

“A wonderfully clear and accessible account of the good news about Jesus of Nazareth and a fast-paced tour of the message of the entire New Testament. In short, an excellent introductory book on the message of the New Testament.”

Tom Schreiner, Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Professor of Biblical Theology,
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“A concise and practical Christ-centered history of the New Testament that does not miss the forest for the trees. This book illuminates the New Testament by guiding the reader through key events and explaining their theological significance, helping the reader see how all the pieces fit together.”

Brandon Crowe, Professor of New Testament at
Westminster Theological Seminary

“Mitch Chase has produced an exciting book that will enthuse you for the Bible and make you wonder at God’s amazing plan of salvation. A great tool to help Christians grow in their understanding of how the whole Bible story fits together and points to Jesus.”

Alistair Chalmers, author of *Road Map to Jesus*

UNDERSTANDING
THE STORY OF
THE NEW TESTAMENT



GOOD NEWS

FOR ALL THE EARTH

MITCHELL L. CHASE

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A SELECT TIMELINE

The following list of dates is a timeline of major events right before and during the New Testament period.

331 BC Greece conquered Persia

146 BC Rome conquered Greece

37–4 BC Herod the Great was king of Judea

27 BC – AD 14 Augustus reigned as emperor of Rome

6–4 BC The window of time for John the Baptist's birth

6–4 BC The window of time for Jesus' birth

AD 14–37 Tiberius reigned as emperor of Rome

AD 26–37 Pilate was governor of Judea

AD 28 or 29 The time when John the Baptist’s ministry began

AD 29 or 30 The time when Jesus’ earthly ministry began

AD 33 The death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus

AD 33–62 The years covered in the book of Acts

AD 33 or 34 The likely conversion of Paul

AD 40s to 60s Paul’s missionary journeys and letter writing

AD 66 or 67 The martyrdom of Paul in Rome

AD 70 The destruction of the Jerusalem temple



INTRODUCTION:

THE NEW COVENANT CHRONICLES

During the first-century Roman Empire, an explosion of literature told the riveting account of a man from Nazareth and the people who followed him. This collection of work is called the New Testament, and its documents were all written in approximately fifty years.

If such a scope and flurry of writing took place in such a short amount of time, people must have believed something important had happened. The New Testament authors believed they were writing the continuation of an older

story that was left unfinished for centuries. This older story is the one the Old Testament tells. It's the story of God's plan to save the world through a promised son.

The Old Testament storyline takes us from creation to the 400s BC. The canvas is vast, covering multiple millennia, many empires, and various regions in the ancient Near East.

By contrast, the New Testament story starts small. It focuses on the land of Israel and a person named Jesus. Other names appear along the way, but he is the main character. The fourfold account of Jesus is found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These are the four books at the head of the New Testament. They tell of Jesus' birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension.

After the four Gospels is the book of Acts. This book is a selective history of the first thirty years of the early church. Acts narrates the geographical expansion of the message about Jesus, moving from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the end of the earth. We read about suffering and perseverance. We hear speeches and trials. We see conversions and miracles. In Acts, the risen and ascended Jesus is building his church.

The next block of New Testament literature consists of letters (or epistles). From Romans to Jude, there are twenty-one letters written by various authors to various recipients. The letters' authors aim to encourage, correct, admonish, teach, update, and warn the recipients about all manner of things. The volume of epistles is a testimony to their importance for Christian discipleship. The writers interpret how the Old Testament points to Jesus, ground the readers in doctrinal truths, and apply wisdom for Christian living.

At the end of the New Testament is the book of Revelation, sometimes called the Apocalypse. It is the capstone of the whole Bible, pulling the threads of the biblical story together in a glorious consummation. Addressed to several churches, the book of Revelation encourages their faithfulness and reminds them of God's promises. The wicked would be judged, and the righteous would be delivered. A future resurrection would defeat death, and all things would become new.

The Old Testament promises and prophecies find fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The New Testament story tells of the

dawn of hope, with the arrival of the grace and mercy of God in his beloved Son. Light has come into the world, and we need to understand what that means. What did Jesus come to do? How did his ministry connect to Old Testament expectations? What did his teachings and deeds reveal about his identity? How did the biblical authors relate the work of Christ to the lives of his disciples? And why should you care about any of this?

In order to answer these questions and more, we will proceed through eight chapters that overview the story of the New Testament. Chapter 1 takes us into the story of Christ's birth and the surrounding events. Chapter 2 transports us to the wilderness where Jesus faced temptation, and then we go to the Jordan River where he was baptized. Chapter 3 focuses on the teachings and miracles of Jesus. Chapter 4 surveys the events of Jesus' suffering and death. Chapter 5 celebrates the news of his resurrection and ascension. Chapter 6 is about the book of Acts, where the early church multiplies, and proclaims the gospel, and suffers for its message. Chapter 7 considers the purpose and themes of the New Testament letters. Chapter 8 closes our

study by lifting our gaze to the hope that is to come—a hope found in the book of Revelation.

The many documents written about Jesus and his church in the first century are worthy of our patient attention and lifelong study. The twenty-seven books of the New Testament chronicle the new covenant—both the Christ who brought it and the community abiding in it. These chronicles are gospel—*good news*. This good news for all the earth is that a Savior has come, Jesus is his name, and whoever trusts in him will have everlasting life.



1

GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY

The Old Testament era had come to an end. Though our Bibles seem to move smoothly from Malachi to Matthew, the transition was not so quick. After the days of Malachi, four hundred years passed without a new word from God. But the lack of a prophet didn't mean the centuries were uneventful. The Old Testament era closed with Persia ruling over the promised land. But Persia eventually fell to Greece, and Greece to Rome.

As these nations fell and rose, the promised Messiah had not yet come. The promised kingdom had not been established. The offering

of sacrifices continued at the temple in Jerusalem. Long lay the world in sin and error, pining and groaning for redemption.

Then, after centuries without a new word from the Lord, an angelic declaration broke the silence.

PREPARING THE WAY

A priest named Zechariah was in the temple to offer incense when he encountered an angel of the Lord. This was no normal day in the temple. In the Old Testament, an angel's appearance was a sign of something important underway. What news did this heavenly being bring?

Zechariah would have a son with his barren wife Elizabeth (Luke 1:13). This conception, like those of barren women in the Old Testament, was miraculous. The power of God would enable Elizabeth to conceive. And her son, John, would be the forerunner of the Messiah.

This John was the "Elijah" promised in Malachi 4:5: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes." The future Elijah would prepare the way for the Lord. Malachi's words

confirm that John's role connected to ancient expectations that had remained unfulfilled for centuries.

The reference to Elizabeth's barrenness (Luke 1:7) was part of an earlier pattern in the Old Testament, where a woman's barrenness was mentioned in order for the biblical author to narrate its reversal. Just as Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Manoah's wife, and Hannah all conceived because of God's power upon their womb, so also Elizabeth would be with child. Though the Old Testament authors reported a handful of barren women who gave birth, John's mother Elizabeth is the only such woman mentioned in the New Testament.

The angelic announcement of a child to a barren woman would be good news for the family, but the news had impact elsewhere too. John's birth was good news not because he was the Savior, but because he would testify about the Savior. As the fourth Gospel tells us, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light" (John 1:6-8).

If John's mission was to bear witness about the world's saving Light, then his generation would be the generation to see the long-awaited Christ. When we read about John's birth, we can marvel at the promise-keeping character of God. Divine promises require patience, but the waiting is never in vain. John was born because God is trustworthy. And John was born from a woman who had been barren because a miraculous conception drew attention to divine power.

A VIRGIN NAMED MARY

The miraculous conceptions in the Old Testament were surpassed by what God did in the life of a young virgin named Mary. The angel Gabriel appeared to this girl in Nazareth of Galilee, and he said, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus" (Luke 1:30–31).

This promised son of Mary was the long-awaited son from Eve, the seed of the woman who would defeat the serpent (Gen. 3:15). Mary's son would also be the prophesied son of David (2 Sam. 7:12–13). The angel told her, "He will be great and will be called the Son of