



THE STORY
OF
GOD'S GLORY

Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!

| Psalm 96:3 |

The Story of God's Glory
An Introduction to Christian Scripture

- |1| The Inspiration & Authority of Scripture
- |2| Introduction to the Old Testament
- |3| Historical Books | *The Pentateuch*
- |4| Historical Books | *From Moses to the Monarchy*
- |5| Historical Books | *Divided Monarchy, Exile, & Return*
- |6| Wisdom Books | *Job & Psalms*
- |7| Wisdom Books | *Solomonic Writings*
- |8| Prophetic Books | *Pre-Exilic Prophets*
- |9| Prophetic Books | *Pre-Exilic Prophets*
- |10| Prophetic Books | *Exilic & Post-Exilic Prophets*
- |11| Introduction to the New Testament
- |12| The Synoptic Gospels
- |13| The Johannine Gospel
- |14| Historical Book | *Acts*
- |15| Epistles | *Pauline General Letters*
- |16| Epistles | *Pauline Captivity Letters*
- |17| Epistles | *Pauline Pastoral Letters*
- |18| Epistles | *General Letters*
- |19| Epistles | *General Letters*
- |20| Apocalyptic Literature | *Revelation*

| 1 |

The Inspiration & Authority of Scripture

On my bookshelf sits an old, torn, stained copy of Halley's Bible Handbook. There is a quotation at the beginning of this trusted resource that states: "The Bible is the most priceless possession of the human race." I believe that statement is true; not merely because it could be argued that the Bible is the most magnificent piece of literature ever written or assembled, but because in the pages of Scripture we find God's self-revelation to his creation. Only when we open up the Bible do we have a final, authoritative word from the true God.

Christians throughout the centuries have understood this; and have read, translated, studied, preached, and taught its words with a fervor that suits the book's grandeur. That same fervor must consume the present church if she is to remain faithful to the God who has revealed himself within the pages of holy writ. Therefore, it is imperative that we know what we understand the Bible to be, what it claims for itself, and why we hold it so dear. To begin that quest we must start with its inspiration and authority.

The Inspiration of Scripture

The most fundamental point to understand about the Christian view of the Bible is that we believe it is *inspired by God*. This means that its words were "breathed out" by God through the human authors. Two passages of Scripture help us sort through what this means and how this happened:

2 Timothy 3:16-17

2 Peter 1:20-21

The words of these books that we have come to recognize as being of divine origin were written, for the most part, by human beings using their own personalities and skill sets. However, as these writings were being produced the Holy Spirit of God was "carrying along" the writers so that what they wrote was the very word of God.

There are three key concepts to remember when discussing the inspiration of the Bible. They are *verbal inspiration*, *plenary inspiration*, and *inerrancy*. Verbal inspiration means that the very words of Scripture are inspired - not merely the concepts, sentences, or phrases. This logically flows out of our understanding of inspiration. If God "breathed" what was written he inspired every word. A few Scriptures that highlight the verbal inspiration of the Bible are:

Psalm 119:89

Matthew 5:18; 24:35

Plenary inspiration means that all of the Bible is inspired by God - not only the well-known, well-liked, or easy to understand sections. This too flows out of our concept of inspiration. We must read, study, and obey all of what God has to say in its proper context. Here are a few Scriptural references for plenary inspiration:

Proverbs 30:5
2 Timothy 3:16

Inerrancy, the third concept, means that the Bible is completely without error. Of the three of these ideas inerrancy is the most obvious logical conclusion from our understanding of inspiration. If God inspired the Bible it is perfect. God does not make mistakes. Inerrancy also implies veracity (truthfulness). Here are a few places where the Bible speaks of its perfection and veracity:

Psalm 19:7-9; 119:86
John 17:17
Titus 1:2
Hebrews 6:18

One very important thing to keep in mind about the claims being made above is this: these concepts apply to the *autographa* (the original copies of Scripture) only. Scribal errors have crept into our copies of the originals (which are no longer extant), and so care must be taken to discover what was originally written. This brings the question of the preservation of Scripture to the forefront.

The Preservation of Scripture

If the original copies of Scripture, which we believe were inerrantly, verbally, and plenary inspired of God, are no longer in existence, can we trust the Bible we have today? The answer is a resounding "yes." There are more copies of the Bible (especially the New Testament) than any other work of antiquity. That means if we know what any ancient work actually said, we are sure of Scripture's original content.

The Bible itself tells us that it will be preserved forever; i.e., that its contents and meaning will never be destroyed and its words will never be unfulfilled:

Psalm 119:89-90, 160
Isaiah 40:6-8
Matthew 5:18; 24:35

There is no good reason why we cannot trust that what we have in our modern translations of the Bible is what was originally written by the authors of so long ago.

The Perspicuity of Scripture

However reliable the Bible may be, it is of no use to us if we cannot understand it. *Perspicuity* speaks to Scripture's ability to be understood and comprehended. It means that not only can we know what the Bible means if we put the work in, but that there is a single meaning to be understood in the first place which makes our effort worthwhile.

Language or communication of any kind assumes comprehensibility and the word of God is no different. Its entire contents assume that we can understand what it says. Here are a few examples:

Matthew 12:3, 5; 22:29, 31-32

Claims that understanding the Bible's true meaning is impossible are unwarranted. Careful study, examining the context, and familiarity with the author's intent make interpreting Scripture correctly attainable for the born again believer in Christ.

The Sufficiency & Authority of Scripture

All of the above truths mean that the Bible is sufficient to satisfy our every spiritual need and has the final authority in our lives. *Sufficiency* means that Scripture is fully capable of guiding us in all matters of faith and practice. It does not need to be supplemented, replaced, or tweaked. It has everything we need for our spiritual health:

Deuteronomy 4:2
Proverbs 30:5-6
Revelation 22:18-19

Because it is completely and perfectly inspired, well preserved, clear and understandable, and absolutely sufficient, the Bible is our absolute spiritual *authority*. We follow its commands, obey its rules, honor its principles, and trust in its God. This is what makes it so worthy of our reverence, time, and energy. It is the communication of God to humanity. The story it contains is all about its ultimate author: God - who reveals himself as a redeeming and saving God who is worthy of our glory, honor, and worship.

| 2 |

Introduction to the Old Testament

It happens every year. Motivated followers of Christ around the world set out to accomplish a meaningful and admirable goal: read the entire Bible in one year. On January 1st they open up to Genesis 1 and start reading. Things go well for a while, but somewhere down the road they get lost in Leviticus. Some make it further than that, others not quite as far, but eventually the goal is left unmet as the rigors of working through the Old Testament prove to be too much to handle.

There are more than a few reasons why this happens. One big one, however, is that many people don't know how to read the Old Testament to begin with. They grew up hearing stories of Old Testament heroes, so they assume that the entirety of the Old Testament is story after story of biblical heroes accomplishing great feats for God. The meticulous laws of Moses don't fit that mold. Neither do the accounts of God commanding Israel to slaughter entire cities. Their preconceived notions lead to disillusionment; disillusionment leads to despair; despair leads to the Bible going back to its permanent spot on the book shelf or end table.

Our goal is to break that pattern. When we understand the purpose of the Old Testament understanding its contents becomes easier (though not without issue). Once we understand its contents in light of its purpose we can apply it to our own lives.

The Purpose of the Old Testament

The Old Testament contains the written word of God given to the nation of Israel in order to prepare them for the coming of the Messiah. It is easy to lose this purpose in the details, but keeping it in mind will help enormously. Jesus said in John 5:39, "You search the Scriptures [the OT] because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me."

That is the proverbial key to understanding the Old Testament. It was written to prepare the nation of Israel for the coming of the Savior. Accordingly, it contains various historical accounts of God's dealings with the nation as history moved toward the first advent of Jesus. In John 5, Jesus tells us that he is the main theme of the entire Old Testament. He is the fulfillment of it.

The Old Testament is not merely a list of rules by which we please God with our obedience. In fact, it is not that at all. It was given to Israel (and to us) to show them that they cannot possibly keep all of God's holy commands; and so they must rely on God's provision for forgiveness - a provision that is completed in Jesus Christ.

So the Old Testament is the inspired account of God's dealings with the historical nation of Israel as he moves time toward the climax of his redemptive plan: the coming of Jesus Christ to redeem his people from their sins.

The Content of the Old Testament

There are three major divisions of the Old Testament books. They are:

Historical Books
Wisdom Books
Prophetic Books

The *historical books* are so named because they contain historical narratives. They are presented in rough chronological order and include the books of:

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy
Joshua
Judges
Ruth
1 Samuel
2 Samuel
1 Kings
2 Kings
1 Chronicles
2 Chronicles
Ezra
Nehemiah
Esther

The first five books of the Old Testament are often distinguished from the rest of the historical books as the books of Moses, or the *Pentateuch* (which means "five scrolls"). They contain the laws of Moses given by God on which the rest of the Old Testament is built. These books are also often called "the Torah."

The *wisdom books* contain more poetry than historical narrative. They are arranged after the historical books in our English Bibles. They include the books of:

Job
Psalms
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Song of Solomon

Lastly, the *prophetic books* are so called because they record the prophetic careers and oracles of various Old Testament leaders. These accounts occurred within the timeframe of the historical books and coincide with much of what we read in the books of Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. They are:

Isaiah
Jeremiah
Lamentations
Ezekiel
Daniel
Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

There are two ways to divide the prophetic books. The easiest one to remember is to divide them into *major prophets* and *minor prophets*. The major prophets are *Isaiah*, *Jeremiah*, *Lamentations*, *Ezekiel*, and *Daniel*. They are labeled as such because they are the lengthy works. The shorter, more concise books make up the minor prophets and include the rest of the prophetic books.

Another way to divide the books is to distinguish them by the time period in which the prophet ministered. The exile of the Jews from their homeland of Israel in 586 B.C. is the event which serves as the reference point. The *pre-exilic* prophetic books are *Isaiah*, *Jeremiah*, *Lamentations*, and *Hosea* through *Zephaniah*. The *exilic* prophetic books are *Ezekiel* and *Daniel*. The *post-exilic* books include *Haggai*, *Zechariah*, and *Malachi*.

The Old Testament contains 39 different books and 929 chapters in English, and is by far the lengthier of the two Testaments. This can make it seem overwhelming; but when it is broken down into its various parts and its overall purpose is kept in mind it can serve the purpose for which it was written - helping us understand how God worked as he prepared the world for the coming of Jesus, and what that still means for us today.

| 3 |

Historical Books | The Pentateuch

They are some of the most famous words ever written: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). With these words the reader is pulled by Scripture into the grandest story ever told. All of time and eternity is covered. The Bible begins with the beginning and ends with the end. In our quest to understand the big picture of all of the books of the Bible, we too will begin with the beginning.

The first five books of the Bible are historical books and are known as the "Pentateuch" or "Torah". They include some of the Bible's most familiar stories; as well as some of its most meticulous and confusing passages. Our purpose is to develop a grasp of the main theme of each book and be familiar with its general contents and background. To do this, we will first briefly consider the books as a unit; then individually.

Taken together, the books of the Pentateuch record the history of the nation of Israel from creation to preparation to enter the Promised Land. William LaSor rightly points out that there are six "building blocks" of the Pentateuch. That is, these are the themes which are played out over the course of the narrative: *promise, election, deliverance, covenant, law, and land.*

Promise

In Genesis 15, 17, and 22, after creating the world and allowing mankind to fall into depravity, God makes a promise to a man named Abram (Abraham). The promise states that he will bless the offspring of Abraham so that his descendants will number as the stars. To these descendants he will give the land of Canaan. More importantly, God tells Abraham that "in [his] offspring...all the nations of the earth [will] be blessed" (Genesis 22:18).

Election

Particularly in Exodus, it is revealed that the reason why God has made this promise to Abraham's descendants is that he chose them from all of eternity to be his treasured possession (Exodus 19:5). It was not because they were better than any of the other surrounding nations, but because God elected them as his own people by grace. Through them the Deliverer would come to accomplish God's saving plan. (Incidentally, this theme is a precursor to the New Testament doctrine of election.)

Deliverance

In order to reveal his trustworthiness and faithfulness, God allows his people to be enslaved in the land of Egypt. Then, by rescuing them from the hand of Pharaoh he

shows his power and ability to bring his plan to pass. The book of Exodus is largely about this deliverance from Egypt. God is preparing his people to receive the beginning of the promises he made to them.

Covenant

As a solemn vow that God would not abandon his people, nor take back his word to bless them, God initiates a covenant (or official promise) with Israel. These were the terms: if Israel would obey God and follow him with their whole hearts, they would never cease to dwell in the land of Canaan. If they disobeyed him, they would be overtaken by their enemies. God was to be their true and only King.

Law

In order to show the people what was required of them to be obedient to God and serve him faithfully, God instituted what is commonly called the Law of Moses; so named because it was given to Moses to relay to the rest of the people. It is important to remember that even during its initial institution the Law was given to the people to reveal their sinfulness, to show them that they needed a Savior from God, and to foreshadow the work that coming Savior would accomplish.

Land

Part of the covenant agreement between God and Israel was that the people would inhabit the land of Canaan (roughly modern day Israel) so long as they remained faithful to God. In Numbers and Deuteronomy the Pentateuch closes with the people of Israel preparing to invade the land and take it over for God's purposes.

Genesis

Author | Traditionally, Moses
Date | ca. 1445 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Creation, Fall of Man, "Noah's" Flood, The Lives of the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph)

Important Themes | God as Creator, Man as Sinner, Judgment upon Sin, Promise

Genesis can be broken down in two major ways. The first is to notice that chs. 1-11 deal with what is called **Primeval History**, while chs. 12-50 recount **Patriarchal History**. From a literary standpoint, the book is structured around its "**toledoths**", or generations (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1,9; 37:2).

Exodus

Author | Traditionally, Moses

Date | ca. 1445 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Moses, The Plagues and Exodus from Egypt, The Red Sea Crossing, The Ten Commandments, The Golden Calf, The Tabernacle Built

Important Themes | Election, Deliverance, God's Sovereignty, Idolatry, Covenant, Law

Exodus is about God showing himself to be powerful and faithful enough to keep his promises to his people. It reveals his sovereignty over nations and individuals. At book's end, the people have been delivered by God from the hands of Pharaoh, they have constructed the Tabernacle, and God is dwelling among them. The book can be divided into **The Exodus Account** (chs. 1-18) and **The Covenant at Sinai** (chs. 19-40).

Leviticus

Author | Traditionally, Moses

Date | ca. 1445 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | The Giving of the Specifics of the Law

Important Themes | Covenant, Law, Sacrifice and Offerings, Priesthood, Holy Days

Leviticus records the very detailed instructions for the people of Israel to follow as they made offerings to God as a picture of his coming sacrifice for the sins of the world.

It can be outlined as follows: **The Five Major Offerings** (chs. 1-7), **The Establishment of the Priesthood** (chs. 8-10), **Laws of Cleanness and Holiness** (chs. 11-22), **The Institution of Holy Days** (chs. 23-25), **Covenant Blessings and Curses** (ch. 26), and **Various Rules for Dedication** (ch. 27).

Numbers

Author | Traditionally, Moses

Date | ca. 1405 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | The Census of Israel's Men, The Move from Sinai to the Border of the Promised Land, Israel's Initial Refusal to Enter, Wilderness Wandering, Renewed Preparation to Enter the Land

Important Themes | Covenant, Law, Land, Disobedience

Numbers gets its name from the census that it records in the first part of the book. It goes on to tell of Israel's move from Mt. Sinai to the edge of the Jordan River, the border of the Promised Land. After the people refuse to enter because of fear, they wander in the wilderness for forty years until the entire generation dies. At the book's conclusion a new generation is ready to follow God into the fulfillment of his promises.

Chs. 1-12 record the move from **Sinai to Kadesh**, chs. 13-19 recount the **Wilderness Wandering**, and chs. 20-36 tell of the **Preparation to Enter the Promised Land**.

Deuteronomy

Author | Moses

Date | ca. 1405 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | The Retelling of the Law, The Death of Moses, Joshua

Important Themes | Promise, Election, Deliverance, Covenant, Law, Land, Succession

Deuteronomy (which means "second law") recapitulates the law through speeches Moses gave at the end of his life. The content is generally the same as Exodus-Numbers. In recalling all that God has done for the people as they are ready to enter the land he has promised them, Moses highlights the covenant faithfulness of God.

The book can be divided into three speeches: **Recalling the Past** (chs. 1-4), **Recalling the Law** (chs. 5-26), and **Blessings and Curses** (chs. 27-30). The book closes with the **Succession of Leadership** (chs. 31-34) from Moses to Joshua.

Historical Books Timeline Through the United Monarchy

1406 B.C.	Moses' death; Israel's entry into Canaan under Joshua
1375	Joshua's death
1375–1055	Period of the judges
1050/42/30–1010	Saul's reign
1010–971	David's reign
971–931	Solomon's reign
931	Kingdom Divided

The last book of the Pentateuch (Deuteronomy) records the death of Moses. This represents a monumental moment in the history of the young nation of Israel. Their inaugural leader is gone, so new leadership must emerge to lead God's people into the Promised Land. Joshua had already been chosen as Moses' successor as recorded in Deuteronomy. As the page turns to the book of Joshua, he will assume leadership over Israel's army and lead the people into the land God had promised to give them.

The same themes that are the building blocks of the Pentateuch will resurface at various points throughout the rest of the Old Testament as God moves history towards the coming of Jesus Christ.

(Remember, they are: *Promise, Election, Deliverance, Covenant, Law, Land*)

Joshua

Author | Unknown, Certain Traditions Suggest Joshua

Date | ca. 1400 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Joshua, Taking the Promised Land, Dividing the Land

Important Themes | God as Warrior, God as Judge, Obedience, God's Faithfulness

The book of Joshua records the military victories of the nation. In accordance with his promise, God enabled the people to inhabit the land of Canaan and take it as their own possession. Two and a half of the tribes settled on the east side of the Jordan River (Reuben, Gad, Half-Tribe of Manasseh), while the remaining nine and a half were allotted land to the west of the Jordan.

Judges

Author | Unknown, Certain Traditions Suggest Samuel

Date | ca. 1050 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Failure to Complete Conquest, The 12 Judges

Important Themes | Disobedience & Apostasy, Rejection of God as King

The book of Judges gets its name from the various people who led Israel after the death of Joshua until Israel's first king was crowned under Samuel - they are called judges. They functioned as military/political leaders.

Judges records some of the darkest hours in Israel's history. The key phrase that sums up the whole book is: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

The Judges

Othniel	3:7-11
Ehud	3:12-30
Shamgar	3:31
Deborah	chs. 4-5
Gideon	chs. 6-8
Tola	10:1-2
Jair	10:3-5
Jephthah	10:6-12:7
Ibzan	12:8-10
Elon	12:11-12
Abdon	12:13-15
Samson	chs. 13-16

The content of the book of Judges: **Israel's Apostasy** (chs. 1-3), **The Lives of the Judges** (chs. 3-16), and **Continued Corruption** (chs. 17-21).

Ruth

Author | Unknown

Date | Sometime after 1010 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Naomi, Ruth, Boaz, Boaz' Redemption of Ruth

Important Themes | Faithfulness, Redemption, Davidic & Messianic Lineage

Ruth takes place during the period of Judges and records the heartwarming story of a woman who follows the mother (Naomi) of her deceased husband to her homeland, then marries into her family. The man in the story, Boaz, "redeems" Ruth in accordance with cultural custom and marries her. The story is a picture of faithfulness and, more importantly, a foreshadowing of the coming Redeemer from God.

Outline: **Naomi & Ruth** (ch. 1), **Ruth & Boaz** (chs. 2-4), **Ruth to David** (ch. 4).

1 Samuel

Author | Unknown

Date | ca. 931-722 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Samuel, Saul, David, Saul's Kingship, David's Anointing

Important Themes | Rejection of God as King, The Kings' Faithfulness/Unfaithfulness

The book begins with Samuel as the leading figure in the nation, operating as a prophet/priest/judge. The people, however, demand to have a king like the rest of the nations around them. So God permits Samuel to anoint Saul the first king of Israel. Saul's reign is then covered with special attention given to his interaction with David, the man who would replace him upon his death.

1 Samuel can be divided by noting the main figure(s) in each section of the story: **Samuel** (chs. 1-8), **Saul** (chs. 9-15), and **Saul & David** (chs. 16-31).

2 Samuel

Author | Unknown

Date | ca. 931-722 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | David, The Davidic Covenant, Birth of Solomon

Important Themes | Promise, Covenant, Disobedience

The most important account in 2 Samuel is the making of a covenant between God and David (known as the Davidic Covenant). God promises that David's descendants would sit on the throne of Israel forever - meaning he would give them an eternal reign. This promise is ultimately and finally fulfilled in Jesus Christ, a descendant of David, and King of all kings.

Since the entire book of 2 Samuel is about King David, outlining it merely becomes a matter of highlighting the various occurrences in his reign. One way of doing so is as follows: **David Begins His Reign in Judah** (chs. 1-4), **David King Over All Israel** (chs. 5-24), **Davidic Covenant** (ch. 7), **David's Adultery** (ch. 11), **Solomon's Birth** (ch. 12).

1 Kings 1-11

Author | Unknown

Date | ca. 561-538 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Solomon, Solomon's Reign, Building of the Temple

Important Themes | Davidic Promise/Covenant, Kingly Disobedience

The first eleven chapters of 1 Kings record the reign and fall of King Solomon, David's son. Two key events occur during/immediately following his reign: the building of the Temple and the division of the kingdom. The Temple was built as a "permanent" (as opposed to the Tabernacle) dwelling place for God, where the Ark of the Covenant rested and the priests of Israel ministered. Because of Solomon's turning away from God the kingdom splits after his death - becoming the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.

| 5 |

Historical Books | Divided Monarchy, Exile, & Return

Historical Books Timeline From Solomon Through the Return from Exile

931 B.C.	Solomon Dies & the Kingdom is Divided
931-722 B.C.	Israel is the Northern Kingdom (19 Kings)
722 B.C.	Samaria (Israel's Capital) and Israel Fall to Assyria
931-586 B.C.	Judah is the Southern Kingdom (19 Kings, 1 Queen)
586 B.C.	Jerusalem (Judah's Capital) and Judah Fall to Babylon
(605) 586-539 B.C.	Jewish People in Exile in Foreign Lands
539 B.C.	Cyrus King of Persia Captures Babylon
538 B.C.	Cyrus Frees Jewish Exiles to Return to the Land
536 B.C.	Temple Rebuilding Begins
530-520 B.C.	Temple Rebuilding Halted
520 B.C.	Temple Rebuilding Resumes
516 B.C.	Temple Completed
479 B.C.	Esther Becomes Queen in Persia
458 B.C.	Ezra Leaves Babylon for Jerusalem
445 B.C.	Nehemiah Arrives in Jerusalem
445 B.C.	Jerusalem Walls Rebuilt

Because of Solomon's falling away from God, upon his death the kingdom splits. Two tribes (Benjamin and Judah) make up the southern kingdom of Judah, while the remaining 10 make up the northern kingdom of Israel. The reigns of the kings in both kingdoms are "up and down." A few men were godly, most were not. The continued decline into disobedience causes judgment from God. Israel's kingdom falls to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Judah's kingdom falls to the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

The Jewish people spend 70 years in exile (calculated either from 605 B.C.-535 B.C. or 586 B.C.-516 B.C.). When Persia conquers Babylon, Cyrus the King of Persia gives the Jews permission to return to their homeland. The historical books end with this return by the Jews to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple and city walls.

1 Kings 12-22

Author | Unknown

Date | ca. 561-538 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Various Kings of Israel & Judah, Elijah the Prophet

Important Themes | The LORD as the True God, Idolatry

The last eleven chapters of 1 Kings record the reigns of various kings in both Israel and Judah. King Ahab of Israel takes center stage because of his confrontation with the godly prophet Elijah. Here is a suggested outline: **Division of the Kingdom** (ch.12) **Various Kings of Israel & Judah** (chs. 13-22), **Elijah & Ahab** (chs.17-22).

2 Kings

Author | Unknown
Date | 561-538 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Various Kings of Israel & Judah, Elisha the Prophet, The Fall of Israel to Assyria, The Fall of Judah to Babylon

Important Themes | The LORD as the True God, Idolatry, Exile

2 Kings was originally combined with 1 Kings as one book. It details the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah until they fall to their respective captors. Elisha's ministry is a highlight of this work. It can be outlined as follows: **Kings of Israel & Judah** (chs. 1-16), **The Fall of Israel** (ch. 17), **Kings of Judah** (chs. 18-24), **The Fall of Judah** (ch. 25).

1 & 2 Chronicles

Author | Unknown, Jewish Tradition Suggests Ezra
Date | ca. 400 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | King David, King Solomon, The Kings of Judah, Exile, Return

Important Themes | Davidic Covenant, God's Faithfulness

Chronicles (one book in the original Hebrew) is a recounting of Israel's history with special attention given to the reigns of David and Solomon. 1 Chronicles recounts David's reign, while 2 Chronicles recounts Solomon's reign and the reigns of the various kings of Judah after the kingdom divided. It was written sometime after the return of the Jews from Babylonian exile in order to encourage them to trust in the faithfulness of God. Despite their decline and captivity God was going to keep his promise to David that he would have a descendant reign on the throne of Israel forever.

Selected Genealogy (1 Chron. 1-9), **The Reign of David** (1 Chron. 10-29), **The Reign of Solomon** (2 Chron. 1-9), **The Kings of Judah** (2 Chron. 10-36), **Jerusalem Captured** (2 Chron. 36), **Jews Freed From Captivity** (2 Chron. 36).

Ezra

Author | Unknown, Possibly Ezra

Date | ca. 430 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Ezra, Return from Exile, Rebuilding of the Temple

Important Themes | God's Faithfulness, Faithfulness to God, Inter-marriage

Ezra begins where 2 Chronicles ends: the freeing of the Jews to return from exile in Babylon. It records the first two "waves" of Jewish people to return to their land. The people rebuild the Temple that was destroyed upon their captivity, yet are not without failures. Ezra must preach and teach God's law in order to bring the people out of idolatrous marriages.

First Group of Exiles Return (chs. 1-2), **Rebuilding the Temple** (chs. 3-6), **Ezra Teaches God's Law & Confronts Sin** (chs. 7-10).

Nehemiah

Author | Unknown, Possibly Ezra

Date | ca. 430 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Nehemiah, Return from Exile, Rebuilding the Walls

Important Themes | God's Faithfulness, God Hears & Answers Prayer

Nehemiah was originally grouped with Ezra as one book. It finishes the story that Ezra begins. Nehemiah leads the third "wave" of Jews back to the Promised Land in order to rebuild the walls of the city of Jerusalem. After the walls are rebuilt they are dedicated. Nehemiah ends with the Jews in their homeland, worshipping in their temple.

Nehemiah Returns to Rebuild the Walls (chs. 1-2), **The Walls Rebuilt** (chs. 3-6), **Record of Returned Exiles** (ch. 7), **The Reading of the Law** (chs. 8-10), **The Population & the Priests** (chs. 11-12), **The Dedication of the Wall** (ch. 12), **Nehemiah's Reforms** (chs. 12-13).

Esther

Author | Unknown

Date | ca. 450 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Esther, Mordecai, Haman, King Ahasuerus (Xerxes 1)
The Saving of the Jewish People from a Plot to Destroy Them, The Institution of Purim

Important Themes | God's Providential Care for His Chosen People

The contents of the book of Esther take place when the Jews are returning from exile. Persia is the world power under which the Jews now live. In a remarkable story of God's care for his people, Esther becomes Queen of Persia and subsequently saves her people from the murderous plot of Haman. She is aided by her cousin Mordecai.

Queen Vashti's Downfall (ch. 1), **Esther Named Queen** (ch. 2), **Esther & Mordecai Foil Haman's Plot to Destroy the Jews** (chs. 3-8), **The Jews Defeat Their Enemies** (ch. 9), **Institution of Purim** (ch. 9), **Mordecai Honored** (ch. 10).

General Historical Books Timeline*

1406 B.C.	Moses' death; Israel's entry into Canaan
1375	Joshua's death
1375–1055	Period of the judges
1050/42/30–1010	Saul's reign
1010–971	David's reign
971–931	Solomon's reign
931–722	Divided kingdom (Israel)—19 kings
722	Destruction of Samaria (Israel's capital) by Assyria
931–586	Divided kingdom (Judah)—19 kings, 1 queen
586	Destruction of Jerusalem and temple by Babylon
586–538	Judah's exile in Babylon
561	Release of King Jehoiachin from prison in Babylon
539	Cyrus II of Persia captures Babylon
538	First return of Jews to Jerusalem
516	Temple rebuilding completed
478	Esther and Mordecai rise in the Persian court
458	Ezra's return to Jerusalem from Babylon
445	Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem from Babylon
445–???	Walls of Jerusalem rebuilt
433	Nehemiah's visit to Babylon & return to Jerusalem

*From the ESV Study Bible

| 6 |

Wisdom Books | Job & Psalms

Brief Introduction to Wisdom Literature

In our English Bibles there are five books that separate the historical books from the prophetic books. They are called the Wisdom Books. They are *Job*, *Psalms*, *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes*, and *Song of Solomon*. While the historical books and prophetic books cover much of the same time period (the united and divided monarchies, exile, and return), the time periods covered in the wisdom books are more scattered. The dates of composition and dates of each book's events will be covered individually.

When looking at the content of the wisdom books, two types of literature should be distinguished: *proverbial wisdom* and *contemplative wisdom*. Proverbial wisdom is written in concise, plain statements which contain guidelines for spiritual wellbeing or observations about life. Quite obviously, this would include the book of Proverbs.

Contemplative wisdom is broader. It is written in the forms of monologues, dialogues, or narratives. The book of Job is a combination of narrative and dialogue. Psalms is a unique book of Hebrew songs and poetry, but could be described as a collection of monologues (mostly prayers) and proverbial sayings. Ecclesiastes is a monologue containing poetry and proverbs as well. Song of Solomon is a dialogue between two lovers as they express their desire for one another. Notice that both forms of wisdom writing are often contained within a single work.

The purpose of biblical wisdom literature is to reflect on and inform "that orientation which allows one to live in harmonious accord with God's ordering of the world."* In other words, it teaches us how to live a life that pleases God because it shows us how to live wisely by following God's general and specific scriptural rules.

*ESV Study Bible, *Poetic and Wisdom Literature*

Job

Author | Unknown

Date of Composition | Sometime between 2000 and 500 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Job, Job's Loss of Everything, Job's Three Friends, Elihu, Job's Restoration

Important Themes | The Sovereignty of God, The Problem of Suffering

The book records the painful experiences of a man named Job, who most likely lived during the Patriarchal period (ca. 2000 B.C.). With permission from God, Satan attacks Job in every facet of his life. He takes his property and children, assaults his health, and drives Job to the point where he curses the day he was born.

The rest of the narrative records the dialogues between Job and four of his acquaintances. They wrestle back and forth with why this has happened to Job. Job seeks to justify himself, while his friends assume he must have done something wrong to bring about this judgment upon himself. During these conversations, the themes of God's sovereignty and human suffering are explored.

In the end, God himself speaks and, in a sense, they are all wrong. Job must repent of his self-righteousness, while the LORD also rebukes the three friends for giving Job false counsel. God then restores all of Job's fortune and he ends up with twice as many riches and possessions as he had before. He is also given a new family.

Here is an overview outline of Job: **Prologue: Job Attacked By Satan** (chs. 1-2) **Dialogue: Job Interacts With His Three Friends** (chs. 3-31) **Dialogue: Elihu Rebukes Job And His Friends** (chs. 32-37), **Dialogue: The LORD Answers Job** (chs. 38-42), **Epilogue: God Restores Job** (ch. 42).

Psalms

Author | Various

Date | Beginning ca. 1400's B.C., Collected by 200's B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | God, David, Various Other Psalmists

Important Themes | Monotheism, God's Faithfulness, Sin & Suffering, Praises, Laments

The book of Psalms is a collection of songs/hymns/prayers with a variety of themes. Many of the psalms were authored by David. However, other authors contributed as well. It was essentially the hymnal for the nation of Israel.

Psalms is the longest book of the Bible both in terms of number of chapters and word count. It contains both the longest (ch. 119) and shortest (ch. 117) chapters in Scripture. Psalm 117 is also the midpoint of the entire Bible - there are 594 chapters before it and 594 chapters after it.

In terms of structure, outlining is nearly impossible. Rather, the Hebrew text divides the book into five sections: **Book 1** (chs. 1-41), **Book 2** (chs. 42-72), **Book 3** (chs. 73-89), **Book 4** (chs. 90-106), and **Book 5** (chs. 107-150). Each book ends with a doxology that may or may not have originally been a part of that particular psalm.

Literary Features in Psalms

The Psalms employ many different types of literary features that are helpful to recognize when reading and discerning the meaning of each psalm.

Metaphor | An implied comparison that does not use the formula *like* or *as*.

Example | “The Lord is my shepherd” (Ps. 23:1).

Simile | A figure of speech in which a writer compares two things using *like* or *as*.

Example | “He is like a tree planted by streams of water” (Ps. 1:3).

Personification | A figure of speech in which human attributes are given to something nonhuman, such as animals, objects, or abstract qualities.

Example | *Light* and *truth* are personified as guides in Psalm 43:3.

Hyperbole | A figure of speech in which a writer consciously exaggerates for the sake of effect; usually that effect is emotional, and thus, loosely put, hyperbole usually expresses emotional truth rather than literal truth.

Example | “My tears have been my food day and night” (Ps. 42:3).

Apostrophe | A figure of speech in which the writer addresses someone absent as though present and capable of responding. By slight extension, an apostrophe might be an address to something nonhuman as though it were human and capable of responding, even if the speaker is in the presence of the object.

Example | The psalmist in Psalm 148:3 commands the sun, moon, and stars to praise God as if they can hear him and respond.

Synonymous Parallelism | The first line of a psalm is repeated/restated in several different ways.

Example | “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers” (Psalm 1:1).

Antithetic Parallelism | The thought of a line or set of lines is contrasted with the first.

Example | “For not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm save them, but your right hand and your arm, and the light of your face, for you delighted in them” (Psalm 44:3).

Climactic Parallelism | The lines of the psalm develop a thought or key word.

Example | Psalm 29:3-9

Chiasm | The order of a line is reversed in the following line. This is a device that is frequently used in Hebrew poetry. [A, B, B, A] It is sometimes difficult to identify in English, since translation often requires changing word order.

Acrostic | The poetic practice of opening each line with a different letter of the alphabet. This also can only be seen in the Hebrew text. Psalm 25 is an example of an acrostic.

Types of Psalms

Wisdom | These psalms have themes in common with the rest of Wisdom Books; i.e., they instruct the readers in how to live in accordance with God's will.

Example | Psalm 1

Lamentation | Psalms of lament express the need for God's help because of trouble. Some psalms are laments on behalf of the entire community, while others are individual.

Example | Psalm 54

Penitential | A psalm of repentance and grief over sin.

Example | Psalm 51

Kingship/Royal/Enthronement | Psalms of this nature deal with either God as the universal king of the earth (theocratic) or the kingship of the coming Messiah (messianic).

Example | Psalm 2

Thanksgiving | Psalms that thank God for his answer to prayer, deliverance, etc.

Example | Psalm 138

Imprecatory | Prayers that invoke God's wrath against evildoers.

Example | Psalm 137

Praise | Songs that call God's people to admire his character and deeds.

Example | Psalm 8

The Life of King Solomon

Solomon, the son of the great King David, reigned over the united kingdom of Israel from 971-931 B.C. His kingship is a tale of two reigns. During the early years of his reign he was known for his great wisdom and trust in the LORD. His kingship brought what is often called a golden age in Israel - they enjoyed immense power and fame. Their relationships with surrounding nations were peaceful and the wars that characterized David's kingship were no longer.

However, Solomon would turn away from the true God of Israel when he began getting involved with many foreign women. These women drew Solomon's heart into idolatry. As a result of Solomon's wickedness, God split the nation in two; and turmoil would be the norm throughout the rest of Israel and Judah's history leading up to captivity. (cf. 1 Kings 1-11)

The wisdom writings of Solomon come from the early years of his reign (likely the first twenty or so years), when his heart was close to God and his wisdom was world renown (cf. 1 Kings 3:12). The Solomonic Writings include: *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes*, and *Song of Solomon*.

Proverbs

Author | Primarily Solomon

Date of Composition | The Early Years of Solomon's Reign

Compiled | ca. 700 B.C. During King Hezekiah's Reign

Important Accounts & Figures | Solomon, Agur, Lemuel

Important Themes | Wisdom, Fear of the LORD, Relationship to God, Others, & Self

The book of Proverbs addresses a variety of practical and useful topics. Wisdom is the overarching theme that is applied to these various subjects. In Proverbs, wisdom means "the fear of the LORD" (cf. 1:7). The writers are not attempting to instruct their readers in knowledge simply for knowledge's sake. They are trying to work through things that all of us experience with an eye to pleasing the Lord with one's life.

A primary characteristic of the book is the juxtaposition of wisdom with foolishness. Often the writer will explain the blessings and benefits of applying wisdom to one's life and contrast them with the detriments and consequences that come with foolishly disobeying the Lord's word.

Proverbs can be outlined as such: **A Fatherly Invitation to Wisdom** (chs. 1-9), **The Proverbs of Solomon** (chs. 10-22:16), **The Sayings of the Wise** (chs. 22:17-24:34), **Hezekiah's Proverbs of Solomon** (chs. 25-29), **The Words of Agur** (ch. 30), **The Words of Lemuel** (ch. 31).

Ecclesiastes

Author | Solomon

Date of Composition | The Early Years of Solomon's Reign

Important Accounts & Figures | The Preacher

Important Themes | The Depravity of Man, The Vanity of Life, The Fear of God

Ecclesiastes tells of the absolute necessity of fearing and honoring God in a fallen, frustrating, confusing, and fleeting world. The Preacher, the author of the book (traditionally taken as Solomon), wrestles with the question of the meaning of life. He looks to all of the "good" things in the world and notices their vanity and vaporous nature - they are here today and gone tomorrow. If these various disappearing pleasures truly make up "the good life", then life is utterly meaningless.

Despite its seemingly pessimistic tone, Ecclesiastes should not be taken as a negative book. It merely describes in vivid, poetic language customary to Hebrew wisdom literature the worthlessness of a life without God. Without God, all of the things we enjoy in this life and simply temporary pleasures that lull us into judgment. With God, the pleasurable things in life take on their full and intended meaning - gifts from a loving Father meant to point us toward worship of him.

The book is summed up in its last two verses: "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil" (12:13-14).

The outline of the book is as follows: **The Vanities of Life** (chs. 1-4), **Life Under the Sun** (chs. 5-12), **The Problem: Sin** (7:29), **The Conclusion: Fear God** (12:13).

Song of Solomon

Author | Solomon (Possibly Dedicated to Solomon)

Date of Composition | The Early Years of Solomon's Reign

Important Accounts & Figures | The Two Lovers, The Lovers' Longing for Each Other, The Lovers' Marriage to Each Other

Important Themes | Love, Passion, Sexual Desire, Sexual Purity, Fidelity, Marriage

The Song of Solomon (or Song of Songs) is a collection of passionate interactions between a man (a shepherd) and a woman (a shepherdess). The language is highly symbolic and has been the subject of many interpretations - some more plausible than others. A few of the most common interpretations are: 1) it is a symbolic picture of God's love for Israel/the Church; 2) it is a collection of love poems with no logical flow; 3) it is the story of a man and a woman coming together in love. It is best to see the book as the progression of love between a man and the woman he desires.

Song of Solomon celebrates the joy and pleasure of physical and emotional intimacy within the confines of the marriage relationship (cf. 3:5). It was God himself who designed men and women to relate to one another in this way. When God's guidelines for relationships are kept intimacy of any kind is a joy, blessing, and pleasure. This Song is the perfect illustration of that great truth. It celebrates physical and emotional closeness as a gift from God himself.

In accordance with viewing the book as the progression of a relationship between two people (a man and a woman), this is the suggested outline: **The Lovers Long For Each Other** (chs. 1-2), **The Woman Dreams of Marrying the Man** (chs. 3-6:3), **The Lovers Again Express Desire** (chs. 6:4-8:4), **The Lovers Marry and Finally Consummate Their Relationship** (ch. 8:5-14).

Prophetic Books | Pre-Exilic Prophets

The first division of the prophetic books is known as the **Pre-Exilic Prophets**. These men of God preached to, ministered to, and warned the people about impending judgment from God should they continue in their sinful ways. Some of them concentrated on the northern kingdom of Israel, while others largely prophesied in the southern kingdom of Judah. All carried out their ministries before the dreadful Babylonian Captivity of Judah, which began in 605, continued in 597, and culminated with the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Remember, the Pre-Exilic prophets are: *Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*.

Isaiah

Author | Isaiah

Date of Composition | ca. 739 – 681 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Isaiah, Assyria, King Ahaz, King Hezekiah, Babylon

Important Themes | The Emptiness of Religious Ritual, The Powerlessness of Foreign Nations to Thwart God's Plans, The Foolishness of Idolatry, The Judgment of God Upon Sin, The Grace and Mercy of God Upon Repentant Sinners

Often called "The Miniature Bible", Isaiah bears similarities to the structure of Scripture as a whole that makes remembering its content a bit easier than it would otherwise be. It has two major sections: *chs. 1-39* and *chs. 40-66*; even as the Old Testament has 39 books and the New Testament has 27. The first section speaks of God's wrath in judgment, while the second speaks of his mercy and restoration; even as it is sometimes (though erroneously) supposed that the Old Testament is primarily about the wrath of God and the New Testament about his mercy.

Isaiah was called to his prophetic ministry by God in ca. 739 B.C., the year that King Uzziah of Judah died (cf. Isaiah 6:1). His ministry would span the reigns of four kings (cf. Isaiah 1:1, 2 Kings 19). His purpose was to warn the people of Judah of the dangers of turning away from God and trusting in worldly powers. He predicts the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel to the Assyrians, the captivity of the southern kingdom to the Babylonians, and the restoration of God's people under the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Isaiah 1-39

Isaiah 40-55

Isaiah 56-66

Date and Setting	The eighth century B.C. (700s); the Assyrian threat	Prophecies about the sixth century B.C.(500s); the Babylonian exile	Prophecies about all times and occasions until the end
Audience	God's rebellious people craving worldly security	God's defeated people under worldly domination	All who hold fast to God's covenant
Actions	God purifies a remnant of his apostate people through judgment	God consoles his discouraged people in exile	God prepares all of his true people for his promised salvation
Message	"In returning and rest you shall be saved; ... But you were unwilling" (30:15)	"the glory of the Lord shall be revealed" (40:5)	"Keep justice, and do righteousness" (56:1)

*From the ESV Study Bible

Jeremiah

Author | Jeremiah & Baruch (Jeremiah's Scribe)

Date of Composition | ca. 627 – 550 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Jeremiah, Baruch, The Fall of Judah to Babylon

Important Themes | God's Judgment on the Nations, God's Judgment on Judah, Repentance, The New Covenant

Jeremiah is known as "The Weeping Prophet" because of the tumultuous events he records and his mourning over the fate of Jerusalem and Judah. However, this title does not suggest weakness, as Jeremiah endured one of the harshest lives any Old Testament prophet lived. His ministry was a "failure" on all earthly accounts. He was called of God to plead with the people of Judah to repent, knowing that they would not, and would ultimately suffer for their stubbornness at the hands of the Babylonians.

He began his ministry in the thirteenth year of King Josiah's reign - 627 B.C. He prophesied at least until the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. While the book is largely dominated by judgment (both on Judah and on foreign nations), God still reminds his people that a day is coming when he will make a New Covenant with them; one that is better than the Mosaic one because it will result in God's people being redeemed on the inside by receiving new hearts (cf. Jeremiah 31).

The Call of Jeremiah (ch. 1), **Israel's Idolatry** (chs. 2-10), **Opposition to Jeremiah** (chs. 11-20), **Jeremiah Confronts Judah's Leaders** (chs. 21-29), **Restoration is Promised** (chs. 30-33), **Judgment on Judah** (chs. 34-45), **Judgment on the Nations** (chs. 46-51), **The Fall of Jerusalem** (ch. 52).

Lamentations

Author | Traditionally, Jeremiah

Date of Composition | Shortly after 586 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | The Fall of Jerusalem, Judah, Babylon

Important Themes | The Terror of God's Judgment, The Greatness of God's Mercy

Lamentations contains an eyewitness account of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. It is written in the form of 5 poems. The book starts with the despair caused by judgment, and moves toward the hope that God will restore his people to a place of favor. It affirms that the reason why Judah suffered the fate that it did was because of their own sinfulness; and if they would be restored as God had promised, it would only be because of the graciousness of their Lord.

Poem 1 (ch. 1), **Poem 2** (ch. 2), **Poem 3** (ch. 3), **Poem 4** (ch. 4), **Poem 5** (ch. 5).

Hosea

Author | Hosea

Date of Composition | ca. 755 – 710 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Hosea, Gomer (Hosea's Unfaithful Wife)

Important Themes | Israel's Spiritual Adultery, God's Jealousy, God's Judgment

Hosea bears the unflattering designation of "the deathbed prophet of Israel" because he was the last man to prophesy against the northern kingdom before their fall to Assyria in 722 B.C. To illustrate Israel's idolatry, Hosea marries a woman named Gomer, who is unfaithful to him. Gomer's infidelity is compared to the infidelity of Israel. Hosea then gives Israel its final warning of impending doom. Yet the restoration of God's people is still intermingled with these last words of warning.

The Faithfulness of Hosea and the Adultery of Gomer (chs. 1-3), **The Faithfulness of God and the Adultery of Israel** (chs. 4-14).

Joel

Author | Joel

Date of Composition | Late 9th Century B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Joel, The Locust Invasion, The Day of the LORD

Important Themes | The Day of the LORD, Repentance, The Outpouring of God's Spirit

Joel tells of the dreadful coming day of God's wrath known as the Day of the LORD. The book begins by describing an actual locust plague that the people were enduring, then uses that plague to illustrate what the coming day of God's judgment will be like. It is short, but powerful. It is a universal warning to all nations (though special attention is given to Israel, of course) that salvation from God's wrath is only available for those "who [call] on the name of the LORD" (Joel 2:32). There is coming a day when the Lord of the universe will end history and all who have opposed him will reap the consequences of their actions. Joel also prophesied of a time before that end when God would pour out his Spirit on all who called upon him - an occurrence which happened at (and continues to happen since) the Day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2).

The Locust Invasion (ch. 1), **The Day of the LORD** (chs. 2-3).

Amos

Author | Amos

Date of Composition | ca. 793 – 739 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Amos the Shepherd, The Northern Kingdom of Israel

Important Themes | Social Justice, God's Judgment on Israel's Idolatry

"Famous Amos" was a Judean shepherd called to primarily prophesy against the northern kingdom of Israel in the decades before its fall to Assyria (cf. Amos 7:15). He tells of God's displeasure with the people's superficial religious ritual and lack of concern for the people around them. Israel's religion was not influencing how they lived, and so was revealed to be fake. They were merely giving lip service to God. Amos warned the people that should this continue, God would execute judgment.

Judgment on Israel's Neighbors (ch. 1), **Judgment on Israel and Judah** (ch. 2), **Israel's Guilt Before God** (chs. 3-6), **Visions of Judgment** (chs. 7-9).

Prophetic Books | Pre-Exilic Prophets

The remaining Pre-Exilic prophets (along with Hosea, Joel, and Amos) are all Minor Prophets (so named for their relatively short length). While they are shorter than the Pre-Exilic Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations), they are just as powerful as agents of warning to the nations of Israel and Judah.

Obadiah

Author | Obadiah

Date of Composition | ca. 840 B.C. or shortly after 586 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Obadiah, Edom, Judah

Important Themes | The Foolishness of Opposing God's People, Retributive Justice

The book of Obadiah is a pronouncement of judgment on the people of Edom for their opposition to the people of Judah. The people of Edom were descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother, and so were distantly related to the Jews. However, the two groups did not like each other and rarely got along. During an attack on Jerusalem, the Edomites aided Judah's enemies instead of helping their "brothers". For this, and their general betrayal of God's people, God would punish them.

There is debate regarding the specific attack on Jerusalem to which Obadiah refers. The two most probable theories are: 1) Obadiah refers to an attack which took place during the reign of King Jehoram of Judah (2 Chronicles 21:8-20) or 2) Obadiah refers to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. If the first is correct, the book would be dated ca. 840 B.C., with the events it describes occurring just prior to that. If the second is correct, the book would be dated just after 586 B.C., making Obadiah an Exilic rather than a Pre-Exilic Prophet.

Obadiah's outline: **God's Judgment on Edom** (1:1-14), **God's Judgment on the Nations** (1:15-16), **God's Restoration of Israel** (1:17-21)

Jonah

Author | Jonah

Date of Composition | Early to Middle 8th Century B.C. (700's)

Important Accounts & Figures | Jonah, The Repentance of the Ninevites

Important Themes | Rebellion, God's Mercy, Forgiveness, and Patience, Repentance

Jonah prophesied during the reign of King Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25). As a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel, Jonah ministered during a time before Assyria became a major threat to the Jews. Assyria was weakened by various battles and uprisings, and this explains the people of Nineveh's response to the preaching of Jonah.

"The primary purpose of the book of Jonah is to engage readers in theological reflection on the compassionate character of God, and in self-reflection on the degree to which their own character reflects this compassion, to the end that they become vehicles of this compassion in the world that God has made and so deeply cares about."*

It tells of Jonah being called by God to go to Nineveh and preach repentance in the Assyrian capital. Jonah initially flees from this call, and finds himself being thrown into the sea and swallowed whole by a great fish. This affords Jonah the opportunity to reflect upon his resistance and repent of his actions.

He then goes to Nineveh and the people respond positively to his preaching, repenting of their sins. This displeases Jonah and he actually asks God to take his life - thus revealing his own issue of heart. God responds by declaring his desire to be merciful to all who genuinely cry out to him for forgiveness.

The outline of Jonah is as follows: **Fleeing from God's Call** (ch. 1), **Surrendering to God's Call** (ch. 2), **Obeying God's Call** (ch. 3), **Questioning God's Mercy** (ch. 4).

*From the ESV Study Bible

Micah

Author | Micah

Date of Composition | 750-700 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Micah, Israel, Judah, Assyria, Babylon

Important Themes | Justice, Judgment, True Worship

Micah is very similar to Amos in theological content and focus. Both Israel and Judah had become unjust in just about every way. Their religious systems were corrupt and this trickled down into their social and economic lives. The religious leadership was full of hypocrisy, and the people were regularly committing idolatry, acts of violence, and corrupt business practices.

Just as Amos called for true justice and equity based upon authentic faith in God, so Micah calls for reform and repentance. Unfortunately, the people would not listen. Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, actually falls to Assyria during Micah's ministry. All hope is not lost, however, as Micah (as did all the prophets) tells of a time when God will restore his people by sending them a Shepherd-King who will rule in peace forever (Micah 5).

Outline of Micah: **God Testifies of Israel's Guilt** (chs. 1-2), **God Denounces Israel's Practices** (chs. 3-6), **God Promises Israel's Restoration** (ch. 7)

Nahum

Author | Nahum

Date of Composition | ca. 650 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Nahum, The Future Destruction of Nineveh

Important Themes | God's Patience, God's Sovereignty, The Consequences of Sin

Nahum is the tragic conclusion to the book of Jonah. The prophet Nahum wrote about a century after Jonah when Nineveh, the capital of Assyria had returned to its evil and wicked ways. In the time since they had repented under Jonah's preaching, Nineveh had invaded and destroyed Samaria, the capital of Israel and enjoyed tremendous power in other parts of the world as well. Along with this power came a return to their pride, arrogance, and rebellion against the God of Israel. As a result, God pronounced judgment upon the wicked city. God's word would be fulfilled just a few decades later, when Nineveh fell to the Babylonians in 612 B.C.

The book of Nahum: **God's Wrath Against Nineveh** (ch. 1), **The Destruction of Nineveh Predicted** (ch. 2), **A Woeful Lament for Nineveh** (ch. 3).

Habakkuk

Author | Habakkuk

Date of Composition | 640-615 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Habakkuk, The Babylonian Invasion of Judah

Important Themes | God's Justice in Judgment, God's Sovereignty

Habakkuk addresses the question, "How can a righteous God use an unrighteous nation to punish his people?" The prophet foresaw the invasion of the Babylonians that would come upon Judah and wondered about God's character in the matter. He goes back and forth with God because he cannot understand how God is working in these things. God tells Habakkuk that "the just shall live by faith."

Although humans cannot always understand how God is working, we must always remember that we know why God is working: he is working all things together for the good of his people and the dispersion of his glory.

Outline of Habakkuk: **Habakkuk's First Complaint and God's First Response** (ch. 1), **Habakkuk's Second Complaint and God's Second Response** (ch. 2), **Habakkuk's Prayer** (ch. 3).

Zephaniah

Author | Zephaniah

Date of Composition | 640-625 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Zephaniah, Judah, The Coming Day of the Lord

Important Themes | Judgment, Restoration, The Day of the Lord

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah of Judah (640-609 B.C.). Having seen their brothers to the north fall to the Assyrians, the people of Judah should have repented of their turning away from God, but they did not. They continued their downward spiral into idolatry, injustice, and generally wicked lifestyles.

The prophet warns that because of this, the Day of the Lord is coming upon them; and not only them, but all the nations of the world. This speaks to a two-fold prophecy. The first part refers to Judah's coming fall to Babylon, on which day the Lord would judge his people in righteousness. The second part looks forward to the end of the age, when God will judge all nations at this return. The only way to escape the judgment of the day of the Lord is to trust in the God of Israel for salvation.

Zephaniah can be outlined as follows: **God's Judgment is Coming on Judah** (ch. 1), **God's Judgment is Coming on the Nations** (ch. 2), **God's Mercy is Available through Repentance** (ch. 3).

Exilic Prophets

The two Exilic Prophets are both Major Prophets (along with Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Lamentations), and are two of the most difficult books of the Bible to interpret. They are *Ezekiel* and *Daniel*. Remember, these men ministered to the people of Israel during the 70 year captivity known as the Babylonian exile; which began with the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

Ezekiel

Author | Ezekiel

Date of Composition | 593 - 571 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Ezekiel, God, Judah, Foreign Nations

Important Themes | God's Holiness, God's Sovereignty, Judgment, Restoration

Ezekiel was both a prophet and priest who was taken away from Judah by the Babylonians with a group of exiles in 597 B.C. Since this was before the fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel did warn about that coming disaster, but the majority of his prophetic ministry took place during the exile. As an exile himself, Ezekiel had a unique opportunity to speak to the people of Judah where they were. Yet, his messages are not sugar-coated in any sense. Like the rest of God's faithful prophets, he told the people what they needed to hear, while also reassuring them of God's faithfulness.

The book of Ezekiel is a profoundly God-centered piece of literature. The prophet reminds the people that it was for his glory that God set them aside as his elect nation in the first place. It would be for his glory that he would bring them back from exile as well (cf. 36:22-23). His visions of God recorded throughout offer a glimpse at the majesty and holiness of God, while at the same time providing difficulties of interpretation.

Judgment on Jerusalem (chs. 1-24), **Judgment on Foreign Nations** (chs. 25-32), **The Blessings of Future Restoration** (chs. 33-48).

Daniel

Author | Daniel

Date of Composition | 605 - 536 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar, King Belshazzar

Important Themes | God's Sovereignty, Daniel's Visions, Faithful Living in Exile

Daniel was taken away to Babylon even before Ezekiel in 605 B.C. While Ezekiel apparently lived among and served the people, Daniel was chosen to serve in King Nebuchadnezzar's court. There he remained faithful to God and warned Nebuchadnezzar about his end. When the Persians conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. Daniel was again given a position of power.

The latter half of Daniel contains visions of future judgment and restoration, often interpreted as indicating some of the events of the end of history. Daniel's themes are often alluded to or directly referenced in the apocalyptic book of Revelation in the New Testament. While shorter than the rest of the Major Prophets (with the exception of Lamentations), Daniel is a fascinating read - mixing historical accounts with supernatural visions of the future.

Outline of Daniel: **Daniel and His Friends in the Babylonian Court** (chs. 1-6), **Daniel's Prophetic Visions** (chs. 7-12)

Post-Exilic Prophets

There are only three Post-Exilic Prophets and they are all Minor Prophets. They are *Haggai*, *Zechariah*, and *Malachi*. These men carried out their ministries after the Persians allowed the Jews to return to their homeland beginning in 539 B.C.

Haggai

Author | Haggai

Date of Composition | ca. 520 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Haggai, Zerubbabel, Darius, Rebuilding the Temple

Important Themes | Obedience, Completing the Temple Work

When the first group of Jews returned to their homeland in 539/8 B.C. they immediately began working to rebuild the Temple and thus restore Jerusalem's former glory. However, as the book of Ezra notes, opposition arose, and the work to rebuild the Temple ceased around 530 B.C. God's Temple remained unfinished for ten years, before Haggai (and Zechariah) motivated the people to continue the work in 520 B.C. How could God's people live in lavish houses while God's earthly dwelling place remained unfinished? This is Haggai's message to the people. The Temple was completed ca. 516 B.C.

Haggai's Outline: **The Command to Rebuild** (ch. 1:1-11), **The People Obey** (ch. 1:12-15), **The Glory of the Temple Described** (ch. 2:1-9), **A Call to Obedience and Faithfulness** (ch. 2:10-23).

Zechariah

Author | Zechariah

Date of Composition | ca. 520 B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Zechariah, The Rebuilding of the Temple

Important Themes | Repentance, Holiness, Obedience, Worship

Ministering during the same time as Haggai, Zechariah encouraged the people of God to purify themselves in preparation for the completion of the Temple. A finished Temple would mean nothing if the people were not worshipping God with sincerity and authenticity. He warns them against acting as their ancestors did - disobeying God and falling into idolatry. The latter portion of Zechariah kindles Messianic expectation, as the eternal Davidic ruler is predicted to reign over all the earth.

Oracles and Visions (chs. 1-8), **The Coming Davidic King** (chs. 9-14)

Malachi

Author | Malachi

Date of Composition | 400's B.C.

Important Accounts & Figures | Malachi, A Call to Repentance

Important Themes | Injustice, Repentance, Messianic Expectation, Disobedience

Malachi owns the distinction of being the last (and latest) book of the Old Testament. Under the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah the Temple had been completed. However, this did not usher in the Messianic age that the people expected. Very quickly the spiritual state of the nation again declined. The priesthood was corrupt, worship had become apathetic, divorce was widespread, the needy were neglected, and the people were not giving their resources to God in the form of tithes. Malachi is the last Old Testament prophet to once again call the people back to God. At the end of his writing Malachi predicts the coming of John the Baptist and Jesus. With the close of this work, the Old Testament canon was completed and God would inspire no further Scripture for over 400 years until the coming of the Messiah, Jesus.

Rebuke of the Priests (chs. 1-2), **The Messengers of the Lord** (ch. 2:17-3:5), **Robbing God** (ch. 3:6-15) **The Righteous and the Wicked Distinguished** (ch. 3:16-18), **The Coming Day of the LORD** (ch 4).

Introduction to the New Testament

The Intertestamental Period

The approximately 400 years between the last writings of the Old Testament and the beginning events of the New are often called the “400 silent years.” This is because there was no new authoritative inscripturated revelation from God. However, this does not mean that God was not at work in the world. In fact, he was continuing his plan to ready the world for the coming of the Savior, Jesus Christ.

This can be seen in world events that led up to the first century A.D. God would bring rulers over the nation of Israel that would pave the way for the Messiah, making the cultural, political, and religious climate perfect for his advent.

Recall that during the last events of the Old Testament, the Persian Empire was ruling. It was the Persians who defeated the Babylonians and let the Jews return to their homeland to rebuild their temple and city. This occurred in 539 B.C.

The Persian Period

The Persian Empire ruled the land of Israel from 539 – 331 B.C. During this time the Jews enjoyed relative freedom. As the Old Testament records, they rebuilt Jerusalem and built the Second Temple. Persecution and difficulty did exist (such as in the book of Esther), but Israelite life was generally without incident.

The Hellenistic (Greek) Period

In the late 330s B.C. Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire, defeating Darius III in several key battles. This gave the Greeks control of the land of Israel. Alexander was intent on spreading Greek culture and philosophy throughout his empire; and one of the results of this was that the Greek language became prominent all across the known world.

When Alexander died, his kingdom split amongst his four generals. The land of Israel came under the control of Ptolemy I, who ruled from Egypt, ca. 320 B.C. During this time the Jews continued to enjoy religious and political freedom. However, there was constant conflict between the Ptolemaic Empire and the Seleucid Empire (reigning in the area of Syria). In 198 B.C. the Seleucids took control of Palestine from the Ptolemies, and were not nearly as tolerant toward the Jews. The Israelites were forbidden to practice their religion and their temple was desecrated. Ridicule and persecution then became the norm in Jewish life.

The Hasmonean (Maccabean) (Jewish) Period

Of course, this lifestyle of persecution and religious oppression did not sit well with the Jews. So, under the initial leadership of an old priest named Mattathias, the Jews revolted. When Mattathias died, his son Judas (called “Maccabaeus”) took over as leader and the Jews won their independence in 164 B.C.

During this time of independence, the Hasmonean family of priests ruled. However, the family quickly became corrupt – so much so that Jewish leaders asked the Romans (who had since supplanted the Greeks as the great world empire) to come restore order. Pompey, the Roman general at the time, did so, but also initiated Roman rule. This occurred in 63 B.C., and Jewish “independence” was short lived.

The Roman Period

The Romans ruled Israel throughout the New Testament time period and into the next few centuries. Under Roman rule, the empire experienced what is often referred to as *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace). This meant that, generally speaking, there was political, social, and religious stability. Rome also built an extensive system of roads, which enabled travelling for business easier and quicker. The church would subsequently take advantage of these roads as the gospel spread quickly throughout the Roman empire.

Intertestamental Period Timeline

539–331 B.C.	The Persian Period
331–164 B.C.	The Hellenistic Period
164–63 B.C.	The Hasmonean Period
63–70 A.D.	The Roman Period*

*The Romans continued to rule the land of Israel after a revolt in 70 A.D. However, by this time the New Testament was being written and thus the “Intertestamental” period was over.

Religious Groups of the New Testament

Several religious groups developed during the Intertestamental time period and were operating during the ministry of Jesus and the writing of the New Testament.

The Essenes

The Essenes were a separated group of people who lived communally and shared all things in common. They are not mentioned in the New Testament. According to one historical source, they mostly resided near the area of the Dead Sea. It is probable, then, that some (if not all) of the Dead Sea Scrolls are a product of this community. So, even though they are not mentioned in the Bible their influence is still felt by biblical scholars and readers of the Old Testament.

The Sadducees

This group consisted of priestly families who were generally rich. They were the rulers of the Temple, overseeing its practices and rules. Only the Torah (the Pentateuch) was believed to be Scripture from God. Thus they did not hold to many beliefs that other religious groups of the time held (i.e. the resurrection of the dead, cf. Mark 12:18). Jesus interacts with Sadducean leaders occasionally in the gospels.

The Pharisees

The Pharisees are the most visible Jewish religious group in the New Testament. However, they were likely the minority in terms of sheer numbers. Despite this minority status, they exerted the majority of influence on the thinking and beliefs of the common people. They mostly lived in Jerusalem.

They were intensely concerned with maintaining a righteous status before God by observing the laws of the Old Testament. It is this self-righteousness that Jesus often attacks during his ministry.

Scribes and Rabbis

These men studied the Old Testament vigorously and taught their interpretations to the common people in the local synagogues. The scribes are often mentioned along with the Pharisees as opponents of Jesus during his teaching ministry.

The Content of the New Testament

There are four divisions of the books of the New Testament. They are:

Gospels

Historical

Epistles

Apocalyptic Literature

The *Gospels* contain the story of Jesus' life on earth. They each tell his story from a unique vantage point and with a specific purpose. The Gospels include the books of:

Matthew

Mark

Luke

John

The books of *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke* are known as the *Synoptic Gospels* because they follow the same general order and are similar in content.

The Gospels contain history, yet are given a special designation because they chronicle the life of Jesus. So, there is only one book of the New Testament labeled as a *historical book*. It is the book of:

Acts

The *Epistles* are letters written by church leaders to various church communities or individuals. The New Testament epistles are:

Romans

1 Corinthians

2 Corinthians

Galatians

Ephesians

Philippians

Colossians

1 Thessalonians

2 Thessalonians

1 Timothy

2 Timothy

Titus

Philemon

Hebrews

James

1 Peter

2 Peter

1 John

2 John

3 John

Jude

Those letters written by the Apostle Paul are designated as *Pauline Epistles*. The Pauline Epistles include *Romans – Philemon*. The others are called the *General Epistles*. These are *Hebrews – Jude*.

The one *apocalyptic* piece of literature in the New Testament is the book of:

Revelation

It contains visions and scenes of how God will end history upon the return of Jesus.

The New Testament contains 27 books and 260 chapters in English. It is the fulfillment and completion of the Old Testament. In the Scriptures of the Old Testament, God was preparing the nation of Israel for the coming of the Savior, who would glorify God by redeeming his people from their sin. On the pages of the New, this coming is a reality. God's promised Deliverer had arrived; and the world would never be the same.

| 12 |

The Synoptic Gospels

Why Four Gospels?

The fact that there are four different Gospels has often confused many readers of the Bible. Why are there four different accounts of the life of Jesus? Are they different? If they are not different, then why are there four of them? These questions, and others, have often plagued the minds of sincere and critical readers alike. The answer to these inquires lies, in part, in the fact that the Gospels are not biographies in the modern sense. The authors make no attempt to cover every detail of the life of Jesus. In fact, most of the earthly life of Christ is not covered in any of them. Only the first and last few years of his life are even treated. It is best to see each Gospel as a selected historical narrative with a theological purpose. Each author deliberately chose real events from the life of Jesus of Nazareth to convey specific theological truths to specific audiences. As with studying the rest of Scripture, knowing the intent of the author and his audience is crucial to understanding the meaning and application of the Gospel text.

Matthew

Author | Matthew

Date of Composition | ca. 50s-60s A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | Jesus, John the Baptist, The Disciples, The Scribes, The Pharisees, The Sadducees, The Romans

Gospel Vantage Point | Jesus is Messiah/King

The book of Matthew was written by a Jew with a Jewish audience in mind. It seeks to show that Jesus of Nazareth is the long awaited Messiah/Deliverer of Israel. It records his birth along with a genealogy intended to show that he came from the line of King David. It then immediately moves to the three year ministry of Jesus when he was around 30 years of age. Matthew structures his presentation of this ministry around five major discourses: the Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5-7), the Commissioning of the Apostles (ch. 10), the Parables of the Kingdom (ch. 13), Child-like Faith (ch. 18), and the Olivet Discourse (chs. 24-25). Intermingled with these teachings of Jesus are accounts of his ministry of healing and miracles.

An outline of Matthew: **Birth Narrative** (chs. 1-2), **Preparation for Ministry** (chs. 3-4), **Beginning of Ministry** (ch. 4), **The Sermon on the Mount** (chs. 5-7), **Healing Ministry** (chs. 8-9), **Commissioning of the Apostles** (ch. 10), **General Ministry** (chs. 11-12), **Parables of the Kingdom** (ch. 13), **General Ministry** (chs. 14-17),

Discourse on Child-like Faith (ch. 18), **General Ministry** (chs. 19-23), **Olivet Discourse** (chs. 24-25), **The Passion** (chs. 26-27), **The Resurrection** (ch. 28).

Mark

Author | John Mark

Date of Composition | ca. 50s-60s A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | Jesus, John the Baptist, The Disciples, The Scribes, The Pharisees, The Sadducees, The Romans

Gospel Vantage Point | Jesus is the Perfect Servant

The gospel of Mark is considered by many scholars to have been the first gospel written. It contains no birth narrative and is the shortest and most “fast paced” of the Synoptics. It is characterized by the use of the word εὐθὺς, which is usually translated as “immediately.” This word, which keeps the narrative swiftly moving along, occurs some 40 times in Mark’s short work. The Apostle Peter’s preaching is likely the source of information Mark used to compile his accounts. Mark seems to target a Roman audience, as he displays Jesus’ amazing servanthood despite his being God. This is highlighted by the fact that a Roman centurion recognized his divinity upon his death.

Mark’s Outline: **Preparation for Ministry** (ch. 1), **Ministry in Galilee** (chs. 2-6) **Ministry Beyond Galilee** (chs. 6-8), **Moving Toward and in Jerusalem** (chs. 8-16)

Luke

Author | Luke

Date of Composition | Early 60s A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | Jesus, John the Baptist, The Disciples, The Scribes, The Pharisees, The Sadducees, The Romans

Gospel Vantage Point | Jesus is the Perfect Man

Luke writes his Gospel in the form of a letter to a man named Theophilus. Theophilus’ identity is not known, but it is likely that he was a Gentile of great social standing, as Luke gives him the title “most excellent.” The broader audience consisted of other Gentile Christians like Theophilus. Luke’s birth narrative is the one with which most readers are familiar. He is very detailed and is regarded by scholars as an excellent historian. As a colleague of Paul, Luke had access to all of the information he needed.

The Births of John and Jesus (chs. 1-2), **Jesus’ Preparation** (chs. 3-4), **Jesus in Galilee** (chs. 4-9), **Jesus’ Journey to Jerusalem** (chs. 9-19), **Jesus’ Passion in Jerusalem** (chs. 19-23), **Jesus’ Resurrection** (ch. 24)

| 13 |

The Johannine Gospel

The Johannine Gospel

John's Gospel is unique in that it is not categorized with the other three as Synoptics. It does not follow the general timeline of the first three gospels; though this does not mean that any of John's content contradicts that of the Synoptics. Rather, he carefully crafts a theological reflection of the life of Jesus that is intended to convince people to believe in Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the World. All four Gospels should be seen as complimentary rather than contradictory

John

Author | John

Date of Composition | ca. 80s A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | Jesus, John the Baptist, The Disciples, The Scribes, The Pharisees, The Sadducees, The Romans

Gospel Vantage Point | Jesus is the Son of God

John puts a heavy emphasis on the deity of Jesus Christ in his Gospel. He intends to prove that Jesus is God and so provide a basis for calling people to believe in him as Savior and Lord. He presents seven of Jesus' greatest miracles and seven "I AM" statements for this very purpose. It is the latest Gospel (in terms of date of composition), and contains many of the most beloved verses of Scripture, including John 3:16.

*Seven Signs Pointing to Jesus as the Messiah**

The first half of John's Gospel features Jesus' demonstration of his messianic identity by way of seven selected signs (cf. [20:30-31](#)):

Changing water into wine [2:1-11](#)

Healing the official's son [4:46-54](#)

Healing the invalid [5:1-15](#)

Feeding the multitude [6:5–13](#)

Walking on the water* [6:16–21](#)

Healing the man born blind [9:1–7](#)

Raising Lazarus [11:1–44](#)

*John does not explicitly identify this event as a sign.

*From the ESV Study Bible

Jesus' "I Am" Statements*

Absolute "I am" statements [6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 18:5](#)

Metaphorical "I am" statements

1. I am the bread of life [6:35, 48, 51](#)

2. I am the light of the world [8:12; 9:5](#)

3. I am the door of the sheep [10:7, 9](#)

4. I am the good shepherd [10:11, 14](#)

5. I am the resurrection and the life [11:25](#)

6. I am the way, the truth, and the life [14:6](#)

7. I am the true vine [15:1](#)

* From the ESV Study Bible

Signs Proving Jesus' Deity (chs. 1-12), **The Farewell Discourse** (chs. 13-17) **The Passion** (chs. 18-19), **The Resurrection and Appearances** (chs. 20-21)

The Unique Nature of the Book of Acts

Because it contains the account of the birth of the church, the book of Acts includes many passages that are very miraculous in nature. Care is needed to discern and interpret what occurrences in Acts should be expected to occur regularly today, and what things are restricted to this special point in history.

It must be noted that the events of a miraculous nature in the book of Acts were just that: miraculous. There were not commonplace or normative, or else they wouldn't be miraculous. The great and mighty deeds performed by the apostles of the church were "signs of a true apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12); indicating their unique authority as founders of the church. As such, many of their miracles should not be expected to occur with regularity (if, in the same manner, at all) today.

However, the God who worked through these mighty men is the same God we serve today. So, the book of Acts, in addition to recording the tremendous spread of the gospel, is an example for us of the power and might of our God. We serve a Savior who can do all things, heal all infirmities, and save all people. God is still a God of miracles.

Acts

Author | Luke

Date of Composition | Early 60s A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | Pentecost, The Martyrdom of Stephen, The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus, The Jerusalem Council, Peter, Paul

Important Themes | The Coming of the Holy Spirit, The Universality of the Gospel

Acts is the sequel to the Gospel of Luke. It begins with the ascension of Jesus to heaven, and the apostles and other followers of Christ gathering in Jerusalem. On the day of Pentecost (a Jewish holiday), this small group of believers experience the first coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell believers. This miraculous event was accompanied by the ability of the apostles to speak in tongues (lit. languages); i.e., they were able to speak the languages of all of the different people groups who had gathered in Jerusalem, despite having no prior knowledge of these dialects. This was a sign to all people: the Spirit had come, and he was empowering the church to spread the gospel of Jesus around the world.

The account then follows Peter through his early days in ministry, noting a few of his sermons and subsequent persecution. The narrative then shifts to the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who would later be renamed Paul. The remainder of the book follows Paul on his three missionary journeys, until he is arrested and sent to Rome for a trial before Caesar. The book ends with Paul in house arrest, awaiting his appeal.

Paul's First Missionary Journey ([Acts 13:4–14:26](#))

c. A.D. 46–47

Barnabas and Paul first visited Barnabas's home region of Cyprus before sailing to the southern region of Asia Minor. When they reached Perga in Pamphylia, John Mark left the group and returned to Jerusalem. Making their way to Antioch (in Pisidia), Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, Paul and Barnabas were driven out of each city by jealous Jewish religious leaders. Later they returned by the same route, strengthening the new churches as they went. From Attalia they set sail for their home in Antioch of Syria.



Paul's Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36–18:22)

C. A.D. 49–51

Paul and Silas revisited the places in Asia Minor where Paul had preached on his first journey (cf. [map](#)), while Barnabas took John Mark and sailed to Cyprus. Paul and Silas visited Derbe, Lystra, and Antioch in Pisidia. From there Paul and Silas traveled to Troas, where Paul received a vision of a man from Macedonia calling to them. Crossing into Europe, they passed through several towns along the Egnatian Way and traveled to the cities of Athens and Corinth in southern Greece. Then, sailing to Ephesus and Caesarea, they visited the church in Jerusalem before returning to Antioch of Syria.



Paul's Third Missionary Journey ([Acts 18:22–21:17](#))

c. A.D. 52–57

Paul's third missionary journey traversed much the same ground as his second (cf. [map](#)). Passing through Galatia and Phrygia, he proceeded directly to the great port city of Ephesus. After three years of preaching and teaching there, Paul traveled again through Macedonia and Achaia, strengthening the believers, and then finished with a visit to Jerusalem.



*Maps from the ESV Study Bible

An outline of the Book of Acts: **The Ascension of Jesus** (ch. 1), **The Coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost** (ch. 2), **Peter's Ministry** (chs. 3-5), **The Martyrdom of Stephen** (chs. 6-7), **The Persecution by Saul** (ch. 8), **The Conversion of Saul** (ch. 9), **Peter's Ministry** (chs. 10-12), **Paul's Ministry** (chs. 13-28)

| 15 |

Epistles | Pauline General Letters

The General Letters of Paul

The books of the New Testament that make up the general letters of Paul include: *Romans*, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, *Galatians*, and *1 & 2 Thessalonians*. These are letters that Paul wrote to a church or group of churches instead of specific people. He also wrote these letters while a free man, before his Roman imprisonment.

Romans

Author | Paul

Date of Composition | ca. 57 A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | Paul, The Roman Church

Important Themes | The Total Depravity of Man, The Righteousness of God, Justification by Faith Alone, The Sovereignty of God in Salvation, The Universal Offer of the Gospel, Personal Holiness as Evidence of Salvation

Paul's letter to the Romans his longest one in the New Testament. It contains some of the most valuable theologically reasoned material in the Bible. His purpose is to explain the gospel, both in its amazing simplicity and unfathomable depth. He focuses on the sinfulness of humanity and the righteousness of God. As sinners in danger of receiving God's righteous wrath, all humans need a Savior – one who is provided for us in the person of Jesus Christ. His salvation is received by grace alone through faith alone. No amount of adherence to Mosaic Law will do. This salvation is available to anyone in the world: *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved* (Rom. 10:13), and it transforms the life of the one who receives it, producing holiness.

The Unrighteousness of All People (chs. 1-3), **Justification by Faith** (chs. 4-5), **Dead to Sin, Released from the Law** (chs. 6-7), **In the Spirit** (ch. 8), **God's Sovereign Election** (ch. 9), **Salvation Available to All** (ch. 10), **Israel's Remnant** (ch. 11), **Living Sacrifices** (ch. 12), **Submission to Authority** (ch. 13), **Living by the Example of Christ** (chs. 14-15), **Personal Greetings** (ch. 16)

1 Corinthians

Author | Paul

Date of Composition | ca. 55 A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | Paul, The Church at Corinth

Important Themes | Unity, Purity, Orderly Worship, Spiritual Gifts, Love, Resurrection

1 Corinthians is a letter to the believers who lived in the city of Corinth. Paul had planted the church there on his second missionary journey, only to discover during his third that the church in Corinth had fallen into intense worldliness. There were divisions forming in the church, and sexual immorality was running rampant. Chaos characterized their worship meetings, and even the spiritual gifts were being misused. So far had they defected from Paul's teaching, that there were some who were teaching that there is no such thing as resurrection from the dead. Because of these grave theological and practical errors, Paul writes a very heavy-handed letter to correct the church there.

Divisions in the Church (chs. 1-3), **Apostolic Example** (ch. 4), **Sexual Immorality Addressed** (chs. 5-7), **Food Offered to Idols** (ch. 8), **Apostolic Example** (ch. 9), **Idolatry Addressed** (ch. 10), **Issues of Public Worship** (ch. 11), **Spiritual Gifts** (chs. 12-14), **The Importance of Physical Resurrection** (ch. 15), **Final Greetings** (ch. 16)

2 Corinthians

Author | Paul

Date of Composition | ca. 56 A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | Paul, The Church at Corinth

Important Themes | True Apostleship, Suffering, God as Comforter, Giving

2 Corinthians was written about a year after Paul wrote his first letter to the believers in Corinth. It is an intensely personal letter that focuses on Paul's authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Because Paul had endured so much suffering for the sake of the faith, others had begun accusing him of being a fake. Paul counters with a treatise on the true meaning of apostleship, the role of his suffering for the sake of the gospel, and absurdity of his opponents' claims. Intermixed with this defense are various passages dealing with issues in the Corinthian church.

The God of Comfort (chs. 1-2), **The New Covenant** (ch. 3), **Encouragements for Ministry** (chs. 4-7), **Encouragement to Give** (chs. 8-9) **Paul's Defense** (chs. 10-12)

Galatians

Author | Paul

Date of Composition | ca. 49 A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | Paul, The Group of Galatian Churches

Important Themes | Christ as Our Substitute, The Exclusivity of the Gospel, The Uselessness of the Law to Save, Justification by Faith, Adoption, Spirit-Filled Living

It is possible that Galatians was the first New Testament book ever written (with the other possibility being *James*), and it is certainly the first Pauline letter. One would expect it, then, to clarify the gospel in no uncertain terms. It does just that. Written to churches in the area of modern day Turkey, Galatians lays out the gospel clearly for all to see. There is only one gospel, it is received by faith, apart from the law, and it frees us to serve and worship Christ in holiness. The theme of the letter is found clearly in 2:16: *a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.*

No Other Gospel (ch. 1), **Justification by Faith** (ch. 2), **The Role of the Law** (ch. 3), **Adoption as sons of God** (ch. 4), **Spirit-Filled Living** (chs. 5-6)

1 Thessalonians

Author | Paul

Date of Composition | ca. 51 A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | Paul, The Church at Thessalonica

Important Themes | The Death and Resurrection of Jesus as Our Hope, Living Holy Lives in Light of the Lord's Second Coming

1 Thessalonians was written to a group of new believers to address concerns they had regarding the second coming of Jesus. Would those who have already died participate in the Lord's reign? How and when would Jesus come again? Paul gives answers to these questions, reminding them that any proper focus on the return of Jesus must produce lives of holiness as we await our coming King.

Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians (ch. 1), **Paul and the Thessalonians** (ch. 2), **Timothy's Encouraging Report** (ch. 3), **Holiness in Light of the Lord's Second Coming** (ch. 4), **The Day of the Lord** (ch. 5)

2 Thessalonians

Author | Paul

Date of Composition | ca. 51 A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | Paul, The Church at Thessalonica

Important Themes | The Return of Jesus Christ

2 Thessalonians, like 1 Thessalonians, is all about the second coming of Jesus. It was written shortly after Paul's first letter to these believers, and encourages them to not be deceived into thinking that Jesus had already returned, but also to not be so caught up in his return that they fail to honor him with their lives. This is one of the few books of Scripture that gives us an idea of what the Antichrist (the man of lawlessness) will be like. He will proclaim himself to be God and profane all that is holy; but he will be decisively defeated with Jesus returns in righteousness.

Judgment at Christ's Coming (ch. 1), **The Man of Lawlessness** (ch. 2), **Remain Steadfast and Ready for Jesus' Return** (ch. 3)

| 16 |

Epistles | Pauline Captivity Letters

The Captivity Letters of Paul

The books of *Ephesians*, *Philippians*, *Colossians*, and *Philemon* are known as the Captivity or Prison Epistles of Paul. This is because he wrote them while under house arrest in Rome. They were all written within a year or two of each other, and share many themes accordingly.

Ephesians

Author | Paul

Date of Composition | ca. 60 A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | Paul, The Ephesian Church

Important Themes | The Deadness of Humanity in Sin, God's Sovereign Election of His People, Predestination, Salvation By Grace through Faith, Unity, Submission

Ephesians was written to believers in the vicinity of Ephesus, the capital city of the province of Asia Minor located on the eastern side of the Aegean Sea. Masterfully written yet easily outlined, *Ephesians* deals with important doctrines and theological concepts as well as the practical implications of those truths. The first half of the letter focuses primarily on doctrine, while the second half primarily on pragmatics. The mystery of the gospel revealed should effect how followers of Jesus live daily.

The Spiritual Blessings of Election, Predestination, and Adoption (ch. 1), **Saved By Grace** (ch. 2), **One in Christ** (ch. 2), **The Mystery of the Gospel** (ch. 3), **Unity in the Church** (ch. 4), **Walking in Love** (ch. 5), **Godly Submission** (chs. 5-6)

Philippians

Author | Paul

Date of Composition | ca. 61 A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | Paul, The Church at Philippi

Important Themes | Joy, The Example of Christ, The Kenosis of Christ, The Righteousness of Christ, The Meaninglessness of Self-Righteousness

The book of Philippians was written to the church(es) that met in the city of Philippi, which was located a few miles from the north shore of the Aegean Sea. The congregation in Philippi would have likely been very important to Paul, because it is surmised from the book of Acts that this is the first city in what is now modern day Europe in which he planted a church. A main theme of this letter is joy, although reducing the letter to one theme is probably unwise. Many other topics and doctrines receive treatment from Paul. Philippians contains some of the deepest Christological truths found in Scripture. The most notable of these theological sections is 2:5-11, which deals with the kenosis or self-emptying of Jesus the Son. The letter also contains telling biographical information on Paul himself. In 3:2-11 the reader gazes into the privileged past of the Apostle as he denounces any claim to righteousness through his own merits. Other key topics and themes include the unity of the body, Christ as our example of godliness, the deity and humanity of Jesus, the Christian view of death, and the battle against false teachers who pervert the true gospel.

To Live is Christ (ch. 1), **The Kenosis of Christ** (ch. 2), **Righteousness through Faith in Christ Alone** (ch. 3), **Final Encouragement** (ch. 4)

Colossians

Author | Paul

Date of Composition | ca. 60 A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | Paul, The Church at Colossae

Important Themes | False Teachers, Jesus as Preeminent, Life in Christ, The New Self

Colossians bears striking similarities to Ephesians because of similar subject matter and a near simultaneous date of writing. It is a refutation against false teachers who sought to distort the true person and work of Jesus. It boldly defends Jesus' deity and full humanity, and the full redemption that is available only through him. It negates claims of righteousness based upon religious merits, and emphasizes the superiority of Christ over all things. It then calls its readers to live lives that are consistent with such truths.

Jesus' Preeminence (ch. 1), **New Life in Christ** (ch. 2), **The New Self and Heavenly-Minded Living** (ch. 3), **Final Greetings** (ch. 4)

Philemon

Author | Paul

Date of Composition | ca. 60 A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | Paul, Philemon, Onesimus

Important Themes | Reconciliation, Freedom, Forgiveness, Love

Philemon is one of the shortest books in the New Testament. It is a personal appeal from the Apostle Paul to a slave owner named Philemon, who lived in Colossae. The appeal consists of a request to forgive a slave named Onesimus, who had stolen from Philemon and fled his home. Paul met Onesimus in Rome and led him to Christ. He then sent him back to his owner with this letter; but called Philemon to accept Onesimus back not as a slave, but as a fellow brother in Christ.

Greeting (vv.1-3), **Philemon's Faith** (vv.4-7), **Paul's Plea for Onesimus** (vv.8-22), **Final Greetings** (vv.23-25)

The Pastoral Letters of Paul

The Pastoral Letters sent by the Apostle Paul were designed to instruct and encourage those who would continue his work. Two of them were written to his spiritual son in the faith: Timothy. The other was written to a young man named Titus. The letters are designated as “pastoral” because they were written to young pastors, contain instructions regarding pastoral leadership, and also because Paul takes an intimate shepherding role in these writings.

1 Timothy

Author | Paul

Date of Composition | ca. 62-64 A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | Paul, Timothy, The Church at Ephesus

Important Themes | False Teachers, God’s Desire for the Salvation of Sinners, Qualifications for Overseers and Deacons, Orderly Worship and Sound Doctrine

Timothy was a young man who learned from the Apostle Paul and went on to lead the church in Ephesus. While at Ephesus, he encountered tremendous opposition from false teachers. Paul wrote to this young man to encourage him, strengthen him, and give him instruction regarding how to operate the church.

Warning Against False Teachers (ch. 1), **God’s Concern for All** (ch. 2), **Qualifications for Overseers and Deacons** (ch. 3), **Being a Good Servant of Christ** (ch. 4), **Instructions for the Church** (ch. 5), **Opposing False Teachers by Fighting the Good Fight of the Faith** (ch. 6)

2 Timothy

Author | Paul

Date of Composition | ca. 67 A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | Paul, Timothy, The Church at Ephesus

Important Themes | Suffering, Perseverance, Faithfulness, The Inspiration of Scripture, Preaching the Word

2 Timothy is chronologically the last letter written by the Apostle Paul. Paul seems to be aware of his imminent execution, so he writes to his son in the faith one last time with final instructions. He reminds Timothy of his giftedness, given to him by God for the good of the church. He calls him to persevere during suffering and work to present himself to God as one who need not be ashamed. To do this, Timothy would need a strong emphasis on remaining faithful to Scripture and preaching its truths. Finally, there is a sort of goodbye with an appeal to Timothy to come visit in Rome before he dies.

Guard Your Gift (ch. 1), **Be a Good Soldier** (ch. 2), **Guard Against Ungodliness** (ch. 3), **Preach the Word** (ch. 4), **Come Before Winter** (ch. 4)

Titus

Author | Paul

Date of Composition | ca. 62-64 A.D.

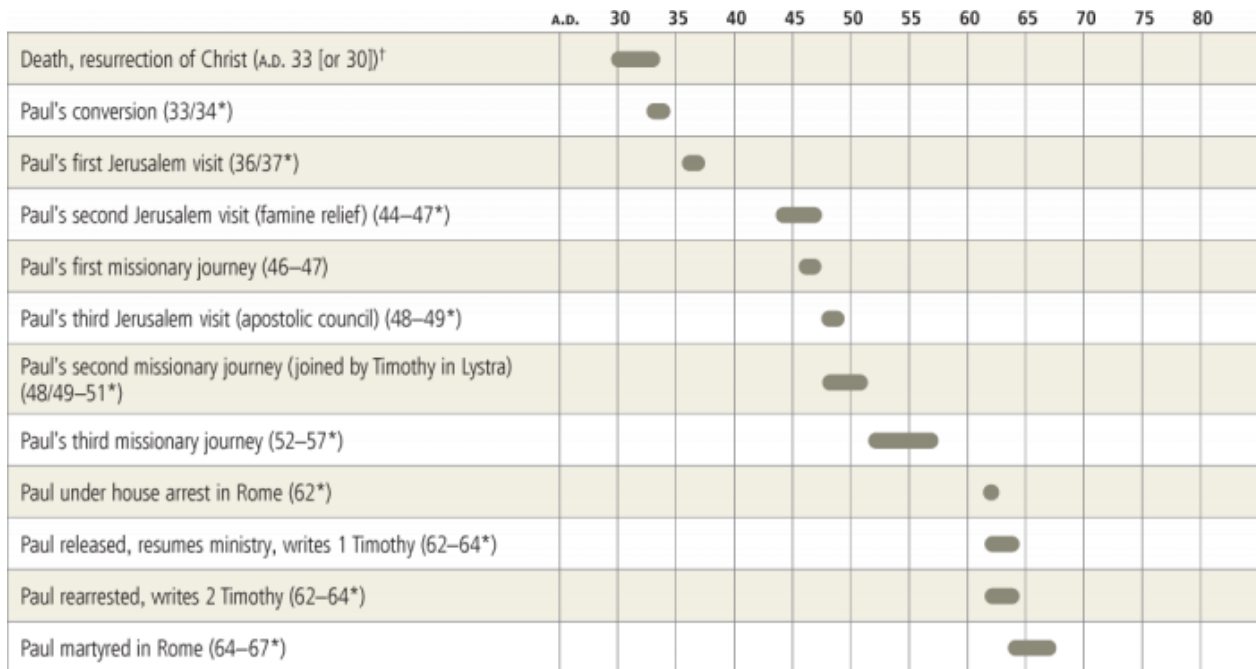
Important Accounts & Figures | Paul, Titus, The Church at Crete

Important Themes | The Gospel as the Basis for Good Works, The Importance of Good Works, The Importance of Godly Men Serving as Overseers

Titus was another young protégé of Paul who took over leadership in the church at a young age. Paul left him in Crete to appoint elders and lead the church. His letter includes encouragement to finish the task, fight false teachers, and develop godly church leadership. It also highlights the importance of good works as the visible result of being made new by the Holy Spirit.

Qualifications for Overseers (ch. 1), **Teach Sound Doctrine** (ch. 2), **The Importance of Good Works** (ch. 3)

An Outline of Paul's Life*



* denotes approximate date; / signifies either/or; † see *The Date of Jesus' Crucifixion*, pp. 1809–1810

*From the ESV Study Bible

The General Letters

The General Letters are those New Testament epistles which were not written by the Apostle Paul. One's author is anonymous (*Hebrews*). One is written by James, the half-brother of Jesus (*James*). Two are written by Peter (*1 & 2 Peter*), and three by John (*1, 2 & 3 John*). The final one is by Jude, the half-brother of Jesus (*Jude*).

Hebrews

Author | Unknown

Date of Composition | Mid to Late 1st Century A.D., Before 70 A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | Early Jewish Christians

Important Themes | The Deity and Humanity of Jesus, The Inferiority of the Law and the Sacrificial System, The Superiority of Christ, Complete Salvation in Christ

The book of Hebrews was written to early Jewish Christians who were still struggling with how to integrate their Jewish heritage into their newfound faith in Jesus as the Messiah. The tendency was to hold on to various aspects of the Jewish religious system. The writer of Hebrews warns against this by displaying Jesus as the complete fulfillment of the Old Testament. He has absolute supremacy and is completely sufficient to save them. They were to set aside their hope in Jewish law and ritual for a new and better hope in Jesus; because he is superior in every way to all things.

Jesus' Superiority Over Angels (chs. 1-2), **Jesus' Superiority Over Old Testament Laws & Sacrifices** (chs. 3-10), **Exhortation to Faith** (chs. 10-13)

James

Author | James, the Half-Brother of Jesus

Date of Composition | 40-50 A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | James, The Twelve Tribes in the Dispersion (Early Jewish Christians Scattered Across the Roman Empire)

Important Themes | The Role of Testing and Temptation, The Importance of Works Accompanying Faith, Patience in Suffering, Practical Christian Wisdom

James is one of the earliest New Testament writings (possibly the first), and its simplicity of style and subject matter reveals this. It is commonly called the “Proverbs of the New Testament” because it frequently alludes to the Old Testament book of Proverbs, and stresses some of the practical issues of everyday life. Along with its frequent use of the Old Testament, James parallels the Sermon on the Mount regarding practical ethics in many ways. James concerns himself with some of the issues facing the mostly Jewish audience to which he wrote – mainly the nature of genuine saving faith and how one’s actions reveal that faith.

Trials and Temptations (ch. 1), **Doing the Word** (ch. 1), **The Sin of Partiality** (ch. 2), **Dead Faith** (ch. 2), **Wise Speech** (ch. 3), **Warning Against Worldliness** (ch. 4), **Warning to the Rich** (ch. 5), **Comfort for the Suffering** (ch. 5)

1 Peter

Author | Peter

Date of Composition | Mid 60’s A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | Peter, The Elect Exiles (Believers, Primarily Gentile)

Important Themes | Suffering as a Christian, Holy Conduct, The Preciousness of Jesus, The Election of the People of God, Submission, Spiritual Gifts, Discernment

1 Peter was written to believers scattered across the Roman Empire who were primarily Gentile. Peter writes to teach them about their salvation, and how that salvation should impact their lives. Faith in Jesus leads to pursuing holy character. It leads to submitting to the proper authority. It leads to promoting a godly family. It leads to be used of him as he gifts us for ministry. It also leads to suffering on occasion. All of these things are to be done with gratitude, acknowledging that we do not deserve our salvation in Christ, but rather “are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession” (1 Peter 2:9).

Born Again to Be Holy (ch. 1), **Chosen to Be God’s Own** (ch. 2), **Submitting to Authority** (ch. 2), **Godly Family Life** (ch. 3), **Suffering for Jesus** (ch. 3), **Using Our Gifts** (ch. 4), **Suffering for Jesus** (ch. 4), **Shepherding the Flock of God** (ch. 5)

2 Peter

Author | Peter

Date of Composition | ca. 67 A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | Peter, Likely in Prison

Important Themes | Godliness, The Inspiration of Scripture, False Teachers, The Patience of the Lord, The Return of Jesus,

The book of 2 Peter was likely written by the Apostle while he was in a Roman prison. Peter probably died shortly after writing this letter, as he was executed by the Romans. In Peter's own words, this letter was written: "...to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things" (2 Peter 1:12-15). This last letter of Peter is comparable to Paul's second letter to Timothy in terms of location of and occasion for writing.

Making Your Calling & Election Sure (ch. 1), **The Truthfulness of God's Word** (ch. 1), **Denunciation of False Teachers** (ch. 2), **The Day of the Lord** (ch. 3)

| 19 |

Epistles | General Letters

1 John

Author | John

Date of Composition | 80-90 A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | John, Apostle of Jesus

Important Themes | Jesus as God Incarnate, Jesus as Our Advocate, Jesus as Our Propitiation, Fellowship with and Love for One Another, Discernment

The book of 1 John, among other things, is about relationships. It is about a proper relationship with God and the corresponding relationships with other people, especially other believers. John writes to his readers during a time of confusion over the true nature of Jesus, not unlike our own time. The church had existed for just over half a century and false doctrines had begun to creep in. The Apostle writes to correct some of those mistakes, to instruct his fellow believers in sound doctrine, and to teach them how that sound doctrine should play out in their lives. To John, a proper view of who Jesus is is necessary for having fellowship with him; and fellowship with God through Christ is necessary for having true fellowship with other people.

The Word of Life and Light (ch. 1), **Christ our Propitiation** (ch. 2), **Not Loving the World** (ch. 2), **Love for the Children of God** (ch. 3), **Discerning the True Jesus** (ch. 4), **God is Love** (ch. 4), **Overcoming the World** (ch. 5)

2 John

Author | John

Date of Composition | 80-90 A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | John, The Elect Lady (Likely a Local Church)

Important Themes | Christian Love, God's Commandments, False Teachers

2 John is a short letter reminding a local congregation to remain true to correct Christological doctrine. Genuine faith in Jesus acknowledges both his divinity and his humanity. Any other teaching is heresy and is to be outright rejected.

Greeting (vv. 1-3), **Walking in the Truth and Obeying the Commandments** (vv. 4-11), **Final Greetings** (vv. 12-13)

3 John

Author | John

Date of Composition | 80-90 A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | John, Gaius

Important Themes | Support of Christian Missionaries, Opposing False Teaching

Another very short letter by John, 3 John was written to a man named Gaius, who was likely a leader in a local church. Gaius was facing opposition from a man named Diotrophes. Apparently, Diotrophes was a self-promoter who undermined the authority of the Apostle John. John tells Gaius to ignore the example of Diotrophes and pursue godliness and love instead. John would deal with Diotrophes when he arrived in person.

Greeting (vv. 1-4), **Support the Brothers, Oppose Diotrophes** (vv. 5-12), **Final Greetings** (vv. 13-15)

Jude

Author | Jude, the Half-Brother of Jesus

Date of Composition | Mid 60's A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | Jude, brother of James and Half-Brother of Jesus

Important Themes | Defense of the True Faith, False Teachers and Immoral Character

Jude is also a very short letter which addresses the problem of false teachers in the church. The half-brother of the Lord Jesus, Jude writes to his audience that in order to be faithful to Christ, they must oppose false teachers and their perverse lifestyles. He alludes to the Old Testament to make his point clear, then calls his readers to faithfulness in light of Jesus' ultimate victory in the end.

Greeting (vv. 1-2), **False Teachers Will Be Judged** (vv. 3-16), **A Call to Faithfulness** (vv. 17-23), **Doxology** (vv. 24-25)

| 20 |

Apocalyptic Literature | Revelation

Revelation

Author | John

Date of Composition | Mid 90's A.D.

Important Accounts & Figures | John, The Seven Churches, The Seal Judgments, The Trumpet Judgments, The Bowl Judgments, The Final Judgment

Important Themes | The Triumph of Jesus, Judgment of the Wicked, The Reward of the Redeemed, The Eternal State

Revelation is one of the most fascinating books of the Bible, as well as one of the most difficult to interpret. It is laden with symbolic language and mysterious references. Yet its main point is crystal clear: Jesus Christ will triumph over evil and reign supremely forever with his saints. Below is a brief outline of the book, followed by charts which help illustrate the different approaches to interpreting this climactic end of Scripture.

The Things That Are (chs. 1-3), **The Things That Shall Take Place After This** (chs. 4-20), **The Eternal State** (chs. 21-22)

*Schools of Interpretation**

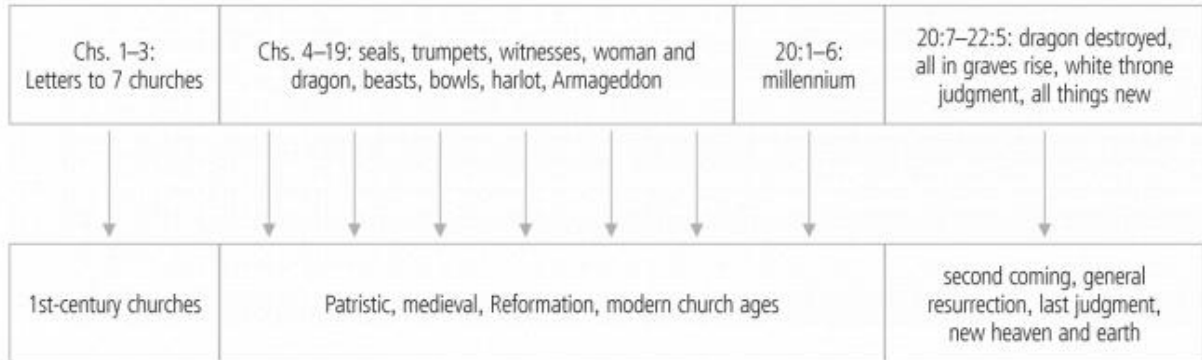
Four approaches for interpreting Revelation have been distinguished by their understanding of the relationship of the visions to one another and the relationship of the visions to the events of history:

1. *Historicism* understands the literary order of the visions, especially in [4:1–20:6](#), to symbolize the chronological order of successive historical events that span the entire era from the apostolic church to the return of Christ and the new heaven and earth.

Historicist School

Historicist School

Revelation's Visions



Historical References and Events

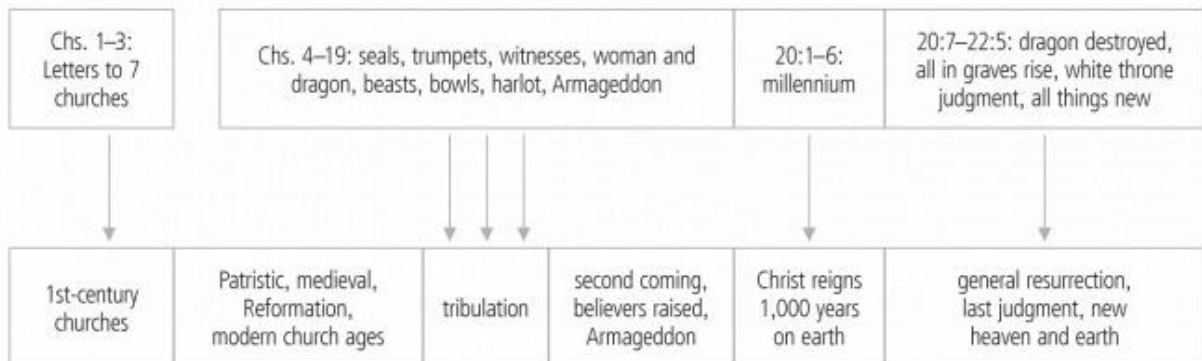
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2. *Futurism* likewise treats the order of the visions as reflecting the order of particular historical events (with some exceptions). Futurists, however, typically view the visions of [chapters 4–22](#) as representing events still future to twenty-first-century readers, thus in a *distant* future from the standpoint of John and the churches of Asia. For many futurists, these coming events include a discrete seven-year period of intense tribulation ([chs. 6–19](#)), followed by a millennium ([20:1–6](#)) in which Christ will rule on earth before the general resurrection and the inauguration of the new heaven and earth ([20:7–22:5](#)).

Futurist (Historical Premillennialism)

Futurist (Historical Premillennialism)

Revelation's Visions



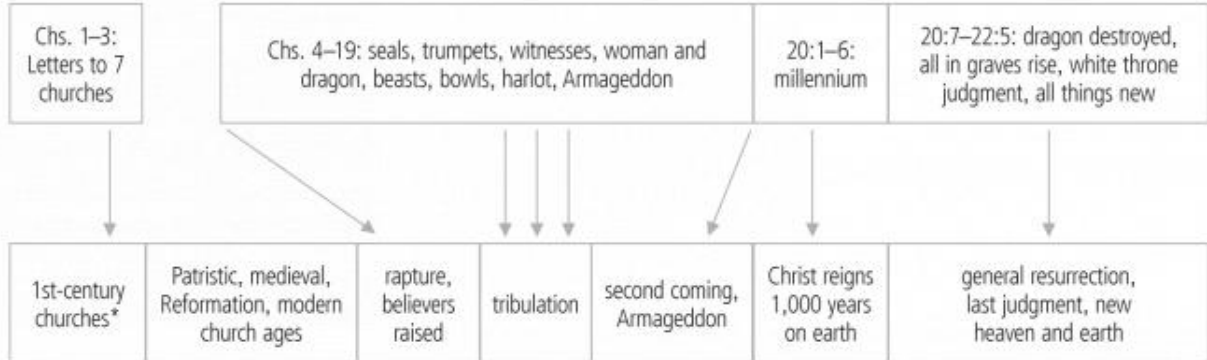
Historical References and Events

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Futurist (Dispensational Premillennialism)

Futurist (Dispensational Premillennialism)

Revelation's Visions



Historical References and Events

* Some dispensational interpreters think the churches addressed in chs. 2–3 predict different periods in church history.

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3. *Preterism* (from Latin *praeteritum*, “the thing that is past”) thinks that the fulfillment of most of Revelation's visions already occurred in the distant past, during the early years of the Christian church. Preterists think these events—either the destruction of Jerusalem or the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, or both—would “soon take place” only from the standpoint of John and the churches of Asia. Some preterists interpret the order of the visions as reflecting the chronological succession of the events they signify, but others recognize the presence of recapitulation (that is, that distinct, successive visions sometimes symbolize the same historical events or forces from complementary perspectives). Full preterism—which insists that *every* prophecy and promise in the NT was fulfilled by A.D. 70—is not a legitimate evangelical option, for it denies Jesus' future bodily return, denies the physical resurrection of believers at the end of history, and denies the physical renewal/re-creation of the present heavens and earth (or their replacement by a “new heaven and earth”). However, preterists who (rightly) insist that these events are still future are called “partial preterists.”

Partial Preterist School(s)

Partial Preterist School(s)

Revelation's Visions

Chs. 1–3: Letters to 7 churches	Chs. 4–11: seals, trumpets, witnesses	Chs. 12–19: woman/dragon, beasts, bowls, harlot, Armageddon*	20:1–6: millennium	20:7–22:5: dragon destroyed, all in graves rise, white throne judgment, all things new
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
1st-century churches	Jerusalem's fall: A.D. 70	Rome's fall: 4th century*	Rest of Patristic, medieval, Reformation, modern church ages	second coming, general resurrection, last judgment, new heaven and earth

Historical References and Events

* Partial preterists differ on what would (from the original recipients' viewpoint) precipitate the millennium. This chart represents the view that sees ancient Rome as the church's main enemy. Others would understand Second Temple Judaism as the church's main enemy.

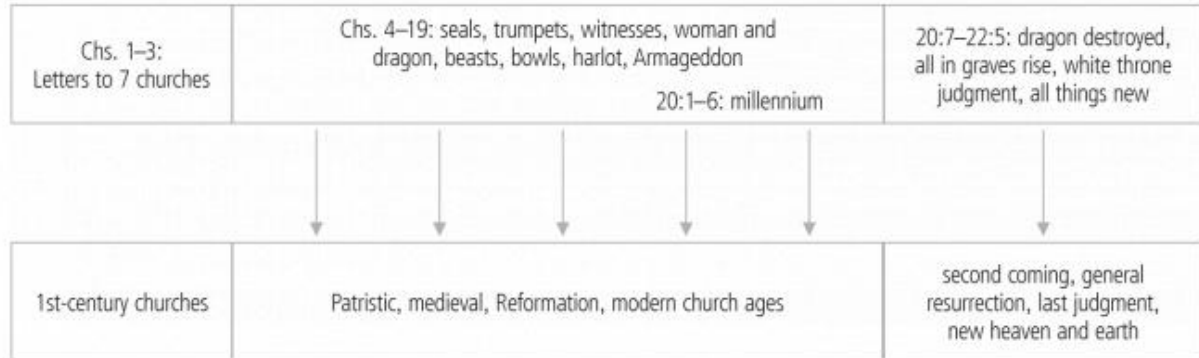
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4. *Idealism* agrees with historicism that Revelation's visions symbolize the conflict between Christ and his church on the one hand, and Satan and his evil conspirators on the other, from the apostolic age to Christ's second coming. Yet idealist interpreters believe that the presence of recapitulation means that the visions' literary order need not reflect the temporal order of particular historical events. The forces and conflicts symbolized in Revelation's vision cycles manifest themselves in events that were to occur "soon" from the perspective of the first-century churches (as preterists maintain), but they also find expression in the church's ongoing struggle of persevering faith in the present and foretell a still-future escalation of persecution and divine wrath leading to the return of Christ and the new heaven and earth.

Idealist School

Idealist School

Revelation's Visions



Historical References and Events

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5. Finally, some interpreters hold a *mixed* view, combining features of these various positions, such as saying that many events have both present and future fulfillments, or saying that many events have past fulfillments but that there may still be a future personal Antichrist.

*From the ESV Study Bible

