New Testament survey study will help you

- It will help you to quickly grasp the message of each NT book.
- It will help you to see the “big picture” of the entire NT.
- It will help you to discover ways to apply the Bible to your life.
- It will help you to appreciate early Christianity.
- It will help you to understand where God is taking you.
- It will help you to share the good news of the gospel more clearly.

Four main parts of the Bible

1	<u>Preparation</u>	Old Testament	Makes ready for the coming of the Messiah
2	<u>Manifestation</u>	Gospels	The Messiah enters the world, dies for the world, and establishes his church
3	<u>Appropriation</u>	Acts, Epistles	Reveals the ways in which the Messiah was received, appropriated, and applied in individual lives
4	<u>Consummation</u>	Revelation	God's perfect plan was completed and the eternal reign of the Messiah

The word “testament” means covenant or contract.

A covenant in the Bible is a binding agreement or contract between man and man or between man and God. Some biblical covenants are conditional (bilateral) where both parties must agree and adhere to the contract, and some are unconditional (unilateral) where only one party, such as God, is bound to the promise.

As such, the New Testament is a new contract offered by God, into which others may enter if they accept the covenant conditions. This new contract establishes a new relationship into which men may be received by God.

The Old Testament was primarily between God and Israel.

The Old Testament (or Old Covenant) is primarily a record of God's dealings with the Israelites based on the Mosaic Covenant given at Mount Sinai. The Mosaic Covenant became obsolete when the New Testament began (Matt. 5:17; Heb. 8:13). Only those portions of the Old Testament that have been carried into the New Testament are valid today.

The New Testament is between God and all people.

The New Testament or New Covenant, anticipated in Jeremiah 31:31 and instituted by the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 11:25), describes the new arrangement of God with everyone who will accept salvation on the basis of faith in Christ. When Jesus was rejected as the Messiah by the leaders of Israel, the gospel was opened to all who would accept Christ as Messiah.

The only books that belong in the Bible are those that met the canon of the early church.



By the end of the first century many writings were claiming to be inspired by God. To separate false writings from those that contained evidence of God's inspiration, it was necessary to create a standard against which to evaluate them.

The word “canon” is derived from the Greek *kanōn* which meant a “reed,” or a “rod” or “bar,” which, because it was used for measuring, came to mean metaphorically a standard.¹ The

word canon today refers to both the *acceptance criteria* and the *list* of books in the New Testament.

The measuring rule for canonicity consisted of the following criteria:



The test of divine inspiration. Did the book claim to be divinely inspired?

The test of authorship. Was the book written, edited, or endorsed by an accredited agent of God, such as a prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ, or one of his apostles? If not, did the writer have the gift of prophecy (e.g., David, Daniel) or a relation to a prophet or an apostle (e.g., Mark, Luke) that would raise his book to the level of their writings?

The test of consistency. Was there soundness and consistency with other canonized writings? Did the book agree doctrinally with the teachings of known canonical books? While there is a progression in the Bible's revelation of doctrine, there could be no contradiction.

The test of testimony. Was the book universally recognized by the Jews and/or by the early Christian church as being God's Word? Does the Holy Spirit bear witness to the regenerated reader that the book is His Word?

The test of fulfillment. Is there any evidence in history, or in the known canonical books, of the fulfillment to this book's promises or predictions?

Important point

The canon detected the inspired books of the NT...it did not make them inspired.

The canon of the Bible is now closed.

The canon of the Bible is now considered closed and complete because there are no apostles or prophets today who are receiving new messages from God. The only books that passed the canon test are the 27 books shown below.



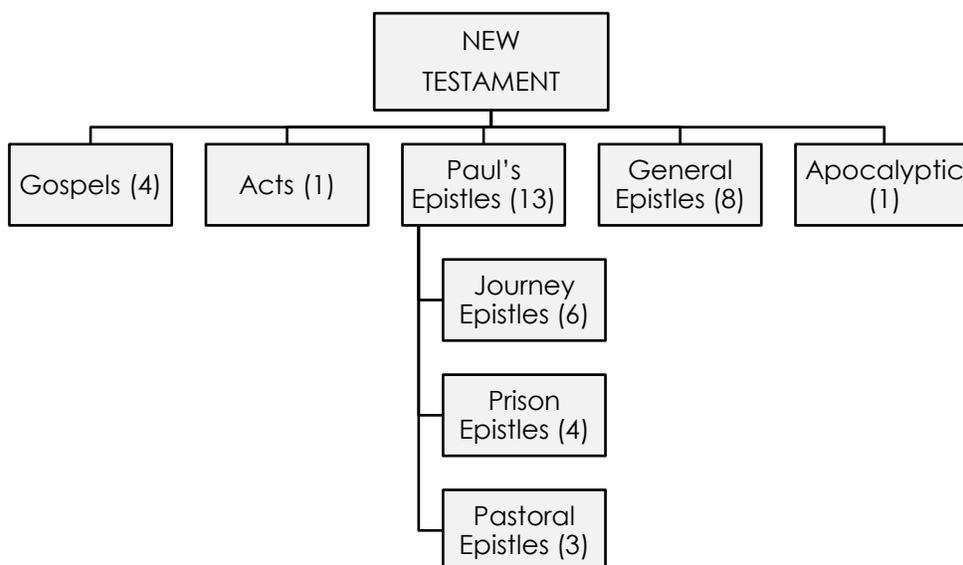


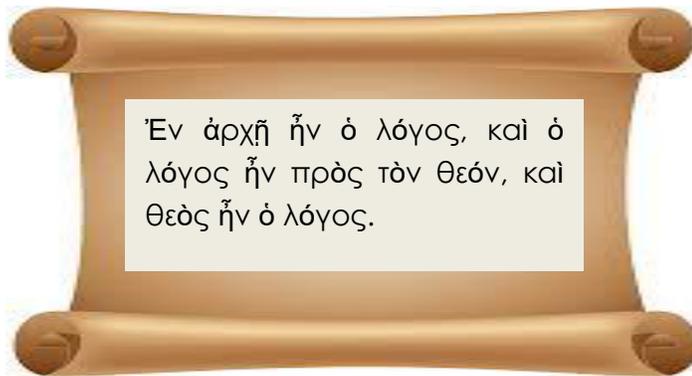
Figure 1: New Testament book categories

The genres and language of the New Testament

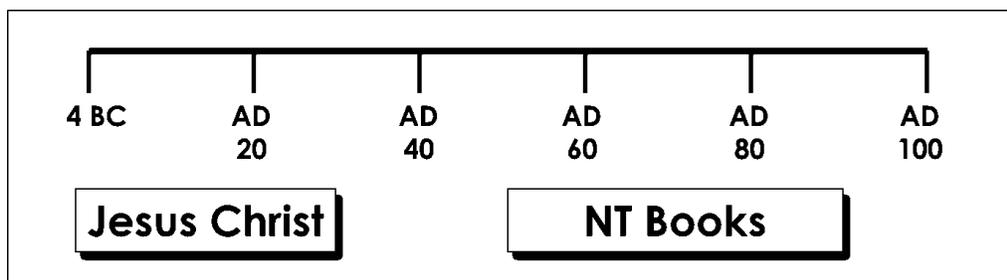
By knowing the genre of a book, one can more accurately interpret it and discover the author's intended message (AIM). For instance, the Epistles may be interpreted more literally while Apocalyptic literature may be interpreted more figuratively.

No.	Genre	NT Books
1	Gospels	Mathew--John
2	Historical Narrative of the Early Church	Acts
3	Pauline Epistles	Romans--Philemon
4	General Epistles	Hebrews--Jude
5	Apocalyptic	Revelation

The original language of the New Testament was koine Greek.



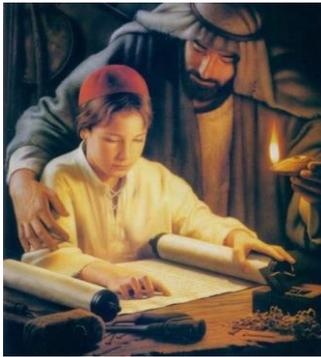
New Testament books were written between AD 49 to early 90s.



The earliest book is most likely Galatians (~AD48), and the latest books were probably the Gospel of John, 1/2/3 John, and Revelation (AD 90s).

2 JESUS' LIFE

Jesus' boyhood



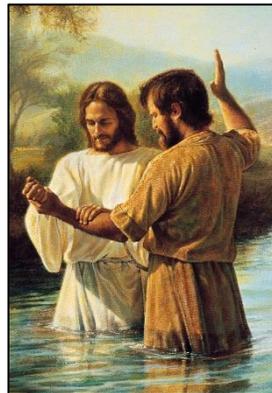
- Age: birth (4-6 B.C.) to 12 years old.
- Place: Bethlehem (Judea).
- Beginning with: His birth (Matt. 1-2; Luke 1:1—2:38).
- Ending with: Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:39-52).

Jesus' hidden years

- Age: 12 to late 20s.
- Place: Nazareth (Galilee).
- He probably cared for his family since Joseph may have died in Jesus' younger days.

Jesus' baptism and temptation

- Age: Late 20s to early 30s.
- Place: Jordon River, wilderness.
- Begins with: Jesus' baptism (Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11).
- Ends with: Jesus' temptation by Satan (Luke 4:1-13).



Jesus' ministry years



- Age: late 20s to early 30s.
- Beginning with his first miracle of turning water into wine in Cana, Galilee
- His ministry in Galilee
- His ministry around Galilee
- His Judean ministry
- His ministry in and around Perea
- His final entry into Jerusalem

Jesus' passion week and crucifixion

- "Passion" = Gr. *pascho* = to suffer
- Age: Early 30s.
- Begins with: The Triumphal; Entry
- Ends with: Jesus' death on the cross

Jesus' post-resurrection ministry and ascension

- Begins with: Jesus' resurrection
- Appears to over 500 people over 40 days
- Ends with: Jesus' ascension to heaven

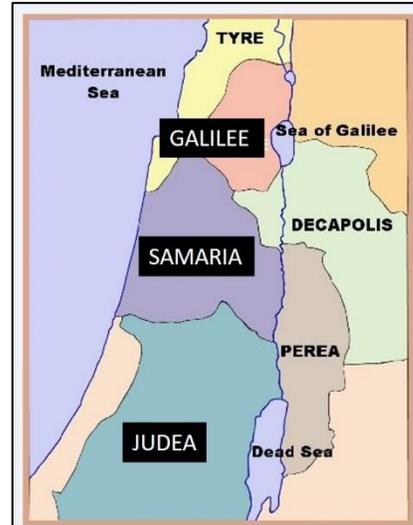


The culture of Galilee

- Generally receptive and friendly to Jesus
- Somewhat like Lake Tahoe area.
- Pleasant rural area with mixed Jewish and Gentile cultures.
- Roman soldiers R & R

The culture of Samaria

- Suspicious but receptive of Jesus
- Mixed race of Jews and Assyrians.
- Hated by Jews.
- Wilderness area, rocky and treacherous.



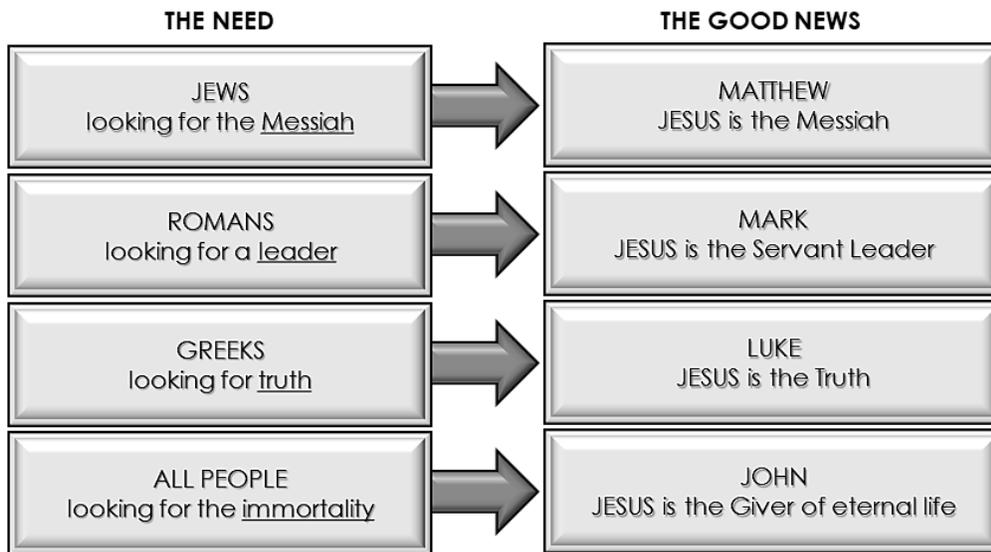
The culture of Judea

- Mixed reception of Jesus, opposition from Jewish leaders
- Jerusalem: Power center of Judaism.
- Location of 2nd Temple, Pharisees, Scribes
- The Great Sanhedrin (70 men + High Priest)

3 THE FOUR GOSPELS

The word “gospel” means *good news*

The word *gospel* is derived from the Greek word *euaggelion* which means “to announce good news.” The Greek pronunciation of the Greek word is where we get the English word *evangelist*. The four writers of the Gospels are therefore referred to as evangelists.

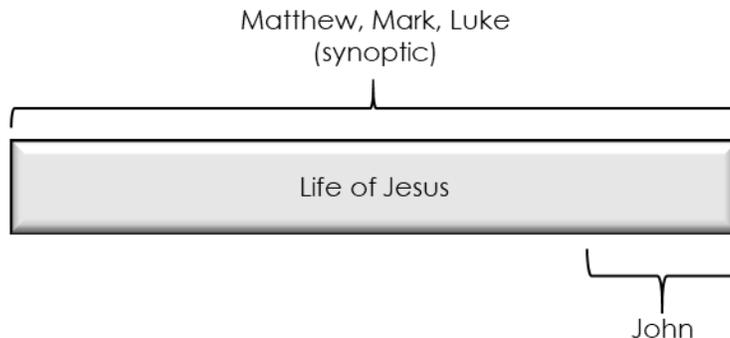


Comparison of the gospels

Aspect	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Jesus as...	King	Servant	Son of Man	Son of God
Emphasis	His Sermons	His Miracles	His Parables	His Doctrines
Recipients	Jews	Romans	Greeks	The World
Style of Writer	Teacher	Preacher	Historian	Theologian

Three of the four Gospels are “synoptic”

Synoptic means “taking the same point of view.” The first three books of the New Testament, which share content, style, and order of events and which differ largely from John, are called the synoptic Gospels. See the figure below.



MATTHEW



Main Point: Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah prophesied throughout the Old Testament!

What to look for in this book

- Notice how the book of Matthew is a bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament. He did this by quoting over 60 OT passages, mostly Isaiah, to show how Jesus fulfilled these prophecies.
- Mathew wanted to show his fellow Jews that Jesus is the Messiah.

Matthew contains five teaching discourses:

- Discourse #1: The Sermon on the Mount (5:1--7:29).
- Discourse #2: The commission and instruction of the disciples for kingdom ministry to Israel (10:11-42).
- Discourse #3: Parables on the mysteries of the kingdom (13:1-52).
- Discourse #4: Behavior in the community of believers (18:1-35).
- Discourse #5: Olivet Discourse: The King's triumphant coming (23:1; 24:1--25:46).

MARK



Main Point: Jesus came to serve, not to be served.

What to look for in this book

- Observe the frequent use of the word "and."² This reveals Mark's vivid, rapid-fire style of writing which encourages the reader to digest the entire book in one sitting. It's hard to lay the book down once started.
- Notice how Mark shows that the time of God's rule, the Kingdom of God, has come with Jesus.
- Examine how Jesus has come as the Servant King to serve others not to be served, and to give his life as a ransom.
- Discover what it means to a disciple of Jesus is by letting him be in complete control of your life.
- Note how Jesus' humanity is presented in addition to his deity. His sorrow (14:34), his being displeased (10:14), his anger (11:15-17), his amazement (6:6), and his fatigue (4:38).

LUKE



Main Point: Jesus is the "Son of Man" (emphasizing his humanity).

What to look for in this book

- Notice Luke's way of compassionately showing how the gospel is for all people, including the marginalized of society--the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, a despised Samaritan, and women.
- Watch how God's Messiah has come to his people, Israel, with the promised inclusion of Gentiles.

- Notice too how Luke traces Jesus' ministry from his birth to the final climax of his crucifixion in Jerusalem.
- Observe Luke's unique way of using contrasts--the rich/poor, and the humble/proud, etc.
- Note how Luke describes Jesus' ministry as being carried out under the power of the Holy Spirit, and the necessity of his death and resurrection (fulfilling Old Testament prophecies) for the forgiveness of sins.

JOHN



Main Point: Jesus is the "Son of God" (emphasizing his deity).

What to look for in this book

- Notice in Matthew and Luke, "Son of David" and "Son of Man" show the divine connection between Jesus and mankind (horizontal). In John, "Son of God" connects him with the Father in heaven (vertical).³
- Note in this Gospel that Jesus proclaims that he is God, that he is the "I am." (cp. Exodus 3:6; John 8:58).
- Carefully read the dialog between Jesus and Nicodemus as it provides one of the most straightforward definitions of salvation and what man must do to be saved from the penalty of sin (John 3).
- Notice Jesus' self-identification as the "I am" throughout this Gospel, especially in Chapter 8.
- Observe how John explains that "fruit-bearing"⁴ happens only when a follower "remains in the Vine" (Jesus).

ACTS



Main Point: Acts records a selective history of the early church following the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

What to look for in this book

The book of Acts was probably written sometime following the writing of the book of Luke. Acts is in a sense “Luke Part 2.” Notice the continuity between the close of Luke and the beginning of Acts.

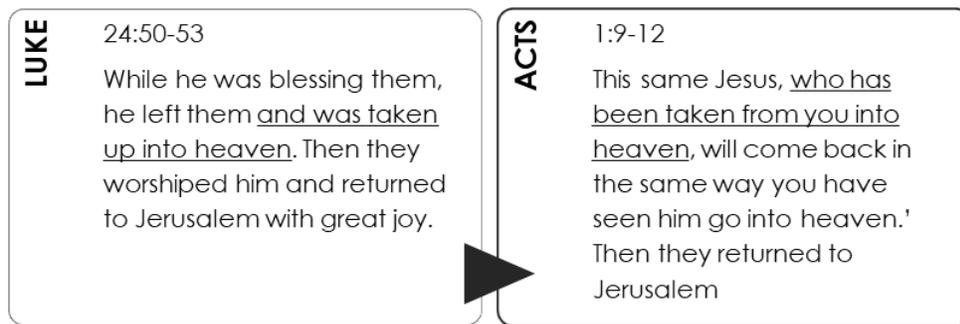


Figure 2: The Luke-Acts connection

Acts is Luke's account of the good news of Jesus and how by the power of the Holy Spirit, the good news spread from Jerusalem to throughout the world. It is in this book that we see the beginning of the church.

Acts is composed of two major parts.

- The first is Peter's ministry with the establishment of the church and its expansion (1:1—12:25).
- The second is Paul's ministry and his three missionary journeys, culminating with his imprisonment in Rome (13:1—28:31).

Acts addresses the issue concerning how much of the Mosaic Law carried over into the New Covenant, such as the issue of whether a person had to become a Jew before becoming a follower of Jesus.

Acts 1:8, a key verse, describes the geographical expansion of the "witnesses," beginning in Jerusalem and expanding to “the ends of the earth.” This expansion is traced throughout Acts. It begins in Jerusalem and culminates with Paul's witness

to Roman guards, some of whom believed and in turn carried the gospel throughout the ends of the earth.

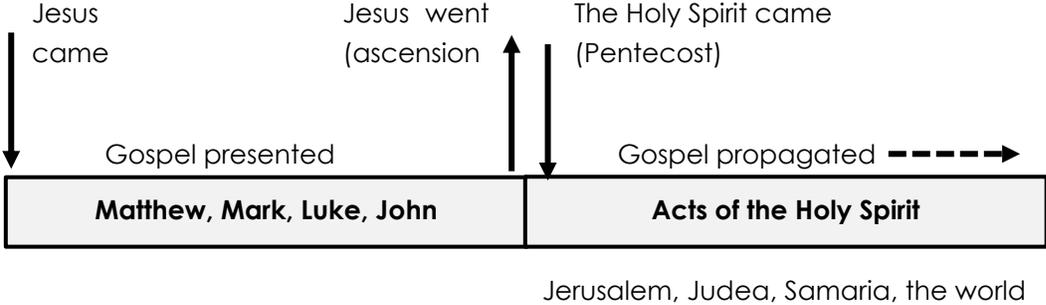


Figure 3: The Gospels-Acts connection

4 PAUL'S JOURNEY LETTERS

ROMANS



Main Point: To present basic doctrine of Christianity to a church that had not received the teaching of an apostle before.

What to look for in this book

At issue is tension between Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome, who probably met in separate house churches and who appear to be at odds regarding Gentile adherence to the Jewish law--especially over three basic means of Jewish identity:

- Should new male Christians be circumcised (2:25--3:1; 4:9-12)
- Should new Christians observe the Jewish Sabbath (14:5-6)
- Should new Christians obey Jewish food laws (14:2-4; 15--23)

Theologically, these two groups were arguing about whether God's righteousness comes by way of "doing" the law or by faith in Jesus Christ.⁵

Paul addresses the failure of the law and success of the Holy Spirit in producing true righteousness. Believers are instructed to have transformed minds (by the Holy Spirit) and to live in unity as God's people in the present.



Figure 4: The Structure of Romans

1 CORINTHIANS



Main Point: To unite a divided church so that it will work together to advance the gospel.

What to look for in this book

The church at Corinth was Paul's "problem child." It was struggling with those around them who openly embraced corruption, sexual immorality, and every other conceivable sin. Spiritually, they remained immature, even though they felt otherwise. They possessed knowledge but lacked genuine love. Because of this, they found themselves broken into factions, confused about marriage, and vulnerable to the philosophy of "tolerance."



This is a letter of correction dealing with no less than eleven issues (mostly behavioral) in a predominately Gentile church situated in one of the most morally decadent cities of the Roman Empire. Some of these issues address matters such as divisions within the church, a case of incest, litigations, going to prostitutes, and foods offered to idols.

Paul addresses these issues by placing Christian conduct within the context of the gospel and one's proper response to it. He also clears up misunderstandings of the Lord's Supper, spiritual gifts, and the bodily resurrection of believers. This book is especially helpful to believers living in a morally decadent society where such behavior is not only practiced but also encouraged.

2 CORINTHIANS



Main Point: Paul defends his apostleship and his message because some in the Corinthian church had apparently taken his meekness among them to be a sign of moral weakness or lack of authority.

What to look for in this book

This book is like turning on the TV and watching a convoluted movie, full of twists and turns, that is well underway. The characters are talking and actions are taking place and we're not sure who they are or what the plot is.

Bible commentators believe this letter is actually two letters combined into one. In Chapters 1-9 the language is positive and joyful—confident in their growth. In Chapters 10-13 the language is angry and broken—not confident in their growth.

Paul's tenuous relationship with this church is apparent, and it appears to be getting worse as he touches on four issues:

- First is his sudden change of plans regarding his visit to Corinth.
- Second, the collection is taken for the poor church in Jerusalem.
- Third, his apostleship and ministry.
- Fourth, the presence of false apostles who have infiltrated the Corinthian church...wolves in sheep's clothing!



GALATIANS



Main Point: Christ's death has brought in the age of the new covenant in which believers do not have to become Jews or follow the outward ceremonies of the Mosaic Law

What to look for in this book

Paul is red-hot in this letter against the (Gentile) Galatian believers who were being convinced by agitators (1:6-7; 5:12) to live by a perverted gospel. This perversion was that Christians must live under the Mosaic Law and follow its practices, especially the practice of circumcision. The Galatians were torn between the Law and grace

Paul is obviously agitated as he writes forcefully but passionately making pleas with the Galatians not to buy into the teachings of these Jewish Christian "missionaries." At stake is not only the true gospel but also Paul's calling as an apostle to the Gentiles.



First, Paul launches an attack against the agitator's slandering of his apostleship.

Next, he presents his arguments to the Galatians (2:15-21). His primary argument is that the cross of Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, have brought the observance of the Jewish law to an end.

1 THESSALONIANS



Main Point: At King Jesus' future coming, believers who have died will physically rise and will be caught up (raptured), along with living believers, to meet the Lord in the air and to be with him forever

What to look for in this book

Part of the delight of reading this letter is seeing how Paul deals with very new converts. These spiritually-young Christians were worried about their fellow Christians who had died ("fallen asleep") before Jesus returned. They had lost all hope because his return did not come as soon as they expected. Paul writes to encourage these Christians about how Jesus will someday return and how those who have died will be physically raised up from the grave.



Having been driven out of Thessalonica by certain Jews and Paul and Silas made their way to Berea where they met with Timothy and sent him to Thessalonica to

strengthen and encourage the believers living there.

These Thessalonian Christians had been believers for only a few weeks, and Paul had to know how they were doing because they too were experiencing persecution from these jealous Jews. When Timothy returned to Paul, who was now in Corinth (Acts 18:1-5), he was greatly relieved at the excellent report.

2 THESSALONIANS



Main Point: The return of King Jesus will be preceded by an “apostasy” (rebellion) and by the revealing of the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist.

What to look for in this book

Paul comes across as being a little upset in this brief letter, the warmth of feeling expressed in 1 Thessalonians is lacking. Why?

First, because someone (ostensibly using Paul's authority) had misled these Christians into thinking that Jesus had already returned (2:2).

Second, he is miffed at those who are still idle and disruptive, a problem he already addressed in his first letter to them (1 Thess. 4:9-12; 5:14).

Paul explains that the day of the Lord will not take place until the rebellion led by the “man of lawlessness” occurs (2:3-4). The word “rebellion” means apostasy (Gr. *apostasia*) referring to the deliberate denial of beliefs once formerly held. The “man of lawlessness” may very well be the Antichrist (1 John 2:18; 4:3; 2 John 1:7).



This behavior was probably not because of being misled about Jesus' second coming but because of the general dislike for manual labor on the part of the Greek aristocracy. He instructs the church on how to deal with these idle/disruptive individuals (3:14-15)

5 PAUL'S PRISON LETTERS

EPHESIANS



Main Point: Unity and love, in the bond of peace, mark the work of the Savior and the Christian's grateful response to his free grace in their lives.

What to look for in this book

Ephesians begins with praise to God for the generous blessings he has given in Christ (1:3-14). It then moves into thanksgiving and prayer (1:15-23), followed by the reconciliation of both Jews and Gentiles, including Paul's role in it (2:1-22; 3:1-13). The letter moves to another prayer and doxology (3:14-21).

The remaining portion of the letter urges these Christians to maintain the unity with which God has provided through Christ's death and resurrection, along with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit (4:1-5:20), especially in Christian households (5:21--6:9).



The letter concludes by encouraging them to remain bold in Christ and the Holy Spirit, especially against spiritual enemies (6:10-20).

PHILIPPIANS



Main Point: True joy is found only in a loving relationship with Jesus Christ.

What to look for in this book

Philippians is one of the favorite books among Christians because it is warm and friendly--evoking a sense of joyfulness, even in difficult times.

Chapter 1 To live is Christ: addresses the need for putting a high priority (to rank things in order of importance) on certain things in life.

Chapter 2 The attitude of Christ: deals with having a positive purpose. A *purpose* is a reason for doing something, and in this letter, it reveals the main reasons why we were created.

Chapter 3 Knowing Christ: addresses positive goals-- objectives to be met in the Christian life.



Chapter 4 Riches in Christ: deals then with positive petitions. A *petition* is simply a request.

Philippians is simple and straightforward. It's not a formal treatise but a warm letter to friends. Read it like you would read any personal letter.

Paul's introduction refers to the common use of the words "joy" and "rejoice" the primary theme of the letter. Use Philippians as a devotional book, first observing what it says, then interpreting what it means, and lastly applying it to your own life.

COLOSSIANS



Main Point: Christ is Lord over all creation, including the invisible realm. He secured redemption for his people, enabling them to participate with him in his death resurrection, and fullness.⁶

What to look for in this book

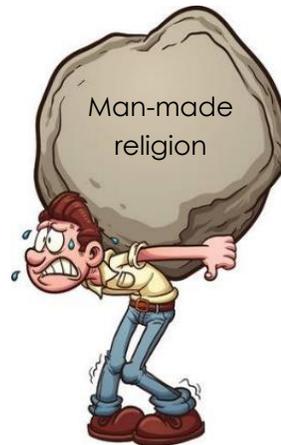
False teachers were promoting a heresy that stressed man-made rules (legalism). They also promoted the idea that spiritual growth comes only through the severe discipline of the body (asceticism) and visions (mysticism).

Apparently derived from the Greek philosophy of dualism, where the spirit is viewed as being good and physical matter is viewed as being evil, the result was pride in their self-centered ascetic practices.

Against this backdrop, Paul offers clear godly clarifications to Christians in Colossae who were becoming unsure about the importance of the law and self-efforts regarding salvation.

Although Paul never visited Colossae, he knew much about them and his letter indicates that it was one of "his" churches--through a coworker Epaphras (1:7-8).

Paul writes to encourage them to stand firm in what they have been taught, and to avoid the errors of embracing a man-made, performance-based religion centered on keeping the Mosaic Law because Christ's death brought it to an end (2:21). He does this by emphasizing the supremacy of Christ over all things, his powerful role in creation (1:15-19).



PHILEMON



Main Point: The gospel can transform lives and impact human relationships

What to look for in this book.

This letter of Paul is written to Philemon, a Gentile believer living in Colossae, urging his forgiveness toward his runaway slave Onesimus.

Such crimes deserved punishment, yet Paul appeals to Philemon for forgiveness toward Onesimus who is a recent convert, and now a brother in the Lord.

Onesimus is being sent back to Philemon accompanied by Tychicus who is also carrying letters to the churches in Colossae (Colossians) and Asia (Ephesus).⁷

This letter is about relationships, especially the way Christians are to relate to each other when mistakes are made



6 PAUL'S PASTORAL LETTERS

1 TIMOTHY



Main Point: The gospel leads to practical, visible change in the lives of those who believe it and obey it.

What to look for in this book

Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus are often referred to as pastoral epistles, written to young pastors on church order.

In this first letter to Timothy he issues a charge against false teachers--their character and their teachings--instructing him on how to deal with the crisis they created in the church community. He also brings encouraging words to this young pastor who is most likely working in the church at Ephesus.

These false teachers were probably local elders who were leading some house churches astray. They were most likely a mixture of Jews and Gentiles, insisting on following the law (1:7), practicing asceticism and denying the goodness of creation (4:3-5).



2 TIMOTHY



Main Point: Persevere in the gospel despite suffering, and continue the fight of faith until God calls you home

What to look for in this book

This is Paul's final letter as he awaits his execution in Rome. His purpose in this urgent letter is to have Timothy join him in Rome as quickly as possible and to bring Mark and some personal items with him when he comes (4:11, 13). The reason for the haste is the onset of winter and the fact that Paul's preliminary court hearing has already taken place (4:16).

The greater part of this letter is not about Paul's situation but is directed more to Timothy as he makes an appeal to him to remain loyal to Paul and the gospel he taught. He warned Timothy that being a Christian could mean suffering and hardship. This appeal is made in the context of the damaging influence of false teachers (2:16-18; 3:13), the defection of many (1:15), and Paul's execution (4:6-8).



Note the tone of this letter since it was probably Paul's last letter. Its purpose was to ask Timothy to come to Rome as quickly as possible since time was running out (4:6).

Paul points out that false teachers were everywhere, but the Lord knows those who are his (2:14—3:9). He characterized these false teachers by their quarreling over words (2:14, 23), their incorrect teaching that the resurrection had already taken place, their success in gaining control over weak-willed women (3:6-7), and their lifestyle which was inconsistent with the gospel (3:1-5).

TITUS



Main Point: There is an inseparable link between one's faith and one's practice. Between one's beliefs and one's behavior.

What to look for in this book

Paul writes to pastor Titus for the purpose of having him establish strong leadership in the churches on the island of Crete. Specifically, he was to appoint elders in these churches who were grounded in the gospel's truth.

Paul had left Titus in Crete to "straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town" (1:5). Elders were those who met specific requirements and were above reproach (1:6-9).



Paul's primary message in the letter to Titus is that the knowledge of the truth which leads to godliness is to be preached to God's elect. It was a work that Paul began earlier and is now being commissioned to Titus (1:1-5). From this, Paul stresses the need to teach sound doctrine and good conduct. He gives clear examples of sound doctrine and good conduct while pointing out that both must be taught to all ages in the church and that false teachers must be openly rebuked and refuted.

Paul instructs Titus to silence the "rebellious people" who were stressing the Jewish law for the sake of dishonest gain (1:10-11).

7

GENERAL LETTERS

The eight letters of Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude are often called the General Epistles because they seem to speak to the Christian church in general rather than to individual churches. They are also united by their interest in practical matters such as organizational leadership, hard work, fairness, good relationships, and effective communication.

HEBREWS⁸



Main Point: Jesus Christ is greater than any angel, priest, or old covenant institution.

JESUS > Anything else

What to look for in this book

Someone has said that Hebrews was written to "rekindle a dampened fire."⁹ This is a long, sustained argument in which the author moves back and forth between an argument (based on scripture) and exhortation.

The three-fold purpose of the letter is:

- To convince Jewish Christians not to revert back to the Mosaic Law.
- To show that Christianity had replaced Judaism.¹⁰
- To present the sufficiency and superiority of Christ.¹¹

The recipients were struggling with their new faith and were becoming discouraged about the message of Jesus Christ and his return (10:35-39). They were drifting back into their old Jewish traditions and routines mainly because of their persecution (10:32-39).

Following Jesus seemed to nullify their Jewish heritage putting them into an "identity crisis." The author explains how the old (Judaism) and the new (Christianity) were both revealed by God (1:1-3).

The main thought throughout Hebrews is that Jesus Christ is far superior to any aspect of the old Jewish religion. He is superior to angels, superior to Moses, and superior to the whole priestly system. The author then encourages them to remain confident in Jesus Christ and to live by faith.

JAMES



Main Point: How to live out one's faith in Jesus Christ, being a doer and not just a hearer of the Word. Believers are not saved by good works; they are saved for good works.

What to look for in this book

the need and nature of true Christian wisdom (1:5, 3:13-18), avoiding favoritism (2:1-13), putting faith into action (2:14-26), controlling the tongue (3:1-12), having proper motives (4:1-3), and praying in faith (5:13-18).

This letter, which has been called the "Proverbs" of the New Testament, teaches how to grow in faith, why believers can experience joy and patience in trials (difficult times of testing), the nature of genuine godly wisdom, attitudes of the rich toward the poor, abuse and proper use of the tongue (speech).



One of the primary emphases is on an inward faith that is outwardly expressed by good works. Faith without works is dead (2:20, 26). James is not saying that works are necessary for salvation, but they are a response to God's grace based on faith in Christ.

1 PETER



Main Point: Christians are to endure suffering for the sake of Jesus Christ, looking *back* on his sufferings and *forward* to his second coming.

What to look for in this book

This is a letter written specifically to newer Christians (mostly Gentiles) who were experiencing persecution because of their beliefs. These Christians were scattered throughout the five provinces in the northwest quadrant of Asia Minor (modern Turkey), referred to as "strangers" (exiles) in the world.



Peter explains how suffering for being a Christian should not surprise us; believers should submit to unjust suffering the way Jesus Christ did. Christ suffered on our behalf to free us from sin; God's people should live righteously at all times, but especially in the face of hostility by remembering that our hope for the future is based on the certainty of Jesus Christ's return.

Difficult times (trials) refine and strengthen the believer's faith, bringing glory and honor to Jesus (1:6-7).

Because all are accountable to God, we can leave judgment of others to him. We must not hate or resent those who persecute us. We should realize that we will be held responsible for how we live each day.

2 PETER



Main Point: It is God's grace, through Jesus Christ, that truly transforms and empowers Christians to live righteously, even in the face of opposition and false teachings

What to look for in this book

This is somewhat of a "farewell letter" urging Christians to grow and mature spiritually, depending on God's divine power as their source for living the Christian life (1:3-11).

False teachers, who denied the second coming of Jesus Christ were creating confusion among a specific but unidentified group of believers. These greedy teachers were secretly introducing destructive heresies, made up stories, and even denying the sovereign Lord (2:1-3). Apparently, these false teachers were more interested in making money by distorting the truth. Peter warns these Christians about these false teachers and encourages them to *grow in their faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ* (1:5-8).



1 JOHN



Main Point: John calls the readers back to the three basics of the Christian life: 1) knowing biblical truths, 2) living obedient lives, and 3) being completely devoted to God.

What to look for in this book

False teachers (probably Docetists) were telling Christians that Jesus was actually a "ghost." John was perhaps the only surviving apostle at the time of this writing.

Here he expresses concern about two heresies:

- First, false teachers were denying the reality of sin (1:6, 8, 10).
- Second, they denied that Jesus was the Messiah, God in the flesh (2:22; 4:1-3).

These false teachers were stating that Jesus only appeared to be human, that he was a phantom, an apparition. Notice how John states that as an eyewitness to Jesus, he personally touched him with his hands (1:1), something that couldn't be done with an apparition.

Love means putting others first and being unselfish. Love is action—showing others we care—not just saying it. To show love we must give sacrificially of our time and money to meet the needs of others.

2 JOHN



Main Point: Live in God's amazing love, and not to God only but to other people as well.

What to look for in this book

To obey Christ fully, we must believe his command to love others. Helping, giving, and meeting needs put love into practice



False teachers were a serious threat to the church as they spread their heresies to other communities of faith.

John issues clear warning against believing those who say that Jesus was not a flesh-and-blood figure. John refers to them as "antichrist."

3 JOHN



Main Point: Live your life in the truth of God's Word and let your love for fellow believers be expressed openly, especially through hospitality to itinerant Christian workers.

What to look for in this book

This is the shortest letter in the New Testament and can be read in less than two minutes. This letter is about "the elder" who wrote it; Gaius, who received it;

Diotrephes, who provoked it; and Demetrius, who carried it."¹²

John commends his good friend, Gaius, for his generous hospitality to traveling evangelists and teachers (8). It also addresses a problematic individual named Diotrephes, who wanted to control the church by refusing to have anything to do with other spiritual leaders (9-10).¹³

Faithful Christian missionaries need our support. Whenever you can extend hospitality to others, it will make you a partner in their ministry. Showing hospitality to other Christians is a noble way of working together to spread the truth.

Believers must be cautious of church leaders like Diotrephes who operate through self-centered pride and belittle the work of genuine Christians (9-11).

JUDE



Main Point: Be careful about following false teachers who have surreptitiously infiltrated the church and perverted the truth of God's Word. The church is to defend the truth aggressively against such false teachers.

What to look for in this book

If Christians are not under the Old Testament Law, what is to stop Christians from living however they want? That was the issue in this letter.

Jude writes to a church probably located in Palestine made up mostly of Jewish Christians where false teachers have "secretly slipped in among them" (4). These antinomians ("against the law") were propagating the notion that because Christians were under God's grace, they were free to live as immorally as they wished (4). Theologically, antinomianism is the belief that there are no moral laws God expects Christians to obey.

Jude confronts these heresies by giving three examples in Old Testament times when God dealt with these kinds of rebellious people.

He concludes by expressing his concern for these believers and how they are to persevere (20-21), and to help those who have been influenced by these heresies (22-23).



8

THE PROPHETIC (APOCALYPTIC) LETTER

REVELATION

Main Point: Revelation (Greek apokalupsis) means “an uncovering,” an “unveiling”, or a “disclosure.” In the NT, this word describes the unveiling of spiritual truth (Rom. 16:25; Gal. 1:12; Eph. 1:17, 3:3). The word revelation refers to something or someone, once hidden, becoming visible. What this book reveals or unveils is Jesus Christ in glory and his return as King of kings.



Setting

The Apostle John, the last surviving apostle, and an old man in exile on the small, barren island of Patmos, located in the Aegean Sea, southwest of Ephesus. The Roman authorities banished him there because of his faithful preaching of the gospel (1:9). While on Patmos, John received a series of visions that laid out the future history of the world. When John was arrested, he was in Ephesus, ministering to the church and surrounding cities.

Structure of Revelation

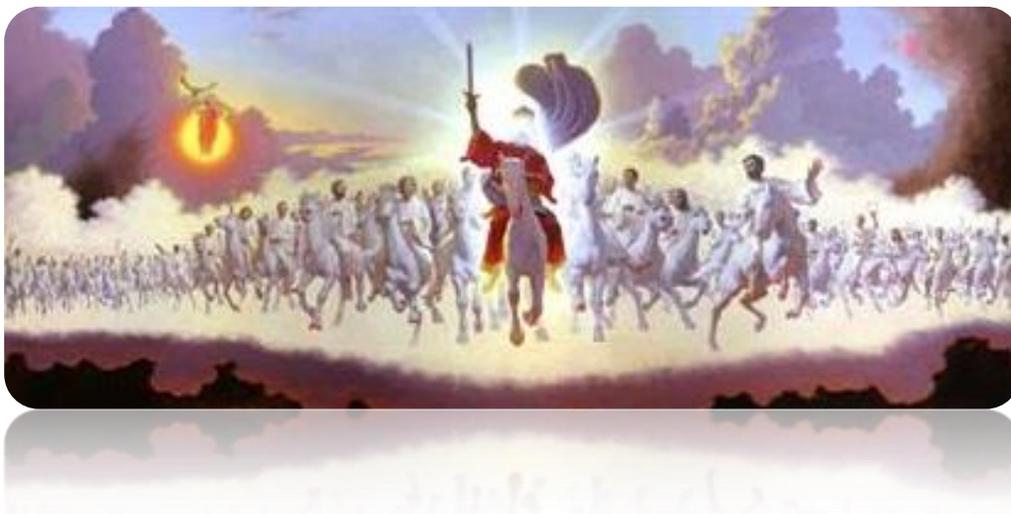
PAST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•What you have seen•Chapter 1
PRESENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•What is now•Chapters 2-3
FUTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•What will take place later•Chapters 4-22

Brief description of the book

Revelation discloses the full glory, character, and deity of Jesus Christ (1:1), and his second coming (1:7).

This book promises a blessing to whoever reads it and takes it to heart (1:3). "Blessed" (Gr. *makarios*) means fortunate, to be happy because of one's circumstances. The word also has the implication of being free from daily cares and worries.

This book describes Christ's complete and eternal victory over Satan and his future physical reign on the earth. It tells more about Satan's final doom than any other book in the Bible.



Six Interpretive approaches to understanding Revelation

- **Critical Approach:** Denies either the inspiration or canonicity of the Book of Revelation and sees the writing as a purely human composition based on the historical situation at the end of the first century A.D. This view must be rejected completely by all who hold unreservedly to the inspiration and canonicity of Revelation.
- **Allegorical Approach:** The allegorical approach to the book denies the literal reality behind the descriptions of the narrated events and takes the accounts to be solely allegories, parables, and metaphors, which contain messages of spiritual encouragement. This view is contradicted by the first verse of Revelation which states its purpose.
- **Preterist (i.e., “past”) Approach:** Interprets Revelation as a description of first-century events in the Roman Empire. This view conflicts with the book's own often-repeated claim to be prophecy (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19).
- **Historicist Approach:** This approach views Revelation as a panoramic view of church history from apostolic times to the present—seeing in the symbolism such events as the barbarian invasions of Rome, the rise of the Roman Catholic Church, the emergence of Islam, and the French Revolution. This method robs Revelation of any meaning for those to whom it was written.
- **Idealist Approach:** This view interprets Revelation as a timeless depiction of the cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil. This view ignores Revelation's prophetic character and, if carried to its logical conclusion, severs the book from any connection with actual historical events. Revelation then becomes merely a collection of stories designed to teach spiritual truth.
- **Futurist Approach:** This approach insists that the events of chapters 6-22 are yet future and that those chapters literally and symbolically depict actual people and events yet to appear on the world scene. It describes the events surrounding the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (Chapters 6-19), the Millennium and final judgment (Chapter 20), and the eternal state (Chapters 21, 22). This view has the most reasons for acceptance and is the approach taken in this study.

Basic Principles for Interpreting Revelation

Principle No. 1: Whenever John saw things in the heavenly realm that were beyond human comprehension, he used metaphors to describe what he saw. Metaphors are usually identified as similes, words such as “like,” or “as” (Rev. 1:13-16; 8:8; 9:7; 10:1; 13:2, 11).

Principle No. 2: Be careful about forcing a meaning into a metaphor that isn't there. Remember, for now we see these things dimly (1 Cor. 13:12).

Principle No. 3: Always approach a prophecy as literal (in its usual, ordinary meaning) unless one of the following occurs:

- The grammatical context shows that it is figurative language by using similes, metaphors, parables, allegories, symbols, or types.
- A literal interpretation violates common sense (i.e., it is contrary to what John is saying or is contrary to what the rest of Scripture teaches).

Principle No. 4: When interpreting figurative or symbolic language in Revelation look for meanings:

- Within the surrounding context of the book in which the passage appears
- In any other writings of John
- In any other prophetic writings to which John had access

Principle No. 5: When John refers to future events, he does not always use the future tense.

Principle No. 6: Consider the historical context of Revelation, remembering that God was delivering his prophecy to a particular people at a particular time.

Principle No. 7: Events in Revelation are not always disclosed in chronological order, and not all Bible scholars agree to the exact order of events.

Principle No. 8: The book of Revelation is about Jesus, so keep your eye on the ball (Jesus and what he does), not just on the symbols and metaphors. The three important questions to ask when reading the book of Revelation are:

- What is Jesus doing?
- Why is he doing it
- What does this tell me about Jesus?

9

HOW TO READ THE NEW TESTAMENT

Peter Krol offers the following way to read the New Testament based on four “tracks.”¹⁴

- Track #1: Matthew, Hebrews, James, Jude
- Track #2: Mark, 1 Peter, 2 Peter
- Track #3: Luke, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon
- Track #4: John, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Revelation

Track 1 focuses explicitly on how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament and led Jews into the new covenant. Those familiar with the Old Testament tend to love this track.

Track 2 focuses on Peter’s eyewitness testimony to scattered Jewish converts to Christianity. Established religious folks often benefit from this track.

Track 3 focuses on Paul’s witness to Christ and his ministry to the Gentiles. Nonsense folks who love to have all the facts tend to love this track.

Track 4 focuses on John’s eyewitness testimony to scattered Jews, seeking to persuade them of Jesus’ messiahship and to assure them amid great persecution. Young believers and unbelievers exploring Jesus often benefit from this track.



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End Notes

¹ Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985) 401.

² The word "and" occurs 583 times in Mark. *BibleWorks*, Version 5.0 (Norfolk: BibleWorks, LLC, 1996).

³ Mears 397

⁴ "Fruit" is what God produces in believers, and through believers, as they maintain a fresh, trusting relationship with Jesus Christ!

⁵ Fee and Stuart, 317-319.

⁶ (ESV Crossway Bibles 2289)

⁷ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*, (Zondervan, 2002) 387.

⁸ Some bible commentators place the book of Hebrews in the Pauline letters category; however, since the authorship is unknown it may fit best in the general letters category.

⁹ Irving L. Jensen, *Survey of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981) 408.

¹⁰ Ronald F. Youngblood, ed., *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995) 553.

¹¹ *Life Application Bible, New International Version* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers and Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991) 2217.

¹² (Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* 420)

¹³ (Life Application Bible New International Version 2290)

¹⁴ Peter Krol, "My Favorite Way to Read the New Testament"
<<https://www.knowableword.com/2015/02/04/my-favorite-way-to-read-the-new-testament/>>.