



THE BIBLE — An Overview.

Old Testament books of the Bible

(These are the books written long before Jesus was born.)

1. Genesis

Genesis answers two big questions: “How did God’s relationship with the world begin?” and “Where did the nation of Israel come from?”

Author: Traditionally Moses, but the stories are much older.

Fun fact: Most of the famous Bible stories you’ve heard about are probably found in the book of Genesis. This is where the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Ark, the Tower of Babel, Abraham and Isaac, Jacob’s ladder, and Joseph’s coat of many colors are recorded.

Genesis: the story begins

The book of Genesis is the first book of the Bible, and opens with one of the most famous first sentences of any literary work: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” It’s where we find the famous stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the ark, Abraham and Isaac, and a well-dressed dreamer named Joseph.

On its own, the book of Genesis reads like a string of epic stories: a semi-tragic saga of a world that just keeps going wrong, despite its Creator’s intentions. But Genesis isn’t a stand-alone book. It’s the first installment in the five-part Torah (or Pentateuch), which is the foundational work of the Old Testament. The Torah is Israel’s origin story: it’s the history of how the nation of Israel got its population, its land, and its religion.

Important characters in Genesis

Genesis is the second-longest book of the Bible (after Jeremiah). That means there are a lot of characters in Genesis. But in terms of getting an overview of the book, these four characters are the most important ones to know about:

God (Yahweh)—the creator of heaven and earth, including the humans Adam and Eve. God makes all things “very good,” but when both humans and divine beings rebel against God, the world slips back into chaos. The humans rebel against God, bringing a



curse on the world and growing so violent that God destroys everyone but Noah and his family. God is still at work to bring the world back to "very good" status again—and chooses to begin this work through a man God names Abraham.

Abraham (formerly Abram)—a Mesopotamian whom God chooses as the patriarch of a special nation. Abraham journeys through the land of Canaan, which God promises to give to Abraham's descendants. God makes a covenant (a special binding agreement) with Abraham—which is where Israel's story as a nation truly begins.

Jacob/Israel—Abraham's grandson. Jacob tricks his father and brother, finagling his way into receiving a special blessing. He has twelve sons, which the twelve tribes of Israel trace their lineage back to.

Joseph—Jacob's favorite son, who has prophetic dreams of greatness. He is also able to interpret other people's dreams. His brothers sell him into slavery, but through his God-given wisdom, he ascends to the position of second-in-command over all Egypt. Key themes in Genesis

The book of Genesis is full of stories we know from Sunday school, like Adam and Eve, Noah's Ark, and Jacob's Ladder. But the story of Genesis is really all about setting the stage for the rest of the Pentateuch: it's the long, long prologue to Israel's beginnings as a nation. Specifically, it's the story of the promises God made to humans—promises that God begins to carry out through the rest of the Bible.

In fact, if the main thrust of Genesis were summed up in one verse, it would be these words that God said to Abraham:

I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. (Gn 17:7, NIV)

Let's take a quick tour of Genesis' foundational themes:

Covenant

A covenant is a solemn, binding agreement that makes two or more parties one (you can get a more in-depth definition here). Covenants usually involve promises, conditions, blessings for keeping the covenant, and curses for breaking it. Genesis has a lot of these agreements, including God's covenant with the post-flood



world (Genesis 9:1–17) and his covenants with Abraham (Genesis 15, 17).

Covenant is what moves the story forward in Genesis. God promises the childless Abraham that he will be the father of nations, that his descendants will have a land, and that the world will be blessed through them. For 38 of Genesis' 50 chapters, the story follows Abraham's family as God begins fulfilling the first part of that promise: Abraham has eight children, who have children of their own, and so on and so forth. The next four books tell the story of how these descendants become a nation and make their move toward claiming their promised land.

As you read or study the book of Genesis, pay special attention to any mentions of "covenant," "promise," and "swear"—especially when God's the one talking.

Blessing

In the twelfth chapter, God promises to bless Abraham, bless his allies, curse his enemies, and eventually, bless the world through him (12:1–3). This kicks the rest of the book, the rest of the Torah, and indeed the rest of the Bible into gear. From this point on, God has a special relationship with Abraham and his family. The rest of Genesis watches this promise unfold—and it involves a lot of people getting blessed.

The narrative of blessings is especially important when we get about halfway through the book, when Jacob "inherits" (i.e., tricks his dad into giving him) the blessing that God had given to Abraham and Isaac. This blessing was originally intended for Jacob's older brother Esau. But before another Cain and Abel situation takes place, Jacob escapes to a distant land, where he starts a new life. When Jacob returns, he wrestles with God—who blesses him.

As you read and study Genesis, keep an eye on who blesses whom, and what happens when people are blessed.

Records and genealogies

A key repeated phrase in Genesis is, "this is the account of ...," or "these are the records of..." followed by either a bunch of names or a bunch of stories. In fact, this is pretty much all of Genesis. The second chapter opens with the account of the "heavens and the earth," (2:4). Then the book of Genesis swings us through a long series of sub-accounts:

Adam's family line (5:1)

Noah's family line (6:9)



- The nations that stemmed from Noah's sons (10:1)
- Abraham's family (11:27)
- Ishmael's family (25:12)
- Isaac's family (25:19)
- Esau's family (36:1)
- And finally, Jacob's family (37:2)

As you read through Genesis, pay attention to these lines—they signal that the focus of the book is shifting from one family to another. Genesis is a collection of origin stories—these genealogies feel trivial to modern readers, but they give us a good idea of how the ancient Israelites thought about the countries surrounding them. For example, the nations of Israel and Edom don't tend to get along in Scripture. (There's an entire book of the Bible about how Edom did Israel dirty.) Genesis frames this rivalry: they've been getting each other's goats since Jacob stole Esau's blessing!

Promised land

One more important theme in Genesis: the land of Canaan. God promises that Abraham's descendants will possess that land in chapter 15, but this promise is not fulfilled until the book of Joshua. Abraham wanders through Canaan, Isaac settles there, and Jacob eventually settles here, too. However, at the end of the book, the budding nation of Israel is dwelling as guests in Egypt. The next four books of the Torah tell us how they make their way back to Canaan. As you read and study Genesis, don't just pay attention to what is happening—pay attention to where it's happening.

Zooming out: Genesis in context

Genesis is the first book of the Bible, but more importantly, it's the first book of the Torah, the law of Moses. Genesis told the ancient Israelites that God had befriended their ancestors, promised them a land, and had a plan to bless the world through them. But the story of Genesis is really just the grand prologue to Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Together, these five books tell the story of how Israel became God's special nation.

Genesis ends with Israel in Egypt as special guests. But Exodus begins with Israel being enslaved by their hosts. Through the rest of the Torah, God rescues Israel from Egypt, declares them to be his people, and leads them through the wilderness to their promised land. Genesis explains how Israel came to be in Egypt in the first place, and why, of all the places on earth, God lead the nation of Israel to that patch of land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.



If we look beyond the Torah (and we should!), the stories in Genesis set the backdrop for vital theological principles in the rest of the Bible. In Genesis, we see that God has authority over the world. We see that humans and other creatures (like the serpent and the Nephilim) are in rebellion against God's order. We see the hints of God's plan to redeem his creation back to himself.

Genesis also introduces Abraham, the ancestor of Israel through whom the whole world will be blessed. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are the three chief patriarchs of the nation Israel (which gets its name from Jacob). Jacob's sons and grandsons have their own families, which eventually become the 12 tribes of Israel.

Abraham believes God's promises to him, and Abraham's faith is reckoned to be righteousness (Gn 15:6)—that is, it satisfies God. The concept of righteousness by faith is repeated in the New Testament (Ro 10:10), and Paul states that all who share Abraham's faith are the spiritual children of Abraham (Ga 3:6–9).

Genesis sets forth several biblical themes that weave across the rest of the Bible:

God's authority. God is the maker of all things, and He is sovereign over nature and humanity. We see His creative work in the first two chapters of Genesis, but we also see His sovereignty in choosing Abraham, blessing the Hebrews, and protecting Egypt from famine. Man's rebellion. Adam and Eve disobeyed God in Eden, but that's only the beginning. Cain presents an unacceptable sacrifice, the world becomes violent in the days of Noah, people construct the tower of Babel, and so on and so forth.

God's judgment. God evicts Adam and Eve, He sends a flood to destroy the earth, and He rains fire on Sodom and Gomorrah (Gn 19). God is holy, and sin must be punished.

God's preservation of life. God promises a descendant to Eve (Gn 3:15), He saves Noah's family in an ark, He delivers Jacob from Esau's wrath, and He allows Egypt to survive a harsh famine through Joseph's wisdom.

Blood sacrifice. God skins animals to cover Adam and Eve after they sin (Gn 3:21), and He provides a ram for Abraham to take Isaac's place (Gn 22). The blood sacrifice motif becomes far more prominent in the book of Leviticus. It's a grand book with many of the Bible's most well-known stories, but it's only the beginning.

Overview of Genesis's story and structure



Genesis can generally be broken into two large movements, each one the beginning of a bigger story. The first is the story of God's relationship with the world. The second is the origin story of God's relationship with Israel.

Movement 1: God and the world (Genesis 1–11)

Genesis opens with God creating the heavens and the earth, the stars, the plants, the animals, and humans: Adam and Eve. God places Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, but they rebel against God, introducing a curse of sin and death to the world. Adam and Eve have children (including Cain and Abel), and those children have children. Eventually the world becomes so violent that God sends a great flood to destroy the world, but He spares the only righteous man, Noah. Noah builds his famous ark to escape the floodwaters with his family (and many animals). After the waters recede, God promises to never again destroy the earth with a flood. This movement culminates with the strange story of the Tower of Babel. The people of earth come together to make a great city and a name for themselves. At this time, God and the divine beings with him scatter the people of earth by confusing their languages and setting up different nations (Genesis 11, Deuteronomy 32:8).

Movement 2: God and Israel

Act 1: Abraham & Isaac (Genesis 12–26)

Hundreds of years later, God calls Noah's descendant, Abram, to leave his family and journey to the land of Canaan. God promises to bless Abram with many descendants, and to bless all the nations of the world through him. Abram believes God's promise, even though he is old and childless. God considers him to be righteous, and changes his name from Abram to Abraham. Later, Abraham has a son, Isaac.

Act 2: Jacob (Genesis 27–36)

Isaac dwells in the land of Canaan and has twin sons: Jacob and Esau. Jacob grows up, tricks Esau into giving away his blessing, and then leaves town to live with his uncle. He marries, has 13 children, and lives with his uncle for 20 years before God calls him back to Canaan. As Jacob returns to the land of Abraham and Isaac, his name is changed to Israel (35:9–12).

Act 3: Joseph (Genesis 37–50)

Of Jacob's 12 sons and one daughter, Joseph is his favorite. Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery, and he becomes a prisoner



in Egypt. His God-given ability to interpret dreams becomes valuable to the Pharaoh, however, and so Joseph is released from prison and made second in command of all Egypt. Joseph warns Pharaoh that a terrible famine is coming, and stockpiles food for the coming years.

Joseph's predictions are correct: the famine reaches Canaan, and his brothers come to Egypt to buy food. The brothers reconcile, and Joseph provides for all the children of Israel to move to Egypt until the famine is over. The book of Genesis ends with the death of Joseph, whose last prediction is that God will bring the children of Israel back to the promised land. God begins fulfilling this in the next movement of the story: the book of Exodus.

Who wrote the book of Genesis?

Genesis is a carefully and intentionally crafted account of Israel's origin story. Moses is traditionally credited as the human author of the Old-Testament book of Genesis. This is because Genesis is part of the Torah, which is known as the Law of Moses.

Pages related to Genesis:

- Exodus (next book of the Bible)
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy
- The Gospel of John (also begins with creation)
- Galatians (lots of discussion on Abraham)
- The Pentateuch

2. Exodus

God saves Israel from slavery in Egypt, and then enters into a special relationship with them.

Author: Traditionally Moses

Exodus: God saves His people from Egypt

The book of Exodus is the story of God rescuing the children of Israel from Egypt and forging a special relationship with them. Exodus is the second book of the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses), and it's where we find the stories of the Ten Plagues, the first Passover, the parting of the Red Sea, and the Ten Commandments.



The book gets its name from the nation of Israel's mass emigration from Egypt, but that's only the first part of the story. This book follows Israel out of Egypt into the desert, where the nation is specifically aligned with God (as opposed to the idols of Egypt and the surrounding nations). This is the book in which God first lays out his expectations for the people of Israel—we know these expectations as the 10 Commandments. Most of the Old Testament is about how Israel meets (or fails to meet) these expectations. So if you want to understand any other book of the Old Testament, you'll need a basic understanding of what happens in Exodus.

Important characters in Exodus

Exodus has a tight cast of important characters to keep an eye on.

God (Yahweh)—the creator of heaven and earth and the divine being who chooses the nation of Israel to represent him on earth. God goes to war against the gods of Egypt, frees Israel from their tyranny, and then makes a pact with the new nation. While the rest of the nations serve lesser gods, Yahweh selects the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the people group that will serve him and him alone.

Moses—the greatest of the Old Testament prophets who serves as a go-between for God and the other humans in the book of Exodus. Moses negotiates with Pharaoh for Israel's freedom, passes God's laws on to the people of Israel, and even pleads for mercy on Israel's behalf when they anger God.

Aaron—Moses' brother and right hand. Aaron assists Moses as a spokesperson, and eventually is made the high priest of the nation of Israel.

Pharaoh—the chief antagonist in the Exodus story. Pharaoh enslaves the nation of Israel, commits genocide, and is generally a huge jerk. Pharaoh is worshiped as part of the Egyptian pantheon: a lesser god laying an illegitimate claim to God's people. God defeats Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt by sending a series of ten devastating plagues, and finally destroying Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea.

Key themes in Exodus

Exodus is all about God making Israel his own. God rescues the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (whom he made some important promises to back in Genesis). Then, he gives them his expectations—a list of dos and don'ts. Finally, God sets up camp in the midst of the new nation: they are his people, and he is their God.



When God gives Israel the Ten Commandments, he frames them by stating his relationship to the Hebrews. This verse sums up the themes of Exodus nicely:

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." (Ex 20:2)

Let's take a quick spin through some of Exodus' themes.

Redemption

It's hard to miss this one! The entire book is about God hearing Israel's cries for help, rescuing them from their oppressors, and making them his own.

Covenant

Like the rest of the Torah, covenant is a big theme here. God makes a solemn, binding agreement with the people of Israel, establishing himself as their god and them as his people. This relationship comes with certain expectations, with benefits for the Israelites if they uphold their end of the agreement, and consequences if they do not.

God's presence

Toward the beginning of the book, the cries of Israel rise up to God, who hears them and remembers his promises to Abraham back in Genesis. In the middle of the book, God meets Israel in the wilderness: he is high atop a mountain, and they are on the plain below. God is closer to the people, but still a ways off. However, by the end of the book, God is dwelling in the middle of Israel's camp in the wilderness. Moses believes that it is God's presence among the people that sets Israel apart from every other nation in the world (Exod 33:16).

Law

This is related to the theme of covenant—specifically, the expectations God has for the people of Israel. From chapter 20 onward, we start seeing more and more directives for the people on how to live as the people of God.

Zooming out: Exodus in context

Exodus is where the story of the Bible really starts picking up. God has already made his promises to Abraham: his descendants would be a mighty people, they would possess the land of Canaan, and



through them the whole earth will be blessed by God. While in Genesis we see God working through a family, in Exodus we see God working with an entire nation.

Exodus is a starburst of Old and New Testament theology. God is faithful, and keeps His promise to Abraham (Gn 15:13–21) by judging the Egyptians and liberating Israel. The Lord also gives Israel the first iteration of the Law, and begins to dwell among His people in the tabernacle. God's liberation of Israel from slavery foreshadows His work to redeem the nations (Ro 6:17–18), just as His judgment on His people serves as an example for Christians now (1 Co 10:6–13). Exodus is also where God reveals His memorial name: YHWH, or LORD (Ex 3:14; 6:3).

An overview of Exodus' story and structure

Act 1: God hears Israel (Exodus 1–6)

Exodus picks up where Genesis leaves off: the young nation of Israel is in Egypt (they were invited by Joseph, the one with the famous coat). A new Pharaoh notices the Israelites multiplying, and enslaves them. Afraid of an uprising, he orders that all Hebrew sons should be cast into the Nile at birth.

But one baby boy escapes this fate: the Hebrew Moses grows up in Pharaoh's household. When adult Moses kills an abusive Egyptian slave driver, he flees the country. Forty years later, God appears to Moses as a burning bush and sends him to deliver Israel from the hand of Pharaoh.

Act 2: God saves Israel (Exodus 7–18)

Moses, with the help of his brother Aaron, confronts Pharaoh on God's behalf: "Let My people go" (Ex 5:1). Pharaoh refuses, and so God sends those famous 10 plagues upon the Egyptians. When the last plague kills Pharaoh's son, he finally allows Israel to leave.

The Israelites celebrate the first-ever Passover, and then set out into the wilderness. Pharaoh changes his mind and sends his army to recapture them. God saves Israel miraculously by parting the Red Sea and allowing Israel to escape their would-be captors—and then uses the sea to wash away Pharaoh's army.

Act 3: God makes a covenant with Israel (Exodus 19–34)

The Israelites leave Egypt and make their way to Mount Sinai, where God gives His laws to Moses. God makes a covenant with the nation of Israel and the generations to come: because He rescued them



from Egypt, Israel is to observe His rules. God speaks the Ten Commandments directly to the whole nation of Israel, and He relays specific ordinances to Moses on the mountain.

But already things aren't going as planned. While God is giving Moses laws for the people, the people start worshiping a golden calf ... not cool. Moses pleads with God on Israel's behalf, and the nation is given another go at keeping God's commands.

Act 4: God dwells with Israel (Exodus 35–40)

God does not stop with a list of rules, however. He gives Moses instructions for a tabernacle, a special tent of worship.

The book of Exodus ends with the glory of the LORD filling the tabernacle: God is now dwelling among His chosen people, Israel. The book of Leviticus goes on to document the laws God gives His people at Mount Sinai.

Who wrote Exodus?

The whole Torah is a carefully, intentionally edited work. Moses is traditionally credited as the human author of the Old-Testament book of Exodus. This is because Exodus is part of the Torah, which is known as the Law of Moses. That doesn't necessarily mean Moses penned every single word of this book—but since Moses is the main human character in these books, and since Moses is the one receiving directives from God, the books are usually attributed to him. (You can learn more about the authors who wrote the Bible here.)

More pages related to Exodus

Leviticus (next book of the Bible)
Genesis (previous)
Numbers
Deuteronomy
Joshua
The Pentateuch

3. Leviticus

God gives Israel instructions for how to worship Him.
Author: traditionally Moses



Leviticus: how to be holy

Leviticus is known as a book of rules, but really Leviticus is a book of worship.

You could sum up the book of Leviticus with God's repeated command: "Be holy, as I am holy."

This book is filled with details on how the people of God should live, eat, sacrifice, celebrate, and more. (We'll get into why Israel needed this kind of direction in a moment.)

The name "Leviticus" refers to the many laws for the priests, all of whom belonged to the tribe of Levi. If you know much about the twelve tribes of Israel, you know that Levi is kind of an oddball in the bunch (more on that here).

Leviticus is the third movement in the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses), and picks up where Exodus leaves off. The children of Israel have just built a tabernacle, a temporary temple where God can dwell among them as they journey through the wilderness.

Now the Lord is relaying specific laws through Moses to His people. There's very little narrative in the book of Leviticus, but a few important things happen, such as Aaron's ordination and the deaths of Aaron's sons. The story of Israel's journey to the promised land picks back up in the book of Numbers.

Important characters in Leviticus

God (Yahweh)—This isn't a cop-out. This whole book is about how the nation of Israel needs to live in order to survive living in the presence of such a powerful, holy being.

Moses—He led the Israelites from Egypt to Sinai. At this point in the story, Moses has already passed along many, many laws to the people of Israel on God's behalf. In Leviticus, Moses continues to list the ways Israel can stay pure enough to live alongside their God.

Aaron—Moses' older brother and the high priest of Israel, Aaron is a character to keep an eye on throughout the Pentateuch. Leviticus's narrative elements have a lot to do with Aaron. In this book, Aaron is consecrated as the high priest, but this is also the book in which God kills Aaron's sons.

Key themes in Leviticus



I like to find a passage in each book of the Bible that sums up what that book is all about. Moses makes it easy for me:

"Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine." (Le 20:26)

Holiness

"Holy" means "set apart"—but it's a lot more involved than just being special. God is holy: far greater in love, goodness, power, and justice than humans. Until this point in the Bible, God has been a long way off from the people of earth. Although God has communicated with humans and in some cases even appeared to them privately (think Abraham's visitors in Genesis 18), he has yet to publicly manifest his presence on earth since the garden of Eden.

But all this has changed. God has made Israel his people: a people that now represent him on earth. He has now established his presence in the tabernacle, a portable holy place where God can dwell in the midst of his new nation.

But if people are going to live in the presence of God, some things will need to change. Because God is so "other" from the world, the people associated with him must become "others" too. God is holy, and his people need to be holy as well.

Cleanliness and uncleanness

One way that the ancients understood holiness was in terms of whether something was "clean" or "unclean." This isn't the same as "good" or "bad." It's a sense of purity. Is something aligned with the god we are approaching? Or is it unaligned?

This wasn't specific to the people of Israel. People of most religions (past and present) have an understanding that there are ways that are appropriate and inappropriate when it comes to interacting with the divine. Those who work and live closest to a divine being are expected to abide by more stringent rules. The rules vary from religion to religion. We even see this within Christianity today: some faith traditions prefer married church leaders, others prefer celibate leaders.

This is a core theme to the book of Leviticus. When someone is operating in alignment with God's purity laws, they are "clean." When someone is out of bounds, they are "unclean." The book of Leviticus has a lot to say about how to stay clean and how to become clean again.



An important thing to note: throughout the Pentateuch, Moses assumes that everyone will be unclean at some point. After all, everybody poops (Dt 23:12–14). The point is to live in a manner that respects the presence of God.

Zooming out: Leviticus in context

Leviticus is right in the middle of the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. It has a reputation for being boring, harsh, and unpopular. (But it's not the least-popular book of the Bible.)

In Genesis, we saw Israel's origin story. At the tower of Babel, God and the other divine beings scattered the families of the world into nations with their own languages. A few generations later, God chooses Abraham as the patriarch of his own special nation.

In Exodus, Abraham's descendants have multiplied, becoming a mighty people group cohabitating with the Egyptians. The Pharaoh enslaves the people for a few centuries until God rescues them. After a dramatic exit from Egypt, God makes a special agreement with Israel, making them his people and himself their only God. The people then build a tabernacle, and the Creator of the world begins dwelling among his people.

That's why Leviticus is so important. It's a new normal: Yahweh is publicly living with humans. This hasn't happened since the Garden of Eden, when God would visit with Adam and Eve. Last time God shared a place with humans, the humans (with help from an evil serpent) messed it up. How can they get it right this time?

Not a lot of story happens in Leviticus. The people stay camped at Mount Sinai throughout the book. It's not until the book of Numbers that they resume their journey to the promised land — and that journey isn't completed until the book of Joshua.

Leviticus' role in the Bible

Leviticus is about holiness (being set apart, separate)—both God's holiness and the holiness He expects of His people.

Whereas Exodus displays God's holiness on a cosmic scale (sending plagues on Egypt, parting the Red Sea, etc.), Leviticus shows us the holiness of God in fine detail. God spells out His expectations for His priests and people so that the congregation can appropriately worship and dwell with Him.

The call to holiness in Leviticus resounds throughout Scripture, both the Old and New Testaments. Parts of the Levitical law are fulfilled



in Jesus Christ, such as distinctions between clean and unclean foods (Mark 7:18–19), but the call to holiness still stands—Peter even cites Leviticus when he encourages us to be holy in all our behavior (1 Peter 1:15–16).

Quick outline of Leviticus

How to give offerings (Leviticus 1–7)
Aaron and sons ordained (Leviticus 8–10)
Cleanliness laws for the congregation (Leviticus 11–15)
Atonement for sin (Leviticus 16–17)
How to be a holy culture (Leviticus 18–27)

Who wrote Leviticus?

The whole Torah is a carefully, intentionally edited work. Moses is traditionally credited as the human author of the Old-Testament book of Leviticus. This is because Leviticus is part of the Torah, which is known as the Law of Moses.

That doesn't necessarily mean Moses penned every single word of this book. However, Moses is the main human character in these books, and since Moses is the one receiving directives from God, the books are usually attributed to him.

More books related to Leviticus

Numbers (next book of the Bible)
Exodus (previous)
Deuteronomy
Malachi (God addresses His covenant with Levites)

4. Numbers

Israel fails to trust and obey God, and wanders in the wilderness for 40 years.

Author: Traditionally Moses

Numbers: the 40-year journey to the promised land

You've heard that the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, right? The book of Numbers tells that story.

Numbers follows Moses and Israel's journey from the foot of Mount Sinai (which is where Leviticus ends) to the edge of the promised land of Canaan. If this were a regular road trip of the time, the journey would only take about two weeks.



So why does it take 40 years? When the people get about halfway there, Moses sends a few spies into the land to scout it out for the upcoming invasion. (The current inhabitants probably aren't going to welcome them with open arms.) Most of the spies come back in a panic, claiming that the Canaanites are far too powerful for Israel to overcome. This leads to a revolt, with the people refusing to take the land. God gives them their wish, decreeing that the whole generation will die in the wilderness, and the land will be taken by their children.

Important characters in Numbers

God (Yahweh)—the creator of heaven and earth, who chose Israel as his special nation and dwells in their midst.

Moses—the prophet and human leader of the nation of Israel. He's the chief spokesperson for God to his people, and vice versa.

Aaron—Moses' brother, and the high priest of Israel.

Eleazar—Aaron's son, who takes his place when Aaron dies.

Balaam—A diviner for hire from far away. He is hired by Israel's enemies to curse God's people.

Joshua—Moses' aide who spies on the people of Canaan. God selects him to be Moses' successor.

Key themes: what is Numbers about?

There are a lot of weird happenings along the Israelites' journey—including that episode with the talking donkey. But the main focus of the book is Israel's repeated rebellion and God's repeated mercy and discipline on his people. If we had to choose just one verse to sum up the key themes in this book, it would be Numbers 14:11: "The LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?"

Human rebellion

The Israelites rebel against God and Moses several times in the book of Numbers. They complain about food. They complain about water. They complain that they'll be crushed by their enemies. They complain about Moses (and even make a few death threats).

Divine punishment



When the people complain, God hears them—and it doesn't go well. The book of Numbers has stories of God killing rebellious Israelites with fire, plague, and snakes. Sometimes Moses calls to God for help when the people turn on him—sometimes God punishes them directly.

Divine provision

But even though the people prove to be rebellious, God extends mercy to them. Rather than killing off the whole nation in the wilderness, he waits for the rebellious generation to die and preserves the younger people. He continues to provide manna, that mysterious bread from heaven. He even prevents Balaam, the pagan prophet, from cursing the people.

More laws

This is still the Torah, after all. The book of Numbers is a string of episodes from Israel's journey. And the author punctuates many of these episodes with a new set of laws given to the people. Numbers doesn't have the big, bulky sets of laws we see in the latter half of Exodus, Leviticus, and almost the whole of Deuteronomy—but there's still plenty of rules in here.

Moses' leadership

Moses deals with the pressures of leading a new nation, at one point asking God why he has to bear the burden of leading them to Canaan. He feels like an unappreciated nanny forced to carry more than 600,000 squalling brats across the wilderness. Moses tells God early in the book, "I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me" (Nu 11:14–15).

Time and time again, God makes it clear to the people that Moses is his chosen prophet, and Aaron is his chosen priest. However, due to an episode of Moses' disobedience, he is not permitted to enter Canaan, either.

God's covenant with Abraham

Back in Genesis, God made a pact with Abraham, saying that one day, his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan, and through those people all the nations of the world would be blessed. Furthermore, God promises to bless those who bless Abraham and curse those who curse Abraham. The name "Abraham" only shows up once in the book of Numbers, but if you look closely, you'll see



that God is at work fulfilling his promises to Abraham throughout the book of Numbers.

As you read and study Numbers, you need to keep an eye on what the book says about the land of Canaan, what happens when someone tries to curse the people God chooses, and any hints of a king coming from Israel.

Zooming out: Numbers in context

Numbers isn't a standalone book. Numbers is the fourth book of the Pentateuch—Israel's five-movement origin story. Reading Numbers without at least familiarizing yourself with the previous three books (Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus) is kind of like tuning in to the fourth season of a TV series—you're not going to know what's going on if you didn't see what happened beforehand.

In Genesis, God makes promises to Abraham, the patriarch of Israel. God specifically promises that his descendants will be given the land of Canaan, that the nations would be blessed through him, and that God will bless those who bless Abraham and curse those who curse Abraham. Abraham's family grows, and the book ends with about 70 of his descendants as refugees in Egypt.

At the start of Exodus, the nation of Israel has grown—but they've been enslaved by their Egyptian overlords. God sends his people a prophet, Moses, who speaks on God's behalf to both Israel and Pharaoh. God frees Israel, and leads them to a mountain in the wilderness (Mount Sinai), where he makes a special agreement with them. They promise to follow his commands, and he promises to dwell among them, giving them his blessing and protection. The book of Leviticus focuses on how a nation of mortals can cohabitate with the God of heaven.

Numbers picks up the story right as the Israelites have been at Sinai for a year.

Overview of Numbers' story and structure

Act 1: Preparing to leave Sinai (Nu 1:1–10:10)

The book opens with Moses taking a census of the people in Israel. (That's why we call the book "Numbers.") Israel has been camping in the wilderness for a year now, and it's time for them to be on the move. Moses gives the nation orders for how the twelve tribes should position themselves as they camp and as they move through the wilderness—with the tabernacle of God being at the center of the



camp. A good deal of new laws, rituals, and sacrifices that take place here.

Interlude: From Sinai to Paran (Nu 10:11–12:16)

This isn't a very pleasant journey. The people complain against God and Moses—and God sends fire and a plague. Moses' brother Aaron and sister Miriam speak out against him, and Miriam is temporarily afflicted with leprosy. It's really not great.

Act 2: Israel Rejects the Land (Nu 13–19)

When the Israelites get about halfway to Canaan, Moses sends twelve spies into the land to scope it out. Two of them, Joshua and Caleb, tell the people that the land is good, and God will give it to them. The other 10, however, have no confidence that they can take the land—they believe the forces protecting Canaan outmatch Israel.

The nation isn't very happy to hear this, so they turn on Moses. They refuse to take the land, and so God says, "OK. You will die in the wilderness and I'll give it to your children."

Interlude: from Paran to Moab (Nu 20–21)

Things get a little worse before they get better on this trip. Moses disobeys God in front of the people, and he too is prohibited from entering the promised land. Aaron dies, and his son takes his place. Israel defeats several enemies along the way. They end up just across the Jordan river from Canaan, in the plains of Moab.

Act 3: Israel settles across from Canaan (Nu 22–36)

Israel makes camp just across the Jordan river from Jericho (yes, that Jericho). They're a force to be reckoned with—they've defeated some armies and a few of the tribes begin settling the east side of the Jordan permanently.

As you can imagine, the surrounding nations are freaked out. They hire a jerk named Balaam to curse Israel, which doesn't work out. (Remember God's promise to Abraham in Genesis?) Then Balaam gets a different nation to send in their daughters to seduce the Israelites and get them to worship other gods. That doesn't end well for Israel at first (yet another plague). But it's an even worse deal for the other nation—five of their rulers and Balaam are killed.



There's yet another census. Joshua is named Moses' successor. And generally speaking, the whole nation is made ready for the next chapter: entering the promised land.

But not just yet. Moses has a very important message for them—but that's covered next in Deuteronomy.

Numbers' role in the Bible

Numbers shows us how a holy God dwells with His people. Israel rebels against God, and even Moses disobeys Him, but God is faithful to bring this nation to the promised land. God keeps His promises: the promises He made to Abraham in Genesis along with His promises to bless and punish Israel.

Although few of us are in the nation of Israel's position today, the stories in Numbers still serve as good examples to us. Paul teaches that the events in Numbers are recorded for our instruction, that we may endure and escape temptation (1 Co 10:11–13).

More pages related to Numbers

Deuteronomy (next book of the Bible)

Leviticus (previous)

Exodus (Numbers picks up where the Exodus narrative leaves off)

Joshua (Israel finally enters the land)

What are the 12 tribes of Israel?

5. Deuteronomy

Moses gives Israel instructions (in some ways, a recap of the laws in Exodus–Numbers) for how to love and obey God in the Promised Land.

Author: Traditionally Moses

Deuteronomy: love God, obey God

Overview of Deuteronomy

Finally: Israel is just across the Jordan River from the promised land of Canaan. Moses has led the young nation out of Egypt and on a 40-year journey through the wilderness, and they have just defeated several enemies before setting up camp here. Three of the 12 tribes are already settling the land east of the Jordan, and the whole nation is almost ready to enter the land God promised to their ancestor Abraham (back in the book of Genesis).



Almost ready.

The last time Israel was this close to the promised land, they doubted God's promise and tried to go back to Egypt. Because of their unbelief, God banned that generation of Israelites from the land, causing them to wander in the wilderness for 40 years (see Numbers for the whole story). Now the old generation has died and the new nation is about to claim the land.

Before they do, Moses rallies the people to remind them of God's law—and why they should obey Him. This is how the book of Deuteronomy gets its name: it's the "second giving" of God's law.

Theme verses of Deuteronomy

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse.

So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them. (Dt 30:19–20)

Deuteronomy's role in the Bible

Deuteronomy reviews the Pentateuch and foreshadows the rest of the Old Testament's story. In Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the people of God's actions in the past:

- His promises to Abraham in Genesis
- His faithfulness in rescuing Israel in Exodus
- His holiness in Leviticus
- His punishment on the disobedient in Numbers

Moses also gives directions, blessings, and warnings, for the children of Israel in the future:

- The appointment of Joshua as the new leader
- God's expectations of kings—which take effect when Saul becomes king in 1 Samuel
- Prosperity for obeying God—which happens during David's and Solomon's reigns (1 Kgs 8:56; 10:14–29)
- Exile for disobedience—which happens when the tribes are conquered by Assyria and Babylon (2 Kgs 17:6–23; 25:1–26)
- God's promise to restore Israel—which happens when Cyrus allows the Jews to return from Babylon in Ezra.



Deuteronomy is primarily the retelling of Mosaic law, but its text is still important today.

When asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus cites Deuteronomy 6:5: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mk 12:30). Jesus quotes Deuteronomy three times when the devil tempts Him in the wilderness (Mt 4:1-11).

Deuteronomy focuses on loving God and keeping His commandments (Dt 11:1), which is exactly what Christ expects of us (Jn 14:15).

Quick outline of Deuteronomy

- Recap of Israel's journey from Egypt (Dt 1-3)
- Recap of Israel's relationship with God (Dt 4-10)
- How to love God and keep His commandments (Dt 11-26)
- Blessings, curses, and restoration (Dt 27-30)
- The death of Moses (Dt 31-34)
- More books related to Deuteronomy
- Joshua (next book of the Bible)
- Numbers (previous)
- Exodus (when God first establishes His covenant law)
- Leviticus (God's holiness)
- 1 Samuel (Israel demands a king)
- 2 Kings (Israel is exiled)
- Ezra (Israel returns to their land)

6. Joshua

Joshua (Israel's new leader) leads Israel to conquer the Promised land, then parcels out territories to the twelve tribes of Israel.

Author: Nobody knows

Fun fact: You've probably heard of a few fantastic stories from this book (the Battle of Jericho and the day the sun stood still), but most of the action happens in the first half of this book. The last half is pretty much all about divvying up the real estate.

Joshua: seizing the promised land

Overview of Joshua

The nation of Israel has followed Moses for 40 years. God has delivered them from slavery in Egypt, disciplined them in the wilderness, and brought them to the land He promised their



ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But not Moses is dead, and his aide Joshua is commissioned to lead the people into the promised land of Canaan.

The book of Joshua can be broken into two simple parts: conquering the land and settling the land. The 12 tribes of Israel have been charged with keeping God's commandments, driving out the land's evil inhabitants, and divvying up the land among themselves as an inheritance. Joshua oversees this process, which includes the miraculous crossing of the Jordan (Jos 3), the battle of Jericho (Jos 6), and the sun and moon standing still (Jos 10:12–14).

This book begins with God calling Joshua to be strong, courageous, and obedient (Jos 1:6–7). Joshua is obedient, and the people are faithful to God under Joshua's leadership. The book ends with Joshua's death, and the people of Israel happily serving God in the land He has given them.

Theme verse of Joshua

"Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them." (Jos 1:6)

Joshua's role in the Bible

The book of Joshua marks God fulfilling His promise to Abraham: that the land of Canaan would belong to his descendants. More than 500 years later, the children of Israel finally settle the land and make it theirs.

This book also marks the end of an age for Israel. After Moses and Joshua die, there is no commissioned leader of the whole nation, save God Himself. Israel moves into the age of judges, when God periodically raises leaders to deliver Israel from her enemies.

Quick outline of Joshua

Joshua and Israel conquer the land (Jos 1–12)
Joshua divides the land among the tribes (Jos 13–24)
More pages related to Joshua
Judges (next book of the Bible)
Deuteronomy (previous)
Numbers
Exodus
The 12 tribes of Israel



7. Judges

Israel enters a cycle of turning from God, falling captive to oppressive nations, calling out to God, and being rescued by leaders God sends their way (called "judges").

Author: Nobody knows

Judges: a cycle of sin and deliverance

Overview of Judges

Judges is the account of how Israel behaves between the death of Joshua and the leadership of a king. Instead of remaining loyal to God and following His laws, this generation of Israelites wanders in their faith, worshiping idols, indulging in violence, and generally becoming just like the other nations around them. (Which is a problem, as Israel was supposed to represent God to the other nations.)

The book of Judges opens with a snapshot of the political and spiritual landscape:

The land is not fully possessed yet, as Israel does not drive out a few "pockets" of the people they were told to eliminate.

The military and spiritual leader Joshua is dead.

The people begin worshiping false gods (introduced by the Canaanites living among them).

Judges presents various examples of how God deals with His people during this time period. The stories of Judges follow a pattern (Jgs 2:11–23):

Israel turns from God and serves idols.

God turns Israel over to the oppressive surrounding nations.

Israel turns to God and cries out for help.

God raises up a judge to deliver them.

Israel rebels, God disciplines; Israel repents, God delivers.

Theme verses of Judges

"The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had spoken and as the LORD had sworn to them, so that they were



severely distressed. Then the LORD raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them." (Jdg 2:14–16)

Judges' role in the Bible

The period of judges is a dark era in Israel's history. This book shows how persistent Israel is in forgetting the Lord, and how faithful God is to discipline and deliver His people.

It's in Judges that we see Israel's need for a Messiah, a godly king. Because there is no good king in Israel, everyone does what is right in their own eyes (Jdg 21:25).

Both Judges and Ruth tell us how bad things were in Israel before God gave them a king, but anticipate the coming of the good king David.

The writer of Hebrews references several characters from Judges as examples of Old-Testament characters who gained approval through faith. Though Judges describes the consequences of unbelief in grim detail, we also see is a series of vignettes displaying the powerful, positive effects of faith in a faithful God.

Quick outline of Judges

Spiritual and political snapshot of Israel's disobedience (Jgs 1:1–3:6)
 Stories of the judges (Jgs 3:7–16:31)
 Othniel (Jgs 3:7–11)
 Ehud (Jgs 3:12–30)
 Shamgar (Jgs 3:31)
 Deborah and Barak (Jgs 4–5)
 Gideon (Jgs 6–10)
 Tola (Jgs 10:1–2)
 Jair (Jgs 10:3–5)
 Jephthah (Jgs 10:6–12:7)
 Izban (Jgs 12:8–10)
 Elon (Jgs 12:11–12)
 Abdon (Jgs 12:13–15)
 Samson (Jgs 13–16)
 Appendices describing Israel's depravity (Jgs 17–21)
 Dan's rejection of their inheritance and the Levitical priesthood (Jgs 17–18)
 Benjamin's civil war against the other tribes (Jgs 19–21)

More books related to Judges

Ruth (next book of the Bible)
 Joshua (previous)



1 Samuel (when the period of judges ends)

8. Ruth

Two widows lose everything, and find hope in Israel—which leads to the birth of the future King David.

Author: Nobody knows

Ruth: redemption and hope for a family and a nation

Overview of Ruth

It's a dark and troubled time for Naomi: a famine drives her and her family from their land in Israel, and her husband and sons die in a foreign country. But when she hears that there is food in her homeland again, she makes her way back. One daughter-in-law leaves Naomi to find a new husband; the other swears an oath of loyalty to Naomi:

Where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me. (Ru 1:16–17)

This woman's name is Ruth.

Even though Ruth is a foreigner in the land of Israel, a wealthy farmer named Boaz takes interest in her. Boaz is also related to Naomi, making him eligible to redeem Naomi's family, that is, to purchase her late husband's field and continue her late husband's bloodline. Boaz is impressed by Ruth's character, and marries her. Ruth and Boaz have a son, and the book closes with a surprise: Ruth is the great-grandmother of King David, whom we meet later in the book of 1 Samuel.

The story of Ruth takes place during the time of the Judges: it's a bright story of hope during a very dark period in Israel's spiritual and political history.

Theme verse of Ruth

"Then the women said to Naomi, 'Blessed is the LORD who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel.'" (Ru 4:14)

Ruth's role in the Bible



The book of Ruth is a love story, but it is far more than a romance. Ruth's devotion to Naomi and Boaz' devotion to Ruth provide two compelling portraits of love among the people of God. But the greatest love displayed in this book is God's love for Naomi (and all of Israel):

Naomi claims that God has dealt bitterly with her (Ru 1:20), but the story ends with the women recognizing God's provision for her (Ru 4:14)

Naomi blames God for the loss of her two sons (Ru 1:21), but the book concludes with Ruth being praised as better than seven sons (Ru 4:15).

Just as Boaz redeemed Naomi, David will go on to deliver Israel from her enemies and bring about security for the nation of Israel.

The book of Ruth shows us a picture of Christ in Boaz, the kinsman-redeemer. Boaz was a qualified redeemer to Naomi: he was a family member, he had the means of purchasing her land, he had the willingness to buy the land and marry Ruth. Jesus has done this for us:

- He became one of us (Jn 1:14; He 2:14).
- He was capable of buying us back (1 Pt 1:18–19).
- He was willing to buy us back, setting an example of a self-sacrificing husband (Eph 5:25–27).
- Jesus Christ is the great Redeemer, and the book of Ruth foreshadows His work.
- Quick outline of Ruth
 - Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem (Ru 1)
 - Ruth gleans in Boaz' field (Ru 2)
 - Ruth proposes to Boaz (Ru 3)
 - Boaz redeems Ruth and Naomi (Ru 4:1–15)
 - King David's genealogy (Ru 4:16–22)
- More books related to Ruth
 - 1 Samuel (next book of the Bible)
 - Judges (previous)

9. 1 Samuel

Israel demands a king, who turns out to be quite a disappointment.
Author: Nobody knows

1 Samuel: Israel demands a king



What is 1 Samuel about?

Israel has not heard from God in decades. The priests are corrupt. The nearby nations threaten the land's safety. Even Eli, the high priest and judge of Israel, is not faithfully serving God and the people. Israel needs more than a judge. Israel needs to hear from God again. Israel needs a prophet.

So God gives them Samuel.

Samuel serves the people as a prophet and judge. He speaks the word of the Lord to the people, and teaches them how to live as the people of God. But when Samuel grows old and Israel's enemies attack, the people demand that Samuel appoint a king. Samuel advises the people to trust in God and not in human leadership, but the people do not listen—they are determined to have a king rule over them and deliver them from the enemy.

So God gives them Saul.

Saul is a foolish, selfish, cowardly king. He ignores the word of the Lord and craves the approval of men. He disobeys God several times, oversteps his duties, and puts the people at odds with God and each other. King Saul does not keep the Law of Moses, and does not direct the Israelites to live as God's holy people.

So God gives them David.

David is a "man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sa 13:14). He's a skilled warrior, musician, and leader of men—a man who trusts in God and encourages his countrymen to act like God's people. David's famous defeat of Goliath makes him a popular, famous figure in Israel. Saul fears that David will seize his kingdom eventually, and spends the rest of his life hunting David down.

Theme verses of 1 Samuel

Only fear the LORD and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, both you and your king will be swept away. (1 Sa 12:24–25)

1 Samuel's role in the Bible

No one knows who wrote 1 Samuel.

First Samuel marks a great turning point in Israel's history: Israel transitions from theocracy to monarchy. Instead of crying to God



for help—which worked before (Jdg 3:9, 15)—Israel demands that Samuel appoint a king. At first, they are saddled with the ungodly Saul, but God raises up another to deliver and lead His people.

It is in 1 Samuel that we first see an example of Messiah (God-anointed royalty). Saul and David are anointed by God to lead and deliver Israel. Jesus, a descendant of David (Mt 1:1), is the true Messiah anointed by God to rule over all (Php 2:10–11) and save the lost (Ac 13:38).

The books of 1 and 2 Samuel are really one story: God finds a man after His own heart to lead His people. These two books were not originally divided, and so Second Samuel begins with David hearing the news of Saul's death.

Quick outline of 1 Samuel

- God raises up Samuel as prophet and judge (1 Sa 1–7).
- Israel demands a king: Saul (1 Sa 8–15).
- God raises up David to be king of Israel (1 Sa 16–20).
- Saul hunts David out of jealousy (1 Sa 21–31).
- More books related to 1 Samuel
- 2 Samuel (next book of the Bible)
- Ruth (previous)
- Judges (period of Israel's history that ends in 1 Samuel)
- 1 Chronicles

10. 2 Samuel

David, a man after God's own heart, becomes king of Israel.
 Author: Nobody knows

2 Samuel: good King David reigns

King Saul and the prophet Samuel are dead, but God has not left Israel without a leader. David, the boy who killed Goliath, is a famous and mighty warrior in Israel—and the man God has chosen as Israel's new king.

David is a good king who serves the Lord and cares for his people. God blesses David and the entire nation under his rule. More importantly, God makes a covenant (a solemn agreement) with David, promising to establish his throne forever.

However, David disobeys the Lord and sleeps with Bathsheba, who is married to one of David's soldiers. David repents, but God



punishes him with wars, betrayal, rebellions, and national upheaval. David still serves God throughout these difficulties, though, and God is faithful to His promise: David remains king over Israel.

Theme verse in 2 Samuel

"Now, O Lord GOD, You are God, and Your words are truth, and You have promised this good thing to Your servant." (2 Sa 7:28)

2 Samuel's role in the Bible

Whereas the book of First Samuel shows Israel's transition from God's authority to Saul's irresponsible rule, Second Samuel documents the transition back to God-honoring leadership under David.

David was anointed king of Israel by God, and is a picture of the true Messiah (God's anointed one). In the New Testament, Jesus is revealed to be the fulfillment of a godly king. While David seeks to uphold the Law of Moses, but Christ comes to fulfill the law (Mt 5:17). David is tempted and fails, but Jesus overcame temptation (Mt 4). God promises that David's bloodline will have an everlasting kingdom, and Christ will rule over Israel forever (Lk 1:32–33).

The books of First and Second Samuel are really one story: God finds a man after His own heart to lead His people.

Quick outline of 2 Samuel

- David becomes king of Israel (2 Sm 1–5)
- God establishes David's kingdom (2 Sm 6–10)
- David sins with Bathsheba (2 Sm 11–12)
- David's son Absalom leads an uprising (2 Sm 13–18)
- David wages wars (2 Sm 19–21)
- More books related to 2 Samuel
- 1 Kings (next book of the Bible)
- 1 Samuel (previous)
- Judges
- Deuteronomy (when God sets His expectations for kings)
- Psalms (half were composed by David)

11. 1 Kings

The kingdom of Israel has a time of peace and prosperity under King Solomon, but afterward splits, and the two lines of kings turn away from God.

Author: Nobody knows



12. 2 Kings

Both kingdoms ignore God and his prophets, until they both fall captive to other world empires.

Author: Nobody knows

1 & 2 Kings: Israel falls into idolatry and captivity

The books of First and Second Kings are the story of Israel's decline. Whereas First and Second Samuel document Israel's shift from corrupt judges to the righteous leadership of David, Kings shows how Israel divides and falls into the hands of her enemies.

These books of history pick up where Second Samuel left off: Israel is united under the godly King David, who appoints his son Solomon to rule after him. Solomon is blessed with wisdom, and charged with building a majestic temple to the Lord in Jerusalem. God tells Solomon to remember Him and follow his father David's example.

Unfortunately, Solomon is unfaithful to God in his later years, and God divides the kingdom after his death. The northern ten tribes follow Solomon's former warrior and taskmaster Jeroboam, and the tribes of Judah and Benjamin remain loyal to the throne of David. The rest of these books document the way these kings (and those who followed) lead God's people to worship. Each king is remembered according to whether or not they lead Israel to worship God in Jerusalem or worship idols elsewhere.

Neither the Northern Kingdom (Israel) nor the Southern Kingdom (Judah) keep the Law of Moses and worship God at Jerusalem, and therefore both are taken captive by enemy nations. Israel is taken by Assyria (2 Kgs 17:6–23) and Judah falls to Babylon (2 Kgs 25:1–26)—which is just what God promised would happen if they disobeyed His law (Dt 28:36–37).

Theme verses of 1 & 2 Kings

“As for you, if you will walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you and will keep My statutes and My ordinances, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, just as I promised to your father David, saying, ‘You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’ But if you or your sons indeed turn away from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, and



go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them, and the house which I have consecrated for My name, I will cast out of My sight." (1 Ki 9:4-7)

1 & 2 Kings' role in the Bible

The books of Kings were probably written during the time of Judah's captivity in Babylon (which begins at the end of Second Kings). The temple of God was destroyed. Jerusalem was in ruins. The tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and some of Levi were serving a pagan king in a faraway country. These books answer the questions, "What happened? How did it come to this?" that captive Hebrews would have asked.

The response: "Whom did you worship?"

The kings are evaluated by how they worshiped the Lord God. Good kings served the Lord in the temple at Jerusalem, the others did evil in His sight. Two kings set examples for the rest of the nation: David and Jeroboam. David honored God and upheld His law. Jeroboam disregarded God and His temple, and instead set up two golden calves to worship.

Good kings of the South followed David's example. Every king of the North followed Jeroboam's example. Most kings of the South worshiped pagan gods, too.

The books of Kings show us how faithful God is to His people. We see the full spectrum of God's dealings with Israel: from extreme blessing under Solomon to utter desolation and captivity. These blessings and curses were all promised to Israel in the book of Deuteronomy.

Quick outline of 1 Kings

- God establishes Solomon's reign over Israel (1 Kgs 1-5)
- God establishes His temple in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 6-9)
- Solomon turns from God; Israel divides (1 Kgs 10:1-12:24)
- Jeroboam leads the Northern Kingdom away from God (1 Kgs 12:25-14:20)
- Northern kings struggle for control (1 Kgs 14:21-16:34)
- God judges King Ahab with Elijah the prophet (1 Kgs 16:35-22:53)

Quick outline of 2 Kings

- God judges Ahab's family with Elisha, Jehu, and Hazael (2 Kgs 1-10)
- More kings of the North and South rule Israel and Judah (2 Kgs 11-16)
- Israel falls to Assyria (2 Kgs 17)



Judah reforms under Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18–20)
Manasseh provokes God, dooms Judah (2 Kgs 21)
Judah reforms under Josiah (2 Kgs 22:1–23:30)
Judah falls to Babylon (2 Kgs 23:31–25:30)

More pages related to 1 & 2 Kings

1 & 2 Chronicles (next books of the Bible)
2 Samuel (previous)
Deuteronomy (God's expectations for Israel and her kings)

13. 1 Chronicles

This is a brief history of Israel from Adam to David, culminating with David commissioning the temple of God in Jerusalem.
Author: Traditionally Ezra

14. 2 Chronicles

David's son Solomon builds the temple, but after centuries of rejecting God, the Babylonians take the southern Israelites captive and destroy the temple.
Author: Traditionally Ezra

1 & 2 Chronicles: the kingdom and the covenant

What if you had the job of communicating your nation's entire history—its rulers, wars, religious events, economic cycles—starting with the beginning of mankind? First and Second Chronicles is that history for Israel. It's the story of Israel's kings and God's faithfulness to His promises.

It's a long story, and many Bible readers find it boring. Maybe that's because the Chronicles account opens with a list of names—literally, “Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared . . .” (1 Chr 1:1–2). The genealogies go on for nine chapters. But that's not all there is to this document. First and Second Chronicles is an executive summary of God's covenant with David, and how things played out afterward. The books tell this story in four major acts:

From Adam to David. The first nine chapters cover all the time that takes place from Genesis 2 to First Samuel 15 (mostly via long genealogies). They trace David's ancestry along with the other major families in the 12 tribes of Israel.



David's reign. David was a good king who followed God, united the tribes of Israel, and delivered the nation from her enemies. God makes an everlasting covenant with David: his son Solomon's throne will be established forever (1 Chr 17). David draws up plans to make a great temple for the Lord. Before he dies, he charges Solomon and the people with building the temple and being faithful to the Lord (1 Chr 28:8–9).

Solomon's reign. When Solomon becomes king, he asks God for wisdom instead of riches, long life, or the deaths of his adversaries. God is pleased with his request, and grants him wisdom, plus extravagant riches and power. Solomon builds the temple of God in Jerusalem: a majestic house for His name. Israel flourishes under Solomon's rule, becoming the most prominent nation in their region of the world (2 Chr 9:13–30).

From Jerusalem to Babylon. The kingdom splits after Solomon dies: 10 tribes rebel and form a new kingdom to the North, while the tribes of Judah and Benjamin remain loyal to David's royal line. This act gives us the highlights of each king's reign. The kings that follow do not serve the Lord the way David did, however. They neglect God's temple, they ignore God's law, they persecute God's prophets, and they seek out new gods. A few good kings bring about revival, but eventually God disciplines His people for forsaking Him—which is exactly what David warned would happen long ago. The Babylonians sack Jerusalem, raze the temple, and carry the children of Israel into captivity for 70 years. Afterward, the Persian king Cyrus decrees that the temple be rebuilt.

The Chronicles focus on two important themes: God's covenant with David and the temple. As you read First and Second Chronicles, you'll see that the temple of God is the main location of interest: David plans it, Solomon builds it, kings are crowned in it, prophets are killed in it, and the law is rediscovered in it. The temple is center stage in the drama of Chronicles.

Theme verses of 1 & 2 Chronicles

"He [Solomon] shall build for Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever." (1 Chr 17:12)

"Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I am bringing evil on this place and on its inhabitants, even all the curses written in the book which they have read in the presence of the king of Judah. Because they have forsaken Me and have burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands;



therefore My wrath will be poured out on this place and it shall not be quenched.'" (2 Chr 34:24–25)

1 & 2 Chronicles' roles in the Bible

The Chronicles were written sometime after the Hebrews returned to Jerusalem from Babylon—possibly by Ezra. The author, or Chronicler, surveys Israel's history as a sovereign state. David and Solomon are the key characters, as they were the great kings who ruled all Israel from Jerusalem. The Chronicles record the history of kings through two lenses:

The Mosaic Covenant, which God made with all Israel after delivering them from Egypt. In this covenant, God sets Israel apart as His special nation. The terms: if Israel obeys God's laws, He blesses them, but if Israel rejects God's laws, He disciplines them. The documents of this agreement are known as the Law of Moses, or the Pentateuch: they're the first five books of the Bible.

The Davidic Covenant, which God made to David. David had planned to build a house for God, but God instead promises to establish David's family on the throne forever. God is faithful to His promise: even when the northern tribes of Israel rebel, God keeps David's line on the throne in Jerusalem. The Davidic Covenant is later realized in Jesus Christ, who is called both the Son of David and King of Kings (Mt 1:1; Rev 17:14).

First and Second Chronicles cover all Hebrew history from the creation of Man (Gn 2:20; 1 Chr 1:1) to the Hebrews' return from exile (2 Chr 36:22–23; Ezra 1:1–4). The content in Chronicles also reflects Moses' predictions in Deuteronomy:

- Anointing of a righteous king (Dt 17:14–20)
 - Establishment of a temple where God's name dwells (Dt 12:5–14)
 - Prosperity when Israel obeys God under David and Solomon (Dt 28:1–14)
 - Exile when Israel disobeys God (Dt 28:49–50)
 - Restoration to the promised land (Dt 30:3)
- The books of Chronicles are long. They're full of genealogies and records. But they're the records of God's long-lasting faithfulness to His people, even when they are not faithful to Him.
- Quick outline of 1 & 2 Chronicles
 - From Adam to David (1 Chr 1–9)
 - David rules and unites Israel (1 Chr 10–29)
 - Solomon builds the temple (2 Chr 1–9)
 - David's line rules in Jerusalem (2 Chr 10–35)
 - From Jerusalem to Babylon (2 Chr 36)



More pages related to 1 & 2 Chronicles

Ezra (next book of the Bible)

1 & 2 Kings (previous)

1 Samuel

2 Samuel

Nehemiah (Ezra part two)

Matthew (presents Jesus as the Son of David, King of the Jews)

15. Ezra

The Israelites rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, and a scribe named Ezra teaches the people to once again obey God's laws.

Author: Ezra

Ezra: Israel returns to her foundations

After 70 years in exile, the people of Israel were coming back home. The new Persian emperor Cyrus had decreed that they return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple of their God—which had lain in ruins the whole time (Ezr 1:1–4).

Zerubbabel and Jeshua, descendants of King David and Aaron the priest, answer the call to rebuild the house of God. But the temple wasn't the only thing that needed attention. Many of the returning Hebrews had forgotten God's laws—and were disregarding them in front of the people. They needed to remember the covenant they'd made with God. They needed to remember why they were in their situation: why they had to go to Babylon (which you can read about in Kings and Chronicles), and why they'd been allowed to come back. The temple needed a new foundation, but the people needed to return to the foundations of their faith, too. Ezra, the scribe, answers the call to teach Israel the ways of God again (Ezr 7:10).

The book of Ezra chronicles both stories: rebuilding the temple and remembering the law. This account weaves together several categories of written works.

Historical narrative—events surrounding Israel's return, temple reconstruction, and revival

Official documents—letters and decrees sent to and from the Persian emperors during this time period

Jewish records—names of individuals and families who returned to Israel



Ezra's autobiographical texts—prayers, reflections, and actions from Ezra's point of view

These pieces come together to tell us how God began restoring Israel.

Theme verse of Ezra

"For we are slaves; yet in our bondage our God has not forsaken us, but has extended lovingkindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us reviving to raise up the house of our God, to restore its ruins and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem." (Ezr 9:9)

Ezra's role in the Bible

Ezra begins a new story arc in Israel's history:

From Genesis to Deuteronomy, God calls out Israel as a special nation and teaches them His laws.

From Joshua to 2 Chronicles, God gives Israel a land and a king, but Israel loses both when they consistently disobey God.

From Ezra to Esther, God restores Israel from exile in their own land again.

Ezra and Nehemiah (the next book of the Bible) were originally considered two parts of one book. Ezra focuses on rebuilding the temple; Nehemiah focuses on rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. Both form the story of how God reestablishes Israel in the land He promised to her. The book of Ezra also references other biblical prophets, namely Haggai and Zechariah, whose messages stirred up the people to finish building the temple (Ezr 5:1).

Ezra calls attention to Israel's covenant history with the Lord. God had made promises to Israel through Moses:

If the people obeyed Him, they would enjoy a good land and prosperity.

If the people disobeyed Him, they would face punishment and exile.

The people disobeyed, and God kept His promise (Ezr 9:7). However, God had made another promise: He would gather Israel back to her land after He had punished her (Dt 30:3). The book of Ezra shows us how God kept that promise.

Ezra is also traditionally credited with writing the books of First and Second Chronicles. If this is true, then Ezra is the second most prolific author of the Bible (after Moses).



Quick outline of Ezra

- Rebuilding the temple (Ezr 1–6)
- The remnant returns to Judah (Ezra 1–2)
- Judah lays the new temple foundations (Ezra 3)
- Judah's adversaries stop temple work (Ezra 4)
- Judah resumes temple work (Ezra 5)
- The temple is completed (Ezra 6)
- Remembering the law (Ezr 7–10)
- Artaxerxes sends Ezra to teach the law in Jerusalem (Ezra 7–8)
- Ezra has the people put away their foreign wives (Ezra 9–10)

Pages related to Ezra

- Nehemiah (next book of the Bible)
- 1 & 2 Chronicles (previous)
- Haggai
- Zechariah

16. Nehemiah

The city of Jerusalem is in bad shape, so Nehemiah rebuilds the wall around the city.

Author: Nehemiah

Nehemiah: rebuilding and remembering

What is Nehemiah about?

After 70 years in exile, the Jews had returned home and rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem. They were able to worship God in their own land, but the city still lay in ruins. The once-great capital of the promised land was a depressing rubble heap exposed to her enemies.

When Nehemiah hears this, he sets out to restore the city walls. The book of Nehemiah is his story in his own words.

The book of Nehemiah is about reestablishing God's people both physically and spiritually.

In the first part of the book, Nehemiah restores Jerusalem in a physical sense. When Nehemiah hears that "the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire," (Neh 1:3), he gets permission from Persian King Artaxerxes to rebuild the city. The



governors of surrounding territories viciously oppose Nehemiah's efforts, but the wall is finished in just 52 days (Neh 7:15). Nehemiah also restores economic justice in the land, admonishing the wealthy for taking advantage of their less fortunate brothers (Neh 5).

In the second section, Nehemiah and Ezra bring spiritual revival to Jerusalem. Ezra reads the law of Moses aloud to the people, and the nation rededicates to obeying God. Later on, Nehemiah works diligently to point people back to the law of Moses (Neh 13).

Nehemiah writes in first person. His story is peppered with personal commentary—sometimes it reads like a historical account, and sometimes it reads like Nehemiah's journal. We know when he is afraid (Neh 2:2). We know when he is angry (Neh 5:6). We even see him break his own narrative with prayers to God (Neh 13:14). This book gives us a look into the mind of an Old Testament man of God, giving us examples of how to lead, pray, and deal with discouragement.

Theme verse of Nehemiah

"Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people." (Neh 5:19)

Nehemiah's role in the Bible

Like the books of Ezra and Esther, Nehemiah tells us what happened after the Jewish exile to Babylon. Israel has been disciplined, and is now being restored to her land and her God. Nehemiah chronicles God's covenant relationship with Israel, and even provides a sweeping overview of the relationship in Nehemiah chapter 9.

Ezra and Nehemiah were originally considered parts one and two of the same work, and for a good reason: together, they tell the story of God restoring His people—keeping His promise to them in Deuteronomy 30.

Author of Nehemiah

Nehemiah wrote this book as himself, in first person.

Quick outline of Nehemiah

- Rebuilding the wall (Neh 1–7)
- Nehemiah gets permission to rebuild Jerusalem. (Neh 1–2)
- City wall construction begins (Neh 3)
- Enemies threaten construction (Neh 4)
- Nehemiah alleviates pressure on the poor (Neh 5)



- The wall is completed despite the enemies' plots (Neh 6)
- Nehemiah numbers the people (Neh 7)
- Remembering the law (Neh 8–13)
- Ezra reads the law to the people (Neh 8:1–12)
- Israel reinstates the Feast of Booths (Neh 8:13–18)
- Israel confesses sin and rededicates to God (Neh 9–10)
- Census of the Jews in the land (Neh 11–12:26)
- The people worship on the wall (Neh 12:27–47)
- Nehemiah keeps aligning the people to God's law (Neh 13)

Pages related to Nehemiah

- Esther (next book of the Bible)
- Ezra (previous)
- Deuteronomy
- 1 & 2 Chronicles

17. Esther

Someone hatches a genocidal plot to bring about Israel's extinction, and Esther must face the emperor to ask for help.
 Author: Nobody knows

Esther: the Jews persevere

What is Esther about?

Courage. Faith. Betrayal. Politics. Plots of genocide. The book of Esther is a drama about how two Jews risked everything to save their people.

The story is set in Susa, the capital of the Persian Empire. Not long ago, the Jews were taken from their land to live as captives in Babylon for 70 years. God (via the Persian Cyrus) had brought a remnant of His people back to their homeland, but not everyone had returned. The Jewish people remained scattered across the Middle Eastern world, including a woman named Esther and her cousin Mordecai.

But although the Jews were enjoying a time of restoration, there were still those who wanted them all dead.

The book of Esther focuses on four central characters:

Queen Esther, the heroine. When Esther becomes queen, she keeps her Jewish descent a secret (Est. But when she learns of a plot to kill



all the Jews in the Persian provinces, she courageously uses her position to intercede on behalf of her people.

Mordecai, Esther's cousin. Mordecai is a devout Jew characterized by conviction. He is loyal, strong, and persistent. He saves the king from an assassination plot early in the story—foreshadowing his work to save the Jewish people. Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman, which instigates the central conflict of Esther: Haman vs. Mordecai. Mordecai is a father figure to Esther (an orphan), advising and informing her through the story.

Haman, enemy of the Jews. Haman rises to power in Susa, but Mordecai refuses to bow to him. Haman escalates the conflict by getting the king to sign an edict against all Jews in the empire and planning to hang Mordecai. Esther intercepts his plans, however, and the king kills Haman instead. Haman is called an “Agagite,” possibly referring to King Agag the Amalekite (1 Sa 15:8)—the Amalekites had opposed Israel for hundreds of years (Dt 25:17–19).

King Ahasuerus. The king deposes Queen Vashti when she publicly disobeys him at his banquet. He then brings on Esther as his new queen. Ahasuerus is a very reactive character in the story: he deposes Vashti, he goes along with Haman's plot, he makes grand promises to Esther, he allows Esther and Mordecai to write their own counter-laws and enact their own feasts. Ironically, the king of 127 provinces is the weakest of the main characters.

It's a fascinating story of faith, courage, and conviction. We do not know who wrote the book of Esther, although Mordecai's records may have served as a source (Est 9:20).

Theme verse of Esther

The theme of Esther is summarized in Esther's conversation with Mordecai in chapter 4.

[Mordecai to Esther] “For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?” (Est 4:14)

[Esther to Mordecai] “I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish.” (Est 4:16b)

Esther's role in the Bible

We don't know who wrote the book of Esther, though it could have been Mordecai.



The drama of Esther is unique among the books of the Bible. There is no mention of God. There is no mention of covenant. At face value, it comes across more like a political novella than a movement in the biblical narrative.

However, when you read Esther in the context of God's covenant relationship with Israel, it becomes clear that something bigger is stirring below the surface:

Why do Esther and Mordecai fast?

How is Mordecai so confident that the Jews will be delivered?

Mordecai and Esther act in faith that someone or something will intervene for their people. Their bold faith propels the story to its end: the deliverance and prosperity of the Jews.

The book of Esther gives us an idea of what faith looks like when it's played out, and challenges us with the question: is my faith as evident as Esther's and Mordecai's?

Quick outline of Esther

The author of Esther makes great use of parallelism in storytelling. The first half of the book opens with a feast and lays out problem after problem for Esther and Mordecai, while the second half resolves those problems in reverse order and concludes with the Jewish feast of Purim.

Ahasuerus holds a feast and selects Esther as his queen (Es 1–2)

Haman plots to destroy the Jews.

Ahasuerus promotes Haman, who plots to kill the Jews (Es 3).

Esther must risk her life to intercede for the Jews (Es 4–5:8).

Haman plans to kill Mordecai (Es 5:9–14).

Esther foils Haman's plan

Ahasuerus has Haman honor Mordecai instead (Es 6)

Esther intercedes for the Jews and Haman is killed (Es 7)

Ahasuerus promotes Mordecai, who delivers the Jews (Es 8)

Esther and Mordecai institute the feast of Purim (Es 9–10)

More pages related to Esther

Job (next book of the Bible)

Nehemiah (previous)

Ezra



18. Job

Satan attacks a righteous man named Job, and Job and his friends argue about why terrible things are happening to him.

Author: Nobody knows

Job: faith under fire

What is Job about?

Nobody has it better than Job:

He's righteous

He's rich

He has a big, happy family

But things abruptly change. In one day, his children die when a building collapses, his employees are slaughtered, and his cattle are stolen. Then, painful boils break out on his skin. Job loses everything, and is left wondering why.

The answer: Someone wants to prove that Job will curse God. This is the central conflict of the book. It's Job's test: will he abandon his faith or remain loyal to God?

Here's how the story plays out:

An adversary attacks Job. God tells a character called Satan (literally, "the accuser") that Job is a blameless and upright man, but the Satan points out that God has already blessed Job abundantly. The Satan argues that Job is just returning the favor, and asserts that Job would turn on God if his blessings were taken away. God gives the Satan a chance to prove it, and he immediately rips everything he can away from Job. But Job does not curse God.

Job mourns while his friends accuse him. Job's three friends come to comfort him, and Job begins to lament his loss to them. Their response stings: "God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves" (Job 11:6). Job's friends tell him that this suffering must be brought on by Job's sin, and he should repent. Job argues back that he has not incurred any punishment. Job wishes he could plead his case to God. Still, Job does not curse God. Job and his friends go back and forth three times on this issue, and then a young bystander named Elihu jumps in.



God Himself answers Job. After Elihu weighs in, God speaks to Job. God challenges Job's understanding by reminding Job of His wisdom, sovereignty, and power.

Job is restored. When God finishes, Job humbly concedes that God's will is unstoppable, and repents. God also reprimands Job's friends for misrepresenting Him. Finally, God restores Job: he becomes twice as wealthy, he again is blessed with children, and he dies at a ripe old age.

Throughout the book of Job, we wonder whether Job will stand firm in his faith or abandon it. In the end, Job remains faithful to God, and God remains faithful to Job.

Theme verses of Job

"[Job] said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.' Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God." (Job 1:21–22)

Job's role in the Bible

Job is the first Old Testament book of poetry (the others are Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations). Although the book of Job is best known for its story, only three of the 42 chapters are narrative. The rest are poetic discourses from Job, his friends, a young bystander, and God Himself. Job is considered wisdom literature: the book helps us understand God, His creation, our relationship with Him, and how we should respond.

A few features make Job especially unique in the Bible:

Job is not said to be Hebrew. All other times the Bible mentions a place called Uz, it is not in the land of Israel (Lam 4:21; Jer25:20). Job makes sacrifices on behalf of others (Job 1:5)—there is no mention of Levitical priests nor God's covenant law with Israel.

Job focuses on God's role as sovereign creator. When God answers Job, He asks a series of "Where where you when . . ." questions. The book of Job attests to God's creative power, wisdom, and authority. Because God made the universe, we can trust that He knows how to rule it.



Job pulls back the curtain on Satan's activities. Until the book of Job, we've only seen Satan influence David for Israel's harm (1 Chr 21:1), but in Job, we see the enemy in full-on attack against God's servant. We see that Satan can manipulate the weather (Job 1:16, 19), a person's health (Job 2:7), and even groups of people (Job 1:15, 17). But we also see God setting Satan's limits (Job 1:12; 2:6).

Job serves as an example of how the righteous are not immune to suffering. In the New Testament, James cites Job as an example to Christians who suffer:

As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful. (James 5:10—11)

And like Job, we are Satan's targets now. Peter warns us that the devil "prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." But our response should be the same as Job's: we must "resist him, firm in [our] faith" (1 Pet 5:8–9).

Quick outline of Job

- Job: a righteous and rich man (Job 1:1-5)
- Satan strips Job of his blessings to get him to curse God (Job 1:6–2:13)
- Job and company discuss his situation (Job 3–37)
- Cycle 1 (Job 3–14)
- Cycle 2 (Job 15–21)
- Cycle 3 (Job 22–31)
- Elihu interrupts (Job 32–37)
- God speaks to Job (Job 38–41)
- Job's blessings restored (Job 42)

19. Psalms

A collection of 150 songs that Israel sang to God (and to each other)—kind of like a hymnal for the ancient Israelites.
 Author: So many authors—meet them all here!

Psalms: 150 songs and poems to God

Theme verse: "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
 Nor stand in the path of sinners,



Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
 But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
 And in His law he meditates day and night." (Ps 1:1–2)

Summary of Psalms

Psalms is a collection of 150 poems written over hundreds of years. Many were originally put to music, and used in the Jewish temples to praise the Lord. It all begins with an invitation:

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
 Nor stand in the path of sinners,
 Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
 But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
 And in His law he meditates day and night. (Ps 1:1–2)
 The man who meditates on the Law of the Lord will be blessed, and by contrast, the wicked will perish (Ps 1:6). Why? Because God is King, and His Messiah will one day rule.

Psalms has it all.
 History, poetry, prayer, song, chant, prophecy—Psalms runs the gamut when it comes to the kind of content covered in the Bible.

The Psalms address every major Old Testament event:

- Creation
- God's covenant with Abraham, Issac, and Jacob
- The exodus
- The giving of the Torah
- The conquest of the promised land
- God's covenant with David
- The temple in Jerusalem
- The Babylonian captivity
- The return to Jerusalem

Psalms takes us through the spectrum of human experience, and shows us that no matter what we go through, there is a God who listens to those who call on Him. He walks beside us, goes before us, encamps around us, reigns above us, and dwells among us. He is God, and we should praise Him.

The authors of Psalms

Psalms has more authors than any other book of the Bible, by far. Psalms credits five individual authors and two families (who wrote psalms over the centuries). Many psalms are still not attributed to any authors today.



Here's the spread:

David: 73 psalms

(The Septuagint and Latin Vulgate credit a few more to him.²) Half of Psalms was written by King David at various points in his life—and not all of them were good times. David's psalms show how a man of God prays during times of hardship, loss, joy, and guilt.

Asaph (the family): 12 psalms

This family was ordained by David to lead the people in worship, and was recommissioned when Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem (1 Ch 25:1; Neh 7:44; 12:46–47).

The sons of Korah: 11 psalms

Back in the book of Numbers, a man named Korah rebelled against Moses and Aaron—and God caused the earth to swallow him up. His sons survived, though (Nu 26:11), and continued to serve in the house of the Lord. They share one psalm (Ps 88) with the wise man Heman.

Solomon: two psalms

Solomon is better known for his work in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon, but he also contributes a few lines to Psalms.

Moses: one psalm.

In addition to writing Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, Moses also wrote the ninetieth psalm (Ps 90).

Ethan the Ezrahite: one psalm

We don't know much about Ethan, except that he was very wise, and Solomon was wiser (1 Ki 4:31). Sorry, Ethan.

The remaining 50 psalms aren't credited to any one author.

The structure of Psalms

Psalms is really five smaller books in one. And since each of these smaller books is an anthology, there's really not a single narrative to follow throughout the book; however, there are a few things we can learn from the book's structure:

Book One (Ps 1–41) is mostly written by David, and focuses on God's ability to deliver those who fear Him. We see David pour out his heart to God, beg for protection, and ask for help against his enemies. Of all the books, this is the most personal, and has the feel of a one-on-one interaction with God. In Book One, we see the Lord beside us during times of trouble.



Book Two (Ps 42–72) focuses on God as the mighty Judge and King. He is the executor of justice on all nations, and the rescuer of those who delight in Him. In Book Two, we see the Lord going before us to execute justice on His enemies.

Book Three (Ps 73–89) is mostly written by the sons of Asaph, a family devoted to leading the people in worship to God in His temple (1 Ch 25:1). This book focuses on God's relationship with the whole nation of Israel, not just the psalmist. It emphasizes God's faithfulness—a faithfulness that spans generations. In Book Three, we see the Lord around us, remaining faithful to His people through the generations.

Book Four (Ps 90–106) directs our eyes to the Lord who rules over all the earth. Several of these psalms begin with simply, “The Lord reigns,” or “Praise the Lord!” This part of Psalms shows the Lord above us, the kind and righteous God who deserves our worship and praise.

And in Book Five (Ps 107–150), we are called to thank Him. He's the Savior, deliverer, and God of all. In Book Five, we see the Lord among us, in His temple with his people.

Psalm's role in the Bible

Psalms is the second book of poetry in the Bible. While the poetic books of Job, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon read as whole pieces, Psalms is a collection of 150 small units in one book—somewhat like today's hymnals.

Which brings up an interesting point: Psalms is the only book of the Bible that isn't given chapters. Most books of the Bible were divided up by chapters around 1227 A.D., but Psalms is (mostly) divided according to the original documents. Most of the psalms have titles designating their composers, and some even include a little historical backdrop (example: Ps 51). Since Psalms is naturally divided by poem, you don't find a “Psalms chapter 23,” instead, you'll just find “Psalm 23” or “the twenty-third Psalm.”

Oh, and don't let the psalm count fool you. Although there are 150 psalms, Psalms is not the longest book of the Bible—that's Jeremiah. But here's my favorite thing about Psalms: while most of the Law and Prophets deal with God's messages to men, the Psalms give us examples of how we can respond to God. While every other book of the Bible is written to people, the Psalms are directed to God.



They're still inspired by God (2 Ti 3:16), but they feel incredibly human. Through the Psalms, we see how godly people spoke to a holy God in all kinds of circumstances.

20. Proverbs

A collection of sayings written to help people make wise decisions that bring about justice.

Author: Solomon and other wise men

Proverbs: principles of wisdom, righteousness, and justice

The new king Solomon became king, God came to him in a dream with a golden opportunity: "Ask what you wish Me to give you" (1 Ki 3:5).

He could have asked for long life, riches, or the deaths of his adversaries, but instead, he asks for wisdom (1 Ki 3:9). God was pleased with Solomon's answer; it showed that the young king desired to lead His people with justice. The Lord grants Solomon's request, and heaps upon him riches and honor to boot.

Solomon rules with wisdom and justice, and all Israel prospers (1 Ki 4:20, 25). The writer of First Kings gives us an idea of just how wise Solomon was:

Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that grows on the wall; he spoke also of animals and birds and creeping things and fish. Men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom. (1 Ki 4:30, 32–34)

The book of Proverbs is a collection of Solomon's wise sayings, with a few more wise men chiming in here and there. Proverbs urges the reader to make decisions based on wisdom, justice, and righteousness (Pr 1:3). His sayings are sometimes direct instructions (Pr 1:10), sometimes general observations (Pr 20:14).

Even today, Solomon is an icon of wisdom. Proverbs is our opportunity to piggyback on this king's insight and make wise choices ourselves.

Key verse in Proverbs



"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction." (Pr 1:7)

Proverbs' role in the Bible

Proverbs is the third of the Old Testament books of poetry (after Job and Psalms). The poetry of Proverbs takes several forms:

Discourse. The first nine chapters of Proverbs poetically argue the advantage of wisdom. This argument is progressively developed: wisdom is personified as a lady who cares for young men, rewards them, and protects them. If you've spent much time in the book of Job, this style will feel very familiar to you.

Two-liners. Once you're through the first nine chapters, two-liners dominate the book of Proverbs. These pithy sayings show similarity (Pr 26:17), contrast (Pr 10:7), and consequence (Pr 25:17). They were easy to remember and easy to apply.

Lists. These are some of my favorites. Part puzzle, part solution, these sayings bring a group of seemingly random observances and profoundly expose something they have in common. Example: Proverbs 30:29–31.

Acrostics. Also great for memorizing (if you grew up learning Hebrew)! You've heard of the "Proverbs 31 woman"? That's actually an acrostic: each line in Proverbs 31:10–31 begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Extended sayings. These are longer than two-liners, but don't nicely fall into the other categories. Example: Proverbs 30:7–9.

Though most of its text can be attributed to Solomon, the book does mention a few other contributors:

Agur (Pr 30)

Lemuel (Pr 31)

"The wise" (Pr 22:17–24:34)

Hezekiah's men transcribed some of Solomon's proverbs (Pr 25–29)

One trait that makes Proverbs an interesting book of the Bible is that not all of its text is given as absolute truth. The sayings in Proverbs are best interpreted as principles, not hard-and-fast laws about how God and the world work.

After all, not all righteous men are delivered from trouble (Pr 11:8), and not all who abuse their wealth come to poverty (Pr 22:16). These are observations that Solomon made, and they steer us toward godly living.



When you read and study Proverbs, remember that these sayings were guidelines intended to help people make wise, just, righteous decisions.

Quick outline of Proverbs

Choose wisdom! (1–9)
 The excellence of wisdom (1–4)
 Drawbacks of folly (5–7)
 Wisdom calls (8–9)
 Wisdom vs folly (10–18)
 Life principles (19–24)
 Wickedness, righteousness, and similarities (25–29)
 Misc. advice (30–31)
 More related to Proverbs
 Ecclesiastes (poetry, next book of the Bible)
 Psalms (poetry, previous)
 Job (poetry)
 Song of Solomon (poetry)
 Lamentations (poetry)

21. Ecclesiastes

A philosophical exploration of the meaning of life—with a surprisingly nihilistic tone for the Bible.
 Author: Traditionally Solomon

Ecclesiastes: what's the point?

Overview of Ecclesiastes

The Preacher. This guy has it all. He's a world-renowned wise man. He's king over the twelve tribes of Israel.

But he can't hold onto it forever. He'll die someday, and who knows how his sons will handle the kingdom? Who knows what will happen to the people? Who knows what will happen to him?

This Preacher wrote, gathered, and assembled written words of wisdom: the one who assembled wisdom and assembled the people (Ecclesiastes 12:9–10). And now he's grappling with an age-old riddle:

What advantage does man have in all his work which he does under the sun? (Eccl 1:3)



By "under the sun," he means apart from God. God is in heaven, and man is on earth (Eccl 5:2). So if you deal solely with the visible, tangible, observed-cause-and-effect human experience, what are you left with? It's a tough question. After all, the universe seems to be in a constant state of resetting itself. The sun rises, sets, and rises again. Rivers flow, but never empty. Information multiplies, but the mind is never satisfied. So in the never-ending cycles of life, what can man do? It sure looks meaningless. And the more the Preacher learns about the world, the more depressing a world it becomes (Eccl 1:18). So he explores this problem. The first portion of Ecclesiastes explore man's situation on earth (Eccl 1:13). And the situation isn't too great:

The smarter you get, the harder it is to cope with the world (Eccl 1:18).

Pleasure and riches do not satisfy (Eccl 2:10–11; Eccl 5:10;).

Wise men and fools die alike (Eccl 2:16).

You can't take the results of your hard work with you when you die (Eccl 2:18–19; 5:13–17).

What you leave behind goes to a generation who didn't earn it (Eccl 2:18–19).

And the results of your labor don't really satisfy your desires, either (Eccl 2:10–11; 5:10; 6:7).

People practice evil instead of justice (Eccl 3:16; 4:1; 5:8).

Even obedience to God doesn't guarantee a long, happy life (Eccl 7:16).

And the wicked sometimes get away with it (Eccl 7:15; 8:14).

So then he turns to explain it. Why is the world this way? What can we do about it? What's the point? He's sure that there's a just God (Eccl 8:12–13)—he's seen him with his own eyes (1 Ki 3:5). But the world doesn't always reflect God's justice, so the Preacher explains what man can do to enjoy life, even if God's works are not apparent:

Eat, drink, and enjoy life, because you're in the hand of God (Eccl 9:7–9).

Work hard, and use wisdom while you can (Eccl 9:10, 18).

Avoid acts of foolishness—especially when dealing with authority (Eccl 10:2, 5–6, 20).

Take chances, pursue opportunities, and enjoy life while you can (Eccl 11:4, 8–10).

As you live, remember who made you (Eccl 12:1).

And then the Preacher sums everything up:

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil. (Eccl 12:13–14)



The question: in a world of injustice and pain, what's the point? The answer: fear God, even though you might not see Him make it right.

Theme verse of Ecclesiastes

I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind. (Eccl 1:14)

Ecclesiastes' role in the Bible

Ecclesiastes is the fourth book of poetry in the Bible (after Job, Psalms, and Proverbs). While Psalms is a collection of songs and Proverbs is a collection of principles, Ecclesiastes is one long-form poetic discourse: it poses one main question at the beginning and spends the next twelve chapters arriving at an answer. The book never mentions its author by name: and it's important to note that the author is not necessarily the Preacher.

The author opens with the words of "the Preacher," and then concludes by wrapping up the Preacher's words and putting his own takeaways at the end.

This isn't a Sunday-morning-sermon-delivering preacher we're familiar with today; rather, it's "one who assembles." The original Hebrew word for this role only shows up in Ecclesiastes, and probably refers to someone who assembles wisdom and teaches the people. So why is this book traditionally attributed to Solomon?

The Preacher gives us a few clues:

He is a son of David (Ec 1:1).

He is a king (Ec 1:1).

He ruled all of Israel in Jerusalem (Ec 1:12).

He was a wise man of great renown (Ec 12:9–10).

There were only two kings from David's line who ruled Israel from Jerusalem: Solomon and Rehoboam. And Rehoboam's legacy really doesn't fit the bill (check out the twelfth chapter of First Kings). That leaves Solomon the likely candidate, if the verses identifying the Preacher are to be taken literally. Ecclesiastes' tone isn't one you'd expect from the Bible. It's melancholy and dismissive. You'll find happier language in Lamentations (and I'm not joking). That's because the Preacher is exploring the world according to human experience alone. Without a God working behind the scenes to execute justice, the Preacher sees life as pretty meaningless. But Ecclesiastes is encouraging nonetheless:



We see that it's OK to recognize flaws in the world around us. The Bible doesn't bind us to Pollyanna-ism—there are injustices and inconsistencies that we cannot control, and we don't have to smile through it or pretend they don't exist.

We can hope in a good heavenly Judge. The apostle Paul agrees that all creation was subjected to futility (Ro 8:20), and is groaning in anticipation of the coming glory that Christ will bring (Ro 8:22). We join the rest of the universe in anticipation.

Christians don't live in the same world as the Preacher's. We have something he didn't experience: the continuous indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Preacher lived in a world where God worked behind the scenes and judged everyone eventually (Eccl 12:13–14), but God is at work in us every single day. The world may be a messed up place, but if Christ is in us, we always have hope (Col 1:27)

Quick outline of Ecclesiastes

- The problem (Eccl 1:1–11)
- Exploring the problem under the sun (Eccl 1:12–8:17)
- Explaining life in the hand of God (Eccl 9–12:12)
- The conclusion (Eccl 12:13–14)
- More pages related to Ecclesiastes
- Job (also wisdom poetry that deals with unexplained pain)
- Proverbs (also wisdom poetry)
- Song of Songs (also often attributed to Solomon)

22. Song of Solomon (Song of Songs)

A love song (or collection of love songs) celebrating love, desire, and marriage.

Author: Traditionally Solomon (but it could have been written about Solomon, or in the style of Solomon)

Song of Solomon: delighting in love, sex, and marriage

About Song of Solomon

In the book of Genesis, when God made Adam and Eve, He brought them together as husband and wife. Adam recognized Eve as bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.



For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. (Gn 2:23–24)

The Song of Solomon (also known as the Song of Songs) celebrates this kind of union: a man and a woman becoming one.

It's a ballad of love and longing. It's an exchange of love notes. It's a story of adoration, satisfaction, delight, and sexual desire.

It's the tale of a young woman preparing to marry her love: a handsome gent who adores her. They describe their emotions, their passions, their appearances, their fears. They vulnerably display their love and desire for one another—sometimes rather graphically.

The structure of Song of Solomon

Song of Solomon is arranged by character. Three parties join the song:

The bride, a hard-working shepherd girl with a rough home life (So 1:6).

The bridegroom, a handsome and stately shepherd. The text doesn't explicitly say whether or not Solomon is the bridegroom, but the bride does reference Solomon's wedding parade (So 3:6–11).

The chorus, the community of people celebrating the bride and bridegroom's love and union.

If this were indeed an arranged song, think of it as a duet with a choir. And this song has three general movements:

The bride and groom prepare for the wedding.

The bride and groom profess their desire for one another.

The bride and groom are finally united.

It culminates in their marriage and mutual delight in one another: the bride is her beloved's and his desire is for her (So 7:10).

Theme verse of Song of Solomon

"I am my beloved's,
And his desire is for me." —Bride (So 7:10)

A few facts about Song of Solomon

Song of Solomon is one of two books in the Bible that don't mention God.

Solomon uses some really strange analogies in the song of songs to describe his bride, comparing her cheeks to pomegranates and her hair to a flock of goats, to name a few. Well, they're strange to us, because we're used to visual analogies, but to the original readers, this was top-notch stuff.



Song of Solomon is the fifth book of poetry in the Bible.

Solomon wrote 1,005 songs in his lifetime (1 Ki 4:32), but this is the “song of songs” (So 1:1). Like Psalms, it's a book of lyrics; but while every psalm's beginning and end is clearly marked, Song of Solomon doesn't give us this level of clarity.

Song of Solomon's role in the Bible

It's possible that the song of songs has always been one grand piece that Solomon wrote. But it's also possible that Solomon explored and arranged pieces of poetry for the people, like Quohelth in the book of Ecclesiastes (Eccl 12:9–10). The song of songs may be a metason: an anthology of smaller pieces.

Song of Solomon gives us a biblical look at human love. The characters experience attraction, lovesickness, and what seems like a pretty great wedding night (So 7).

In fact, the book has an almost secular feel. God is never directly mentioned in the original Hebrew; the closest we get to a mention of God is in the last chapter, when the bride compares jealous love to a blazing flame (So 8:6). That Hebrew word for flame literally means “flame of the Lord,” but could just mean an especially hot fire.

Solomon's song of songs is an old book, but its portrait of powerful, all-consuming love probably resonates with most of us today:

“Many waters cannot quench love,
 Nor will rivers overflow it;
 If a man were to give all the riches of his house for love,
 It would be utterly despised.” (So 8:7)

It's a passionate description of human love.

Quick outlines of Song of Solomon

Here's the basic outline of the book's progression:

Preparation for the wedding (So 1–3)

The bride prepares (1–3:5)

The groom prepares (3:6–11)

The couple profess their love and desire

The groom professes his love (4)

The bride professes her love and longing (5)

Both are united in love (6–8)

More pages related to Song of Solomon

Proverbs (mostly written by Solomon)

Psalms (also a book of song lyrics)



Ecclesiastes (also written by Solomon)
Lamentations (also a book of lyrics or short poems)

23. Isaiah

God sends the prophet Isaiah to warn Israel of future judgment—but also to tell them about a coming king and servant who will “bear the sins of many.”

Author: Isaiah (and maybe some of his followers)

Isaiah: judgment and comfort for Israel

The nation of Israel has long been split into two nations: North and South, Israel and Judah. They’d weathered wars against each other and the surrounding nation for a few hundred years, but neither kingdom can stand through the storms to come.

The Assyrians are rising in power, and the Babylonians will overthrow them in time. And the people hadn’t remained faithful to their God, and so their security as a nation cannot last.

The North will fall soon. The South will fall later. God raises up the prophet Isaiah to tell the people this message.

But by His grace, the message doesn’t end there.

Yes, God is going to bring the Assyrians against the North. He will bring the Babylonians against the Assyrians. He will send the South into exile in Babylon. He will bring the Persian Cyrus against the Babylonians.

But He will also bring Israel back home. He will also rule Israel as Immanuel: God with us. He will judge Israel’s enemies, and bring all the nations to Himself, too.

And somehow, a mysterious Servant will bear the sins of many, reconciling Israel and the world to the Lord.

That’s Isaiah’s message. God’s judgment is coming, but so is His comfort.

Theme verse of Isaiah

Zion will be redeemed with justice
And her repentant ones with righteousness. (Is 1:27)



Isaiah's role in the Bible

Isaiah is the first of the Major Prophets. When God had a message for the people, He spoke to them through prophets: men moved by the Holy Spirit to speak on God's behalf.

Isaiah is the only Major Prophet whose story takes place before the fall of Jerusalem. While Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesy about these events before and while they happen, Isaiah looks into the future to see Judah's Babylonian captivity.

And the other writers of the Bible look back at Isaiah when telling the story of Israel. Isaiah personally interacts with the kings of Judah, the Southern Kingdom, and so his story covers some of the events in Kings and Chronicles:

The writer of Chronicles cites Isaiah as a source of information on kings Uzziah and Hezekiah (2 Ch 27:22; 32:32;).

Isaiah describes the spiritual conflict surrounding Ahaz' war against Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and Aram (Is 7, 2 Ki 16:5-9; 2 Ch 28). Isaiah goes into much detail on Hezekiah's reign: including his run-in with Sennacherib and miraculous recovery.

Isaiah foretells the downfall of Israel at Assyria's hand, which we learn about in more detail in Second Kings (2 Ki 17).

Isaiah anticipates Judah's fall, too. He predicts that the Babylonians will carry the Jews away. We see this come true in Second Chronicles and Daniel (2 Ch 36; Da 1:1-2).

Lastly, Isaiah makes the incredible prediction that Cyrus, the Persian emperor, will send the Jews back home. Second Chronicles ends on this note, and the story continues in Ezra (2 Ch 36:22-23; Is 44:28-45:7).

Isaiah's most famous prophecies, however, concern Jesus. No other prophet is referenced in the New Testament as much as Isaiah. Isaiah preaches of the coming King who will rule Israel and the nations in justice and peace. He also looks forward to a special Servant of God: one who will fulfill all Israel's duties and bear their sins.

Here are just a couple of famous things Isaiah said about Jesus:

"Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel" (Is 7:14). This prophecy ultimately points to Jesus, as the Gospel of Matthew points out (Mt 1:22-23).



“All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him” (Is 53:6). The entire fifty-third chapter is a beautiful prophecy of Jesus.

Isaiah's words also have a special meaning for today's church (which is made up of Jews and Gentiles). Paul quotes Isaiah extensively in his letter to the Romans as he explains salvation, the sovereignty of God, and the new relationships between the Lord, the Gentiles, and the Jews.

Quick outline of Isaiah

- Messages of righteous judgment (1–35)
- Judgment on Israel and Judah (1–12)
- Judgment on the other nations (13–24)
- Promised restoration of all nations (25–27)
- Woe and judgment on Jerusalem (28–33)
- Woe to nations, blessings to Jerusalem (34–35)
- Isaiah's ministry to Hezekiah (36–39)
- Messages of comfort and salvation (40–66)
- Israel's coming restoration (40–45)
- Babylon's judgment (46–48)
- Salvation through the Servant (49–56:8)
- Rebuke for the wicked (56:9–59:21)
- Zion glorified (60–65)
- God's righteous, final judgment (66)

More pages related to Isaiah

- 1 & 2 Chronicles (uses Isaiah as a source)
- Romans (uses many Isaiah passages in its arguments)
- Jeremiah (also anticipates the fall of Judah)
- Micah (also concerned with God's expectations of Judah and Israel)

24. Jeremiah

God sends a prophet to warn Israel about the coming Babylonian captivity, but the people don't take the news very well.
Author: Jeremiah

Jeremiah: Jerusalem's rebellion, punishment, and hope



The temple of the Lord had stood in Jerusalem for more than 300 years. The nation was known by God's name: the surrounding nations had heard of the wonders Israel's God had worked for them in Egypt, in the wilderness, and in their own land. Israel's God was a great God, and His throne was in Jerusalem.

Yet they did not follow Him. They worshiped other gods, perverted justice in the land, and ignored His laws. Once in a while, a king, a descendant of David, would turn the people back to God, but the other kings led the people into all kinds of disobedience.

The people have gone far enough. God promised to exile His people from their land if they turned from Him, and now Jerusalem's time has come. The Babylonians will destroy the city, raze the holy temple, and carry the Jews away.

But even as the Lord plans Jerusalem's destruction, He sends his people a prophet to warn, challenge, and comfort them. That prophet is a young man named Jeremiah.

Jeremiah ministers to the Jews for about 40 years, and his career is a sad one. He is, for the most part, the only prophet of God in the land: everyone else who claims to have a word from the Lord is a fake.

That's especially difficult for Jeremiah, because while the false prophets preach peace, safety, and victory over Babylon, Jeremiah insists that the Babylonians will destroy everything. The false prophets tell everyone that God is with His people; Jeremiah tells everyone that God is on the enemy's side. You can imagine which message is more popular.

Jeremiah endures mockery, imprisonment, kidnapping, and death threats from the people he desperately tries to help.

But God's word comes true: Nebuchadnezzar defeats the Jews, and carries off the royal family. The temple is destroyed. The city is burned with fire. The Babylonians set up a new governor over the area and go back to their land. They also release Jeremiah from prison and tell him to live a happy life.

But it doesn't end there. A neighboring nation assassinates the governor, and the Jews are left with two options:

- Stay in their land
- Migrate to Egypt as refugees



They ask Jeremiah what the Lord would have them do, and He promises them that if they stay in the land of Israel they will flourish. They will live in peace under Babylonian rule, and God Himself will have compassion on them. But if they disobey, God will bring the Babylonians against the Egyptians, and the Jews will perish when Egypt is conquered.

The Jews choose to go to Egypt anyway.

Theme verse in Jeremiah

“See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms,
 To pluck up and to break down,
 To destroy and to overthrow,
 To build and to plant.” —God, to Jeremiah (Je 1:10)

Jeremiah’s role in the Bible

Jeremiah is the second of the Major Prophets. When God had a message for the people, He spoke to them through prophets: men moved by the Holy Spirit to speak God's words.

Jeremiah is also the longest book of the Bible by word count in the original language.

Jeremiah is known as the “weeping prophet,” and for good reason. Jeremiah’s message is heartbreaking: the people of God have forsaken Him, and now He will destroy them. And even as Jeremiah preaches to the people, they do not listen. Jeremiah’s tragic writings don’t end in this book, either: the weeping prophet is the traditional author of Lamentations, a collection of funeral dirges for Jerusalem.

Jeremiah mixes prophetic discourse with narrative, and the narratives are not arranged chronologically. He speaks to kings, priests, commanders, and the people, and travels to many nations. As you read Jeremiah, you’ll learn to anticipate Jeremiah’s advice and the people’s response—and you’ll see just how many chances God gives His people to follow His voice and keep His covenant.

But the covenant is broken. The people are broken.

And it’s in Jeremiah that we learn about God’s plan to make a new covenant with His people. His law will be on their hearts, and they will all know Him. He shall be their God, and they shall be His people. He will forgive their sin and remember it no more (Jer 31:31–34). God



makes this covenant through Jesus Christ in the New Testament—the book of Hebrews explores this new covenant in detail.

When the prophet Daniel reads the book of Jeremiah (Dan 9), he prays to the Lord on behalf of Israel—and nicely sums up how the book fits into the rest of the Old Testament:

The Jews were warned that this would happen in the Law of Moses. But the kings and rulers did not obey.

They ignored the prophets.

Although Jeremiah's messages focus on the coming punishment of Judah, this book is not without hope. Jeremiah promises restoration and return for the Jews, which comes to pass in the book of Ezra. Jeremiah also looks forward to a righteous king from the line of David to arise in the future, and although He has been born (Mt 2:2), the Lord Jesus Christ has yet to take office in Jerusalem.

Quick outline of Jeremiah

- God commissions Jeremiah (Jer 1)
- Prophecies of God's wrath against Jerusalem (Jer 2–25)
- The people reject Jeremiah's message (Jer 26–28)
- Messages of hope: God will restore the people (Jer 29–35)
- The people reject Jeremiah's message (Jer 36–38)
- Jerusalem falls, and the remnant flees to Egypt (Jer 39–45)
- Prophecies of God's wrath against the nations (Jer 46–51)
- Chronological summary of Jerusalem's fall (Jer 52)

25. Lamentations

A collection of dirges lamenting the fall of Jerusalem after the Babylonian attacks.

Author: Traditionally Jeremiah

Lamentations: the dirge for Jerusalem

The city of God is in ruins. The temple is destroyed. The king's palace is in shambles. The gates are burned down. The walls are torn apart. The Babylonians have ransacked the holy city.

“How?”

That's the original name of Lamentations, this small collection of five poems that mourn the fall of Jerusalem. According to tradition, the



prophet Jeremiah writes these dirges for the city he had ministered to for years. And it all begins with the word "How."

"How lonely sits the city
That was full of people!
She has become like a widow
Who was once great among the nations!
She who was a princess among the provinces
Has become a forced laborer!" (La 1:1)

The book deals with the question, "How could this happen?" How could Jerusalem fall to the Babylonians? The answer has little to do with the political or military forces surrounding the events. Rather, the fall of Jerusalem is a spiritual event, one that happened by spiritual means for spiritual reasons.

The people had rejected their God and His prophets. Before they ever entered the promised land, Israel was given a choice: remain loyal to God and enjoy His blessings and prosperity, or worship other gods and be exiled from their land (that's from Deuteronomy). Israel followed other gods, showed injustice to the poor, and ignored God's laws.

The people had sworn to love and obey and follow the Lord, and they broke that promise time and time again. But God is faithful and just: and He cannot let the guilty go unpunished.

So Jerusalem falls, and all the people can do is mourn.

The siege is unforgettable, but the reason it happened should never be forgotten. And the poetry in Lamentations is particularly memorable. You can't tell in English, but the Lamentations are intricate poems built around the Hebrew alphabet:

The first, second, and fourth chapters are 22 verses long, and when lined up, the first letters of the verse form the Hebrew alphabet. That means verse one begins with the letter alep, verse two begins with bet, and so on through the 22 letters of the alphabet. Here's an example:

Note: Hebrew reads right-to-left.

The third chapter is even more impressive: it's 66 verses long, and it works through the alphabet three verses at a time. Verses 1–3 begin with alep, verses 4–6 begin with bet, etc. Here's what it looks like in Hebrew:

Chapter 5's verses reflect the Hebrew alphabet in number alone. There are 22 verses, but they aren't arranged into an acrostic.



But even in a book named "Lamentations," the God of vengeance is still a God of hope. In the middle of the book, the writer reminds the people to hope in God:

The LORD'S loving kindnesses indeed never cease,
 For His compassions never fail.
 They are new every morning;
 Great is Your faithfulness. (La 3:22–23)
 Why should any living mortal, or any man,
 Offer complaint in view of his sins?
 Let us examine and probe our ways,
 And let us return to the LORD. (La 3:39–40)

The city was destroyed and the people were exiled because of their sin, but even this is an opportunity to call on God for help. For the people of God, He is the only hope.

Theme verse of Lamentations

The LORD is righteous;
 "For I have rebelled against His command;
 Hear now, all peoples,
 And behold my pain;
 My virgins and my young men
 Have gone into captivity." —Jerusalem (La 1:18)

Lamentations' role in the Bible

Lamentations sits in the Major Prophets section of our English Bibles. It follows the story of Jeremiah, who (traditionally) wrote Lamentations. But the poetic structure of this book clearly makes it more similar to the Psalms, Proverbs, and other wisdom literature.

Why the acrostics? It could be to illustrate how completely Jerusalem has been destroyed, or how completely faithful God is to His people and His promises. It could also be a means of keeping the material brief and memorable—after all, Jeremiah's other account is the longest book of the Bible.

This book of Lamentations may include some content the author of First and Second Chronicles references when good King Josiah passes away:

Then Jeremiah chanted a lament for Josiah. And all the male and female singers speak about Josiah in their lamentations to this day. And they made them an ordinance in Israel; behold, they are also written in the Lamentations. (2 Ch 35:25)



Josiah was the last righteous king of Judah, and God had said that Jerusalem would not fall until after Josiah died (2 Ch 34:28). The kings after Josiah led the people into all kinds of rebellion against the Lord, and sealed Jerusalem's fate. The death of Josiah was the first step in Jerusalem's march toward utter destruction.

Lamentations fits into the prophetic section of the Bible by describing the theological backdrop of Judah's exile. Lamentations is a moment of self-awareness: anyone reading the scroll would remember why Jerusalem fell and why the survivors were taken to Babylon. But the book also would have been a hearty (and solemn) encouragement to those who return in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah: no matter how faithless His people are, God remains faithful.

Quick outline of Lamentations

- Jerusalem: punished and in pain (La 1)
- The Lord's anger on Jerusalem (La 2)
- The individual's distress turns to hope (La 3)
- The siege of Jerusalem (La 4)
- A plea for God's mercy (La 5)

More pages related to Lamentations

- Jeremiah (traditionally written by the same author)
- Psalms (also a collection of song lyrics and poems)
- Proverbs (also wisdom poetry)
- Ecclesiastes (also wisdom poetry)

26. Ezekiel

God chooses a man to speak for Him to Israel, to tell them the error of their ways and teach them justice: Ezekiel.
Author: Ezekiel

Ezekiel: God's watchman for a rebellious people

Jerusalem has already been conquered twice. The first time, the Babylonians took Daniel and the noble families of the land (Dan 1:1–3, 6) back to Babylon. Eight years later, the Jews rebelled, and the Babylonians took the king and 10,000 captives. One of those captives was a priest named Ezekiel.

All this had happened because the Jews had broken God's laws. They were supposed to worship God and God alone, but they



turned to the idols of the surrounding nations. They desecrated the temple of the Lord and brutally persecuted His prophets.

So God disciplined them (like He said He would in Deuteronomy). The Babylonians came once. Then they came again.

But instead of turning to God, the people still chased the gods of the nations. They still mistreated the poor. They still disregarded God's laws.

Now it's been five years since the Babylonians last attacked Jerusalem. The Jews in the city would soon revolt again (2 Ki 24:20), but they'd been rebelling against a far greater King than Nebuchadnezzar for a long, long time.

Israel has a worship problem that they cannot, cannot fix. But even now, God doesn't leave them without hope. He chooses a man to speak for Him to the people, to tell them the error of their ways and teach them justice. He chooses a watchman to warn Israel of the coming storm (Eze 3:17).

Ezekiel is the watchman. And he sees some incredibly sad things on the horizon:

The people have broken God's heart with their lewd idolatry and self-serving leaders.

Because of Israel's rebellion, God is withdrawing from and destroying Jerusalem.

But the good news is, that's not all he sees.

God will render justice not only on Jerusalem, but on all the other nations who have led her into idolatry and celebrated her destruction.

God will form a new covenant with the people of Israel. He will lead them Himself as a good shepherd, and they will be reunited under David.

God will defend Israel from her enemies in the dark future.

There will one day be a new temple in Jerusalem, and the glory of the Lord will one day return.

Ezekiel may be the watchman, but it's really God who is watching out for Israel—even as she rebels against Him.



Theme verse of Ezekiel

Say to them, "As I live!" declares the Lord GOD, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?" —God, to Ezekiel (Eze 33:11)

Ezekiel's role in the Bible

Ezekiel is the fourth of the Major Prophets. When God had a message for the people, He spoke to them through prophets: men moved by the Holy Spirit to speak on God's behalf.

Ezekiel has his fair share of oracles (verbal "burdens" from God), but this book is best known for Ezekiel's visions. He sees some intense, intense things, including:

- The Lord enthroned above the cherubim (Eze 1)
- The flagrant idolatry happening within Jerusalem (Eze 8)
- The divine executioners who will slaughter the wicked (Eze 9)
- A valley of dry bones reanimating (Eze 37)
- A new temple in Jerusalem (Eze 40–48)

Take a spin through Ezekiel and you'll find angels with four faces, wheels with eyes, and dry bones growing ligaments (which I imagine was like watching a zombie film backwards).

But Ezekiel isn't the only prophet to have these kinds of visions. Daniel, Zechariah, and John have visions of a similar stock.

But with the larger-than-life visions and watchman status comes some tremendous hardships for Ezekiel. Jeremiah may be known as the weeping prophet, but Ezekiel has his share of suffering:

God takes away Ezekiel's voice, rendering him mute for 7 years (Eze 3:27; 33:22). He can only speak when the Lord has words for him to share with the people.

Ezekiel is tied to the ground on one side for 390 days, and on the other for 40 days. He eats cakes cooked over cow feces for that time, too.

Ezekiel's wife dies, but he is forbidden to mourn the loss. Her death is a sign that Jerusalem will be destroyed, and Ezekiel's response will mirror the Jews'.



Ezekiel prophecies during the same time period as Jeremiah, but while Jeremiah is in Jerusalem and Egypt, Ezekiel is in the land of the Babylonians.

Ezekiel gives us a glimpse of the new relationship God plans to make with His people. His Holy Spirit will dwell within them (Eze 37:14). His glory will be among them (Eze 43:1-9). He will be their God, and they will be united under a righteous king (Eze 34:24). Ezekiel also devotes a great deal of attention to what the restored Israel's land and temple will look like (Eze 40-48).

Ezekiel is the watchman, and through him we see some of God's generous plans for Israel that have yet to come about.

Quick outline of Ezekiel

- God commissions Ezekiel (Eze 1-3)
- Judgments on Israel (Eze 4-24)
- The coming siege of Jerusalem (Eze 4-7)
- Jerusalem's idolatry and God's withdrawal (Eze 8-11)
- Judah and Israel's rebelliousness (Eze 12-24)
- Judgments on the nations (Eze 25-32)
- God's restored relationship with Israel (Eze 33-39)
- The new temple in the restored nation (Eze 40-48)

More pages related to Ezekiel

- Jeremiah (ministered during the same time period)
- Daniel (ministered during the same time period, similar visions)
- Zechariah (similar visions)
- Revelation (similar visions)
- Habbakuk (also concerns Babylonian sieges)
- Haggai (concerns construction of a new temple)

27. Daniel

Daniel becomes a high-ranking wise man in the Babylonian and Persian empires, and has prophetic visions concerning Israel's future.

Author: Daniel (with other contributors)

Daniel: God's long-term plan for the world

Isaiah was right. Jeremiah was right. Habakkuk was right. The Babylonians had attacked Jerusalem and carried off many Jewish captives. One of them was a young man named Daniel.



Daniel quickly distinguishes himself from the men of Babylon. He is loyal to his God. He is wise beyond his years. He can even interpret visions and dreams—accurately. Daniel's gifts are from the God of Israel, and the young man becomes a living testimony to his God in a strange land.

Daniel also has vivid, symbolic visions about the future of Israel, world kingdoms, and the kingdom of God—exposing us to some of God's long-term plan for the world.

The book of Daniel is about how God shows His everlasting wisdom, power, and faithfulness through one of Israel's greatest prophets.

God's wisdom is pervasive in the book of Daniel. In God's wisdom, Daniel was brought to Babylon to give counsel. Through God's wisdom, Daniel is proven to be a trustworthy prophet, even capable of interpreting other people's dreams—a gift only shared by Joseph in Genesis (Gn 41:15) and an unnamed man in Judges (Jdg 7:13–14). Daniel attributes his vast wisdom, insight, and understanding to his wise God (Dan 2:28).

Daniel puts God's sovereignty is on display. The God of Israel is consistently called the Most High God in the book of Daniel. He is the one who raises and removes kings. He is the one who establishes new world empires. He is the Ancient of Days on the throne (Dan 7:9). He is the God of heaven, whose kingdom will never be destroyed (Dan 2:44).

Daniel's visions show God's faithfulness to His people. God cares for His people, and gives them a set of prophecies that point to the events that come in later days. Daniel prophecies about the Messiah, the temple, Jerusalem, and a coming kingdom of righteousness. Through Daniel, God promises a full restoration of Israel.

Daniel can be neatly divided into two parts. The first half is primarily narrative, and concerns Daniel's life in Babylon under foreign kings. The second half is mostly a record of Daniel's visions concerning Israel and world empires. There are many interesting similarities and contrasts between the two halves:

In the first six chapters:

- Daniel interprets visions for foreign kings.
- God's fame among the nations is emphasized.
- Daniel's stories are written in third person.
- Most text is written in Aramaic.



In the last six chapters:

- God gives visions directly to Daniel.
- God's faithfulness to His nation is emphasized.
- Daniel writes in first person.
- Most text is written in Hebrew.

Although Daniel is rich with prophetic visions, the book is better known for its narrative passages in the first half. Many of the stories from Daniel's narrative sections are taught to children, and several English idioms are references to this book:

The "fiery furnace" story involves Daniel's friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. The three friends defy King Nebuchadnezzar's command to worship a golden image, and the king hurls them into a blazing furnace. God intervenes, however, and the three are miraculously unharmed. (Dan 3)

The "handwriting on the wall" is a reference to God's work in the fifth chapter of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar's descendant Belshazzar uses vessels stolen from the Jew's temple to praise other gods, but is interrupted when a hand mysteriously appears and writes a cryptic message on the wall. Daniel is the only one who can interpret the message: God will repay Belshazzar by handing over his kingdom to the Medes and Persians.

In the "lions' den" episode, Daniel obeys God rather than men. Daniel has been awarded a position of power in Babylon after the Medes and Persians overthrew the Babylonian king Belshazzar. Daniel's peers are jealous, and trick the king into making prayer to God illegal. Daniel does not stop praying, and so he is thrown to the lions. God delivers Daniel, though, and he survives the night in the lions' den. (Dan 6)

The book of Daniel is a compelling record of God's wisdom and sovereignty, and it's a key book to study if you're interested in biblical prophecy.

Theme verse of Daniel

"It is He who changes the times and the epochs;
 He removes kings and establishes kings;
 He gives wisdom to wise men
 And knowledge to men of understanding." (Dan 2:21)

Daniel's role in the Bible



Daniel is the last of the major prophets (the others are Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel), and he was a captive of Judah.

The book of Daniel plays several roles in the Bible. Daniel's life serves as an example of godly integrity. His visions paint a prophetic landscape for Daniel's contemporaries. Jesus Christ references Daniel when He describes the future to his apostles (Mt 24:15).

Daniel's role is unique in that its intended audience is not necessarily Jewish. The book was written in two languages, and Daniel's ministry seems more weighted toward supporting the government in Babylon than leading the Jewish community.

Another interesting thing to note: Daniel is one of the few OT books that explicitly references a bodily resurrection. In Daniel's last vision, an angel tells him, "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt" (Dan 12:2). The angel even promises Daniel's resurrection in the end (Dan 12:13).

Quick outline of Daniel

- Daniel's story (1–6)
- Daniel is taken to Babylon (1)
- Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream of an image (2)
- Daniel's friends survive the fiery furnace (3)
- Nebuchadnezzar is humbled (4)
- Daniel interprets the handwriting on the wall (5)
- Daniel survives the lions' den (6)
- Daniel's visions (7–12)
- Vision of the four beasts (7)
- Vision of the ram and goat (8)
- Prayer and vision of 70 weeks (9)
- Vision of kings yet to come (10–12)

More pages related to Daniel

- Hosea (next book of the Bible)
- Ezekiel (previous)
- Revelation (many similarities exist between John's and Daniel's visions)

28. Hosea

Hosea is told to marry a prostitute who leaves him, and he must bring her back: a picture of God's relationship with Israel.



Author: Hosea

Hosea: God's unending love for an unfaithful people

What is Hosea about?

The Northern Kingdom of Israel had turned her back on God.

When God chose Jeroboam to rule the northern ten tribes of Israel, He was prepared to establish Jeroboam's bloodline the same way He'd done for David (1 Ki 11:38). Instead, King Jeroboam set up two golden calves and instituted a pagan priesthood—forever cementing his legacy as the one “who made Israel sin” (1 Ki 13:26). Israel had left the one who had saved her, loved her, and made her His own. The Southern Kingdom of Judah wasn't far behind.

So God tells a man named Hosea to marry a harlot.

Hosea marries her, and has children. But she leaves him and commits adultery.

Then God tells him to go after her and bring her back.

Hosea's marriage is symbolic of God's covenant relationship with Israel. Through Hosea, the Lord tells the story of Israel's disobedience, His discipline, and His steadfast, faithful love:

Rejection and betrayal. Hosea's wife, Gomer, leaves him for another—just like Israel has left God to worship idols.

Rejection and discipline. Just as Israel rejected Him, God will reject her. Israel and Judah will fall to other empires and be taken away from their promised land.

Restoration and reconciliation. Hosea brings back his adulterous wife and loves her again. In an even greater way, God will not forget his love for Israel and Judah, nor His promises to them. He will bring them back to their land. He will restore them to Himself and to David their king: “they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days” (Ho 3:5).

Hosea's message is harsh. Hosea's message is tender. Hosea's message is heartbreaking.

It's the story of God and the unfaithful nation He loves anyway.
Theme verse of Hosea



"Then the LORD said to me, 'Go again, love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.'" (Ho 3:1)

Hosea's role in the Bible

Hosea's book is the first of the Minor Prophets—the last 12 books of the Old Testament. When God had a message for the people, He gave his message through the prophets. These messages came in visions, oracles, dreams, parables, and the like.

While most of the Minor Prophets were from the Southern Kingdom, Hosea was from the North and ministered to the North. He does mention the Southern Kingdom of Judah a few times, though (Ho 1:1, 11; 4:15; 5:5, 8–15; 6:4, 11; 8:14; 10:11; 11:12; 12:2).

Hosea is especially famous for his marriage to the prostitute Gomer. His role and Gomer's profession don't strike readers as the best match, and their marriage certainly would have attracted some attention when it occurred. So why does it happen?

Hosea marries a harlot because God was proving a point: Israel had treated Him in the same way Gomer treats Hosea.

That's the dynamic that sets Hosea apart from the rest of the Scriptures: no other prophet so squarely focuses on the intimate relationship God holds with His people, even when they betray Him. Unfortunately, we know that Israel did not listen to Hosea's warnings (2 Ki 7:13–14).

Like Jeremiah and Habakkuk, Hosea lives to see his prophecy of captivity come to pass. Hosea ministered during the days of southern kings Ahaz and Hezekiah (Ho 1:1), who reigned when the Northern Kingdom was sacked and carried off by Assyria.

Quick outline of Hosea

- Hosea illustrates God's relationship with Israel (Hos 1–3)
- Hosea's wife is unfaithful to him, like Israel is to God (Hos 1–2)
- Hosea brings his wife back, like God will do for Israel (Hos 3)
- Hosea explains God's plan for Israel (Hos 4–13)
- Israel's idolatry against God (4–7)
- Israel's impending punishment (8–10)
- God's loving discipline (11–13)
- God's promise of restoration (14)

More pages related to Hosea



Joel (next book of the Bible)
Daniel (previous)
Amos (also written to the Northern Kingdom of Israel)
Isaiah (written during the same time)

29. Joel

God sends a plague of locusts to Judge Israel, but his judgment on the surrounding nations is coming, too.
Author: Joel

Joel: locusts and the day of the Lord

What is Joel about?

Locusts. Locusts everywhere.

A devastating swarm had come to Judah, the Southern Kingdom. This was no small infestation; the people had never seen anything like it:

“What the gnawing locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten;
And what the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten;
And what the creeping locust has left, the stripping locust has eaten.” (Joe 1:4)

The crops were gone. The people were hungry. The cattle were hungry. What was happening—and why?

The day of the Lord was upon them. When God was delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt, He sent a plague of locusts on the Egyptians' crops. Now, hundreds of years later, He was judging His people with the same kind of plague for straying from Him.

But God also sends His prophet: Joel.

Joel explains to the people what the Lord wants from them: repentance. The Lord would soon have His day, both with Judah and the whole world. Joel's message has two strong points:

God is judging Judah, but He will bless and restore them again when they repent.

God will judge all the nations on Judah's behalf.



God disciplines His people, but He also defends them. Joel says that although Judah is under God's wrath right now, in the future holds many exciting things for the people of God:

The Lord will pour out His Spirit on all mankind.
 Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be delivered.
 The Lord will avenge Judah of her enemies.
 Judah will again become a land of plenty.
 Joel's message is stern for the disobedient, but it also highlights God's love and desire to be with His people. Rather than let them starve after sending the locusts, God sends Joel to direct their hearts back to Him.

Theme verse of Joel

"Yet even now," declares the LORD,
 Return to Me with all your heart,
 And with fasting, weeping and mourning;
 And rend your heart and not your garments."
 Now return to the LORD your God,
 For He is gracious and compassionate,
 Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness
 And relenting of evil. (Joe 2:12–13)

Joel's role in the Bible

Joel is the second minor prophet, who ministered to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. We don't know much about him, and we don't know much about how his message was received.

We do know that Joel's prophecy about the day of the Lord has begun to come to pass. In the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit comes upon the apostles and they began speaking in tongues (on the day of Pentecost). Peter explains that this is what Joel prophesied about in Joel 3:28–32.

However, the promises of Joel's third chapter are yet to be fulfilled. Of all the Old Testament books, Joel has the highest concentration of imperative verbs: 1.1% of the Hebrew words are commanding verbs.

Quick outline of Joel

- God judges Judah (Joel 1–2)
- God sends a plague of locusts on Judah (Joel 1:1–2:11)
- God calls Judah to repent (Joel 2:12–17)
- God promises to restore Judah from the plague (Joel 2:18–27)
- God judges the nations (Joel 2:28–3:21)



God promises to pour out His Spirit on all mankind (Joel 2:28–29)
 God provides opportunity to repent before the day of the Lord (Joel 2:30–32)
 God judges the nations on behalf of Judah (Joel 3)

More pages related to Joel

Amos (next book of the Bible)
 Hosea (previous)
 Acts (promise of the Holy Spirit fulfilled)

30. Amos

A shepherd named Amos preaches against the injustice of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.
 Author: Amos

Amos: the sovereign Lord roars against Israel

Amos was a simple shepherd in the Southern Kingdom of Judah (Am 1:1). He wasn't a prophet. There were no prophets in his family. But God had a message for the rebellious Northern Kingdom of Israel, and He chose Amos to deliver it (Am 7:15).

God had made Israel His chosen people (back in Exodus), and He was to be their God. But when the kingdom divided, the northern tribes turned their backs on Him. The Lord's temple and priests were still in Zion, but Israel worshiped new idols at the cities of Bethel and Dan (1 Ki 12:28–30) and created a new order of priests (1 Ki 12:31), and listened to false prophets.

And now, while God had mercifully given them peace and prosperity under King Jeroboam II (2 Ki 14:26–28), the nation was abusing its own people. The rich were oppressing the poor (Am 4:1; 5:11). The judges were accepting bribes (Am 5:11; 6:12).

God had promised to bless the nation if they obeyed Him and curse them if they rebelled (in Deuteronomy). Israel rebelled, and now judgment is coming. But God isn't going to punish Israel without explaining what's going on (Am 3:7).

So Amos, the shepherd, the tree trimmer, goes to Bethel (a royal city of idol worship) and proclaims God's message of justice, punishment, and restoration. He makes two bold prophecies:

King Jeroboam II will die.



Israel will be carried off into exile. (Am 7:11)

As you can imagine, this message doesn't sit well with Jeroboam II and his false priests. But Amos answers to the Lord, not Israel (Am 3:8):

A lion has roared! Who will not fear?
 The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?
 And when Israel rebels at Bethel, the Lord roars from Zion (Am 1:2).

Theme verse in Amos

“Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are on the sinful kingdom,
 And I will destroy it from the face of the earth;
 Nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob,
 Declares the LORD.” (Am 9:8)

Amos' role in the Bible

Amos is the third of the Minor Prophets, the last twelve books of the Old Testament. When God had a message for the people, He gave his message through the prophets. These messages came in visions, oracles, dreams, parables, and the like.

Amos's ministry may have been the earliest of the Minor Prophets'. He preached during the reigns of Uzziah in Judah and Jeroboam II in Israel (probably no later than 750 B.C.), two years before a major earthquake *(Am 1:1). The prophets Hosea (Hos 1:1) and Jonah (2 Ki 14:23–25) also ministered to Israel during Jeroboam II's reign.

Amos was a prophet from the South (Judah) whom God sent to the North (Israel). This book focuses on God's sovereign justice:

God is sovereign. He created the universe (Am 5:8). He is the one who allows cities and nations to fall (Am 3:6). He is the one who rescued Israel from Egypt (Am 9:7). “The Lord of hosts is His name” (Am 4:13).

God is just. Before the nation of Israel entered the promised land, they made a covenant with God. God promised blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (in Deuteronomy). Israel has disobeyed, and the judgment is on the way.

Amos claims that Israel will be carried away into exile as punishment for their rebellion. His prophecies come true when the Assyrians conquer the Northern Kingdom (2 Ki 17:6–23).



The writer of Second Kings tells us that God's prophets urged Israel and Judah to turn from their evil ways and keep God's commandments, but the people stubbornly ignored them (2 Ki 17:13–14). Amos is an example of this. When God sent Amos with a message of judgment, the false priest tries to silence him (Am 7:10–13).

Amos gave his message during a time of prosperity in Israel—prosperity that God had mercifully given them through the wicked king Jeroboam II (2 Ki 14:24–28). The book of Amos reminds us that God's blessings don't always coincide with our obedience (and are often in spite of our disobedience).

Amos also shows us that God demands justice for the poor. During their time of God-given security, Israel had abused her most insecure citizens (Am 4:1; 5:11–12)—a crime God considers worthy of punishment. God's standards on this haven't relaxed with time. According to the apostle James, God still expects the rich to deal justly with those around them, and will punish those who oppress the poor and the righteous (Ja 5:1–6).

Even though the book of Amos is a message of impending doom, it isn't without notes of hope and restoration. Amos urges the people to “seek the Lord that [they] may live” (Am 5:4–6, 14–15), and even foretells of a day when Israel will be restored from captivity (Am 9:14–15) and reunited with Judah under David's line of kings (Am 9:11).

Quick outline of Amos

- Judgment on surrounding nations (1–2:3)
- Judgment on Israel (2:4–4:13)
- The dirge against unrepentant Israel (5–6)
- Amos' visions against Israel (7–9:10)
- God's promise of restoration (9:11–15)

More pages related to Amos

- Hosea (also a message to the Northern Kingdom)
- Obadiah (next book of the Bible)

31. Obadiah

Obadiah warns the neighboring nation of Edom that they will be judged for plundering Jerusalem.
Author: Obadiah



Obadiah: Edom's judgment is coming

What is Obadiah about?

The book of Obadiah is a brief prophetic word regarding the nearby nation of Edom. And it's not good news for Edom.

Israel has a longstanding rivalry with the nation of Edom, but now Edom has gone too far. When the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem and the temple of God, Edom was there—cheering on the Babylonians (Ps 137:7; Ob 10–11).

Obadiah's message is simple: no matter how safe they think they are, no matter how wise they think they are, Edom can't get away with this (Ob 4, 8).

So God sends his messenger to them: a man named Obadiah (Hebrew for "servant of Yahweh"). Through Obadiah, God swears to turn the tables on Edom.

For now:

Edom dwells in security on their mountain
Israel is scattered and in exile
Edom has plundered Jerusalem
But when the Lord has His day:
Edom will be brought down from Mount Sier (Ob 4)
Israel will be gathered back to her land (Ob 19–20)
Edom will be plundered (Ob 6)
Edom may seem to have won, but the Lord prevails in the end.

Obadiah's backstory

Obadiah unpacks a longstanding history between Israel and one of its enemies—and more importantly, the history of God's covenant with Israel's ancestors. The Israel vs. Edom rivalry is more than just two nations who don't get along. The struggle begins in the book of Genesis.

God made a promise to Abraham: He would bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him (Gn 12:1–3). That blessing was passed on to Isaac, Abraham's son (Gn 21:12; 26:24).

Isaac's wife Rebekah had twins: Esau and Jacob (Gn 25:24–26). God told Rebekah that one nation would prevail, and that Esau would serve Jacob (Gn 25:23). Isaac (accidentally) reiterated this promise, making Jacob the master of Esau (Gn 27:29).



How did that happen? Esau sold Jacob his birthright for a bowl of soup, and then Jacob tricked their father into giving him the blessing of the firstborn. Esau wasn't too happy about that, and for a while, he was bent on killing his twin.

Jacob and Esau eventually resolved their differences (Gn 33:4), and God gave both of their descendants a land. Esau's descendants became the nation of Edom, while Jacob fathered the 12 tribes of Israel. Israel's capital was Mount Zion (Jerusalem); Edom's was Mount Seir (Dt 2:5). Both had an inheritance. Both had a mountain. Only one was God's chosen people.

As time wore on, the relationship between their descendants became strained. Edom refused to let Moses and the Israelites take the highway through their land, and opposed them militantly (Num 20:20–21).

When Israel was serving God under the righteous king David, God's prediction to Rebekah came true: Edom served Israel as a vassal state (2 Sa 8:14).

But after Solomon and Israel turned from God, the kingdom divided and troubles with Edom reignited (1 Ki 11:14, 2 Ki 8:22). When God finally exiled Judah to Babylon, Edom helped the Babylonians loot Judah, and happily returned to their own fortified cities in Mount Seir (Ps 137:7; Ob 10–11).

The Jews knew the story of Jacob and Esau, though. They knew about God's message to Rebekah. So why would He allow the Edomites to do this?

The book of Obadiah shows that God will not forsake His promises to Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. To the Edomites, it's a message of judgment and doom. To the Jews, it's a message of faithfulness and salvation.

Theme verse in Obadiah

The deliverers will ascend Mount Zion
To judge the mountain of Esau,
And the kingdom will be the LORD'S. (Ob 21)

Obadiah's role in the Bible

Obadiah is the fourth of the Minor Prophets, the last 12 books of the Bible. When God had a message for the people, He gave his message through the prophets. These messages came in visions, oracles, dreams, parables, and the like.



Most of the Minor Prophets are messages to the people of Judah and Israel (the Southern and Northern Kingdoms of God's people), but Obadiah's vision is different. Like Jonah and Nahum, Obadiah's writings mainly concern the people outside of Israel—in Obadiah's case, it's the nation of Edom.

We don't know much about the prophet Obadiah or when his book was written. Most scholars date this vision around the time of Jeremiah, when God had delivered similar messages concerning Edom (Je 49:7–22). Some Jewish traditions claim that this book was written by the Obadiah who served King Ahab, which would make him a contemporary of Elijah (1 Ki 18).

Obadiah is the shortest book of the Old Testament, and the fourth-shortest book of the Bible (after Third John, Second John, and Philemon).

Quick outline of Obadiah

The book of Obadiah begins with a promise to bring Edom down from their mountain (Sier), and ends with the deliverers of Israel ascending Mount Zion to judge Edom.

What will happen to Edom: punishment (1–9)
Why: because of Edom's violence to Israel (10–14)
Israel's restoration and Edom's destruction (15–21)

More pages related to Obadiah

Genesis (the story of Jacob and Esau)
Jonah (another prophet whose message is directed at another nation)
Nahum (another prophet whose message is directed at another nation)
Amos (previous)

32. Jonah

A disobedient prophet runs from God, is swallowed by a great fish, and then preaches God's message to the city of Nineveh.
Author: Traditionally Jonah

Jonah: God's compassion for all nations



Theme verse: "Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity." (Jon 4:2)

Summary of Jonah

God had created all mankind, but He'd chosen one special nation as His own: Israel. Through Israel, all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gn 12:3). God had given Israel His laws through Moses (back in Exodus), and called them by His name (2 Sa 7:23). Through Israel, the world would know who God is.

Nineveh, on the other hand . . .

Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, and a place of great wickedness. So the Lord tells a prophet named Jonah to "Arise, go to Nineveh, and cry against it" (Jon 1:2).

But Jonah does something entirely unexpected: he boards a ship headed in the opposite direction. The Lord sends a mighty storm after him, which threatens to destroy the vessel. Jonah confesses to the sailors that he is a Hebrew, and that he is trying to escape Yahweh's presence.

His proposed solution: "Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you" (Jon 1:12). They do so, and the sea calms—and all the sailors recognize the God who spared them. Then comes the part everyone remembers: Jonah is swallowed by a "great fish." He prays from within the fish, and God has it vomit him onto the land.

Now we're back to square one. God tells Jonah to arise and go to Nineveh, and this time Jonah obeys. He walks through the evil city, heralding Nineveh's impending doom: in just 40 days, Nineveh will be overthrown.

The Ninevites do the unexpected: they repent.
 And God relents.
 And Jonah is not OK with this.

The author of Jonah

Jonah is traditionally credited as the author of the book named after him. If that's the case, he must have had a moment of clarity after the events took place!



The structure of Jonah

Jonah has only four chapters, which makes it easy to outline the book chapter-by-chapter:

- God directs Jonah, Jonah disobeys (Jonah 1)
- God has compassion on Jonah (Jonah 2)
- Jonah preaches to Nineveh, Nineveh repents (Jonah 3)
- God has compassion on Nineveh, but Jonah does not (Jonah 4)

But it gets more interesting if we look beyond the chapter layer.

The book of Jonah can be divided down the middle to show two short episodes: **God's compassion to Jonah** and **God's compassion through Jonah**. And when you look at these two episodes side-by-side, you'll see some rather obvious similarities:

Jonah 1–2, God's compassion to Jonah	Jonah 3–4, God's compassion through Jonah
1. God sends Jonah to Nineveh.	1. God sends Jonah to Nineveh.
2. Jonah disobeys.	2. Jonah obeys.
3. God's judgment comes after Jonah in a storm, and Jonah tells his shipmates that the storm is from Yahweh, the Hebrew God.	3. Jonah warns that God's judgment is coming to Nineveh.
4. The sailors pray to Him, "do not let us perish."	4. Nineveh repents and calls on God "so that [they] will not perish."
5. The storm subsides, and the crew is spared.	5. God relents, and Nineveh is spared.
6. Jonah prays to God when he is in trouble (in the fish).	6. Jonah prays to God when he is in trouble (in the scorching heat)
7. Jonah is answered: the fish spits him onto dry land.	7. Jonah is answered: God chides him for not having compassion on Nineveh

Jonah's role in the Bible

Jonah is the most widely known of the Minor Prophets, the last 12 books of the Old Testament. When God had a message for the people, He spoke through the prophets. His word came in visions, oracles, dreams, parables, and the like. Most of these books were written to the people of Israel and Judah, but Jonah, Obadiah, and Nahum are more concerned with surrounding nations.



These Minor Prophet books record those messages. They outline the people's sins, the consequences of those sins, and the proper response to God.

Well, except the book of Jonah. It's a story, not a sermon. It focuses on the prophet, not the people. And Jonah contains hardly any prophecy at all . . . only one line: "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (Jon 3:4). Among the books of the Bible, Jonah is a bit of an oddball.

But fast-forward to the New Testament, and you'll see Jesus referring to Jonah as a sign of the Messiah:

Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. "The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here." (Mt 12:40–41)

Jonah's life events told some of Christ's story, and his message foreshadowed Christ's message: repent!

But Jonah isn't all about repentance. It's also a story of God's compassion for all peoples, not just Israel. Remember the two-episode breakdown of Jonah above? In both episodes, the Hebrew (Jonah) gets people from other nations to recognize God's sovereignty and compassion . . . even when he disobeys.

The book of Second Kings tells us that Jonah had a prophesied about Israel's king Jeroboam II (2 Ki 14:25), which means his ministry may have overlapped with those of Hosea (Hos 1:1) and Amos (Am 1:1; 7:11), who also preached to Israel during Jeroboam's reign.

Through the book of Jonah, we see God's compassion for Nineveh when they repent. But Nineveh's repentance is not permanent: they return to violence and wickedness. The Assyrians (whose capital is Nineveh) come against Israel and carry her off into exile (2 Ki 17:6). Nineveh becomes so wicked that the Lord chooses another prophet, Nahum, to speak against it. But this time, there's no way out (Na 2:13).

However, God's story of compassion for the nations has only just begun. Later, there will arise yet another Prophet who will obey and submit to God (Php 2:8), who will be a light to the Gentiles (Lk 2:32), who will make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19–20) . . .



More pages related to Jonah

- Nahum (a follow-up prophecy to Nineveh)
- Obadiah (also written to one of Israel's neighboring nations)
- Hosea (also a prophet in the Northern Kingdom)
- Amos (also a prophet in the Northern Kingdom)

33. Micah

Micah confronts the leaders of Israel and Judah regarding their injustice, and prophecies that one day the Lord himself will rule in perfect justice.

Author: Micah

Micah: the just God demands justice

God had made Israel His own special nation, and He had special expectations of them. God is holy, and His people were to be holy. God is faithful, and His people were to be faithful to Him. God is merciful, and His people were to be merciful.

God is just, and His people should exercise justice.

But the prophet Micah feels that there are no righteous people, there is no justice in the land (Mic 7:2). The judges accept bribes (Mic 7:3), the rulers oppress the poor (Mic 3:1–3), the prophets lead the people astray (Mic 3:5), and the priests are easily bought (Mic 3:11).

Israel's behavior is unacceptable, and Micah tells the people that they have no excuse:

He has told you, O man, what is good;
 And what does the LORD require of you
 But to do justice, to love kindness,
 And to walk humbly with your God? (Mic 6:8)

They know better, and God will not sit by while they treat one another this way.

So He comes to the prophet Micah with a twofold message:
 Israel and Judah must be disciplined for their injustice.
 God Himself will rule Israel with justice someday.
 Because God is just, even when His people have no justice.



And because God is merciful, even when His people show no mercy.

Theme verse of Micah

I will bear the indignation of the Lord
 Because I have sinned against Him,
 Until He pleads my case and executes justice for me.
 He will bring me out to the light,
 And I will see His righteousness. (Mic 9:9)

Micah's role in the Bible

Micah is the sixth of the Minor Prophets, the last 12 books of the Bible. When God had a message for the people, He gave his message through the prophets. These messages came in visions, oracles, dreams, parables, and the like.

While most of the Minor Prophets spoke to one nation, Micah called out both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Like Amos, Micah calls the people's injustice to light. Micah admonishes the people, telling them that they should have known better.

And in light of the other Old Testament documents they had at the time, they indeed should have known better.

In Deuteronomy, Moses laid out what social justice should look like for God's people:

For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. (Dt 10:17–18)

But instead, this is what God sees in Israel:

Recently My people have arisen as an enemy—
 You strip the robe off the garment
 From unsuspecting passers-by,
 From those returned from war.
 The women of My people you evict . . . (Mic 2:8–9a)

In Micah, we see how seriously God takes justice among His people. We also get a glimpse of God's future redemptive work in Jesus. God had laid out His expectations of man:



Do justice
Love kindness
Walk humbly with Him

Man did not meet God's expectations, and although God would punish them, God also promises to meet His own expectations:

He would rule in justice (Mic 4:3).
He would show mercy (Mic 7:19).
He would lead them in the ways of God (Mic 5:4).

How does that work? How does God meet His expectations for mankind?

In Jesus.

We know that Jesus was that ruler promised from long ago. He was born in Bethlehem (Mt 2:8–11), He showed us kindness, He satisfied the justice of God (Ro 3:23–26), and He humbled Himself, even to death (Php 2:8).

And soon, Jesus will return as King to rule in justice and peace forever.

Quick outline of Micah

Israel's injustice (Mic 1–3)
The Lord's promise to rule Israel with justice (Mic 4–5)
The Lord's expectations and judgment (Mic 6)
The Lord's compassion and everlasting love (Mic 7)

More pages related to Micah

Amos (also focuses on justice in Israel)
Nahum (next book of the Bible)
Jonah (previous)

34. Nahum

Nahum foretells of God's judgment on Nineveh, the capital of Assyria.
Author: Nahum

Nahum: it's over for Nineveh



When Jonah warned Nineveh of God's wrath, the Ninevites repented and God spared them. But their repentance didn't take. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, and the Assyrian empire had only grown more mighty and more wicked since the time of Jonah. Nineveh continued to lead nations into idolatry (Nah 3:4). Plus, the Assyrians had touched Israel, the "apple of God's eye." They had carried off the northern tribes into captivity, and had since oppressed the people of Judah during the time of the righteous King Hezekiah (Is 36:1).

The people of God must have wondered, "are they really going to get away with this?"

Not a chance.

God sends the prophet Nahum to reveal Nineveh's future: utter desolation. With Jonah, there was a chance to repent. Now the time for repentance is over. God is good and compassionate (Nah 1:7, Jon 4:2), but He will not leave the guilty unpunished (Nah 1:3).

Why would a loving God send such a harsh message? The structure of Nahum's oracle gives us a clue. The book doesn't begin with a simple description of the judgment to come; instead, Nahum leads by describing God in the following ways:

Jealous. There is one God, and there are none equal to Him. He allows no room for idols, and although Nineveh had recognized Him in Jonah's day, they viewed Him as just another god (Is 36:20).

Avenging and wrathful against His enemies. Historians recognize Assyrians as a brutal people even today, and these violent people had to answer for their crimes.

Slow to anger. God had plans to punish Nineveh decades earlier (Jon 3:4), but He had spared them when they repented before Him (Jon 3:10).

Great in power. Nahum points out God's sovereignty over the sky (Nah 1:3), the sea (Nah 1:4), and the whole earth (Nah 1:5–6). Good. He's a stronghold to those who take refuge in Him.

God is good—that's the twist.

Because God is about to display all His wrath and might and jealousy, but the Assyrians have not taken refuge in Him. God is safety to those who fear Him, but danger to those who disregard Him.



And because the Assyrians disregard Him, they cannot be safe.

Nahum is a brutal prophecy against the enemies of God and His people, but Nahum's name means "comforter." This oracle comforts God's people by showing them that He is still in control. He still watches over His own. And even when justice seems completely out of balance, He has a plan to right the scales.

Theme verse of Nahum

The LORD is slow to anger and great in power,
And the LORD will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. (Na 1:3)

Nahum's role in the Bible

Nahum is the seventh of the Minor Prophets, the last 12 books of the Old Testament. When God had a message for the people, He spoke through the prophets. His word came in visions, oracles, dreams, parables, and the like. Most of these book were written to the people of Israel and Judah, but Nahum, Obadiah, and Jonah are more concerned with surrounding nations.

We don't know much about the prophet Nahum. The other books of the Bible don't mention him, and we aren't even sure where his town (Elkosh) was located, though it was probably a town in Judah, since the Northern Tribes had been taken into exile by the time Nahum wrote his book.

Nahum was written after the Assyrians sacked the Egyptian city of Thebes, or No-amon (Nah 3:8). It was likely written before the Babylonians took over Nineveh in 612 B.C.

It might help to think of Nahum as a follow-up to the book of Jonah. Both prophets speak God's word regarding the city of Nineveh. Both warn that the Lord will judge them for their wickedness. But while God extends compassion to Nineveh in Jonah, He only promises to punish and avenge in Nahum.

Nahum is similar to Habakkuk, too. While Nahum foretells the downfall of a world empire, Habakkuk anticipates the empire that takes its place: Babylon.

Quick outline of Nahum

The Lord: Nineveh's vengeful enemy (Nah 1)
The siege of Nineveh (Nah 2)
The inevitable judgment of God (Nah 3)



More related to Nahum

Jonah (also prophesied concerning Nineveh)
Obadiah (also written to a foreign nation)
Habakkuk (next book of the Bible)
Micah (previous)

35. Habakkuk

Habakkuk pleads with God to stop the injustice and violence in Judah, but is surprised to find that God will use the even more violent Babylonians to do so.

Author: Habakkuk

Habakkuk: the Babylonians are coming

“How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and you will not hear?”

The people of Judah had grown wicked, violent, and corrupt. There was no justice in the land that was supposed to be known by God's name. Habakkuk couldn't take it anymore. These people shouldn't be allowed to disregard God's law. Surely God would set things right.

So Habakkuk pleads with God, asking Him to save Judah from her own wickedness. God answers, but not in the way Habakkuk expected.

To judge Judah's wickedness, God says He will hand them over to the Chaldeans: a nation even more wicked, violent, and corrupt.

Then Habakkuk asks, “Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they (Hab 1:13)? Will they continually slay nations without sparing (Hab 1:17)?”

But God is way ahead of Habakkuk. The Lord shows him that something else is in store for the Chaldeans (Babylonians)—justice:

The Babylonians looted many nations, but the remaining ones will loot them (Hab 2:8).

The Babylonians cut off other families so that they could secure their own empire, but soon the work of their hands will cry out against them (Hab 2:9–10).



The Babylonians built their cities with bloodshed, but their work will be for nothing (Hab 2:12–13).

The Babylonians disgraced the nations around them, but the Lord will disgrace them (Hab 2:15–16).

The Babylonians crafted idols and then called on them, but all the earth will be silent before the Lord (Hab 2:18–20).

When Habakkuk sees God’s master plan, he can only worship. God will correct Judah. God will punish Babylon. But most importantly, God will be known in all the earth (Hab 2:14).

Theme verse of Habakkuk

“Your eyes are too pure to approve evil,
 And You can not look on wickedness with favor.
 Why do You look with favor
 On those who deal treacherously?
 Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up
 Those more righteous than they?” —Habakkuk, to God (Hab 1:13)

Habakkuk’s role in the Bible

Habakkuk is the eighth of the Minor Prophets, the last 12 books of the Old Testament. When God had a message for the people, He spoke through the prophets. His word came in visions, oracles, dreams, parables, and the like.

In Deuteronomy, God had promised to bless Israel if they loved and obeyed Him, and punish Israel if they chose to go their own way. Later, Israel divided into two kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom kept the name Israel, and the Southern Kingdom was named Judah. Israel turned from God, ignored His prophets, and worshiped idols, and so God handed them over to the Assyrians (2 Ki 17:7).

And Judah followed Israel's example (2 Ki 17:19), so God would bring a similar fate upon them. But this time, He would discipline them through the Babylonians. Habakkuk saw this happen in his own lifetime (Hab 1:5).

But Habakkuk doesn't stop at Judah's punishment. Like Nahum, Habakkuk foresees God's judgment on those who oppress other nations and lead them into wickedness. Habakkuk speaks of Babylon's fall: an event which the prophet Daniel witnesses.

Habakkuk isn't a well-known (or often read) book of the Bible, but it contains one of the most important lines in church history: “The



righteous will live by his faith" (Hab 2:4). Paul quotes Habakkuk in his letters to the Romans and Galatians when he explains how faith and God's justice work together (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11).

Like Daniel, Habakkuk comforts us with a message of God's sovereignty. God is in control, and He uses the kingdoms of this world to accomplish His purposes. Daniel says it best: "It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings" (Da 2:21).

Quick outline of Habakkuk

Habakkuk asks when God will judge Judah (Hab 1:1–4)
God will judge Judah with the Chaldeans (Hab 1:5–11)
Habakkuk asks why God would use the wicked Chaldeans (Hab 1:12–17)
God pronounces judgment on the Chaldeans (Hab 2)
Habakkuk responds with a song of worship (Hab 3)

More pages related to Habakkuk

Jeremiah (same time period, also prophesied about the Babylonian invasion)
Daniel (the prophet was a captive of Babylon, the book also describes Babylon's fall)
Nahum (describes the downfall of Nineveh, who captured Israel)
Zephaniah (next book of the Bible)

36. Zephaniah

God warns that he will judge Israel and the surrounding nations, but also that he will restore them in peace and justice.
Author: Zephaniah

Zephaniah: God removes everything, God restores everything

Judah was doomed.

Judah had been doomed long ago. The old king Manasseh had led the nation away from God and into heinous idolatry, including human sacrifice (2 Chr 33:9). Manasseh's son only made it worse (2 Chr 33:22–23). God had shown mercy during those days, but although He is slow to anger, He does not let the guilty go unpunished.



Judah is enjoying some peace, though. The good king Josiah reigns, and he has directed people back to God. It's about this time that God sends the prophet Zephaniah with a startling message for Judah:

God is about to bring everything to an end (Zep 2:2). The day of the Lord is coming to Judah, and it's a terrible day for those who have put God to the test all these years.

The judgment doesn't stop at Judah—the whole world will be consumed. Zephaniah tells the people that the nations of the world cannot stand: Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia, and especially Assyria. All nations will know that He is God, and "He will make a complete end, indeed a terrifying one, of all the inhabitants of the earth" (Zep 1:18). But Zephaniah doesn't end the message there. God has bigger plans than the end of the world. God will remove all things, yes, but then He will restore all things.

And the restoration doesn't stop at Judah. God will bring about a time when all the nations will call on the name of the Lord. Judah, Israel, the nations, and the Lord will dwell together in peace, justice, and joy.

Theme verse of Zephaniah

Seek righteousness, seek humility.
Perhaps you will be hidden
In the day of the LORD'S anger. (Zep 2:3b)

Zephaniah's role in the Bible

Zephaniah is the ninth of the Minor Prophets, the last 12 books of the Old Testament. When God had a message for the people, He spoke through the prophets. His word came in visions, oracles, dreams, parables, and the like.

The man Zephaniah has an interesting pedigree: he traces his lineage back to a man named Hezekiah. We're not sure whether or not this is the same person as King Hezekiah, who initiated reform, transcribed much of the Proverbs, and was remembered long afterward for following God (2 Ki 19:5). Zephaniah was probably a contemporary of Habakkuk, Nahum, and Jeremiah.

Zephaniah preached his message during the rule of King Josiah, who had initiated religious reform in all of Judah and some surrounding territories. At this time, the nation as a whole was obeying God's laws and turning from idols (2 Chr 34:33). Since the



land was obeying God, one might ask, “Whom was Zephaniah warning, then?”

His warnings seem to better resonate with the next generation of Judah. After Josiah dies in battle, his sons take the throne for 22 years. They disobey the Lord, they stir up trouble with Babylon, and they disregard the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 36:27–29; 37:1–2). Plus, the priests and citizens defile God’s temple (2 Chr 36:14).

In light of this, Zephaniah’s message makes sense. God knows what will happen, and the punishment is coming. That punishment plays out in the books of Kings, Chronicles and Jeremiah.

Quick outline of Zephaniah

Like the book of Joel, Zephaniah takes a “bad news first” approach: he begins with the coming destruction of Jerusalem, discusses the downfall and restoration of the outside nations, and finishes with the promise that Judah and Israel will be restored.

- Desolation and discipline on Judah (Zep 1)
- Desolation on the surrounding nations (Zep 2)
- The Lord’s remnant from the nations (Zep 3:1–11)
- The Lord’s remnant from Israel (Zep 3:12–20)

More pages related to Zephaniah

- Joel (also concerns the day of the Lord and restoration)
- Habakkuk (also anticipates the fall of Judah)
- Nahum (also anticipates the fall of Nineveh)
- Haggai (next book of the Bible)

37. Haggai

The people have abandoned the work of restoring God’s temple in Jerusalem, and so Haggai takes them to task.

Author: Haggai

Haggai: consider your ways!

After spending 70 years as captives in Babylon, the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem. The Persian emperor Cyrus issued a decree: the Jews were to rebuild the temple of the Lord. Zerubbabel, who was of the royal line of David, led the Jews back home.



They made some progress, too. They set up a new altar (Ezr 3:3), and they even laid the foundations of the new building (Ezr 3:11). But when the surrounding nations interfered, the temple construction stopped (Ezr 4:24). The Jews built their own houses, worked their fields, and let the Temple lie in shambles.

But their lives were in shambles, too. There was little food, little wine, little clothing, little rain, and little money (Hag 1:6, 10).

At this time, a new prophet named Haggai speaks up: "Consider your ways!"

Because the people have ignored God's temple, God has withheld rain, food, and prosperity. The solution? Get back to work on the temple!

Zerubbabel and the people do so, and Haggai responds to their obedience with four more brief messages from God:

"I am with you" (Hag 1:13).

"I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory" (Hag 2:7).

"From this day on I will bless you" (Hag 2:19).

"I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, My servant [. . .] and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you" (Hag 2:23).

The book of Haggai begins as a wake-up call to the Jews who had neglected the temple, but it ends with an example of how God delights in His children's obedience.

Theme verses of Haggai

Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Consider your ways! Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified," says the LORD. (Hag 1:7–8)

Haggai's role in the Bible

Haggai is the tenth of the Minor Prophets, the last 12 books of the Old Testament. When God had a message for the people, He spoke through the prophets. His word came in visions, oracles, dreams, parables, and the like.

Most of the Minor Prophets wrote about the coming destruction of Judah, Israel, or the surrounding nations, but Haggai is different. Like Zechariah and Malachi, Haggai shows up on the scene long after the destruction took place.



Haggai points the Jews in an obedient direction, particularly their leaders Zerubbabel (their governor) and Joshua (their high priest, not the one who fought at Jericho). When they obey, God affirms.

The book of Ezra specifically mentions Haggai and Zechariah as the agents God uses to kick temple work back into action (Ezr 5:1–2). If you're familiar with the past relationships between Jewish kings and prophets, you'll probably find Zerubbabel's response surprising. Whereas most kings ignored the prophets (2 Ki 17:13–14), the governor Zerubbabel hears and obeys in reverence (Hag 1:12).

Here's something interesting: while Ezra sees Haggai and Zechariah motivating the Jews toward one goal, the two books of prophecy show some striking differences:

Zechariah is the longest book of the Minor Prophets. Haggai gives brief messages, including the shortest message from God found in the Minor Prophets: "I am with you" (Hag 1:13).

Zechariah deals with the larger picture of Israel's history and future. Haggai focuses explicitly on the present temple work.

Zechariah is highly symbolic, instead pointing to the spiritual activities behind the scenes. Haggai is very literal, directly addressing the economic decline and the tangible solution (building the temple).

Haggai blends history and prophecy like no other Minor Prophet. Most of these books are collections of discourses and visions, but Haggai mixes short messages from God with the way people respond to them. Haggai is also the most specific of the Minor Prophets when it comes to dates: he gives the month and day of every message God sends him.

Quick outline of Haggai

- God calls the people to complete the temple (Hag 1:1–11)
- The people obey (Hag 1:12–15)
- God responds with encouragement and blessing (Hag 2)

More pages related to Haggai

- Zechariah (supported the people with Haggai)
- Ezra (discusses the same events from a historian's perspective)
- Malachi (also served as a prophet after the exile)
- Zephaniah (previous book of the Bible)



38. Zechariah

The prophet Zechariah calls Israel to return to God, and records prophetic visions that show what's happening behind the scenes.

Zechariah: return to God, and He will return to you

When God had a message for the people, He sent His prophets. The prophets would then speak forth the word of God to kings, priests, and the people. The prophets warned the people of God's need to punish sin, and pleaded with the people to turn to God. But the Jews almost never listened (2 Ki 17:13–14).

So God exiled them to foreign lands. The northern tribes were carried off by Assyrians; the southern tribes went to Babylon for 70 years. Now the Jews had been released to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple of the Lord.

The city is in ruins. The royal family has been reduced to governor status. The temple is under construction. But the words of the prophets still remain.

And now the Jews have another chance to pay attention. God sends them a new prophet: Zechariah. This prophet has colorful visions—messages of comfort and hope to the Jews. It all begins with a simple request: “Return to Me,” declares the LORD of hosts, “that I may return to you” (Zec 1:3).

Zechariah's writings encourage and admonish the Jews of Jerusalem. He specifically affirms the governor and priest of that time (Zec 3, 4). He chastises the foolish leaders among them (Zec 11), and calls all the people to follow God and remember the words of the prophets before (Zec 1:6).

But most importantly, he anticipates a full restoration of God and His people. The temple will be rebuilt, Israel will be purified, the enemies will be overcome, and the Lord Himself will dwell in Jerusalem. But this restoration isn't only for the Jews; the Lord will rule the whole earth, and all the nations will worship Him (Zech 8:22; 14:9).

Theme verse in Zechariah

“Return to Me,” declares the LORD of hosts, “that I may return to you,” says the LORD of hosts. (Zec 1:3b)

Zechariah's role in the Bible



Zechariah is the eleventh of the Minor Prophets, the last 12 books of the Old Testament. When God had a message for the people, He spoke through the prophets. His word came in visions, oracles, dreams, parables, and the like.

Most of the Minor Prophets wrote about the coming destruction of Judah, Israel, or the surrounding nations, but Zechariah is different. Like Haggai and Malachi, Zechariah shows up on the scene long after the destruction took place.

Of the Minor Prophets, Zechariah is easily the hardest to understand. This is partially due to the dense symbolic nature of his writings. Whereas Hosea, Micah, and others give direct instructions and warnings of what is to come, Zechariah "lifts up his eyes" to see scenes, characters, and strange objects. Zechariah is one of only two Minor Prophets who records his visions in this way; the other one is Amos (Am 7:8; 8:2; 9:1).

Zechariah uses a few different ways to communicate God's word to the people in this book:

Visions. Zechariah has vivid visions, similar to those that you see in the books of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation. He sees lampstands (Zech 4:2), horses (Zech 6:2), flying scrolls (Zech 5:2), and other images that symbolize the spiritual landscape. Lucky for Zechariah—and us!—an angel interprets many of these symbols (Zech 4:4–6).

The word of the Lord. This is your typical prophetic discourse, which you'll find in almost every book of the Minor Prophets (except Jonah). This is God using Zechariah as His mouthpiece to the people through word alone.

Symbolic demonstrations. Sometimes, Zechariah will do something in the physical world that represents the spiritual side of things. In one example, Zechariah forges a crown for the high priest Joshua (not the one who fought at Jericho) to remind Him that one day, there will be a Man who is both king and high priest in Jerusalem.

The prophets Zechariah and Haggai were contemporaries: the book of Ezra notes that these two prophets compelled the Jews to finish rebuilding the temple of the Lord, even though the surrounding nations were opposing them (Ezr 5:1–2). Haggai's recorded ministry seems to conclude after three months, but Zechariah continues to preach for at least two more years (Zech 1:1, 7:1).



Here's something interesting: while Ezra sees Haggai and Zechariah motivating the Jews toward one goal, the two books of prophecy show some striking differences:

Haggai gives brief, almost clipped messages. Zechariah is the longest book of the Minor Prophets.

Haggai focuses explicitly on the present temple work, while Zechariah deals with the larger picture of Israel's history and future.

Haggai is very literal, directly addressing the economic decline and the tangible solution (building the temple). Zechariah is highly symbolic, instead pointing to the spiritual activities behind the scenes.

Zechariah is ultimately a message of assurance: God has brought the Jews back to Jerusalem, and His work of restoration is far from over.

Quick outline of Zechariah

- Zechariah's first visions (Zech 1–6)
- The Lord calls Jerusalem to return to Him (Zech 1)
- The Lord will return to Jerusalem (Zech 2)
- The Lord affirms Jeshua and Zerubbabel (Zech 3–4)
- The Lord's judgment on other nations (Zech 5–6:8)
- The Lord promises a priestly king (Zech 6:9–15)
- Zechariah's teaching to Israel (Zech 7–8)
- Learn from the former days (Zech 7)
- The Lord's return to Zion (Zech 8)
- Zechariah's oracles (Zech 9–14)
- Judgment on the nations, blessings on Israel (Zech 9–10)
- Warnings against foolish shepherds (Zech 11)
- Victory for God and His people (Zech 12–14)

More pages related to Zechariah

- Haggai (contemporary prophet who also encouraged the leaders)
- Daniel (more vivid, end-times visions)
- Ezekiel (more vivid, end-times visions)
- Revelation (more vivid, end-times visions)
- Malachi (also ministered after the return from exile)

39. Malachi



God has been faithful to Israel, but they continue to live disconnected from him—so God sends Malachi to call them out.

Malachi: the faithful God and the disconnected people

The Jews had returned to Jerusalem from Babylon. They'd obeyed the messages of God from the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. They'd rebuilt the temple of God.

And nothing happened. No Messiah, no great divine war against Israel's enemies, no worldwide kingdom of God—none of the good things those prophets said would come about.

So the people grew indifferent. They offered faulty sacrifices (Mal 1:8,13), married pagan women (Mal 2:11), were unfaithful to their wives (Mal 2:14), and withheld tithes and offerings (Mal 3:8). Furthermore, the priests of God were misleading the people and disrespecting the God who had called them to ministry (Mal 2:8).

God has made sacred covenants with His people. He's their Father and Master, the one who loves them and disciplines them. This sort of behavior just won't do, so a prophet named Malachi (which means "my messenger") points out the great disconnect between God and His people:

He cares for them, but they don't care for Him.

The people and the priests have become estranged to God, and the disconnect has grown to a point where the people just can't wrap their minds around God's nature and expectations. Malachi will state the way God sees things, but anticipates that the people will not understand. Malachi often says something to the effect of, "This is what you have done, yet you say, 'How have we done this?'"

Here are a few ways the disconnect takes shape in the people:

- They doubt His love for them (Mal 1:2).
- They don't understand how God view their offerings (Mal 2:13–14).
- They forget the way God values justice (Mal 2:17).
- They neglect their tithes and offerings (Mal 3:8).
- They claim that serving God is useless (Mal 3:13–14).

Fortunately, Malachi's message resonates with some of the people.

The Jews who still revere God write their names in a book, and God promises to purify Israel: punishing the wicked, but sparing the righteous.



But before He comes to purify them, God will send another messenger to clear the way . . .

Here the prophets, and our Old Testament, end.

Theme verse of Malachi

For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed. (Mal 3:6)

Malachi's role in the Bible

Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament.

Malachi finishes off the Minor Prophets, the last 12 books of the Old Testament. When God had a message for the people, He spoke through the prophets. His word came in visions, oracles, dreams, parables, and the like.

Most of the Minor Prophets wrote about the coming destruction of Judah, Israel, or the surrounding nations, but Malachi is different. Like Haggai and Zechariah, Malachi shows up on the scene long after the destruction took place—and warns against repeating the sins of the fathers (Mal 3:7).

The prophet Malachi isn't mentioned anywhere else in the Bible, but he deals with some of the same issues that Ezra the scribe and Nehemiah the governor deal with when the Jews disregard God's law in their times:

- Corrupt priests (Neh 13:4–9)
- Intermarriage with pagans (Ezr 9:2; Neh 13:23)
- Lapses in tithes and offerings (Neh 13:10)

We can't be sure, but it's possible that Malachi ministered between the time that Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and the time that he returned as governor (Neh 13:6).

This is interesting: if we're going by the Jewish arrangement, Malachi isn't the last book of the Old Testament—that's First and Second Chronicles.

Quick outline of Malachi

- God loves His children (Mal 1:1–5)
- God disciplines His children (Mal 1:6–2:17)
- For the priests' dishonesty (Mal 1:6–2:9)
- For intermarriage with foreigners (Mal 2:10–12)



For husbands' infidelity (Mal 2:13–17)
God will purify His children (Mal 3:1–15)
Some people again revere The Lord (Mal 3:16–18)
God will bless those who fear Him (Mal 4)

More pages related to Malachi

Haggai (also ministered after the exile)
Zechariah (also ministered after the exile)
Nehemiah (dealt with similar issues)
Ezra (dealt with similar issues)

New Testament books of the Bible

(These books were written about Jesus, and what it means to follow him.)

40. The Gospel of Matthew

This is an account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, focusing on Jesus' role as the true king of the Jews.
Author: Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew: Jesus Christ, king of the Jews

What is Matthew about?

This is the story of Jesus as written by an eyewitness: the apostle Matthew. The book of Matthew is the first Gospel (an account of Jesus' life and ministry) in the New Testament. In Matthew, Jesus performs miracles, shares parables, and teaches the ways of God. He is betrayed and crucified. He rises again and commissions His disciples to spread the good news. Matthew seems to have written this Gospel to a Jewish Christian audience, so he focuses on Jewish writings and prophecies more so than the other Gospels do.

Matthew presents Jesus as the Messiah (Mt 1:1), the one chosen by God to deliver the people from their sins. Matthew quotes the Old Testament extensively, and places special emphasis on Jesus' fulfillment of prophecies—which would have been important to a Jewish audience. Matthew tells us the story of Jesus with an emphasis on His role as Messiah, or Christ:



Jesus is the son of God. He is conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb (Mt 1:18–20), and God endorses Jesus as His beloved Son (Mt 3:17). He is God incarnate, living among men (Mt 1:23).

Jesus is the king. He is the son of King David (Mt 1:1). Jesus repeatedly declares that the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Mt 4:17), and tells many parables about it. The book of Matthew makes more mentions of the "kingdom of heaven" or "kingdom of God" than any of the other Gospels.

Jesus is the promised savior. He is the son of Abraham, through whom God had promised to bless all nations of the earth. Matthew emphasizes the Old Testament prophecies that Jesus fulfills, from His birth (Mt 1:22–23; 2:5–6, 17–18) through His ministry and right up to His death and resurrection. He lives a righteous life, teaches us what it means to be righteous, and dies on a cross so that we can be right with God.

Matthew opens with a simple statement of who Jesus is (the Messiah), and closes with a simple statement of what we should do (make disciples for Him).

Theme verse of Matthew

"She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." (Mt 1:21)

Why Matthew was written

Unlike John, Matthew doesn't state his purpose explicitly. However, his opening verse makes it very clear what this book is about: Jesus, the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. The rest of this Gospel presents evidence of who Jesus is.

Quick outline of Matthew

- Jesus' origins: His birth and baptism (Mt 1–3)
- Jesus' teaching and ministry (Mt 4–25)
- Jesus' sacrifice (Mt 26–27)
- Jesus' resurrection (Mt 28)

More pages related to Matthew

- Mark (next book of the Bible)
- Malachi (previous)
- Luke
- John



41. The Gospel of Mark

This brief account of Jesus' earthly ministry highlights Jesus' authority and servanthood.

Author: John Mark

The Gospel of Mark: Jesus, servant and Son

Mark is the story of what Jesus did for us. The author, John Mark, wrote this book based on the apostle Peter's memories of Jesus' words and deeds.

Mark is the second Gospel (an account of Jesus' life and ministry) in the New Testament. Like the other Gospels, Mark records Jesus' life: His miracles, betrayal, death, resurrection, and commission. However, Mark's Gospel is very brief (nearly half as long as Luke) and focuses more on things Jesus did than things Jesus said. Mark's stories are not arranged chronologically; instead they're put together to give us a quick, accurate view of Jesus.

This Gospel emphasizes two important characteristics of Jesus Christ:

His authority as the Son of God

His compassionate service to people (particularly in miracles)

As you read Mark, you'll see the word "immediately" repeated often: Mark is a quick, urgent, bold message about who Jesus is and what He did.

Theme verse of Mark

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45)

Why Mark was written

Mark opens with a quick overview of what the book is about: "the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mk 1:1). Every passage in Mark, every miracle, every conversation, every deed, points back to Jesus' authority as the Son of God.

Mark is a brief synopsis of Jesus, and could have been meant for reading in one sitting—or aloud to an audience. It's an exciting account of the Son of God that could speak to the Jews and the non-Jews of Mark's day.



Quick outline of Mark

- Jesus' authority among the people (Mk 1:1–8:13)
- Jesus' mission and nature revealed to the disciples (Mk 8:14–10:52)
- Jesus is tested and crucified (Mk 11–15)
- Jesus' resurrection and commission (Mk 16)

More pages related to Mark

- Luke (next book of the Bible)
- Matthew (previous)
- John

42. The Gospel of Luke

Luke writes the most thorough account of Jesus' life, pulling together eyewitness testimonies to tell the full story of Jesus.
Author: Luke

The Gospel of Luke: Jesus in detail

Luke is the story of Jesus Christ—exactly as it happened. It's written by Luke, the physician.

Luke is the third Gospel (an account of Jesus' life and ministry) in the New Testament. Luke tells Jesus' story in extensive detail, more so than any other Gospel. Luke records miracles, sermons, conversations, and personal feelings (Lk 2:19). The writer is a thorough historian who researched everything (Lk 1:3). And Luke's attention to detail shows: not only is his the longest of the four gospels, but it's also the longest book of the New Testament.

That's a lot of content!

The book of Luke shows us Jesus, who came to seek and save the lost (Lk 19:10). We learn all about the God-man in whom we've placed our faith. We see how He lived, how He died, and how He rose again.

Luke's Gospel is written in ways that Jewish and non-Jewish people can understand and appreciate. In Luke, Jesus is indeed the long-awaited Messiah; He is also the savior of the nations (Lk 2:30–32). Whereas Matthew traces Jesus' ancestry to Abraham (Mt 1:1), Luke charts His lineage all the way back to Adam (Lk 3:38). This isn't surprising—after all, Luke spent a great deal of time with the apostle



Paul, who shared the good news with both Jewish and Gentile audiences.

Theme verse of Luke

“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Lk 19:10)

Why Luke was written

Luke states his purpose right away: this book is meant to give believers an accurate, chronological understanding of Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection. Luke investigated the events of Jesus' life by speaking with eyewitnesses (Lk 1:2), giving Theophilus (and us) a thorough record of the things Jesus did and said.

Luke is written to a Christian with little education in the life of Christ, making this book a terrific starting point for believers interested in studying His life today.

Quick outline of Luke

Jesus' origins (Lk 1–3)
Jesus' popularity as a prophet grows (Lk 4–9:17)
Opposition to the Son of Man grows (Lk 9:18–19:27)
Jesus' betrayal, trial, and death (Lk 19:28–23:56)
Jesus' resurrection (Lk 24)

More pages related to Luke

John (next book of the Bible)
Mark (previous)
Acts (part two of Luke's NT work)
Matthew

43. The Gospel of John

John lists stories of signs and miracles with the hope that readers will believe in Jesus.

Author: John

The Gospel of John: reasons to believe in Jesus

John is the story of Jesus: God who came down to save the world. This book was written by a disciple whom Jesus loved—the Church traditionally attributes it to John.



John is the fourth and last Gospel (an account of Jesus' life and ministry) in the new Testament. John focuses on the deity of Christ more so than the other four: we see Jesus as the Word of God, the Son of God, and God Himself. Jesus is a great miracle worker, an omniscient teacher, a compassionate provider, and a faithful friend.

John may be the final Gospel, but this narrative begins far, far earlier than the other three. While Mark begins with Jesus' adult ministry, and Matthew and Luke begin with His physical birth, John opens with the beginning of all creation: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Jesus presents Himself as God incarnate throughout the Gospel of John, often using the phrase "I am" (the memorial name of God revealed in Exodus). John records several "I am" statements from Jesus throughout this book:

- "I am the bread of life" (Jn 6:35, 41, 48, 51)
- "I am from [God], and He sent Me" (Jn 7:29)
- "I am the Light of the world" (Jn 8:12; 9:5)
- "I am [God]" (Jn 8:58)
- "I am the door" (Jn 10:7, 9)
- "I am the good shepherd" (Jn 10:11, 14)
- "I am the Son of God" (Jn 10:36)
- "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:25)
- "I am the way and the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6)
- "I am the vine" (Jn 15:1, 5)

The Gospel of John makes a strong argument for Jesus as the exclusive savior, and the only way to know God (Jn 1:18; 14:6). Jesus is greater than the Jewish heroes Moses and Abraham (Jn 1:17; 8:58); Jesus Christ is God in the flesh, and John challenges us to believe in Him.

Theme verse of John

"Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." (Jn 20:30–31)

John's role in the Bible

In addition to this Gospel, John wrote three New Testament letters and possibly the prophetic book of Revelation. He was a leader in



the early church, and he probably wrote his documents after most of the other New Testament books were already written.

The miracles recorded in John's gospel are written that the reader would believe in Jesus and find life in His name (Jn 20:30–31). Therefore, much of John's material directly states who Jesus is, not just what He does or says.

Unlike Luke, John does not aim to chronicle the whole life of Christ—in fact, John doesn't think the world could contain such a document (Jn 21:25). Instead, John presents a few signs and teachings that should compel us to believe in Jesus.

Quick outline of John

- Beginnings (Jn 1)
- Signs that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God (Jn 2:1–11:46)
- Turning water to wine (Jn 2)
- Healing the nobleman's son (Jn 4:46–54)
- Healing the sick man at the pool of Bethesda (Jn 5)
- Feeding 5,000 (Jn 6:1–14)
- Walking on water (Jn 6:15–21)
- Healing the blind man (Jn 9)
- Raising Lazarus from the dead (Jn 11)
- Jesus' final week and teachings (Jn 11:47–17:26)
- Jesus' betrayal, trial, and death (Jn 18–19)
- Jesus' resurrection and encouragement to the disciples (Jn 20–21)

More pages related to John

- Acts (next book of the Bible)
- Luke (previous)
- Matthew
- Mark
- 1 John

44. Acts

Jesus returns to the Father, the Holy Spirit comes to the church, and the gospel of Jesus spreads throughout the world.

Author: Luke

Acts: the Holy Spirit advances the gospel

Jesus lived, Jesus died, Jesus rose, Jesus ascended into heaven. Acts tells us what happens next.



Acts tells us how the Holy Spirit came upon the church, and how the gospel spreads from Jerusalem to Rome. The book picks up where the Gospels (four accounts of Jesus' life and ministry) leave off. The book of Acts begins with the ascension of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit, and goes on to show how the apostles preached Christ to the world.

Peter and Paul are the primary human actors in this story. While Peter emerges as the leader among Christians at Jerusalem, Paul becomes the key missionary to Jews and Gentiles across the Roman empire. With their leadership under the Holy Spirit, the church expands from a group of believers small enough to fit in one house (Ac 2:2) to a worldwide fellowship said to have turned the world upside-down (Ac 17:6).

Acts is the second book from Luke, who also wrote the Gospel that shares his name.

Theme verse of Acts

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." (Ac 1:8)

Why Acts was written

Acts is the follow-up to the Gospel of Luke (Ac 1:1-2). Luke carefully records the spread of Christianity in the Roman world, sometimes as an eyewitness.

Acts shows us that Jesus was true to His word: the Holy Spirit came to the disciples and empowered them to work miracles and preach the good news throughout the world.

Quick outline of Acts

- The gospel spreads among the Jews (Ac 1–9)
- The church spreads to Gentiles (Ac 10–12)
- Paul spreads the gospel and plants churches in Asia and Greece (Ac 13–21:14)
- Paul spreads the gospel as a prisoner from Jerusalem to Rome (Acts 21:15–26:31)

More pages related to Acts

- Romans (next book of the Bible)
- John (previous)
- Luke (the first part of Luke's history)



45. Romans

Paul summarizes how the gospel of Jesus works in a letter to the churches at Rome, where he plans to visit.

Author: Paul

Romans: how the gospel works

Paul has not yet been to Rome, and wants to encourage the church and remind them of the things they believe. So he writes them a letter.

And this letter is among the most articulate descriptions of the gospel, salvation, and Christ's work ever written.

Paul explains the gospel: the good news of Jesus Christ, and he unpacks its implications for everyone:

All humanity, whose sin makes us enemies of God
 Jesus, who died to satisfy God's justice and bring us back to Him
 The Holy Spirit, who transitions us from sinners to adopted sons of God
 Jews, who were exposed to God's standards through the Law of Moses
 God the Father, who is glorified in Christ's sacrifice, the Spirit's work, and the salvation of Jews and Gentiles

Paul also takes care to explain the Christian's proper response to the gospel: to serve and honor God (Ro 12:1–2). The rest of the letter describes what this looks like in real life: serving in church, persevering under affliction, interacting with human governments, and loving one another.

Theme verse of Romans

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." (Ro 1:16–17)

Why Romans was written



Romans is the first of Paul's letters. Of the 27 New Testament books, Paul wrote 13. Nine of these books are letters to local churches (like the one in Rome).

Paul had wanted to visit the church at Rome for many years when he wrote this letter (Ro 15:23). Because it would still be a while before he was able to make the trip to Rome, he wrote them a letter with a twofold purpose:

To establish them in the faith by explaining the gospel (Ro 1:8–15)
 To encourage and remind them how they should act as a church (Ro 15:14–15)

Paul (and his company) also use this letter to send along greetings to Christians in Rome.

Quick outline of Romans

- Greeting from Paul (Ro 1:1–17)
- The gospel (Ro 1:18–11:36)
- How our sin makes us enemies of God (Ro 1:18–3:20)
- How Jesus reconciled us with God (Ro 3:21–5:21)
- How the Spirit changes us from sinners to sons of God (Ro 6–8)
- How God glorifies Himself in salvation (Ro 9–11)
- Our response to the gospel (Ro 12–15)
- Greetings to specific Christians in Rome (Ro 16)

More pages related to Romans

- Pauline epistles
- 1 Corinthians (next book of the Bible)
- Acts (previous)
- Galatians (Paul addresses many of the same issues he does in Romans)

46. 1 Corinthians

Paul writes a disciplinary letter to a fractured church in Corinth, and answers some questions that they've had about how Christians should behave.

Author: Paul

1 Corinthians: a new perspective for a troubled church

The church in Corinth was in trouble. They were divided. They were immature. They were abusing the sacraments, spiritual gifts, and



each other. The apostle Paul had founded this church earlier (Acts 18), and when he hears of the young church's struggles, he writes them a letter.

And it's a bold one. He tackles the issues the church faces, reprimands them for their shortcomings, and encourages them in love.

First Corinthians is not a step-by-step guide to solving church problems, however. Instead of telling the church precisely what to do, Paul proposes a new perspective: put God's glory first. It's the key to overcoming these struggles.

The Corinthians were fighting each other, with one faction claiming Paul as their leader while others claimed the eloquent Apollos, the original apostle Peter (Cephas), or the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (1 Co 1:12). Paul reprimands them for their immaturity (1 Co 3:3), and points to God as the one who deserves glory, not His servants (1 Co 3:5-7).

The church was condoning sexual immorality: one man was sleeping with his mother-in-law (1 Co 5:1) and others seem to have been seeing prostitutes (1 Co 6:16-18). The church was not judging their own based on God's Word; rather, they were taking their disputes with other Christians to the secular courts (1 Co 6:5-7). Paul's direction: recognize God's authority and glorify Him with the physical body (1 Co 6:19-20).

The Corinthians had written Paul with questions about what they were at liberty to do in marriage, divorce, eating and drinking, and the like. Paul gives detailed responses on each topic, but sums up the Christian philosophy: "whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Co 10:31 ESV)

Unlike Romans and Colossians, 1 Corinthians is a letter written to people Paul knew well. Paul's familiarity is very obvious in this letter, especially in his fatherly language (1 Co 4:14, 21; 11:1-2).

Two of Paul's New Testament letters are written to the church in Corinth. In Second Corinthians, we see Paul's relationship restored with his children in Christ.

Theme verse in 1 Corinthians

"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Co 10:31 ESV)

Why 1 Corinthians was written



Second Corinthians is the third of Paul's letters. Of the 27 New Testament books, Paul wrote 13. Nine of these books are letters to local churches (like the one in Corinth).

The Corinthian church was divided over several issues, and Paul writes to put things back into proper perspective. One could think of First Corinthians as "Christian Living 101" or "Church for Dummies." And since Paul addresses questions from Corinth, this letter contains one of the rare direct Q&A portions of the Bible.

Quick outline of 1 Corinthians

- Paul greets and encourages the Corinthian church (1 Co 1:1–9).
- Paul corrects them in areas of immaturity (1 Co 1:10–6:20)
- Quarrels over leadership (1 Co 1:10–4:21)
- Dealing with the church's lack of judgment on sex and legal disputes (1 Co 5–6)
- Paul addresses issues the church raised in an earlier letter (1 Co 7–10)
- Marriage, divorce, and virginity (1 Co 7)
- Eating meat used for idol worship (1 Co 8–10)
- Paul calls the church to order
- Head coverings and authority (1 Co 11:1–16)
- The Lord's Supper (1 Co 11:17–34)
- Using spiritual gifts (1 Co 12–14)
- Understanding the resurrection (1 Co 15)
- Instructions for greeting other Christians (1 Co 16)

More pages related to 1 Corinthians

- 2 Corinthians (next book of the Bible)
- Romans (previous)

47. 2 Corinthians

Paul writes a letter of reconciliation to the church at Corinth, and clears up some concerns that they have.
Author: Paul

2 Corinthians: forgiveness and reconciliation in the church

When Paul wrote his first epistle to the church in the city of Corinth, they had been going through all kinds of divisive problems. Paul had urged them to put God's glory first and love one another, but he wasn't the only one telling them what to do. When Paul came for a visit, a member of the church opposed him strongly. Paul left, and



sent his associate Titus to Corinth with yet another strong letter admonishing them.

Titus delivered that letter, and the church (including the member who had opposed Paul) repented. Now Paul has heard Titus' report, and writes to Corinth once again to address lingering concerns.

This letter is a comforting one. It's a letter that affirms Paul's loving relationship with the church he planted years ago. It's a letter that praises the young church for their obedience, generosity, and love. It's a letter that reassures them of Paul's legitimacy as an apostle.

We know this letter as Second Corinthians.

Theme verse of 2 Corinthians

"I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you." (2 Co 7:16 ESV)

2 Corinthians' role in the Bible

Second Corinthians is the third of Paul's letters. Of the 27 New Testament books, Paul wrote 13. Nine of these books are letters to local churches (like the one in Corinth).

In the wake of all that happened since writing First Corinthians, Paul writes to the church to resolve a few lingering concerns and issues: Where the Corinthians stand with Paul. When the church last heard from Paul, he was writing to correct them. Now they have repented, and Paul assures them that they are loved by and reconciled to him (2 Co 7:4).

Why Paul hasn't visited Corinth since they repented. Paul had originally planned to visit them twice, but he did not want to put the church through another sorrowful event like his last visit. Paul assures the church that he had avoided a second visit with pure motives, not because of hypocrisy or fickleness (2 Co 1:17, 24). Paul plans another visit to Corinth (2 Co 12:14; 13:10).

How to complete the contribution for the Christians at Jerusalem. The church had eagerly begun to take up an offering to pass along to the church in Jerusalem (1 Co 16:1-2; 2 Co 8:10), but somehow the contribution effort had stalled. Paul encourages the church to generously complete the offering (2 Co 8).

Paul's authority as an apostle. Paul's character and legitimacy had apparently come under attack in Corinth. At least one man had criticized Paul for using strong letters and meek speech in person (2



Co 10:10), and Paul was concerned that the church would be lured away from the truth (2 Co 11:1–5). Paul defends his apostleship, and explains his humble approach to ministry (2 Co 10–13).

Quick outline of 2 Corinthians

Affirmation that Paul and the Corinthians are reconciled (2 Co 1–2)
Paul's ministry as an apostle (2 Co 3–6)
Paul's confidence and joy in them (2 Co 7)
The contribution for Jerusalem (2 Co 8–9)
Paul's legitimacy and authority (2 Co 10–13)

More books related to 2 Corinthians

Galatians (next book of the Bible)
1 Corinthians (previous)

48. Galatians

Paul hears that the Galatian churches have been lead to think that salvation comes from the law of Moses, and writes a (rather heated) letter telling them where the false teachers have it wrong.
Author: Paul

Galatians: our new freedom in Christ

Overview of the book of Galatians

Paul is angry. Some false teacher has pressured the churches in Galatia (a region in the Roman Empire) to follow the Jewish Law.

They're teaching that salvation comes through the Law of Moses, and not through Christ—the exact opposite of what Paul had taught them. So Paul writes a letter to bring them back to the truth. This letter isn't about Paul's ego or preferences: it's about understanding why Jesus had to die and how it affects us.

The Jews had been living under the Law since the days of Moses. The Law was a set of expectations for God's people: commands that, when followed, would distinguish Israel from all other nations as a people that belonged to God. However, Israel couldn't keep the Law. Nobody could: everyone was a sinner.

So God sent Jesus. Jesus lived the Law, died for our sins, and rose again—He fulfilled the Law.



The Galatians' new teacher completely disregards and disrespects God's grace, Christ's sacrifice, and the Holy Spirit's work. That's why Paul is so upset.

This book explains the believer's new relationship with God. We're freed from sin. We're freed from the Law. We're adopted as children of God. We're counted as spiritual children of Abraham, whether we're Jews or non-Jews. And we're all empowered by the Holy Spirit to do good works, something sin prevented us from doing and the Law never enabled us to do.

Christ's death is important, and Paul won't let anyone forget it.

Theme verse of Galatians

The verse that demonstrates the theme of this book is Galatians 5:1, which reads:

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

Galatians' role in the Bible

Galatians is the fourth of Paul's letters. Of the 27 New Testament books, Paul wrote 13. Nine of these books are letters to local churches (like the ones in Galatia).

The Galatians felt pressured to seek salvation from the Law of Moses, even though they had already accepted the grace of Christ. The book of Galatians succinctly outlines the relationship between the Law of Moses and God's New Covenant with the Church.

Paul defends the true gospel, and deals with a few questions that would naturally arise in an argument of Law vs. grace:

What about God's promises to Abraham?

God made an everlasting covenant (a pact or agreement) with Abraham in the book of Genesis. This was a promise to bless Abraham, his descendants, and the world (Gn 15). Abraham's descendants, the Hebrews, were considered God's special people, and God set them apart from the world with the Law at Mount Sinai (this happened in Exodus). Paul teaches that faith in Christ does not cancel out God's promises to Abraham; rather, it extends the blessings of that covenant beyond Israel. Now, anyone who believes in Christ is a spiritual son of Abraham (Ga 3:29).

What is my relationship with God?



Paul teaches that faith in Jesus makes us not only children of Abraham, but also children of God. It's a radical shift in identity: we are adopted into God's family (Ga 4:5–6).

Why make the Law in the first place?

The Law is a tutor that taught us two things: (1) God is holy and expects His people to be holy, and (2) we cannot live up to His standards. The Law makes it clear that we need a savior.

What about sin?

We're being changed, but we still sin. Paul explains how the Holy Spirit works in us to battle our sinful desires. It's in Galatians that we find the fruit of the Spirit (Ga 5:22–23).

If we're free from the Law, are we free to sin?

No way. "God is not mocked," and we all reap what we sow (Ga 6:7). Paul finishes his letter with a strong call to do what's right and not lose heart as a community of believers: "Let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith" (Ga 6:9–10).

Paul acknowledges that those who advocate the Law may still try to refute his letter, but urges the church to lean on the true gospel of grace in Jesus.

Quick outline of Galatians

- The gospel under attack in Galatia (Ga 1:1–10)
- History of the Law vs. grace debate (Ga 1:11–2:21)
- Salvation via faith vs. salvation via works (Ga 3)
- Slavery vs. sons and heirs of God (Ga 4)
- The sinful flesh vs. the Holy Spirit (Ga 5)
- How to do good in Christian community (Ga 6)

More books and pages related to Galatians

- Ephesians (next book of the Bible)
- 2 Corinthians (previous)
- Romans (Paul covers much of the same material in Romans)
- Genesis (God makes a covenant with Abraham)
- Exodus (God gives His law to Israel)



49. Ephesians

Paul writes to the church at Ephesus about how to walk in grace, peace, and love.

Author: Paul

Ephesians: walking in grace, peace, and love

You're a Christian. Now what?

Paul's letter to the Ephesians has the answer. The church at Ephesus (a city in the Roman Empire) had been established during Paul's two-year stay (Ac 19). They heard the call, they believed, and they turned away from their old idols and practices—even if it was costly (Ac 19:19). Now Paul writes to remind them of where they stand in the family of God, and how to behave as members of that family.

Paul calls attention to three major themes: grace, peace, and love. God has shown these to the Ephesians, and Paul calls the readers to be imitators of God (Eph 5:1); therefore, we are to treat one another in like manner.

Grace. We're saved by God's grace—His favor which we could not deserve (Eph 2:8–9). Paul encourages the church to deal graciously with one another in turn (Eph 4:25–32).

Peace. We naturally deserved God's wrath (Eph 2:3), but He has adopted us through Jesus (Eph 1:5). Furthermore, he has united the Jews and non-Jews in His Son, establishing peace between all parties (Eph 2:14). Now, the church is to preserve peace and unity with one another (Eph 4:3).

Love. God showed His love through Jesus (Eph 2:4), and Paul commends the Ephesians for the way they love one another (Eph 1:15). He prays that they be rooted in love (Eph 3:17) and encourages them to continue walking in love (Eph 5:2).

The call of Christ is a call to action, and Ephesians lays out God's desire for your spiritual walk like no other book of the Bible.

Theme verse of Ephesians

"Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." (Eph 4:1)



Ephesians' role in the Bible

Ephesians is the fifth of Paul's letters. Of the 27 New Testament books, Paul wrote 13. Eight of these books are letters to local churches (like the one in Ephesus).

Paul wrote Ephesians to accomplish two things:

Describe the Christian's calling. The first half of the letter focuses on the Ephesians' calling. They were chosen by God, sealed with His Spirit, and saved by His grace. The church was mostly Gentile (Eph 3:1; 4:17), and didn't have the historical relationship with God that the Jews had, but Paul assures them that they are just as much a part of God's family as the Christian Jews are (Eph 2:19).

Prescribe the Christian's walk. The second half teaches how to "walk in a manner worthy" of the Christian's calling (Eph 4:1). Paul outlines what the Christian walk looks like in various facets of life. Like his letters to the Philippians and Colossians, this epistle is meant to encourage the Ephesians to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel (Eph 4:1; Php 1:27; Col 2:6). Whereas Philippians focuses on the believer's attitude and Colossians focuses on the believer's mind, Ephesians focuses on how to walk as part of God's family.

Quick outline of Ephesians

- Our calling in Christ (Eph 1–3)
- Identity in Christ (Eph 1)
- Grace in Christ (Eph 2:1–10)
- Peace in Christ (Eph 2:11–22)
- Paul's calling (Eph 3:1–13)
- Paul's prayer for the Ephesians (Eph 3:14–21)
- Our walk in Christ (Eph 4–6)
- Walk in unity (Eph 4:1–16)
- Walk differently from the world (Eph 4:17–31)
- Walk carefully (Eph 5:1–21)
- Walk in love (Eph 5:22–6:9)
- Stand firm in the armor of God (Eph 6:10–24)

More pages related to Ephesians

- Philippians (next book of the Bible)
- Galatians (previous)
- Colossians (condensed overview of the Christian walk)
- Acts (more about Paul and the churches he planted)
- Romans (more on Jew and Gentile relationships in the church)



50. Philippians

An encouraging letter to the church of Philippi from Paul, telling them how to have joy in Christ.

Author: Paul

Philippians: how to rejoice no matter what

Life was hard in the city of Philippi. The Christians were being persecuted for their faith. Paul, their first teacher, was in prison far away. One of their key members had fallen deathly ill. They had worked for the sake of the gospel ever since Paul first shared it with them—and the work was really hard.

And in the middle of all this, Paul tells them to rejoice. Why?

Because God is at work.

The book of Philippians is one of Paul's most encouraging letters. Paul commends the Philippians for their earnest work in spreading the Word of God. He tells them how much he longs to see them. He warns them about potential pitfalls. He coaches them on dealing with hard times, and provides examples from his own life, other Christians, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

No matter what, the good news of Jesus will advance. God will complete His work in the Philippians' lives. His children will have all their true needs supplied. Paul will continue to minister to them.

And that's reason to rejoice.

Theme verse of Philippians

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Php 4:4)

Philippians' role in the Bible

Philippians is the sixth of Paul's letters. Of the 27 New Testament books, Paul wrote 13. Nine of these books are letters to local churches (like the one in Philippi).

No book of the Bible focuses on joy like Philippians. The imprisoned Paul hears that the Philippians are going through difficult circumstances:

They were being persecuted for their faith (Php 1:28)



Other teachers were trying to trouble their friend Paul while he was in prison (Php 1:17)

Their friend Epaphroditus had gone to visit Paul but had fallen very sick (Php 2:26–27)

False teachers were trying to submit the Gentile believers to the Old Testament law (Php 3:2)

Despite all these hardships, they were still doing their part to spread the gospel—even sending Paul a gift to provide for his needs. Paul writes this letter as a response to all this.

Like his letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, this epistle is meant to encourage the Philippians to joyfully walk in a manner worthy of the gospel (Eph 4:1; Php 1:27; Col 2:6). Whereas Ephesians focuses on how to walk as part of God's family and Colossians focuses on the believer's mind, Philippians focuses on the believer's attitude. And Paul drives his point home: of all the books of the Bible, Philippians has the highest concentration of the words translated "rejoice" or "joy."

Quick outline of Philippians

- Rejoice! Christ is our life (Php 1)
- Rejoice! Christ is our example (Php 2)
- Rejoice! Christ is our glory (Php 3)
- Rejoice! Christ is our strength (Php 4)

More pages related to Philippians

- Colossians (next book of the Bible)
- Ephesians (previous)
- 1 Thessalonians (more about suffering as a Christian)
- 2 Thessalonians (more about suffering as a Christian)

51. Colossians

Paul writes the church at Colossae a letter about who they are in Christ, and how to walk in Christ.

Author: Paul

Colossians: establishing your faith in Christ



Paul had never been to Colossae, but he'd heard from a good friend that the church in that city was blossoming in faith and love. They'd been rooted in Christ—but young churches had been misled before. Paul desperately wants to encourage the church and head off any persuasive arguments from false teachers, so he writes them a letter.

The brief book of Colossians is all about who we are in Christ. In the first two chapters, Paul teaches the Colossians who they are in Christ; in the last two chapters, he instructs them on how to walk in Christ. Paul emphasizes the mind throughout the book—the better the Colossians know what they believe, the harder it will be for someone to persuade them otherwise.

This letter is still a profound, encouraging word to us today for several reasons:

We, like the Colossians, have never met Paul face-to-face (Col 2:1)
 We continue to face persuasive arguments that contradict sound Christian doctrine (Col 2:8).

We need to remember that our lives are hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:1–3).

We should walk in a manner worthy of the Lord Jesus (Col 1:10).

If we know who we are in Christ, we'll have a much better idea of what to believe and how to behave.

Theme verses of Colossians

“Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.” (Col 2:6–7)

Colossians' role in the Bible

Colossians is the seventh of Paul's letters. Of the 27 New Testament books, Paul wrote 13. Nine of these books are letters to local churches (like the one in Colossae).

Paul makes a few statements as to why he wrote this letter:

He heard about their growth and wants to encourage them (Col 1:3–8)

He wants them to walk in Christ and remain established in their faith (Col 2:6–7).

He knows false teachers are trying to lead them astray (Col 2:8, 16, 20).



Like his letters to the Ephesians and Philippians, this epistle is meant to encourage the Colossians to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel (Eph 4:1; Php 1:27; Col 2:6). Whereas Philippians focuses on the believer's attitude and Ephesians focuses on how to walk as part of God's family, Colossians emphasizes the believer's mind (Col 2:8; 3:1–2). Paul addresses what Christians should know (Col 1–2) and what it looks like to set our minds on things above (Col 3–4).

Quick outline of Colossians

Who we are in Christ (Col 1–2)
 Christ: our head (Col 1)
 Christ: our God (Col 2)
 How to walk in Christ (Col 3–4)
 Christ: our life (Col 3)
 Christ: our Master (Col 4)

More books related to Colossians

1 Thessalonians (next book of the Bible)
 Philippians (previous)
 Ephesians (similar structure and content)

52. 1 Thessalonians

Paul has heard a good report on the church at Thessalonica, and encourages them to “excel still more” in faith, hope, and love.
 Author: Paul

1 Thessalonians: how to keep growing in faith, love, and hope

Timothy had good news for Paul: the church they had founded in the city of Thessalonica was growing. The members were loving one another. They were standing firm in their beliefs. They were holding up under persecution for their faith. The gospel is sounding forth from their city. Paul is overjoyed to hear this, and (with Timothy and Silvanus) writes them a letter to encourage and instruct them.

This is one of the most positive letters from Paul to a church. Paul overviews his history and relationship with the church members (which you can also read about in Acts 17:1–9), commends them for their excellent example, and goes on to list ways that they can “excel still more” until Jesus returns:

Sexual morality
 Understanding the Lord's return
 Unity
 Basic Christian conduct



The Thessalonians set a good example for churches in the area (1 Thes 1:7), and they still set a good example for us today.

Theme verse of 1 Thessalonians

“Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. (1 Thes 4:1)

1 Thessalonians’ role in the Bible

First Thessalonians is the eighth of Paul's letters. Of the 27 New Testament books, Paul wrote 13. Nine of these books are letters to local churches (like the one in Thessalonica).

Paul opens his letter commending the Thessalonians for their “work of faith,” “labor of love,” and “steadfastness of hope” (1 Thes 1:3)—themes that echo throughout his letter. Paul writes to remind, encourage, and instruct them concerning a few areas of interest:

Encouragement for the Thessalonians. Paul had sent Timothy to them, and Timothy had returned with a glowing report. The Jews in Thessalonica had opposed Christianity since it came to the city (Acts 17:5), and the church there had come under persecution from their own countrymen. But despite the present suffering, the Thessalonians stood firm in their convictions. Paul commends them: they are following the examples of Paul, the church elders in Judea, and even the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (1 Thes 1:6).

Expression of Paul's affection for them. Paul communicates his pride in the Thessalonians, even calling them his glory, hope, joy, and crown (1 Thes 2:19–20). He was both mother and father to this church (1 Thes 2:7, 11), and he loves them dearly.

Instruction for future growth. The church was setting a fine example (1 Thes 1:7), and Paul challenges them to do more and more (1 Thes 4:1). He reminds them of the hope of Christ's return (1 Thes 4:13–5:11) and lists ways to act until He does (1 Thes 5:12–24).

Paul also points to the return of Jesus throughout the letter:

Paul recalls the Thessalonians turning to Jesus and waiting for His return (1 Thes 1:10).

The Thessalonians will be Paul's hope, joy, and crown when Jesus returns (1 Thes 2:19).

Paul prays that their hearts will be established at the coming of Jesus (1 Thes 3:13).



Paul wants them to be prepared for the day of the Lord (1 Thes 4:13–5:11).

Quick outline of 1 Thessalonians

Commendation for faith, hope, and love (1Thes 1–3)
The Thessalonians' example (1 Thes 1)
Paul's history with them (1 Thes 2)
Timothy's visit and report (1 Thes 3)
Challenge to grow in these areas even more (1Thes 4–5)
Love for others (1 Thes 4:1–12)
Hope for the Lord's return (1 Thes 4:13–18)
Preparation for the Lord's return (1 Thes 5)

More pages related to 1 Thessalonians

2 Thessalonians (next book of the Bible)
Colossians (previous)
Acts

53. 2 Thessalonians

Paul instructs the Thessalonians on how to stand firm until the coming of Jesus.

Author: Paul

2 Thessalonians: standing firm until His coming

The world just won't let up. The Christians in Thessalonica was under fire from all directions.

The unbelievers outside were still persecuting them. The unbelievers of the city had come after Paul when he first founded the church in this city (Acts 17:4–5), and they continued to afflict the church. Paul had already written them a letter to encourage them about this: the church had to continue growing in faith and love with the hope that Jesus would return.

But now false teachers were saying that Jesus had already come. The Thessalonians were being told that the day they had hoped for had already passed. They'd been working in faith and laboring in love (1 Thes 1:3) as they prepared for the day of the Lord—was all their preparation and suffering in vain?



And some of their own had just given in. They were undisciplined, doing no work, and yet trying to be involved in everyone else's affairs (2 Thes 3:11).

This church was very dear to Paul's heart—they were his children in the Lord (1 Thes 2:7,11). So he reaches out to them again with a letter that addresses these three issues.

Theme verse of 2 Thessalonians

"But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one." (2 Th 3:3)

2 Thessalonians' role in the Bible

Second Thessalonians is the ninth of Paul's letters. Of the 27 New Testament books, Paul wrote 13. Nine of these books are letters to local churches (like the one in Thessalonica).

Paul needed to address the three troubles the church in Thessalonica faced:

Persecution from outside. Paul puts the church's situation in context. They're being identified with Jesus, and therefore the world hates them now. But what happens later, when Jesus returns? God will give them relief and judge their persecutors (2 Thes 1:6–7). Jesus will be glorified, and so will His saints (2 Thes 1:10–12). What happens when Jesus returns? Justice.

Despair from false doctrine. Someone has told the church that Jesus had already returned and gathered His own to Him—possibly even by forging a letter from Paul (2 Thes 2:2). Paul reminds the church of his teachings regarding the return of Jesus, and the things that must happen beforehand—including the appearance of the mysterious "man of lawlessness" (2 Thes 2:3).

Busybodies in the church. A few Thessalonians had fallen off into undisciplined lives: they weren't working, and they weren't holding to Paul's traditions. Some had become "busybodies," people getting involved in other's work without contributing themselves (2 Thes 3:11). Paul reminds them of the example he set: how he worked among them with his own hands (2 Thes 3:7–8). He also leaves instructions for dealing with those who would reject his teachings in this letter (2 Thes 3:14–15).

Paul cared about the church he'd established, and the message he sends them still informs the way we should think about Jesus' coming and the work we should do in the meantime.



Author of 2 Thessalonians

The apostle Paul wrote the book of 2 Thessalonians.

Quick outline of 2 Thessalonians

How persecution of the church ends (2 Thes 1)
What must happen before Jesus returns (2 Thes 2)
How to live and work together (2 Thes 3)

Pages related to 2 Thessalonians

1 Timothy (next book of the Bible)
1 Thessalonians (written to the same church)
Revelation (on the day of the Lord)
1 Peter (on suffering and glory)
Philippians (on the Christian's attitude during hard times)

54. 1 Timothy

Paul gives his protégé Timothy instruction on how to lead a church with sound teaching and a godly example.

Author: Paul

1 Timothy: the pastor's guide to sound teaching and godliness

Timothy was Paul's protégé, his "child in the faith" (1 Ti 1:2). Paul had left Timothy in the city of Ephesus to steer certain men away from false doctrine and provide sound leadership. This is Paul's follow-up letter.

1 Timothy is about sound doctrine and godliness. Paul deals with two main issues in this epistle:

What Christians should or should not teach. False teachers had already cropped up in the early church, and Timothy was sure to deal with more of them. Paul encourages Timothy to maintain sound teaching regarding the law and the gospel (1 Ti 1:8–17), gifts from God (1 Ti 4:1–5), and the Scriptures (1 Ti 4:13). Timothy is also charged with teaching his church to behave in a godly way, which means he spends even more time discussing . . .

What godliness looks like in the church. From family to finances, from prayer to church leadership—Paul walks through several facets of life and discusses how to go about them in godly ways. The Greek word most commonly translated "godliness" or "piety" in



the New Testament appears eight times in First Timothy: it doesn't show up this much in any other book of the Bible.

First Timothy is a letter to a young church leader with specific instructions on how to “fight the good fight” (1 Ti 1:18; 6:12). This book gives us a look at Paul’s instructions regarding the challenges Timothy faced—challenges many pastors still face today.

Theme verse of 1 Timothy

“But in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.” (1 Ti 3:15)

1 Timothy’s role in the Bible

First Timothy is the first of Paul’s pastoral epistles — letters written to church leaders he knew. In contrast, most of Paul’s epistles were written to entire congregations. Titus also received a pastoral epistle from Paul, but Timothy got two.

Timothy has a special relationship with Paul, and it shows. In this letter (and Second Timothy), we see Paul’s expectations of Timothy. This young church leader is specifically responsible for maintaining Paul’s standard of teaching in the church of Ephesus.

Paul probably wrote First Timothy a few years after he wrote Ephesians, the book that was read to the congregation Timothy now lead.

But First Timothy’s tone is notably different from Ephesians’. For example, whereas Paul’s instructions in Ephesians deal more with the high-level “Why?” and “What?”, his charges to Timothy are in great detail and focus more on the “How.”

So while Ephesians lists general ways a Christian can walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, First Timothy lays out specific ways to honor elders and widows,

Why the stark difference in Paul’s approach? The text gives us a few reasons:

Paul was writing to a fellow church leader. His letters to churches had to be general: if they were too specific, they wouldn’t be applicable to the common listener. However, First Timothy was written from one preacher to another preacher, from one church



leader to another church leader, from one Jewish Christian to another Jewish Christian.

Paul was writing to a friend. Paul and Timothy had many shared experiences, and he was very familiar with the challenges Timothy faced, whether in ministry or in health (1 Ti 5:23).

This book gives us a good look at the challenges pastors face, but more importantly, how Paul instructs Timothy to deal with them.

Quick outline of 1 Timothy

Sound teaching: the law and mercy (1 Ti 1)
 Living in godliness and dignity (1 Ti 2–3)
 Prayer (1 Ti 2:1–8)
 Marriage (1 Ti 2:9–15)
 Overseers (1 Ti 3:1–7)
 Deacons (1 Ti 3:8–13)
 Paul's reason to write (1 Ti 3:14–16)
 Sound teaching: discipline and godliness (1 Ti 4)
 Overseeing the church (1 Ti 5:1–6:10)
 Caring for widows (1 Ti 5:1–16)
 Honoring elders (1 Ti 5:17–25)
 Identifying false teachers (1 Ti 6:1–10)
 Charge to godliness (1 Ti 6:11–21)

Pages related to 1 Timothy

2 Timothy (next book of the Bible)
 2 Thessalonians (previous)
 Titus (third pastoral epistle)
 Philemon (also written to a church leader)

55. 2 Timothy

Paul is nearing the end of his life, and encourages Timothy to continue preaching the word.

Author: Paul

2 Timothy: Paul's solemn charge to carry on the gospel ministry

Paul is about to die.

He had devoted his life to spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. He had fought for sound teaching in the churches. He had trained



pastors. He had corrected individuals, churches, and even apostles. He had testified before kings. Now Paul's work was almost done.

But even though Paul would soon leave the world behind, he wasn't leaving the world without a representative for truth. Timothy, Paul's protégé, his son in the Lord, needed to carry on Paul's standard of sound teaching (2 Ti 1:13).

Paul's second letter to Timothy focuses on solemn charges to the younger pastor:

Guard and fight for the gospel. Paul was appointed a preacher, apostle, and teacher of the gospel, and Timothy is responsible for guarding it (2 Ti 1:12–13) and entrusting it to others (2 Ti 2:2). The road ahead will be fraught with suffering (2 Ti 1:8; 2:3), but Paul encourages Timothy to be strong, and fight the good fight (2 Ti 1:7; 2:1).

Pursue righteousness. There are a lot of people out there who will try to disrupt Timothy's work and lead people into ungodliness. Timothy and the other believers are to accurately handle the word, avoid empty chatter, flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace (2 Ti 2:22).

Continue in sound teaching. Apostasy is coming in the future, and Timothy must remember the Scriptures.

Preach the word. Paul's last charge to Timothy is to preach the word. Timothy is not only responsible for keeping church doctrine in line; he's also supposed to bring that teaching to the lost.

Second Timothy shows us what Paul needed another preacher to know before he was taken from the world. Today, it's a fine letter of advice for church leaders, and gives instruction to those who want to live godly lives.

Theme verse of 2 Timothy

"Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus." (2 Ti 1:13)

2 Timothy's role in the Bible

Second Timothy is the second of Paul's pastoral epistles — letters written to church leaders he knew. In contrast, most of Paul's epistles were written to entire congregations. Titus also received a pastoral epistle from Paul, but Timothy got two.



Although Titus and Philemon come after this letter in our Bibles, Second Timothy is probably the latest of Paul's letters. We assume this because Paul wrote the letter near the end of his life (2 Ti 4:6).

Quick outline of 2 Timothy

Guard and maintain the gospel (2 Ti 1)
Fight and suffer for the gospel (2 Ti 2:1–13)
Pursue godliness (2 Ti 2:14–26)
Continue in sound teaching (2 Ti 3)
Preach the word (2 Ti 4)

Pages related to 2 Timothy

Titus (next book of the Bible)
1 Timothy (previous)
2 Peter (also written by an apostle about to die)

56. Titus

Paul advises Titus on how to lead orderly, counter-cultural churches on the island of Crete.

Author: Paul

Titus: setting up an orderly, counter-cultural church

The churches on the island of Crete need leadership, correction, and order. Establishing churches is Paul's forte, but Paul doesn't sail to Crete to organize things. He already has someone on the island he can trust.

That man is Titus.

Titus is Paul's partner in ministry (2 Co 8:23), a Gentile (Gal 2:3). Like Timothy, Titus is Paul's child in the faith—he was introduced to Christ through Paul's ministry (Ti 1:4).

Paul had left Titus in Crete with a purpose: to set up order in local churches (Ti 1:5). This short epistle unpacks that concept in Paul's list of things Titus should do:

Appoint elders (Ti 1:5–16). Paul lists the qualifications of overseers: they're to be upright, responsible, not divisive . . . there's a whole list of things Paul expects of church leaders.



Instruct people to be sensible (Ti 2). Men and women of all ages have their parts to play in the church. Whereas the Cretans are known for being “liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons” (Ti 1:12), the Christians are to live sensibly, which in turn glorifies God (Ti 2:4, 8, 10). Encourage good deeds (Ti 3). The Christians are saved, and they should behave like it—but why? Paul concisely argues for godly living: we do what is right in response to God’s kindness to us in salvation (Ti 3:3–7).

The book of Titus is a short guide to setting up order in the local churches of first-century Crete, but today it still gives us a theology of counter-cultural Christian living.

Theme verse in Titus

“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you [. . .].” (Ti 1:5)

Titus’ role in the Bible

Titus is the last of Paul’s pastoral epistles—letters written to church leaders he knew. In contrast, most of Paul’s epistles were written to entire congregations. Paul also wrote to Timothy—twice.

Titus is clearly a man that Paul has come to trust. Paul seems to have begun planting churches on the island of Crete, but Titus is specifically responsible for maintaining Paul’s standard of teaching in that area. Titus’s role is similar to Timothy’s (which you can learn about in Paul’s first and second letters to him), but he seems to be facing different cultural challenges—namely the Cretans’ undisciplined lifestyles.

Titus gives us a concise argument for good deeds: the people of the Church should behave differently from the people of the world because God has changed them. Though we don’t all attend church in Crete, we have undergone the same transformation:

For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.



This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men. (Ti 3:3–8)

The church behaves differently because God has made her different.

Quick outline of Titus

- Appointing counter-cultural elders (Ti 1)
- How the counter-cultural church should behave (Ti 2:1–10)
- Men and women (Ti 2:1–8)
- Slaves (Ti 2:9–10)
- Why the counter-cultural church should behave (Ti 2:11–3:15)

More pages related to Titus

- Philemon (next book of the Bible, also written to a church leader)
- 2 Timothy (previous, also a pastoral epistle from Paul)
- 1 Timothy (also a pastoral epistle concerning church leadership)
- James (more on good works)

57. Philemon

Paul strongly recommends that Philemon accept his runaway slave as a brother, not a slave.
Author: Paul

Philemon: how to accept a runaway slave as a brother

Philemon (fi-LAY-moan) is a good guy. He loves Jesus and the other believers (Phm 5). He has refreshed the hearts of many saints (Phm 7). He's a church leader in the Colossae area (Phm 2, Col 4:17). Paul even considers him a beloved brother and a fellow worker (Phm 1). But he's about to find himself in a very awkward situation.

Philemon owned a slave, Onesimus (oh-NAY-see-muss). Onesimus had run away from Philemon, and somehow met Paul in his travels. Paul shared the gospel with him, and Onesimus had been saved. Onesimus then stayed with Paul and assisted him while he was in prison (Phm 13).

But Paul sends the runaway slave back to his old master.



Onesimus is going to show up on Philemon's doorstep with a note from Paul. This message urges him to do something unheard-of: forgive Onesimus and accept him as a brother, not a slave.

Theme verses in Philemon

"For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord." (Phm 15–16)

Philemon's role in the Bible

For the most part, Paul's letters fall into two neat categories: letters to congregations and letters to pastors. In our Bibles, the letters to congregations come first and the pastoral epistles follow. Then we're left with Philemon.

Philemon is a hybrid. The main thrust of the letter is to Philemon, an individual church leader, but the letter is also addressed to Apphia, Archippus, and the church in Philemon's house. The epistle is clearly not a private note to Philemon: Paul is publicly addressing the matter.

There's a good chance that Onesimus delivered both this letter and the letter to the Colossians in the same trip. In that letter, Paul says that in Christ, there is no distinction between "Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all" (Col 3:11). The book of Philemon gives the Colossians (and us!) a tangible example of what that means.

Speaking of tangible examples, you might read Philemon as a case study of how Paul's teachings played out in real life:

In Romans, we see the divine mechanics of salvation. In Philemon, we see the social mechanics of salvation.

In First and Second Corinthians, we learn how church members should deal with interpersonal and cultural conflicts. In Philemon, we see Christians forgiving one another and deferring to one another. In Galatians, we see the Godhead enacting salvation. In Philemon, we learn to view fellow believers the way the Godhead does.

In Ephesians, we see a high-level model of unity in the local church.

In Philemon, the local church is called to witness two brothers overcoming their differences.



In Philippians, we're told to have the attitude of Christ and put others' interests above our own. In Philemon, we see what that looks like in relationships with other Christians.

In Colossians, we learn how to see ourselves in Christ. In Philemon, we learn how to see others in Christ.

In First and Second Thessalonians, we learn about a church that set a great example in anticipation of the Lord's return. In Philemon, we learn about the example Paul expects a fellow laborer to show.

In First and Second Timothy, we see the general qualifications and duties of church leadership. In Philemon, we see a church leader put to the test.

In Titus, we see what the counter-cultural church should work toward. In Philemon, we see a counter-cultural church in practice.

This book has been cited through the centuries as a biblical argument against slavery. Paul does not make any direct attacks on the notion of slavery, but he does hold Philemon to a standard higher than that of the surrounding culture. Punishment for runaways was severe, but Paul told Philemon not only to withhold punishment, but to embrace Onesimus as an equal. And on top of that, Paul is willing to absorb whatever this might cost Philemon (Phlm 18).

And here's another important aspect of Philemon: we see the early church handling ambiguous situations with complete love and deference:

Paul could have kept Onesimus with him, but instead Paul lets Philemon do the right thing on his own.

Onesimus could have run away again to start fresh, but instead faithfully brings Paul's letter to Philemon.

Philemon could have made Onesimus a slave again (or worse), but we can assume he does as Paul requests.

It's a marvelous example of how church leaders and members can approach difficult issues.

Philemon isn't the shortest book of the Bible (that's Third John), but it is only one chapter long (335 words).

Quick overview of Philemon



Paul greets and affirms Philemon (Phm 1–7)

Paul requests that Onesimus be accepted as a brother (Phm 8–19)

Paul anticipates Philemon's obedience (Phm 20–25)

More pages related to Philemon

Colossians (also delivered by Onesimus)

Hebrews (next book of the Bible)

Titus (previous)

2 John (also only one chapter)

3 John (also only one chapter)

Jude (also only one chapter)

Obadiah (also only one chapter)

58. Hebrews

A letter encouraging Christians to cling to Christ despite persecution, because he is greater.

Author: Nobody knows

Hebrews: Jesus is greater, so hold fast to Him

Overview of the book of Hebrews

Should Christians ever turn away from the faith, or should they hold fast to it? Why?

The book of Hebrews is a long list of reasons to cling to Jesus. Hebrews was written for Christians who had been in the church for a while. These folks knew about angels, the Old Testament heroes, the devil, and Moses' tabernacle, but someone thought they needed to know a little more.

So someone wrote Hebrews—we don't know who (more on that later).

It's a word of exhortation (Heb 13:22), a message that comforts us and motivates us to obey God.

Hebrews is about Jesus' supremacy

No other book of the Bible so powerfully demonstrates Jesus' supremacy. Throughout Hebrews, the author compares Jesus to the heroes and icons of the Jewish faith. Each hero played a part, but His sacrifice, His covenant, and His current ministry are far, far greater than anything the others have to offer.



Jesus is greater than the angels, because He is the divine King (Heb 1:4, 6, 8).

Jesus is greater than Moses, because while Moses was a servant of God, Jesus is the Son of God (Heb 3:3–4).

Jesus is greater than Joshua, because Jesus brings a greater rest to the people of God (Heb 4:8–9).

Jesus is a greater priest than Aaron, because He is sinless and immortal (Heb 7:26–28).

But not only is Jesus better than any other human religious figure—He also has a better ministry after ushering in a better covenant built on better promises with a better sacrifice, that is, Jesus Himself (Heb 7:22; 8:6; 9:12).

And what should we do about this? The author of Hebrews encourages the audience to join him in two things:

Holding fast to the confession—relying on Christ and not turning away from the faith (Heb 4:14, 10:23).

Stimulating one another to love and good deeds—living in ways that demonstrate faith, obedience, thankfulness, reverence, and love (Heb 10:24).

Theme verses of Hebrews

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. (Heb 10:23–24)

Hebrews' role in the Bible

Apart from Romans, Hebrews is the most doctrine-heavy book of the New Testament¹. This book compellingly preaches and re-preaches Christ to those who know Him even today. No other book of the Bible so thoroughly explores Jesus' New Covenant and current priestly ministry like Hebrews.

But that's not really what this book is famous for. Today, Christians immediately associate two things with the book of Hebrews: the mystery of who wrote it, and the "Hall of Faith."

We don't know who wrote Hebrews.



It could have been Barnabas, Priscilla, Apollos—it could have been almost anyone. Here's what we do know, though: Hebrews was likely written by someone who heard about Jesus after He ascended. The author claims that salvation was first spoken through Jesus, then through those who heard Jesus. "Those who heard" then performed signs, wonders, and miracles (Heb 2:3–4).

The author of Hebrews puts himself (or herself) in a third category of people who heard about Jesus second-hand. This would exclude Paul, who specifically says he did not receive the gospel from men, but from Jesus Himself (Gal 1:12). Besides, the feel of Hebrews is quite different from that of the Pauline epistles.

Hebrews is also well known for its eleventh chapter, which has been nicknamed the "Hall of Faith." This chapter is a long list of Old Testament characters who, through faith, accomplished great things and bore up under great tribulation. This chapter cites Abraham, Moses, many characters from the book of Judges, and others as examples of what God can accomplish through our faith.

More facts about Hebrews

Both points of interest (the mystery of authorship and the compelling presentation of content) may stem from Hebrew's original nature. Many scholars believe Hebrews was first written as a sermon (or series of sermons) to a congregation. When the sermon was distributed to other churches, an epistle-sounding conclusion may have been added to the end. This could explain why there is no formal introduction to this letter like the ones we see in every other NT epistle.

Tradition holds that the book of Hebrews was written to Christian (surprise, surprise!) Hebrews. The author never explicitly says the audience is Jewish, but does assume that the audience is intimately familiar with the Old Testament, especially the Pentateuch.

Even so, this epistle is, I believe, one of God's greatest gifts to His church: an expository look at the person, life, covenant, sacrifice, and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is indeed greater than all others.

59. James

A letter telling Christians to live in ways that demonstrate their faith in action.

Author: James (likely the brother of Jesus)



James: what does true faith look like?

Imagine you grew up learning the Law of Moses, doing good works and observing the commands that God had given to His people Israel. Now, all of a sudden, you're told that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, the long-awaited Messiah, the seeking savior whose death on the cross covers your sin. And all you have to do is believe in Him.

Now imagine seeing non-Jews grafted into the people of God (the church). They don't all keep your Sabbaths. They're not circumcised. They don't even know the Law—but they're just as much a part of God's people as you are, because they had faith. If this were you, you might wonder if God even cared about good works anymore.

The apostle James meets this line of thought head-on: "faith without works is dead" (Jas 2:17, 26). He writes a letter to the Christian Jews scattered across the world, encouraging them to keep the faith and press onward to good works.

In only 108 verses, James (also a Jew) addresses the trials his brothers and sisters are facing in the world, and sets out very, very practical approaches to Christian living for the people of God.

Theme verse of James

"But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves." (Jas 1:22)

Quick outline of James

- Trials and temptation (1:1–20)
- True religion (1:21–27)
- Favoritism and judgment (2:1–13)
- Faith and works (2:14–26)
- Teachers and the tongue (3)
- Submission to God (4:1–5:6)
- Strength and anticipation (5:7–20)

Pages related to James

- 1 Peter (next book of the Bible)
- Hebrews (previous)



60. 1 Peter

Peter writes to Christians who are being persecuted, encouraging them to testify to the truth and live accordingly.

Author: Peter

1 Peter: suffering and glory

Christians just don't fit in, and that's not easy for the first-century church. Christians are suffering all over the world (1 Pe 5:1), and the Christians in modern-day Turkey need to know why. They need to know how to deal with it. They need to know how to live. And they need to know it's not in vain.

The apostle Peter writes these Christians a letter to address these issues in two ways:

Testify the truth. The more they know about Jesus, themselves, and the world, the better they'll understand their difficult situation.

Exhort them to live accordingly. The book reflects this focus. Peter explores a piece of doctrine, and then encourages the Christians to apply it to their lives. He makes four of these back-and-forth cycles:

Peter begins his letter by calling Christians "aliens," or residential foreigners to the Roman Empire (1 Pe 1:1, 17). He then goes on to explain the relationship between suffering and salvation: suffering lasts now, but it proves our faith so that joy and glory can come later.

Therefore, Christians should be holy, or set apart (1 Pe 1:14). They should love one another and long for the word of God.

After explaining why Christians are different, Peter goes into what the Christian family is: a spiritual house, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession (1 Pe 2:5, 9).

Therefore, Christians ought to keep their behavior excellent, so that even their oppressors will glorify God. They should submit to authorities, submit to one another, honor their spouses, and demonstrate kindness—even when they're suffering as Christians. And who set the finest example of suffering to glorify God? Jesus Christ.



Therefore, the Christians should live for the will of God and use their spiritual gifts to serve one another and glorify God.

And as if these folks had any more questions about suffering, Peter goes into it one more time. Suffering tests us. It's a way that we identify with Christ. And it never gives us an excuse to sin—the suffering Christian will still do what is right (1 Pe 4:19).

Therefore, church leaders should set a good example, and all Christians should humble themselves under God, standing firm as they look forward to Jesus' return.

To Peter, suffering is something the Christian should always see coming. We're foreigners here, and we shouldn't expect to be treated differently until our King claims dominion forever and ever (1 Pe 5:10–11).

Theme verse of 1 Peter

If anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. (1 Pe 4:16)

1 Peter's role in the Bible

No other book of the Bible focuses on suffering and glory as much as First Peter. This epistle was written to give Christians a fuller understanding of what's going on: the present sufferings and the glories to come.

First Peter is the second of the General Epistles (or Catholic Letters), the writings of apostles to the church at large. While Paul wrote to specific congregations and individuals, Peter, James, John, and Jude wrote to broader audiences across the Roman Empire.

This letter from Peter focuses on the sufferings and glory of Christ and His church. While Paul briefly explores Christian suffering with the Thessalonian church, Peter writes a whole letter on the issue. To Peter, Christian suffering isn't just something to put up with—it's something to expect.

Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you (1 Pe 4:12).

No suffering is enjoyable, but Peter actually calls it a blessing. Here's a list of reasons why he sees it this way:

When we suffer as Christians, we identify with Jesus (1 Pe 4:1, 13).



After we share in His hardship, we will share in our King's glory (1 Pe 5:10).

Suffering is an opportunity to prove our faith (1 Pe 1:6–7).

It's an opportunity to do what is right—even when we are wronged (1 Pe 2:20).

Christ set an example of suffering for us to follow (1 Pe 2:21).

The way we deal with persecution will bring our persecutors to glorify God (1 Pe 2:12).

When we do what is right no matter what the circumstances, God is pleased (1 Pe 2:20)

And if anyone's an expert on this, it's Peter. He saw Christ suffer with his own eyes (1 Pe 5:1). He knew from early on that he would be martyred for Christ's sake (Jn 21:18–19). And he'd caught a glimpse of the glory to follow (2 Pe 1:16–18; Mk 9:2–3).

This book was likely written in the early 60s, and the second book attributed to Peter was probably written a few years later.

Quick outline of 1 Peter

Suffering proves salvation (1 Pet 1:1-12)

Therefore:

Be holy (1 Pet 1:13–21)

Love one another (1 Pet 1:22–25)

Long for the word (1 Pet 2:1–3)

We are a holy people (1 Pet 2:4–11)

Therefore, pursue excellent behavior:

Toward authority (1 Pet 2:11–25)

Toward spouses (1 Pet 3:1–7)

Toward all (1 Pet 3:8–12)

Christ suffered for us (1 Pet 3:13–22)

Therefore:

Live for the will of God (1 Pet 4:1–6)

Exercise spiritual gifts (1 Pet 4:7–11)

Suffering tests us (1 Pet 4:12–19)

Therefore:

Elders should guard the flock (1 Pet 5:1–5)

Humble yourselves under God (1 Pet 5:6–7)

Stand firm (1 Pet 5:8–14)



More pages related to 1 Peter

- 2 Peter (written right before Peter died)
- 2 Thessalonians (also deals with suffering as a Christian)
- James (previous book of the Bible, also written to Christians everywhere)
- 1 John (also written to Christians everywhere)
- Mark (written from Peter's recollection of Jesus' life)

61. 2 Peter

Peter writes a letter reminding Christians about the truth of Jesus, and warning them that false teachers will come.
Author: Peter

2 Peter: remember the truth

After Jesus rose from the grave, He had a special conversation with Peter about how the apostle would die:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God (Jn 21:18–19).

Peter knows that he will die for the Lord, and that his time was drawing near.

But there is so much the church needs to know and remember! False teachers are everywhere, causing divisions in the body of Christ (2 Pe 2:1–3). People will mock the promise of Christ's return (2 Pe 3:4). There are those who twist the Old Testament, and even the letters of Paul (2 Pe 3:16).

The church needs to remember the Scriptures: the words of the Old Testament prophets and the words of Jesus that the apostles had passed on. Peter is an undisputed authority in the church, and so before he gives up his life, he writes a letter.

One last letter.

Second Peter is a last attempt to help the global church by reminding them of the truth. Peter explains several things that Christians will need to remember after he's gone:



Godly living is the evidence of salvation (2 Pe 1:10). If the Christians really believe what they say they believe, they will display moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness, and love.

Scriptural truth and prophecy are from God, not man. Peter and the rest of the apostles would die, but the word would remain forever (1 Pe 1:25). Furthermore, the teaching that Peter and the apostles had passed on wasn't just something they'd dreamed up; they were eyewitnesses (2 Pe 1:16–18). And all those Old Testament prophets? They were under the influence of the Holy Spirit (2 Pe 1:21).

False teachers will try to deceive the church. They'll introduce divisive teachings that encourage people to indulge in the sins of the world: a twisted, disgusting take on Jesus' grace (2 Pe 2).

Mockers will discount the idea of Jesus' return. Peter doesn't know when Jesus was coming back; he just knew better than to doubt Him. Peter assures the church that Jesus is indeed returning, and His church should behave accordingly (2 Pe 3:14).

Peter had urged the church to stand firm in his first letter, but there will be no more letters from Peter. There will be no more sermons and no more miracles from the disciple who lead the church for over 30 years.

Second Peter urges the church to stand firm—because even when Peter is gone, the church must carry on.

Theme verse in 2 Peter

Remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles. (2 Pe 3:2)

2 Peter's role in the Bible

Second Peter is the apostle Peter's last reminder to the church. Tradition holds that he was crucified around 64–65 A.D., which means he would have written this letter about this time.

Second Peter is the third of the General Epistles (or Catholic Letters), the writings of apostles to the church at large. While Paul wrote to specific congregations and individuals, Peter, James, John, and Jude wrote to broader audiences across the Roman empire.



There's one more "goodbye" letter in the New Testament: Paul's second letter to Timothy. Both apostles, when they knew they were going to die soon, wrote letters to remind others of what was important.

This letter's second and third chapters bear remarkable resemblance to the epistle of Jude. We don't know if Peter borrowed from Jude's letter, if Jude borrowed from Peter's letter, or if both men were drawing from a prior discussion. Both letters, however, warn the church of two dangerous influences:

**False teachers who lead the people to indulge in sin
Mockers who dismiss the idea of Jesus' return**

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Second Peter is its emphasis on the Scriptures, both Old and New Testament. Peter firmly believes that many of the books in our Bibles today are true:

Peter was an eyewitness of Jesus' majesty when He was transfigured (you can read about that in Mark 9), and so he is not just following a made-up story of Jesus. He was there. He heard the voice of God affirming Jesus as His Son (2 Pe 1:17). Therefore, Jesus' ministry validates the prophets' writings (the Old Testament).

And even those prophets weren't just making things up. They were "moved by the Holy Spirit" when they spoke for God (2 Pe 1:21).

Peter holds the teachings of the apostles in high regard—on the level of the Old Testament prophets (2 Pe 3:2). The apostles included James, Matthew, and John, who went on to write some of the books in our New Testament.

Peter especially esteems Paul's letters—even regarding them as Scripture themselves (2 Pe 3:15–16).

Peter had said in a previous letter that "the word of the Lord endures forever" (1 Pe 1:25). Peter would die, but he believed the Scriptures would live on—and his last recorded words urge us to remember them.

Quick outline of 2 Peter

2 Peter displays some remarkable parallelism. Peter begins with a call to diligence in good works, reminds the reader that they can count on the prophets, and then warns that false prophets will arise. Peter then assures them that the old prophecies are true, and finishes with a call to be diligent and on guard.



- Remember to be diligent (2 Pet 1:1–15)
- True prophets and teachers (2 Pet 1:16–21)
- False prophets and teachers (2 Pet 2)
- Remember the true prophecies (2 Pet 3:1–13)
- Be diligent; be on guard (2Pet 3:14–18)

62. 1 John

John writes a letter to Christians about keeping Jesus' commands, loving one another, and important things they should know.
 Author: John

1 John: how to recognize the children of God

Peter was right: false teachers had arisen from among the church (2 Pe 2:1). Now some people were teaching that Jesus wasn't human, denying that He was the true Messiah. It was probably easier to get away with than it ever had been: the apostles were growing older, and churches were springing up all over the Roman Empire.

Plus these teachers claimed to be Christians, which would have been very troubling for the young churches to hear. Whom can they believe, and how can they evaluate new teachers as they come? The apostle John has the answers. He's been with Jesus; he's seen Jesus die (Jn 19:26); he's seen the empty tomb (Jn 20:4–5). John knows the truth, and so he writes a letter to help the church know how to tell the children of God from the impostors.

John combats false teaching with absolutes: truth and lies, light and darkness, love and hate, sin and righteousness, Christ and antichrist. He shows the church how to tell if they are children of God and how to tell if a teacher is trying to deceive them.

This is a letter written from a wise and loving father to a troubled church. John writes to older men ("fathers"), young men, and children, but he addresses all of them as his "little children"—a term of endearment that a loving father would use for his child.

John's letter moves around from theme to theme, but he makes three things very clear to the church:

- The children of God believe in Jesus Christ**
- The children of God keep His commandments**
- The children of God love one another**



And John as far as John is concerned, the people he writes to are children of God (1 Jn 5:13).

Theme verse in 1 John

This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. (1 Jn 3:23)

1 John's role in the Bible

First John is the fourth of the General Epistles (or Catholic Letters), the writings of apostles to the church at large. While Paul wrote to specific congregations and individuals, Peter, James, John, and Jude wrote to broader audiences scattered across the Roman empire. John's next two letters, however, are written to specific audiences.

In addition to this one, John wrote two other New Testament letters, a Gospel, and possibly the prophetic book of Revelation. He was a leader in the early church, and he probably wrote his documents after most of the other New Testament books were already written. First John is powerful. It's also a bit odd. It reads somewhat like a letter, somewhat like a sermon, and a little like some passages from Proverbs. Most of our New Testament epistles begins with a formal greeting and end with a conclusion and instructions, but First John has neither of these characteristics.

Plus, John's wise, fatherly writing style can wander from point to point: there are few obvious divisions in this letter. Plus, while many epistles contain a single statement of the author's purpose in writing,

John lists at least 12 reasons for penning this letter:

- So that he and the church may have joy (1 Jn 1:4)
- So that they would not sin (1 Jn 2:1)
- Because their sins are forgiven (1 Jn 2:12)
- Because they know God the Father (1 Jn 2:13)
- Because they know Jesus (1 Jn 2:13)
- Because they have overcome the evil one (1 Jn 2:13–14)
- Because they are strong (1 Jn 2:14)
- Because the word of God abides in them (1 Jn 2:14)
- Because they know the truth (1 Jn 2:14)
- Because no lie or false teaching can come from the truth (1 Jn 2:21)
- Because some would try to deceive them (1 Jn 2:26)
- So that they would know they have eternal life (1 Jn 5:13)



To be fair, these reasons are more fluidly interconnected in the text than a bulleted list like this makes them out to be.

First John's role in the Bible is closely related to the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John is written to persuade non-Christians to believe in Jesus and find eternal life in His name (Jn 20:31). Conversely, the first letter of John is written so that those who believe in Jesus would know they have indeed found life in Him.

If you wonder how the teaching in First John played out in real life, you'll love Second and Third John! These two very short letters apply First John's general teachings of truth, love, and obedience to specific local church situations.

No other book of the Bible talks about love as often as First John. About one in every 50 words is a form of "love"—that makes for about 52 mentions of love in just five short chapters. And it's no surprise: love is evidence of salvation (1 Jn 3:14), and John says that God Himself is love (1 Jn 4:8).

Quick outline of 1 John

Disclaimer: this may be the toughest book of the Bible to outline. With all John's reasons to write, scholars have a hard time forming an outline from John's letter. But the central focus of First John seems to be distinguishing the false teachers from children of God, so here's my take:

- The children of God keep His commands (1 Jn 1–3)
- The Spirit of God affirms Jesus' first coming (1 Jn 4:1–6)
- The children of God love one another (1 Jn 4:7–21)
- Things the child of God can know (1 Jn 5)

More pages related to 1 John

- The Gospel of John (written by John)
- 2 John (written by John)
- 3 John (written by John)
- Revelation (written by John)

63. 2 John

A very brief letter about walking in truth, love, and obedience.
Author: John

2 John: walking in truth, love, and obedience



The apostle John had set several things straight in his first epistle. He'd told the churches how to know if they were of the faith, he'd dressed down the false teachings that were making their rounds, and he'd strongly urged the Christians to love one another.

He'd told them about truth, love, and obedience—now he writes to tell them what to do about it.

In Second John, the elder (2 Jn 1) briefly explains the relationship between the three:

Love and truth. John loves those who know the truth, because the truth “abides” in them (2 Jn 1–2). When two parties know the truth, love comes naturally.

Truth and obedience. God the Father commanded that His children walk in truth (2 Jn 4). When you know the truth, obedience comes naturally.

Obedience and love. The commandment that God gave isn't anything new: “love one another” (2 Jn 5). A sure sign of obedience to God is love for His church, and a sure sign of love is obedience to God (2 Jn 6).

He then warns that “many deceivers have gone out into the world” (2 Jn 7), and that the Christians should watch themselves. They should beware of teachers who do not acknowledge Jesus' human life and who deviate from the things He taught (2 Jn 8–9). Such people are dangerous: the church shouldn't side with them, shouldn't invite them in, and shouldn't participate in their actions (2 Jn 10–11).

John is a bit cryptic in this letter, but he seems well aware of this. He would rather discuss this and more in person, so he lets the audience know that he hopes to visit soon (2 Jn 12).

Because truth, love, and obedience should be a part of everyday life, and the church needs to understand how.

Theme verse in 2 John

And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it. (2 Jn 6)

2 John's role in the Bible



In addition to this one, John wrote two other New Testament letters, a Gospel, and possibly the prophetic book of Revelation. He was a leader in the early church, and he probably wrote his documents after most of the other New Testament books were already written.

John writes this second letter to “the chosen lady and her children”—which may refer to a particular church leader, or perhaps metaphorically to a local church or group of churches. John refers to this lady’s “chosen sister” at the end of this letter (2 Jn 13), which may be code for a greeting from the children of another woman, or members of another church or group of churches.

Second John is the fifth of the General Epistles (or Catholic Letters), the writings of apostles to the church at large. While Paul wrote to specific congregations and individuals, Peter, James, John, and Jude wrote to broader audiences scattered across the Roman empire. Second and Third John, however, are written to specific audiences.

Second John is the second shortest book of the Bible—Third John is the shortest (by word count). It’s only one chapter long, and has only thirteen verses.

This letter repeats many themes from John’s first letter, and Third John reflects these themes as well. Overall, the three letters from John give us an idea of what the apostle thought was most important at the time: sound teaching, obedience to God, and brotherly love.

Quick outline of 2 John

- Walk in truth (1–4)
- Love others and obey God (5–6)
- Beware false teachers (7–11)
- Look forward to a visit (12–13)

More pages related to 2 John

- 1 John (the longest and most thorough of John’s letters)
- 3 John (another brief letter that focuses on truth)
- The Gospel of John (also written by John)
- Revelation (also written by John)
- Jude (also only one chapter long)
- Philemon (also only one chapter long)
- Obadiah (also only one chapter long)



64. 3 John

An even shorter letter about Christian fellowship.

Author: John

3 John: the fellowship of truth

Gaius knows the truth. He was baptized by Paul and traveled with him (1 Co 1:14; Acts 19:29). Later, he hosted Paul and a local church (Ro 16:23). Now he's earned a reputation for his hospitality among the Christians (3 Jn 5–6). And hospitality is a good, powerful thing: the apostle John says that by supporting these men, we join them in their work for the truth.

Sadly, not everyone is like Gaius.

The power-hungry Diotrephes is stirring up strife in Gaius' church. He's rejecting John's earlier letter, babbling accusations against the apostle, and even excommunicating church members who welcome other Christians into their homes (3 Jn 9–10).

When truth is rejected, fellowship is fractured.

This won't do. Jesus has commanded Christians to love one another (Jn 13:34), and John writes to Gaius to let him know three things: Gaius is doing the right thing, even though Diotrephes is condemning hospitality.

Gaius should not imitate what is evil, but instead imitate what is good (3 Jn 11).

John is coming to straighten things out.

John will soon arrive to put things right in person (3 Jn 14). He'll hold Diotrephes accountable for his words and deeds (3 Jn 10). Soon, John will arrive.

And there will be peace in truth (3 Jn 15).

Theme verse of 3 John

I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth. (3 Jn 4)

3 John's role in the Bible



In addition to this one, John wrote two other New Testament letters, a Gospel, and possibly the prophetic book of Revelation. He was a leader in the early church, and he probably wrote his documents after most of the other New Testament books were already written. Third John is the sixth of the General Epistles (or Catholic Letters), the writings of apostles to the church at large. While Paul wrote to specific congregations and individuals, Peter, James, John, and Jude wrote to broader audiences scattered across the Roman empire. Second and Third John, however, are written to specific audiences.

Third John is the shortest book of the Bible: only 219 words (in its original Greek).

This letter repeats many themes from John's first letter, and Second John reflects these themes as well. Third John shows us what happens when people follow sound teaching . . . and when they don't:

When Christians walk in truth, joy abounds (3 Jn 4). When someone in the church rejects the truth, everyone hurts (3 Jn 19).

When Christians support one another, they share fellowship in the truth (3 Jn 8). When someone seeks his own power, the fellowship is at risk (3 Jn 9–10).

Overall, the three letters from John give us an idea of what the apostle thought was most important at the time: sound teaching, obedience to God, and brotherly love.

Quick outline of 3 John

Praise for walking in truth (1–4)
Praise for loving the brethren (5–8)
Caution regarding Diotrephes (9–12)
Anticipation of a visit (13–15)

More pages like 3 John

1 John (similar content from the same author)
2 John (similar content from the same author)
The Gospel of John (same author)
Revelation (same author)
Philemon (also only one chapter)
Jude (also only one chapter)



65. Jude

A letter encouraging Christians to content for the faith, even though ungodly persons have crept in unnoticed.

Author: Jude

Jude: fight for the faith!

Jude came from an important family:
The Lord Jesus Christ was his brother
Mary was his mother
James, the church leader was also his brother

Jude hadn't always believed in Jesus (Jn 7:5; Mk 3:21), but after He rose from the dead, things changed. The world changed (Acts 17:6). His brother changed. Jude changed.

Now he shared this glorious salvation with people all over the world: Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female—all united in Christ. He wanted desperately to write about it. But he couldn't.

The church was facing a more pressing issue: people were creeping into the church unnoticed (Jd 4). These were not "seekers," nonbelievers who were genuinely curious about Christianity. They claimed to be believers. But they denied the exclusive authority of Jesus, twisting His grace into a license to sin all they wanted.

They were infiltrators. They indulged in sexual immorality, greed, and grumbling. They rejected the authority of the apostles, angels, and the Lord. They caused churches to split up into opposing factions.

The children of God needed to keep their eyes open for this kind of behavior in the churches. So instead of writing about the salvation they shared, Jude wrote a brief, hard-hitting letter to the churches of the world.

In just 25 verses, Jude covers a few important points for Christians to remember:

The threat to the faith. The ungodly people are perverting the grace of God and denying the only Master, Jesus (Jd 4). God will judge them, just like He has judged the unbelievers in the past (Jd 5).

Characteristics of the ungodly. Jude compares these unrestrained, divisive people to unruly angels, Sodom and Gomorrah, Cain the murderer, the profit-hungry Balaam, and the rebellious Korah. Jude



brings in examples from both the Old Testament and other nonbiblical writings.

The apostles' warnings. The church had been dealing with false teachers for a while—some people were even pretending to be apostles of Jesus, with the authority of Peter, James, Paul, and John (2 Co 11:13). The apostles had warned that “mockers” would arise, causing doubt and division in the church.

But Jude is more than just a detractor. He doesn't just write a list of red flags. This is a letter that urges the Christians to “earnestly contend for the faith”—to fight long and hard on behalf of their Lord. And Jude tells them how to combat this attack:

Build themselves up in faith. They are to pray in the Holy Spirit, maintain themselves in God's love, and wait for eternal life in Jesus. Show mercy to others. They should have mercy on those who doubt, even on those who are stained by sin. They're to be rescuers, snatching some out of the fires that will come.

Jude is a call to fight, but it's not like any other battle cry in history. It's a charge to delight in God and show mercy to others. This is how the church fights valiantly for the faith: by loving God and showing mercy.

Theme verse of Jude

[. . .] I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. (Jud 3b)

Jude's role in the Bible

Jude is the seventh and last of the General Epistles (or Catholic Letters), the writings of apostles to the church at large. While Paul wrote to specific congregations and individuals, Peter, James, John, and Jude wrote to broader audiences across the Roman empire. We're not sure when Jude was written.

Jude's content mirrors the second and third chapters of Peter's second letter. We don't know if Peter borrowed from Jude's letter, if Jude borrowed from Peter's letter, or if both men were drawing from a prior discussion. Both letters, however, warn the church of two dangerous influences:

- False teachers who lead the people to indulge in sin
- Mockers who dismiss the idea of Jesus' return



One major difference between the two books is Jude's use of apocryphal literature (Jewish writings outside of the Scriptures). Jude mentions events that aren't recorded in the Bible, such as an argument between Michael the Archangel and the devil over the body of Moses, or Enoch's ancient prophecies. These examples come from the Assumption of Moses and First Enoch. Jude's intended audience was familiar with these pieces, and therefore would have appreciated the references.

But Jude also relies heavily on the inspired Scriptures, especially Genesis and Numbers. Jude references all sorts of Old Testament figures and events, including:

- The Exodus from Egypt (Jd 5; Ex 12:51)
 - The generation of Israelites who died in the wilderness (Jd 5; Nu 14:35)
 - The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Jd 7; Gn 19:24)
 - Cain, the son of Adam, who killed his brother (Jd 11; Gn 4:8)
 - The prophet Balaam, who tried to curse the Israelites in exchange for money (Jd 11; Nu 22:31–33)
 - Korah, who rebelled against Moses and Aaron, but was swallowed up by the earth (Jd 11; Nu 16)
 - Enoch, the descendant of Adam and ancestor of Noah, whom God "took" from earth before he died (Jd 14; Gn 5:24; Heb 11:5)
- Jude is only one chapter long, and it's the fifth shortest book of the Bible (Third John is the shortest).

Quick outline of Jude

- The ungodly contending against the faith (1–16)
- How we should contend for the faith (17–25)

More pages related to Jude

- 2 Peter (covers much of the same content)
- James (written by Jude's brother)
- Numbers (Jude references several events in this book)
- Genesis (Jude references several events in this book)

66. Revelation

John sees visions of things that have been, things that are, and things that are yet to come.

Author: John

Revelation: behold, He is coming quickly



John is an exile on the isle of Patmos. His crime: bearing witness of Jesus (Re 1:9). Somebody didn't want John spreading this gospel message, and so they'd shipped him off to an island. He's contained.

But now John has received even more news to share.

It all starts one Sunday, when John hears a voice behind him: "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches (Re 1:11)." John turns around to see seven golden lampstands, and among them, the risen Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Jesus gives John a message for seven churches in Asia (modern-day Turkey). Of the seven, one is about to undergo intense suffering (Re 2:10), one has kept His word (Re 3:8), and the other five were faltering in their loyalty to Jesus. The Lord warns the churches that He is the righteous judge, and He knows their deeds. He calls the faltering churches to repentance, and makes seven encouraging promises to those who overcome.

Then, John is whisked into heaven to witness "what must take place after these things" (Rev 4:1). So begins a long series of prophetic visions for the churches, including:

A Lamb (who represents Jesus) breaks seven seals holding an old book shut—each time a seal is broken, it triggers an event on earth, some of which are catastrophic (Re 4–7).

Seven angels blow seven trumpets, and each trumpet blast brings a plague on the earth (Re 8–11).

A great dragon (Satan) and two beasts make war against a certain woman and the saints (Re 12–14).

Seven angels pour out seven bowls, and each bowl brings another plague on the earth (Re 15–16).

The Lamb overcomes the wicked city of Babylon, the dragon, and the beasts, then brings about a final judgment day (Rev 17–20).

A new heaven and new earth appear, where God and the Lamb dwell with people in harmony forever (Rev 21–22).

John faithfully writes everything down as a prophetic letter to the seven churches, with a closing message from Jesus: "I am coming quickly."

Theme verse of Revelation

Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. (Re 1:19)



Revelation's role in the Bible

Revelation is traditionally attributed to the apostle John, who also wrote a Gospel and three New Testament letters. He was a leader in the early church, and he probably wrote his documents after most of the other New Testament books were already written.

Two characteristics of Revelation set it apart from the rest of the New Testament:

It's the only book of its genre. Most of the New Testament is history or a letter. Revelation is indeed sent as a letter with a traditional greeting (Re 1:1–8), direct messages to the recipients (Re 2–3), and a sendoff (Re 22:18–21), but the bulk of the letter is a record of John's vivid symbolic visions. No other book of the New Testament feels like Revelation.

Jesus directly addresses the readers. You'll have to flip back to the Old Testament to see someone write down a message from God for someone else. The Gospels record Jesus' teachings, and the letters draw application from His teachings, but only in Revelation does Jesus Himself speak directly to the churches (Re 2–3; 22:16).

Revelation may be distinct from the New Testament, but its style and theology are right at home in the Bible. Revelation's symbolic visions are similar to what you'd see in the Old Testament prophecies of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah.

Of course, even after going over the book's content, it can still be difficult to know what Revelation is all about. Some of the visions are explained for us: the Lamb is Jesus (Re 17:14) and the dragon is the devil (Re 12:9). Others—most, really—aren't so directly explained. Some say all (or most) of John's visions are about the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.; others say the prophecies haven't been fulfilled yet. As you read and study Revelation, keep a few things in mind:

This message is written to churches in Asia, which had both Jewish and Gentile members.

Jesus begins everything with messages to the churches who were dealing with distraction, persecution, false teaching, immorality, laziness, and stagnation.

The correct response to this letter is to come to Jesus and invite others (Re 22:17).



Revelation is the last book of the New Testament and the Bible—
what a finish!

Quick outline of Revelation

John's greeting and introduction (1:1–8)
Jesus' messages to seven churches (1:9–3:22)
Visions of what comes "after these things" (4–22:9)
The Lamb who was slain breaks seven seals (4–7)
Seven angels sound their trumpets (8–11)
The dragon, the beast, and the saints (12–14)
Seven bowls of God's wrath (15–16)
The Lamb overcomes Babylon and judges the earth (17–20)
The new heaven, new earth, and new Jerusalem (21:1–22:9)
How to respond to John's vision (22:10–21)

More pages related to Revelation

Ezekiel (similar prophetic visions)
Daniel (similar prophetic visions)
Zechariah (similar prophetic visions)
Gospel of John (also written by John)
1 John (also written by John)
2 John (also written by John)
3 John (also written by John)

----- **END.**

A special thanks to Mr. Jeffrey Kranz & Mrs. Laura Kranz.

Thank you for compiling this wonderful overview.

God bless you both.



THE COMMANDMENT OF A NEW EARTH

THE HOUSE THAT IS TO BE BUILT FOR THE LORD MUST BE OF EXCEEDING MAGNIFICENCE, FAME AND GLORIOUS SPLENDOR IN THE SIGHT OF ALL THE NATIONS. I WILL NOW MAKE PREPARATIONS FOR IT – 1 CHRONICLES 22:5...

THE DIVINE DIMENSION

EVERY PURPOSE IS ESTABLISHED BY COUNSEL PROVERBS 20:18

BY WISDOM A HOUSE IS BUILT, BY UNDERSTANDING IT IS ESTABLISHED; BY KNOWLEDGE ITS ROOMS ARE FILLED WITH BEAUTIFUL AND RARE TREASURES PROVERBS 24:4-5

A NOBLE MAN MAKES NOBLE PLANS AND BY NOBLE DEEDS HE STANDS ISAIAH 32:8

THE DIVINE PURPOSE

WE ARE HERE TO BUILD UP THE ARK OF THE ANCIENT OF DAYS FOR ALL ETERNITY AND THROUGH IT TO ADVANCE THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. WE ARE TO BE ON HAND TO DO WHATEVER ELSE THE MOST HIGH ALMIGHTY GOD REQUIRES, HAVING BEEN PURGED FROM ALL SIN TO BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD (1 CORINTHIANS 5:21), WE MUST CULTIVATE ALL THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN US AND STIR UP THOSE NOT YET STIRRED UP IN ORDER TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSE, PLAN AND PROGRAM ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. WE ARE TO BUILD AN EXCEEDINGLY MAGNIFICENT HOUSE FOR THE LORD MADE UP OF SAINTS OF APOSTOLIC PROPHETIC FIRE (SAPPHIRE) – AS THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE NEW EARTH. WE ARE TO STAND OVER THE LAST AGE ENSURING THAT THE EARTH IS A PLEASANT HABITATION – WITH BEAUTIFUL GARDENS AND ORCHARDS AS HEAVEN WOULD ONLY HAVE IT – ACTS 3:21. WE ARE HERE TO HAVE ESTABLISHED **SHAMMAH** – THE ATTRACTION OF ALL AGES; THE EXCELLENCE OF ALL ERAS; THE PERFECTION OF ALL POSTERITIES; AND THE SEAL OF ALL SEASONS – FOR THE LOVE OF GOD AND THE PERPETUATION OF ETERNAL LIFE (ROMANS 2:7)

WE ARE TO BE A BANNER TO THE NATIONS – LEADERS PAR EXCELLENCE IN EVERY SPHERE OF LIFE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN AND THEREBY BECOME A NAME OF JOY, PRAISE, HONOUR AND RENOWN BEFORE ALL NATIONS OF THE EARTH THAT HEAR ALL THE GOOD THAT HE HAS DONE TO US (JEREMIAH 33:9 CF. PSALM. 126:2) SO THAT WE MAY PROCLAIM HIS PRAISES (1 PETER 2:9). ALBEIT THE WORK IS TEMPORAL IN STATURE, IT IS ETERNAL IN NATURE – ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. THE STATURE MAY CHANGE, THE NATURE SHOULD NOT – THIS IS THE TREASURE OF TRANSFIGURATION (II CORINTHIANS 3:18 CF. EPHESIANS 4:13, 23). OURS IS A WAR OF NATURES – NURTURING THE ETERNAL NATURE WITHIN A TEMPORAL STATURE (ROMANS 2:7) AND OUR AGENCY – INDEED OUR INSIGNIA, OUR EMBLEM – IS **WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE**. WE ARE A WONDER SIGN OF WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE.

IN THE MODERN WORLD OF KNOWLEDGE ECONOMIES, REPOSITORIES OF WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE WILL RULE.

WELCOME TO **THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST**.

MR. JAMES WANDERI KAIRU
 +254729252856
JAMES.KAIRU@TEMICENERGY.COM