

Bible Study Helps – New Testament

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Like the Old Testament, the New Testament is also divided into sections that help keep similar writings together. Here are the four sections that divide the Old Testament:

1 - Gospels

- Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
- The Gospels are ordered by the date some people believed they were written. You don't have to put a name on a Gospel until there are more than one and only Luke is the only one of the four to identify himself. A few hundred years after these were written false teachings entered the church that forced the church to decide which writings were inspired/from God and which were not. It was during this process that the New Testament was laid out in its current form.

2 - Historical

- Acts of the Apostles
- Acts is the history that all of Paul's letters fit into. You read about Paul visiting the churches he wrote letters to in the book of Acts (the cities of Ephesus, Galatia, Corinth, etc)

3 – Paul's Letters

- Romans – Philemon
- These are ordered from longest to shortest with Romans being the longest and Philemon the shortest of Paul's letters
- These are some of the earliest writings in the New Testament with Galatians being the earliest book written (48 AD)

4 – General Letters

- Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John, and Jude
- These are all the letters written by people other than Paul

5 - Apocalypse

- Revelation
- This is the last book of the New Testament to be written, nearly 60 years after Jesus' ministry

1. Gospels

Matthew

Date written – 60s

Author - Matthew

Summary – All four gospels tell about the life of Jesus from the time before his birth to the time after his death and resurrection. Yet each Gospel has a distinct emphasis. It is like hearing the same story from four different points of view. Each writer is remembering and focusing on different aspects of who Jesus is and what he came to do.

Matthew's emphasis – Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophesy. Matthew also emphasizes Jesus as King as prophesied Messiah and descendent from David's throne.

Mark

Date written – 50s

Author – Mark

Summary – Mark is about who Jesus is. At first Jesus is more secretive about who he is because he doesn't want to fulfill the wrongly directed hopes of who the Messiah was supposed to be and what he was supposed to do. In the first half of Mark (1-8) It is not uncommon in Mark for Jesus to tell people to keep who he is a secret. Once Peter confesses Christ in Mark 8 Jesus speaks much more freely about who he is and what he came to do. Like Matthew, Mark ends with Jesus commissioning his disciples to spread the Gospel all over the world.

Mark's emphasis – Jesus as Redeemer

Luke

Date written – 60s

Author - Luke

Summary – Luke and Acts are both written by Luke and tell the story of Christianity from the birth of Jesus through the growth of the early church. There are many teachings and miracles in Luke that points us right to the heart of God and just how compassionate he is toward mankind.

Luke's emphasis – Jesus as compassionate and uplifter of the oppressed

John

Date written – 80s

Author - John

Summary – The Gospel of John tells the story of the life and ministry of Jesus through an insider point of view. Matthew was a disciple of Jesus but not in his "inner circle" like Peter, James and John were. Luke and John were not part of Jesus' 12 disciples. So John holds a special place in teaching us about God and Christ as an "insider." One things you will notice in John are

a lot of double meanings that often leave people confused (being born again is one example from John 3). Like the other three Gospels, John shows Jesus on his way to a cross. Like the other Gospels Jesus defeats death through his resurrection and shows us that there is hope beyond the grave.

John's emphasis – Jesus as the Son of God and his unique relationship with His Father.

1. History

Acts of the Apostles

Date written – 62

Author - Luke

Summary – Luke wrote the book of Acts to tell the rest of the story. Acts covers the first thirty years of the church and tells how the Gospel went from being believed by just a few disciples waiting in Jerusalem to the Holy Spirit inspiring them to convert thousands and take the message all over the world. In the book of Acts we see missionaries including Paul, Barnabas, Mark and Luke (who both wrote the Gospels) travelling around the world, spreading the message of Christ to Jews and Gentiles. They travel to many of the cities Paul later writes the letters that follow.

One major dividing line in the book is Acts 10 where God allows the message of Christ to be preached to the Gentiles for the first time. This had been God's plan all the way back to Abraham when he promised Abraham he would be the "father of many nations" (Genesis 17:5).

2. Paul's Letters

Romans

Date written – 55

Author - Paul

Summary – Romans was written to a racially divided church. The Jew and Gentile Christians were struggling to find unity. Paul writes Romans to reconcile their relationships and to understand that the message of Christ should act as a common bond across all nations just as God planned for it to do from the beginning.

1 Corinthians

Date written – 54

Author - Paul

Summary – Corinth is a town in Greece where Paul visited in Acts 18. The Corinthian church was also very divided (1:10-17). Paul sets them straight by talking about how true leaders should bring unity and not division but that ultimately our leader is Christ and not any earthly leaders. Paul also deals with many of their specific concerns as a congregation including marriage (chapter 7), the eating of food sacrificed to idols (chapters 8-11) and issues in worship (chapters 11-14).

2 Corinthians

Date written – 55

Author - Paul

Summary – 2 Corinthians seems to be about Paul's defense of his ministry to those hostile toward him at Corinth. He upholds his integrity and commission from God and defends many of his travel plans in this letter.

Galatians

Date written – 48

Author - Paul

Summary – Galatians was written to address a specific concern among the Christians in the region of Galatia. It seems those who were Jewish Christians were beginning to enforce various aspects of Judaism (circumcision for one) on the Gentile Christians. Paul writes this letter to assure them of the sufficiency of Christ apart from the Law of Moses (Genesis-Deuteronomy) and to help mend the broken relationships left behind between the Christians in the Galatian churches.

Ephesians

Date written – 60

Author - Paul

Summary – One of four letters Paul wrote from prison. Normally Paul's letters have a specific occasion that prompted him to write these churches. Ephesians is the hardest to pin down. What stands out in Ephesians is the connection between knowing God and what he has done for us (Chapters 1-3) and the resulting actions that should be in our lives in response to all God has done for us (Chapters 4-6).

Philippians

Date written – 61

Author - Paul

Summary – Paul invites the Philippian Christians to live their lives for Christ even if it includes suffering (Phil 1). He encourages them to imitate Christ's humility (Phil 2) and to keep in mind the importance of Christ (Phil 3). Even though in jail, Paul has found contentment (Phil 4:11-12).

Colossians

Date written – 60

Author - Paul

Summary – One of four letters Paul wrote from prison. Colossians was written to help combat some false teachings that were taking place in the house churches of Colossae. It seems some believed that it was necessary to appease angels by doing certain religious ceremonies in order to gain entrance to the presence of God (see especially Col 2). Paul assures them, as he did the

Galatians, that we don't need anything more than Jesus Christ to be in the proper relationship with God.

1 Thessalonians

Date written – 50

Author - Paul

Summary – 1 Thessalonians may have been written to Christians in Thessalonica who struggled with understanding the second coming of Christ and what that meant for Christians who died before his return. Some believed in the early church that Christ would come back within a generation due to some of Jesus' teachings (like John 21:22). Paul encourages them toward purity, love and responsibility.

2 Thessalonians

Date written – 51

Author - Paul

Summary – Paul wrote this letter to alleviate even more concerns they had about the return of Christ. It seems some had taught Christ has already come back (2 Thess 2:1-2) and that there were false teachers in their midst (2:3-15). Paul writes this letter to inform and encourage them toward faithfulness so that they will not be led away from God through false teaching.

1 Timothy

Date written – 62

Author - Paul

Summary – 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus are called the "Pastoral epistles". They were written by Paul to help equip these men of God toward a more productive ministry. They were also written to help these ministers of the Gospel (Timothy and Titus) to effectively lead in the congregations they were a part of. These three letters are very practical covering everything from how to dress to qualifications of elders and deacons and how to treat others in the church.

2 Timothy

Date written – 63

Author - Paul

Summary – Written as Paul nears the end of his life in Roman prison. He writes this to ensure the faithfulness of Timothy and to encourage him to finish strong just as Paul is doing himself. The most famous verse in this book is found in 2 Timothy 3:14-17 where Paul encourages him to study the scriptures and explains the extent of their usefulness.

Titus

Date written – 62

Author - Paul

Summary – The last of Paul’s pastoral letters, this letter is written to give instruction to Titus on how Christians are to live and what should be taught to those in the church. Another very practical letter.

Philemon

Date written – 60

Author - Paul

Summary – One of four letters Paul wrote from prison. This letter was written to reconcile the relationship between a slave and a slave master who were both Christians in the church in Colossae. The slave, Onesimus, came to Paul so he could help him make things right again with his master, Philemon. Paul put the pressure on Philemon to make things right, even if it wasn’t easy.

3. General Letters

Hebrews

Date written – between 60 & 70

Author - Unknown

Summary – Hebrews reads more like a sermon than a letter and that may have been how the book of Hebrews started out. Hebrews is about the sufficiency of Christ and his exaltation above all others in all creation. The book proves that by showing his fulfillment of many things found in the Old Testament including the priesthood, sacrificial system, and many other things. This letter was undoubtedly written to a Jewish audience, who would have readily seen the connections the writer of Hebrews makes with the Old Testament.

James

Date written – 44

Author - James

Summary – James was the half brother of Jesus, sharing the same mother, Mary. James is often thought of as the Proverbs of the New Testament. It is very practical and easy to understand. This is a great place to start studying the Bible if you are looking for something practical and easily applicable.

1 Peter

Date written – 65

Author - Peter

Summary – 1 & 2 Peter were written to remind Christians of their special status with God so that they could endure some pretty intense persecution. Peter speaks to unjust suffering and living as a Christian in a hostile world.

2 Peter

Date written – 65

Author - Peter

Summary – 2 Peter was written near the end of Peter’s life and he is calling them to the truth and reminding them of the legitimacy of the Gospel, that what Christ had done for them was real. As an eyewitness who is about to die defending his faith, he wants to make sure those he is leaving behind will hold true to the Gospel because Christ will return and Christians are called to live with that in mind.

1 John

Date written – 90

Author - John

Summary – If Timothy and Titus are pastoral letters to individuals, 1-3 John read like pastoral letters written in love to help them grow closer to God and to other Christians. In 1 John, John tells us what it means to walk in the light and just how connected our love of God is with our love for others (1 John 3). We also get more “insider” facts about who Jesus is and what he has done for us.

2 John

Date written – 90

Author - John

Summary – This letter is addressed probably to a local congregation in order to help them combat false teaching. That false teaching had to do with whether or not Jesus really came in the flesh. John, who knew Jesus first hand, assures them that he did.

3 John

Date written – 90

Author - John

Summary – 3 John is written toward a specific problem in a specific church. A man named Diotrephes was causing a problem in the church and John writes to Gaius, a leader in the church, in order to help him deal with this issue.

Jude

Date written – 70

Author - Jude

Summary – Jude is very much like 2 Peter and is written to combat wickedness in the church. Jude uses several examples from scripture and Jewish tradition who did the same things and were punished by God.

4. Apocalyptic

Revelation

Date written – 90s

Author - John

Summary – Revelation is an often misunderstood book. It was written to Christians who were undergoing some severe persecution in order for them to have the courage to hold to their faith, even if it meant they would die for Christ. Much of what is found in the book has already taken place but a few things still have not. The book concludes the New Testament with a beautiful picture of how this world will end up. Everything will be made right and whole again and there will be no more pain, tears or death as we live in perfect relationship with God.