



COMPASS

01 • DISCOVERY CLASSES

THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON:

Gospels:

Synoptic Gospels:

- a. Matthew, Mark, Luke

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the 'synoptic Gospels' because they include many of the same stories, often in similar sequence and in similar or sometimes identical wording.

- b. John

John's content is largely distinct and in differing sequence.

Epistles:

Pauline epistles:

- Romans
- 1st & 2nd Corinthians
- Galatians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- 1st & 2nd Thessalonians
- 1st & 2nd Timothy
- Titus
- Philemon
- Hebrews (The authorship of Hebrews is debatable)

General epistles

- James
- 1st & 2nd Peter
- 1st, 2nd, & 3rd John
- Jude

Unique Books

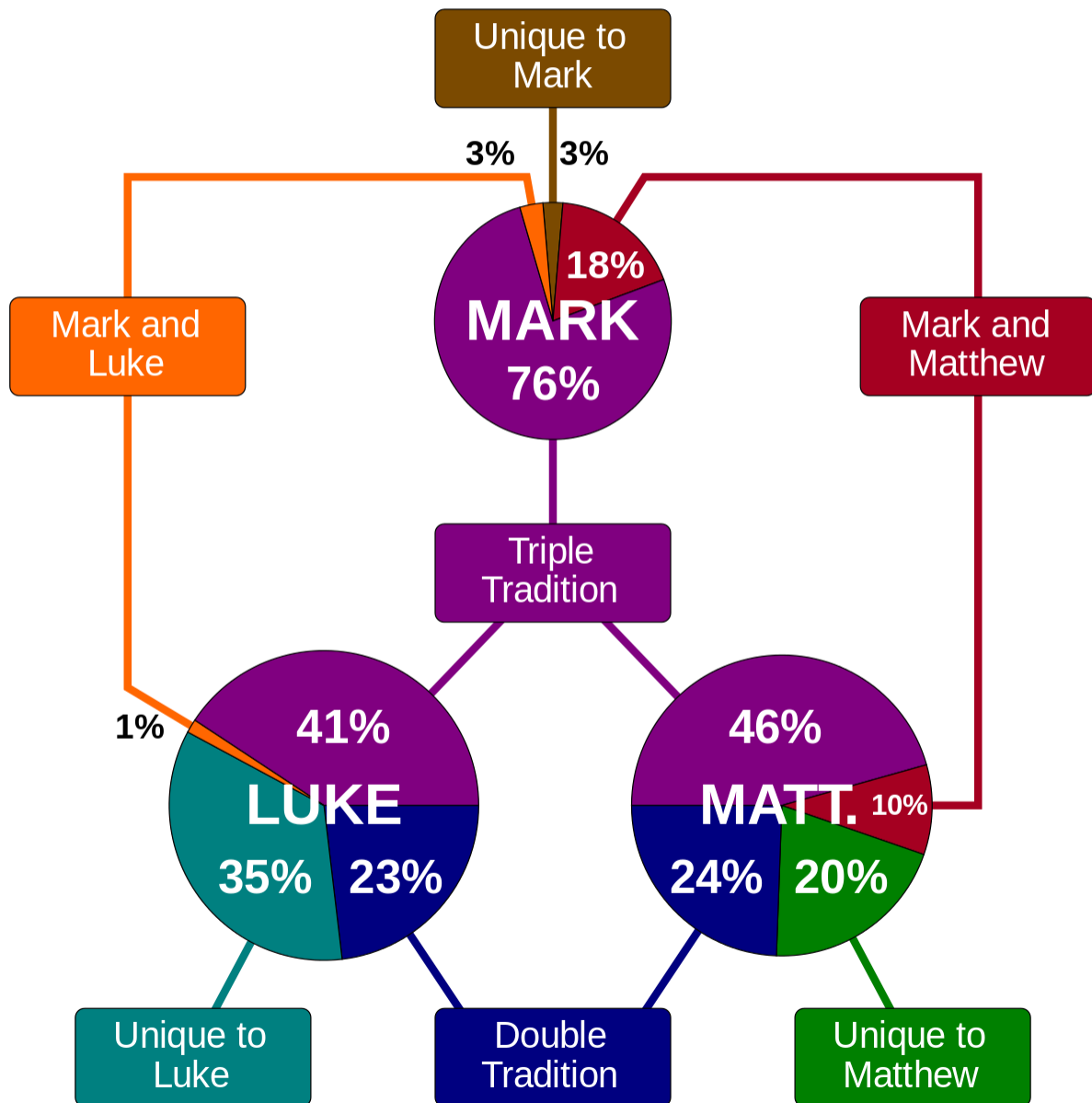
Acts of the Apostles — Historical

Revelation — Prophecy

Pastoral Letters

- 1st & 2nd Timothy, Titus, Philemon, & Jude

Relationships between the Synoptic Gospels



New Testament Dates

DATE (AD)	GOSPELS, HISTORICAL & PROPHECY BOOKS	LETTERS
50		<u>James</u>
52-53		<u>1 Thessalonians</u> <u>2 Thessalonians</u>
55		<u>Galatians</u>
57		<u>1 Corinthians</u> <u>2 Corinthians</u>
57-58		<u>Romans</u>
62-63		<u>Philippians</u> <u>Colossians</u> <u>Philemon</u> <u>Ephesians</u>
63	<u>Luke</u>	
64	<u>Acts of the Apostles</u>	
64-68*	<u>Revelation</u>	
65		<u>1 Timothy</u> <u>Titus</u>
67-68		<u>1 Peter</u> <u>2 Peter</u>
66	<u>Mark</u>	<u>2 Timothy</u>
67	<u>Matthew</u>	<u>Hebrews</u>
68		<u>Jude</u>
70*	<u>John</u>	
85-95		<u>1 John</u> <u>2 John</u> <u>3 John</u>

* Dating of John's Gospel and Revelation is contested. Some propose a date well after the destruction of the Temple (around the same time as his epistles), while there is also strong support for a date just before the Temple destruction.

Canon selection criteria:

Similar to the Old Testament, the New Testament books were examined for three main criteria to determine canonicity:

- Orthodoxy
- Apostolic Association
- Usage

New Testament Epistles (Letters)

Romans

An important literary consideration for all the epistles is that they are modifications of the standard letter writing conventions of the ancient world. Variations are always possible, but the general paradigm consists of five ingredients: salutation, thanksgiving, body, paraenesis (list of moral exhortations), and close. Additionally, more specific epistolary genres govern most of the epistles. Romans belongs to the genre of the letter essay. Set within the framework of letter-writing conventions, the main content is theological exposition on the subject of sin and salvation. Two styles mingle in Romans: the grand or elevated style and features of a form of vigorous street preaching called the diatribe.

1 Corinthians

The most important (and usually ignored) feature of the New Testament epistles is that they are occasional letters, not systematic essays. "Occasional" literature is literature written for a specific occasion. Another label by which to name this is the Latin phrase *ad hoc* ("for the occasion"). The writers of the epistles did not sit down to write an essay; they wrote in response to specific questions posed or circumstances that needed to be addressed. In 1 Corinthians Paul speaks to problems that existed in a disorderly church.

2 Corinthians

This epistle falls in the category of personal letter because it includes so many references to Paul's own life. Paul defends his reputation against false accusations, thereby placing the letter into a genre known in Latin as an *apologia pro vita sua* ("defense of his life"). In keeping with a recent approach to literature called "self fashioning," Paul carefully constructs a picture of his missionary life.

Galatians

A thoroughly polemical (argumentative) letter written in response to a doctrinal crisis that had engulfed Christians living in a specific region (modern-day Turkey). The heresy was a form of Jewish ritualism, but the issue is perennial: whether Christ's atonement is sufficient for salvation or whether human works are also necessary ("works righteousness"). Two common designations for this epistle are helpful—"the angry letter" (denoting the polemical tone) and "the freedom letter" (denoting the theological argument of being free from the need to earn salvation by religious rituals).

Ephesians

A circular letter intended for the church universal. A case study in epistolary form: salutation (1:1-1), thanksgiving (1:3-22), body (2:1—4:16), paraenesis or list of exhortations (4:7—6:20), and close (6:21-24). In addition, characteristic of many New Testament epistles is the division into a doctrinal or theological half and a practical or moral half. Written in a polished and exalted style.

Philippians

A prison epistle written in Rome. Balancing numerous personal references dealing with Paul's relations to the recipients are famous passages with a universal "feel," such as the Christ hymn that celebrates Christ's taking the form of a servant (2:5-11) and the "whatever is true" list (4:8-9). Philippians is also a missionary update letter.

Colossians

Most New Testament epistles refer to doctrinal heresy, but in Colossians, the polemical task of countering heresy is a major thrust of the letter. Paul only briefly denounces the heresy (which claimed that something more than Christ is needed [2:8-23]), preferring to conduct his debate by declaring that Christ is all that is needed. This epistle is strongly Christocentric, climaxing in the famous Christ hymn that exalts the supremacy of Christ (1:15-20).

1 Thessalonians

An "open letter" intended for a group, but it is saturated with statements of affection such that it reads like a personal letter to an individual. There is a large autobiographical element, and like the letters that we ourselves write and receive, it ranges over a wide variety of topics, including Christ's second coming. A good way to assimilate the letter is to regard it as giving "program notes" on living the Christian life.

2 Thessalonians

Partly a sequel to 1 Thessalonians, arising out of misunderstandings about when Christ would return and the need not to live idly in anticipation of that return. A melodic line in the letter is the need to exert oneself in the Christian faith and "not grow weary in doing good" (3:13). As with other New Testament epistles, we should accept the informal, meandering structure and not attempt to force it into an essay format.

1 Timothy

The first of a group known as the pastoral epistles written to individual pastors. 1 Timothy emerges as a manual for church life, with special emphasis on the role and conduct of the pastor.

2 Timothy

Paul's last will and testament, written while he was on death row in Rome. While following the usual format of New Testament epistles, 2 Timothy is also dominated by the genre known as the farewell discourse. Merging with that are elements of spiritual autobiography and a defense of the author's life.

Titus

A pastoral epistle written to a pastor on the island of Crete, this letter is filled with commands. We understand Titus to be a general guidebook for living the Christian life in a world where evil seeks to destroy good. The style is very compressed, reading almost like an outline. There are also directives for church organization.

Philemon

A single-chapter book known best for the story that lies behind it, namely, a runaway slave who had become a Christian and whom Paul is sending back to his owner (also a Christian) with the letter. The most literary aspect of the book is the delicate persuasion or rhetoric that Paul uses to induce Philemon to receive his slave with kindness.

Hebrews

A letter essay written in an exalted style. This Christocentric book asserts the supremacy of Christ to Old Testament foreshadowing. Christ is successively shown to be superior to prophets and angels (1-2), Moses (3), and the Old Testament priesthood (4-7); then the new covenant in Christ is shown to be superior to the old covenant (chapter 8 and following). A subtext is the need to hold fast to the Christian faith and not revert to Judaism in a time of persecution. Another theme by which we remember the book is faith, climaxed in the famous roll call of faith in chapter 11 (which adheres to the genre known as the encomium).

James

Belongs to the genre of wisdom literature; accordingly, the basic unit is the proverb. The structure is stream of consciousness, not that of a systematic essay. The goal is to impart skill for living, and a good tagline for the book is "faith that works." The Greek form known as diatribe exerts a strong influence.

1 Peter

Another very loosely organized epistle. The general progression is (1) the riches that believers possess in Christ, (2) duties for living the Christian life, and (3) how to endure suffering for the sake of Christ.

2 Peter

An informally arranged reminder of selected foundational truths of the Christian faith. The emphasis on remembering stems from the fact that this letter has affinities with the genre of the farewell discourse. The last chapter is one of the great eschatological discourses of the Bible.

1 John

A letter built around the subject of tests by which people can know if they are Christians. An informal letter that yields a long list of separate topics instead of a tidy outline (but that is true of most New Testament letters, contrary to common viewpoint). 1 John resembles our familiar "position paper" or encyclical on a subject that needs clarification.

2 John

An abbreviated letter, perhaps because John expected to visit the church soon (v. 14). This epistle is a shorthand version of the customary epistolary conventions. The book falls readily into three parts: a reminder (4-6), a warning (7-9), and an instruction (10-11).

3 John

Like the books that precede and follow it, one of five one-chapter books in the Bible. A personal letter addressed to a specific person named Gaius, following the format of salutation, body, and personal greetings. It also fits the genre of the letter of instruction, with one of the topics being hospitality to traveling Christian teachers.

Jude

A "fireworks" letter, filled with vivid imagery and anger. The letter displays horror toward apostasy and the false teachers who induce it. The book is primarily a satire (an attack on evil). There is such an abundance of poetic imagery and figurative language that it becomes what literary scholars call poetic prose.

