

Overview of Old Testament Books

Pentateuch

The first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, were written by Moses. They record the beginning of the universe, our world, man, sin, the first murder, the first false religion, the first flood, the first rainbow, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the establishment of Israel, the Exodus from Egypt through the Red Sea, the Ten Commandments, wanderings of Israel in the wilderness, directions for building the tabernacle, guidelines for the sacrifices, numerous ordinances for worship, societal order of conduct, and warnings relative to holiness. But best of all we get our first glimpses of God and we discover that He loves holiness and hates sin. These books also speak of historic people such as Adam, Eve, Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and Joshua.

Book	Theme	Content
Genesis	The Beginning	Genesis is about beginnings. The first eleven chapters are essential to understanding the rest of the Bible. It explains the creation, beginning of marriage, how sin occurred, the curse, the first murder, the first man who pleases God, and the origin of Israel, plus more.
Exodus	God's Deliverance	Exodus describes God's victory over the so-called gods of Egypt, the establishment of the Ten Commandments, priesthood, and tabernacle.
Leviticus	Holiness and Worship	Leviticus is about the Levites' responsibilities and duties. It describes the ceremonial worship that God instituted.
Numbers	Disobedience and discipline	The book focuses on the second and fortieth years of Israel's wandering in the wilderness, including the 12 spies, Moses' sin, the bronze serpent and the death of Miriam and Aaron. The book contains a census of the warriors of Israel and all of Israel.
Deuteronomy	Remembrance and Reward	Deuteronomy describes what happened in the fortieth year of Israel's desert wanderings. Moses reviews key events of the past forty years and reminds Israel to love God. He gives warning and exhortations in preparation for entering the promised land. It records the death of Moses.

Israel's History

The historical books of the Bible cover the period after Moses' death until about 400 years before Christ's birth. After Moses died, Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land. God had directed Israel to defeat all of the nations in the promised land so that they would not be polluted by the sin of the peoples in the region, but they failed to do that. After Joshua's death, Israel was guided by a series of judges during a period of moral bankruptcy. Eventually, the Israelites asked for a king, which God granted to them. The Israelites had rejected God in favor of a human king. It was a bad decision.

The first king, Saul, did not remain true to God and sinned. Therefore God replaced him with King David because David was a man after God's own heart. After David died, his son Solomon became king. Solomon was blessed by God with wisdom and riches. He built the first temple and enjoyed great fame. In the later years of Solomon's life, he followed after other gods due to the influence of his many wives. Consequently, God divided the people into a northern kingdom (Israel) and a southern kingdom (Judah). After that, most of the kings were wicked and did not follow God. As a result, both Israel and Judah were eventually punished. Judah was deported to Babylon. After 70 years, a remnant of the Jews returned to the promised land. The book of Malachi reveals that once again Israel strayed from God and the priests fell into ritualism.

Book	Theme	Content
Joshua	Promised land entered	Israel enters, conquers and divides the promised land - Palestine.
Judges	Israel lives and wars with the Canaanites	Israel lives through cycles of bondage and deliverance. God appoints judges such as Gideon and Samson. Israel did what was right in their own eyes.
Ruth	Kinsman redeemer (Picture of Christ)	Ruth and Naomi leave Moab for Israel. Ruth is redeemed by Boaz and is in the line to David and Christ.
1 Samuel 2 Samuel	God rejected in favor of a human king	The life of Samuel is in view (the last judge). Saul is appointed Israel's first king and David is appointed king as Saul's successor. Life of King David follows.
1 Kings 2 Kings	United kingdom divided - political view	These books record the life of Solomon, Israel's division, and brief histories of the kings. Israel's history is given from a political perspective.
1 Chronicles 2 Chronicles	United kingdom divided - priestly view	Israel's history is repeated from the priestly perspective. Emphasis is given to Judah and the nation's deportation to Babylon.
Ezra	Israel released from captivity and returns to the promised land.	Israel returns to Palestine after 70 years of exile, with emphasis on the spiritual and moral restoration of Jerusalem.
Nehemiah	Israel returns to build the temple and Jerusalem	Nehemiah obtains permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. This is a fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy in Daniel 9:25-27.
Esther	God's providence and protection	God used Esther to save her people. With God's help, she is able to stop Haman's plot to kill the Jews.

Poetry

The books of poetry are God's wisdom literature. The book of Job is probably the oldest book in the Bible. It is about a man named Job, who suffered even though he did no wrong (Job 1:1,8; 2:3). The books of Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon were written primarily by King David and Solomon. Psalms is a book of worship. Many modern day songs have been written using the words from various Psalms. Ecclesiastes provides a true perspective of what life is like here on earth for the person who is not a believer. Song of Solomon is very unusual because it describes the love and beauty of a couple courting and their eventual marriage. It demonstrates that God cares about marriage and the physical aspects of that relationship.

Book	Theme	Content
Job	The righteous are purified by trials	God permits trials to purify Job. Three of his four friends give bad counsel. Eventually, God humbles Job and restores Job's material wealth.
Psalms	Worship	The book is divided into five sections, each of which is written by a variety of authors. The book covers a wide range of praise, confession and adoration to God.
Proverbs	Godly wisdom	This book is about practical wisdom. It provides counsel and guidance for righteous living.
Ecclesiastes	Life without God is empty	This is the result of Solomon's quest for meaning in life during a period of his life when he was away from God. His conclusion is that life is empty apart from God.
Song of Solomon	Godly marriage	This song describes the courtship of a couple and their eventual marriage. The book is wonderful for illustrating New Testament marital truth.

Major Prophets

The major prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. They are called the major prophets not because they are more important prophecies than any other prophecy, but because they are longer in length. Likewise, the twelve minor prophets are simply shorter in length. It is important to remember that the Holy Spirit wrote all of the prophetic books. Since the Holy Spirit wrote all of them, all of them are of equal importance.

The book of Isaiah was written before the kingdom of Judah was defeated by the Babylonian army and Jews were taken captive to Babylon. It was written about 700-671 B.C. The book of Jeremiah was written during the captivity in Babylon in about 586-570 B.C. The book of Lamentations was written about 586 B.C. Ezekiel was also written during the captivity in Babylon in about 590-570 B.C. The prophet Isaiah contains prophecies against the northern and southern kingdoms, warning them to repent of their sins or God would punish them for their sins. God faithfully warned them before sending the Assyrian army to defeat the northern kingdom. God also spoke through all five major prophets against the southern kingdom. God was and is not finished with Israel. These books also contain prophecies of Israel's return to the promised land, Jesus' first coming, the second coming of Christ, the future millennial kingdom, and the eternal state.

Book	Theme	Content
Isaiah	Salvation is of the Lord	Israel warned of judgment, given promises of salvation and the first and second advents of the Messiah.
Jeremiah	God is patient but holy	Israel warned to repent before judgment comes, the deportation to Babylon and restoration of Israel.
Lamentations	Mourning judgement	Mourning over the destruction of Jerusalem
Ezekiel	Judgment and restoration	Decline and fall of Judah and eventual restoration of Israel, including the future millennial kingdom.
Daniel	Sovereignty of God	Panorama of world history from Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece and Rome to the future kingdom.

Minor Prophets

The books of the minor prophets were written between 840 - 430 B.C. Details about the lives of some of these prophets are unknown. Their messages range from warnings to Israel, other nations, predictions about Messiah and the future of Israel. The Old Testament ends with the promise that a messenger will come before the Messiah - Jesus the Christ - arrives. In the final verses of Malachi, we are told that Elijah the prophet will come before the great and terrible day of the Lord. Then there was silence for 400 years followed by the arrival of Jesus. The New Testament continues the history of the promised One - the Messiah who is Jesus the Christ.

Book	Theme	Content
Hosea	God is faithful	The opening chapters start with an illustration of Hosea and his wife Gomer who eventually becomes an unfaithful wife - a prostitute. Yet, Hosea continues to love her. The illustration is used to show that God's love for Israel never fails.
Joel	Judah's judgment is coming	Judah is warned of pending judgment unless she repents. The Day of the Lord is described.
Amos	Israel's judgment is coming	The nation of Israel is rebuked for the absence of true worship, lack of justice, idolatry, luxury, and total indifference to God. Judgment is coming!
Obadiah	Edom will be destroyed	The nation of Edom is to be destroyed since she rejoiced over Judah's destruction. What a lesson for us!
Jonah	Gentiles to be included in salvation	The prophet of God attempts to avoid preaching to the Ninevites. He is swallowed by a large fish, repents, and obeys God. The book is about the love of God.

Book	Theme	Content
Micah	Destruction of Israel and Judah predicted	The prophet Micah describes a court trial in which God is the accuser, the nation of Israel is the accused and the mountains and the earth are the jury. Israel is guilty of sin and the Assyrian empire is coming to defeat them. The trial shows that Israel is guilty.
Nahum	Nineveh doomed	The prophet Nahum prophesied the future destruction of the city of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire. The prophecy occurred about 100 years after Jonah preached in the same city.
Habakkuk	Our holiness is utmost to God	This incredible prophecy answers two questions that many struggle with. The first question is, "Why doesn't God remove evil?" Some ask, "Why doesn't God bring a revival?" The second question is, "Why does God use the more wicked to punish the less wicked?" The last chapter reveals how we should deal with trials in our lives.
Zephaniah	Day of the Lord	The book of Zephaniah describes near fulfillments of the day of the Lord against Judah, its capital city of Jerusalem, and surrounding nations. The book concludes by describing the millennial kingdom.
Haggai	Rebuild My temple	God rebuked the remnant who returned from captivity in Babylon because they were not rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. God withheld blessing from Israel because they were self-centered and ignored God.
Zechariah	Messiah is coming	The book is the Revelation of the Old Testament. The prophet Zechariah gives a series of prophecies about Jesus Christ in each chapter. The first six chapters contain eight visions. The first three prophecies are a telescope into the future. Then Zechariah 6:9-11:17 is a summary of Israel's future. Finally, chapters 9-14 are about Christ's first and second coming, Armageddon, Christ's second coming and the millennial kingdom.
Malachi	Ritualism rebuked	The book is like a barometer that reveals the quality of our relationship with God. In this book the people ask God questions and God asks them questions and answers are given to the questions. This is a very unusual prophecy.

New Testament

Gospels - Life of Christ

The New Testament is composed of twenty-seven books. It starts with four gospels which describe the life of Jesus. It reveals the fact that Jesus did miracles, taught divine principles, healed many, and was in fact God. The gospels include Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each book emphasizes various aspects of Jesus' life. They were written by the Holy Spirit and three apostles. Luke was written by a medical doctor who was a friend of Paul the apostle. These books are filled with the miracles, signs, wonders, and teachings of Christ. The books reveal that Jesus was God in human flesh who entered our world for the purpose of dying so that our sins can be forgiven. After His death, Jesus returned to life three days later and ascended back into heaven. Today, He is in heaven until it is time for His second coming.

Book	Theme	Content
Matthew	Jesus is Messiah	This gospel presents Jesus as Messiah, the king, the fulfillment of prophecy. Matthew emphasizes Jesus' sermons and prophecy.
Mark	Jesus as Servant	This gospel presents Jesus as the servant-savior, the bond-slave who is greatest of them all. Great emphasis is given to the final week of Jesus' life.
Luke	Jesus as Man	Luke gives us the chronological history of Jesus' life.
John	Jesus is God	A series of seven key signs reveal that Jesus is God. Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Early Church History

The book of Acts is the historical book of the New Testament. However, the four gospels all record the history of Jesus' life. The book of Acts, however, is the acts of the apostles. It describes the spread of the gospel beginning in Jerusalem, and then to Judah, Samaria and throughout the Roman world. We discover that salvation has been granted to both the Jews and the Gentiles. The book records the establishment and expansion of the church and concludes with Paul in prison in Rome.

Book	Theme	Content
Acts	Jesus' church will accomplish His purposes.	Christ's ascension is described and the expansion of the church is given. The church is in transition. Peter is the apostle to the Jews and Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles.

Pauline Epistles

The next section of books were written by the apostle Paul. These books are mainly doctrinal. They begin with the book of Romans which provides a wonderful and detailed discussion of salvation. Together the books explain how Christians are to live, how the church is to function, the second coming of Christ, and the rise of the antichrist. Warnings are given about false teachers. In the process solid doctrine is provided to correct false teaching.

Book	Theme	Content
Romans	Doctrine of salvation	John 3:16 is the summary of salvation, but Romans explains the gospel in detail.
1 Corinthians 2 Corinthians	Epistles of correction	These books address numerous sins that existed in the church in Corinth: divisions, incest, lawsuits, abuse of spiritual gifts, divorce, and order in the church.
Galatians	Grace is better than legalism	We are warned about false teaching and false teachers. The Holy Spirit explains the purpose of the law, the superiority of grace, liberty over legalism and how to walk by the Spirit.
Ephesians	The Church	The central message is about the church, the body of Christ, and how it is to function. How to be filled with the Spirit and the armor of God are explained.
Philippians	Be like Jesus	This is a challenge to Christians to think, behave and have the attitude of Christ. It is about joy and unity.
Colossians	Christ is preeminent	The preeminence of Christ is presented. All believers are challenged to submit to Jesus.
1 Thessalonians	Personal holiness	Encouragement to live a holy life and to experience spiritual growth and the second coming of Christ are the major themes.
2 Thessalonians	Second Coming of Jesus	The purpose of persecution, the second coming of Christ and personal responsibility are discussed.
1 Timothy	Guidelines for the church	Qualifications for church leaders, order in the church, and instructions for ministers are presented.
2 Timothy	Be faithful	Timothy is encouraged to be bold, endure hardships in the ministry, to watch out for false teachers and, and to teach the Word.
Titus	Sound doctrine	Leadership qualifications are given along with guidelines for ministry responsibilities to various groups.
Philemon	Love forgives	A slave is encouraged to return to his master and serve him as he would Jesus Christ.

General Epistles

The general epistles were written by the apostles Peter, John, Jesus' brother James and Jude. The writer of Hebrews is unknown. However, some believe Paul wrote the book. These books deal with true faith and false teachers. The first book deals with practical Christian living. The last books are concerned with evidences of true faith and false teachers. The epistles of Peter and Jude deal with suffering and false teachers.

Book	Theme	Content
Hebrews	Superiority of Jesus	This epistle presents Jesus our eternal, holy, High Priest who is better than everything. The Old and New Covenant are discussed.
James	Practical living	Tests of true faith are presented. One who has true faith continues in the faith and produces good works. A variety of topics are discussed.
1 Peter	The righteous will suffer	The challenge to be holy even as God is holy is given. Submission to government, husbands, and parents and of employees to employers is taught. The role of elders is presented. Christ is our example.
2 Peter	False teachers are condemned	Warnings about false teachers and advice about the end times is provided.
1 John	Evidences of true faith	The basis for true fellowship is Christ. The evidences of true faith are given.
2 John	Walk in love	The Holy Spirit encourages believers to adhere to sound teaching and to fervent love for one another.
3 John	True fellowship	Believers are encouraged to support traveling evangelists and to reject false teachers.
Jude	False teachers exposed	The behavior of false teachers and their patterns of life are described.

Prophecy

The last book is about the future. It is a literal book with many symbols which are explained in the Old Testament. Beginning in chapter 6, we learn about the tribulation, the second coming of Christ, the millennial kingdom, judgment, and the eternal state.

Book	Theme	Content
Revelation	End Times	A panorama of Daniel's 70th week is greatly expanded to include the tribulation period, the kingdom, Armageddon, the judgement of Satan and demons, the Great White Throne Judgement, and the New Heaven.