

BIBLE OUTLINE: GOSPEL & ACTS

BIBLE OUTLINE OVERVIEW

- The Bible is a very large collection of writings that can be confusing to read. We have created these outlines as way to give you an overview of each section of the Bible and to remind each reader that the Bible is a story that points to God and is fulfilled in Christ.

SETTING AND WRITING

- The New Testament is set in the first-century and primarily takes place in the Roman provinces known as Judea. This included areas like Galilee, Samaria, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Capernaum, and Jerusalem.
- The New Testament's setting is deeply influenced by Jewish tradition and history as well as the culture and traditions of both Greek and Roman empires. During the time of the New Testament, Rome was in political power, while Greek was the most common or vernacular language used.
- The New Testament writings were influenced by the agricultural surroundings, socioeconomic standings, and ethnic differences of the day.
- The New Testament writings contain Gospel accounts, historical narratives, twenty-one letters, and one "apocalypse", writing by eye-witnesses and apostles of Jesus.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

- The Bible is 66 books. 39 are found in the Old Testament, and 27 are found in the New Testament. The word "testament" is used to describe each part of the Bible in connection to God's covenant with His people and the world. The Old Testament details the covenants to the Hebrew people, while the New Testament explains the new covenant found in Christ Jesus that is offered to all people. This new covenant is prophesied in Jeremiah 31-34, and we see it clearly fulfilled through Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and promise to return.
- The New Testament begins with four Gospel accounts that detail the life of Jesus. It also includes the book of Acts, which explains the ongoing work of God's people called the church. And then it includes letters written to various churches calling them to the ways of Christ.

JUDAISM

- The New Testament is filled with important Jewish beliefs and sects. Especially because of Rome's oppressive rule, the Jewish people were awaiting the Messiah to come. They especially hoped for the Messiah to overthrow Rome and reinstall Israel as a political and national power.
- The Jewish religious leaders and groups were made up of the:
 - Pharisees: Law-focused teachers emphasizing tradition and everyday holiness
 - Sadducees: Temple elites rejecting oral law, aligned with Rome
 - Zealots: Radical nationalists advocating violent revolt against Rome
 - Essenes: Ascetic separatists awaiting God's apocalyptic intervention
- The beliefs, temple, and practices of Judaism had a massive impact on the writings of the New Testament

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

- “Good News” comes from the Greek Word “εὐαγγέλιον”. This Good News is a reference to good tidings that are brought on behalf of a Kingdom and more specifically on behalf of the Kingdom of God.
- In the Old Testament, the Good News was referred to by the prophets as messages that revealed God’s plan of salvation and redemption to His people.
- In the New Testament, the Good News summarizes entirety of Christ Jesus’ teachings and His reign in taking our sin through crucifixion, death, and burial. But the Good News doesn’t stop at His death, it continues in His resurrection, pouring out of His Spirit, ascension to heaven, and promise to return.
- The Gospel is truly Good News because it proclaims over all of creation that there’s no one and nothing too far gone or broken for God’s reign to not impact with salvation and hope and freedom and grace and love. As we receive this Good News, it continues a process by God’s grace in us in which we are transformed in God’s image from glory to glory.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

What is the Gospel?

- God created everything and it was good.
- God created humanity and it was very good.
- God and humankind were in perfect relationship.
- Humanity broke that relationship through sin (disobedience, pride, missing the mark, idolatry, etc.).
- Humanity could not repair that relationship by ourselves.
- God had a perfect plan of redemption through:
 - Creating a chosen group of people called Israel
 - Setting them apart from other nations by His Presence, the Law, and Covenants
 - So that through them, a man named Jesus Christ of Nazareth could provide redemption.
- Jesus, 100% God, 100% man, came in flesh, lived among humanity, taught the Word of God, fulfilled the Word of God, performed miracles, signs, and wonders, and invited all people to follow Him by atoning for sin through death by crucifixion and burial.
- After 3 days, Jesus was raised from the dead, appeared to many disciples, breathed His Spirit upon them, calling them to make disciples that they baptize and teach to obey everything Jesus taught.
- The Spirit of God empowers believers to love God, love others, make disciples, and live in eternal life now and forevermore.

In short:

- God created, and it was good.
- Humanity broke that goodness with sin.
- God came as a human named Jesus who paid for that sin to restore humanity and creation into right relationship with God.
- All who call on Jesus’ name are filled with His Presence to walk rightly, love fully, and live eternally.

ONE GOSPEL OR FOUR?

The New Testament begins with four Gospel accounts written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each account details the life, teachings, miracles, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus. The four Gospels all share similarities, and each account also offers a different perspective on these events, as all of the writers of these Gospels communicate to various communities.

It is important to know who is writing these accounts and to whom they are writing, as these contextual details give readers helpful insights into why things were written the way they were.

It is also important to know that although there are four Gospel accounts, there is ONE GOSPEL, and the Gospel is Good News for all people through God creating, redeeming, and offering salvation to all who receive His grace and mercy.

MATTHEW OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

Matthew is the first book of the New Testament and the first of the four Gospel accounts. Many scholars date Matthew's (disciple of Jesus) writing of this narrative between the years 75-85 (AD/CE) and believe that he was writing to a predominantly Jewish Christian audience. In distinction from the other Gospel writers, Matthew's focal point of Christ is that Jesus is the Messiah. He is the fulfillment of the Scriptures (Old Testament), and He calls all to join with Him in loving God, loving others, and making disciples.

The content of Matthew can be broken into the following outline (from *Introducing the New Testament* by Joel Green):

- Preparation for the Ministry of Jesus the Messiah, Son of God (1:1-4:22)
- Jesus Proclaims the Good News and Heals the Sick (4:23-9:34)
 - Introduction (4:23-25)
 - Jesus' First Discourse / Sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:29)
 - Jesus' Powerful Ministry (8:1-9:34)
- The Emergence of the Church in Israel (9:35-16:20)
 - Jesus' Second Discourse (9:35-10:42)
 - Growing Hostility Toward Jesus (11:1-12:50)
 - Jesus' Third Discourse - in Parables (13:1-53)
 - Violence and Confession Intensify (13:54-16:20)
- Christology, Discipleship, and the Life of the Church (16:21-20:34)
 - The Ministry of Jesus the Messiah in Jerusalem (21:1-25:46)
 - The Question of Jesus' Identity and Authority (21:1-22:46)
 - Jesus Criticizes His Opponents (23:1-39)
 - Jesus Admonishes His Disciples Concerning Readiness (24:1-25:46)
- The Death and Resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, Son of God (26:1-28:20)

Key Characters, Themes, Terms, Locations, and Stories:

- God the Creator, Blessing, and Redeemer of Creation
- The Messiah, the Son of God - Jesus is introduced and explained as the Messiah, the Son of God. This important theme is rooted in Old Testament prophecies about an "anointed one" who would come to redeem God's people. Many Jewish believers hoped for this Messiah to overcome their current oppressors, the Romans, and restore Israel as a political and national power. As the Messiah, Jesus shows us that He does overcome the oppression of sin, death, injustice, and the grave, not through political power but through His sacrificial death and resurrection.
- Jesus' Ministry - As the Rabbi, Jesus' public ministry is highlighted by His teachings about the Law, His fulfillment of the Law, and His healings. Through these, He invites His followers and disciples to live in His fulfillment of the Law through lifestyles that prioritize loving God, loving others, and making disciples that follow the ways of Christ Jesus as the Rabbi of all. This is carried out through lives of righteousness, prayer, forgiveness, generosity, and worship, honoring God and blessing others.
- The Temple - Jesus includes many teachings and moments connected to the Temple in Jerusalem. He corrects oppressive worship traditions, He predicts the fall of the temple by Rome, and He proclaims a new temple that He would construct through His bodily sacrifice.
- The Kingdom of Heaven - Jesus refers to the Kingdom of Heaven many times, and Matthew's writings include this phrase to explain what Jesus establishes through His earthly ministry. This Kingdom is made up of Jewish believers and all believers in Jesus who live according to His ways and gifts of righteousness. Matthew refers to this new group of people as the Church.

MARK OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

Mark is the second Gospel account and the second book of the New Testament. Many scholars believe Mark the Evangelist wrote this narrative sometime in the early 60s (AD/CE) to Christians in the Roman Empire. As Mark unpacks the Gospel of Jesus, he focuses on Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. Differing from the other Gospel writers, Mark also points to Jesus as the suffering servant described in Isaiah 53. Mark's writing is believed to be the first account written about Jesus and is highly utilized by the other Gospel writers.

The content of Mark can be broken into the outline (from *Introducing the New Testament*):

- Introduction: Jesus is Messiah, Son of God (1:1-15)
- Jesus, Bearer of the Kingdom of God (1:16-8:26)
 - Jesus' Authority and Responses to It (1:16-3:12)
 - Jesus' Disciples (3:13-6:6)
 - The Training of the Disciples (6:7-8:26)
- The Road to Golgotha (8:27-15:41)
 - The Journey to Jerusalem (8:27-10:52)
 - Jesus in the Temple (11:1-13:37)
 - Toward the Cross (14:1-15:41)
- Epilogue
 - HE IS RISEN (16:1-8)
 - Jesus Appears to His Disciples (16:9-20)

Key Characters, Themes, Terms, Locations, and Stories:

- God the Creator, Blessing, and Redeemer of Creation
- Jesus the Messiah and Son of God - Once again, the Gospel account of Mark includes a major emphasis on Jesus being the Son of God who fulfills the Old Testament prophecies about being the Messiah and Redeemer. He does this not through the conquest and powers of this world, but through His suffering and resurrection.
- The Messianic Secret - Mark writes about Jesus telling people to keep His identity as the Messiah a secret. This takes place because His being the Messiah is fully understood through His revelation, crucifixion, and resurrection, rather than through the beliefs/expectations of the people for a political leader.
- The Kingdom of God - Differing from Matthew's "Kingdom of Heaven", Mark talks about the "Kingdom of God". The Kingdom is explained as an upside-down kingdom marked by service, love, and sacrifice rather than the powers of this world (specifically Rome).
- Discipleship - Jesus invites people to be His disciples and to follow Him as Rabbi. However, He tells them that part of this discipleship is experiencing hardship, persecution, and sacrifice. This was especially important in the context of the Roman Empire, which brought all of these things upon anybody who claimed Jesus as Lord rather than the Emperor as Lord.
- Immediately - Mark uses the phrase "immediately" often to express God's response to humanity's depravity and humanity's invitation to respond quickly to the Good News of Jesus.
- Jesus' Power - Jesus' power is seen not only through His authority over the demonic, sicknesses, and nature, but also through laying down His life in humility and service to others.
- Jesus' Humanity - Jesus' humanity is seen clearly through various portraits of His emotions, frustrations, and compassion/mercy.
- The Suffering Servant - Jesus' life, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection portray Him as the promised "suffering servant" who came to atone for the sins of humanity through death. This was prophesied in Isaiah 53 and fulfilled God's plan for redemption for not only Israel, but all people who would receive it by grace.

LUKE OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

Luke is the third Gospel account and book of the New Testament. This Gospel was written by Luke, who was a doctor, historian, and companion of the apostle Paul. He wrote the Gospel of Luke and Acts together as one narrative about Jesus and the Church. Luke is believed to have written this account in the late 80s (AD/CE) and focuses on Jesus as the Holy Spirit-anointed and led Savior that brought about a new prophetic movement displaying God's compassion toward and invitation of salvation for all people. Many believe Luke wrote to a person named Theophilus, and to Christians who were Gentiles (non-Jewish).

The content of Luke can be broken into the following outline from *Introducing the New Testament*:

- Prologue (1:1-4)
- The Birth and Childhood of Jesus (1:5-2:52)
- Preparation for the Ministry of Jesus (3:1-4:13)
- The Ministry of Jesus in Galilee (4:14-9:50)
 - The Gospel Proclaimed in Synagogues (4:14-44)
 - Mission and Controversy (5:1-6:11)
 - Jesus Teaches His Disciples and the Crowds (6:12-49)
 - Healing and Teaching (7:1-50)
 - Broader Ministry (8:1-56)
 - Jesus' Identity and the Nature of Discipleship (9:1-50)
- On the Way to Jerusalem (9:51-19:48)
 - Teaching on Discipleship and the Kingdom (9:51-10:42)
 - Teaching on Prayer (11:1-13)
 - Escalating Hostility (11:14-54)
 - Teaching on Vigilance (12:1-13:9)
 - Who Will Participate in the Kingdom of God? (13:10-17:10)
 - Responses to the Kingdom (17:11-19:27)
 - Jesus Arrives in Jerusalem (19:28-48)
- Teaching in the Temple (20:1-21:38)
- Jesus' Suffering and Death (22:1-23:56)
- Jesus' Exaltation (24:1-53)

Key Characters, Themes, Terms, Locations, and Stories:

- God the Creator, Blesser, and Redeemer of Creation
- Jesus the Savior of the World - By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is born and brings about God's offer of salvation to the entire world (including Jews and Gentiles). He ushers in a new prophetic movement of God to bring about justice, joy, compassion, and mercy to all neighbors through Jesus' life, ministry, death, resurrection, and empowerment of His disciples.
- Compassion, Justice, and Mercy - Luke highlights Jesus' mission to bring about God's care for the needy, sick, marginalized, oppressed, and overlooked. Luke also shows how Jesus' commands were for His followers to carry on this same mission after His death and resurrection.
- Prayer - Jesus is depicted praying often, teaching on prayer through parables, and teaching His disciples to pray.
- Upside-Down Kingdom - Like Mark, Luke speaks to the upside-down Kingdom of God. However, Luke explains this through Jesus' teachings that turn societal values and structures upside down. The poor are blessed and the rich are challenged. The outside is included and the insider is warned. God's Kingdom is upside-down.
- Jesus as Son of Man/Prophet - Luke emphasizes Jesus' humanity and powerful prophetic ministry, fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies and revealing His connection with and invitation to all of humanity.
- Scriptures Fulfilled - Through Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and commission to His disciples, the Scriptures are fulfilled. This theme reveals the truths of His nature and calling for all people.

JOHN OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

John is the fourth Gospel account and book in the New Testament. Many believe the apostle John, also known as the beloved disciple, wrote this book between 90-110 (AD/CE) to the “Johannine Community”. This community was composed of many Christians with Jewish and Greek backgrounds. John’s writing is vastly different from Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and he includes a major focus on Jesus as the Overcoming King who took on flesh to bring life to all of the world through His powerful name.

The content of John can be broken into the following outline from *Introducing the New Testament*:

- Prologue (1:1-18)
- The Book of Signs (1:19-12:50)
 - Confession of Jesus (1:19-4:54)
 - Rising Hostility (5:1-12:36)
 - Summary (12:37-50)
- The Passion (13:1-21:23)
 - Jesus’ Last Meal and Instructions to His Disciples (chi. 13-17)
 - Arrest, Trial, and Crucifixion (chs. 18-19)
 - Resurrection (20:1-21:23)
- Postscript (21:24-25)

Key Characters, Themes, Terms, Locations, and Stories:

- God the Creator, Blessing, and Redeemer of Creation
- Jesus as God - John writes about Jesus being God through describing Him as the Word (*logos* or “the Word” was the Greek word used to explain the “thing” that holds all things together), the I AM, and the Son of God that overcomes darkness, sin, death, and the grave. Jesus reveals God’s glory and truth as the promised Messiah, and offers eternal life to all through His victory.
- Eternal Life - The infamous passage of John 3:16 details God’s gift of eternal life through Jesus. Rather than just an afterlife hope, this gift is also explained in John 17:3 as a relationship with God that is current and eternal.
- Light and Darkness - Jesus is the Light of the world and overcomes the darkness of the world, offering the light of His salvation to all who live in darkness (unbelief, sin, etc.).
- I AM - Jesus uses many “I AM” statements, revisiting the Old Testament self-declaration of God to Moses in Exodus 3:14 “I AM WHO I AM”. In these statements, He reveals His divine nature and what He offers to humanity through His life, death, and resurrection.
- Signs and Miracles - Jesus performs many signs and miracles that are connected to His “I AM” statements. These signs and miracles reveal His supernatural power and glory, and His invitation for all to experience His greatest miracle of eternal life and salvation through His name.
- Love - John’s Gospel is filled with LOVE. Jesus’ sacrificial, selfless, and action-oriented commitment to the well-being and life of others is revealed passionately by the “beloved disciple.” Love is the main marker of Jesus’ ministry and His disciples, and it is revealed through relational and sacrificial means.
- Belief - John’s emphasis in Jesus’ ministry is for people to believe in Jesus as God and to find life in His name. This is highlighted through Jesus’ consistent invitation for people to believe in Him.
- The World - The world is used in various ways in John’s Gospel. Sometimes it refers to the Jewish people and sometimes to those who reject Jesus in general. It stands in contrast to those who believe and are marked by Jesus’ love and eternal life.
- Glory - The Gospel of John reveals Jesus’ glory through His life, miracles, teachings, and most fully, through His atoning crucifixion and death, and triumphant resurrection from the dead.
- Judgment and Salvation - John highlights God judging those who don’t believe and saving those who do believe. He also highlights that God’s goal through Jesus is not to condemn, but to save all.

ACTS OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

Acts is the fifth book of the New Testament and follows the four Gospel accounts by detailing the origins of the Church. The author, Luke, most likely wrote this narrative in connection with his Gospel account to Theophilus and Gentile Christians to explain the ascension of Jesus, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the birth, work, and expansion of the Church through the apostles of Christ Jesus. Like his Gospel account, Luke focuses heavily on the gift of God's salvation for all people (both Jews and Gentiles alike), and reveals this through the missions of the apostles (namely Peter and Paul).

The content of Acts can be broken into the following outline from *Introducing the New Testament*:

- Preparations - 1:1-26
- The Witness of the Disciples in Jerusalem - 2:1-6:7
- The Expansion of the Mission Beyond Jerusalem - 6:8-15:35
- Paul's Mission - 15:36-20:38
- Paul's Imprisonment and Trial - 21:1-28:31

Key Characters, Themes, Terms, Locations, and Stories:

- God the Creator, Blessing, and Redeemer of Creation
- The Holy Spirit - Much like Luke's Gospel, the Holy Spirit is emphasized as the One who empowers the Church for witness, miracles, vision, and boldness to speak the Gospel.
- Witness - Jesus commissions His disciples to bear witness of His life, death, and resurrection to the all. In Acts 1:8, He gives them the Holy Spirit and calls them to go from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the ends of the earth (showing an ever-expanding circle of influence and witness).
- Peter - the apostle and follower of Jesus who is empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach the Gospel to the Jewish people in Jerusalem and beyond, inviting Israel to receive and experience God's salvation through Christ Jesus. His ministry, in partnership with John and James, is marked by healing, boldness, and the conversion of many Jews to become disciples of Christ.
- Stephen - Stephen is one of the first Christian martyrs who proclaimed the story of God to many Jews in Jerusalem. In his proclamation, he details the hardening of their hearts toward the power of the Holy Spirit and work of Christ Jesus. They stone him and in turn, the apostles begin to take the Gospel beyond Jerusalem, just as Christ commanded them (1:8).
- Philip - Philip continues the theme of the apostles and disciples of Jesus witnessing beyond Jerusalem. He preaches in Samaria and even goes to a Gentile (Ethiopian Eunuch) to bear witness of Christ Jesus.
- Jerusalem Council - this gathering of early Jewish Christians convened to debate what regulations they needed to place on incoming Gentile Christians. Peter affirms their need to choose grace rather than legalistic standards for Gentiles to become Christians.
- Paul - Saul (Hebrew name) or Paul (Greek/Roman name) was a persecutor of the early Church who encountered Jesus and received a call from Christ to become an apostle, proclaiming the Gospel to many Gentiles and forming important churches (Corinth, Ephesus, and many others) through his ministry. Paul reveals the expansion of Christ's witness to the "ends of the earth." His life and ministry is marked by incredible church growth and expansion, inclusion of the Gentiles, persecution and suffering through imprisonment and trials, and a faithfulness to God's transforming work in and through his life.
- Repeated Themes - Much like Luke, Acts contains similar themes that are repeated and highlighted as important in the early church community including prayer, unity, generosity, following the Spirit's lead, and the Scriptures fulfilled in Christ and the ongoing work of the Church through witnessing to and worshiping Jesus.
- Persecution - It is important to note that the Church did not experience explosive growth through being in power, but rather through their persecution. Acts and other New Testament writings reveal a call for the people of God to bear witness through persecution trusting in God's reign.

BIBLE RESOURCES

You will find that there are many challenging passages to understand and apply to your life in Christ. We suggest the following resources to aid your study and application of Scripture.

- **Scripture Reading Practices:**

- SOAP
- Discovery Bible Study
- Lectio Divina
- Communal Reading of Scripture

- **Websites:**

- The Bible Project
- Bible Gateway

- **Commentaries:**

- New Beacon Bible Commentaries
- Word Biblical Commentaries
- Anchor Bible Commentaries

- **Books:**

- *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* by Fee and Stuart
- *Seven Things I Wish Christians Knew About the Bible* by Bird
- *Bruce and Stan's Guide to the Bible* by Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz
- *Introducing the New Testament* by Joel Green
- *An Introduction to the New Testament* by Raymond Brown
- *Right of Malachi* by Norman Hubbard
- *Exploring the New Testament: A Guide to the Gospels & Acts* by David Wenham and Steve Walton