

A New Testament Overview

The New Testament contains 27 “books” or separate writings that have been compiled or “canonized.” These inspired writings were given through 10 men who were either apostles or prophets. For example, of the 4 gospel accounts, Matthew and John were apostles, while Mark and Luke were prophets. Together these writings comprise “everything pertaining to life and godliness” that we need to know, as stated by the apostle Peter in II Peter 1:3.

The order in which the writings are bound does not follow the sequence of time in which they were written down. For example, most scholars agree that I Thessalonians was the first book of the New Testament to be written, but it is placed 13th in the canon.

Instead, the order of the books seem to have a logical, orderly sequence which regards theme. The information presented follows the progression that an individual needs first for salvation, then maturing to “the fullness of the stature of Christ.”

In the following consideration of the books of the New Testament, first we will give a general overview of the 4 basic divisions, or types, of writings found in the New Testament. Next we will consider each book in order, giving a brief synopsis of each. Such an overview will give the reader the contextual position of each book and hopefully reveal the Lord’s design in logically imparting His pattern for developing Christ’s kingdom through the ages, as well as His children individually.

I. Four gospels--life of Christ

II. Acts--history

III. Letters (epistles) to Christians

A. Congregations

B. Personal

C. Universal

IV. Revelation—prophecy

Synopsis of each New Testament Book

I. Gospel accounts--life of Christ

- #1. *Matthew--written to the Jews; Christians of Jewish background. Author Matthew educated Jew (tax gatherer), as an apostle was an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry.*
- #2. *Mark--written for the Roman audience; short and full of action. Mark was a disciple of the apostle Peter.*
- #3. *Luke--written to Gentiles by a Gentile. Luke was a physician; detailed, "investigated everything carefully" and wrote "in consecutive order".(Luke 1:3)*
- #4. *John--written 30 years after other 3 gospel accounts, gives personal, insiders' perspective of the man Jesus. "Written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31)*

II. The Acts of the apostles--history

- #5. *Written by Luke, continues where Luke's gospel account ends. Chapters 1-12 follow the apostle Peter, primarily, and chapters 13-26 follow Paul the apostle. Chapter 2 records the events beginning the church on Pentecost. It includes many conversion accounts and reveals the pattern of the church: growth and development, evangelism, organization, decision making, roles of leadership.*

III. Letters written to Christians

A. Congregations (all written by Paul)

- #6. *Romans--the doctrinal giant; includes justification by faith, the gospel of salvation, worship and service. Introduces most of Paul's teachings.*
- #7. *I Corinthians--a congregation in a total mess, worldly. A call to repentance.*
- #8. *II Corinthians--the joy of repentance, view to ministry after overcoming sin.*
- #9. *Galatians--the law vs. the faith.*
- #10. *Ephesians--a mature, sound congregation that sets the standard; how to gain and maintain victory in Christ.*
- #11. *Philippians--a generous congregation that supported Paul's ministry. Letter speaks of proper attitudes, joy, and peace.*
- #12. *Colossians--small town congregation; shows God's concern for even the "little guys", contains doctrinal statements and definitions found nowhere else in New Testament.*
- #13. *I Thessalonians--a congregation suffering for Christ; some members martyred for their faith. Gives standards of Christian conduct even under persecution, and hope in Christ's return.*
- #14. *II. Thessalonians--describes events prior to Lord's second coming, exhorts Christians to godly conduct.*

B. Personal letters (all written by Paul)

- #15. *I Timothy--responsibilities and instructions to Timothy as an evangelist. Valuable information for all church leadership: evangelists, pastors/elders, teachers, and deacons.*
- #16. *II Timothy--a personal appeal and charge to Timothy as an evangelist. Valuable motivation for church leaders to continue and remain faithful.*

- #17. *Titus*--directions to a young minister responsible for completing the establishment of congregations started in Crete. Valuable instruction for all church leaders; short and to the point.
- #18. *Philemon*--an example of an evangelist appealing to and using his authority to leverage a Christian to do the right thing voluntarily. Ramifications: overcoming the institution of slavery through love and the perfect law of liberty!

C. Universal letters

- #19. *Hebrews*--author unknown. Written before destruction of Temple in 70 A.D. to Jews and Christians of Jewish descent regarding the preeminence of Jesus Christ and His covenant as the fulfillment of the Old Testament.
- #20. *James*--Universal letter to all Christians for the entirety of the church age by the half-brother of Jesus.
- #21. *I Peter*-- "keys" (see Matthew 16:19) for young Christians to gain maturity.
- #22. *II Peter*--Universal letter to all Christians (*II Peter* 1:1). Contains keys for: 1. making sure you make it to heaven (chapter 1), 2. discerning false teachers (chapter 2), and 3. knowing what to expect and do with regards to the Lord's return (chapter 3).
- #23. *I John*--Universal call to all Christians to overcome sin and the world.
- #24. *II John*--John's love letter to the church at large.
- #25. *III John*--instructions on how to relate to others in the church; walking in the Truth.
- #26. *Jude*--short exhortation to "contend earnestly for the faith, once for all delivered" Contains rules of engagement for spiritual warfare.

IV. Prophecy

- #27. *Revelation*--1. chapters 1-3: Contemporary statements of evaluation for 7 congregations in Asia (95-100 A.D.), 2. chapters 20-22: End of church age, judgment, heaven revealed, 3. chapters 4-19: Apocryphal visions of events on earth and in heaven spanning the entire church age after 100 A.D.