

A New Testament Survey

My purpose in developing this survey is to instill a love for God's Word and to encourage an accurate handling of the Bible. Paul made this point to Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the Word of truth" (II Tim. 2:15 NASB). I believe this accurately handling comes when we think of the Bible as a Book that must be read that way. The Bible is telling a story from Genesis to Revelation. God is the main character and as we read it we find ourselves caught up in the story line. *Biblical Theology* then, interprets the books of the Bible as *intimately connected/related*. Think of the Bible as a necklace, a pearl necklace, with 66 pearls of great price. Each pearl represents a book of the Bible. Without one, the necklace falls apart.

As you read, remember where you are. You live in a world detached from the context of the original writers of Scripture. You are reading a Book written in the Middle East. You are wearing Western glasses so to speak, so be careful not to make application too quickly to your world. Our responsibility as Bible readers is to discover the context of the author and his audience centuries ago. I recommend a *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* to help you make those discoveries, and a pencil and paper to help you remember. *Who is the author? To whom is he writing? Under what circumstances is he writing?* These are the questions that must be considered while you read.



After 400 years of silence, God breaks into human history initiating a relationship with sinful and condemned mankind. This is the story of **redemption**: *God seeks sinners*. The commandments show us our moral weaknesses; we are unable to keep them. To break one is to break them all. God was teaching us a lesson all along. The Law is a *school master* pointing us to Christ. The only way into to the Father's family is by Jesus Christ, "the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). If you have not come to the place where you have handed over control of your life to Christ, I hope this survey will exhibit the pursuing love of God. Repent of your sins, turn to Christ, believe, and be baptized.



God has accommodated us with different literary genres that enable us to clearly see the author's intent. Here are some of those genres found in our New Testament:

Parable: Jesus' best-known teaching method. He often told earthly stories with spiritual truth attached. The listeners clearly understood them then but require some disciplined interpretation on our part. For example, the parable of the sower (Luke 8:4 -15). In Jesus' day sowers were a common thing. Remember context, then you will better understand the parable. Take note of where the parables are in the Gospel you are reading. Read before and after the parable to gain a better understanding of what the Gospel writer was doing back then. *What emotion do you feel as you read the parable? Respond as the Holy Spirit leads you.*

Epistle: These are the *letters* written to churches and individuals. Authors like Paul, James, Peter, Jude and John are all men who wrote epistles in the New Testament. Notice the

beginning and ending of these letters. See how they differ from our normal greetings, and farewells.

Historical Narrative: Just as the title implies a narrative is a long informative story with a plot, and main characters. The *Book of Acts* is an example of *historical narrative* in the New Testament.

Apocalyptic: Highly symbolic writing. “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last. What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia:” (Rev. 1:11).

Gospel: Good News. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are authors of *Gospel*. They tell their Good News of our Lord and Savior through stories, each with his own emphases: “And Jesus walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, ‘Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.’ They immediately left their nets and followed Him ” (Matthew 4:18 -19). Each writer wrote in his own personality, and with his own agenda. All are Jesus focused. *Let me share more about their agendas.* Below are key words or phrases that will help.



The Four Gospels

The first **four books** of the New Testament record for us the life, teachings, and miracles of Jesus Christ according to **Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.** As you read the Gospels, notice the unique perspectives of each writer. They intend to convince you that what they record is true and requires you to make a decision. The Gospel writers introduce us to the culture, the religious climate, and even the people with whom Jesus interacted. For example:

Pharisees: These men were the largest and most influential Jewish group in New Testament times. They gave strong attention to a rigid observation of the Law. They were supernaturalists. They believed in the existence of angels and spirits, the immortality of the human soul, and the resurrection of the body. They were also known for interpreting the Law into an additional 600 commands!

Sadducees: Historians claim the Sadducees developed during the intertestamental period (between the two Testaments). These guys were smaller in number than the Pharisees and did not always agree with the Pharisees. They were anti-supernaturalists. They did not believe in the resurrection of the body.

Zealots: Zealots were revolutionaries. They were fanatics about overthrowing Roman power. They refused to pay taxes to Rome.

Scribes: Scribes were a professional group, not a religious or political group. Scribes interpreted and taught the Old Testament. They gave their professional opinion on difficult cases brought before them. They had theological skills to interpret the Scriptures and even carefully copied them for the purpose of passing them on to others for teaching and preservation.

Let's meet the Gospel writers.

Matthew: New Testament theologian Leon Morris states, “*Throughout the long history of the church perhaps no Gospel has been more influential than Matthew*” (*New Testament Theology*, Leon Morris, p 115). Matthew was a Jew, so he writes with the specific purpose of convincing Jewish people that Jesus is the Christ promised by the Prophets. This is why he begins with a lengthy genealogy. This is also why it is helpful to have a Customs and Manners book handy when you read Matthew. You will need some help understanding Jewish life and practice.

Matthew has *five* distinctly long narrative sections that many think he intended to mimic the first five books of Moses. Jesus then becomes a new Lawgiver! Perhaps a better way to think of it would be that Jesus is the greater Moses! The teachings of Jesus dominate this Gospel. There is the prophecy of Isaiah in Matthew 1:23. There is a new model prayer for the followers of the King in 6:9-13. There are miraculous healings in Matthew that teach us about the Deity of the Son of God. Jesus takes on the Pharisees head-to-head to expose their hypocrisy. In chapter 22 Matthew includes a parable of a wedding feast, something every Jew attended from time to time. The parable teaches that only those who are invited by Christ can enter Heaven. One must be clothed in Christ to attend the great banquet in Heaven. Finally, there is a Passover Meal with the disciples of Jesus. The disciples are to take the bread and the wine and see them as the body and blood of the Lamb seated with them at the table. This had to be one of the most somber moments in all of human history! Finally, the resurrection of Jesus is the climax in the last chapter of Matthew. There is no mention of the Ascension in Matthew. However, what follows the resurrection in Matthew is the commissioning of the Church to take up their crosses and “Go and make disciples of all nations.”

Discussion Question regarding Matthew:

1. *Can you identify with what the disciples must have felt as they spent more and more time with Jesus? (Think about how He showed them what the Father is like. Think about how they saw Jesus as like themselves).*

Mark: Mark was not a direct follower of Jesus. He was a disciple of Peter. Mark is known for the actions of Jesus. He was here and there going everywhere taking the Good News with Him. The very brevity of chapters, only 16, signals to us that we should pay attention to how busy Jesus was sharing Good News. For me, that brevity is a reminder of how little time we really have to take the Good News to the world around us.

Mark shows us the Personhood of Jesus. He was up early to pray Mark 1:35. And yet He is the Christ, the promised Messiah in Mark. Very early on in chapter one Jesus is found exorcising demons out of humans, healing them from illnesses, and cleansing them from disease. What then does God expect from us as we watch Him work? What kind of response did the people in Mark have? (How about 2:12?) Mark's concept of Jesus is that He is both fully human and fully divine.

Discussion Question regarding Mark:

1. *In Mark 12:30 Jesus was asked by a Scribe "which commandment is the most important of all?" Do you remember Jesus' answer? What then does it look like to love God in that way?*

The Kingdom of God in the New Testament

An Excursus

The **Kingdom of God** is a phrase you will read repeatedly in the NT. To define the kingdom, we must ask several questions: Who is the Ruler? Who are the ruled? Where is this kingdom?

There is a *universal kingdom* where the Scriptures reveal **God** as the Ruler of the whole world. He exercises His sovereignty over all nations of His world, appoints the rulers of His choosing and will one day judge the universal kingdom. In the NT Jesus displays His Deity in several stories that leave the disciples and the crowds astounded. For example, *Mark 4:35-41*. **Read the question of the disciples and answer it for them.**

There is also a *spiritual kingdom* that is an invisible kingdom where all believers are divinely and graciously placed the moment they are regenerated by the Holy Spirit. The Ruler of this invisible

kingdom is _____. Inside this kingdom lives the true church, the called ones, the body of Christ. One gains entrance into this kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Those who reject Christ reject the kingdom and remain outside separated from God. I believe the NT stresses a theme of ‘insiders and outsiders.’ *By paying close attention to the responses of the people who are confronted by the Gospel, we can humbly determine who is in and who is out.*

Where is this kingdom? It is here, and yet it is still to come. Mark 1:14 “. . .the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” Jesus, the Ruler of the kingdom, ushered in the kingdom. The church can enjoy the benefits and blessings of the hidden kingdom in the present. We delight in Christ our King who overcame sin and death and embrace the blessings that come with His victory. Our peace comes from within where the kingdom of God rules and reigns. Our spiritual nourishment in the kingdom comes from the Word of God. The more we feast on the Words of God the more territory His kingdom invades within us.

Not only did Jesus put the kingdom within you when you believed, but He also gave you the _____; yes, baptized you in Him. He is your constant companion, your best Friend and Helper. He will be your Guide in life down here steering you to what is good and nourishing to grow the kingdom, and graciously warning you of things that are harmful.

But there is still a kingdom to come. We know that this age is full of rebellion and evil. In the age to come, God will perfectly judge His world, establish His kingdom on earth, and remove all sin and evil. In the meantime, those who live in the spiritual kingdom can continue to enjoy the blessings of the kingdom. Remember that the kingdom is *constantly at work* within you. To ensure the kingdom is growing in you remain humble, like Christ.



Mark 4:35-41. “Who is this that even the winds and the sea obey Him?”

Luke: Like Mark, Luke was not a direct follower of Christ. Luke wrote as he listened to Paul on his missionary journeys. Luke was well educated. In Colossians 4:14 we are told he was a physician. Unlike Matthew Luke wrote to Gentiles, non-Jews. It's easy to see Luke's agenda for writing his gospel. It is spelled out clearly in *Luke 4:18-19*. This is important for you to go back and reread as you read and study Luke. Pay close attention in Luke's Gospel at the recurring phrase *'the Kingdom of God.'* What happens to people in Luke when the kingdom of God comes upon them? More than any of the others Luke emphasizes how Jesus healed the *brokenhearted*. Luke features King Jesus laser-focused on the outcasts of the first century. Children, women, the blind, lepers, and other outcasts of society benefitted greatly from the miracles of Jesus, the God Man. These people become our teachers in Luke because they show us the right attitude to Jesus. See if you can spot more examples of what I am proposing in Luke and learn from them. Here is an example in Luke 8:26-39. *What do we learn from the demoniac? How might you apply that response to your own life tonight and tomorrow?*

Discussion Question regarding the Gospel of Luke:

- 1. Do you think the Kingdom is still something to come in the future, or do you believe it has already come in Jesus? If it has already come, how could you explain that to us tonight? If it is something still to come, what kind of attitude do you think Jesus expects from us?*

John: Notice the first three words of *John 1:1*. What has John been reading? What point is John making about Jesus from the outset? John was a follower of Christ; he was an apostle. John saw the risen Lord and was commissioned by Him personally. The apostle John wrote 1, 2, 3 John and Revelation. John is deeply passionate about Jesus. He is the disciple who "leaned upon the breast" of our Savior. He refers to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

Some believe that *Polycarp*, a first century disciple of John, is responsible for preserving the Gospel of John and handing it down to Christian scribes who tediously copied it word for word so that we would have the most accurate account in our hands today. It does not take long to discover that reading John will take *some time, some study, and some reflection*. He writes in a way that commands our attention. John describes *two worlds*; one above and one below-where we live and breathe and raise our children. The world below is condemned and corrupt in need of redemption. This is why we read in 1:14 *"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."* Light is another type of imagery that represents salvation. We are told to walk in the light as He is in the light. *What then does walking in darkness represent?*

Exercise: Read John 13:30. What could John be communicating to us about Judas Iscariot when he says that *"he immediately went out. And it was night"*? (It was night in Judas' s _____). He went out into eternal darkness by betraying Christ).

It's obvious I think that the Gospel of John was written to Jews in order to convince them that Jesus is the Messiah. This is why John begins with the Heaven to Earth incarnation of Christ. It is also obvious to us all to see John's purpose: "*So that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have _____ in his name*" 20:31.

Discussion Question regarding the Gospel of John:

1. *Since John dedicates a significant amount space to explain the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit, how might you explain the sense of the pleasure and displeasure of the Holy Spirit in your life?
Has there been a time when the Holy Spirit especially empowered you for a specific situation?*

Passing Along the Traditions

An Excursus

Paul wrote to Timothy, "*By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you*" 2 Tim. 1:14. Paul was conveying to his young protégé the importance of keeping the faith and passing it along to others.

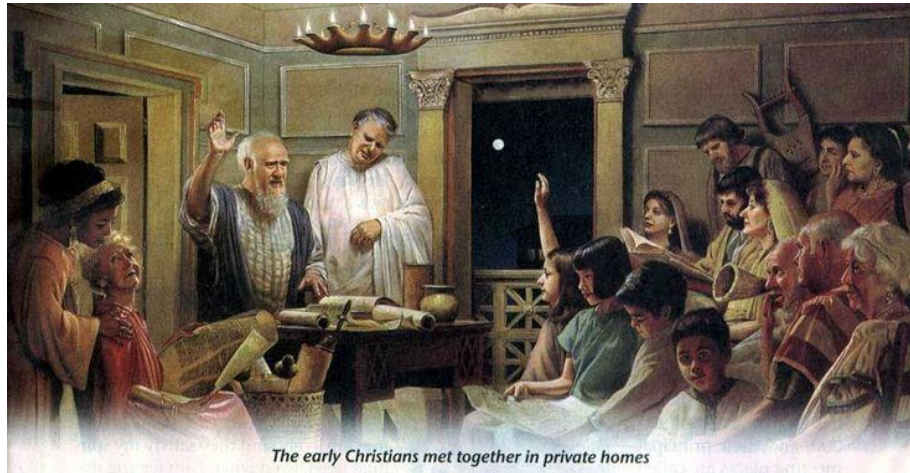
The apostles tell us about the teaching and preaching of Jesus. They describe His preaching in the synagogues and private homes to religious leaders and others. *Who were these people who were listening? Who were the ones who embraced the Gospel and took it upon themselves to take the mantle of the apostles and guard the good deposit to the next generation?* I hope to tighten up that era so we can learn how to apply their methods.

There were three groups of people in particular that responded to Jesus, embraced their new faith, formed churches in their homes, and took the Gospel to their communities and beyond. *They were Gentiles won over in the synagogues, former slaves, and women.* These were primarily the outcasts of society. But women from high-ranking families also played a dominant role. "*Devout women of more august pedigree were also drawn into the churches, and some, such as Lydia, Dorcas, Priscilla, and Phoebe, became significant leaders.*"¹ Considering the culture of that day, what do you make of all these *women* playing such a large part of spreading the Gospel?

These early church members became informal preachers testifying to their coworkers and neighbors about Christ and His Gospel. They believed they were commissioned to teach the faith

¹ Wilson, David Dunn. *A Mirror for the Church, Preaching in the First Five Centuries*. P8. Wm. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2005.

to non-Christians. Wool workers and leather workers witnessed to their customers about the faith and explained how a person could become a follower of Christ and go to Heaven. Even the most uneducated were able to articulate Christian beliefs. This is because they had a personal testimony of meeting Christ for the first time.



The first Christians were not content to stay at home after they were saved. They became Christian missionaries utilizing the 50,000 miles of paved roads in the first century built by the Romans. They took to ships traveling abroad trusting that Christ would sustain them. They took the Gospel back to their hometowns sharing it with everyone they knew. *Street preaching* became popular in the first century emerging as a new way to bolster the spread of the Gospel. They fascinated their listeners because so many of them were illiterate and had no training in public speaking.