

# **Bible Basics**

# **New Testament**

**By Debbie Kolacki of**

**PRC - Practical Resources for  
Churches**

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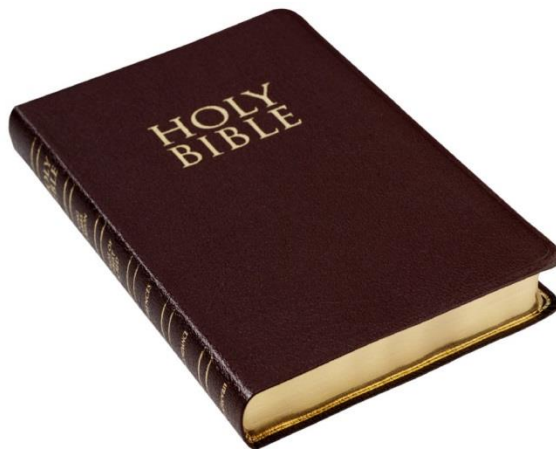
## Basic Bible Information

You're probably familiar with a lot of the material in this booklet, but sometimes it's good to review the basics in a simplified format. I often take out a children's book on a subject I'm interested in, just to get a quick overview on it. Also, there are usually colorful pictures along with the basic information which makes the learning more fun and memorable!

There will be times I'll be generalizing and simplifying information, as there is a lot to cover on this topic.

Let's look at the Bible in general. As in other areas of religion, what constitutes the Bible, as well as how the Bible is viewed, will vary depending on the denomination you belong to. Generally, we'll be taking a middle of the road, mainline Protestant viewpoint in this booklet.

The most theologically conservative denominations view the Bible as inerrant (without mistakes) and take almost all of it literally. Denominations with a very liberal theological viewpoint may believe that many Bible stories belong to the category of myth as opposed to fact and see the Bible as inspired by God but definitely written by humans and therefore not error free. Of course, there are viewpoints of varying degrees between these two, and even people who belong to the same denomination have different viewpoints.



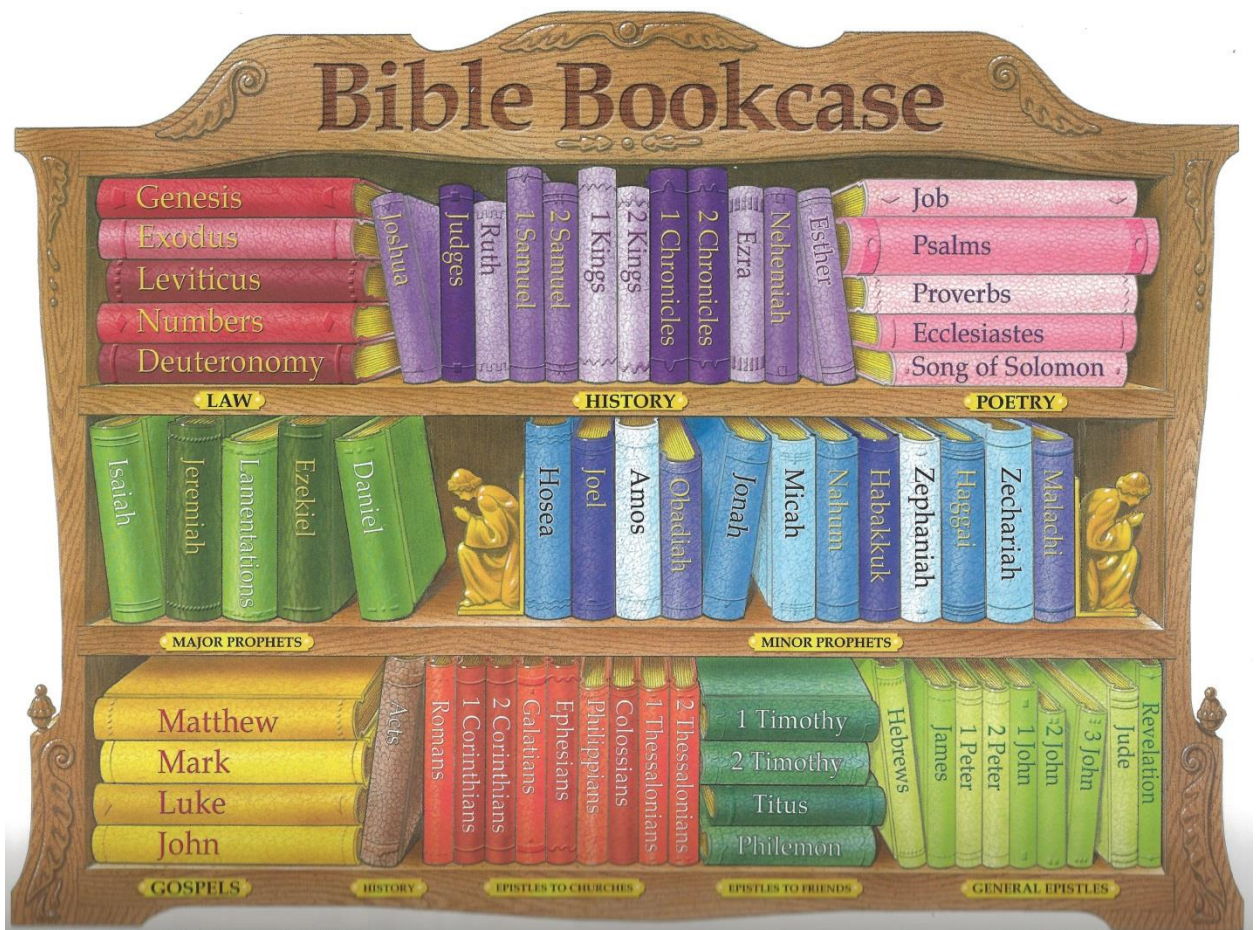
## Books of the Bible

The Bible is made up of a collection of books (sort of like chapters in a modern novel) written by around 40 different people. The earliest parts of the Bible were part of an oral tradition and passed down from generation to generation. Eventually these were written down, probably around eight or nine hundred years before Christ was born. The rest of the Bible was written over a period of many more years, ending around 100 years after Christ.

Most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and most of the New Testament was written in Greek. A few parts were written in Aramaic.

The Protestant Bible has 66 books - 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament.

In the picture below, the New Testament books are on the bottom shelf.



## New Testament overview

The New Testament consists of:

the **Gospels**, which tell about the life of Jesus,  
the **Acts of the Apostles**, which tells the history of the early church,  
the **Epistles**, which are letters written by various people in the early church, and  
**Revelation**, which is often considered a book of prophecy about the end times.



## Gospels

The New Testament begins with the four gospels which tell about the life of Jesus and his teachings.

Although the gospels tell us about the life of Jesus, they're not biographies. They tell us very little of Jesus' youth and don't describe his physical appearance. They concentrate on the three years of Jesus' ministry and the final week of his life on earth.

The authors of the four gospels (the word gospel means "good news") are often referred to as the Four Evangelists; the word evangelist literally means "bringer of good news."

The four statues pictured above show the evangelists with their symbols. Passages in the books of Ezekiel and Revelation prompted Irenaeus in the 2nd century to assign

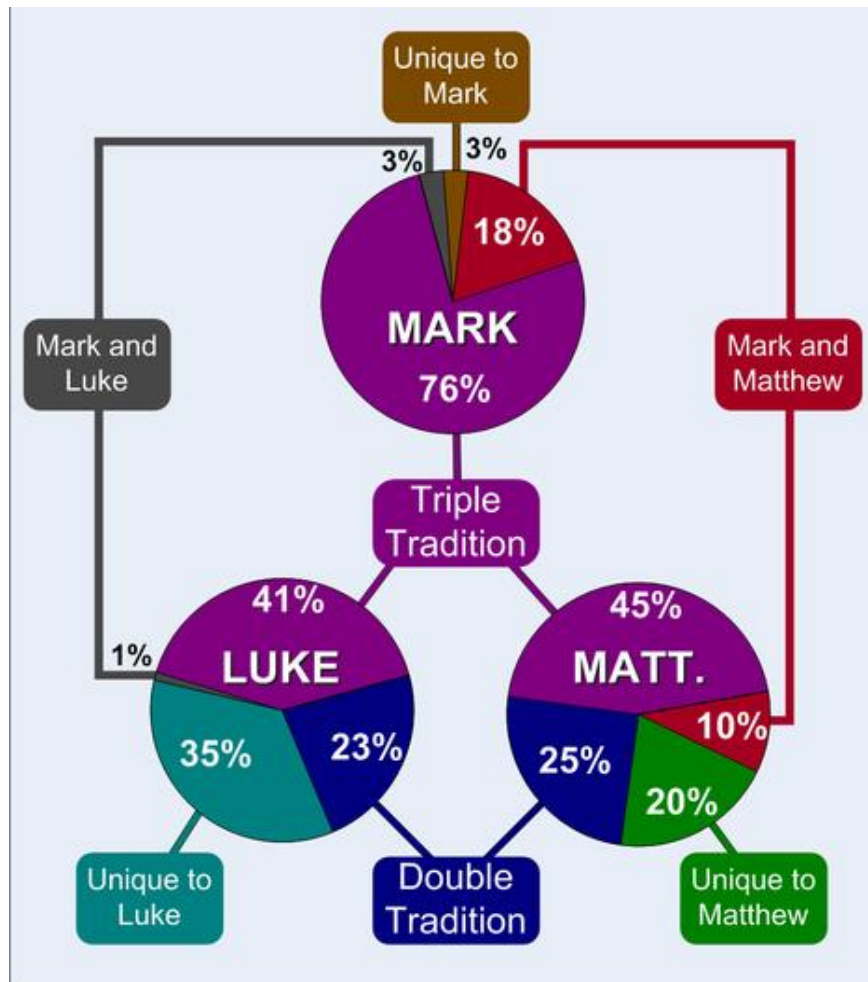
symbols to the evangelists. Matthew is symbolized by a winged man or angel, Mark by a winged lion, Luke by a winged ox or bull, and John as an eagle.

## The Synoptic Gospels

The first three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are called the Synoptic Gospels.

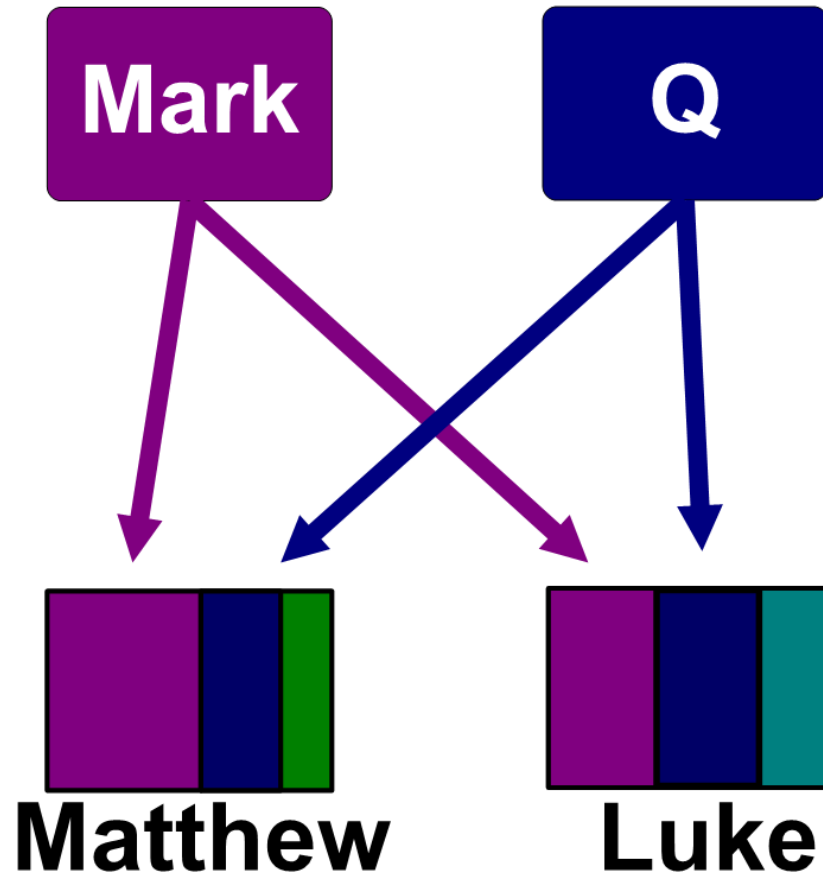
The term synoptic means “taking the same point of view.”

The Synoptic Gospels share similar content and a similar order of events.



The chart above attempts to show which content in each of the Synoptic Gospels is shared with one or both of the other gospels and which content is unique to a gospel. It is thought that the Gospel of Mark was written first and that the Gospels of Luke and Matthew incorporated some of this content into their gospels.

# Two-source Hypothesis



There is also a theory accepted by many scholars that Matthew and Luke also used material from a hypothetical source called Q; Q is short for the German word Quelle which means "source." Q is a collection of the sayings of Jesus and was probably a written document rather than oral tradition.

## The Gospel of Matthew

- **Gospel for the Jews**

The first book of the New Testament is the Gospel of Matthew. In many ways, Matthew serves as a bridge between the Old and New Testaments; it emphasizes Jesus as Israel's Messiah and King who fulfills Old Testament prophecy. It's in this gospel that we hear the term "Kingdom of Heaven." It may be said that Matthew was written primarily for the Jews.

- **Authorship and date of composition**

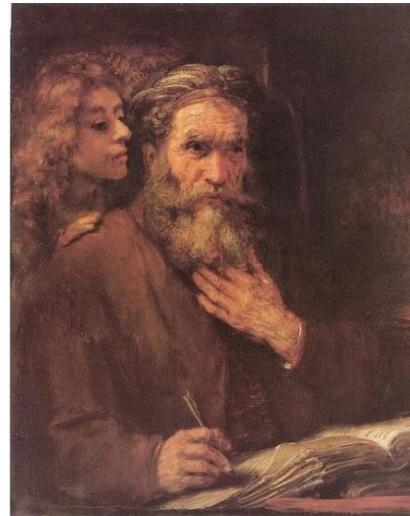
Traditionally the author of Matthew was said to be the disciple Matthew, who was a tax collector before he followed Jesus. Many modern scholars believe that Matthew was written by an anonymous, highly educated Jew between about 80-90 CE (AD), although some suggest this gospel was written several decades before that date.

- **Contains five major discourses**

The material of the gospel is woven around five great discourses (or speeches); the first of these is Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and the third consists of the kingdom parables; parables are simple stories told to illustrate a moral lesson. The discourses are found in chapters 5-7, chapter 10, chapter 13, chapter 18, and chapters 24-25.

- **Outline of the Gospel of Matthew**

- Jesus' genealogy, birth and early years (1-2)
- Beginnings of Jesus' ministry (3:1 – 4:11)
- Ministry in Galilee (4:12 – 14:12)
- Jesus' withdrawals from Galilee (14:13 – 17:20)
- Jesus' last ministry in Galilee (17:22 – 18:35)
- Jesus' ministry in Judea and Perea (19-20)
- Holy Week (21-27)
- Resurrection (28)





On this map of first century Palestine, you can see Nazareth and Galilee, where Jesus' ministry begins. If you go further south you see Perea and Judea where Jerusalem is located.



## The Gospel of Mark

- **Gospel for Roman Christians**

It is believed that Mark's gospel was composed for the Christians in Rome.

- **Authorship**

According to tradition, Mark's gospel was written by Mark or John Mark, a companion of the apostle Peter, and records events that Peter included in his teaching. However, many modern scholars believe the author is not known.

- **Date of composition**

Mark is generally accepted as the earliest written Gospel. It was probably written around 60-70 CE.

- **Jesus as the Suffering Servant**

The author of Mark portrays Jesus as the Suffering Servant prophesized in the Old Testament. The Messianic Secret is also part of Mark's Gospel, where Jesus commands his followers not to tell anyone that he is the Messiah.

- **Outline of the Gospel of Mark**

- Beginning of Jesus' ministry (1:1-13)
- Ministry in Galilee (1:14 – 6:29)
- Jesus' withdrawals from Galilee (6:30 – 9:29)
- Jesus' last ministry in Galilee (9:30-50)
- Jesus' ministry in Judea and Perea (10)
- Holy Week (11-15)
- Resurrection (16)



## Gospel of Luke

- **Gospel for Gentiles/Greeks**

The Gospel of Luke is often referred to as the Gospel for the Gentiles (non-Jews) or the Gospel for the Greeks. Luke's Gospel emphasizes Jesus' humanity and his acceptance of women, children, and the poor. The Greeks associated these traits with the Ideal Man.

- **Authorship**

It is generally accepted that the author of the Gospel of Luke was also the author of the Acts of the Apostles. According to tradition, this author was the physician Luke, who may have been a Gentile. Again, scholars don't agree on this.

- **Date of composition**

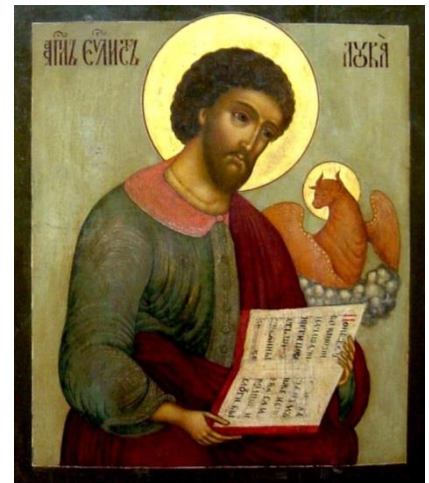
The Gospel of Luke was probably written sometime between 75-100 CE.

- **Longest Gospel**

The Gospel of Luke is the longest of the gospels and the most comprehensive. The Parables of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan are found only in Luke's Gospel. Luke also emphasizes prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit.

- **Outline of the Gospel of Luke**

- Preface (1:1-4)
- Births of John the Baptist and Jesus (1:5 – 2:52)
- Jesus' preparation for ministry (3:1 – 4:13)
- Ministry in Galilee (4:14 – 9:9)
- Jesus' withdrawals from Galilee (9:10-50)
- Jesus' ministry in Judea (9:51 – 13:21)
- Jesus' ministry in and around Perea (13:22 – 19:27)
- Holy Week (19:28 – 23:56)
- Resurrection (24:1-12)
- Post-Resurrection Ministry (24:13-49)
- Ascension (24:50-53)



## Gospel of John

- **Gospel for the Greek world**

The Synoptic Gospels share a considerable amount of material, but over 90% of John's gospel is unique to him. John presents Jesus as the incarnation of the divine Logos (or Word), which in Greek philosophy is reason, the controlling principle in the universe. John is less interested in the historical order of events in Jesus' life and focuses more on the inner meaning of Jesus' teaching.

- **Authorship**

The author of this gospel is referred to as the "disciple whom Jesus loved" and was traditionally thought to be the apostle John, but here again there is disagreement among scholars. Many scholars do think that the author of the Gospel of John and the author of the three Epistles of John are the same person.

- **Date of composition**

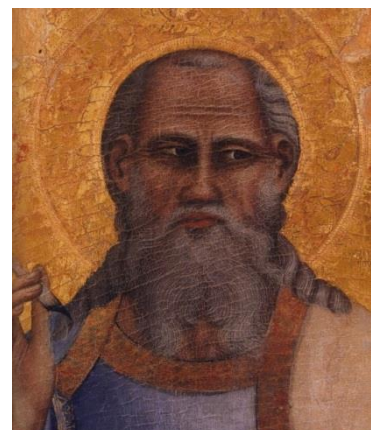
The date when the Gospel of John was written is thought to be around 90-100 CE.

- **Jesus is divine Son of God**

John presents Jesus as the divine Son of God and shows Jesus talking about his divine role. John focuses largely on different miracles than those in the Synoptic Gospels and calls them signs, which are meant to bring people to faith in Jesus. John gives a lengthy account of the Last Supper with Jesus giving several discourses to his disciples. John contains the famous "I am" statements of Jesus: "I am the bread of life; the light of the world; the gate of the sheep; the good shepherd; the resurrection and the life; the way, the truth, and the life; and the true vine."

- **Outline**

- Prologue: The Word became flesh (1:1-18)
- Jesus' ministry begins (1:19-51)
- Jesus' public ministry: miracles and teaching (2-11)
- Holy week (12-19)
- Resurrection (20:1-30)
- Jesus appears to the disciples (21)



## Harmony of the Gospels

There is something called a Harmony of the Gospels which is usually presented in a chart form. It takes events from the life of Jesus listed in all four Gospels and attempts to put them in chronological order. In a similar way, this is also the way Sunday school curriculum may be put together.

## The Acts of the Apostles

- The book that comes after the gospels is called The Acts of the Apostles or just Acts.
- It is the only book of history in the New Testament.
- Acts was probably written around the year 63-64 CE.
- It is considered to be a continuation of Luke's Gospel and begins with Jesus' ascension into heaven.
- In its twenty-eight chapters, Acts records the growth of the early church and the beginnings of the missionary movement. It covers a period of more than thirty years.
- Peter is the central figure of the book's first twelve chapters.
- Paul is the central figure of the book's last sixteen chapters.
- Chapters 13-20 cover Paul's three great missionary journeys.
- Acts emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit.
  
- **Outline**
  - Prologue, Jesus' Ascension, Matthias Chosen (1)
  - Pentecost (2)
  - Peter, John, and the early church (3:1-6:7)
  - Stephen (6:8-8:3)
  - Philip (8:5-40)
  - Saul's Conversion (9:1-31)
  - Peter's ministry on the Mediterranean coast (9:32 – 11:18)
  - The church in Antioch (11:19-30)
  - Persecution and Peter's deliverance (12)
  - Paul's first missionary journey (13-14)
  - The Council at Jerusalem (15:1-35)
  - Paul's second missionary journey (15:36 – 18:22)
  - Paul's third missionary journey (18:23 – 21:16)
  - Paul's imprisonment in Jerusalem (21:17 – 23:35)
  - Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea (24-26)
  - Paul's voyage to Rome (27:1 – 28:15)
  - Paul under house arrest in Rome (28:16-31)



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## Epistles

- **Twenty-one Epistles**

After the gospels and Acts, there are twenty-one epistles or letters.

- **Pauline Epistles**

The first thirteen Epistles are called the Pauline Epistles, as they were traditionally thought to be written by Paul. However, most scholars only consider seven of these to have been actually written by Paul.

- **Hebrews**

Hebrews had been attributed to Paul, but now the author is thought to be anonymous.

- **General Epistles**

There are seven General Epistles, which are called General because their intended audience, for the most part, seems to be Christians in general, rather than individual persons or congregations, as is the case with the Pauline Epistles.



## Pauline Epistles

The Pauline Epistles are the earliest written books of the New Testament. The earliest of them is probably 1 Thessalonians, written around 51 CE. They were written to encourage and instruct both churches and individuals. The first nine of these epistles were written to churches and are named after the places where the churches were located.

- **Romans**  
Paul's letter to the Romans explains the gospel and unfolds major doctrines of Christianity. Its theme of "justification by faith alone" had a profound impact on Martin Luther and ushered in the Reformation.
- **1 & 2 Corinthians**  
1 Corinthians addresses concerns of the church at Corinth, whose members were urged to resolve divisions and live a moral life. 2 Corinthians is a follow up to the previous letter.
- **Galatians**  
Galatians was written to be circulated among the churches of Galatia and emphasizes the Christian's freedom because of God's grace through faith.
- **Ephesians**  
Ephesians was written to affirm Christian unity and to warn against false doctrine and immorality.
- **Philippians**  
Philippians emphasizes joyful Christian living, even in the face of suffering.
- **Colossians**  
Colossians confronts false doctrine by affirming that Christ must be our doctrinal center, just as he is the center of Creation.
- **1 & 2 Thessalonians**  
1 and 2 Thessalonians focus on the Second Coming of Christ and how Christians should live in light of Christ's return.
- **1 & 2 Timothy**
- **Titus**  
The last four epistles are addressed to individuals. 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are known as the Pastoral Epistles because they address how to shepherd God's flock.
- **Philemon**  
Philemon is a plea to a wealthy Christian for a runaway slave to be freed and accepted as a brother in Christ.

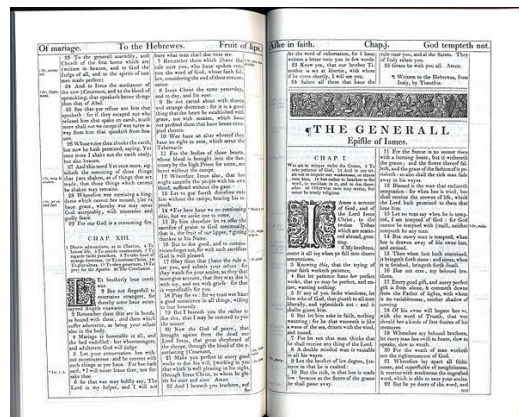
# Hebrews

The book of Hebrews was written to Hebrew Christians and emphasizes the superiority of Christ over the Old Testament prophets and priests. Christ is the Great High Priest who is the one mediator between God and man.

# General Epistles

The last seven epistles are called the General Epistles and designated by the name of their author, instead of being named by whom they are addressed to. The General Epistles are, for the most part, addressed to the church in general or to groups of churches.

- **James**  
James is full of practical wisdom and asserts that faith without works is dead. Traditionally, the author of this epistle is said to be James, the brother of Jesus, but scholars don't agree on this.
- **1 & 2 Peter**  
1 & 2 Peter have been attributed to the apostle Peter, but there are numerous reasons to doubt this. In 1 Peter, persecuted Christians are comforted and encouraged. In 2 Peter, Christians are warned against the danger from within the church by false teachers, as opposed to outside dangers.
- **1, 2, & 3 John**  
1, 2, & 3 John are thought to be written by the author of the Gospel of John, who was probably not John the apostle. The theme of these letters is love and light, good and evil. The letters caution against Gnosticism, a teaching which denied Christ's full deity and true humanity.
- **Jude**  
Jude also warns against false teachings.





## Epistles in Sunday school

We don't see many lessons in Sunday school based on the Epistles but there are two that are fairly popular.



Galatians 5:22-23 speaks about the Fruit of the Spirit: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." Lessons based on this passage usually use apples, oranges, and other fruits to represent each of the fruits of the Spirit.



Ephesians 6:10-17 is where you'll find a description of the Armor of God: "Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and his powerful strength. Put on God's armor so that you can make a stand against the tricks of the devil. We aren't fighting against human enemies but against rulers, authorities, forces of cosmic darkness, and spiritual powers of evil in the heavens. Therefore, pick up the full armor of God so that you can stand your ground on the evil day and after you have done everything possible to still stand. So, stand with the belt of truth around your waist, justice as your breastplate, and put shoes on your

feet so that you are ready to spread the good news of peace. Above all, carry the shield of faith so that you can extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's word."

## Revelation

- The last book of the New Testament is Revelation. It's often mistakenly called "Revelations." It's a fascinating book and has been interpreted in numerous ways through the ages and even today.
- The Greek word for "revelation" is "apocalypse" which refers to an unveiling of God's secret purposes.
- Revelation is the only distinctively prophetic New Testament book. It tells of the visions of John of Patmos, who was once thought to be the same John who wrote the Gospel and Epistles of John; most scholars today don't think that.
- When Revelation was written, in approximately 90-95 CE, the church was facing serious persecution. John's prophetic vision of the war between good and evil and God's glorious victory over evil was meant to strengthen and give hope to suffering Christians.
- John addresses seven churches and describes a complex series of events. Figures and images in Revelation include the Whore of Babylon, The Beast, and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.
- The book describes the Second Coming of Christ and ends with a description of the new heaven and new earth where God comes to live with humans.
- There are varying interpretations of the book. Some see it as a broad view of history, some see it as referring mostly to events in the first century, some believe it describes future events, and some interpret the book as symbolic and allegorical and not describing actual events.
- Revelation isn't usually found in children's Sunday school curriculum but may be mentioned in some youth materials. Teens may also be interested in it as there are books and movies based on it, such as the Left Behind series.



## New Testament stories in Sunday school curriculum

- Some Sunday school curriculums cover the Old Testament in the fall and then focus on Jesus beginning in Advent. They'll then follow the life of Jesus along with the church seasons, starting with Jesus' birth in December and then focusing on the events at the end of Jesus' life just before Easter.
- Often on a three-year cycle, curriculum will focus on a different aspect of Jesus' ministry each year, such as the miracles, parables, and teachings.
- After Easter, the story of the beginning of the church is usually told. There may be a focus each year on a different person, such as Peter or Paul, or several characters such as Lydia, Dorcas, and Timothy.
- As mentioned before, there may also be lessons based on other New Testament books, such as the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians or the Armor of God in Ephesians.
- Lectionary curriculum, which is based on the scripture readings in church each week, usually focuses on gospel passages, so this kind of curriculum will naturally follow the life of Jesus and the beginnings of the church according to the church year.
- Topical curriculum will sometimes include both Old and New Testament stories that are based on a particular theme.

## Resources for teaching the New Testament

- **Regular curriculum**  
Your regular curriculum can be a good source for teaching your children about the New Testament.
- **The Story**  
Zondervan published a curriculum called The Story which has several versions for [children](#) as well as [teens](#).
- **re:form Ancestors**  
Another resource for youth is [re:form Ancestors](#) which uses humor and DVD segments to teach about 15 New Testament characters.
- **Other**  
There's also [Through the Bible in Twelve Weeks](#) which can be used for older children and youth.

## **If you want to know more...**

There are plenty of resources out there to learn about the Bible and the New Testament.

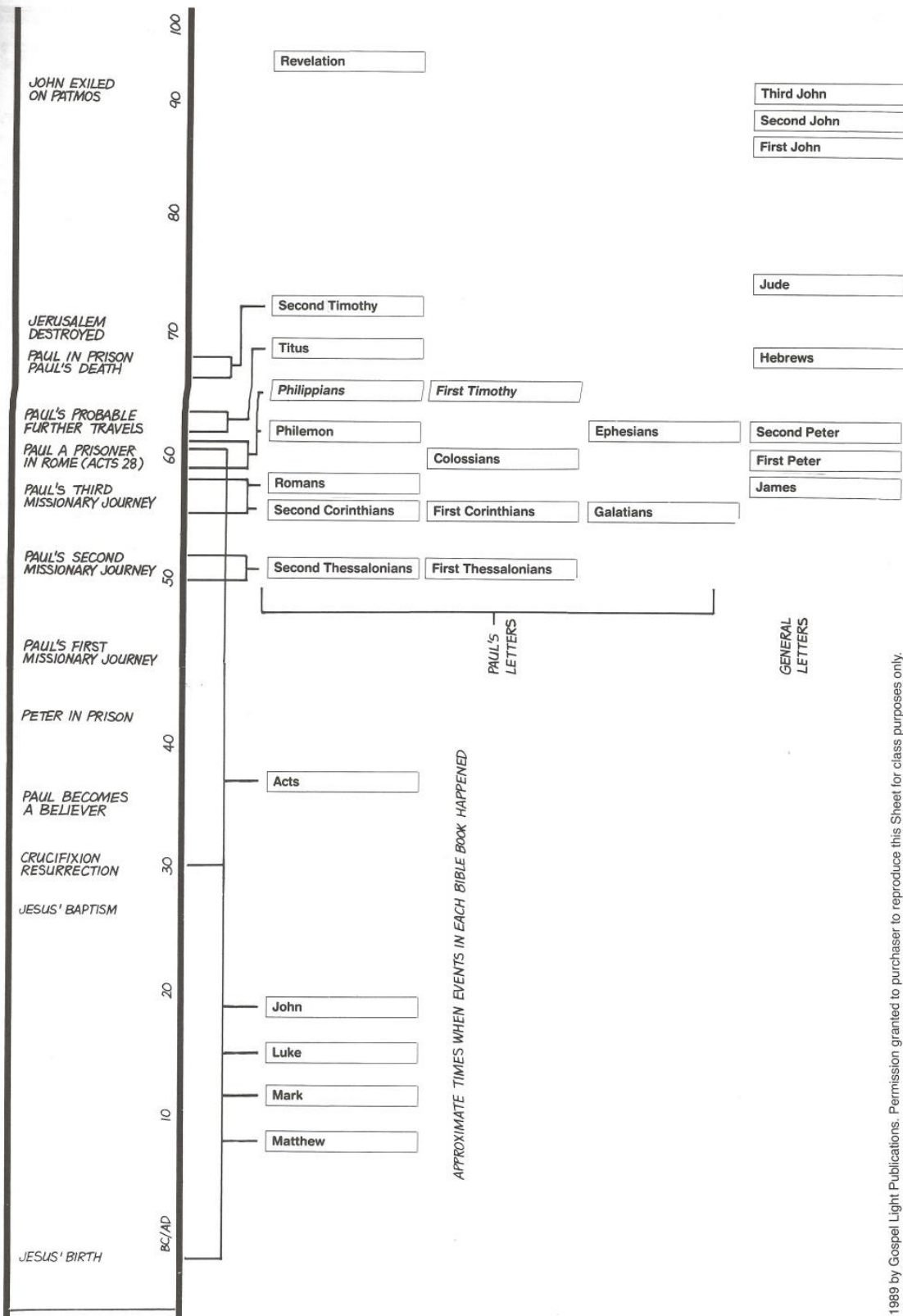
Books include commentaries, dictionaries, atlases, encyclopedias, books with charts and illustrations, and concordances.

There are also many free websites with Bible information and there are even apps for your smartphone or tablet. I've included a list of some websites in this booklet.

Studying with others can be fun and will keep you motivated. There are numerous short- and long-term studies which give an overview of the Bible or focus on an aspect of the New Testament.



# When New Testament Events Happened



APPROXIMATE TIMES WHEN EVENTS IN EACH BIBLE BOOK HAPPENED

## **Bibles and Bible Study Websites**

### **American Bible Society**

Includes resources, study guides, and more on Books of the Bible and People of the Bible. There are resources and articles about the Bible and about topics in the bible, as well as church resources such as eBulletins, devotionals and more.

<http://biblesresources.americanbible.org/bible-resources/bible-resource-center>

### **Bible Crosswalk**

Includes [John Darby's Synopsis of the New Testament](#), the Fourfold Gospel, the [Geneva Study Bible](#), [John Gill's Exposition of the Bible](#), [Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible](#), [Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible](#), the [People's New Testament](#), [Robertson's Word Pictures of the New Testament](#), [Scofield Reference Notes \(1917 Edition\)](#), [the Treasury of David](#), and [Wesley's Explanatory Notes](#).

<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Commentaries/>

### **Bible Gateway**

Bible Gateway is a free tool for reading and researching scripture online in the language or translation of your choice which provides advanced searching capabilities based on keywords, phrases, or scripture reference. Other features include a Verse of the Day widget, Bible commentaries, audio Bibles, and more. It also includes InterVarsity Press' New Testament Commentaries and Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible.

<http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/>

### **Bible Oremus**

Free New Revised Standard Version (American and Anglicized versions), and several versions of the Psalms.

<http://bible.oremus.org>

### **Biblia**

Includes Bible search engine, reading plans, concordance and dictionary, book outlines and more from the Zondervan NIV Study Bible.

<https://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn1.1>

### **Bible Hub**

Includes Bible atlas, parallel Bible, concordance, dictionary, encyclopedia, commentary, devotions, Christian books, and mobile app.

<http://biblehub.com/>

### **Blue Letter Bible**

Includes commentaries by Robert M. Bowman, John Brown, John Calvin, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Mark Eastman, Alfred Edersheim, David Guzik, Matthew Henry, Bob Hoekstra,

Fausset & Brown Jamieson, Gary Kusunoki, Joseph Barber Lightfoot, Martin Luther, Andrew Murray, Isaac Newton, Neal Pirolo, Church Smith, Donald R. Smith, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Ray Stedman, David Terasaka M.D., R.A. Torrey, and John Walvoord.

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/>

### **Christians Unite**

Includes Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible, the People's New Testament, John Wesley's Notes on the Bible, JFB: Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, the Geneva Study Bible, and John Nelson Darby - Synopsis of the New Testament.

<http://bible.christiansunite.com/commentary.shtml>

### **Enter the Bible**

Written by Luther Seminary faculty this site includes summaries, outlines, background and videos for your group study or personal devotions.

[www.enterthebible.org](http://www.enterthebible.org)

### **E-Sword**

Website to download free Bible study software.

[www.e-sword.net](http://www.e-sword.net)

### **Net Ministries**

Information about the Bible, pronunciation guide, several Bible dictionaries, articles and links to more resources.

<https://www.netministries.org/resources>

### **Study Light**

Includes Adam Clarke's Commentary, John S.C. Abbot and Jacob Abbott Illustrated New Testament, James Burton Coffman's Commentaries: Whole Bible, Barne's Notes on the New Testament, John Darby's Synopsis of the New Testament, John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible, the Geneva Study Bible, David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible, Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, John Lightfoot's Commentary on the Gospels, Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible, Martin Luther's Commentary on Galatians, J.W. McGarvey's Original Commentary on Acts, the People's New Testament, Robertson's Word Pictures of the New Testament, Scofield Reference Notes (1917 Edition), The Fourfold Gospel, the Treasury of David, the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, and Wesley's Explanatory Notes.

<https://www.studylight.org/>

## **You Version**

YouVersion, a LifeChurch.tv offshoot, hosts a free online Bible and community which allows users to take the Bible on the go with multiple mobile applications, languages and translations. YouVersion also offers more than 20 reading plans that differ in translation, Scripture length, frequency of delivery and topic focus. Readers choose a plan that fit their schedules and lifestyles. For example, readers can pick a translation they like, such as “The Message,” then choose a reading plan from the Gospels that delivers one chapter, twice a day.

Visit our [website](#) and our [Facebook page](#) for more free resources and to sign up for our monthly free children’s ministry webinars.

PRC – Practical Resources for Churches

### **Everyone Has a Calling Ours Is Helping You!**

PRC – Practical Resources for Churches is a non-denominational, education-based organization. We currently have two locations on Long Island and a virtual presence.

We provide consultants, educational opportunities and physical resources to churches.

What makes us different? We are here to walk the journey every day with a congregation. We look for practical, cost-effective solutions for each request. No question is too large or too small. Call, visit or e-mail us to find out.

*Revised November 2024*