

## **Lesson 3**

### **The Bible – New Testament Survey**

**TEACHERS:** It is indeed a challenge to present the entire New Testament in a concise lesson capable of being effectively communicated within the parameters of our Bible Study structure. However, be encouraged that if you approach this as a survey of the major themes, emphasizing the central message, and drive it home with key scripture passages, you will be able to communicate the Good News in a powerful way.

**TEACHERS: Here are your goals:**

1. Provide some background understanding of the collection of books we know as the New Testament, giving major sections and the purposes.
2. Provide an understanding of the relationship of the Gospels in describing the life of Christ as the key message of the New Testament.
3. Describe how the growth of the church is recorded in the Book of Acts.
4. Describe the purposes of the Epistles of Paul and their significance to the New Testament.
5. Explain the contribution of Hebrews, the General Epistles, and Revelation to the message of the New Covenant.
6. Finally, and most importantly, focus on some key passages that will emphasize the New Covenant message of the New Testament.

(The following information is sourced heavily from *The New Testament: Its Background and Message*, by Thomas D. Lea, Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996. )

#### **Background of the New Testament**

The period of time between the Old Testament recordings and the New Testament spans some 400 years. The last ruler mentioned by name in the Old Testament is Darius the Persian (Nehemiah 12:22). When we arrive at the New Testament, the ruling monarch is Augustus, who represents the power of Rome. Between these two periods of time, Palestine transitioned from the Babylonian period, through the Persian period (539-331 B.C.), the Grecian period (331-320 B.C.), the Ptolemaic period (320-198 B.C.), the Syrian Period (198-167 B.C.), the Maccabean

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period (167-142 B.C.), the Hasmonean Period (142-63 B.C.), and finally to the Roman period (63 B.C. on).

As you can see, the Palestinian people were certainly not accustomed to ruling themselves. Their history had seen them as a subservient society to various dynasties in power through the years. However, the Roman Empire offered a different approach to government that set the stage the New Testament writings. Rome was founded in 753 B.C. as a union of small villages on the Tiber River in central Italy. In the fifth century B.C., Rome developed a republican form of government which vest power in the people and their chosen representatives. Rome grew by building alliances with nearby cities and by waging wars against their neighbors. Over the next few hundred years, the Roman Empire expanded by defeating all rivals to it power in the region. The rule of Julius Caesar solidified the influence of the Roman Empire on the World until his murder in 44 B.C. The following struggle for power saw Octavian, Caesar's nephew seize control over Antony and Cleopatra in Greece in 31 B.C., and entered the Roman Empire into a period of relative peace known as *Pax Romana*, or Roman Peace.

The victories of Octavian allowed him to become the first Roman Emperor, and in 27 B.C., the Roman Senate named him the commander-in-chief of the Roman armed forces and the title of Augustus, which literally means "the majestic one." To administer this vast empire, Augustus implemented two styles of government depending on the perceived unrest of a region. For the more peaceful and settled areas, a proconsul was appointed by the Roman Senate. However, in areas that presented more of a challenge, like Palestine, Augustus retained direct control and appointed a proprietor or prefect, who retained his office at the discretion of the emperor. Pontius Pilate served as prefect of Judea from A.D. 26-36, encompassing the ministry of Jesus Christ. Several emperors followed during the writing of the New Testament (basically the first century) including Tiberius (A.D. 14-37), Caligula (A.D. 37-41), Claudius (A.D. 41-54), Nero (A.D. 54-68), Vespian (A.D. 69-79), Titus (A.D. 79-81), and Domitian (A.D. 81-96).

The Roman Empire used local rulers to implement policy and control, at times giving the false sense of self-government in local regions. But the region during New Testament times was under the control of Rome and had the political dynamics of the Roman Empire.

### **Life in Palestine**

The population of Palestine has been estimated at between 500,000 and 600,000, while Jerusalem was home to about 25,000 of these people. The city of Jerusalem grew to several times this population during Jewish festivals. Most people lived in either tents or homes made of stone and plaster. Palestinians usually had 2 meals a day, being midday and evening, consisting of mainly vegetables, fruits, and breads. Meat was considered expensive and reserved for festive

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occasions. Breads were made from either wheat or barley and olive oil was a vital ingredient for cooking. Both men and women wore tunics, a loosely fitting garment from shoulder to knee or ankle.

Jewish people had basically a couple of social classes, the chief priest and temple officials being the upper class and everyone else being the lower class. Jews in Judea looked with disdain upon the residents of Galilee because of the mixing of races. Slavery, while common in the Roman Empire, was less prevalent in the Jewish culture and did not involve inhumane treatment. Three languages were most common in Palestine: Hebrew, the language of the synagogue, Greek, the language of business and government, and Latin, an international language. Aramaic was a dialect of Hebrew. Industry consisted of agriculture, fishing, and trading mainly. There was no public transportation and most people did not venture far from home. The synagogues assumed the responsibility of educating the young men, starting at about age 6. Writing materials were papyrus, broken bits of pottery, and wax paper. Marriage was not based upon mutual love but was arranged by the families, mainly negotiated by the fathers. Divorce was obtained rather easily, but could only be pursued by men. Entertainment was usually reserved for festival times but included a variety of games from board games to athletic competitions. Death and funerals was an occasion for a public display of grief and emotion.

## **The New Testament Writings**

The New Testament consists of 27 books known as the New Testament Canon. Derived from the Greek word Kanon, the concept originally inferred a straight rod or measuring stick used as a measurement of length. How were the New Testament books selected? The most important criteria of canonicity is inspiration. Paul reminds us in 2 Timothy 3:16, which we discussed in Lesson 1 of this class, that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” In order to stand the test of canonicity, the early church used three criteria: (1) The rule of Faith, meaning the teaching of the book was consistent with their faith, (2) The book needed to demonstrate apostolicity, meaning it needed to be written by an apostle (one who had *seen* Christ) or an associate of an apostle, and (3) That the writing be universal, meaning it was accepted in a broad geographic region. Discussion and debate over the Canon of Scripture began in the early second century and continued until general agreement occurred in the Third Council of Carthage in A.D. 397.

## **The Four Gospels**

Four broad literary types appear in the New Testament: Biography in the Gospels, Letters in the epistles, history in Acts, and prophetic in Revelation. Almost all of what we know about Jesus is obtained from descriptions of his life in the Gospels. The recordings of the four Gospels were rarely questioned as factual versions of the same set of events until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The period of the Enlightenment ended this trust in the historical accuracy of the Gospels. Writers such as D. F. Straus (1835), Albert Schweitzer (1906), and eventually Rudolph Bultmann openly questioned the facts as skeptics. These authors attempted to separate the Christ of history from the Christ of faith. Clearly, the gospels do not present every detail of the life of Christ. These documents were written with the purpose of communicating the details of the most important man who ever lived, a person upon whom our faith can be established. This is the central message of the Gospels, that Christ came to redeem a lost people, specifically you and me. This does not change the historicity of the facts included within the documents, but provides the context for the central message of the gospels.

The four gospels do not profess to be comprehensive historical accounts of the life of Jesus because they lack details about his childhood and growth into maturity. Although they do not provide complete details of the ministry years, they do generally focus on this aspect of his life. The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) focus on the Galilean ministry of Christ while John focuses more on his Judean ministry. Each author provides a different perspective provides different emphases.

## **The Book of Acts**

The Book of Acts is basically an account of history, covering the early years of the development of the church. The book is literally entitled “The Acts of the Holy Spirit” and is the Apostle Luke’s effort to provide chronological detail to the spread of Christianity from Jerusalem to Rome, although certainly not an exhaustive account. Luke provides a practical description of the early church following the direction of God to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to whatever doors were opened. Acts 2:41-47 is an example of this description of early church practices.

The book of Acts, being primarily a historical document, should not be used primarily as a theological foundation. While the Apostle Luke provides theological insights into the historical account, it comes as additional perspective on the events as opposed to a theological description. It is important to match these historical accounts with the other theological documents, as in the

epistles, for a balanced foundational study.

## **The Epistles of Paul**

Paul provides an understanding of his theological teachings in his epistles (letters). These letters were written in an occasional sense, meaning they were designed to communicate something specific to a particular group of believers. The occasion of the writing, the reason for the letter, is significant to understand in order to understand the writing. For example, Romans is a theological argument while I Corinthians is written in response to specific needs and questions from the Corinthians. The letters to Timothy and Titus were written to young Pastors. Paul offers a variety in his communications from exhortation to chastisement to doctrinal explanation. These letters offer great theological foundation taken from the experiences of the early church.

## **Hebrews, The General Epistles, and The Revelation**

The additional letters of the New Testament provide a variety of authors and audiences, all centering around some practical purpose for the writing, whether overtly theological or not. The General Epistles consist of a collection of letters written primarily for general distribution to all churches. These letters are generally named for the person who wrote them through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The work referred to as Hebrews has an unknown author, although some scholars consider it to have overtly Pauline tendencies. The Revelation is an account of the Apostle John's visions about future events and is considered to be prophetic, apocalyptic, and an epistle in one book. Revelation is a fascinating study, although it should be studied in conjunction with other scripture as opposed to an isolated Biblical study exercise.

## **Key Passages**

### **Matthew 28:18-20**

*<sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

### **Hebrews 1:1-2**

*<sup>1</sup> In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.*

### **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

*<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

### **Matthew 3:16-17**

*<sup>16</sup> As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. <sup>17</sup> And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”*

### **Hebrews 4:14-16**

*<sup>14</sup> Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

### **Romans 3:23-26**

*<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup> God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— <sup>26</sup> he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*

### **Romans 8:12-14**

*<sup>12</sup> Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. <sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup> For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.*

# Books of the New Testament Classified Doctrinally

BOOK	CLASSIFICATION	THEME
Matthew Mark Luke John Acts Romans 1 Corinthians 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians 1 Timothy 2 Timothy	Gospel — Good News of Jesus Christ Gospel — Good News of Jesus Christ Gospel — Good News of Jesus Christ Gospel — Good News of Jesus Christ Theological history Soteriology Ecclesiology Ecclesiology Soteriology Christology Christology Christology Eschatology Eschatology Ecclesiology Ecclesiology Ecclesiology Personal note Christology-soteriology	Jesus the Messiah as King Jesus the Messiah as Servant of Yahweh Jesus the Messiah as Son of Man Jesus the Messiah as Son of God Acts of the Holy Spirit through the church Paul's interpretation of the gospel Church problems Ministry of Paul vindicated Liberation by the gospel Christ as Lord over the church Joy in Christ Christ as Lord over the cosmos Second coming of Christ described Second coming of Christ clarified Pastoral care of a church Ministry of Paul completed and his final charge to his spiritual son The proper traits of a church — sound doctrine and good works
Titus Philemon Hebrews James 1 Peter 2 Peter 1 John 2 John 3 John Jude Revelation	Personal note Christology-soteriology Soteriology Eschatology Eschatology Soteriology Soteriology Personal note Eschatology Eschatology	Forgiveness and brotherhood in Christ Superiority of the priesthood of Christ and His salvation Practical outworking of salvation Christian response to suffering in anticipation of Christ's coming Certainty of the gospel and the Day of the Lord Assurance of personal salvation Warning about false teaching Exhortation in view of tyrannical teacher in the church Contending for the faith in view of Christ's coming Victory of Christ and the church over sin and the world

The base of this chart is from Irving Jensen, 1 Corinthians (Chicago: Moody, 1972). Adapted by permission.

# Theological Emphases and Order of New Testament Letters

LITERARY CLASSIFICATION	NEW TESTAMENT BOOK	THEOLOGICAL CATEGORY	THEOLOGICAL EMPHASIS
Gospels	Matthew		Jesus as King
	Mark		Jesus as Servant
	Luke		Jesus as Son of Man
	John		Jesus as Son of God
History	Acts		Birth and building of the church
Epistles, Pauline	Romans	Salvation	Explanation of the doctrine of salvation
	1 Corinthians		Discussion of various aspects of Christian conduct
	2 Corinthians		Portrayal of the Christian ministry
	Galatians		Implications of justification by faith
	Ephesians	Church as the body of Christ	Believer's position "in Christ"
	Philippians		Believer's attitude in Christ
	Colossians		Believer's completeness in Christ
	1 Thess.	Second Coming	Second Coming described
	2 Thess.		Second Coming clarified
	1 Timothy	Church organization	Conduct in house of God elucidated
	2 Timothy		Final charge to servant of God given
	Titus		Need for sound doctrine and good works stated
	Philemon	Personal note	Favor requested for a Christian brother
	Epistles, General	Hebrews	Comfort and exhortation
James		Need for good works as evidence of genuine faith	
1 Peter		Conduct and joy of believers in suffering	
2 Peter		Warning concerning false teaching	Gospel's certainty and the Day of the Lord
1, 2, 3 John			Way of fellowship and genuine faith
Jude			Warning concerning false teachers
Prophecy-Apocalypse	Revelation		Capstone of God's kingdom and redemptive programs

The base for this chart is from Stanley A. Ellisen, *Bible Workbook, Part VI: The Synoptic Gospels* (Portland, Ore.: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1969); Stanley A. Ellisen, *The Book of Romans: God's Philosophy of Salvation*, *Progressive Bible Studies* (Portland, Ore.: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1971). Adapted by permission.



# Literary Classification of the New Testament

GOSPEL <sup>1</sup>	HISTORY <sup>2</sup>	PAULINE EPISTLES	GENERAL EPISTLES	PROPHECY- APOCALYPSE <sup>3</sup>
Matthew Mark Luke John	Acts	Romans 1 Corinthians 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians 1 Timothy 2 Timothy Titus Philemon	Hebrews James 1 Peter 2 Peter 1 John 2 John 3 John Jude	Revelation

<sup>1</sup> Some consider these books biography, but, though they have some affinity with ancient biography, they should more naturally be taken as a new literary type brought on by the uniqueness of the Christ-event. They are proclamations of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

<sup>2</sup> Acts is not merely history in the sense of a record of historical data. It is interpretive theological history — Salvation history.

<sup>3</sup> The Book of Revelation shares similarities with Jewish apocalyptic works and later Old Testament books of apocalypticism, but also with Old Testament prophecy. Internally, the book is called a book of prophecy and an apocalypse.

# A Comparative Chart of the Four Gospels

THE GOSPELS	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
PROBABLE DATE OF WRITING	60s	late 50s or early 60s	60	late 80s or early 90s
PROBABLE PLACE OF WRITING	Antioch or Syria	Rome	Rome	Ephesus
PROBABLE ADDRESSEES	Jews in Syria	Non-Christian Romans	Non-Christian Roman official, or other cultured non-Christians	Christians and/or non-Christians in the region around Ephesus
PRESENTATION OF JESUS CHRIST	Messiah-King, Son of David	Servant of Yahweh; the Redeemer	Son of man; compassionate, ideal man	Son of God

BOOK	AUTHOR	TIME OF WRITING <sup>1</sup>	PLACE OF WRITING	ADDRESSEES
Acts	Luke	61	Rome	Same as above
Philippians	Paul	61	Rome	Christians in Philippi
1 Timothy	Paul	62	Macedonia	Timothy in Ephesus
Titus	Paul	62	Nicopolis	Titus in Crete
2 Timothy	Paul	63	Rome	Timothy in Ephesus
1 Peter	Peter	63	Rome	Christians in Asia Minor
2 Peter	Peter	63-64	Rome	Christians in Asia Minor
Matthew	Matthew	60s	Probably Antioch in Syria	Jews in Syria or Palestine
Hebrews	Unknown <sup>2</sup> (Apollos, Luke, Barnabas, Priscilla?)	60s	Unknown	Jewish Christians in Rome or Jerusalem
Jude	Jude, half brother of Jesus	60s or 70s	Unknown	Christians in general
John	John	late 80s or early 90s	Ephesus	Christians and/or non-Christians in the region around Ephesus
1 John	John	late 80s or early 90s	Ephesus	Christians in the region around Ephesus
2 John	John	late 80s or early 90s	Ephesus	A church near Ephesus
3 John	John	late 80s or early 90s	Ephesus	Gaius, a Christian in the region around Ephesus
Revelation	John	late 80s or early 90s	Patmos, off coast of Asia Minor	Seven churches in western Asia Minor

<sup>1</sup> All dates are A.D. Date of writing, place of writing, and addressees are disputed among scholars. For representative dates by conservative scholars, see James L. Boyer, *New Testament Chronological Chart* (Winona Lake, Ind.: James L. Boyer, 1961); Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974); Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964); Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961).

<sup>2</sup> See chart on authorship of Hebrews for details.

The base for this chart is from Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970). Adapted by permission.

# Books of the New Testament

(arranged according to time of writing)

BOOK	AUTHOR	TIME OF WRITING <sup>1</sup>	PLACE OF WRITING	ADDRESSEES
Galatians	Paul	49, just after 1st missionary journey	Antioch in Syria (?)	Christians in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and southern Galatia
1 Thessalonians	Paul	50-51, during 2nd missionary journey	Corinth	Christians in Thessalonica
2 Thessalonians	Paul	50-51, during 2nd missionary journey	Corinth	Christians in Thessalonica
1 Corinthians	Paul	54, during 3rd missionary journey	Ephesus	Christians in Corinth
2 Corinthians	Paul	55, during 3rd missionary journey	Macedonia	Christians in Corinth
Romans	Paul	55, during 3rd missionary journey	Corinth	Christians in Rome
James	James, half brother of Jesus	40s or 50s	Probably Jerusalem	Jewish Christians of the Dispersion
Mark	John Mark	late 50s or early 60s	Rome	Non-Christian Romans; new converts
Philemon	Paul	60	Rome	Philemon, his family, and the church in his house at Colosse
Colossians	Paul	60	Rome	Christians in Colosse
Ephesians	Paul	60	Rome	Christians in the region around Ephesus
Luke	Luke	60	Probably Caesarea or Rome	Non-Christian Roman official, possibly other cultured non-Christians