



Week 3: New Testament Overview

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What is the New Testament? It is the second half of what Christians call “the Bible.”

The 39 books that compose the Old Testament were written over a span of many centuries. The 27 books of the New Testament were written over a span of probably less than fifty years.

God has made us competent to be ministers of the new testament. - 2 Corinthians 3:6 KJV

Paul is talking about the new testament (covenant) sealed in the blood of Christ.

This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you. - Luke 22:20

We might say the Eucharist is the new testament (covenant), while the biblical text announces and explains the implications of the new testament (covenant).

The New Testament speaks of the Scriptures (the Old Testament) as being “veiled” until that veil is removed in the light of Christ, but the New Testament can’t really be understood apart from a working knowledge of the Old Testament.

The New Testament is the canonical (ruling) text of the Christian faith.

The New Testament provides the raw material (building blocks) for Christian theology and practice.

The New Testament is not the same thing as Christianity.

How did the canon of the New Testament come into being? It was an organic process. They privileged the apostolic texts from the first century.

The Festal Letter of Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria (367 AD)

The 27 books of the New Testament can be placed in three groups:

- Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke-Acts, and John
- Epistles: Paul (13), John (3), Peter (2) James, Jude, and Hebrews
- Revelation

The first New Testament books were the epistles (*letters*) of Paul written over approximately ten years (c. 50–60 AD). Revelation may have been the last book written, composed by John of Patmos not John the Elder.

The New Testament opens with four Gospel witnesses to the life of Jesus Christ. Each of these Gospels has their own voice, perspective, and particular emphasis. The Gospels are not mere biographies. They are theologically-driven documents.

Tatian, a second-century theologian, created a single Gospel from the four. But the Church, led by Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyon, wisely rejected Tatian's idea.

Mark was the first Gospel written, and Matthew and Luke both use it as a template.

John, the last Gospel written, is much more spiritual and deliberately theological.

There are twenty-one epistles in the New Testament. Thirteen are attributed to Paul, while eight are attributed to various other writers. John is unique in being the only writer to author both a Gospel and epistles.

Paul and John represent the two most important theological writers of the New Testament.

Paul's epistles are mostly what we call "occasional" letters. Paul is writing on a particular occasion in response to particular questions/problems.

Paul is very concerned about setting forth a new ethic in the light of the risen Christ. Now that the new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) has been inaugurated in the resurrection of Christ, how should we live?

Paul's theological masterpiece is his epistle to the Romans. Central to Paul's theology (as an apostle to the Gentiles) is the question of justification. How do we justify the Gentiles as Gentiles belonging to the Jewish body of Messiah?

John is the other great theologian of the New Testament. This is John the Elder, who may be "the beloved disciple," but not necessarily John the son of Zebedee.

Irenaeus (born in 130 AD) was bishop of Lyon. He was a disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of John. He says John was writing his gospel and his epistles in Ephesus around AD 90.

John's style is quite different from Paul. While Paul's epistles are more pedagogical (*teaching*), John's writings are more theo-poetical (*theology contained in poetry*).

John's recurring themes are light and love. (See John 1:1–6 and 1 John 4:18)