

## New Testament letters : notes

The letters in the New Testament were written down at various times during the first century. They came about because of the activity of the early Christian church as described in the book of Acts.

The letters in the New Testament

- are sometimes called epistles
- are found after the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and after the book of Acts
- are also found in the book of Revelation, but in the first three chapters only
- were intended to be read out aloud from the beginning to the end.

The letters arose because of specific situations in the life of the early church.

Often they were written because there was

- some behaviour that needed correcting
- a belief that needed setting right
- a misunderstanding that needed sorting out.

<b><i>What the letters are</i></b>	<b><i>What they are not</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>are</b> prompted by something that needed to be said <i>at the time</i></li><li>• <b>are</b> written in the 1<sup>st</sup> century</li><li>• <b>do</b> relate to specific people and situations at a specific time, so it is possible to link them to incidents recorded in the book of Acts</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>not</b> both ends of the same conversation: <i>the written record provides "the answers" but we do not always know the question or issue (if there was one!) that prompted the letter</i></li><li>• <b>not</b> a full record of all theology</li><li>• <b>not</b> as easy to interpret and apply to today as it first appears</li></ul>

The New Testament letters were written in the way all letters were written at the time, which was:-

1. name of the writer and the person or people the letter was written to
2. a greeting
3. a prayer wish or thanksgiving
4. the main body of the letter
5. advice or exhortation
6. final greetings & farewell

Not every New Testament letter includes all these elements. The majority of the letter would have been dictated to a secretary to write down. Then the person sending the letter would add a personal note at the end.

Remember, there were no *chapter divisions* or *outline headings* in the original letter and the *verse numbers* were added in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. So try to ignore these.