



As with the Overview of the Old Testament, the emphasis of this overview focuses as well on the application of Scripture to our life. We're not going to attempt to replicate the great factual overviews which you should read thoroughly in your own Bible dictionary; here we'll attempt to summarize the important features of the New Testament in our daily walk with Christ.

Organization of the Books

Surprisingly, the general categories of the books of the New Testament can be related directly to their Old Testament counterparts as they appear, left to right, in the Bible:

Old Testament	New Testament
The (Old) Law (Genesis – Deuteronomy)	The (New) Law (Matthew – John)
The History of God's People (Joshua – Esther)	The History of the Church (Acts)
Commentary or "Journal" Books (Job – Song of Solomon) of the correct application of the Old Covenant.	Commentary or "Journal" Books (Romans – Jude) of the correct application of the New Testament.
Prophets (Isaiah – Malachi)	Prophets (Revelation)

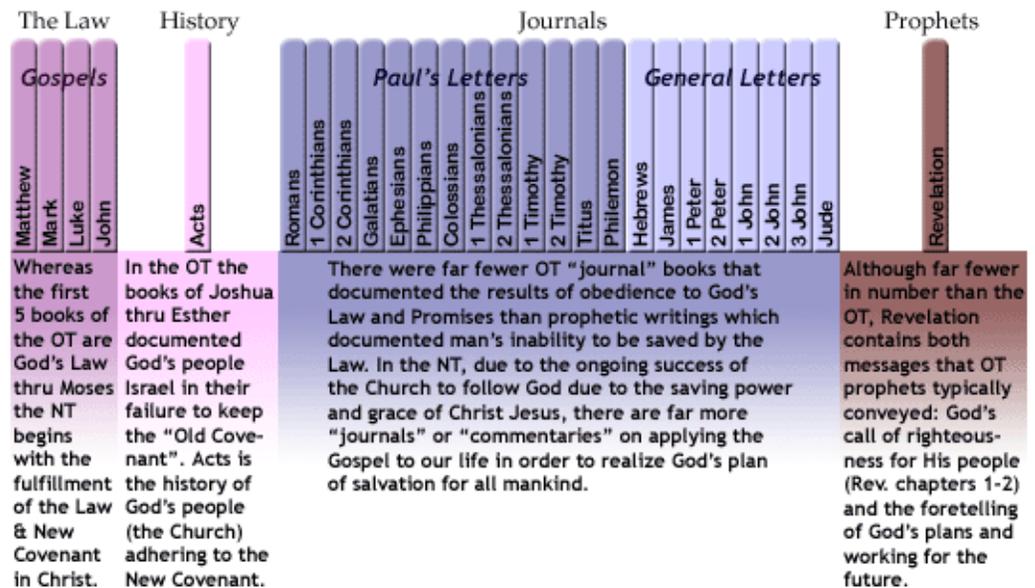
The fact that they provide a different emphasis in each area (e.g. 17 Old Testament prophetic books vs. 1 in the New Testament, 5 "journal" books vs. 21, etc.) is itself an indication of the completely different results of the Old Covenant vs. the New ushered into history through the First Coming of Jesus.

The theme of the entire Bible is God's plan of salvation for man. The Old Testament documents man's inability to live according to the original promises or "covenant" (what the translated word "testament" actually means) and concludes with God's promise to reconcile man

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through a new covenant initiated through His Messiah. The New Testament provides the Gospel through Christ which initiates the “New Covenant”. Whereas the Old Testament shows the people (Israel) called by God to have failed in their relationship with Him and documents their repeated falling away and bearing God’s judgments for their sin, the New Testament is open-ended, conveying the continued success of the Gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit to bring God’s plan of salvation continued success to this very day.

Books of the New Testament



Chronological Publication

The books of the New Testament are grouped into the 4 basic categories described above, not published chronologically in the order in which they were written. As with the study of the Old Testament, understanding the context—the times, the original audience, the inspiration of the Spirit through the writer for his present time—is essential.

"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.'"

–Acts 1:6-8

If you document the sequence of events of the early church's ministry as documented in Acts, you will discover that the Gospel spread just as Jesus stated in Acts 1:8. It started with Pentecost, in Jerusalem, instantly adding 3,000 converts. For a time the ministry continued, centered in Jerusalem before being extended first to Judea, then Samaria, and finally to all Gentiles and therefore "*...even to the remotest part of the earth.*" This serves as one of the basic foundations of "context" for the New Testament.

The apostles' writings come at different points along this timeline of Jerusalem to Samaria to all nations and it helps us to understand the original audience and intent of the message.

James—probably the earliest of the apostles' writings—is written at a time when the Gospel may have still been in the early stage, mainly conveyed to Jews (Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria). This context helps us understand one of the greater values of this book as a transitional device providing a bridge between the life devoted to God through the Old Covenant but now also submitting to Him through the New Covenant.

Galatians—the earliest surviving letter of Paul—was written at a time when the Gospel was spreading to all the nations but many of the early Jewish converts were uncertain to what extent non-Jewish Christian converts should adhere to the traditions of the Old Covenant. Within this context we are provided important lessons on how God is reconciling all groups to Him while still maintaining a special role for Jews that does not contradict the "freedom" Gentiles experience in not being accountable in the same way as Jews to the Old Covenant.

We can begin developing this context by reconstructing a rough timeline for each of the categories of the books of the New Testament:

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New Testament Rough Chronology

The Law	History	"Journals"/Writings						Prophets
		Paul's Letters				General		
		Early	Later			Early	Later	
		During Missionary Journeys	First Imprisonment	Release	Second Imprisonment			
Matthew	Acts	Galatians	Colossians	1 Timothy	2 Timothy	James	Hebrews	Revelation
Mark		1 Thess.	Ephesians	Titus			1 Peter	
Luke		2 Thess.	Philemon				2 Peter	
John		1 Cor.	Philippians				1 John	
		2 Cor.					2 John	
		Romans					3 John	

Next we can develop a timeline showing when each book of the New Testament was written. (As best we can, that is. All dates are estimates – “educated” estimates but estimates nonetheless.)

<i>New Testament Canon</i>	
Year	Book
47	Galatians
49	James
51/52	1 & 2 Thessalonians
55	1 & 2 Corinthians
57	Romans
58/60	Mark
60	Colossians & Ephesians & Philemon
61	Philippians
61/64	Matthew
61/64	Luke
64	1 Timothy
64	Titus
64/65	1 Peter
65	Jude
66/68	Acts
66/68	2 Peter
66/67	2 Timothy
68-70	Hebrews
85	John
85/90	1, 2, & 3 John
95	Revelation

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Just taking a look at the order in which Paul's letters came out and the different social and religious times in which they were published provides a lot of insight as to their proper context.

The web site provides this [timeline in parallel](#) with the timelines of the same period for the Roman Empire and the nation Israel, providing a basic context for the early church as well as the books of the New Testament.

But the Correct "Context" for the New Testament is...the OLD Testament

It's important to note that the New Testament does not "replace" the Old Testament but fulfills and builds upon it. (In fact, there are many things documented in the Old Testament that are still to come.) There's a host of things in the New Testament that you'll never fully understand until you've made the effort to understand the Old Testament.

The best example and evidence of this is the message provided through Peter at Pentecost, probably the most defining moment for the early church other than Christ's resurrection.

At Pentecost, the core of the very first message conveyed by the Holy Spirit through the early church is based on quotations of David, Joel, and Samuel. In this explanation to the Jews in Jerusalem of the meaning of the events they were witnessing it is explained how the Old Testament is being fulfilled. Peter quotes from Joel 2, Samuel 7, and Psalms 16, 89, 119 and 132. The events surrounding the New Testament epicenter of Pentecost needed the foundation of the Old Testament to be properly understood.

It's important to note that every New Testament writer does not simply use the Old Testament as a teaching tool but repeatedly demonstrates that it is the foundation for the New. Every writer at various points not only directly quotes the Old Testament but often

uses the people, places, and events of the Old Testament to place God's will and work through Christ in the proper context.

It's important to note that the New Testament did not come together with the Old Testament as a single book for at least the first century after Pentecost. (There are many good textbooks and references detailing how the New Testament "canon" came about so seek them out if you have a thirst for detailed information on this subject.) Therefore one of the primary teaching tools of the Apostles and teachers was the Old Testament, properly placed in the context of Christ's life and teaching.

In fact, look at Christ's own use of the Old Testament throughout the Gospels. It's interesting to note that no one on either side of a conversation in the New Testament ever disputed the authority of the Old Testament, nor the fact that a New Covenant was to come through the Messiah to be sent by God. Even the authorities that rejected Jesus as the Messiah believed the correct interpretation of the Old Testament yielded a forthcoming "New Covenant", Messiah, etc.

The important point being made here is that "information" never saves, never changes a person's behavior or thinking on its own. One of Jesus' most important discourses was the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) wherein He begins, point by point, quoting familiar Old Testament Law and explaining not only how it was misinterpreted and misapplied, but why everyone is going to continue to misunderstand God's Word as long as they're simply "hearers" and not "doers." In other words, the bottom line, ultimate proper context for all Scripture is whether or not you chose to live by it rather than just be aware of it.

New Testament Application for Our Life

Here are a few of the many things to pay attention to in order to not only properly understand the New Testament within its proper context but to become a "doer" rather than a "hearer".

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- The Gospels are not clones of each other but each have a different, specific message. More important than comparing the parallel passages common between 2 or more Gospels is seeing the different aspects of Christ's character and ministry each viewpoint provides. Comparing individual parallel passages may be advantageous in many situations and highly encouraged, but don't allow it to override the greater message being communicated by each individual Gospel. (Ever notice how Matthew is divided into specific sections? Why?)
- Not only do the Apostles' writings provide a glimpse of the early church during different stages of development, they are a window into Believer's differing maturity levels. Some of these letters are addressed to churches whose congregants are in the earliest stages of their walk with Christ, others intermediate or even very mature. What is it about certain books that attract your attention at different times of your own life? Is this telling you something about your own walk?
- Galatians may be the most important book for our understanding of the true meaning of "the Gospel" and the character of the early church. It is Paul's earliest extant letter written to address the first threats of reinterpreting the Gospel and its application to one's personal walk with Christ.
- All of the teaching concerning the End Times by Jesus, Peter, Paul, John, etc. spend far more time warning Believers not to be taken in by the spiritual deception accompanying those events than the events themselves. Even Revelation begins with 7 types of Christian (represented by the 7 churches) in various conditions in regards to the quality of their walk and spiritual maturity in Christ. Just as in the Old Testament, signs are mainly for non-believers and the role of God's people in such times is to provide an example of faith and obedience to His Word, not be obsessed with the signs themselves.

Suggestions for Studying the New Testament

The number one suggestion is the same opening suggestion for studying the Old Testament: Use your Bible dictionary. People, places, and things are not only defined in your Bible dictionary but in a single article you will see them/it threaded together with all their corresponding scriptural references. Taken together you are provided a deeper context.

One thing not advocated here—which admittedly will go against mainstream advice—is spending a lot of time examining individual New Testament words in their native Greek, nor following the trail of Strong’s numbers back and forth from verse to verse. The problem is that this is a tool/technique that is misused more often than applied correctly.

The best example of the problem is when you hear a point of teaching that states something like, “This is the word that we get today’s English word ‘yada-yada’ from.” This is probably 100% true. However, although “yada-yada” can trace 2,000 year-old roots to a Greek word, it’s taken on a new, contemporary meaning that the *original* word often never represented. Taking a word out of a verse of Scripture, applying its modern derivation, and then re-inserting it back into the verse is **NOT** placing things in their proper context. It often leads to interpretations never intended for that Scripture, then or now.

If you want to understand a single word in its proper context, study the sentence as a whole. To understand a sentence in its proper context, study it within the associated paragraph; and the paragraph within the chapter, the chapter within the book, the book within the Bible. Don’t allow a single word to change the meaning of the context of the sentence, paragraph, chapter, etc. within which it’s found.

When it’s absolutely necessary to study a word, study every instance it’s used throughout Scripture listed in your concordance, examining the context of the sentence, paragraph, chapter, etc. for each entry.

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You will obtain the proper context without assigning a new meaning to the word that was never meant to be. Studying individual words will be unavoidable at times (e.g. the Greeks used three words with specific meanings for "love" whereas English can cover them all with just one) but as a general rule, work "top down" to get the context rather than from the word up.

What are the Old Testament tie-ins? When reading a passage that invokes memory of something said in the Old Testament-or if there's a direct reference to an Old Testament person, place, event or Scripture-look it up and meditate on what the Spirit is communicating. It's definitely more than worth the time to build these associations which will become even more valuable while studying the New Testament. Over time you're going to clearly understand the relationship between them, the foundation laid by the Old Testament, and how the New Testament truly "fulfills" the Old.

Finally, whenever possible, relate teachings and concepts provided in the Apostles' writings with the life and teaching of Jesus in the Gospels. Just as the Old Testament was the foundation for Jesus' ministry, so the Apostles are building further upon that foundation. It will both amaze and strengthen as you discover that even what appear to be complicated sermons from Paul have corresponding examples in the earthly ministry and teachings of Christ. Building these associations truly brings the New Testament and even the entire Bible together as a whole.