

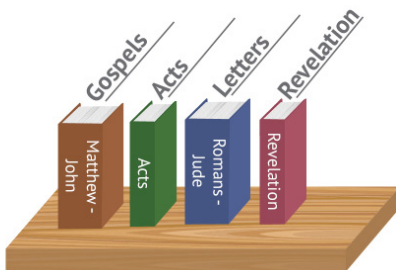
New Testament: The Gospels and Acts

Our Daily Bread Christian University
This course was developed by
Christian University &
Our Daily Bread Ministries.



The New Testament

27 books
Written over 50 years
8 known authors
1 unknown author



Testament:
“Covenant; agreement”

Knowing God Through the New Testament

The New Testament is a collection of smaller books. The 27 books in this “library” were written over a span of 50 years (AD 45–95) by eight known authors (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, Paul, James, Jude) and one unidentified author (Hebrews).

The history of the Old Testament covers thousands of years; the New, about a century. Yet that century was the most important in the history of man. It was during those years that Jesus Christ was born, conducted His public ministry, was crucified, and was resurrected. Messianic prophecy was fulfilled, and God’s plan of salvation was accomplished. The birth, the establishment, and the initial expansion of the church also occurred in that century.

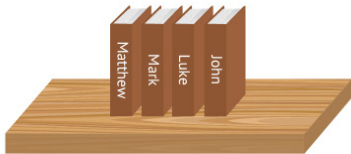
The books of the New Testament are not arranged in the order in which they were written. Rather, they are placed in four literary groupings:

1. **Gospels:** Four biographies of Jesus Christ
2. **Acts:** The history of the early church
3. **Letters:** Twenty-one letters that define Christian belief and practice
4. **Revelation:** A vision of the endtimes

The word *testament* means “covenant” or “agreement.” The New Testament, then, tells of a new relationship between God and people—a new way of knowing God. The old covenant was based on the Mosaic Law and was made with the Jewish nation. The new (1 Corinthians 11:25) was made with people of every nation who accepted by faith the salvation offered through Jesus Christ.

The 27 books of the New Testament are filled with intense drama, inspired teaching, and practical instruction. According

Gospels: Biography



to the New Testament itself, they originated in the mind of God, came to us by divine inspiration, and were kept from error through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16).

God became a man and dwelt among us (John 1:14), revealing Himself more fully. The New Testament records the life, teaching, and impact of this God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why an understanding of the New Testament is essential if we are to know God better.

1. Gospels: Biography

The New Testament story begins with the cry of a newborn baby. In Bethlehem of Judea, a son was born to Joseph of Nazareth and his young wife, Mary. But this was no ordinary birth. It was a virgin birth, prophesied in the Old Testament, announced by angels, and made possible by a miracle.

Jesus' Birth. An angel appeared to Mary, a devout Jewish girl, to tell her three astounding things: (1) She was to be the mother of the "Son of the Highest" who would be given "the throne of His father David." (2) He would be miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit. (3) Her aged cousin Elizabeth was pregnant.

Joseph, Mary's husband-to-be, was troubled when he learned that she was pregnant. But he was told by an angel that the baby conceived in her was from the Holy Spirit, that he should marry her, and that this child would "save His people from their sins."

When it came time for Mary to deliver, she and Joseph were in Bethlehem, "the city of David," miles away from home because Rome had demanded that everyone in Palestine enroll for the tax in the city of their lineage. This fulfilled a prophecy of Micah.

Angels heralded Jesus' birth to shepherds on a Judean hillside. Eastern astrologers followed the leading of a star to worship Him. Joseph was warned by an angel in a dream to flee to Egypt, saving the child from a massacre by the jealous and cruel King Herod.

Jesus' Inauguration. The child born to Elizabeth was John the Baptizer. He began to preach, calling the Jews to repentance in preparation for the kingdom of God. Those who purified their hearts testified to their act of preparation by being baptized.



One day, while John was baptizing in the Jordan River, Jesus came and insisted on being baptized. While He was in the water, the Holy Spirit descended on Him like a dove and the Father in heaven voiced His approval. John's words, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" introduced Jesus to the world as its Messiah-Savior. The next day, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness where He was tempted by Satan. Jesus thwarted His enemy's attack by quoting from the Old Testament.

Jesus' Public Ministry. After His temptation in the wilderness, Jesus began to make Himself known to the people. His 3 years of public life were marked by 3 major activities: teaching, performing miracles, and training His apostles.



Teaching the Crowds Performing Miracles Training His Disciples

The Sermon on the Mount was Jesus' first great teaching session. In it He presented principles for living in His kingdom, His relationship to the Law, and instruction in prayer. He taught in ways the common people understood: parables, epigrams, and object lessons. Yet He taught with authority.

His teaching was accompanied by miracles. He demonstrated that His claim to be the Son of God was true by showing His power over nature, demons, disease, and even death. Jesus chose 12 men to be His apostles. During the last 2 years of His public ministry, these men were with Him nearly all the time. This was important because the responsibility of carrying out His plan would fall squarely on their shoulders when He was gone.

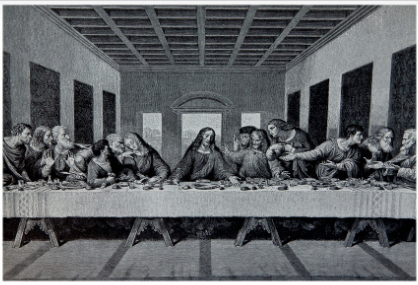
Crowds flocked to Jesus. It seemed that wherever He went, He was surrounded by throngs. The common people accepted Him, and He soon became popular.

The religious leaders of Israel, however, hated Him. They resented His popularity and they despised His claims. To them He was an impostor and a blasphemer, so they began plotting His death.

As His ministry drew to a close, even the crowds forsook Him. His enemies grew more bold. Finally, one of His own apostles conspired to betray Him.

Jesus' Death. Each of the four gospel writers closed his book with an account of the last few days of Jesus' life. In Matthew, it





covers 9 chapters; in Mark, 6; in Luke, 4 1/2 long chapters; and in John, 10. This should not surprise us, for Jesus had made it clear from the beginning that He had come to give His life. Seven times He had told His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and die.

Jesus traveled to Jerusalem at Passover, the annual commemoration of Israel's rescue from the slaying of the firstborn in Egypt. When He came into the city of Zion in a triumphal entry, He was celebrated by the common people. The next day, He threw the moneychangers out of the temple.

His enemies, masterminded by Caiaphas the high priest, planned Jesus' death. He met with His disciples one last time in an upper room, and while they were assembled, Judas left to betray Him. Jesus initiated the communion service before making His way to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. There He was arrested by a mob and then given an illegal trial before the Sanhedrin, declared guilty, and brought to Pilate. When the Roman proconsul could not persuade the mob to release Him, he turned Him over to them. Jesus was led to Calvary, where He was crucified with two criminals. When He died, His body was claimed by two of His followers and placed in a new tomb. All seemed lost for Jesus' disciples. But 3 days later, He rose from the dead. He appeared privately to His disciples on several occasions, and was also seen by hundreds of others. He had conquered death! The last sight of Him was His ascension into heaven 40 days after His resurrection.

Seeing God. Because Jesus was God in the flesh, and because the Gospels tell His story, they tell us volumes about God. Here are some examples of what Christ's life, death, and resurrection tell us about God.

- In Jesus' birth, we see the mercy of God as He humbled Himself to come to our rescue (Matthew 1:21-23).
- In Jesus' teaching, we see the wisdom and goodness of God as He tells us what to believe and how to live (John 12:49-50).
- In Jesus' miracles, we see the unlimited power of God to control nature, disease, and death (Mark 4:35-41; Luke 7:11-18; 9:37-42).

Acts: History



- In Jesus' training of the Twelve, we see God's desire to work through His people (John 14:12).
- In Jesus' death, we see how far God would go to redeem us from our sins (John 3:16).
- In Jesus' resurrection, we see the supernatural power of God to conquer death (Mark 16:1-8).

2. Acts: History

The hopes of Jesus' disciples were crushed when Jesus died. His crucifixion had left them scattered and disillusioned. The news of His resurrection, however, brought them hope, and His appearance transformed them. From that little band of men, the church grew rapidly to worldwide dimensions. The book of Acts tells the story of the beginnings of the church. We will look at it under four headings: power, proclamation, persecution, and Paul.

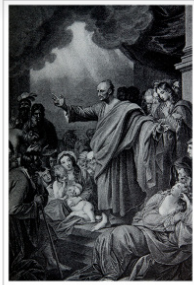
Power (Acts 1–2:13). Before Jesus ascended to the Father, He told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the coming of the Holy Spirit. Ten days later, as the disciples were gathered on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came.

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4).

Pentecost



This marked the beginning of the church, the “called out ones” of all generations who compose the body of Christ. What appeared to be flames rested on each of the disciples, and they began to speak in foreign languages they had never learned. A sound like a howling wind caused a crowd to gather, and people from many countries heard the disciples speaking in their native dialects. That great institution for this age, the church, had begun.



Proclamation (2:14–3:26). Jesus had said that the disciples would receive power to become His witnesses. The very day they received that power, they began to proclaim Christ. Peter stood and addressed the crowd with great courage. The theme of his sermon was this: You crucified your long-awaited Messiah, but God raised Him from the dead. When the people asked what they should do, Peter replied:

Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:38).

That day about 3,000 people trusted in Christ, and the church began to grow. Peter and John preached again in Solomon's portico, and many more believed in the saving message of the gospel.

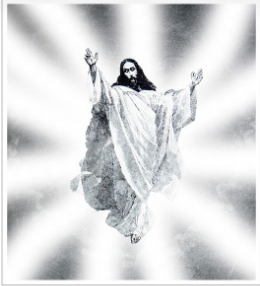
Persecution (Acts 4:1–8:3). With growth came opposition. Peter and John were arrested for preaching, threatened, and ordered to stop. But they refused to obey the order and prayed for even more boldness to preach. The Sadducees were jealous of the apostles' popularity, so they had them arrested and imprisoned. After they were freed by an angel the apostles were recaptured and brought before the Jewish council, where they were beaten and commanded not to preach. They told the council that they would obey God rather than men, and they continued daily in their preaching and teaching.

The religious leaders' hatred of the Christians finally focused on Stephen. When he was brought before the high priest, Stephen preached with tremendous power, concluding his address with these strong words of condemnation:

You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it (Acts 7:51-53).



The crowd was furious. Stirred up by the religious leaders, they stoned Stephen to death. A man in that crowd named Saul held the garments of those who threw the rocks. He then took the lead in persecuting Christians, going from house to house and



imprisoning men and women alike. The followers of Jesus fled Jerusalem, and wherever they scattered they took the gospel with them. Some went to Damascus, and Saul got permission to go and arrest them.

Paul (Acts 9:1–28:31). As Saul was traveling to Damascus, a brilliant light stopped him and forced him to the ground. A voice spoke to him from the light. When Saul asked who was speaking, Jesus identified Himself. In an instant Saul was converted. He said, “Lord, what do you want me to do?” Blinded, he was led to the house of Judas in Damascus, where the Lord used Ananias to restore Paul’s sight.

What a transformation! The persecutor became a follower; the antagonist became a believer. He would become the great missionary to the Gentiles—the one who would break the European barrier and take the gospel to the very heart of Rome itself.

Paul was called to carry the gospel to the Gentiles. Accompanied by Barnabas, Silas, or Timothy, he went into city after city to proclaim Christ. His method was to go to the synagogue and teach as a rabbi. Usually the Jews would resist him, but he would still gather a following. He would then stay in the city, meet with the believers in homes, and continue to preach and teach as long as it was safe. Sometimes it would take beatings, scourgings, or imprisonment to make him move on. Thousands believed and churches were established in private homes. After Paul moved on, he often wrote to the churches to confirm the believers in the faith, to correct their doctrine, or to instruct them in Christian behavior.

The day came when Paul could no longer avoid imprisonment. He was arrested in Jerusalem, where he appealed to his Roman citizenship. He was transported at night to Caesarea, before being sent to Rome, where he remained under house arrest for 2 years. But he was still able to preach and teach and correspond with the churches he had planted.

The initial work was done. The church, firmly established in Jerusalem, had spread throughout the Roman world. Many thousands of people from all walks of life had believed. And the flame that was ignited on Pentecost still burns brightly today.

Seeing God. We can know God better through the history of the

church recorded in Acts. Consider the following:

- In the coming of the Comforter, we see that God does not leave His people without help (Acts 2).
- In the establishment and growth of the church, we see that God has provided for the spiritual and personal needs of believers (Acts 2:40-47).
- In the boldness of the disciples, we see the power of the Holy Spirit available to us today (Acts 4:33).
- In the persecution of the Christians, we see the way God turns adversity into opportunity and accomplishment (Acts 8:4).
- In the missionary journeys, we see how God backs up His commission with His help (Acts 16:20-26).