



W O M E N I N T H E W O R D  
LEARN IT, LOVE IT, LIVE IT

THE BIG STORY OF THE BIBLE

# THE BIG STORY OF THE BIBLE

## BOOK BY BOOK

*God wrote, "I love you" - he wrote it in the sky, and on the earth, and under the sea. He wrote his message everywhere! Because God created everything in his world to reflect him like a mirror - to show us what he is like, to help us know him, to make our hearts sing. And God put it into words, too, and wrote it in a book called "the Bible."*

*Now, some people think the Bible is a book of rules, telling you what you should and shouldn't do. The Bible certainly does have some rules in it. They show you how life works best. But the Bible isn't mainly about you and what you should be doing. It's about God and what he has done.*

*Other people think the Bible is a book of heroes, showing you people you should copy. The Bible does have some heroes in it, but (as you'll soon find out) most of the people in the Bible aren't heroes at all. They make some big mistakes (sometimes on purpose). They get afraid and run away. At times they are downright mean.*

*No, the Bible isn't a book of rules, or a book of heroes. The Bible is most of all a Story. It's an adventure story about a young Hero who comes from a far country to win back his lost treasure. It's a love story about a brave Prince who leaves his palace, his throne - everything - to rescue the one he loves. It's like the most wonderful of fairy tales that has come true in real life!*

*You see, the best thing about this Story is - it's true. There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling one Big Story. The Story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them.*

*It takes the whole Bible to tell this Story. And at the center of the Story, there is a baby. Every Story in the Bible whispers his name. He is like the missing piece in the puzzle - the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together, and suddenly you can see a beautiful picture.*

*And this is no ordinary baby. This is the Child upon whom everything would depend. This is the Child who would one day - but wait. Our Story starts where all good stories start. Right at the very beginning...*

*Taken from The Jesus Storybook Bible - Written by Sally Lloyd-Jones*

*The content in this booklet was adapted from the  
ESV Study Bible & OverviewBible.com*

# THE OLD TESTAMENT

# LAW OF MOSES (GENESIS-DEUTERONOMY)

## GENESIS

The theme of Genesis is creation, sin, and recreation. This book tells how God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit created the world. God then commissioned humans as His representatives to fill the earth and caringly govern over the rest of creation. Abandoning these duties, humans rebel and betray God by listening to the enemy. This disobedience radically affects human nature and the harmonious perfect order of creation. God graciously promises that the woman's offspring will redeem humanity from the enemy.

While Genesis illustrates the effects of this broken relationship, it also introduces the special family line that will bring relief from this hardship. The earth was destroyed in the flood as a result of man's disobedience, but God saved a remnant of faithful people through Noah showing that He still desired to fill the earth with His people. The new world after the flood continued to be spoiled by human sin. This corruption of human nature causes families to be torn apart by resentment and hatred, but this book shows us that members of that same family have the potential to be agents of reconciliation.

The book closes with the call of Abraham, through whom all nations would be blessed. With Abraham, God established a Covenant that he reaffirmed with Isaac and Jacob. **The covenant between Abraham and God consisted of four separate parts:**

- the promised land.
- the promise of descendants.
- the promise of covenant relationship.
- the promise of blessing and redemption.

This gives hope that God's purpose will eventually be realized in the person of Jesus who would come into the world through Abraham's line of descendants (the twelve tribes which become the nation of Israel).

## EXODUS

The book of Exodus is the story of God rescuing the children of Israel from Egypt and making them His covenant people. The story unfolds in this book through Moses, who God assigns as the mediator of this Covenant, the one through whom the Lord will reveal His purposes to His people. Up against the opposition of Egypt and Pharaoh which was the greatest superpower in the ancient world and despite the disobedience, rebellion, and grumbling of the people themselves, God is still faithful to fulfill His promises to Israel. Exodus is where we find the stories of the Ten Plagues, the first Passover, the parting of the Red Sea, and the Ten Commandments. Exodus shows us much about the character of God in that He remembers His promises to His people, punishes sin, and forgives those who are repentant. This book also highlights the faithfulness of Moses as He leads the Israelites despite feeling ill equipped to do so. Finally, this book highlights that God desires to be near His people as He lays out detailed instructions for the Tabernacle, a physical place where His presence can dwell among them. Exodus ends with a lingering question of just how a sinful people will live with a Holy God in their midst, which will begin to be answered in Leviticus.

## LEVITICUS

Leviticus is a book of laws, but it's also a book of worship. This book is filled with details on how the people of God should live, eat, sacrifice, celebrate, and more. In Leviticus, we see a further and deeper unfolding of the human relationship with God. On one hand, it assumes that Israel is sinful and impure. On the other hand, it describes how to deal with sin and impurity so that a Holy God can dwell in their midst. The book then lays out detailed instructions on how to properly address their sin and impurity and work toward personal holiness. The book lays out instructions for A Day of Atonement ritual once a year for the total cleansing of sins. It is a gracious act of the Lord to allow atonement for these sins and impurities, offering a way to be near to Him. Leviticus is a book filled with detailed instructions which tell the overarching story of a perfect Holy God who wants to draw near to His people. The purpose of the laws laid out in Leviticus is not to create an impossible checklist, but rather to show us what matters to God while also making our need for Him clear. The book of Leviticus shows us a God that puts rules in place as protection for His people, not as restrictions. When rules are not followed, like any Good Father, He lays out discipline that is ultimately for the good of His people and for His glory.

## NUMBERS

The theme of Numbers is a gradual fulfillment of the promise (covenant) that God made with Abraham. There were four parts to this covenant that was first set out in Genesis: a promised land called Canaan, many descendants, a covenant relationship with God, and being a blessing to the nations. We see all these promises play out in Numbers.

- **Land:** God prepares them to take the land by war, spies are sent into the land, and through much opposition, they approach the edge of this land
- **Descendants:** A census of the people shows that God has multiplied them to over 2 million and we see predictions of the powerful kingdom they will become.
- **Covenant relationship with God:** This book continues to show us God's presence with Israel in the Tabernacle and as a cloud that guided them. Even through repeated displays of unbelief and rebellion by the people of Israel, God never leaves them. This disobedience leads to a delay of their entry into the promised land of Canaan by 40 years, but He doesn't break His promise to lead them in and He is with them every step of the way.
- **Blessing to All Nations:** *Numbers 24:9* gives us this promise, "Blessed are those who bless you, and cursed are those who curse you." The book ends as the Israelites approach the promised land.

## DEUTERONOMY

Deuteronomy is a reflection by Moses on the people's past mistakes and an urging to not repeat those mistakes when entering the Promised Land. Israel's entry into the land fulfills the promise made to the Patriarchs, but if they once again fall into idolatry and rebellion, they will be exiled from the land. The book is mostly made of speeches given to the people by Moses, it reads like a "farewell speech to a nation" as Moses is nearing the end of his life. He reminds them of God's promises and begs them to stay faithful to God in the future. The book ends with Moses' death and a commissioning of their new leader Joshua who will lead them into the Promised Land.

# HISTORICAL WRITINGS

## (JOSHUA-ESTHER)

### JOSHUA

Joshua recounts part two of God's greatest work of redemption in the Old Testament period. Genesis-Deuteronomy is part one under the leadership of Moses, when the Lord rescued His people out of bondage in Egypt and established his covenant of love for them. Part two is under the leadership of Joshua; the Lord as the divine Warrior brings his people into the Promised Land and gives them "rest." The first half of the book focuses on Israel's conquest of the land of Canaan and the second half focuses on the distribution of the conquered territories among the tribes. It can be easily summarized like this:

- Crossing into the Land
- Conquering the Land
- Dividing the Land
- Serving the Lord in the Land.

This book shows us many key things such as God's abiding presence is the key to strength and courage, the dangers of presumption and failure to inquire of the Lord, the Sovereignty of God to give his people a place to rest, and finally, the necessity of removing false gods and worshipping the One True God alone.

### JUDGES

The theme of Judges is the downward spiral of Israel's national and spiritual life into chaos and abandonment of all belief in God. It shows the need for a godly king to lead the nation. This book shows us that the people did not rid the land of false gods and fully conquer it as God had commanded, and their unfaithfulness was threatening their existence in the land. As the book continues, the oppression and chaos are due to their repeated sin. Over and over, we see them break the covenant with God by worshipping other gods and doing evil. As a result, they repeatedly suffered the consequences, but we also see God continue to deliver them despite their rebellion. The judges (*political leaders*) appointed to lead did not do much to help the situation. We see judges such as Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson accelerate the problems, while one shining exception was a woman named Deborah. The book paints a gloomy picture of how far the people can descend into chaos in the absence of a godly king. The book ends with verse 21:25: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

### RUTH

The book of Ruth takes place during the time of the Judges. It highlights how God's people experience His sovereignty, wisdom, and covenant kindness. These often come through hard circumstances and are mediated through the kindness of others. There are two overarching themes of Kindness and Redemption. We see Ruth show Naomi kindness by leaving her country and family to care for her mother in law. We see Boaz show kindness as he becomes Ruth's kinsman redeemer and ultimately her husband. This human kindness reflects the kindness that the Lord shows His people. Boaz serves as a beautiful picture of God's redemption in the lives of Ruth and Naomi which through the generations extends to the line of David (*who comes from the line of Ruth*) and ultimately to our Redeemer Jesus (*who comes from the line of David*).

## I & II SAMUEL

Samuel is a prophet that plays a key role in the transition from the period of judges to the rule of kings. The Israelites demanded a king so God gave them a king. Samuel anointed the first king, Saul, who turned in disobedience, so God removed him. Samuel later anointed king David. In II Samuel 7, we see God establish a covenant with David that foreshadows Jesus. In 7:16, God says to David, “And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” Our Sovereign God guided David’s life, elects him to represent His kingship and David serves as a predecessor of Jesus. The theme of these books shows God exercising His ultimate Kingship by bringing about King David’s dynasty which leads to the Eternal Kingdom of Jesus. These books show Him establishing a holy city (*Jerusalem*) where David’s successor (*Jesus*) will establish His temple for worship of Yahweh (*the One True God*.) At this point, Israel is still a Unified Kingdom (*Israel and Judah*).

## I KINGS

These two books set out to explain what happens to Israel after King David’s reign. Back in Deuteronomy, God laid out the possibility of exile if His people continued in rebellion, we see this come to pass in these books. The intent of these books is not to provide detail of all these kings, but more to interpret the history of Israel from a theological viewpoint, showing what happens when political and spiritual leaders foolishly choose to worship false gods instead of wisely choosing to worship the One True God over a span of 400 years.

In the book of I Kings, the dominant characters are Solomon and Elijah. We see the first temple built by David’s son, Solomon in the holy city of Jerusalem set up to worship the Lord. As the book goes on, we see the people move from wisdom to folly under Solomon’s leadership and ultimately it ends in a war leading to a divided kingdom. In II Kings, we later see this temple destroyed.

## II KINGS

In II Kings, we see a summary of nearly 30 kings and there is a focus on the life of the prophet Elisha. This is the point when we see Israel become a divided kingdom. The northern part of this divided kingdom (*Israel*) eventually gets conquered by Assyria and the southern part of the divided kingdom (*Judah*) eventually gets conquered by Babylon. These stories will get fleshed out in more detail as the Old Testament continues, consider this the summary. This book is tragic and shows how a great nation can fall into ruin and all that can happen when the people break their covenant with God. II Kings ends with a people in exile, a now divided Israel has been conquered by Assyria and Babylon. We see an all-powerful God who controls both nature and history and allows negative consequences to come to His people. But we also see a God who remains ready to forgive those who repent.

## I & II CHRONICLES

These two books are a summary of all of the Old Testament so far. It’s a picture of Israel’s past including the genealogy from Adam, the monarchy of David and Israel’s move from a unified kingdom to a divided one that spans over 400 years of kings. The events in these books overlap with the storyline of II Samuel & I Kings. The theme of these books show the significance of the Davidic covenant made back in II Samuel and highlights that God’s covenant with His people was the basis of Israel’s life and hope for the future. The Davidic covenant does not replace the Mosaic covenant but builds on it for a new era.

The books recount an endless pattern over the 400 years of “seeking God” and “rejecting God” and then sets out the consequences that flow from each choice. The message of forgiveness

and restoration to God through sacrifices of atonement and humble prayer come through in these books more than in the Kings. It shows that God, in His mercy, provides a way back to Himself. For example, where Rehoboam and Manasseh are portrayed as notorious sinners who led to the downfall of the kingdom in I & II Kings, here in the Chronicles they are shown to be examples of repentance and recipients of God's grace.

As you read Chronicles, you'll see that the temple of God is the main location of interest: David plans to build it, Solomon builds it, and then it is destroyed. The temple is the center stage in the drama of Chronicles. This divided kingdom has now been in exile for 70 years, and the Chronicles close with their current ruler, Cyrus, declaring the Lord has instructed them to return to their land and rebuild the temple.

*The timeline of the Old Testament story officially ends here, the rest of the OT books point back to this story and give a deeper look into all that was happening during this time. In this period of Kings, Israel went from a unified kingdom to a divided kingdom. The Northern Kingdom (Israel) was conquered by the Assyrians. The Southern Kingdom (Judah) was later conquered by Babylon. The Israelites were exiled from their land. These final books of the Old Testament will be filled with poetry, historical accounts and prophecy that took place during this rise and fall of Israel's kingdom and their return to their land from exile.*

## **EZRA**

The theme of Ezra is faithfulness to the Lord, both in building a new Temple and in keeping the Mosaic Law. This is the story of starting over and a return from exile. After 70 years in exile, the people of Israel were coming back home. But the temple wasn't the only thing that needed attention. Many of those returning needed to be reminded of God's laws and to be reminded of their covenant with God. They needed to remember why they were in exile in Babylon and see the redemption of the Lord at work in their return to the land. We learn some things about God in this book: He is faithful to his promises, His mercy exceeds his anger, and He can work through righteous and unrighteous people to accomplish His plan.

## **NEHEMIAH**

The theme of Nehemiah is the Lord's protection of His people and the need for their faithfulness in keeping the Mosaic law and in worship. The people begin to renew their commitments to the covenant and seek God's forgiveness. God mercifully raised up Ezra as a priest/teacher and Nehemiah as the governor to lead his people in the hard work that this renewal requires. The book records the return from exile and Nehemiah leading the charge to rebuild the city wall of Jerusalem. Nehemiah reminds us that God hears prayer and works providentially through leaders to bring about his greater purposes.

## **ESTHER**

Esther tells the story of how a Jewish girl during the time of the exile became the queen of Persia and saved her people from a plot to destroy them. Although God's people were enjoying a time of restoration, there were still those who wanted them all dead. The book of Esther is a drama about how two Jews (*Esther and her cousin Mordecai*) risked everything to save their people. 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 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 entire nation. Esther's story shows us that even when God's presence isn't visible, He is still working out His plan for the good of His people and for His glory.



# POETRY WRITINGS

## (JOB-SONG OF SOLOMON)

### **JOB**

The book of Job concerns itself with the question of faith in a sovereign God. This book is the account of the fall and restoration of a righteous man named Job. He was a blameless man, whose peace and prosperity are tragically disrupted when (unknown to Job) God points him out to Satan in the heavenly courts. Job will be tested to see if he will abandon his faith or remain loyal to God. This is the central conflict of the book. Job's friends offer no real help, they begin with sympathy, but quickly turn to judgement and accusations of Job. As Job comes under scrutiny, He wrestles with God and boldly declares his innocence. Job begs for God to intervene, but through all the questioning and doubting, we also see how the truths hidden in his heart are what he clings to in his times of sadness, anger, and grief. At the end of the book, God finally speaks to point out His sovereignty over all of humanity and even over suffering. Job ultimately finds comfort in knowing that God was in control and took solace in God's unsearchable wisdom. The question at the heart of the book of Job is often "Why does God allow suffering?" The book of Job doesn't quite answer that question for us, but the book does point us to see a Just, Sovereign, and Merciful God that never leaves or forsakes us in the midst of pain. The book of Job is about suffering, but more than that, it's about the God who speaks to us in the midst of our pain.

### **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. David is believed to be the author of about half of the Psalms. This book is filled with "songs" that range from adoration and thanksgiving to cries for help and moans of desperation. It's essentially a songbook of the people of God, taking the major themes of the Old Testament and turning them into songs. The content spans Israel's history from the time of Moses, through David and Solomon, and continuing through exile and post-exile times. 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. There is a God who is always with us.

### **PROVERBS**

The book of Proverbs is a collection of Solomon's wise sayings, with a few more wise men chiming in here and there. Proverbs states its theme right at the beginning- to describe and instill wisdom in God's people, a wisdom that's founded in the "fear of the Lord" and that works out covenant life in the practical details of everyday situations and relationships. It urges the reader to make decisions based on wisdom, justice, and righteousness. These sayings are sometimes direct instructions, sometimes general observations. 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. We see in this book how much God cares about the way his people interact with each other.

## **ECCLESIASTES**

This book seems to be written by a preacher (perhaps Solomon) who wants to impart wisdom and knowledge to the people of God. He tells of his quest to find satisfaction in life with vivid imagery. The more the preacher learns about the world, the more depressing a world it becomes. The first portion of Ecclesiastes explores the man's situation, which isn't great. Then he turns to explain why the world is this way and what we can do about it. He is sure that God is just; he's seen him with his own eyes. But the world doesn't always reflect God's justice, so the Preacher explains what man can do to enjoy life: fear God and keep His commandments. So in a world of injustice and pain, it's a call toward a reverence and awe of the Lord for He will make it all right in His eternal timing. For God will bring every act that is hidden whether good or evil to judgment. He is a God who will bring order into the chaos.

## **SONG OF SOLOMON/SONG OF SONGS**

The Song of Solomon (also known as the Song of Songs) tells the story of two who look forward to their marriage and the pleasure of their union: a man and a woman becoming one. It's considered a book of love poetry. It's the tale of a young woman preparing to marry her love: a handsome man who adores her. It describes their emotions, their passions, their appearances, their fears. They vulnerably display their love and desire for one another. This song has three general movements: preparing for the wedding, professing their desire for one another, and finally their union. It culminates in their marriage and mutual delight in one another: "I am my beloved's and his desire is for me." This story serves as an allegory of God's intimate love for His people, Israel.

# MAJOR PROPHETS

## (ISAIAH-DANIEL)

*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. The prophets emerged in time of great crisis to bring God's message to His people. These messages came in visions, oracles, dreams, parables, and the like. These major and minor prophets were prophesying during the time described earlier in Kings, Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah*

### ISAIAH

Isaiah is the first of the Major Prophets. Isaiah is the only Major Prophet whose story takes place before the fall of Jerusalem and the audience is Judah. While Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophecy about these events before and while they happen, Isaiah looks into the future to see Judah's Babylonian captivity. Isaiah personally interacts with the kings of Judah, the Southern Kingdom, so his story covers some of the events we saw in Kings and Chronicles. The timeframe of this book is when the nation of Israel was a divided kingdom, North and South, Israel and Judah. They'd weathered wars against each other and the surrounding nations for a few hundred years, but neither kingdom can stand through what is to come. The Assyrians are rising in power, and the Babylonians will overthrow them in time. God raises up the prophet Isaiah to tell the people this message. But by His grace, the message doesn't end there. God is going to bring the Assyrians against the North and the Babylonians against the Assyrians. The Persian Cyrus will take over against the Babylonians.

After all the exile, Isaiah prophesied that God will bring Israel back home and God will provide a new kind of ruler for Israel, an Immanuel: God with us. He will judge Israel's enemies, and bring all the nations to Himself. And somehow, this mysterious Servant will bear the sins of many, reconciling Israel and the world to the Lord. God's judgment is coming, but so is His comfort. The later parts of the book challenge all the people of Judah in Isaiah's time to accept their role in the story that is headed to a glorious future and to live faithfully.

### JEREMIAH

Jeremiah was a prophet that served under the reign of Judah's last good king through the time that Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylon. Although Jeremiah's messages focus on the coming punishment of Judah, this book is not without hope. It's filled with 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. 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 foreshadowing God's plan to make a new covenant with His people through Jesus. 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, the temple & city are destroyed. The Babylonians set up a new governor over the area and release Jeremiah from prison and tell him to live a happy life. The Jews are left with two options: stay in their land or go 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 and live in peace under Babylonian rule. Jeremiah tells them that God Himself will have compassion on them. But if they disobey and go to Egypt, 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. The central theme of Jeremiah is that we see that God pursues a covenant relationship with His people. They rebel, but God's determination to restore His people is constant and unwavering as He is working toward the new covenant that is coming.

## LAMENTATIONS

Lamentations much like Psalms was likely written to be used by the people in prayer or worship. The Babylonians have ransacked the holy city and the people are devastated. Lamentations is a small collection of five poems that mourn the fall of Jerusalem. The book deals with the question, “How could this happen?” The answer has little to do with the political or military forces surrounding the events, but deals with the fall of Jerusalem as a spiritual event, one that happened by spiritual means for spiritual reasons. It is a formal expression of grief in a beautiful literary style. It is structured like an acrostic poem and uses the entire Hebrew alphabet to give full expression to suffering in effect to offer a lament “from A to Z” for the people. The book moves from horrible loss and personal shame to restored hope and prayer for renewal.

## EZEKIEL

Ezekiel is a prophet best known for his visions which are filled with symbolic imagery. He foresees the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the judgment awaiting rebellious Judah. He also gives us a glimpse of the new relationship God plans to make with His people through Jesus. Jerusalem has already been conquered twice. The first time, the Babylonians took Daniel and the noble families of the land back to Babylon. Eight years later, they rebelled again, and the Babylonians took the king and 10,000 captives. One of those captives was a priest named Ezekiel. Israel has a disobedience problem that they cannot fix. But even now, God doesn't leave them without hope, he chooses this watchman, Ezekiel, to speak for Him and teach them justice. His visions include bad news: God's heart is broken over their idolatry and self-serving ways & God is allowing the destruction of Jerusalem. But he also shares some good news: God will render justice on the other nations who have led them into idolatry and celebrated the destruction. God will form a new covenant with the people of Israel and defend them against future enemies. There will one day be a new temple in Jerusalem, and the glory of the Lord will return. Ezekiel may be the watchman, but it's really God who is watching out for Israel—even as she rebels against Him.

## DANIEL

Daniel is a book that shows us that it is possible to live a faithful life while in exile, surrounded by pagan influences and propaganda, if one sets their mind on serving the Lord wholeheartedly. 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. Daniel can be neatly divided into two parts. The first half is primarily narrative and concerns Daniel's life in Babylon under foreign kings with stories such as the fiery furnace and the lion's den. The second half is mostly a record of Daniel's visions concerning Israel and world empires. The book of Daniel is about how God shows His everlasting wisdom, power, faithfulness, and sovereignty through one of Israel's greatest prophets.

# MINOR PROPHETS

## (HOSEA - MALACHI)

### HOSEA

Hosea is a book about redeeming love. Hosea's marriage to Gomer is symbolic of God's covenant relationship with Israel. Through Hosea, the Lord tells the story of Israel's disobedience, His discipline, His compassion, 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. Hosea's message is harsh, tender, and heartbreaking. It's the story of God and the unfaithful nation He loves anyway. 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. Like Jeremiah and Habakkuk, Hosea lives to see his prophecy of captivity come to pass.

### JOEL

Joel calls all the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem to lament and return to the Lord, because "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 to explain that the Lord wants their repentance. God disciplines His people, but He also defends them. Joel reminds them the future holds many exciting things for them such as The Lord's Spirit poured out on them, deliverance, their enemies being avenged, and restoration as 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. God is establishing His authority as the ultimate judge and defender.

### AMOS

Amos was a simple shepherd in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. But God had a message for the rebellious Northern Kingdom of Israel, and He chose Amos to deliver it. So Amos 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 and Israel will be carried off into exile. As you can imagine, this message doesn't sit well with Jeroboam II and his false priests. His prophecies come true when the Assyrians conquer the Northern Kingdom in II Kings. Amos gave his message during a time of prosperity in Israel—prosperity that God had mercifully given them even during the reign of the wicked king Jeroboam II. 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. Even though the

book of Amos is a message of impending doom, it isn't without notes of hope and restoration as he foretells of a day when Israel will be restored from captivity and reunited with Judah under David's line of kings.

## **OBADIAH**

The book of Obadiah is a brief prophetic word regarding the nearby nation of Edom. Obadiah unpacks a longstanding history between Israel and one of its enemies, Edom—and more importantly, the history of God's covenant with Israel's ancestors. This rivalry stems all the way back to Genesis, because Israel came from the line of Jacob and Edom from the line of Esau. When the Babylonians attacked Israel and the temple of God, Edom was there—cheering on the Babylonians. Through Obadiah, God swears to turn the tables on Edom when they will be brought down from Mt. Sier, Israel will go back to their land, and Edom will be plundered. Edom may seem to have won, but the Lord prevails in the end.

## **JONAH**

The Minor Prophet books so far outlined the people's sins, the consequences of those sins, and the proper response to God. Jonah is totally different as it focuses on the prophet's life. 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." But Jonah does the complete opposite: he boards a ship headed in the opposite direction to run from God's call. The Lord sends a mighty storm after him. Jonah confesses to the sailors that he is a Hebrew, and that he is trying to escape Yahweh's presence. His proposed solution is for them to throw him into the sea. They do so, and the sea calms—and all the sailors recognize the God who spared them. Then Jonah is swallowed by a "great fish." He prays from within the fish, and God has the fish 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, God relents and Jonah was not pleased, but again the Lord shows him compassion. Jonah is a story of God's compassion for all peoples, not just Israel. This book shows God's boundless love and compassion not just for Jonah and the Israelites, but also for the pagan sailors and Nineveh.

## **MICAH**

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. The judges accept bribes, the rulers oppress the poor, the prophets lead the people astray, and the priests are easily bought. Israel's behavior is unacceptable, and Micah tells the people that they have no excuse: They know better, and God will not sit by while they treat one another this way. God 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. God is just, even when His people are unjust. God is merciful, even when His people show no mercy.

## **NAHUM**

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. Nineveh's first 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. 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, but He will not leave the guilty unpunished.

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. Even when justice seems completely out of balance, He has a plan to right the scales. The theme in this book is that the Lord is a stronghold for those that take refuge in Him.

## HABAKKUK

Habakkuk speaks of Babylon's fall: an event which the prophet Daniel witnesses. 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. Habakkuk questions God, much like Job, "Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they? Will they continually slay nations without sparing?" But God is way ahead of Habakkuk. The Lord shows him that something else is in store for the Chaldeans (*Babylonians*). He reveals His justice that is to come... The Babylonians will be looted by the other nations and become disgraced. God makes it clear that both nations will be judged and appropriately punished, but that "the righteous will live by his faith". 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 in His perfect timing.

## ZEPHANIAH

Zephaniah was probably a contemporary of Habakkuk, Nahum, and Jeremiah. He 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. Since the land was obeying God, one might ask, "Who was Zephaniah warning?" 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, disregard the prophet Jeremiah & the priests and citizens defile God's temple. In light of this, Zephaniah's message makes sense. The punishment that he foretells plays out in the books of Kings, Chronicles, and Jeremiah. Zephaniah tells the people that God will bring about a time when all the nations will call on the name of the Lord. The day is coming when Judah, Israel, the nations, and the Lord will dwell together in peace, justice, and joy.

## HAGGAI

Haggai shows up on the scene long after the destruction took place. Haggai points the Jews in an obedient direction, particularly their leaders Zerubbabel and Joshua (*their high priest, not the one who fought at Jericho*). 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, the governor Zerubbabel hears and obeys in reverence. 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 and started the process. They set up a new altar, and they even laid the foundations of the new building. But when the surrounding nations interfered, the temple construction stopped. The Jews got distracted building their own houses, working in their fields, and let the Temple lie in shambles. This is when 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! 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.

## **ZECHARIAH**

This book is ultimately a message of assurance: God has brought the Jews back to Jerusalem, and His work of restoration is far from over. Like Haggai and Malachi, Zechariah shows up on the scene long after the destruction took place. Temple reconstruction has begun, 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. Zechariah's writings encourage and admonish the Jews of Jerusalem. He specifically affirms Zerubbabel and Joshua. He chastises the foolish leaders among them and anticipates a full restoration of God and His people: a restoration to include the temple being rebuilt, Israel being purified, their enemies being conquered, and the Lord Himself dwelling 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.

## **MALACHI**

Even though Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament, remember that this story ended back in I & II Chronicles (*we've just been digging deeper through the poetry books and prophecies*). Malachi shows up on the scene long after the destruction took place, perhaps 100 years after Cyrus' decree to rebuild the temple, and warns against repeating the sins of the fathers. We can't be sure, but it's possible that Malachi ministered after Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. The Jews had returned to Jerusalem and obeyed the messages of God from the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. They'd rebuilt the temple of God and then 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, married pagan women, were unfaithful to their wives, and withheld tithes and offerings. Furthermore, the priests of God were misleading the people and disrespecting the God who had called them to ministry. God has made sacred covenants with His people and as a Good Father, He loved them and disciplined them every step of the way. So this 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 disconnect has grown to a point where the people claim that serving God is useless. 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 the Holy Refiner will send another messenger to prepare the way... the Old Testament ends with this promise of a coming Savior.



# THE TIME BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS - 400 YEARS

## **The Hellenistic Period, The Maccabean Period, The Roman Period**

In the four hundred years in between the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Pharisees and Sadducees, synagogues, Roman governors, and the family of Herod emerged onto the scene. None of these central things from the New Testament were present in the Old Testament. Countless events not mentioned in the New Testament had a profound impact on the world of Jesus, such as the Maccabean revolt, the rise of the Essenes, the dominance of the Greek language, and the rise of the Roman Empire. After the Persians were defeated by Alexander, the Greeks invaded Palestine. With them they brought their language and culture—their architecture, names, styles of clothing, and entertainment.

The influence of the Greeks was long-lasting: the entire New Testament was written in Greek. For the Jewish people—who were to be set apart—the coming of Greek culture represented a moral and spiritual crisis. They wrestled with this question up to and during the time the events of the New Testament took place. And it remains an important question we must wrestle with today. But the story of the Greeks doesn't end with Alexander. Alexander's empire broke into four parts, some parts treated the Jews well and some forced pagan religion on the Jews. Many people objected to the persecution and rebelled, and this rebellion is known as the Maccabean revolt. Through this revolt, Jews gained independence, which lasted until 63BC, when the Romans took control. Rome's rule was ever-present—every person mentioned in the New Testament felt the pressure of the empire. The empire was led by Julius Caesar & later by Caesar Augustus. We will see in the New Testament that under Caesar Augustus' Roman rule, Christianity was able to grow and flourish—missionaries could travel widely on Rome's transportation networks and spread the gospel throughout the empire. The Old Testament closes without a mention of either the Pharisees or Sadducees. These groups of Jewish leaders emerged after the revolt, both groups were considered righteous followers of God as high-ranking priests and aristocratic laymen centered in Jerusalem. The Sadducees were Jews who had adopted Greek culture and thought. They did not believe in Jesus' resurrection. The Pharisees were the Jewish conservatives who shun Greek influence. These groups hated each other, but they found a common enemy in Jesus. As the New Testament opens, we see a native ruler named Herod the Great in Palestine who was put in place by Rome, shortly into the New Testament he died and was succeeded by his son Herod Antipas.

# THE NEW TESTAMENT

# THE GOSPELS

## (MATTHEW-JOHN) - THE LIFE OF JESUS

*As we open the New Testament, we see that Jesus' life fulfilled Old Testament prophecies with stunning accuracy. From His virgin birth to death and resurrection, Jesus fulfilled every prophecy, all of the 109 concerning His first coming. He is the fulfillment of the Old Covenant and He establishes the New Covenant. The gospels are various narrative accounts of the same period of time when Jesus, the promised Messiah, makes His appearance on Earth.*

### **MATTHEW**

Matthew's goal in this book is to present Jesus as a divine and Sovereign King. Matthew emphasizes the fact that Jesus is the Messianic Savior they have been promised and has come to earth to lead His Kingdom. Matthew's audience was the Jews, so he addresses God's covenant relationship with Israel and their rejection of him. He wanted the Jews to recognize Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise. In Matthew's account, Jesus teaches people what it means to be part of his kingdom, the "kingdom of heaven." He is betrayed and crucified. He rises again and commissions His disciples to spread the good news. 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 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. The bulk of Matthew is arranged into five main sections (which may have been in reference to the five-fold Law of Moses). Each section opens with stories of Jesus' life and ministry, and closes with a long set of teachings from Jesus.

### **MARK**

Mark's goal in this book is to present Jesus as a servant King willing to suffer for the purposes of God. Mark depicts Jesus as the Servant of all, the One sent by God to serve His people and to submit Himself to the Father's will, even to the death. Mark is a brief action packed synopsis of Jesus' life, 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. Mark wrote this book based on the apostle Peter's memories of Jesus' words and deeds. Mark records Jesus' life: His miracles, betrayal, death, resurrection, and commission. However, Mark's Gospel is very brief and focuses more on things Jesus did than what Jesus said. Mark's stories are not arranged chronologically; instead they're put together to give us a quick, accurate view of Jesus. Mark is a quick, urgent, bold message about who Jesus is and what He did.

### **LUKE**

Luke's goal in this book is to present Jesus as fully God and fully man. This book focuses on Jesus' humanness. Luke was the only gospel writer who was a Gentile, so He wants to emphasize that the gospel is good news for all people, Jews and Gentiles. Where Matthew traces Jesus' ancestry to Abraham, Luke charts His lineage all the way back to Adam, showing Jesus came as the Savior for all mankind. 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. Luke tells Jesus' story in extensive detail, more so than any other Gospel. It's also the longest book of the New Testament. Luke investigated the events of Jesus' life by speaking with eyewitnesses, he is a thorough historian and physician who researched everything. Luke records miracles, sermons, conversations, and personal feelings. The book of Luke shows us Jesus, who came to seek and save the lost, who was fully God and fully man. We see how He lived, how He died, and how He rose again.

## JOHN

John's goal in this book is to present Jesus as I AM: the living, perfectly divine Son of God. He is the Word of God, the Creator who breathed life into the world, and who still works among us through the Holy Spirit. John focuses on the deity of Christ more so than the other three: 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. While Mark begins with Jesus' adult ministry, 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." John records several "I am" statements from Jesus throughout this book. The Gospel of John makes a strong argument for Jesus as the exclusive savior, and the only way to know God. Jesus is greater than the Jewish heroes Moses and Abraham; Jesus Christ is God in the flesh, and John challenges us to believe in Him.

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## ACTS

### HISTORY OF THE EARLY CHURCH

## ACTS

Acts was also written by Luke, it's his account of how the followers of Jesus grew from a small group of witnesses to a movement that spread throughout the Roman empire. The stories in this book cover many years and many miles. The central characters are Peter and Paul: two prominent leaders in the early church. 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 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. While Peter emerges as the leader among Christians in 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 to a worldwide fellowship said to have turned the world upside-down. 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.

# PAUL'S LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES

## (ROMANS-I & II THESSALONIANS)

*In the book of Acts, we see how Paul spread the good news about Jesus throughout the first-century Roman empire. As he did this, he and his associates established gatherings of people ("churches") who regularly met. Paul kept tabs on how these churches developed, and on several occasions sent letters to local churches to educate and instruct them on how churches should conduct themselves.*

### ROMANS

Paul had wanted to visit the church at Rome for many years when he wrote this letter, his intended audience was the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome that he had not yet met. He begins and ends with greetings and in the middle explains what the gospel is and what our response to it should be. Paul explains the gospel: the good news of Jesus Christ, and he unpacks its implications for everyone:

- All humanity falls short and our sin makes us distant from God
- Jesus died to redeem our sins and restore our relationship with God
- As followers of Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit, who dwells within God's children to guide them in furthering His kingdom

Paul also takes care to explain the Christian's proper response to the gospel: to serve and honor God. 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. Romans is rich with content helping the early church understand what it looks like to fully follow Jesus. It's the most complete doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in all of the Bible.

### I & II CORINTHIANS

When these letters were written by Paul to the church in Corinth, they were in trouble. They were divided, immature, abusing the sacraments, spiritual gifts, and each other. The apostle Paul had founded this church earlier in Acts, and when he hears of the young church's struggles, he writes them a letter. I Corinthians is a bold letter where he tackles the issues the church faces, reprimands them for their shortcomings, and encourages them in love. It's 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. These people knew Paul very well. Paul's familiarity is very obvious in this letter, especially in his fatherly language. He writes to put things back into proper perspective.

After this letter was written, Paul returned to visit Corinth, he faced opposition in his return. In the meantime he sent his associate Titus with another letter and the church repented of their ways. This is where II Corinthians comes in, Paul has heard Titus' report of the church's repentance, and writes to Corinth once again to address lingering concerns. This letter is a comforting one 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. We see Paul's relationship restored with this church. These books show us how to drop divisiveness to build one another up for the advancement of the gospel.

## GALATIANS

The book of Galatians succinctly outlines the relationship between the Law of Moses and God's New Covenant with the Church. This is a letter that Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia. They had been pressured and taught by false teachers that salvation comes through the Law of Moses (OT), 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. This book explains that a follower of Jesus now has a new relationship with God, a new life as an adopted child of the King— one that's free from the law of sin and death. A life now empowered by the Holy Spirit to do good works, something the law of sin and death never enabled us to do. Christ's death is important, and Paul won't let anyone forget it. The Galatians felt pressured to seek salvation from the Law, even though they had already accepted the grace of Christ.

Paul deals with a few questions that would naturally arise in an argument of being saved by the law vs. saved by grace, he taught that:

- Faith in Christ does not cancel out God's promises to Abraham; rather, it extends the blessings of that covenant beyond Israel to all people.
- The Law is a tutor that taught that God is holy and expects His people to be holy, and we cannot live up to His standards. The Law makes it clear that we need a savior.
- 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.
- He also addresses whether this grace gives us free reign to sin. To that Paul says "God is not mocked," and we all reap what we sow.

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". 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.

## EPHESIANS

The church at Ephesus had been established during Paul's two-year stay. The church was mostly Gentile, 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. They heard the call, they believed, and they turned away from their old idols and practices—even if it was costly. 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; therefore, we are to treat one another in like manner. The first half of the letter focuses on the Ephesians' calling: chosen by God, sealed with His spirit, and saved by grace. The second half teaches how to "walk in a manner worthy" of the Christian's calling. Paul outlines what the Christian walk looks like in various facets of life. Like his letters to the Philippians and Colossians, this one is meant to encourage the Ephesians to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. 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 giving us memorable passages like the Armor of God. 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.

## PHILIPPIANS

The book of Philippians is one of Paul's most encouraging letters, most likely because Paul knew that life was hard in the city of Philippi. The Christians were being persecuted for their faith. Paul, the church's first leader, was writing from 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. The imprisoned Paul hears that the Philippians are going through difficult circumstances. Paul commends the Philippians for their earnest work in spreading the Word of God. He tells them how much he longs to see them and 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. And in the middle of all this hardship, Paul tells them to rejoice. Why? Because God is still at work. Even if they can't see it, the good news of Jesus will still advance. God will complete His work in the Philippians' lives by supplying their true needs, and that's reason to rejoice. 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. 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. No book of the Bible focuses on joy like Philippians.

## COLOSSIANS

Paul had never been to Colossae, but had a good friend in the church there. It 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. If we know who we are in Christ, we'll have a much better idea of what to believe and how to behave. 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. Where 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 and establishing our identity in Christ. Paul addresses what Christians should know and what it looks like to set our minds on things above.

## I & II THESSALONIANS

Paul met Timothy on one of his missionary trips and he became a mentor to Timothy. They founded a church together in the city of Thessalonica and it was growing. The members were loving one another, standing firm in their beliefs and holding up under persecution for their faith. Paul is overjoyed to hear this, and (with Timothy and Silvanus) writes them the letter of I Thessalonians to encourage and instruct them. This is one of the most positive letters from Paul to a church. The Thessalonians set a good example for churches in the area by their "work of faith," "labor of love," and "steadfastness of hope." Paul overviews his history and relationship with the church members, commends them for their excellent example, and goes on to list ways that they can continue to grow until Jesus returns.

After the first letter, the church, the Christians in Thessalonica continued to be 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, 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 returned. 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. Thinking all their preparation and suffering might be in vain, some in the body had given up. They were becoming undisciplined, doing no work, and yet trying to be involved in everyone else's affairs. This church was very dear to Paul's heart, so he reaches out to them again in II Thessalonians and addresses these three issues: persecutions from the outside, despair from false doctrine, and being involved in other people's business. This book gives us a great picture of how to live and work in harmony with others.



# PAUL'S LETTERS TO THE INDIVIDUALS (I & II TIMOTHY-PHILEMON)

## I & II TIMOTHY

Timothy was Paul's protegee, his "child in the faith". 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 to Ephesians. I Timothy is about sound doctrine and godliness. Paul deals with two main issues in this letter: What Christians should or should not teach and what godliness looks like in the church. This is a letter to a young church leader with specific instructions on how to "fight the good fight". This book gives us a look at Paul's instructions regarding the challenges Timothy faced as a pastor, and focuses on how to do church well. So while Ephesians lists general ways a Christian can walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, I Timothy lays out specific ways to honor elders and widows. This is a letter written from one preacher to another preacher - Paul was writing to a friend. They had many shared experiences, and he was very familiar with the challenges Timothy faced, whether in ministry or in health. This book gives us a good look at the challenges pastors face, but more importantly, how Paul instructs Timothy to deal with those challenges.

When Paul writes II Timothy, he 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 and trained pastors. He had corrected individuals, churches, and even apostles. He had testified before kings and now his 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. Paul's second letter to Timothy focuses on solemn charges to the younger pastor. II Timothy is a fine letter of advice for church leaders, and gives instruction to those who want to live godly lives.

## TITUS

Titus is another of Paul's partners in ministry, a Gentile. Like Timothy, Titus is Paul's child in the faith—he was introduced to Christ through Paul's ministry. Paul had left Titus in Crete with a purpose: to set up order in local churches. Titus has been entrusted the leadership of the churches on the island of Crete that need leadership, correction, and order. The book of Titus is a short guide to setting up order in the local church but gives us a theology of counter-cultural Christian living. Titus' role is similar to Timothy's, 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: The church behaves differently because God has made her different.

## PHILEMON

Most of Paul's letters are either written to churches or individuals, 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 letter is clearly not a private note to Philemon— Paul is publicly addressing the situation. Philemon is a good guy who loves Jesus and the other believers. Paul even considers him a beloved brother and a fellow worker. He's a church leader in the Colossae area, but he's about to find himself in a very awkward situation. Philemon owned a slave named Onesimus. Onesimus ran away from Philemon, and 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, then Paul sends him

back to his old master, Philemon. 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. 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. The book gives an important example of how church leaders and members can approach difficult issues.

# GENERAL LETTERS TO CHURCHES (HEBREWS-REVELATION)

## HEBREWS

We don't know who wrote Hebrews. Here's what we do know, though: Hebrews was likely written by someone who heard about Jesus after He ascended, but most say it is not Paul. The feel of Hebrews is quite different from that of Paul's letters. 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 the writer of Hebrews thought they needed to know a little more. It's a word of exhortation, a message that comforts us and motivates us to obey God. 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 Christ's sacrifice and His covenant is far greater than anything the others have to offer. But not only is Jesus better than any other human religious figure—Christ is greater than any angel, priest, or old covenant institution that we have seen.

The author of Hebrews encourages the audience to hold fast to Jesus and spur one another to love and good deeds—living in ways that demonstrate faith, obedience, thankfulness, reverence, and love. No other book of the Bible so thoroughly explores Jesus' New Covenant. Hebrews is also well known for Chapter 11, which has been nicknamed the “Hall of Faith.” This chapter is a long list of Old Testament characters who, by 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.

## JAMES

James was a leader of a church in Jerusalem and his audience were those Jews who had grown up knowing the Law of Moses and following it. They were used to doing good works and observing the commands that God had given to His people Israel. Now, they are to believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, the long-awaited Messiah, a seeking savior whose death on the cross covers your sin. Even harder to believe is all you have to do is believe in Him and you will be saved.

These Jews struggle as they are now seeing non-Jews grafted into the people of God (*the church*) under this new covenant. These new believers don't follow all those old rules. They don't all keep the Sabbath and they aren't circumcised. They don't even know the Law—but they're just as much a part of God's people as the Jews are, because they had faith in Jesus. They wondered if God even cared about good works anymore. The apostle James meets this line of thought head-on: “faith without works is dead”. 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 practical approaches to Christian living for the people of God.

## I PETER

While Paul wrote to specific congregations and individuals, Peter, James, John, and Jude wrote to broader audiences across the Roman Empire. 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. They need to know how to

deal with it and they need to know it's not in vain. Peter begins his letter by calling Christians "aliens," or residential foreigners to the Roman Empire. Therefore, Christians should be holy, or "set apart". This "set apart" living should lead those watching them to glorify God. They should submit to authorities, submit to one another, honor their spouses, and demonstrate kindness—even when they're suffering. He sets Jesus as the finest example of suffering to glorify God. Suffering tests us, but it's a way that we identify with Christ. He reminds them that suffering never gives us an excuse to sin. 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.

Peter's focus here is on the present sufferings and the glories to come. No suffering is enjoyable, but Peter actually calls it a blessing. Peter saw Christ suffer with his own eyes and knew that He himself would likely be martyred for Christ's sake. But Peter caught a glimpse of the glory to follow in Eternity.

## **II PETER**

II Peter is a brief letter of reminders for first-century Christians most likely written a few years after the first book. Peter urges his readers to make every effort to grow in their faith, to remember that the promises of God (spoken by the prophets and apostles) are trustworthy, and to beware those who teach otherwise. After Jesus rose from the grave, He had a special conversation with Peter that led him to believe he would die for the Lord and he knew that his time was drawing near. 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 one last letter.

Peter explains several things that Christians will need to remember after he's gone. Peter didn'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.

There will be no more sermons or miracles from disciples that were with Jesus. II Peter urges the church to stand firm—because even when Peter is gone, the church must carry on.

## **I JOHN**

The book of I John 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. Conversely, I John is written so that those who believe in Jesus would know they have indeed found life in Him. People were beginning to teach that Jesus wasn't human, denying that He was the true Messiah. These teachers claimed to be Christians, which would have been very troubling for the young churches to hear. They struggled to know who to believe or how to recognize false teachers. 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. This book combats false teaching with absolutes: truth and lies, light and darkness, love and hate, sin and righteousness, Christ and antichrist. This is a letter written from a wise and loving father to a troubled church. No other book of the Bible talks about love as often as I 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, and John says that God Himself is love.

## II JOHN

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. We see in the next two letters how this teaching in I John plays out in real life. These two very short letters apply I John’s general teachings of truth, love, and obedience to specific local church situations. He’d told them about truth, love, and obedience—now he writes to tell them what to do about it. John loves those who know the truth, because the truth “abides” in them. When two parties know the truth, love comes naturally. When you know the truth, obedience comes naturally. A sure sign of obedience to God is love for His church, and a sure sign of love is obedience to God. He then warns that “many deceivers have gone out into the world”, 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.

## III JOHN

The theme of III John is steadfastness in the face of opposition. The author is writing to his friend Gaius. Gaius was baptized by Paul and traveled with him. Gaius earned a reputation for his hospitality among the Christians, but accusations against him mounted and Diotrephes starting stirring up trouble. John writes to Gaius to let him know that he is doing what is right. He reminds Gaius that he should not imitate what is evil, but instead imitate what is good. John promises to visit and make things right in person. He’ll hold Diotrephes accountable for his words and deeds bringing peace in truth. III John shows us what happens when people follow sound teaching and what happens when they don’t. 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.

## JUDE

Jude came from an important family, his mother was Mary, the mother of Jesus. His brother was James, a prominent church leader in Jerusalem. Jude hadn’t always believed in Jesus, but after Jesus rose from the dead, things 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. The church was facing a more pressing issue: people were creeping into the church that claimed to be believers. They denied the exclusive authority of Jesus, twisting His grace into a license to sin all they wanted. 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. Jude also relies heavily on the inspired Scriptures, especially Genesis and Numbers. This is a letter that urges the Christians to “earnestly contend for the faith”—to fight long and hard on behalf of their Lord. 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.

## REVELATION

Revelation is just that, a revelation from Jesus himself to John, mostly through visions that John records. So the real author here is Jesus. Revelation’s symbolic visions are similar to what you’d see in the Old Testament prophecies of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. As you read and study Revelation, remember this was written to churches in Asia, which had both Jewish and Gentile members. John is in exile on the isle of Patmos. They didn’t want John spreading this gospel

message, and so they sent him off to an island. It begins when John hears a voice behind him: "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches." Jesus gives John a message for seven churches in Asia. Of the seven, one is about to undergo intense suffering, one has kept His word 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". So begins a long series of prophetic visions for the churches and John faithfully writes everything down as a prophetic letter to the seven churches, with a closing message from Jesus: "I am coming quickly."

Revelation is a difficult book to interpret. Some of the visions are explained for us: the Lamb is Jesus and the dragon is the devil. 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. No matter how you interpret it, the important takeaway from Revelation is the unseen spiritual warfare that is always happening within churches. It shines a light on the cosmic ongoing battle between God with Christ at his right hand and Satan with his evil allies (human and demonic).

In this conflict, we see clearly that Jesus the Lamb has already won the decisive victory through His death & resurrection, and the church anxiously awaits His coming return. John's visions warn the church to fortify themselves to endure suffering and stay pure until His return when there will be a new heaven and new earth. A fitting close to God's big beautiful story of Redemption & Restoration...

# TIME LINE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

## Poetical Books

Job						Psalms	Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon				
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## Historical Books

	Leviticus	Deuteronomy		Ruth		1 Chronicles	2 Chronicles			Esther	
Genesis <b>1</b>	Exodus <b>2</b>	Numbers <b>3</b>	Joshua <b>4</b>	Judges <b>5</b>	1 Samuel <b>6</b>	2 Samuel <b>7</b>	1 Kings <b>8</b>	2 Kings <b>9</b>	-----	Ezra <b>10</b>	Nehemiah <b>11</b>

## Prophetical Books

								<b>To Israel:</b> Hosea Amos  <b>To Judah:</b> Habakkuk Isaiah Jeremiah Joel Micah Zephaniah Lamentations  <b>To Assyria:</b> Jonah Nahum  <b>To Edom:</b> Obadiah	Ezekiel Daniel	Haggai Zechariah	Malachi

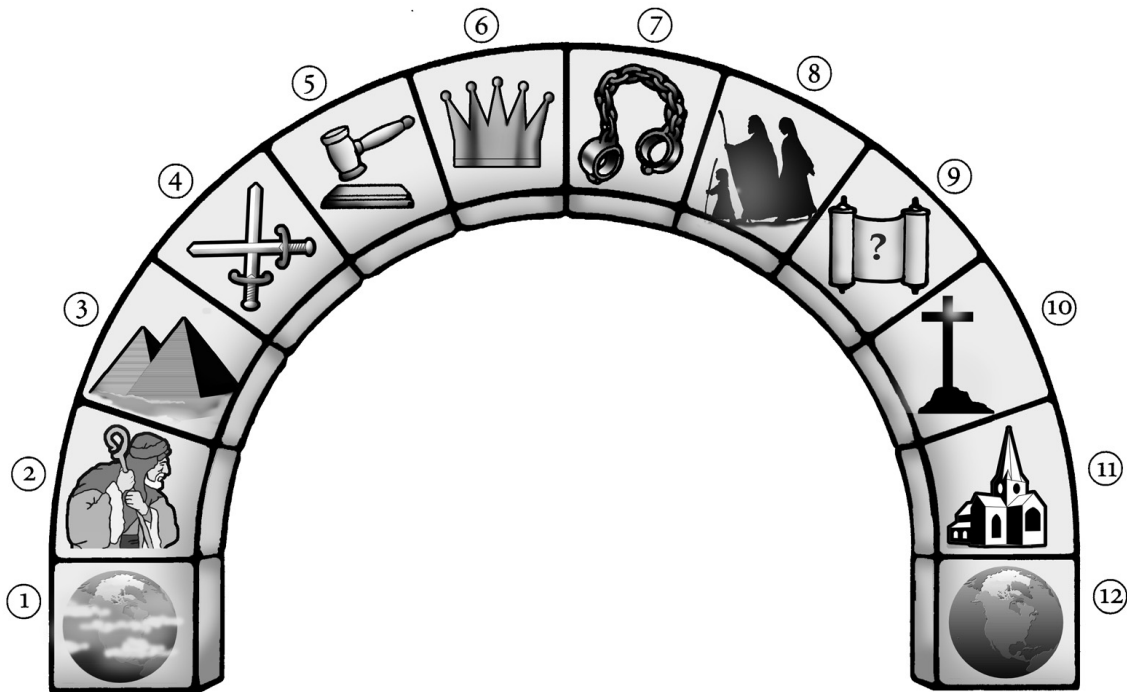
## STORY OF THE BIBLE

ERA	FIGURE		STORY LINE SUMMARY
<i>Creation</i>	<i>Adam</i>	<i>Eden</i>	Adam is created by God, but he <i>sins</i> and <i>destroys</i> God's original <i>plan</i> for man.
<i>Patriarch</i>	<i>Abraham</i>	<i>Canaan</i>	Abraham is <i>chosen</i> by God to "father" a <i>people</i> to represent God to the world.
<i>Exodus</i>	<i>Moses</i>	<i>Egypt</i>	Through Moses God <i>delivers</i> the Hebrew people from <i>slavery</i> in Egypt and then gives them the <i>Law</i> .
<i>Conquest</i>	<i>Joshua</i>	<i>Canaan</i>	Joshua leads the <i>conquest</i> of the <i>Promised Land</i> .
<i>Judges</i>	<i>Samson</i>	<i>Canaan</i>	Samson and others were chosen as <i>judges</i> to <i>govern</i> the people for <i>four hundred</i> rebellious years.
<i>Kingdom</i>	<i>David</i>	<i>Israel</i>	David, the greatest king in the new <i>monarchy</i> , is followed by a succession of mostly <i>unrighteous</i> kings, and God eventually <i>judges</i> Israel for her sin, sending her into exile.
<i>Exile</i>	<i>Daniel</i>	<i>Babylonia</i>	Daniel gives <i>leadership</i> and encourages <i>faithfulness</i> among the <i>exiles</i> for the next seventy years.
<i>Return</i>	<i>Ezra</i>	<i>Jerusalem</i>	Ezra <i>leads</i> the people back from <i>exile</i> to rebuild <i>Jerusalem</i> .
<i>Silence</i>	<i>Pharisees</i>	<i>Jerusalem</i>	Pharisees and others <i>entomb</i> the <i>Israelites</i> in <i>legalism</i> for the next <i>four hundred</i> years.



ERA	FIGURE		STORY LINE SUMMARY
<i>Gospels</i>	<i>Jesus</i>	<i>Palestine</i>	Jesus comes in fulfillment of the Old Testament <i>prophecies</i> of a savior and offers <i>salvation</i> and the true kingdom of God. While some accept Him, most <i>reject</i> Him, and He is crucified, buried, and resurrected.
<i>Church</i>	<i>Peter</i>	<i>Jerusalem</i>	Peter, shortly after the <i>Ascension</i> of Jesus, is used by God to <i>establish</i> the <i>church</i> , God's next major plan for man.
<i>Missions</i>	<i>Paul</i>	<i>Roman Empire</i>	Paul <i>expands</i> the church into the <i>Roman Empire</i> during the next <i>two decades</i> .

## ARC OF BIBLE HISTORY



# Creation

GOD MADE EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD,  
AND HE MADE IT ALL GOOD (GENESIS 1-2).  
HE MADE MEN AND WOMEN IN HIS IMAGE  
SO THAT WE CAN ENJOY HIM AND  
BRING HIM GLORY!

# Fall

THE BAD NEWS IS THAT THE FIRST MAN AND WOMAN,  
ADAM AND EVE, DID NOT TRUST GOD'S RULES  
FOR THEM, AND THEY DISOBEYED HIM  
(GENESIS 3). SIN ENTERED THE WORLD AND WITH IT  
CAME PAIN AND SICKNESS AND EVEN DEATH.  
EVERYTHING HAS BEEN HARD SINCE THEN.

# Redemption

THANKFULLY, THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT GOD SENT HIS SON, JESUS, TO THE WORLD. HE KNEW THAT WITH SO MUCH SIN IN OUR HEARTS WE WOULD NEVER BE ABLE TO GET BACK TO THE PERFECT ORDER OF CREATION THAT HE STARTED WITH, SO JESUS PAID THE DEBT OUR SIN OWED BY DYING ON THE CROSS.

# Restoration

AND NOW, GOD HAS PROMISED TO RESTORE THE WHOLE WORLD! ONE DAY THERE WILL BE NO MORE PAIN OR SICKNESS OR DEATH, BECAUSE JESUS IS MAKING ALL THINGS NEW (REVELATION 21) AND GOOD AGAIN (GENESIS 1-2). THE GOSPEL IS THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT GOD'S PLAN TO SAVE THE WORLD THROUGH JESUS, AND GIVE US A TRUE HOPE THAT THIS LIFE IS NOT ALL THERE IS. NOW WE GET TO BE A PART OF SHARING



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