

Outline of the Bible

OBJECTIVES:

1. To gain a basic understanding of the Bible by learning the “big idea;”
2. To help facilitate a love for reading Scripture; and,
3. To encourage Bible study individually and corporately.

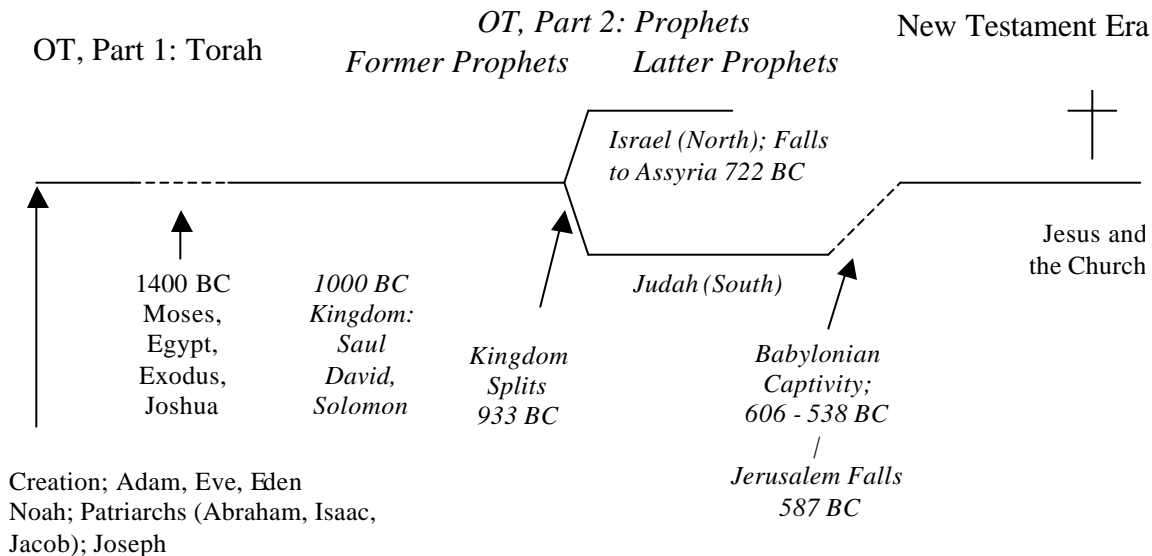
BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

It helps to know the books of the Bible in order. They are listed at the beginning of the Bible. Biblical references are made by citing the book of the Bible, and then the chapter, followed by a colon and the verse(s). A number before the name of the book indicates that there is more than one book with the same name.

Examples: John 2:4-7
 I Peter 2:1
 III John 1 (or 3 John 1)

The Protestant Bible is comprised of 66 books (39 Old Testament, 27 New Testament). Some Christians, such as Roman Catholics, add a few more books to their canons, but their canon is very similar to ours.

THE BIBLE IN 60 SECONDS:



OUTLINE OF THE BIBLE OLD TESTAMENT

THE OLD TESTAMENT (3 Parts--Torah, Writings, Prophets)

Part I – Torah: means “law” or “instruction;” a.k.a. Pentateuch, or 5 books of Moses.

1. Genesis

The Creation
Adam, Eve & the Fall
Noah & the Flood; Tower of Babel
Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (= the Patriarchs)
Joseph & the Descent into Egypt

Structure: Genealogy
A Key Text: Genesis 12:1-3
A Theme: Blessing through strife.

Genesis covers a huge amount of time, starting “In the beginning...” We see the creation of the world and humankind, the covenant God made with Abraham, and the formation of the Hebrews, who leave Israel for Egypt during a famine, where they become enslaved for 400 years under Pharaoh.

2. Exodus

Moses; Deliverance from Egypt
10 Plagues, Passover, Parting of the Red Sea
10 Commandments, Covenant at Sinai
The Golden Calf
Building of Tabernacle

Structure: Exit 1-15, Desert 15-18, Sinai 19-40
A Key Text: Exodus 8:1
Theme: Grace and law.

Exodus refers to the “exit” of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt into the wilderness (or desert) of what is now Saudi Arabia. Moses is born, and is the key figure throughout the rest of the Torah.

3. Leviticus

Sacrifices & Burnt Offerings
The Priesthood
Holiness and Laws

Structure: Worship 1-16, Holiness 17-27
A Key Text: Leviticus 19:1-2
Theme: Holiness at rest.

Leviticus lists many laws and how one lives holy or “clean.” After the Hebrews left Egypt, they were in the wilderness for 40 years, in part at Mt Sinai, where most of the laws were given.

4. Numbers

40 Years in the Wilderness
Israel’s Journey to the Promised Land
Censuses
Balaam

Structure: Itinerant
A Key Text: Numbers 11:1-3
Theme: Holiness on the move.

Numbers gets its name from all the censuses that were taken in the wilderness. It tells how many Hebrews there were, and how they organized their camp. At one point, spies are sent into Israel to scout out the land.

5. Deuteronomy

Recounting of History
Rehearsal of Laws
Covenant with Yahweh
Moses’ Final Speech & Death

Structure: Moses’ farewell discourses
Text: Deuteronomy 30:15-16
Theme: Law is grace.

Deuteronomy literally means “repetition of the law.” Moses recalled much of what happened in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers before the people. Throughout the whole Torah, the Hebrews have been waiting for the Promised Land. The end of Deuteronomy is a “cliffhanger.” The people are on the border of entering the Promised Land at the Jordan River. They are finally about to leave the wilderness!

OUTLINE OF THE BIBLE OLD TESTAMENT

Part II – Prophets: The Prophets are a Comment on Torah; there are 2 types: “former” and “latter.” The “former” prophets contain the *ongoing history of a nation* after Moses’ death. The “latter” prophets are more what we often think of: an individual speaking God’s word to the people.

NOTE: These books of the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament, were grouped by Jews. Christians later kept the same books, but rearranged their order. Thus, your Bible will have some books in a different order.

A. The Former Prophets

1. Joshua

Crossing the Jordan into Promised Land Structure: Conquer Land 1-12, Divide Land 13-24
Conquest of Canaan Text: Joshua 1:8-9
Fall of Jericho, & Rahab Theme: Leadership Under the Lord.
Division of the Land

Moses died and did not enter the Promised Land, so Joshua faithfully led the people and began to conquer the Canaanites, taking the land God had promised to them. Many battles are recorded here.

2. Judges

300 Years in Promised Land Structure: Episodic
Rulers after Joshua (=Judges) Text: Judges 2:18-19
Deborah, Gideon, Samson Theme: Leadership Apart from the Lord.
Philistine Oppression & Israelite unfaithfulness

Judges ruled after Joshua died but before the monarchy was formed. Israel keeps falling away from God and sinning, and each time a “judge” (temporary ruler) is raised up by God to restore them.

3, 4. I, II Samuel

Samuel: Priest, Prophet, Judge I Samuel Structure: Ark stories 1-12, Saul 13-31
Saul & Birth of the Monarchy II Samuel Structure: Stories of David
David; Goliath; Bathsheba Text: I Sam. 8:4-7
Solomon & David’s other sons Theme: Yahweh is King.

Samuel replaces the prophet Eli, who was bad. Samuel anoints Saul, and later David, as king at God’s command. I Samuel is primarily about Saul and the founding of the monarchy. II Samuel is about King David’s long reign.

5, 6. I, II Kings

Solomon & the Temple Structure: Reign of Individual Kings/Prophets
Rehoboam and Jeroboam Text: I Kings 22:51-53
Divided Kingdom Theme: Problems Under Kings.
Elijah & Elisha
Hezekiah

I Kings opens with David’s death and the succession of Solomon. Israel experienced its “Golden Age” under David and Solomon, but split into 2 kingdoms after Solomon! This is a *major event* in the Bible. The northern nation is Israel (10 tribes); the southern one is Judah (2 tribes). 933 B.C. II Kings talks of the destruction that will happen: Israel will be forever conquered [Assyria; 722 B.C.], and Judah will fall [Babylon; 587 B.C.]. After this “Babylonian Captivity,” Judah will be restored. These are some of the biggest events in the Old Testament!! There was much tension between Judah and Israel. (This is why the parable of the Samaritan is so striking in the New Testament: it crosses this boundary of dislike between the Israel and Judah.)

OUTLINE OF THE BIBLE OLD TESTAMENT

B. *The Latter Prophets*: Are divided into the Big 3 (“Major” prophets) and Book of the 12 (“Minor” prophets). The 3 nations involved: Assyria (8-7th C BC), Babylon (6th C BC), Persia (6-5th C BC).

❖ **Major Prophets** (“Major” = a long book; does not imply theological importance)

1. **Isaiah**: 8-6th C BC

Structure: 1-35, 36-39 (deliverance of Jerusalem), 40-66

Theme: Holy One of Israel

Text: 6:3

Isaiah is sometimes called the “Messianic Prophet.” Chapter 53 is famously later interpreted to be a prophecy about Jesus, and likens Christ to a lamb. Perhaps Isaiah’s biggest theme is that of the impending doom: Assyria is coming. The Northern Kingdom, Israel, falls, but Jerusalem (the capital of the Southern Kingdom, Judah) does not fall at this time.

2. **Jeremiah**: 6th C BC in Jerusalem

Many Themes.

Text: 7:1-7 Temple Speech; 18 Potter image

As Assyria and Israel was to Isaiah, so Babylon and Judah are to Jeremiah. Jeremiah tried to keep Judah focused on God, but failed. Babylon attacked and carried off the people to Babylon, where they were captive for 40 years.

3. **Ezekiel**: 6th C BC in Babylon

Theme: New Life; God is in control.

Text: 37:14 (Dry Bones)

Ezekiel warned Jerusalem would fall if it was not faithful; just because they are God’s people and Jerusalem has the holy Temple does not exempt them. Jerusalem did not listen and did fall. Ezekiel comforted them in Babylon.

❖ **Minor Prophets** (Or, Book of the 12, because all 12 fit on one scroll. “Minor” = short.)

1. **Hosea**: 8th C BC

Theme: God is Covenant Love

Text: 11:11 Holy One in Your Midst

Hosea is famous for marrying a prostitute named Gomer. Some people debate if this is literal or an simply an allegory of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God.

2. **Joel**: 6th C BC

Theme: Locusts Coming; Day of Lord

Text: 2:28 Dream Dreams

Although locusts are compared to Yahweh’s imminent judgment, there will be a future, glorious day.

3. **Amos**: 8th C BC

Theme: Justice and Righteousness

Text: 5:24 Let justice roll down.

After all of Israel’s neighbor’s are condemned in oracles from the Lord, the Northern Kingdom is threatened, with a promise of future deliverance.

OUTLINE OF THE BIBLE OLD TESTAMENT

4. Obadiah: 6th C BC

Theme: Edom and Day of Lord

Text: 15; Day of Lord near.

This one-page book prophesies the destruction of Edom, the descendents of Esau. This is the shortest book in the Old Testament.

5. Jonah: 8th and 5th C BC

Theme: Outsiders and Insiders

Text: 4:11; Don't I care for the cattle?

Jonah was a reluctant prophet who ran away from God, only to be swallowed by a fish, which took him and spit him out where God wanted him to be: Nineveh. Jonah is interesting because this time the people actually listen and repent and are not destroyed! Jonah is mad at God for his mercy!

6. Micah: 8th C BC

Theme: Justice and Righteousness

Text: 6:8; He has told you what is good

Micah prophesies doom for Israel and Judah. He equates Judah's guilt with its corrupt kings.

7. Nahum: 7th C BC

Theme: God doesn't like brutality

Text: 3:19; Who has escaped your endless brutality?

Prophecies against the city of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire, for its wickedness.

8. Habakkuk: 6th C BC

Theme: Trust in Tough Times

Text: 2:4 righteous live by trust

This book is a dialogue between the prophet Habakkuk and God. Habakkuk complains that the evil people around him are never punished by God. Verse 2:4 is famously used in the NT by Paul.

9. Zephaniah: 7th C BC

Theme: Day of Lord

Text: 1:14 Day of Lord is Near

The theme, the coming Day of the Lord, is when God will punish Judah for its wickedness.

10. Haggai: 6th C BC

Theme: Build God's House

Text: 1:9

This short book talks about the consequences for obedience and disobedience. Chapter 2 talks of the future Messiah.

11. Zechariah: 6th C BC

Theme: Day of Lord

Text: 14:1 Day is Coming; 9:9 coming on a donkey

Similar to Haggai in that it prophesies against Judah. It also speaks of rebuilding the Temple.

OUTLINE OF THE BIBLE OLD TESTAMENT

12. Malachi: 5th C BC

Theme: Day and Covenant

Text: 3:1-2; 4:5 Elijah coming

Malachi means “my messenger.” Malachi encouraged Judah to please God and speaks of the coming Messiah. For this reason, and because the tone is rather upbeat, it is the last book in the Old Testament and thus leads right in to the New Testament.

Part III – Writings: This 3rd and final part of the Old Testament is the most diverse. The writings mostly belong to the time right after Judah was restored from the Babylon Captivity. Therefore, some are very similar to previous books (i.e. I, II Kings and I, II Chronicles), except that they sometimes reflect upon earlier events through a post-exilic, rather than a pre-exilic lens.

A. Wisdom Literature: Reflections on ordinary life.

Proverbs

Structure: Collections

Theme: Fear of Lord is Wisdom

Text: 1:7

“Maxims” traditionally attributed to Solomon reflect (in part) on the value of wisdom and the “perfect wife.”

Job

Structure: Story and Dialogue

Theme: Suffering

Text: 1:9

Job is a book famously dedicated to the idea of suffering. Despite our lack of understanding concerning suffering, God is still in control, and suffering is not necessarily the result of wrongdoing.

Ecclesiastes (Associated with Tabernacles, or Feast of Booths)

Theme: “Skeptical” wisdom.

Texts: 3:1-8; 12: 13-14.

Life not centered on God is meaningless.

B. Hebrew Poetry

Psalms

Structure: 5 books, corresponds to the Torah

Theme: Answer God

Texts: Psalm 1 (meditate on Torah), Psalm 150 (Praise God)

C. Festival Scrolls: There are 5 festival scrolls, one for each major festival of the Jewish liturgical year. Together they cover a wide range of life and human nature. (Ecclesiastes is sometimes listed here.)

Ruth (Festival of Pentecost, the harvest festival)

Theme: God’s and Ruth’s faithfulness.

Text: 1:16; 2:10

Ruth is a Moabite (i.e. a foreigner) who becomes part of the Israelite nation (this is quite unusual). She becomes (King) David’s grandmother.

OUTLINE OF THE BIBLE OLD TESTAMENT

Song of Songs (Read on Passover)

Structure: Love song between a husband and wife.

Theme: Love.

Text: 8:6

While this is clearly set in the context of a marriage, some have interpreted allegorically as God's love for the Church.

Lamentations (Fast of the Ninth of Ab -- destruction of the Temple)

Theme: Mourning with hope.

Text: 1:1 – the lonely city; 3:22 – God's steadfast love.

Esther (Institution of the Feast of Purim)

Theme: God saves his people.

Text: 9:29-32.

In Esther, we see the beginnings of a Jewish festival called the Purim. Interestingly, this is the only book in the Bible that does not mention God.

D. Apocalyptic Literature

Daniel

Theme: Serve God Under Pressure

Text: 3:17-18 Even if we die, we will not serve others.

E. Work of the Chronicler

Ezra: 5-4th C BC

Theme: Rebuilding the Temple.

Nehemiah: 5-4th C BC

Theme: Rebuilding the Wall

Text: 8:1-3.

Ezra/Nehemiah took place when the Israelites returned home from Babylon; thus, they had to rebuild.

I, II Chronicles: 5-4th C BC

Theme: The Good King (David)

Text: I Chronicles 29:26-30

For further reading:

To see simply the content of each book, try *Halley's Bible Handbook*, by Henry H. Halley. For an easy read with more background information, see Stephen Travis' *Understanding the Bible*.

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NEW TESTAMENT

(4 Parts--Gospels, Acts, Letters, Revelation)

I. The Gospels (Life of Jesus)

- a. "Synoptic" Gospels ("synoptic" = "with the same eye" because they are similar). The Gospels are records of the life, deeds and teaching of Jesus. Each Gospel embodies different themes and makes its own contribution to the canon. For further reading, see Mark Powell's *Fortress Introduction to the Gospels*.
1. Matthew – Probably written around 70 AD by the apostle Matthew. Its strong connections between the Old Testament and Jesus accounts for its placement as the first book in the NT.
 2. Mark – Shortest Gospel, probably the first written (c. 65 AD). Themes include the urgency of the Gospel message, discipleship and the mystery that surrounds Jesus. Emphasis on Jesus' deeds.
 3. Luke – Themes often center around the role of women, worship, the Holy Spirit and the oppressed. First in a two part series (Luke-Acts). Emphasizes community as well. (c. 70 AD).
- b. John – John is the most unique of the four Gospels. It emphasizes the Holy Spirit, Jesus' love, and the sharp difference between truth and falsehood. Much time is devoted to the last days of Jesus' life. (c. 90-100 AD)

II. Acts of the Apostles (History of the Early Church)

Acts has the same author as Luke's Gospel. It tells the history of the early church (which makes it unique in the NT) beginning with the ascension of Christ. It includes: Pentecost, the stoning of Saint Stephen (the first martyr) and Paul's conversion. Most of Acts chronicles Paul and his missionary journeys, ending around the time of his death.

III. NT Epistles (Letters)

- a. Letters of Paul (These letters are generally arranged from longest to shortest.)
1. Romans – Paul wrote this to Christians in Rome. The great theme is "salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ." Salvation does not come through good works or obeying the OT law.
 2. I & II Corinthians – Paul wrote this to Christians in Corinth. These letters are good examples of Paul in that they illustrate Paul primarily wrote to correct problems in the church and answer their questions. However, these letters are known for their teaching on love (I Cor. 13) and spiritual gifts (I Cor. 12, 14).
 3. Galatians – Paul wrote to assure Christians that they did not have to obey the OT law, as they did when they were Jews. Like Romans, a big theme is salvation by faith, not works. (Key verse = Gal. 5:6).
 4. Ephesians – Paul's letter to the churches in Asia Minor (now Turkey), was circular, or passed around among the different churches. A theme is the church is the Body of Christ.
 5. Philippians – Paul wrote this while under house arrest (or maybe prison). It is noted for the themes of "joy" and imitating Christ in humble obedience, which is the basis for Christian community.

OUTLINE OF THE BIBLE NEW TESTAMENT

6. Colossians – Was written to combat some form of unknown heresy. It is clear though, that Jesus – and nothing else (i.e. Judaism) – is the center for our faith.
 7. I & II Thessalonians – Early letters of Paul. He wrote them because many Christians thought Jesus would return so soon that they stopped working and were becoming lazy!
 8. Philemon – The shortest NT letter. Paul wrote to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus, a slave of Philemon who had run away. Later in the NT, it appears Philemon did indeed let Onesimus go free.
- b. Pastoral Epistles (By Paul Re: Church Offices)
1. I & II Timothy – From Paul to a young pastor named Timothy. Paul wanted to encourage him and give advice. All three of these “pastoral” letters describe church officers, such as elders and deacons.
 2. Titus – Titus was a missionary at Crete. Paul wrote to encourage him.
- c. General Epistles (Not by Paul)
1. Hebrews – Unknown author who wrote to Jewish Christians to help explain how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament. This cites the OT many times and helps us understand who Jesus is.
 2. James – James, the brother of Jesus, wrote this letter. It contains much moral and ethical advice, thus giving it practical application to everyday life.
 3. I & II Peter – Peter wrote these letters to Christians who were suffering under persecution in Asia Minor. Christ is lifted up as our exemplar of how to act while being persecuted for one’s faith.
 4. I, II, III John – These short letters are very similar in style and language to the Gospel of John. I John is the longest, and helps sort truth from error. Some think II John was delivered with I John and acted as a type of cover letter (due to its brevity). III John was a personal letter that may have been attached.
 5. Jude – Written by Jude, a brother of James. This letter was written to defending orthodoxy, and was severe warnings for judgment for false teachers.

IV. Revelation

Rome demanded that everyone, including Christians, worship the Emperor, causing some Christians to compromise the faith. Those who did not comply were persecuted (for example, by the Emperor Domitian). Revelation is different from other NT books, due to its symbolic language, which was used in part as signs between Christians to avoid persecution. However, it belongs to a genre that has many non-biblical parallels. Revelation is a circular letter that was written by John on the island of Patmos, and was written (perhaps) after all of the rest of the NT, after 110 AD. This book is often misinterpreted, so it deserves special attention (see note below).

For further reading:

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