

Overview of the Bible

Old Testament

The Books of Law (The Pentateuch or Torah or the Books of Moses)

Genesis: Describes four major events and four major characters. The events are: Creation; The Fall; The Flood, & The Tower of Babel. The characters are Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. God's covenant with His chosen people begins with Abraham.

Exodus: The history of Israel's departure from Egypt; the giving of the law; the tabernacle.

Leviticus: The ceremonial laws and feasts regarding holiness and worship.

Numbers: The census of the people; the story of the wanderings in the wilderness.

Deuteronomy: A review and expansion of the law; the death of Moses.

The Books of History

The next 12 books continue the history of the Israelites for about 700 years. They moved into the Promised Land and established the nation of Israel.

Joshua: The capture and settlement of the Promised Land (Canaan).

Judges: The nation of Israel is led by a series of judges or military leaders.

Ruth: A beautiful story of God's love and provision involving the ancestors of the royal family of Judah.

1 Samuel: Israel during the judgeship of Samuel and the reign of Saul.

2 Samuel: The story of the reign of David.

1 & 2 Kings: The history of the nation from David's death and Solomon's accession, the building of the temple, the dividing of the kingdom, the kings that followed, and the destruction of Israel. (The Northern Kingdom/Israel fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C.; the Southern Kingdom/Judah fell to the Babylonians in 586 B.C.)

1 & 2 Chronicles: The most complete genealogical record in the Bible; a religious history of Israel—covering the same period as 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings.

Ezra: The story of the return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity and the rebuilding of the temple.

Nehemiah: The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem after the Jewish exiles returned from Babylon.

Esther: The story of a Jewess who becomes queen of Persia and saves the Jewish people from destruction.

The Books of Poetry

Almost one-third of the Old Testament was originally written in poetry. These poems concentrate on God, life, pain, and love.

Job: The story of the trials and patience of a holy man as he faces tragedy.

Psalms: A collection of sacred poems intended for use in worship; these prayers and hymns cover the full range of human emotions.

Proverbs: Wise sayings offering advice for practical living. The style of wise living described leads to a fulfilled life.

Ecclesiastes: A poem reflecting the futility of earthly things. A life without God leads to meaninglessness and despair.

Song of Solomon: A beautiful poem celebrating romantic and physical love.

The Books of the Prophets

During the years when kings ruled Israel, God spoke to His people through prophets. Although prediction was an essential part of their preaching, their primary function was to call people to obedience and dependence upon God.

Isaiah: Analyzed the failures of the nations around him and pointed to a future Messiah who would bring peace.

Jeremiah: Prophecies announcing the captivity of Judah, its sufferings, and the final overthrow of its enemies.

Lamentations: Jeremiah's sorrow expressed upon the capture of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple.

Ezekiel: Messages of warning and comfort to the Jews in their captivity. He used dramatic stories and enacted parables to make his points.

Daniel: A narrative of some of the occurrences of his captivity and a series of prophecies concerning world powers and Christ.

Hosea: A story of one-sided love and faithfulness that represents Israel and God, illustrated through the life of Hosea and his unfaithful wife, Gomer.

Joel: Prediction of judgment and woes upon Judah and of the favor with which God will receive the penitent people.

Amos: Prediction that Israel and other neighboring nations will be punished by conquerors from the north, and of the fulfillment of the Messiah's kingdom.

Obadiah: Prediction of the desolation of Edom, a nation bordering Judah.

Jonah: Jonah reluctantly goes to Nineveh and finds Israel's enemies responsive to God's message.

Micah: Micah exposed corruption in every level of society, but closed with a promise of forgiveness and restoration.

Nahum: Prediction of the downfall of Assyria.

Habakkuk: In a frank conversation with God, he discusses problems of suffering and injustice. He predicts the doom of the Chaldeans.

Zephaniah: A prediction of the overthrow of Judah for its idolatry and wickedness resulting in a remnant left to bless the entire world.

Haggai: Prophecies concerning the rebuilding of the temple. He reminds people to put God first.

Zechariah: Prophecies relating to the rebuilding of the temple and to the coming Messiah.

Malachi: Malachi faced a nation who had grown indifferent. He sought to stir them from apathy. He prophesied of the calling of the Gentiles and the coming of the Messiah.

New Testament

THE GOSPELS

The Gospels of Jesus Christ According to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John tell us about the life of Jesus, yet they are not actual biographies. They say little about Jesus' family life, his childhood, or his youth, and nothing is said about his physical appearance. The Gospels concentrate almost entirely on the three years of Jesus' ministry, but even there they do not give enough information to reconstruct a complete history of those years. Rather, attention is focused on the Person of Jesus and his teachings. All four Gospels climax with Jesus' death and resurrection, and the events associated with them.

Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the *Synoptic Gospels*. Synoptic means they view the life of Christ from a common perspective. These three Gospels agree closely in language, material, order of events, and sayings of Christ. The Gospel of John is different from the Synoptics in a number of ways. It tells more about Jesus' early ministry in Judea and records long thematic discourses by Jesus rather than the typical shorter sayings of the Synoptics. John's Gospel is much more theological in content. Each Gospel was written to emphasize certain aspects of Jesus and His ministry.

Matthew: Written by a Jew primarily to a Jewish audience. Matthew emphasizes that Jesus is the true Messiah and the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. He gives Jesus' genealogy from Abraham through the line of Judah and on through David's son Solomon (the royal line) to Joseph, the earthly father of Christ. *Jesus is emphasized as Messiah/King.*

Mark: This fast-moving account was written primarily to the Romans. Mark tells us more about the actions than the sayings of Jesus. He stresses the servitude of Christ and includes no genealogy. *Jesus is emphasized as the Servant.*

Luke: Written by a Gentile physician, the focus in this book is on Jesus' humanity. Luke is writing primarily to a Gentile audience. Jesus is not only the Jewish Messiah but the Savior of the whole world. Luke gives the genealogy from his mother Mary's father back through David's son, Nathan, back through Judah, Abraham, and all the way back to the first man, Adam. *Jesus is emphasized as the Son of Man who came to save all people.*

John: Written to new Christians and searching non-Christians, it contains the most theological reflection on the meaning of Jesus' life and death. He gives a very short genealogy—God is the Father and Jesus is His Son. He stresses the work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in accomplishing salvation. His emphasis is on the *deity of Christ*.

HISTORY

Acts: Luke provides a condensed history of the labors of the apostles and of the foundation of the Christian Church and an eyewitness account to the miraculous spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. The main characters of Acts are Peter and Paul.

THE LETTERS OR EPISTLES

Romans: A letter to the Romans by Paul to introduce himself before he comes there and to explain the doctrine of justification by faith.

First Corinthians: Paul writes to the Corinthians identifying problems in the Corinthian church, offering solutions, and teaching believers how to live for Christ in a corrupt society.

Second Corinthians: Paul affirms his disciples in their faith, vindicates his own authority as an apostle, and refutes the false teachers in Corinth.

Galatians: Paul maintains that we are justified by faith, and not by works or rituals. He calls believers to faith and freedom in Christ.

Ephesians: Paul explains the power of divine grace and writes to strengthen the believers in Ephesus in their Christian faith by explaining the nature and purpose of the church.

Philippians: Paul sets forth the beauty of Christian kindness and to strengthen the believers by showing them that true joy comes from Jesus Christ alone.

Colossians: Paul warns his disciples against errors, and exhorts to certain duties. He presents Christ as having absolute supremacy and sole sufficiency.

First Thessalonians: Paul exhorts his disciples to continue in the faith and in holy conversation. He assures them of Christ's return.

Second Thessalonians: Paul corrects an error concerning the coming of Christ the second time.

First Timothy: Paul writes to give encouragement and instruction to Timothy, a young leader.

Second Timothy: Paul instructs Timothy in the duty of a pastor, and encourages him in the work of the ministry.

Titus: Paul encourages Titus in the performance of his ministerial duties.

Philemon: Paul makes an appeal to a converted master to forgive and receive a converted escaped slave with kindness.

Hebrews: The author maintains that the supreme Christ is the substance of the ceremonial law and that His once-for-all sacrifice is sufficient.

James: A treatise on the efficacy of faith united with good works.

First Peter: Peter offers encouragement to suffering Christians. He exhorts them to live righteous, holy lives.

Second Peter: Peter warns of false teachers and exhorts them to grow in their faith and in knowledge of Christ.

First John: The Apostle John writes to reassure Christians in their faith and to counter false teachings. He exhorts them to Christian love and conduct.

Second John: John emphasizes the basics of following Christ—truth and love—and warns against false teachers.

Third John: A letter to Gaius, praising him for his hospitality.

Jude: Confronts corrupt teachers and encourages godly living.

APOCALYPTIC

The Revelation of Jesus Christ: While in exile on the island of Patmos, God reveals to John the full identity of Jesus Christ and the future of the church. He gives warning and hope to believers.