

New Testament Survey
(Part One: The Gospels)

I. Introduction.

A. The Structure of the New Testament: The NT contains 27 books that may be divided into four categories:

1. History:
 - a. The four Gospels.
 - (i) The account of Christ's birth, life, teaching, miracles, death, resurrection, ascension.
 - (ii) Each written by either an apostle or close associate of an apostle.
 - b. The book of Acts:
 - (i) Written by Luke, a close associate of Paul.
 - (ii) Chronicles the expansion of the early church according to the command/prophesy of Jesus before His ascension: "So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, 'Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth'" (1:6-8).
2. Pauline letters:
 - a. 13 letters total.
 - b. Written either generally to churches, to specific churches, or to specific individuals to address certain problems arising in the church.
3. General letters:
 - a. 8 letters total.
 - b. 5 authors total: The author to the Hebrews, James, Peter, John, and Jude.
 - c. Written to admonish, encourage and instruct Christians.
4. Revelation:
 - a. Written by John, the apostle.
 - b. Intended to address the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple which completes the transition from the Old Covenant to the New, the Second Coming of Christ, the final judgment, and the establishing of the New Heavens and New Earth at the end of human history.
 - c. "When He said, 'A new *covenant*,' He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear" (Heb. 8:13).

B. The Covenantal Context of the New Testament.

1. The Bible is a covenant/legal document. A covenant may be divided into five parts:
 - a. Preamble: Identifies the Lord/Sovereign of the covenant.
 - b. Historic Prologue: Tells what the Sovereign did/does to ingratiate the recipients.
 - c. Stipulations: The Laws/Commandments which the Sovereign imposes on his people.
 - d. Sanctions: The blessings/curses for obedience/disobedience.
 - e. Disposition: The placement of the covenant document and provision for its review.
2. The New Testament as a covenant document:
 - a. Preamble: God reveals Himself as the faithful covenant keeping Lord throughout.
 - b. Historic Prologue: God tells of the gracious gift of His Son to bring salvation.
 - c. Stipulations: He reveals to us His continuing will throughout.
 - d. Sanctions: Tells how His Son earned the blessings and took the curse sanctions on Himself, as well as how we are to live in the light of these blessings.

- e. Disposition: encourages distribution of the message of the Gospel and the treasuring up of His Word in our minds and hearts.

II. The Gospels.

A. General Purpose.

1. Why were they written?
 - a. The Gospels are an historical account of the life and ministry of Savior.
 - b. They show what Jesus said and did – that He is the Messiah, by fulfilling prophecy, performing miracles (John).
 - c. They show the faithfulness of God to save His people as He promised.
 - d. They vindicate God's justice in showing mercy to OT saints (Rom. 3:25).
2. Why are there four Gospels?
 - a. Each was written for a specific purpose.
 - b. By the mouth of two or three witnesses (Matt. 18:16).
3. Their Role in the Covenant.
 - a. Preamble: They reveal God more fully as Triune, faithful and gracious.
 - b. Historic Prologue: The account of what God did through His Son endears us further to be faithful to Him and to keep His commandments.
 - c. Stipulations: Moral commandments remain the same, but reemphasized; the ceremonial law is fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ; the civil was not to be tied to a state of Israel for much longer – since Israel was about to come to an end as a national entity – but its general equity would remain.
 - d. Sanctions: The Gospel give us the account of how Christ obeyed the Law – qualifying Himself and us to receive the blessings – and how He took the curse sanctions of the broken covenant on Himself – fulfilling God's judgment against us.
 - e. Disposition: This Gospel is to be held dear by every believer and to be published among the nations.

B. Particular Gospels.

1. Matthew.
 - a. Author: Matthew, a disciple of Christ, the former tax-collector.
 - b. Date: "It was evidently written before the destruction of Jerusalem (Mt 24:1) and some time after the events it records. The probability is that it was written between the years A.D. 60 and 65" (Easton).
 - c. Purpose:
 - (i) "The cast of thought and the forms of expression employed by the writer show that this Gospel was written for Jewish Christians of Palestine. His great object is to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah, and that in him the ancient prophecies had their fulfilment. The Gospel is full of allusions to those passages of the Old Testament in which Christ is predicted and foreshadowed. The one aim pervading the whole book is to show that Jesus is he 'of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write.' This Gospel contains no fewer than sixty-five references to the Old Testament, forty-three of these being direct verbal citations, thus greatly outnumbering those found in the other Gospels. The main feature of this Gospel may be expressed in the motto, 'I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.'"
 - (ii) The leading characteristic of this Gospel is that it sets forth the kingly glory of Christ, and shows him to be the true heir to David's throne. It is the Gospel of the kingdom. Matthew uses the expression 'kingdom of heaven' (thirty-two times), while Luke uses the expression 'kingdom of God' (thirty-three times). Some Latinized forms occur in this Gospel, as *kodrantes* (Mt 5:26) for the Latin *quadrans*, and *phragello* (Mt 27:26) for the Latin *flagello*. It must be remembered that Matthew was a tax-gatherer for the Roman government, and hence in contact with those using the Latin language. As to the relation of the Gospels to each other, we must maintain that each writer of the synoptics (the first three) wrote

independently of the other two, Matthew being probably first in point of time. 'Out of a total of 1071 verses, Matthew has 387 in common with Mark and Luke, 130 with Mark, 184 with Luke; only 387 being peculiar to itself.'"

- (iii) "The book is fitly divided into these four parts: (1.) Containing the genealogy, the birth, and the infancy of Jesus (1-2) (2.) The discourses and actions of John the Baptist preparatory to Christ's public ministry (3-4:11) (3.) The discourses and actions of Christ in Galilee (4:12-20:16) (4.) The sufferings, death and resurrection of our Lord (Mt 20:17-28)" (Easton).

2. Mark.

- a. Author: Mark, also called John Mark, a close associate of the apostle Peter. "It is the current and apparently well-founded tradition that Mark derived his information mainly from the discourses of Peter. In his mother's house he would have abundant opportunities of obtaining information from the other apostles and their coadjutors, yet he was 'the disciple and interpreter of Peter' specially" (Easton).
- b. Date: "As to the time when it was written, the Gospel furnishes us with no definite information. Mark makes no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem, hence it must have been written before that event, and probably about A.D. 63. The place where it was written was probably Rome. Some have supposed Antioch (comp.) (Mr 15:21) with (Ac 11:20)."
- c. Purpose:
- (i) "It was intended primarily for Romans. This appears probable when it is considered that it makes no reference to the Jewish law, and that the writer takes care to interpret words which a Gentile would be likely to misunderstand, such as, 'Boanerges' (Mr 3:17) 'Talitha cumi' (Mr 5:41) 'Corban' (Mr 7:11) 'Bartimaeus' (Mr 10:46) 'Abba' (Mr 14:36) 'Eloi,' etc. (Mr 15:34) Jewish usages are also explained (Mr 7:3 14:3 14:12 15:42) Mark also uses certain Latin words not found in any of the other Gospels, as 'speculator' (Mr 6:27) rendered, A.V., 'executioner;' R.V., 'soldier of his guard'), 'xestes' (a corruption of sextarius, rendered 'pots,' (Mr 7:4,8) 'quadrans' (Mr 12:42, rendered 'a farthing'), 'centurion') (Mr 15:39,44,45) He only twice quotes from the Old Testament (Mr 1:2 15:28) The characteristics of this Gospel are, (1.) the absence of the genealogy of our Lord, (2.) whom he represents as clothed with power, the 'lion of the tribe of Judah.' (3.) Mark also records with wonderful minuteness the very words (Mr 3:17 5:41 7:11,34 14:36) as well as the position (Mr 9:35) and gestures (Mr 3:5,34 5:32 9:36 10:16) of our Lord. (4.) He is also careful to record particulars of person (Mr 1:29,36 3:6,22) etc., number (Mr 5:13 6:7) etc., place (Mr 2:13 4:1 7:31) etc., and time (Mr 1:35 2:1 4:35) etc., which the other evangelists omit. (5.) The phrase 'and straightway' occurs nearly forty times in this Gospel; while in Luke's Gospel, which is much longer, it is used only seven times, and in John only four times."
- (ii) "In Mark we have no attempt to draw up a continuous narrative. His Gospel is a rapid succession of vivid pictures loosely strung together without much attempt to bind them into a whole or give the events in their natural sequence. This pictorial power is that which specially characterizes this evangelist, so that 'if any one desires to know an evangelical fact, not only in its main features and grand results, but also in its most minute and so to speak more graphic delineation, he must betake himself to Mark.' The leading principle running through this Gospel may be expressed in the motto: 'Jesus came...preaching the gospel of the kingdom' (Mr 1:14) 'Out of a total of 662 verses, Mark has 406 in common with Matthew and Luke, 145 with Matthew, 60 with Luke, and at most 51 peculiar to itself' (Easton).

3. Luke.

- a. Author: Luke, a close associate and traveling companion of Paul. "He does not claim to have been an eye-witness of our Lord's ministry, but to have gone to the best sources of information within his reach, and to have written an orderly narrative of the facts (Lu 1:1-4)."
- b. Date: "The date of its composition is uncertain. It must have been written before the Acts, the date of the composition of which is generally fixed at about 63 or 64 A.D. This Gospel was written, therefore, probably about 60 or 63, when Luke may have been at Caesarea in attendance on Paul, who was then a prisoner. Others have conjectured that it was written at

Rome during Paul's imprisonment there. But on this point no positive certainty can be attained. It is commonly supposed that Luke wrote under the direction, if not at the dictation of Paul. Many words and phrases are common to both; e.g., compare: (Lu 4:22) with (Col 4:6) (Lu 4:32) with (1Co 2:4) (Lu 6:36) with (2Co 1:3) (Lu 6:39) with (Ro 2:19) (Lu 9:56) with (2Co 10:8) (Lu 10:8) with (1Co 10:27) (Lu 11:41) with (Ti 1:15) (Lu 18:1) with (2Th 1:11) (Lu 21:36) with (Eph 6:18) (Lu 22:19,20) with (1Co 11:23-29) (Lu 24:46) with (Ac 17:3) (Lu 24:34) with (1Co 15:5).”

c. Purpose:

- (i) The authors of the first three Gospels, the synoptics, wrote independently of each other. Each wrote his independent narrative under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Each writer has some things, both in matter and style, peculiar to himself, yet all the three have much in common. Luke's Gospel has been called ‘the Gospel of the nations, full of mercy and hope, assured to the world by the love of a suffering Saviour;’ ‘the Gospel of the saintly life;’ ‘the Gospel for the Greeks; the Gospel of the future; the Gospel of progressive Christianity, of the universality and gratuitousness of the gospel; the historic Gospel; the Gospel of Jesus as the good Physician and the Saviour of mankind;’ the ‘Gospel of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man;’ ‘the Gospel of womanhood;’ ‘the Gospel of the outcast, of the Samaritan, the publican, the harlot, and the prodigal;’ ‘the Gospel of tolerance.’ The main characteristic of this Gospel, as Farrar (Cambridge Bible, Luke, Introd.) remarks, is fitly expressed in the motto, ‘Who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil’ (Ac 10:38) comp. (Lu 4:18).”
- (ii) Luke wrote for the ‘Hellenic world.’ This Gospel is indeed ‘rich and precious.’ ‘Out of a total of 1151 verses, Luke has 389 in common with Matthew and Mark, 176 in common with Matthew alone, 41 in common with Mark alone, leaving 544 peculiar to himself. In many instances all three use identical language.’”
- (iii) There are seventeen of our Lord's parables peculiar to this Gospel. . . . Luke also records seven of our Lord's miracles which are omitted by Matthew and Mark.”
- (iv) “Luke's style is more finished and classical than that of Matthew and Mark. There is less in it of the Hebrew idiom. He uses a few Latin words (Lu 12:6 7:41 8:30 11:33 19:20) but no Syriac or Hebrew words except *sikera*, an exciting drink of the nature of wine, but not made of grapes (from Heb. *shakar*, "he is intoxicated",) (Le 10:9) probably palm wine. This Gospel contains twenty-eight distinct references to the Old Testament” (Easton).

4. John.

- a. Author: John, the brother of James.
- b. Date: Sometime before AD 70.
- c. Purpose:

- (i) “The design of John in writing this Gospel is stated by himself (Joh 20:31). It was at one time supposed that he wrote for the purpose of supplying the omissions of the synoptical, i.e., of the first three, Gospels, but there is no evidence for this. ‘There is here no history of Jesus and his teaching after the manner of the other evangelists. But there is in historical form a representation of the Christian faith in relation to the person of Christ as its central point; and in this representation there is a picture on the one hand of the antagonism of the world to the truth revealed in him, and on the other of the spiritual blessedness of the few who yield themselves to him as the Light of life’ (Reuss).”
- (ii) After the prologue (Joh 1:1-5) the historical part of the book begins with verse 6, and consists of two parts. The first part (1:6-ch. 12) contains the history of our Lord's public ministry from the time of his introduction to it by John the Baptist to its close. The second part (ch. 13-21) presents our Lord in the retirement of private life and in his intercourse with his immediate followers (13-17) and gives an account of his sufferings and of his appearances to the disciples after his resurrection (18-21).
- (ii) The peculiarities of this Gospel are the place it gives (1 to the mystical relation of the Son to the Father, and (2 of the Redeemer to believers; (3 the announcement of the Holy Ghost as the Comforter; (4 the prominence given to love as an element in the Christian character. It was obviously addressed primarily to Christians” (Easton).