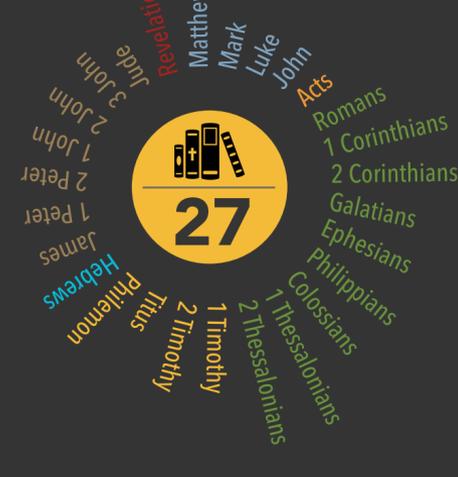




An overview of the NEW TESTAMENT

We should begin by looking at a basic “table of contents” for the New Testament. There are twenty-seven different books, ranging in length from the Gospel of Luke (the longest) to 3 John (the shortest). The books are arranged into **seven categories**:

There Are 27 Books in the New Testament



The Gospel of Luke Is the Longest, 3 John Is the Shortest



These Books Can Be Arranged into Seven Categories

- THE GOSPELS
- THE BOOK OF ACTS
- LETTERS FROM PAUL TO CHURCHES
- LETTERS FROM PAUL TO INDIVIDUALS
- THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS
- LETTERS BY OTHER PEOPLE
- THE BOOK OF REVELATION

1 THE GOSPELS

There are four of these (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John), and they are named for the individuals who traditionally have been identified as their authors. All four report on the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus; thus, they provide four different versions of the same basic story, and there is a good deal of overlap in their content.



Near the end of the second century (about a hundred years after the Gospels were written), Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, suggested that the authors of the four New Testament Gospels be symbolized by the four “living creatures” mentioned in both Ezekiel 1:4-14 and Revelation 4:6-8. This became standard practice in Christian art throughout the centuries. Matthew is portrayed as a man, Mark as a lion, Luke as an ox, and John as an eagle.



Composition of the Gospels: The Synoptic Puzzle

Three of the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—are called the “Synoptic Gospels” because they appear to be related to each other in a way that the fourth Gospel (John) is not. The word *synoptic* literally means “seeing together,” and it came to be applied to the first three Gospels because their contents could be set in parallel columns that allowed them to be read and interpreted side by side.



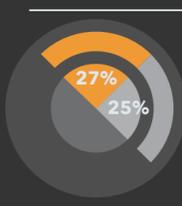
Birth narratives only in Matthew and Luke

2 THE BOOK OF ACTS

This book is actually “part two” of the Gospel of Luke, but it has been put in its own section in the New Testament (following the four Gospels) because it is the only book that relates the history of the early church—that is, what happened after the events reported in the Gospels.



The person who wrote the Gospel of Luke also wrote the Book of Acts.



Author of Luke-Acts wrote 27% of NT.
Letters attributed to Paul are 25% of the NT.

3 LETTERS FROM PAUL TO CHURCHES

There are nine of these (Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians). If you are unfamiliar with the New Testament, the names of these books may strike you as odd or difficult to pronounce; they are geographical references to the people in various cities or regions to which the letters were sent (e.g., the “Ephesians” were people who lived in the city of Ephesus). The designated author of all nine letters is Paul, an important Christian missionary. They are presented in the New Testament in order of length, from Romans (the longest) to 2 Thessalonians (the shortest).



The *Captivity Epistles* or *Prison Letters* are the five letters that appear to have been written by Paul from prison: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 2 Timothy, and Philemon.

4 LETTERS FROM PAUL TO INDIVIDUALS

There are four of these (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon), and they are named for the individuals to whom they were sent. Again, they are presented in order of length. The designated author is the same Paul who is associated with the nine letters to churches, making, all told, thirteen letters from Paul.



The *Pastoral Epistles* or *Pastoral Letters* are the three letters addressed to colleagues of Paul entrusted with pastoral leadership of churches: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus.

5 THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

This one is in a class of its own. It is an anonymous work, and we do not know who wrote it or to whom it was sent, but since it appears to have been written for Jewish Christians (i.e., Hebrew Christians), it is traditionally called “the letter to the Hebrews.”



The tabernacle, a portable sanctuary, served as the primary place for worship and sacrifices during Israel’s wilderness period (see Exod. 25-30; 35-40). According to the book of Hebrews, the earthly tabernacle has a heavenly counterpart (8:2, 5; 9:22).

6 LETTERS BY OTHER PEOPLE

There are seven of these (James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude). Unlike the letters from Paul, these are named not for the people to whom they were sent but rather for the individuals who traditionally have been identified as their authors. They are often called the “General Epistles (Letters)” or the “Catholic Epistles (Letters)”—the word *catholic* in the latter designation has nothing to do with the Roman Catholic Church but simply means “universal” or “general.”



The *Catholic Epistles* or *General Letters* are seven writings thought to be addressed to the church at large: James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude.

7 THE BOOK OF REVELATION

This one too is in a class of its own. It offers an account of a visionary experience as recounted by someone whose name was “John.” It is sometimes called “The Apocalypse of John” (the word *apocalypse* means “revelation”).



Angels blowing trumpets! Monsters rising from the deep! Lakes of fire and rivers of blood! Ah, yes—the book of Revelation. There is nothing else like it in the New Testament. It certainly is the only book to feature dragons (12:3–13:10), giant bugs (9:3–11), and airborne horses (6:2–8, 19:11–12).

Revelation is a book to excite the senses. The Bible does not often tell us what color things are, but here everything is red, purple, yellow, blue, green, gold! Symbolism is prominent, and the content of the visions often involves bizarre creatures, fantastic spectacles, and mysterious events.