

The New Testament begins with four parallel books sharing the good news, or gospel, of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The virgin Mary bore Jesus in Bethlehem, most likely between the years 4 and 6 A.D., that designation standing for Anno Domini or the year of our Lord. One might assume that Jesus's birth occurred in 0 or 1 A.D., but scholars today find errors in the calculations of the sixth-century monk Dionysius who first established the common B.C. (before Christ) and A.D. dating. In any case, the dating of the New Testament's first events around Jesus's birth means a four-hundred-year silence from the last Old Testament book Malachi.

The relationship of Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible, to New Testament is important to understand. The New Testament does not contradict the Old Testament but instead fulfills, builds from the foundation of, and carries forward the Old Testament to its prophesied conclusion. One must not read the New Testament as something apart from, reversing, denying, or otherwise challenging the Old Testament. To do so would be to read the New Testament wrongly, neither as Jesus instructed nor as God's Spirit guides us. Matthew 5:17-18 records Jesus saying that he came not to abolish but to fulfill the Old Testament in every little mark of its every letter. New and Old Testaments are God's integrated account of his love for humankind, so intense that he gave the life of his Son Jesus for us. Reading the Old Testament deepens our understanding of Jesus's New Testament words, actions, and intentions, the Lord having so often quoted, paraphrased, and referred to the Old Testament.

The New Testament includes twenty-seven books, following the Old Testament's thirty-nine. After the first four gospel books Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, comes the book of Acts, a history of the gospel moving through the early church. The next twenty-one books are a series of letters by early church leaders or attributed to them, providing guidance on carrying out Jesus's good-news mission. Many of the letters are to specific churches, although often intended for sharing with other churches or in fact addressed to the church generally even though identified by a church or regional name. A few other letters are to individuals or named for their authors, still informing of Jesus's gospel mission. The New Testament ends with the extraordinary book Revelation, addressing many things but especially God's plan, recorded in spectacular vision, for the future. Read and relish the New Testament.