

A Book You'll Actually Read

Also available in the series:

On Who Is God?

On Church Leadership

On the Old Testament

A Book You'll Actually Read
On the New Testament

Mark Driscoll

CROSSWAY BOOKS

WHEATON, ILLINOIS

On the New Testament

Copyright © 2008 by Mark Driscoll

Published by Crossway Books

a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers
1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law.

The chart on page 28 is from *I'm Glad You Asked* by Kenneth Boa and Larry Moody. Copyright © 1995 Cook Communications Ministries. Used with permission. May not be further reproduced. All rights reserved.

Interior design and typesetting by Lakeside Design Plus

Cover design and illustration by Patrick Mahoney

First printing 2008

Printed in the United States of America

Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the author.

Trade Paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-0134-0

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-0442-6

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-0443-6

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Driscoll, Mark, 1970–

On the New Testament / Mark Driscoll.

p. cm.—(A book you'll actually read)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-4335-0134-0 (tpb)

1. Bible. O.T.—Introductions. I. Title. II. Series.

BS2330.3.D75 2008

225.6'1—dc22

2008000504

VP	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	09	08
	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Contents

Series Introduction	7
Introduction	8
1. Answers to Nine Common Questions about the New Testament	11
<i>Who Wrote the New Testament?</i>	
<i>Can Books of the New Testament Be Written Today?</i>	
<i>Does the New Testament Contain Any Errors or Contradictions?</i>	
<i>How Were the New Testament Books Chosen as Scripture?</i>	
<i>Why Are There Different Bible Translations?</i>	
<i>Why Should I Trust the Transmitted Manuscripts of the New Testament?</i>	
<i>What Is the Central Point of the New Testament?</i>	
<i>What Principles Can Help Me Interpret the New Testament?</i>	
<i>How Did Jesus Interact with the Scriptures?</i>	
<i>How Should I Come to the Scriptures?</i>	
2. How to Read the New Testament	55
<i>The Gospels</i>	
<i>History</i>	
<i>Epistles</i>	
<i>Apocalypse</i>	
Appendix 1: Building a Theological Library	69
Appendix 2: New Testament Reading Checklist	84

Series Introduction

On the New Testament is part of an ongoing series of books you will actually read. The average person can read these books (minus the appendixes) in roughly one hour. The hope is that the big truths packed into these little books will make them different from the many other books that you would never pick up or would pick up only to quickly put down forever because they are simply too wordy and don't get to the point.

The A Book You'll Actually Read series is part of the literature ministry of Resurgence, called Re:Lit. Resurgence (www.theresurgence.com) is a growing repository of free theological resources, such as audio and video downloads, and includes information about conferences we host. The elders of Mars Hill Church (www.marshillchurch.org) have generously agreed to fund Resurgence along with the Acts 29 Church Planting Network (www.acts29network.org) so that our culture can be filled with a resurgence of timeless Christian truth that is expressed and embodied in timely cultural ways. Free downloads of audio and/or video sermons by Pastor Mark Driscoll on topical issues and entire books of the Bible are available at www.marshillchurch.org.

Introduction

Growing up I considered myself a moral and spiritual person. I always believed there was a God and tried to be a generally good person. At public high school I took a “Bible as Literature” class out of curiosity because I knew very little about what the Bible contained. Sadly, the class spent a great deal of time talking about various scholars’ opinions of the Bible, but I don’t recall reading much of what the Bible actually said. Then in college, a number of professors in a variety of classes freely littered their lectures with criticisms of the Bible, though again we never read any of what it actually said.

Providentially, a friend named Grace, who has since become my lovely bride, had given me a nice leather-bound copy of the Bible with my name inscribed on the cover as a high school graduation gift. After owning it for a few months, I decided to pick it up and simply read it, without editorial comment or anyone else’s interpretation, in an effort to establish my own opinion of its content.

As I read, I was stunned and offended by what the Bible said about the human condition, being trapped in sin, and God coming as Jesus on a rescue mission to die and rise to forgive sin and deliver people from Satan, sin, and death. Curiously, the scandal that unfolded as I read through the Old Testament and into the New Testament did not repel me, but instead captivated my attention. I had never heard anything with such authority, brutal honesty, and personal affront.

I first picked up the Bible as a nineteen-year-old non-Christian college freshman who was curious about its content and who wrongly believed he had a pretty good idea of what it said. As I read the New Testament over the course of a few months, God miraculously opened my understanding of the words on the pages and changed my heart from cold indifference to warm devotion. I became a Christian not because

of convincing emotional appeal, pressure from someone I loved, or overwhelming life crisis, but simply because I found the Bible to be both true and helpful.

As I learned about Jesus from the Bible, my desire to know, love, follow, and obey Jesus grew quickly. By God's providence, I found a wonderful church where the pastor baptized me as a Christian at the age of nineteen and plugged me into multiple Bible studies. At the age of twenty-one I married Grace, and at the age of twenty-two we graduated from college together. We then returned to our hometown of Seattle because God had called us to plant a church there.

At the age of twenty-five we began Mars Hill Church as a small Bible study in our living room. The rest of the story of the church is chronicled in another book I wrote called *Confessions of a Reformission Rev.*,¹ but the basic gist is that the church attracted many young non-Christians who knew very little about Jesus or the Bible. At the time I was also co-hosting with my friend, Lief, a weekly national radio show called *Street Talk*. Between the church and the radio program, large portions of my week were taken up answering people's basic questions about Jesus and the Bible. Many people became Christians and were baptized in our small new church. As the church grew from dozens to hundreds and then thousands of people, I could no longer meet with everyone to personally answer their questions. Instead, I began writing booklets that we self-published in our church for people to read. In these little books, I tried to answer the questions I once had and that people I had met through the church and radio program had asked me. Over the years, many thousands of copies of these booklets have been given away from our church for people to read and give to their friends. Upon seeing these brief books, my friends at Crossway asked if they could publish them, which was a humbling encouragement.

1. Driscoll, Mark. *Confessions of a Reformission Rev.: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006.

Subsequently, after some editing, these books are now appearing as the series *A Book You'll Actually Read*. Before we begin, I want to sincerely thank Jesus for saving me, Grace for buying me my first Bible and being the love of my life and mother of our five children, and the people of Mars Hill Church who have entrusted to me the great honor of teaching them the Bible about Jesus and answering their questions about Jesus.

I do not know what your opinion or understanding of the Bible is. I do know, however, that you, too, need to simply read it to discover for yourself how you will respond to its teaching. As you read the New Testament, I implore you not to approach its pages with passionless, Spock-like objectivity. You will be reading about Jesus, who claimed to be the sinless God and was brutally murdered for doing so. You will read about his resurrection from death and being the only person in human history to beat death. You will read about people who died brutal deaths because they claimed to have seen Jesus rise from death and refused to recant. You will also read about the end of the world, heaven and hell, and just about everything else that matters in this life, from sex to work to love. Therefore, it would be silly to not be intensely passionate as you read of these things. Throw yourself into your disagreements, confusions, and agreements wholeheartedly. You will not be the first to do so, and you will not be the first to discover that the pages are written to agitate you until you wrestle with the God who loves you and can take your best shots without flinching.

Chapter 1 of this booklet briefly answers the most common questions I have received about the New Testament. Chapter 2 introduces you to the New Testament and assists you in reading through it in an informed manner. Appendix 1 will help you build a Bible reference library so that you can be a lifelong student of Scripture with the most helpful tools. Appendix 2 is a simple chart to help you track your personal reading of the New Testament.

My intent in writing this book is to be of service to you as a pastor. I have had to read a great number of books and spend thousands of hours in study since my conversion in order to arrive at the conclusions that I'm sharing with you. I wish someone would have given me this book as a non-Christian or new Christian because it would have been quite helpful to me. I pray that you will find it helpful as well.



Answers to Nine Common Questions about the New Testament

In this chapter I will answer nine of the most common questions I have both had and heard regarding the New Testament. Before we examine the New Testament in particular, though, I want to briefly explain the entire Bible in general so that we share a common understanding about both the Old and New Testaments.

The New Testament speaks of the Old Testament as Scripture, for which the Greek word is *graphe*, meaning “writing.” The word *bible* comes from the Greek word for book. *Holy Bible*, therefore, means “Holy Book.” It contains sixty-six separate books. Thirty-nine books are in the Old Testament, which is a record of time from God creating the world and our first parents Adam and Eve until the coming of Jesus Christ into human history. The twenty-seven books of the New Testament begin with the four Gospels, which record the life, death, burial, resurrection, and return to heaven of Jesus, and then proceed to instructions to various Christians and Christian churches about how to think and live in light of who Jesus is and what he has done.

Our Bible, like history, is divided into the period prior to Jesus’ coming (BC or “before Christ”) and the period following his coming (AD or *anno Domini*, which is a Latin phrase meaning “in the year of our Lord”). The Old Testament covers roughly a few thousand years of human history. Most of the Old Testament was originally

written in Hebrew, with part of Daniel and a bit of Ezra in Aramaic. It was written over the course of more than one thousand years.

The New Testament covers just the first century of human history after Jesus' coming. The New Testament was originally written in Greek. Every book was completed by the close of the first century. Authors of the New Testament include a doctor, tax collector, fisherman, former persecutor of Christians, and Jesus' own two brothers.

The Old Testament was written on papyrus—a form of paper made out of reeds; the New Testament was written on parchments (prepared animal skins). A lecturer at the University of Paris created the Bible's chapter divisions in the early 1200s, which accounts for our current 1,189 chapter divisions. The Bible's 31,173 verse divisions were fully developed by 1551, in an effort to provide addresses (not unlike those on our homes) that would help us find particular sections.

Over 77 percent of the Christian Bible is the Old Testament. The Old Testament has 929 chapters and 23,214 verses. The New Testament has 260 chapters and 7,959 verses. In the Old Testament, the longest book is Psalms and the shortest book is Obadiah. In the New Testament, the longest book is Acts and the shortest book is 3 John.

Calling the Old Testament “old” seems to denote information that is archaic, dated, and irrelevant in comparison to the New Testament. It was the early church father Origen (185–254) who first coined the phrases Old and New Testaments. Prior to Origen's designation, the Jews and early church would have only known what we call the Old Testament as the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, or the Scriptures. Origen's confusion came from misunderstanding Jeremiah's use of the old and new covenants in Jeremiah 31:31. By “new,” Jeremiah did not mean something detached from the prior works of God, but something renewed or fulfilled. Therefore, the new covenant is the renewing or fulfillment of the old.

Likewise, the New Testament is inextricably linked with the Old Testament as its renewed fulfillment. Subsequently, the New Testament has roughly three hundred explicit Old Testament quotations, as well as upwards of four thousand Old Testament allusions. In many ways, the Old Testament is a series of promises that God makes, and the New Testament is the record of the fulfillment of those promises.

1. Who Wrote the New Testament?

On one hand, the twenty-seven books of the New Testament were written by at least eight human authors. In most of the books, the author clearly identifies himself. The only exception is the book of Hebrews, which some believe Paul wrote, but this can only be inferred since the author is not mentioned in the book. Chart 1.1 will help you understand who wrote the books of the New Testament.

On the other hand, the human authors of Scripture are not the only authors of Scripture. God communicated through the authors of Scripture in a real and miraculous way so that his divine truth could be perfectly communicated through men. In this way, the divine and human authorship of Scripture is very much like Jesus himself, who was both fully God and fully man. God the Father chose to work through the humanity of Jesus to reveal himself to us in a manner akin to how he had previously revealed himself to us as God through the men who wrote the Old Testament.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus often taught his students/disciples about the future. On a few occasions he promised them that one day he would leave them and send the Holy Spirit to perfectly remind them of his life and teachings so that they could write and teach accurately and truthfully.¹ Therefore, the New Testa-

1. John 14:25–26; 16:12–15.

Chart 1.1 *New Testament Authors*

Author	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	Paul	Peter	James	Jude
Number of NT books written	1	1	2	5	13 or 14	2	1	1
Name(s) of NT books written	Gospel of Matthew	Gospel of Mark	Gospel of Luke Acts	Gospel of John 1 John 2 John 3 John Revelation	Romans 1 Corinthians 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians 1 Timothy 2 Timothy Titus Philemon Hebrews?	1 Peter 2 Peter	James	Jude
Number of NT Chapters Written	28	16	42	50	93, or 106 if he also wrote Hebrews	8	5	1

ment, like the Old Testament, claims to be a combination of both human and divine authorship as God inspired people to write his truth without error.² In writing through men, God did choose to work through each human author’s personality. As a result, the doctor Luke includes details in Acts and Luke that are of a more

2. 1 Cor. 2:12–13; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; 1 Pet. 1:10–12; 2 Pet. 1:20–21.

medical and emotional interest, whereas James is very practical and Paul is very theological.

The belief that God wrote Scripture in concert with human authors whom he inspired to perfectly record his words is called *verbal* (the very words of the Bible) *plenary* (every part of the Bible) *inspiration* (divinely inspired revelation). Very simply, this means that God the Holy Spirit inspired not just the thoughts of Scripture, but also the very details and exact words that were perfectly recorded for us as Scripture.

This doctrine is inextricably tied to the character of God himself. God is a truthful God who does not lie.³ Therefore, because God is ultimately the author of Scripture, it is perfect, unlike every other uninspired writing and utterance.

In an effort to more fully appreciate Scripture, we will now examine six aspects of its origin, authority, and trustworthiness. First, all Scripture claims to be God-breathed or inspired: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”⁴ Jesus himself also taught that “Scripture cannot be broken.”⁵ This is because the Scriptures are from God and therefore come with his authority and power.

Second, all of the prophetic writings of the Old Testament are divinely inspired and perfect, sacred Scripture. As Peter says, “the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving

3. Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2.

4. 2 Tim. 3:16–17.

5. John 10:35.

not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.”⁶ Peter also says that “no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”⁷

Third, the New Testament also claims to be divinely inspired, perfect prophecy, just like the Old Testament. One such example can be found in Ephesians 3:4–5, which speaks of “the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.” Another example is found in Revelation, where John speaks of “the words of the prophecy of this book.”⁸ Therefore, the New Testament is divinely inspired, perfect, prophetic Scripture just like the Old Testament.

Fourth, in the Old Testament we are repeatedly told that the “Word of God” will stand the test of time, unlike anything that has been or ever will be written; it will last forever because it is from God.⁹ The New Testament speaks of itself as the Word of God. Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Paul also calls his letter to the Ephesians “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”¹⁰ In his New Testament letter to the Thessalonians, Paul commends the church for receiving his letter as the Word of God saying, “And we also thank God constantly for this,

6. 1 Pet. 1:10–12.

7. 2 Pet. 1:20–21.

8. Rev. 22:18.

9. Ps. 18:30; Prov. 30:5; Isa. 40:8.

10. Eph. 6:17.

that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”¹¹ Thus, the New Testament is the Word of God and will last forever.

Fifth, the writers of the New Testament said and showed that they believed they were writing divinely inspired Scripture. Some critics of the New Testament claim that the authors never intended for anyone to believe they were writing books of the Bible on par with the Old Testament. However, their own writings prove that they in fact knew that God was using them in a miraculous way to write the final books of the Bible. For example, Paul claimed Jesus Christ was speaking through him.¹² The New Testament writers claimed that their writings are holy.¹³ In 1 Corinthians 14:37, Paul boldly says, “the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.” Paul declared that the letters he wrote were to be read in the churches and obeyed.¹⁴ Paul said that his teaching was to be commanded and taught to others,¹⁵ as well as used for exhortation and rebuke.¹⁶ This is because Paul claimed that his authority was amazingly “not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father.”¹⁷ He goes on to say of his teaching, “I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”¹⁸

11. 1 Thess. 2:13.

12. 2 Cor. 13:3.

13. 2 Tim. 3:15.

14. Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27; 2 Thess. 3:14.

15. 1 Tim. 4:11.

16. Titus 2:15.

17. Gal. 1:1.

18. Gal. 1:12.

The New Testament writers claimed that God was speaking through them in a divinely inspired way just as he did the authors of the Old Testament Scripture. For example, Paul quotes the New Testament text of Luke 10:7 and calls it “Scripture.”¹⁹ Paul also provides one of the best summaries of God speaking through an apostle, saying, “we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.”²⁰

The leader of the early church, Peter, was appointed by Jesus himself as the leader of the disciples and was therefore a man of great spiritual authority. Peter on many occasions argued that the New Testament was Scripture, just like the Old Testament. For example, he says that Jesus himself spoke through the New Testament apostles in the exact same way that he had through the Old Testament prophets, saying, “remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles.”²¹ One of the clearest teachings that the New Testament letters we presently have are no less divinely inspired, perfect Scripture than the Old Testament is presented by Peter: “And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other *Scriptures*.”²²

Obviously, the New Testament writers did indeed claim to be writing books of the Bible on par with the books of the Old Testament, which was a very serious claim for a Jew to make. If it were not true, those making such a claim would be

19. 1 Tim. 5:18.

20. 2 Cor. 5:20.

21. 2 Pet. 3:2.

22. 2 Pet. 3:15–16.

guilty of lying and blaspheming God by teaching false doctrine. They rightly understood the magnitude of what they were saying, and many of them died brutal deaths for what they had written, without ever recanting because they told the truth by divine inspiration.

Sixth, the early church treated the apostles' New Testament teaching as authoritative just like the Old Testament teaching of the prophets.²³ Because of this we are told that the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles [New Testament] and prophets [Old Testament], Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.”²⁴

Therefore, the answer to the question, who wrote the New Testament? is that God wrote the New Testament through human authors whom God the Holy Spirit inspired to perfectly pen his truth. Subsequently, Christians believe that Scripture (Old and New Testaments) is our highest authority, or metaphorical Supreme Court, by which all other things are tested. Practically, this means that lesser courts of reason, tradition, and culture are under the highest court of truth, which is divinely inspired Scripture. During the Protestant Reformation, the slogans *sola Scriptura* and *prima Scriptura* became popular to summarize this conviction; they mean Scripture alone is our highest authority. This should not be confused with *solo Scriptura*, which is the erroneous belief that truth is only to be found in Scripture and nowhere else. Scripture itself tells us that God reveals truth to us in such things as creation and our conscience, but that the beliefs we may subscribe to from such forms of lesser revelation are to be tested by Scripture.

The New Testament was written because Jesus rose from death and proved himself to be God and the only way to eternal life. Nothing else could explain the widespread worship of him as God, the transformation of the disciples from fearful cowards into

23. Acts 2:42; 15.

24. Eph. 2:20.

fearless preachers, the transformation of Paul from a murderer of Christians into a Christian pastor, or Jesus' own mother and brothers worshiping him as God.

While some critics claim that perhaps the authors of the New Testament collaborated in a grand plot to promote lies, we would have to first ask what motive they might have for such a plan. Why would they highlight the embarrassing unbelief of Peter and Thomas if it were not true? Why would they live lives of poverty, hatred, and torture, and ultimately suffer brutal murders without recanting, if they were simply lying? Theologically, why would they teach that everyone was an evil sinner, that a literal hell existed, that no one can save themselves, and risk their own eternity if they were lying? People lie because it profits them by bringing such things as power and wealth. Liars are known to recant when they are tortured and are facing murder. But in the New Testament we clearly see witnesses who never waver from their message that Jesus is God, even though it does not benefit them in any way and they live lives of shame and poverty that end in brutal murder.

2. Can Books of the New Testament Be Written Today?

Books of the Bible cannot be written today for a number of reasons. First, the Old Testament ended with the prophet Malachi promising that the next major event in redemptive history would be the coming of John the Baptist who would prepare the way for Jesus.²⁵ There were then four hundred years of silence during which no book of the Bible was written until John came as promised.²⁶ Likewise, the New Testament ends with its final book, Revelation, telling us that no other books

25. Mal. 3:1; 4:5–6.

26. Luke 1:11–17.