

Overview of the Bible

Old Testament

Genesis: Beginning Stories—Creation; The Flood; Tower of Babel; Abraham and Sarah; Isaac and Rebekah; Jacob, Rachel and Leah; Joseph and his brothers, the move to Egypt

Exodus: The People under Pharaoh; Moses, Aaron and Miriam; The Passing through the Red Sea; Mt. Sinai and the Ten Commandments; the construction of the Ark and the Tabernacle; being in the wilderness

Leviticus: The Laws of the people in the wilderness

Numbers: The Census of the people in the wilderness

Deuteronomy: The “Second” Law; the preparation for the Promised Land; The death of Moses and the appointment of Joshua as his successor

Joshua: Crossing the River Jordan into the Promised Land; the fall of Jericho; the taking of Jerusalem

Judges: The people in the land without a king; stories of Deborah and Barak; Gideon; Samson and Delilah

Ruth: A story of the ancestors of David who came from Moab

1 Samuel: The story of the prophet Samuel; the anointing of Saul as king; David and Goliath; the fall of Saul and the anointing of David as king.

2 Samuel: David uniting the tribes into one kingdom of Israel; David’s plan for the temple; David and Bathsheba; the fall of David

1 Kings: The rise of Solomon; the building of the Temple; the fall of Solomon; the division of the kingdom; the prophet Elijah

2 Kings: The prophet Elisha; the fallen kinds of Israel and Judah; the exile of Israel; the reforms of King Josiah; the fall of Jerusalem and the Exile

1 Chronicles: Retelling of the events of the kings of Israel

2 Chronicles: Retelling of the building of the temple and the exile; The return from exile

Ezra: The prophet Ezra and the rebuilding of the temple around 515 B.C., concerned with Israelites marrying outside of their own people

Nehemiah: The governor Nehemiah and the rebuilding of Jerusalem in the 400’s B.C., he is also concerned with Israelites marrying outside their own people and losing their traditions and faith in God.

Esther: A story of the people in exile, queen Esther of Persia, and their struggle; also a story of the festival of Purim

Job: A story set without a time, without a land (Land of Uz is unknown) but an age-old story to attempt to answer the age old question: why do bad things happen to good people?

Psalms: The Bible's hymnbook: a collection of poems and songs, topics ranging from God's good works, the wonder of creation and the celebration of the Exodus, to lament and despair at the exile; the whole range of human emotion is covered in the Psalms

Proverbs: A collection of stories and sayings of and about Wisdom; Wisdom is personified as a feminine aspect of God in Proverbs 8-9:6

Ecclesiastes: Historically attributed to Solomon, this is a story and collection of sayings about wisdom and how to take life as it comes.

Song of Solomon (or Song of Songs): A collection of love poetry. Traditionally referred to God's relationship with Israel, but in reality poetry and songs about human physical love

Isaiah: A collection of the stories and sayings of the prophet(s) Isaiah. Isaiah I (Ch. 1-39) lived in the 700's B.C. in the northern kingdom of Israel; Isaiah II (Ch. 40-55) was from Judah and lived in the Exile in the mid-500's B.C.; Isaiah III (Ch. 56-65) lived in Judah after the return from Exile (520 B.C.)

Jeremiah: A prophet who lived during the reforms of King Josiah of Judah (627 B.C.) He argued that obedience to the commandments and covenant, not temple worship, was necessary for survival. Jeremiah spoke of a new covenant written in the hearts of people, not on tablets of stone.

Lamentations: A collection of poems, historically attributed to Jeremiah, mourning the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.

Ezekiel: A priest and prophet during the time of the fall of Jerusalem. He has strange visions and dreams and uses graphic images and language to convey God's judgment.

Daniel: A disjointed book—the first half stories of Daniel and others in Exile under king Nebuchadnezzar, the second half apocalypse. Chapters 1-2:7 and chapters 8-12 are in Hebrew; chapters 2:8-the end of chapter 7 are in Aramaic.

Hosea: a prophet told to marry a prostitute in the 700's B.C. in Israel, before the fall of Israel to Assyria. Very graphic in descriptive language.

Joel: hard to date, but probably in the 400-300's B.C., writing about the day of the Lord (God's judgment but also God's deliverance).

Amos: earliest of the prophetic books (probably 800's B.C.) He speaks of justice and righteousness over temple practices, festivals and assemblies

Obadiah: probably a prophet in the 500's B.C. during the exile. Shortest book of the Old Testament, speaks against other nations and lifts up Israel

Jonah: The story of the prophet Jonah and his message to Nineveh (a city of Assyria), and his struggle with God's will, judgment and forgiveness. Hard to date—more like a story than the other prophetic books.

Micah: A prophet in the 700's B.C. during the fall of Israel and the conquering by the Assyrians. Micah was from Judah. He was of a poorer class and spoke out against the idolatry and excesses of the wealthy elite.

Nahum: A prophet in the 600's B.C. who spoke out against Nineveh and announced its destruction.

Habakkuk: A prophet who lived sometime between 725 B.C. and 675 B.C., this book shares his vision, conversation, prayer and song with God.

Zephaniah: A prophet in the early days of King Josiah, speaking out against political and religious corruption.

Haggai: A prophet in the early days of Jerusalem after the exile, speaking about the new temple.

Zechariah: Written in 520-518 B.C. This prophet speaks of visions of God's judgment, a vision of a Messiah, God's restoration and promise.

Malachi: Written after Ezra and before Nehemiah, this prophet is concerned about practices in the temple and the intermarriage of Israelites with non-Israelites. He speaks of Elijah's return.

New Testament

Matthew: The Story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection to a primarily Jewish audience, rooted in Jewish prophecy and scripture. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law. (Written 75-85 A.D.) Follow's Mark's timeline but adds more details.

Mark: The earliest of the Gospels, with fewer details and an incomplete Resurrection account. (Written 66-70 A.D.)

Luke: Written primarily to a Gentile audience, explanations of Jewish festivals and scriptures. Jesus is beyond the law. (Written 75-85 A.D.) Has much in common with Matthew and contains materials shared with Matthew that are not found in Mark. Luke has more parables than any of the other Gospels.

John: Written around 90 A.D., John does not follow the same timeline as the other three, does not contain any parables but contains more "I Am" statements of Jesus and has long speeches by Jesus. John's Gospel is concerned with perseverance and staying faithful in persecution.

Acts: Written by the same author as Luke, this is the story of the early church, the rise of the mission to the Gentiles and the movement from Jesus to Paul.

Romans: A letter of Paul to the church in Rome, concerned with relationships of Jewish and Christian believers and his theology (he hasn't visited Rome yet) and is written after the Jews returned to Rome.

1 Corinthians: This is not Paul's first letter to this church but the first one we have today. Written during the time when Jews were expelled from Rome and some had settled in Corinth, Paul is concerned about rival groups within the church and the arguments over spiritual gifts as well as the allowing of some practices. Central argument is that we are the body of Christ and the greatest gift is love.

2 Corinthians: Probably the fourth letter of Paul to this church but may include pieces of two letters put together. Paul speaks to the need of reconciliation in a divided church.

Galatians: Addressing the contested issue of whether Gentile Christians first needed to become Jewish, Paul argues against Peter that there is no longer Jew or Gentile, all are made one in Christ.

Ephesians: The world's first chain letter—a letter of Paul (or a disciple of Paul) that was probably copied and sent on to many churches—the content is universal in nature to the Christian church; how to survive persecution and remaining steadfast and faithful though it seems Christ's return has been delayed.

Philippians: Written to the church in Philippi from prison, Paul praises Philippians for reaching out to him while he is in prison but is also worried about false missionaries concerned with the law and with conflict within the congregation.

Colossians: Written by Paul or a disciple of Paul, it deals with false missionaries who profess new festivals and Sabbaths, and speaks of the new life in Christ.

1 Thessalonians: The oldest book in the New Testament and the earliest of Paul's letters that we have. Paul responds to the Thessalonians anxiety and fear of being without Paul and facing opposition from the Jewish community there (The Thessalonians were Gentile Christians).

2 Thessalonians: Probably written much later and not by Paul, argues against other Christians who are seen as lazy, and the need for discipline.

1 Timothy: Dealing with pastoral issues, Paul (or a disciple of Paul) writes to Timothy, warning against false teachers and deals with issues between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

2 Timothy: Again dealing with pastoral issues, encouragement, and warning against false teachers

Titus: Very similar in content to 1 Timothy, deals with the appointment of Elders in the church and lessons for the different groups in the church (older women, young men, and slaves)

Philemon: Written to the slave Onesimus' owner Philemon, this is a personal letter asking Philemon to welcome Onesimus (who ran away) back and encourages him to treat him differently because of Christ.

Hebrews: Unknown author, but a letter to Jewish Christians proclaiming Jesus as the high priest and the ultimate sacrifice, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. The writing is rooted in the Hebrew scriptures, stories and prophecies.

James: May have been written by Jesus' brother, James is concerned with living out a faithful life by caring for the needs of others, especially the poor, widowed and orphaned.

1 Peter: Most likely not written by Peter, but the author writes that people should imitate life in Christ, countering the idea of other religions that allowed immoral behaviors.

2 Peter: Most likely not written by Peter but writes his own testimony, speaks against false teachers and waiting for the coming of the Lord.

1 John: Style is similar to the Gospel of John, probably written by someone in the same community. Speaks against those who have separated themselves from the community and have departed from their teachings, calling them "antichrists." The author speaks instead that God is love and that faith will prevail.

2 John: Probably the same author as 1 John, writing to a church to beware of false teachers.

3 John: Same author as 2 John, writing to a friend and praises him for his hospitality and warns against false teachers.

Jude: Attributed to another brother of Jesus, writing against false teachers.

Revelation: Written by John of Patmos to seven churches in Asia, it is in the genre of apocalypse (a message of God given to a human being through angels or heavenly creatures). The writing uses metaphor to show the conflict on earth of human beings (struggles with persecution and living in the Roman Empire, between different groups of Christians and between Christians and Rome) in relationship with the conflict between God and Satan. The distinction of the spiritual world and the earthly world is blurred. God is victorious and triumphant and those who remain faithful will live in the heavenly Jerusalem with God and the Lamb.

