

### 3 The New Testament

In the Old Testament, God established Israel as a kingdom of heaven:

- The **Torah** established the covenant relationship (Genesis – Deuteronomy).
- The **History** recounted how that worked out in practice (Joshua – Esther).
- The **Wisdom** books elevated this way of life (Job – Song of Songs).
- The **Prophets** declared the LORD’S faithfulness to them even when the nation fell apart, calling them back into covenant relationship (Isaiah – Malachi).

In the New Testament, God fulfils that story in the Messiah and those who trust him.

#### Books of the New Testament

Genre	Book	Author	Addressed to	Chapters
<i>Gospel</i>	Matthew	Matthew		28
	Mark	Mark		16
	Luke	Luke	Theophilus	24
	John	John		21
<i>History</i>	Acts	Luke	Theophilus	28
<i>Letter (epistle)</i>	Romans	Paul	Rome (Italy)	16
	1 Corinthians		Corinth (Greece)	16
	2 Corinthians			13
	Galatians		Galatia (Türkiye)	6
	Ephesians		Ephesus (Türkiye)	6
	Philippians		Philippi (Greece)	4
	Colossians		Colossae (Türkiye)	4
	1 Thessalonians		Thessalonica (Greece)	5
	2 Thessalonians			3
	1 Timothy		Timothy (pastor at Ephesus)	6
	2 Timothy			4
	Titus		Titus (pastor at Crete)	3
	Philemon		Philemon (a slave-owner)	1
	Hebrews			13
	James	James		5
	1 Peter	Peter		5
	2 Peter		3	
	1 John	John		5
	2 John		1	
3 John	1			
Jude	Jude		1	
<i>Prophecy</i>	Revelation	John	7 churches in western Türkiye	22

The **Gospels** tell the story of Jesus the Messiah, the Spirit-anointed ruler sent from his Father to save his earthly kingdom. Jesus announces the kingdom of God, using his authority to care for God's people. But Jerusalem's rulers hand him over to be executed by the empire that rules them. On the third day, God raises him up to reign with all authority in heaven and on earth. With his death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus has established a new covenant (a *new testament*) with Israel and all the peoples of the earth. He has brought the whole earth back into his Father's reign.

The resurrected Messiah then returns to his Father in the heavens, sharing his Father's reign. He gives to his people the anointing that was on him as Messiah, so we implement his reign by caring for all the peoples of the earth. Holy Spirit empowers us to spread this good news from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. That's the book of **Acts**.

Paul the apostle opposed this message until he met the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul established churches in Türkiye and Greece. He wrote letters to these churches and their pastors. Others wrote letters too, so 21 of the 27 New Testament books are **letters**.

The final book of the New Testament is a prophetic **apocalypse** (Revelation). John wrote it down while exiled to the island of Patmos for proclaiming Jesus' kingship. His visionary revelations are all about the King of Kings who ultimately overturns all that's wrong on earth. In the end John sees a new heavens and a new earth, everything remade is as God intended in the beginning.

That's an overview. Any questions before we take a peek at each book?

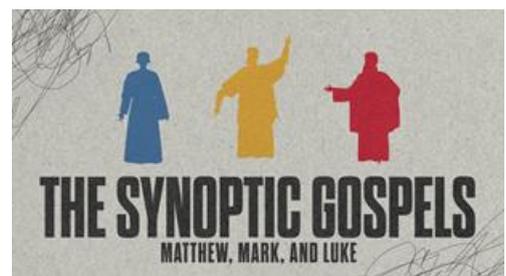
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### 3.1 The Gospels and Acts

Jesus' followers told everyone about him: his life, his four years of ministry, his death, burial, and resurrection. Many who witnessed these events were still alive when the accounts were written down in the second half of the first century. The writers didn't sign their work, but early Christians understood the writers to be Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Mark was probably written first. It's the shortest, and ninety percent of the material in Mark is found somewhere in the other Gospels too, especially Matthew and Luke.

Together, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called **Synoptic Gospels** (*synoptic* = seeing together). They used the oral tradition that Christian communities had developed to tell the stories of Jesus. Sometimes the wording in the Synoptic Gospels is very close (e.g. compare Matthew 19:13-14; Mark 10:13-14, and Luke 18:15-16).



## Matthew

The first book of the New Testament is *The Gospel according to Matthew*. He was a tax collector, so his countrymen regarded him as a traitor—financing the Roman oppression of the nation that should have been under God’s reign. Yet Jesus called Matthew, sending him to “*proclaim the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 9:9-12; 10:7).

From the start, Matthew announces Jesus as *the Messiah, the son of David* (1:1). He summarizes Jesus’ message and ministry, as: *proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people* (4:23; 9:35).

Did you get that? Jesus’ words and works are intertwined. His teaching explains what he’s doing, and what he’s doing interprets his teaching. In fact, Matthew structured his Gospel to interleave Jesus’ ministry and message:

- Matthew 1–4     How Jesus came as King
- Matthew 5–7     The Sermon on the Mount*
- Matthew 8–9     How the king used his authority
- Matthew 10     The mandate for the mission*
- Matthew 11–12   How human and spiritual powers opposed him
- Matthew 13     The parables of the kingdom*
- Matthew 14–21   How Jesus was revealed as the Messiah
- Matthew 22–25   The king’s teaching in the capital*
- Matthew 26–28   How the rulers crucified Jesus, but God raised him to reign.<sup>17</sup>

## Mark

Mark is the action Gospel. Skipping the birth narratives, Mark proclaims Jesus as the anointed ruler restoring the kingdom that God promised through the prophets (1:1-15). With no pause for breath, everything in Mark’s Gospel happens *immediately* (1:10, 12, 18, 20, 21, 23, 28, 29 30, 42, 43, etc).

What shocked people was Jesus’ *authority* (1:22, 27; 2:10; 3:15). “*Who is this?*” they asked (4:41). It’s the question Mark (and Jesus) want us to ask:

### Mark 8:29

“What about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”  
Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.”

This is the hinge of Mark’s Gospel. Previously, it’s been all about the amazing things Jesus did as he brought heaven’s authority to earth. Now that they recognize him as the God-anointed ruler (Messiah), Jesus explains that God does not use his power the way human rulers do. Jesus is therefore vulnerable to those who’ll kill for power:

<sup>17</sup> For podcasts and notes on Matthew’s Gospel see <https://allenbrowne.blog/2023/07/20/figs-matthew/> and <https://allenbrowne.blog/2023/09/27/formed-in-gods-story-matthew-14-28/>

**Mark 8: 31 (NIV)**

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

The *Son of Man* (descendant of humanity) inherits the authority God gave humans in the beginning (Genesis 1:27-28). But the world is now ruled by beasts who tear each other apart for power. That was Daniel's vision of the world (Daniel 7:1-7) until he saw that the Ancient Ruler would take power from the beasts and give it to *someone like a son of man* (Daniel 7:13).

Jesus knew the rulers in Jerusalem would tear him apart (Mark 11:28-33; 12:7; 12:13, 38-40; 14:61-64; 15:2, 32). He called us to take the way of the cross too, trusting his Father to raise him out of death and give him the kingdom (Mark 8:34 – 9:1; 9:9, 31; 10:33-34; 12:7-12, 36; 13:26; 14:24-25; 16:6).

Mark's Gospel concludes with the rejection of *the King of the Jews* (Mark 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32), and the announcement that God has raised him up (Mark 16:5-8).

**Luke**

Luke was not Jewish. He researched Jesus' life:

**Luke 1:1-4 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.

<sup>3</sup> With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

As a physician,<sup>18</sup> Luke feels what Elizabeth and Mary felt. Mary said her child would overturn the power structures of society: *bringing down rulers from their thrones, but exalting the humble* (1:52). Jesus is the heir of King David (Luke 1:27, 32, 60; 2:4, 11, etc.), but so unlike the rulers of the world (1:51-52; 2:1-3; 3:20; etc).

Luke focuses on Jesus caring for the **poor** (4:18; 6:20; 7:22; 11:41; 12:13; 14:31, 21 etc), the **outcasts** (5:27-32; 6:32-34; 7:29-35, 39-50; etc), all who suffer **affliction** (4:18, 38, 40; 5:15; 6:18-19; etc). He draws attention to those who were often overlooked: the **women** disciples (8:1-3; 10:39; 23:27, 55; 24:1-8, 21-24), and the **gentiles** who recognized his authority (2:31-32; 7:2-9; 8:26-39; 10:29-37; 17:18 24:47).

The kingdom of God turns power on its head. To save the world, the king is rejected. In Luke 9:51 as Jesus *resolutely set out for Jerusalem*. On the way he explains what it

<sup>18</sup> See Colossians 4:14.

costs to follow him: “*Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple*” (14:27). He explains how the rulers will treat him: “*The Son of Man ... will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again*” (18:31-33).

The crowds received Jesus into the capital as their long-awaited king (19:28-38). But the leaders rejected his authority (19:39–20:19), handing him over to be crucified (22:66 – 23:56). God raised him to life, and Jesus commissioned his followers to proclaim his authority to transform all the nations (24:46-49).

## **John**

John’s Gospel is different. We still hear of Jesus’ baptism, miracles, confrontation with those in power, crucifixion, and resurrection. But John’s Gospel is primarily a mediation on Jesus as *the Son sent from the Father* (John 5:23, 36-37; 6:44, 57; 8:16, 18, 29 etc) to save *the world* (1:29; 3:16; 4:42 etc).

Consider what God proclaimed for the world:

**Genesis 1** <sup>1</sup> In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ...

<sup>3</sup> And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. <sup>4</sup> God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.

Since then, the world has gone dark, but that has not extinguished God’s decree. What God expressed—his *word*—brought life to a world that was otherwise formless and void. And now, John says, we have seen that living, breathing, enduring Word from God among us, the expression of God restoring light and life to the world:

### **John 1:1-5 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

<sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Creation is being renewed in Christ. The creation account was described in seven days, so John’s account of God restoring creation is recounted in “days” (e.g. 2:1). On the sixth day, God created the human (Genesis 1:27-31), but under the tyranny of thorns and death we barely know what it means to be human anymore. The representative of Rome’s power over Jerusalem presents Jesus as a pitiful example of humanity crowned by thorns and death: “Behold the human!” That was the sixth day of the week (19:31). On the seventh day, God rested—in a tomb! But that’s not the end of the story.

A new week begins—a point John makes twice so we don’t miss it:

**John 20:1** Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.

**John 20:19** On the evening of that first day of the week ...

As the Father raises up his Son, death no longer reigns as prince of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). The light of life has returned. The new creation has begun as a man and a woman stand in the garden with tears wiped away, the Son restoring us to his Father's family (20:11-17), breathing the breath of God back into us (20:22).

That's John's picture of Jesus: the Son who restores his Father's life to the world.

Do you have questions about the Gospels?

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## **Acts**

We've already met the writer of *The Acts of the Apostles* (compare Luke 1:4):

### **Acts 1:1 (NIV)**

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ...

What Jesus *began to do and teach* now continues through us. When we say, "Jesus is the Christ (Messiah)," we're saying he is the Spirit-anointed ruler who restores heaven's reign to the world. And unlike other rulers, Jesus shares his power with all who recognize his leadership, so the kingdom represents its king across the world:

### **Acts 1:8 (NIV)**

"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."

Judea and Samaria were the divided kingdoms that fell in Old Testament times. God promised to resurrect both these fallen kingdoms into the leadership of the Davidic king (e.g. Ezekiel 37:15-28). Now God does even more: extending heaven's reign beyond Israel—to *the ends of the earth!*

That's how the story unfolds in Acts of the Apostles:

Acts 1–7     Jesus is proclaimed in *Judah and Jerusalem*.

Acts 8        Jesus is proclaimed in *Samaria* and beyond.

Acts 12–28   Jesus is proclaimed *to the ends of the world* as they knew it.

The Jewish leaders tried to stop Jesus' disciples from declaring that Jesus had been raised up to rule the world. A key opponent was Saul from Tarsus who chased them all the way to Damascus (Syria). On the journey, Saul had an unexpected encounter:

### **Acts 9:5, 15 (NIV)**

<sup>5</sup> "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting ...

<sup>15</sup> "This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel."

Saul became Paul the apostle. He accepted Jesus’ commission and spent the rest of his life proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the king of all the nations.

Acts 12–28 describes Paul’s three missionary journeys into Türkiye (Galatia, Ephesus) and Greece (Philippi, Thessaloniki, Athens, Corinth). He was constantly in trouble the Jewish leaders, and with the Roman authorities who treated him as an enemy of Caesar: “saying that there is another king, one called Jesus” (Acts 17:7).

That didn’t stop Paul. In the final chapter of Acts, Paul has reached Rome. In the heart of Caesar’s empire, Paul proclaimed Jesus as Lord and king of the world:

**Acts 28:31 (NIV)**

He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!



“Paul’s Second Missionary Journey” in Carl Rasmussen, *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*, (Zondervan, 2010), 228.

What are your thoughts on the Gospels and Acts, what Jesus began, and how we continue his message and ministry?

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## 3.2 The letters

How do you stay in touch with people? Phone? Text? Email? Social media?

There was a time when people wrote letters.

As the Jesus movement spread, the apostles wrote letters to the churches. Their letters still guide our belief and practice—what we believe, and how we live out our faith.

There are twenty-one letters (sometimes called *epistles*):

- 13 from Paul:
  - 9 addressed to churches (*Romans – 2 Thessalonians*),
  - 4 addressed to individuals (*1 Timothy – Philemon*).
- 1 anonymous sermon for Christians with a Jewish background (*Hebrews*).
- 7 letters (called *General Epistles*) that bear the writer’s name:
  - 1 from *James*,
  - 2 from *Peter*,
  - 3 from *John*,
  - 1 from *Jude*.

We’ll discuss Revelation next week.

### **Pauline epistles**

#### ***Romans***

In this letter, Paul explains the gospel of Messiah Jesus to those who lived at the heart of Caesar’s Empire. He says everything God promised in the Scriptures was fulfilled when God installed his Son to reign, by raising him from the dead. This *good news* calls everyone from Israel and the nations to recognize Jesus as Christ and Lord (1:1-6).

The letter ends with a similar summary. The gospel (the good news of Jesus’ kingship) calls all peoples of the earth to the obedience that springs from a faithful commitment to Messiah Jesus (16:25-27).



Valley of the Forums, Rome. Photo: Allen Browne, 2008.

Between these bookends, Paul explains the faith and lifestyle of the gospel community:

- how the gospel unites humanity under Jesus’ leadership (Romans 1–11),
- how to embody that good news in his world (Romans 12–16).

Podcasts and notes are available to help you explore Romans:

- <https://allenbrowne.blog/2025/05/05/invitation-to-romans/>
- <https://allenbrowne.blog/2025/07/31/formed-in-gods-story-romans-9-16/>

## 1 & 2 Corinthians

The Greek port of Corinth was Paul's home for eighteen months (see Acts 18:11). Later he wrote two letters to the church he established there.

People use power the opposite of how Jesus did (**1 Corinthians** 1–4). We're to be careful our lifestyle does not bring the gospel into disrepute (1 Corinthians 5–6). Paul answered their questions (e.g. 1 Corinthians 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1) on marriage (7), lifestyle choices (8–9), gatherings (10–11), spiritual gifts (12–14), resurrection (15) and generosity (16).

The earliest summary of the gospel is found in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

Paul's second letter to the Corinthians reveals grief in his relationship with them. Paul is a servant of the new covenant in the Messiah (**2 Corinthians** 2–6). He asks the Corinthians to demonstrate their solidarity with the Jewish people who served as God's people for centuries past by contributing to them (8–9). He tries to mend the gap that has developed between himself and some of the Corinthians (10–13).

## Galatians

Paul's first missionary journey was to the Roman province of Galatia (Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe—Acts 13-14). Galatians might be Paul's earliest letter.

At issue is whether gentile believers must comply with the Law God gave Israel in the previous covenant. Must they be circumcised, keep the Sabbath, and eat only kosher food? The church leaders met in Jerusalem to discuss this question (Acts 15).

Paul's answer is that all of us—Jews and gentiles—are now brought into relationship with God through the new covenant in the Messiah. The Torah is fulfilled in Christ. God never gave the Sinai laws to gentiles. We're all one people now, a people who have come to life in Christ and live by the Spirit, not by the Law.

## Ephesians

Ephesus was a seaport in western Türkiye where Paul lived for two years (Acts 18–19). His letter to the Ephesians proclaims Jesus as the reigning Saviour of all the peoples of the world, both Jew and gentile (Ephesians 1–3). He explains how to live as the community of our Heavenly Father in a world that's not yet fully submitted to Christ as Lord (Ephesians 4–6).



Acrocorinth. Photo: [Wikipedia](#).



Ephesus today. Photo: Allen Browne, 2014.

## Philippians

Philippi was a Roman colony in Macedonia, named after the father of Alexander the Great. When Paul announced the good news of Jesus here, he upset the authorities and ended up in jail overnight (Acts 16).

Paul was in prison again as he wrote this letter. The Philippians had sent money to help Paul survive, since prisoners were expected to provide for themselves. As well as thanking them, the letter encourages them to live the way our Saviour did as he gave his life for us.



Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Crete, Ephesus, and Colossae.  
 "Map 23" *Standard Bible Atlas* (Standard Publishing, 2006), 36.

## Colossians

Colossae was a town in the southwest of Asia Minor (Türkiye).

The letter to the Colossians is similar to Ephesians. The first half sets out what we believe, i.e. the kingship of Jesus the Messiah (Colossians 1–2). The second half sets out how we live as the people of the Messiah (Colossians 3–4).

## 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Like Philippi, Thessalonica was in Macedonia. After just a few weeks there, Paul was run out of town for *saying that there is another king, one called Jesus* (Acts 17:7).

Paul supported these new believers with two letters. They'd misunderstood what Paul meant when he said Jesus would soon be king of the whole world, so they quit working and sat around waiting for it to happen. Paul wrote to correct them (1 Thessalonians 4:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:8-12), explaining how the day of the Lord will arrive.

## 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus

Timothy was a pastor in the church at Ephesus, and Titus was a pastor on the island of Crete. We refer to the two letters to Timothy and one to Titus as the *Pastoral Epistles*.

These letters contain practical guidance for the church, calling pastors, elders, and deacons to set the example of what it looks like when people serve the Lord Jesus.

## Philemon

A runaway slave had come to faith, as had his owner. Should Paul send Onesimus back to Philemon as required by Roman law? Or does Christ set the slave free?

Paul asked Philemon to treat Onesimus as *no longer a slave, but better than a slave as a dear brother* (verse 16). God has not called us to attack evil institutions like slavery; rather it's as we embody life under Christ's leadership that the world is transformed.

**General epistles****Hebrews**

This book doesn't say who it's from or who it's to. It's more of a sermon than a letter. It's full of Old Testament references, and the speaker is concerned about his audience being pressured to turn from Christ, back to the old covenant (e.g. Hebrews 11:32-39).

Jesus is the better way. He is superior to angels (Hebrews 1–2) and to the founders of the old covenant (Moses and Joshua, 3–4). Jesus is the great high priest (5–6), the king/priest who establishes our relationship with God through a new covenant (7–10). Jesus fulfils everything the Old Testament saints believed for (11). So let's trust his leadership and live as children in our Father's care (12–13).

**James**

This letter is probably from Jesus' brother James (Matthew 13:55), since James the apostle had been killed by Herod (Acts 12:2).

It calls us to trust God in hard times. Faith is expressed by fulfilling the *royal law of love* (2:8). Though the wealthy are often treated as more valuable, everyone is valued under God's authority.

**1 & 2 Peter**

Peter's first letter was written to encourage God's people who were scattered through Asia Minor because of persecution, like the exiles of Old Testament times. Instead of fighting back, we're called to embody the lifestyle that credibly represents the salvation of the world.

Peter's second letter warns against false teachers. We can recognize them because they're preoccupied with their own authority instead of Christ's.

**1, 2, & 3 John**

To be clear, *1 John*, *2 John* and *3 John* are letters, while *John* is a Gospel.

John's first letter marvels at God living among us physically in the person of Jesus (1 John 1:1; 2:22; 4:2). Since that's what God did, we're called to physically care for each other too, for *God is love* (4:16). Father's love is seen in his children (5:1).

2 John addresses a church John calls *the lady chosen by God* (verse 1). It's a warning against false teachers.

3 John is addressed to a friend named Gaius, encouraging him to live faithfully.

**Jude**

Jude was another of Jesus' brothers (Matthew 13:55). As in 2 Peter, Jude warns against false teachers putting themselves in charge since they don't respect God's authority.

