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New Testament Overview

The Christian Bible is divided into two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word “*testament*” can also be translated as “*covenant*” or “*relationship*.” The **Old Testament** describes God’s covenant of law with the people of Israel. The **New Testament** describes God’s covenant of grace through Jesus Christ. When we accept Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we enter into a new relationship with God.

The New Testament contains twenty-seven books which can be divided into four major groups:

- ❖ **The Gospels:** “Gospel” literally means “good news.” Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John tell the good news of Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are known as the “synoptic” gospels—“synoptic” means “with the same eye.” Their narratives are very similar. Scholars believe that Mark was written first. Matthew and Luke based their gospels on Mark but added their own material. John takes quite a different approach from the other three gospels. The gospels are not really biographies—their primary goal is to communicate the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.
- ❖ **The Acts of the Apostles:** The fifth book of the New Testament is often referred to as “Acts.” It records the history of the New Testament church and the spread of Christianity after Jesus’ resurrection. The first chapters focus on the Jerusalem church and the original apostles. The latter part of Acts focuses upon Paul’s missionary journeys. The author of Luke’s Gospel also wrote Acts. Reading Luke and Acts gives a good overview of Jesus’ life and the early church.
- ❖ **The Epistles:** “Epistle” is a Greek word for “letter.” Much of the New Testament contains letters sent by various church leaders to the churches under their pastoral care. Most of the letters were written by the apostle Paul. Two of the letters—James and Hebrews—can also be classified as sermons. Although the Gospels come first in the New Testament and recount Jesus’ life, many of the New Testament Epistles were most likely written before the Gospels were published.
- ❖ **Revelation:** “The Revelation of John” is typically referred to as “Revelation.” (No “s” on the end.) The first section records seven letters sent to the seven churches of Asia Minor by Jesus the Christ. The remaining portion of the book describes John’s vision of the final days. Many people get caught up in the details, attempting to cross-reference the imagery and events with contemporary history. Remember the letter is written to churches undergoing persecution by the Roman Empire. The overarching message is simple: “God wins!” No earthly power can ever overcome the church.

Mnemonics: “Mnemonics” serve as methods for memorization. Here are a few mnemonics to help find the books of the New Testament. “God’s Electric Power Company” stands for “Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians.” The first letters of the phrase give the order of the books. A second mnemonic is that all of the “Ts” are together in the New Testament: 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, and Titus. Isn’t God good!?!

Bible Chronology of the New Testament

The following chronological list is adapted from *The Chronological Bible*. The dates are disputed here and there; but overall, they can give you a reference in time and order.

Jesus is born	5 B. C. Matt. 1; Luke 2	The life of Jesus Matthew, Mark, Luke, John 5 B.C. - 29 A.D.
Flight to Egypt	4 B. C. Matt. 2:13-18	
Childhood at Nazareth	Luke 2:40	
In Jerusalem at 12	Luke 2:41-50	
John the Baptist	Matt. 3; Mark 1; Luke 3	
Jesus' Baptism	Matt. 3	

Temptation in the wilderness	Matt. 4	
Turns water into wine	John 2	
First cleansing of the Temple	John 2:13-22	
Jesus and Nicodemus	John 3:1	
The woman at the well	John 4	
Galilean ministry	Luke 4:14 ; John 4:43	
Miracles by the sea	Matt. 8	
Visit to Jerusalem	John 7	
Jesus anointed by Mary	John 12:8-11	Jesus' Last Week
His triumphal entry	Matt. 21	
Cleansing of the Temple	Matt. 21:12	
Cursing of the fig tree	Matt. 21:18	
Judas agrees to betray Christ	Matt. 26:14-16	
Preparation for Passover	Mark 14:12-16	
Institution of the Lord's supper	Luke 22:14-23	
Jesus washes the disciples' feet	John 13:1-17	
Jesus prays at Gethsemane	Mark 14:26-42	
Jesus is betrayed and arrested	John 18:2-11	
Jesus is tried and condemned	Matt 26:57-68	The Crucifixion to The Ascension
Peter denies the Lord	Matt 26:58 ; 69-75	
Jesus before Pilate	Matt. 27:11-14	
Jesus before Herod	Luke 23:6-12	
Barabbas released	Mark 15:6-15	
Jesus' walk to Golgotha	Matt. 27:32-24	
Jesus is crucified	Matt. 27:35	
Darkness at noon	Mark 15:33	
Jesus dies	Matt. 27:50	
Jesus' body entombed	John 19:42	
Resurrection	Luke 24:1-8	
Women visit the tomb	Matt. 28:1	
Stone rolled away	Matt. 28:2-4	
Message of angels	Matt. 28:5-8	
Christ appears to disciples	Mark 16:14	
The Great Commission given	Matt. 28:19-20	
Jesus' ascension	John 20:26-29	
Pentecost	Acts 2	The Ministries of Paul and Peter 29 - 67 A.D.
Conversion of Saul (Paul)	Acts 9	
Peter imprisoned and delivered	Acts 12:1	
Death of Herod	Acts 12:20-23	
Paul's 1st missionary journey	Acts 13:1	
Council at Jerusalem	Acts 15:1-12	
Paul's 2nd missionary journey	Acts 15	
Paul's 3rd missionary journey	Acts 18	
Paul: Macedonia to Corinth	Acts 20	
Arrest of Paul	Acts 21	
Paul's fourth missionary	Acts 27	
Paul's first imprisonment	Acts 28:16	
Death of Paul and Peter	A.D. 67-68	
Temple at Jerusalem destroyed	A.D. 70	

Chart adapted from: <http://www.carm.org/christianity/bible/bible-chronology-new-testament>

Introduction

The Bible is both a book and a **library** of books. The Old and New Testament contain 66 different books written by diverse authors in various times and places. It begins in the beginning with Genesis and ends with the end in Revelation. The Scriptures include story, history, law, poetry, hymns, love songs, proverbs, prophecy, gospels, letters, and more.

Attempts to summarize the Biblical message have met with varying degrees of success. *Reader's Digest* published a *Condensed Version of the Bible*. There is a *Clift Notes of the Bible* that covers the major themes. I even received an e-mail forward that summarized **the Bible in 50 words**. Listen fast!

God made, Adam bit, Noah arked, Abraham split, Joseph ruled,
Jacob fooled, bush talked, Moses balked, Pharaoh plagued, people walked,
sea divided, tablets guided, Promise landed, Saul freaked, David peeked,
prophets warned, Jesus born, God walked, love talked, anger crucified,
Hope died, Love rose, Spirit flamed, Word spread, God remained.

I. The Bible in 20 Minutes Series

Today we are continuing a two week series entitled *The Bible in Twenty Minutes*. Last week we reviewed the Old Testament. Today we turn our attention to the New Testament. The sermon is actually divided into TWO stages.

The first part is an **overview** of the New Testament. For those keeping time, this does NOT count towards my twenty minutes! An insert with a review of the background material is included in your bulletin. I encourage you to keep it in your Bible.

During the second part of the sermon, we will rehearse the **Scriptural story**. We will begin with the birth of Christ and end with the end of the world.

II. The New Testament

The Christian Bible is divided into two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word "*testament*" means "*covenant*" or "*relationship*." The Old Testament describes the various covenants God made with the patriarchs and matriarchs of our faith along with the people of Israel. The New Testament describes God's new covenant of grace through Jesus Christ.

The New Testament contains 27 books that can be divided into four groups:

1. The Gospels

The word "**gospel**" means "*good news*." The gospels tell the good news of Jesus Christ. The New Testament contains the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are known as the "*synoptic*" gospels—"synoptic" means "*with the same eye*." Their gospels are very similar. Mark is the shortest of the gospels and was written first. Matthew and Luke based their gospels on Mark but also included their own material. John is quite different from the other gospels.

The gospels were not intended to be biographies; instead, they proclaim the good news of God's salvation. Although some information is given about Jesus' early life, they mainly focus upon the final days of Christ's life. For the gospel writers, the crucifixion and the resurrection were critical part of the gospel accounts.

2. The Acts of the Apostles

The fifth book in the New Testament is *The Acts of the Apostles* or simply *Acts*. It begins with the ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven and the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The book describes the expanding growth of the church in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.

The first chapters focus on the Jerusalem church and the original apostles, especially Peter. Then the spotlight shifts to the apostle Paul and his missionary journeys.

Many people do not realize that *The Gospel according to Luke* and *Acts* were written by the same author. They are a two part series on Jesus and the church.

3. The Epistles

The third major section of the New Testament is called “*the Epistles.*” “*Epistle*” is a Greek word for “*letter.*” A large portion of the New Testament contains letters sent by various church leaders to the congregations under their pastoral care. Most of the letters were written by the apostle Paul. The Epistles contain both lofty theology and practical advice about the Christian faith. Two of the Epistles—Hebrews and James—could also be classified as sermons.

4. Revelation

The Revelation of John is the final book of the Bible. Typically, the title is shortened to *Revelation*—note there is no “s” on the end of the name! The book has two main parts. The first section contains seven letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor from Jesus Christ. The second section describes John’s heavenly vision. Most people assume this refers to earth’s final days, although some scholars believe his vision dealt with the church’s situation at the time.

John was a church leader banished to the salt mines of Patmos because of his Christian faith. *Revelation* was written in the 90s AD during a time when the Roman Empire under Emperor Domitian persecuted the church. The book contains vivid imagery and confusing symbols. However, the book has a simple message at its heart: “GOD WINS!” Regardless of what we face as individuals or the church, the end result is never in doubt. God is victorious.

5. Mnemonics

I think it is helpful to memorize the order of the New Testament books. Here are a few mnemonic devices I shared in the *New Testament Overview* insert in your bulletin. Most folk already know the first four books: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The next book is Acts. Then Romans. Then 1 and 2 Corinthians—if you remember 1 Corinthians, it’s easy to get 2 Corinthians!

The next four books can be remembered by this phrase: “*God’s Electric Power Company.*” The first letter of each word stands for Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians! Another trick is to remember that all of the “Ts” are together in the New Testament: 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, and Titus. Of course, Revelation is the final book. And the rest . . . you’ll just have to memorize!

Conclusion

2 Timothy 3 declares that ALL Scripture is “*God breathed.*” The Holy Spirit stirs in the pages of Scripture. The Bible is literally God’s WORD. When we open the Bible, we encounter the living Christ speaking to our lives.

Introduction

Oftentimes, it is difficult to know where to begin. Most stories adopt an arbitrary starting point. Even fairy tale introductions of “*Once upon a time*” have events that occurred beforehand.

So where does one begin with the story of **Jesus**? John decided to begin his Gospel at the very beginning. In Genesis 1:1, we hear: “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*” John introduced his gospel with the words: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.*”

Then in John 1:14, the gospel writer gave an abbreviated version of the Christmas story: “*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*” God’s Word in the flesh was Jesus the Christ.

Birth and Early Life

Out of the four gospels, only Matthew and Luke contain any details about Jesus’ birth. Both chose to include a **genealogy**—which is seldom interesting to anyone except a genealogist! Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience so he traced Jesus’ lineage back to Abraham—the “*Father of the Jews.*” Jesus was the Jewish messiah. However, Luke wrote to a broader audience that included non-Jews or Gentiles. He created a family tree that went all the way back to the very First Man, Adam. Christ was the Savior of the entire world.

Matthew and Luke combine to tell the familiar story of the first Christmas. The angel Gabriel visited a young virgin named Mary and told her that she would conceive and bear God’s son. Despite her questions and misgivings, Mary said, “*I am the Lord’s handmaiden.*” It took another angelic vision before her fiancé, Joseph, came around.

Due to a Roman census, the Holy Couple traveled to Bethlehem. Mary gave birth to her firstborn, a son; and they named him “**Jesus**” which means “*God saves.*” The angels proclaimed the news to shepherds in the nearby fields who came to see what the Lord had done. Later magi from the east also visited “*the king of the Jews.*”

However, the dark world fought against God’s light. King Herod feared a future rival for his throne. He ordered all the boys in the region two years and younger murdered. However, the Holy Family escaped through God’s providence and protection.

Then the story jumped ahead a decade to when Jesus was twelve years old. The entire family visited Jerusalem for the Passover feast. On the way home, Mary and Joseph realized that their son was missing. They searched for three days before they found him in the Temple sitting among the Jewish teachers. Jesus said: “*Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?*” It was a harbinger of things to come. And the boy grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and others.

John the Baptist, the Baptism of Jesus, and the Temptation

Another 18 years passed without mention. In fact, Mark began his gospel with the advent of **John the Baptist**. John appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He was an Old Testament prophet declaring a New Testament coming. He foretold the arrival of the messiah or Christ.

One day Jesus appeared at the Jordan River and received John’s **baptism**. The Holy Spirit descended upon him like a dove. And a voice from the heavens declared: “*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*”

Then Jesus went into the wilderness where he fasted and prayed for 40 days. At the end of this time, the devil came to Jesus and **tempted** him in three different ways. Jesus resisted each temptation by quoting the Scriptures. So the devil left him . . . until a more opportune time.

Jesus' Public Ministry

Jesus emerged from the wilderness and began his public ministry. Out of the hundreds who followed him, he chose twelve men to become his inner circle of **apostles**. Over the next three years, they traveled across Galilee, Judea, and Samaria.

Mark summarized the heart of Jesus' message: *"The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the gospel!"*

Jesus taught the crowds with memorable **parables** or stories such as: The Prodigal Son, The Good Samaritan, The Mustard Seed, The Lost Coin, The Sower and the Seed, the Talents, The Lost Sheep, and so many more.

When asked to choose the most important commandment out of the hundreds in the Hebrew Scripture, Jesus said: *"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you will love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And the second is like the first: Love your neighbor as yourself."*

In addition to his preaching and teaching, Jesus healed the sick and exorcised the possessed. He performed miracles: turning water into wine, walking on water, calming the storm, the feeding of the 5,000, and raising Lazarus from the dead.

According to John's Gospel, the resurrection of Lazarus was the final straw for the Jewish officials. They feared the entire nation would be won over to Jesus' cause; and there was no telling what the Roman armies would do. So they began to plot Jesus' death.

Holy Week

On **Palm Sunday**, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. The crowds covered his path with palm branches and cloaks. They shouted, *"Hosanna!"* Many thought God's kingdom was about to be established on earth. Few suspected that the triumphal parade would become a death march.

On Thursday night, Jesus shared a **Last Supper** with his disciples. During the Passover meal, Jesus infused the bread and wine with new meaning. He said, *"This bread is my body which is given for you. This wine is the blood of the new covenant that is shed for you."*

Following supper, Jesus and his disciples went to the Garden of Gethsemane. One of the apostles, Judas Iscariot, betrayed his master for 30 pieces of silver. During a mock trial before the Jewish court, Jesus was beaten and insulted. Then they carried him to the Roman governor, Pontus Pilate. Despite finding Jesus innocent of all charges, Pilate sentenced him to death.

They marched Jesus outside the city gates to a place called Golgotha—the Place of the Skull. Then . . . they . . . crucified . . . him . . . From noon until mid-afternoon, the sky darkened—all of creation veiled its sight as the Son of God died. The Lord prayed: *"Father, forgiven them, they know not what they do."* Later Jesus cried out, *"It is finished!"* Then he died. As night neared, a Roman soldier plunged a spear into his side before cutting him loose from the cross.

Some of Jesus' disciples buried him in a new tomb carved out of a cave. A large stone sealed the entrance, and Roman soldiers guarded the burial place. Jesus of Nazareth: *"crucified, dead, and buried."*

The Resurrection and Ascension

But on the third day Early on Sunday morning some of the women walked through the predawn darkness to Jesus' tomb. When they arrived, they discovered that the stone—which was very large—had been rolled away from the tomb. Then an angelic messenger said to them: *"Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here—he has risen! Now go and tell his disciples."* The women ran to share the good news that continues to echo in our ears this day.

Later in the morning Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and then Simon Peter. On the road to Emmaus, two other disciples saw him. On Easter night, Jesus joined the gathered disciples in an upper room. Time and again Jesus appeared to his disciples over the next forty days. Hundreds witnessed the resurrected Lord.

On his final day among them, Jesus gathered the apostles outside of Jerusalem. He told them to wait in the city, saying: *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.”*

They watched as Jesus **ascended into heaven**, where he sits *“at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.”*

The Acts of the Apostles

For the next ten days, the disciples faithfully met together in worship and prayer. On **Pentecost** Sunday, a sound like a violent wind filled the house. They saw what looked like tongues of fire that rested upon each of them. Then they were filled with the **Holy Spirit**. The apostles burst out of the room to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

Peter preached a powerful sermon about God’s saving power. Over 3,000 joined the Way that day. The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. The Holy Spirit did many wonders and miracles in their midst. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

When two or more are gathered, however, politics soon emerge. A conflict arose between the Hebraic Jews and the Grecian Jews over the care of their widows. So the apostles appointed seven Godly men to serve as **deacons** of the church. Chief among them was a man named Stephen.

From the start, Jerusalem’s religions and political leaders attempted to squash the movement. Church leaders and members were persecuted and imprisoned. A devout Pharisee named **Saul** arose as one of the church’s chief opponents. When Stephen was arrested and then stoned to death, Saul personally approved his murder.

Saul even sought approval to go to other cities to extend the persecution of the church. On the road to Damascus, however, Saul encountered the risen Lord. The persecutor became an apostle. God ordained Saul—also known as **Paul**—to serve as his apostle to the Gentiles or non-Jews.

Paul began his ministry with Barnabas in the city of Antioch. It was in Antioch that members of the Way were first called *“Christians.”* However, Paul felt a burning fire within to spread the gospel to other people and places. Over the next years, he took three or four extended missionary journeys around the Mediterranean basin. He founded a number of churches along the way.

Eventually Paul was arrested in Jerusalem. Over the next months and years, he progressed from one court to the next until he finally arrived in Rome. He planned to present his case to the emperor himself and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Acts ends before the trial took place. However, legend has it that Paul was beheaded for the faith.

The Letters

Paul established a number of churches during his missionary travels. He taught the believers and appointed church leaders. However, they often had questions, concerns, and conflicts. So Paul wrote a series of pastoral letters to the various congregations. The letters or epistles form a large part of the New Testament story. In order, they include:

- Romans
- 1 & 2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- 1 & 2 Thessalonians
- 1 & 2 Timothy
- Titus
- Philemon

The letters deal with a variety of theological and moral issues. Depending upon the situation, Paul encourages, exhorts, chastises, or condemns. However, there is one central theme that runs through all his letters: salvation comes by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. God has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. At the cross, our sin was put to death. At the empty tomb, we were raised to new life. Those who receive God's gift enter into eternal life.

The next two books of the New Testament are Hebrews and James. Hebrews is a weighty, theological treatise while James is a call to practical Christianity. In truth, they are more sermons than letters—you know how sneaky preachers can be!

The next books are 1 and 2 Peter—two letters written by Simon Peter himself. He addresses how the church should deal with external persecution and internal conflict. These are followed by 1, 2, and 3 John which can be summarized in a single word: love. Love God and love neighbor. The final letter is Jude—a one chapter book warning against the dangers of false teachers in the church.

Revelation

The final book of the New Testament is "*The Revelation of John*" which is normally shortened to "*Revelation*." The Roman Empire exiled John to the salt mines on the island of Patmos because of his Christian faith. One day he received a strange and terrific vision from God.

The book begins with seven letters addressed to the seven churches of Asia Minor. They face both persecution from the Romans and internal conflicts. Some are praised and others chastised but all are called to a higher faith. Then John shares his vision of the final days of the earth. The letter is filled with strange and wondrous signs, portents, and symbols. Many have struggled over the years to interpret their meaning.

However, there is a central, simple message that emerges for the church then and now. GOD WINS! Regardless of what we face and how hopeless the situation, God's people are ultimately triumphant. John concludes with the Greek word "*maranatha*" which is a simple prayer that means "*Come, Lord Jesus.*"

Conclusion

The Old Testament begins with God speaking creation into being. The New Testament begins with God's Word becoming flesh. From Genesis to Revelation, we hear the story of God's saving acts.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. In Christ, we are new creations, saved FROM sin and death FOR forgiveness and life.

God's story and our stories interweave in the story of salvation. It is much more than the greatest story ever told—the Bible tells of God's power to save.

Amen.