

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

A Resource Handbook towards a socio-historical understanding of the Bible.

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WE BELIEVE ... IN THE HOLY BIBLE

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WE BELIEVE

In the Holy Bible as a faithful witness of God's self-revelation in the history of His people, God's inspired instrument to illumine, guide, correct, and edify His people for their faith and witness.

The fourth article in the Statement of Faith recognizes the very significant and normative place the Scriptures assume in the life and work of the Church. By itself, the Holy Bible may be initially described as a collection of ancient documents with varied literary forms which contain the record of the history of God's people in their relationship with God. In short, the Bible is the record of a relationship between God and His chosen people, a relationship that is set squarely on the stage of human political, social and religious history. As it is, the story of such relationship is reflected upon and recorded in various forms of literature that are rooted in the culture and the particular historical situation of the people of God.

A THREE-WAY UNDERSTANDING OF THE BIBLE

With such initial description, we may approach the Bible and study it in three necessarily interconnected ways. **First**, the Bible may be understood on the theological level as the word of God, and as a witness to an affirmation of faith in the God who is, revealed in its pages. In this way, the Bible is understood in primarily theological concepts. That is, ***the Bible is a document that records the deep theological reflections of the people of God***, their confession of faith in this God whom they recognize, from Genesis as the sole Lord and creator of the heavens and the earth, to Revelation, as the great judge and re-creator of all that is. ***Through the pages of these documents, God's people are also making the confession of their faith' in a God who acts in history in order to save and liberate the oppressed, and who came to identify Himself with His own people.*** Indeed, the Bible easily becomes the source of the most profound theological expressions of God's people.

Second, the Bible may also be understood on the textual level, as literature, that is, as word of God that is expressed and recorded by His people in typical literary forms of expression, such as a historical narrative, poetry or song, prophetic oracle or sayings, or proverbs, parables, epistles, and many others. ***Each literary form reflects a particular cultural background and historical situation to which the word of God is initially addressed.*** Thus, a proverb may reflect a typical teaching situation between a sage and his student. A legal material in the Old Testament such as the one's in Exodus (21-23), or in Deuteronomy (12-26) may reflect the context of a periodic religious festival in the sanctuary wherein the priests are expected to read and proclaim anew to the people the covenant regulations for their guidance. The apocalyptic materials in Daniel and the book of Revelation may reflect a situation of extreme political and religious persecution of the Jews and early Christians in the hands of colonial masters. The form of the literature of Biblical material also provides a very important key in understanding the original cultural and historical background of the material and in eventually at arriving the message of the text.

Third, the Bible, on the historical level, being the word of God that is encased in a particular culturally bound literary form, may also be understood as a record of history. ***It records the history of Israel as a nation and as a people of God.*** As such, Biblical literature, even as it contains the word of God, also contains records of events portraying the origins, the rise, fall, and the reconstitution of Israel as a nation, and the birth of Christianity as a religion. All these events are then set against the broader background of the history of the Ancient Near East, the history of the rise and fall of empires and super powers in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Rome. Indeed, the Bible presents itself as a history of a people, even as it may also be seen as a history of ideas and of faith, as well as a collection of varied forms of literature.

By its nature and topic, the literature of the Bible, is *highly historical and communal in the sense that it is concerned with human life in community under concrete conditions subject to change* (Gottwald, 1985: 597).

A WITNESS TO GOD'S SELF-REVELATION AND TO THE DIVINE-HUMAN ENCOUNTER

It is in such historical processes recorded in various forms in the text of the Bible that one perceives the presence and movement, character and purpose of God. In this sense, the Bible becomes a literary-historical record of God's self-revelation to His people. It is a record that is encased in culture-bound literary forms and shaped to a large extent by the historical context out of which the record was written. But it is nevertheless a faithful record and witness to what God has disclosed to His people. It is essentially a witness to an encounter — the divine-human encounter — taking place on the stage of history. It is in that encounter between God and His people, either as a liberating or a judging encounter, that a relationship is born.

A FAITHFUL HISTORICAL WITNESS

The faithfulness of the Biblical witness to God's revelation and to the divine-human encounter does not necessarily imply, however, a faithful reproduction of the facts of the events witnessed to. The Bible does not and never claims to be concerned with the details and facts of a historical event. But the Bible is concerned mainly with an event as it becomes an indicator of God's presence and purpose and as that event becomes a bearer of God's message for His people. This, an event, like the Exodus event, is narrated in the book of Exodus, mainly because of its revelatory significance for God's people, because God's liberating presence was perceived as having acted decisively in favor of an oppressed People.

*An event is recounted, not in order to reconstruct how it happened, but in order to derive meaning which has profound implications in the life of God's people. It is narrated **in order to teach the people about God's ways and demands, and to challenge them towards a faithful and responsible life of relationship with their God.***

The reconstruction of a historical event, thus, is not given so much emphasis as the conveying of certain truth and affirmations designed to guide, upbuild and give hope to the community of believers. *The events recorded are therefore never the 'bare facts', but are always accessible to us only in the clothing of their interpretation by the biblical authors...* (Van-Leer, 1980: 48).

This does not mean however, that the accounts of events and stories in the Bible become historically unreliable. Actually, even in the face of accounts of events that are strongly confessional in character, such as the Exodus-rooted credo in Deuteronomy 28:5-9, it cannot be denied that the memory of the event, as celebrated and recalled by the people in their festivals, is something that must have a basis in the historical experience of the people. No matter how thickly entrusted with theological interpretation the recollection of an event was, it cannot be denied that such theological interpretation has always been based on a "core event", the profound experience of which provided for its continuous reliving in memory.

We must remember, however, that it is the interpretation that makes an event an event. We may wonder why the Exodus, which is the foundational salvation event in the Old Testament, is actually not mentioned at all in the court annals of the Egyptian Pharaohs. It would be understandable to assume that as far as the Egyptian Pharaohs and historians are concerned, the escape of a Motley band of slaves from their work camp is something that is so insignificant. It does not merit being recorded in their official annals. For them, it is a non-event. But what appeared to be a non-event for the Egyptians proved to be the *core event* in Israel's salvation history as far as the Biblical writers are concerned.

The same may be said of the variety of versions in the New Testament concerning the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. In this case, the variety of versions coming from the four gospels, some of them even conflicting in certain aspects (e.g., the differences in the chronology of Jesus' ministry between the Synoptics and the Gospel of John), reinforces rather than weakens the historicity of Jesus as the Christ. They only point to a multiplicity of perspective in the interpretation of the same event. One may just wonder, why does Matthew trace Jesus' ancestry back to Abraham in the very beginning of his gospel (Matt. 1:1-16), while Luke traces Jesus' genealogy all the way back to Adam (Luke 3:25-38)? Why is there no birth story in Mark, and why do the birth stories in Matthew and Luke differ from each other in details (Matt. 1:18 - 2:12; Luke 2:1-20)? And why does John interpret every mighty act of Jesus as a sign (John 2:11; 4:54; 6:14; 9:16; etc.)? Far from discouraging the believer, these problems even add to the richness and color of the Scriptures. They testify to the human dynamism involved in their writing and confirm the Bible as a record of several human witnesses to and interpretation of historical events, which, for the different writers concerned, are filled with religious meaning too profound to be captured by just any one of them.

THE BIBLE AS AN INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY

Since the Bible is considered as a theological interpretation of events in which the active presence of God is perceived by His people, the Scriptures may be seen also as representing a particular interpretation and view of history. History, as far as the Bible is concerned, is not just a plain and arbitrary succession of events into which people are caught. Rather, **history is a purposeful unfolding of God's power over events and people. It is also a meaningful recording of the consequences of the people's decisions and actions in response to contemporary challenges and crises and to their responsibilities as a people of God.** It is a view of history that upholds the lordship of God. It is view of history that upholds the lordship of God over the lives oilmen and nations and the primacy of His righteous and just demands on His people, and the constancy of His mercy and compassion on the weak and the oppressed. At the same time, the Scriptures present an evaluation of the responses of God's people to His demands throughout their history. It shows how the Israelites had responded to God's offer of a covenant relationship in the wake of their liberation from Egypt. It shows the people's early attempts to establish a community in the Promised Land wherein legal, egalitarian, tribal-based safeguards as those social-ethical laws found in Exodus 21-23, were made in order to prevent the recurrence of an Egyptian-type of an oppressive system through their Tribal Confederacy. It shows how, upon the establishment of the Monarchy, the nation began to drift back to a corrupt and highly exploitative system. Such internal decaying eventually led to her becoming victim to external enemies, the foreign colonial masters who *were* then seen as the historical agents of God's judgment on His own people.

The Bible also shows how the people of God, upon receiving the punishment as exiles, attempted again to restore their broken relationship with God through a regimented and strictly legalistic application of the covenant requirements (cf. Ezra-Nehemiah). In the process, the goal of obtaining God's favor and restoring the covenant-relationship is now thought to be hinged on certain legal requirements that only need to be fulfilled by the people. The divine-human relationship is now reduced into a simplistic formula based on human initiative and achievement.

The Bible also shows how the prophets had consistently criticized the regimented but insincere approach to God, without much success. Thus, the story of Jesus' life and ministry may also be *seen* as part of a continuum in the history of the divine-human encounter. Here, however; that history is considered as reaching a decisive nodal point. Jesus is presented as the fulfiller of the people's messianic hopes but in a way so radically different from normal Jewish expectations. Jesus is the Messiah who inaugurates the Kingdom of God. It is a kingdom which is not identifiable with any known human institution. At the same time, it is a kingdom that is supposed to be experienced by people here on earth.

The Scriptures then, specifically, the Gospels, present a new initiative of God in history through Jesus, in His unceasing effort to restore the wholeness of the divine-human relationship. They present God's ultimate self-revelation and, along with it, the depth of His character of love, compassion, justice and righteousness.

The Scriptures, at this point, restate the claim of God on His people. This time, the people are confronted with the ethical demands of the kingdom inaugurated by Jesus' coming. Such demands are nevertheless a re-statement of the original covenant responsibilities demanded of Israel by God, which is encapsulated in the so-called summary of the Law: love of God with the totality of one's whole being, and love of neighbor *as yourself* (cf. Luke 10:26-28).

This demand, however, remains addressed to the collectivity of peoples and nations. For in the final analysis, every individual will face the throne of judgment not as himself or herself alone, but as a member of a collectivity of peoples and nations acting and responding in various historical situations (cf. Matt. 25:82ff.).

In this light, the Scriptures may be considered as God's instrument in effecting His sovereign rule and lordship over peoples and nations. Through the Bible, Christians here in the Philippines are made accountable for the lives of their fellow countrymen just as the ancient Israelites were. **Through the Bible, Filipino Christians are tasked to be participants and God's representatives in the making of history in the nation,** that is, to be involved in issues and questions that concern the welfare of our people at this stage of our history. Filipino Christians are asked to be at the forefront in the struggle for justice, peace and democracy in this country if they are to remain- faithful to the character and mission of God and of Jesus revealed in the Scriptures.

Indeed, the Bible can really be seen in its totality as a faithful witness to God's self revelation, the revelation of His acts and will for persons as they are Made relevant to contemporary Philippine situation. It is also a faithful witness to the dynamics of the divine-human encounter in history taking place in the events being told as well as in the reading of its pages by believers searching for light and guidance in living in contemporary Philippine reality.

THE BIBLE AS AN INSPIRED INSTRUMENT

It is in the light of the above discussion that the Bible may indeed be considered as an inspired instrument of God. It is inspired not in the sense that it is a letter-perfect, flawless book and, that it is literally infallible. To assume that it is so would be tantamount to ascribing to the Bible a quality of perfection that is attributable only to God and to nobody and nothing else including the Bible. It would be tantamount to Bibliolatry, or making an idol of the Bible.

A patient and systematic study of the Bible will reveal the many seeming contradictions in views and theology between books and even within a book of the Bible. It is for this reason that the Book of Isaiah is believed to actually consist of two or three books written at great intervals of time and space. It is also for this reason that the gospel of John is classified differently from the other three gospels. We just have to understand all these problems in the light of the fact that the books of the Bible were written over a time gap of more than one thousand years, over periods of Israel's having six different colonial masters (Assyrians, Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, Graeco-Syrians, Romans), with their corresponding cultural-religious influences, and over a geographical expanse that covers the whole length-of Palestine, Syria, Babylon and Asia Minor. This is in addition to the fact that what we are usually reading are but translations from the original Biblical languages of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. And no translation can be said as having flawlessly translated the words and the original meanings of the words of the Bible into our native language or even in English. The Bible comes to us in a highly filtered form.

But if the inspiration of the Bible is not derived then from the letter and form of the book, where then does it come from? The inspiration is of God Himself. It comes from God Himself as He reveals Himself in the contents of each book of the Bible, and as He elicits in the reader a sense of being confronted by His presence, as He initiates in the reader a process of transformation of being, a conversion, leading him to commit his life in accordance with God's will as reflected in what he has read in the Bible and as he translates it in his own contemporary living and historical situation.

In this view, ***the Bible remains an instrument of God in bringing people to Him.*** It is, therefore, never an end in itself. It is never to be equated with nor substituted for God Himself. ***The Bible is a tool and a gift to us by God in order to enable us to know more about Him and be able to do His will here on earth.*** In effect, it is a guide for a life of obedience, a life of discipleship, a life of committed service to Him and to the people. It is never intended to function as an opiate in the life of a believer. It is never intended to make him withdraw from reality and from social responsibility. Rather, it is intended to open up the eyes of every believer in the community to the various opportunities of service and active involvement in the life of his or her own society, where his or her God reigns as lord and savior. It intends to develop in him or her a sensitivity to the dynamics of history taking place in society and to the presence of God and to the direction of His action in that society. It calls him or her to participate in the work of God in his or her own society, in the struggle to realize God's kingdom here on earth. It is challenging him or her to adopt the very program of ministry of *Jesus*, as his or her own (Luke 4:18-21), even if it may lead to the cross.

As the Bible is to be considered as God's basic instrument to guide us to Him, it is also to be seen as a witness to the edification of God's people. Such edification though, as shown by *Jesus*, is achieved most meaningfully, in suffering for the sake of God's people.

How then do we allow the Holy Bible to become God's instrument for illuminating, guiding, correcting and edifying us as His people? The basic answer is for us to seriously study it. For ***only in seriously approaching the Bible can its profound truths and lessons emerge from the pages that imprison them to become our guide in adopting a lifestyle that is in accordance with God's will, in choosing a vocation that is in answer to His calling, and in pursuing a vision for society in obedience to His demand.***

But since the Bible is a gift of God to His people for their mutual upbuilding, edification and deepening of faith, it is preferable that it be studied also collectively, its truth and lessons be drawn out through collective effort and

sharing. For the Bible was originally handed down to a community of believers. It is the community that is supposed to learn together, grow together in faith and social awareness from the study of the Bible.

We, however, cannot get illumination from the study of the Bible if we only study it to find a confirmation of our traditionally-held beliefs, ideas, practices, and even political options. Rather, we should approach the Bible with total openness of mind and spirit, like a molten clay that is willing to be molded in any shape by its owner, allowing the Holy Spirit to really work in us as we honestly search for the truth.

It may also be important for us to realize that much of the stories in the Old Testament, and much of the New Testament, came out of situations that considered these documents as rather subversive, containing ideas that are rather unsettling for the *status quo* and those who control it. In fact, most of the Biblical heroes, including Jesus himself, suffered because of the radical implications of their teachings.

As we read and study the Bible therefore, we should always consider the fact that what we are reading are documents the possession of which caused the severest forms of persecution of the early Christians. At the same time, they are also documents that provided the seed-bed for the greatest revolution in the world. They are documents that practically turned the world upside down, the world of values and the world of politics (cf. Luke 1:46-55; Acts 17:6).

THE SCIENTIFIC-CRITICAL METHOD OF STUDYING THE BIBLE:

We, however, would not be able to appreciate the significance of this historical relevance and the textual uniqueness of the Bible and the profound implications of its message for us unless we study it with the help of basic scientific-critical tools now becoming more and more available. For ***the study of the word of God***, and how it becomes God's inspired, instrument, is something that should not be taken lightly. ***It is a task that should involve the total commitment of the believer*** and his willingness to learn and grow. And because of the seriousness of the task involved, we need to avail of one of the best gifts of God to man in furthering the frontiers of human knowledge — the gift of science. That is, we use the scientific-critical tools of analysis to enable us to have a firmer grasp of what the text must 'have meant originally in order for us to be able to determine what the text means for us now.

This method of study means that ***we would need to know a little about history, particularly the history of Israel, to help us with the necessary background knowledge in clarifying the context of a passage.*** Also, we need to be acquainted with the form and dynamics of basic literary types present in the Bible. We should be able to distinguish, at the very least, between prose and poetry in the Bible, and how one form is interpreted differently from another form. Surely, we should not interpret any part of Psalms as if it is a prose narrative, as was disastrously done in a popular Bible translation (cf. Taylor's *The Living Bible*). Each literary form, like the parables of Jesus, or the epistles of Paul, or even the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation, reflects particular socio-cultural setting in life which will determine to a large extent the way a passage of the book is to be interpreted". In the process, however, ***as the context of the passage is gradually, disclosed and its original meaning and lesson established, we are also led to a process of examining our own contemporary contexts and our own selves.*** We begin to see some points of application in our lives and in the problems of our society. We begin to see that there are always parallel situations and parallel human responses, and perhaps, parallel demands of God. From there, we can derive further implications that can lead to a renewed hope and commitment, as well as repentance and renewal of lives along with a conviction to act accordingly in response to the word of God heard from that particular passage.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

As one goes through this process, one affirms once more the authority of the Bible in the lives of God's people and in the greater community. In effect, the authority of the Bible becomes more and more established every time a study of the Bible takes place among a group of believers, each time it is seriously and critically grappled with, each time it has resulted in reformed lives and renewed commitment to serve God and His people, each time it has created a new awareness and sensitivity among the believers, seeing their mission-task as being linked to the total effort to uplift human life and dignity, especially among the marginalized and dehumanized sectors of our society. For in the ultimate sense, the authority of the Bible is not to be sought in the letter of the text itself nor in the

Bible's capacity as an instrument of God to effect changes in the lives of people, and in its power to imbue men and women with a vision and a sense of high calling.

Finally, it remains important for every member of the church to know about the theological traditions out of which the Protestant faith developed. And we are indeed indebted to the fathers of the Reformation led by Martin Luther for that principle of *sola scriptura* (scripture alone) and *sola fide* (faith alone) in deciding questions of faith and conduct. Without intending to diminish the significance of their contribution, however, we should never forget the fact that in the ultimate analysis, after knowing the appropriate place of the Bible in the hierarchy of our faith, it is God alone, through Christ alone, who remains the sole authority in our lives as a people and as a nation, today and in the future.

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UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

- The Bible is the Word of God, but even if we read it several times, we cannot expect God to hand the message to us. We must search for the truth with perseverance and we must seek it in community with other believers.
- Some people open the Bible at random, thinking that the first paragraph they find will precisely give them the Word they need at the moment. This is not the way God answers our concerns.
- The message of the Bible does not get through unless we share the experience of the community where these books originated — the experiences of the chosen community, the warnings of the prophets, the concerns which developed from the believers, the crises in their lives that led them into maturity of faith, the coming of Jesus, His life, death and resurrection.
- We must accept the Bible in the way our church understands it.

When you read the Bible, remember that

- You are not the first to read the Bible and to understand God's message.
- Each word was inspired by God for people in concrete situations. Think of what God wanted them to understand. What does this mean to you? Do not think that whatever word you may find in the Bible answers your particular concern.
- Do not take everything literally. The authors of the Bible used images and expressions peculiar to their culture. When we read the Bible now, we have to enter into that culture and understand the context of the message.
- God spoke the message to many people — from Abraham to the apostles — for more than a thousand years. God did not teach everything all at once.
- The Bible is to be understood in "the light of the love of God made manifest in the life of Jesus — His death and resurrection — and what good news it brought to the people.
- The most important things in life are taught clearly in the Bible. However, they are written in a particular literary style which may be strange to us. Do not allow strange sentences to obscure what is clear and fundamental.
- Read the Bible faithfully. In time, you will understand its message for you.
- Study the Bible with others. In this way your understanding of the Word will become really meaningful.
- Our main task in interpreting the Bible is to bridge the gap between the past and the present, how the faith can be lived out today. The interpretation is not complete without fulfilling this task.

There are various methods of studying the Bible just as there are different kinds of leaders and people who will conduct and undertake the study of the Bible. However, before any method is thought of by the leader or by any group, the question, *Why study the Bible?*, should be dealt with first.

Living Word of God

A word reveals something of the one who uttered it. So, when we say the Bible is the *Word of God*, we are saying it reveals something of God — God's purpose, will, nature, characteristics.

The Bible is *living* because even though it was written more than a thousand years ago, still it has a living message for us today. It still speaks to our own lives.

The Bible is the Word of God which communicates life to us.

Affirmation of Faith

The Bible is an affirmation of the faith of a people from their own culture and historical experience. It is a written testimony of life, experience and faith.

Story of Suffering and Hope

The Bible is a story of suffering and hope,' written from the perspective of the persecuted minority who struggled in order to be faithful to their God. It is the story of a people who viewed their suffering under powerful empires in the light of their faith in God.

Written Protest

The Bible is a written protest of a people against the existing social order characterized by oppression and domination of peoples and nations (Exodus); the idolatry of political rulers (Micah 3); the hypocrisy of religious leaders (Amos 5; Matthew 23). The people protested the negation of the reign of God and the vision of a new heaven and a new earth (Isaiah 65).

Testament

The Bible is a testament because it is a precious inheritance from God and the people's experiences of God.

Collection of Books

The Bible is a collection of books by different authors who wrote with different purposes at different times for different readers in a span of approximately 2,000 years.

LISTINGS

CHRONOLOGY

Old Testament

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy
Joshua
Judges
Ruth
I Samuel
II Samuel
I Kings
II Kings
I Chronicles
II Chronicles
Ezra
Nehemiah
Esther

New Testament

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John
Acts
Romans
I Corinthians
II Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
I Thessalonians
II Thessalonians
I Timothy
II Timothy
Titus

Job
Psalms
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Song of Solomon
Isaiah
Jeremiah
Lamentations
Exekiel
Daniel
Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

Philemon
Hebrews
James
I Peter
II Peter
I John
II John
III John
Jude
Revelation

LITERARY FORMS

Old Testament

- stories
- epics
- myths
- laws
- liturgy
- poems
- oracles
- instructions
- wise sayings

New Testament

- miracles
- parables
- stories
- instructions
- discussions
- sayings
- epistles

FAMOUS BIBLE PASSAGES

OLD TESTAMENT

The Creation
The Garden of Eden
Entrance of Sin
Cain and Abel
Noah and the Flood
The Tower of Babel
Sarah and Hagar
Lot's Wife

Genesis 1
Genesis 2
Genesis 3:1-7
Genesis 4:8-16
Genesis 6:9 to 8:22
Genesis 11:1-9
Genesis 16:1-4; 21:8-20
Genesis 19:24-28

Story of Samson
Ruth and Naomi
The Child Samuel
David Anointed King
David Slays Goliath
David and Jonathan
A Prophet Rebukes a King

Judges 13 to 16
Ruth 1 to 4
1 Samuel 1:19 to 3:21
1 Samuel 16:1-13
1 Samuel 17: 12-54
1 Samuel 20
2 Samuel 12:1-15

<i>Abraham and Isaac</i>	Genesis 22:1-19	<i>Building the Temple</i>	1 Kings 6
<i>Esau and Jacob</i>	Genesis 25:27-34	<i>Solomon's Prayer of Dedication</i>	2 Chronicles 6:12-42
<i>Jacob's Ladder</i>	Genesis 28:20-17		
<i>Life of Joseph</i>	Genesis 37 to 50	<i>The Shepherd Psalm</i>	Psalms 23
<i>Moses in the Bulrushes</i>	Exodus 2:1-10	<i>The Blessed Man</i>	Psalms 1
<i>The Ten Commandments</i>	Exodus 20:3-17	<i>A Hymn of Praise</i>	Psalms 103
<i>The Call of Isaiah</i>	Isaiah 6:1-8	<i>Water from the Rock</i>	Numbers 20:10-13
<i>Four Young Princes</i>	Daniel 1	<i>The Fiery Serpents</i>	Numbers 21:4 :9
<i>Nebuchadnezzar's Strange Dream</i>	Daniel 2	<i>The Fiery Furnace</i>	Daniel 3:8-30
<i>Rahab and the Spies</i>	Joshua 2:1-7, 22-24	<i>Daniel in the Lion's Den</i>	Daniel 6
<i>The Fall of Jericho</i>	Joshua 6:15-21	<i>Gideon's Army</i>	Judges 6:7:15-23
<i>Gideon's Fleece</i>	Judges 6:33-40	<i>Jonah's Mission</i>	Jonah 1 to 4

NEW TESTAMENT

<i>Birth of John the Baptist</i>	Luke 1:57-80	Two Great Commandments	Matthew 22:34-40
<i>The Genealogy of Jesus</i>	Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38	Judgment of the Nations	Matthew 25:31-46
<i>The Song of Mary</i>	Luke 1:46-55	Mary Anoints Jesus	John 12:1-8
<i>The Birth of Jesus</i>	Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-20	<i>The Last Supper</i>	Matthew 26:17-30
<i>Visit of the Wise Men</i>	Matthew 2:1-12	<i>Betrayal of Jesus</i>	Luke 22:1-6
<i>Preaching of John the Baptist</i>	Matthew 3:1-12	<i>Jesus Before Pilate</i>	Matthew 27:1-26
<i>The Boy Jesus in the Temple</i>	Luke 2:41-52	<i>The Death of Jesus</i>	Matthew 27:27-50
<i>The Baptism of Jesus</i>	Matthew 3:13-17	<i>The Resurrection of Jesus</i>	Matthew 28:1-10
<i>The Temptation of Jesus</i>	Matthew 4:1-11	<i>The Risen Christ Appears</i>	Luke 24:13-35
<i>The Beatitudes</i>	Matthew 5:1-12	<i>Jesus Convinces Thomas</i>	John 20:24-29
<i>The Sermon on the Mount</i>	Matthew 5 to 7	<i>The Great Commission</i>	Matthew 28:16-20
<i>The Lord's Prayer</i>	Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4	<i>Birth of the Church</i>	Acts 2:37-47
<i>House on a Rock</i>	Matthew 7:24-27	<i>The Beautiful Gate</i>	Acts 3:1-16
<i>The New Birth</i>	John 3:1-21	<i>Ananias and Sapphira</i>	Acts 5:1-11
<i>The Woman at the Well</i>	John 4:1-42	<i>Martyrdom of Stephen</i>	Acts 6:8-7:60
<i>Fishers of Men</i>	Luke 5:1-11	<i>Conversion of Saul of Tarsus</i>	Acts 9:1-9
<i>A Roman Captain's Faith</i>	Luke 7:1-10	<i>Peter Visits Cornelius</i>	Acts 10:1-33
<i>Story of the Sower</i>	Matthew 13:1-23	<i>Peter Rescued from Prison</i>	Acts 12:1-19
<i>The Way to Life</i>	John 14:1-7	<i>Paul and Barnabas</i>	Acts 13:1-13
<i>The True Vine</i>	John 15:1-17	<i>Paul and Silas</i>	Acts 16:19-34
<i>The Prodigal Son</i>	Luke 15:11-32	<i>Paul at Athens</i>	Acts 17:16-34
<i>Transfiguration of Jesus</i>	Matthew 17:1-8	<i>The Plot Against Paul</i>	Acts 23:12-35
<i>Who is the Greatest?</i>	Luke 9:43-50	<i>Paul Before Felix</i>	Acts 24
<i>The Woman Who Anointed Jesus</i>	Mark 14: 3-9	<i>Paul Before King Agrippa</i>	Acts 25:13 to 26:32
<i>The Rich Young Man</i>	Mark 10:17-31	<i>Shipwreck of Paul</i>	Acts 27
<i>Mary and Martha</i>	Luke 10:38-42	<i>Paul, Prisoner and Preacher in Rome</i>	Acts 28:11-31
<i>The Woman Who Touched Jesus' Cloak</i>	Luke 8:42-48	<i>Christian Duty</i>	Romans 12
<i>The Healing of the Bent-Over Woman</i>	Luke 13:10-17	<i>The True Foundation</i>	1 Corinthians 3:10-17
<i>Conversion of Zacchaeus</i>	Luke 19:1-10		

THE PARABLES OF JESUS

The word *parable* suggests the *setting alongside* of two things so that one illustrates the other. Jesus used parables to teach important spiritual lessons by referring to familiar objects. Some appear in more than one Gospel, none is in the Gospel of John.

The Weeds

Mt 13:24-30; 36-43

The Lost Coin

Lk 15:8-10

<i>Hidden Treasure</i>	Mt 13:44	<i>The Prodigal Son</i>	Lk 15:11-32
<i>Pearl of Great Value</i>	Mt 13:45,46	<i>The Dishonest Steward</i>	Lk 16:1-13
<i>The draw Net</i>	Mt 13:47-50	<i>Rich Man and Lazarus</i>	Lk 16:19-31
<i>The Wicked Servant</i>	Mt 18:23-35	<i>Master and Servant</i>	Lk 17:7-10
<i>Laborers in the Vineyard</i>	Mt 20:1-16	<i>The Insistent Widow</i>	Lk 18:1-8
<i>The Pharisee and Tax Collector</i>	Lk 18:9-14	<i>The Two Sons</i>	Mt 21:28-32
<i>The Royal Marriage Feast</i>	Mt 22:1-14	<i>The Ten Pounds</i>	Lk 19:11-27
<i>House Built on a Rock</i>	Mt 7:24-27; Lk 6:46-49	<i>Wise and Foolish Maidens</i>	Mt 25:1-13
<i>The Leaven</i>	Mt 13:33; Lk 13:20,21	<i>The Lost Sheep</i>	Mt 18:10-14; Lk 15:3-7
<i>Lamp Under a Bushel</i>	Mt 5:14-16; Mk 4:21-25; Lk 8:16; 11:33-36		
<i>The Talents</i>	Mt 25:14-30	<i>Sheep and Goats</i>	Mt 25:31-46
<i>New Cloth, Old Garment</i>	Mt 9:16; Mk 2:21; Lk 5:36		
<i>Growth of Seed</i>	Mk 4:26-29	<i>Household Watching</i>	Mk 13:32-37
<i>New Wine, Old Wineskins</i>	Mt 9:17; Mk 2:22; Lk 5:37,38	<i>The Two Debtors</i>	Lk 7:36-50
<i>The Good Samaritan</i>	Lk 10:25-37	<i>The Sower</i>	Mt 13:1-9, 18-23; Mk 4:3-9, 13-20; Lk 8:4-8, 11-15
<i>Friend at Midnight</i>	Lk 11:5-13	<i>The Rich Fool</i>	Lk 12:16-21
<i>Watchful Servants</i>	Lk 12:35-40	<i>The Mustard Seed</i>	Mt 13:31,32; Mk 4:30-32; Lk 13:18,19
<i>Faithful Steward</i>	Lk 12:42-48	<i>The Barren Fig Tree</i>	Lk 13:6-9
<i>Vineyard and House holder</i>	Mt 21:33-42; Mk 12:1-12; Lk 20:9-18		
<i>A Great Banquet</i>	Lk 14:15-24	<i>Tower and Warring King</i>	Lk 14:25-33
<i>Leaves of the Fig Tree</i>	Mt 24:32-35; Mk 13:28-31; Lk 21:29-33		

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

A miracle is a work of God beyond the power of persons to perform. The miracles of Jesus were object lessons addressed to the eye rather than the ear and proved that He was God and God was good. More than thirty miracles of Jesus are recorded; the feeding of the 5,000 alone appears in all four Gospels.

<i>Two Blind Men Cured</i>	Mt 9:27-31
<i>Dumb Demon Cast Out</i>	Mt 9:32-34
<i>Tax Money Provided</i>	Mt 17:24-27
<i>Deaf and Dumb Man Cured</i>	Mk 7:1-37
<i>Woman's Infirmity Cured</i>	Lk 13:10-17
<i>Man's Dropsy Cured</i>	Lk 14:1-6
<i>Ten Lepers Cleansed</i>	Lk 17:11-19
<i>Matthews' Ear Healed</i>	Lk 22:50,51
<i>Water Made Wine</i>	Jn 2:1-11
<i>Official's Son Cured</i>	Jn 4:46-54
<i>Paralyzed Man Cured</i>	Jn 5:1-9
<i>Man Born Blind Cured</i>	Jn 9:1-7
<i>Lazarus Raised from the Dead</i>	Jn 11:38-44
<i>Catch of 153 Fish</i>	Jn 21:1-14
<i>Syrophoenician's Daughter Cured</i>	Mt 15:21-28; Mk 7:24-30
<i>Feeding of the 4,000</i>	Mt 15:32-39; Mk 8:1-10
<i>Fig Tree Withered</i>	Mt 21:18-22; Mk 11:12-14
<i>Centurion's Paralyzed Servant</i>	Mt 8:5-13; Lk 7:1-10

<i>Blind and Dumb Demoniac</i>	Mt 12:22-32; Lk 4:1-37
<i>Man with Unclean Spirit</i>	Mk 1:21-28; Lk 4:31-37
<i>Peter's Mother-in-law Cured</i>	Mt 8:14-17; Mk 1:29-31; Lk 4:38, 39
<i>Blind Man's Sight Restored</i>	Mk 8:22-26
<i>Jesus Passes Unseen</i>	Lk 4:28-30
<i>Catch of Fish</i>	Lk 5:1-11
<i>Widow's Son Raised</i>	Lk 7:11-17
<i>Tempest Stilled</i>	Mt 8:23-27; Mk 4:35-41; Lk 8:22-25
<i>Demoniacs Cured</i>	Mt 8:28-34; Mk 5:1-20; Lk 8:26-33
<i>Leper Cured</i>	Mt 8:1-4; Mk 1:40-45; Lk 5:12-16
<i>Jairus' Daughter Raised</i>	Mt 9:18,19; 23-26; Mk 5:22-24; 35-43; Lk 8:41, 42;49,56
<i>Woman's Hemorrhage Cured</i>	Mt 9:20-22; Mk 2:1-12; Lk 18:43-48
<i>Paralytic Cured</i>	Mt 9-1-8; Nk 2:1-12; Lk 5:17-26
<i>Man's Withered Hand Cured</i>	Mt 12:9-14; Mk 3:1-6; Lk 6:6-11
<i>Demons Cast Out of Boy</i>	Mt 17:14-20; Mk 9:14-29; Lk 9:37-43
<i>Two Blind Men Receive Sight</i>	Mt 20:29-34; Mk 10:46-52; Lk 18:35-43
<i>Christ Walks on Sea</i>	Mt 14:22-27; Mk 6:45-52; Jn 6:15-21
<i>Feeding of the 5,000</i>	Mt 14:13-21; Mk 6:30-44; Lk 9:10-17; Jn 6:1-14; Mt 9:27-31

THE HEBREW CALENDAR

Based on the sacred year which began in the spring, the civil year began in the fall, in the seventh sacred month. The year was divided into twelve lunar months, with a thirteenth month seven times in every nineteen years.

The natural day was from sunrise to sunset, natural night from sunset to sunrise. The civil day was from sunset to sunset.

Hours were counted from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. The first watch in the evening was from 6 to 9; second watch, 9 to 12; third watch, 12 to 3; fourth watch, 3 to 6.

MONTH	NAME	ABOUT	SEASONS	FEASTS	SCRIPTURE
1 st	Abib or Nisan	April	Barley ripe, fig in blossom	Passover	Ex 12:6
2 nd	Ziv or Iyyar	May			
3 rd	Sivan	June	Wheat and barley harvests	Pentecost (Shabouth)	Lev 23:23-25
4 th	Tammuz	July	Early grapes		
5 th	Ab	August	Ripe figs		
6 th	Elul	September	General vintage		
7 th	Ethanim or Tishri	October	Plowing and sowing	Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah) Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) Tabernacles (Succoth)	Lev 23:23-26 Lev16:29; 23:27 Lev. 23:34-44
8 th	Bul or Mar cheshvan	November	Later Grapes		
9 th	Chislev	December	Snow	Dedication (Hanukkah)	Jn 10:22
10 th	Tebeth	January	Grass after rain		
11 th	Shebat	February	Winter figs		
12 th	Adar	March	Almond blossoms	Feast of Esther (Purim)	Esther 9:26-28

HOW THE BIBLE CAME TO US

Oral Tradition

- Preserved through memorization
- Transmitted from one generation to another

Written Tradition

- Oral tradition
- Written materials compiled and edited
- Compiled and edited writings formed into books
- Books canonized (measured *by rule of faith*: in Old Testament, based on belief in God; in New Testament, based on belief in Jesus Christ).
 - Roman Catholic canon - 46 books
 - Protestant canon - 39 books
 - Old Testament canon fixed in 90 AD
 - New Testament canon fixed in 4th century AD
 - First complete Bible was the *Latin Vulgate* by St. Jerome in the 4th century AD
- Translation
 - Old Testament: originally Hebrew and translated to Greek in 200 B.C.
 - New Testament: Greek

ORIGINAL LANGUAGES

***David J. Pant**

The sacred Scriptures came down to us originally in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. The Old Testament was written mostly in Hebrew, and the New Testament in Greek. Aramaic appeared in only a few places.

HEBREW

All Old Testament books were written in Hebrew, with the exception of a few Aramaic passages. Hebrew is called a Semitic language because it has its roots in Shem, one of the sons of Noah. Viewing Jerusalem as its center, it is related to the northern, rougher Aramaic, and to the southern, more polished Arabic. It has a freshness, simplicity and power that few modern languages possess. Bounds of the ancient Semitic tongue were approximately the Mediterranean Sea on the west, the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers on the east, the mountains of Armenia on the north, and the coast of Arabia on the south.

The inspired literature of the Jews to which the Gentile world fell heir is found in the Old Testament, and no people could inherit a richer treasure. Considered merely as literature, it has no equal in the simplicity of its prose and the beauty of its poetry, the vividness of its descriptions, the fast tempo of its annals, and the fervor of its devotions. It has claims to greatness that far surpass mere antiquity. It was the work of many writers throughout many ages in many countries. Some sections of the Bible were composed in Arabia, others in the dungeons of Rome. Some portions were written in the times of the Pharaohs, others in the eras of the Caesars.

ARAMAIC

A few passages in the Old Testament (Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26; Daniel 2:4-7:28; Jeremiah 10:11) were written in a peculiar Aramaic dialect. In later Old Testament times Aramaic more and more displaced Hebrew as the language of Palestine, and was the vernacular (common) language of Palestine in the time of Christ. Likely this is the language Jesus Himself used.

GREEK

All books of the New Testament have come down to us in Greek, though the original of Matthew may have been in Hebrew. The Greek of the New Testament differs from that of the Greek classical writers. It is the common dialect, which spread over the Near East as the result of the conquests of Alexander the Great more than 300 years before Christ, a simplified form of Attic Greek, with some contributions from other dialects. It was spoken by the Hellenists, or Greek-speaking Jews, who for business or other reasons made their homes in the lands of the area. - It could be easily understood by persons acquainted with the classical language.

The Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek at Alexandria (285-246 B.C.), in order to provide a copy for the famous library there, and as a service to the many Greek-speaking Jews. It is known as the *Septuagint*, a word that suggests the seventy-two scholars who it is thought were engaged to make the translation.

**Rev. David J. Fant, Litt. D., Simple Helps and Visual Aids to the Understanding of the Bible, Revised standard version, Collins World, New York.*

ENGLISH VERSIONS OF THE BIBLE

**David J. Fant*

During the Dark Ages, the period in western Europe extending from the decay of classical culture in the fifth century to the beginning of medieval culture in the eleventh, the Word of God was locked up in the Latin tongue, which was unknown to the people. In England, Latin was the language of the church and scholar. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that some efforts should be made to translate the Scriptures into the vernacular of the people. In keeping with this spirit and purpose, portions of the bible were translated into Saxon and Anglo-Saxon by several scholars between 706 and 995, the Psalms and Gospels usually being selected.

Caedmon, a humble Saxon cowherd, is credited with first introducing the Bible into the English language. The legend is that Caedmon, a lay brother in an abbey where the brothers were called on to sing after the evening meal, always fled to the stable because he could not sing. On one such occasion he fell asleep and dreamed that One stood by him who said, "Caedmon, sing me a song." Caedmon replied, "Lord, I can't sing; it was for the reason I left the feast." "Nevertheless," He said, "thou cannot sing to Me." "What must I sing?" And He said, "Sing of the beginning of created things." Caedmon started to sing, and so beautiful was his song that when Lady Hilda of the abbey heard of it, she instructed the priests to tell other Bible stories to Caedmon, who then sang them in the Anglo-Saxon of his day. Thus, Caedmon's paraphrases became the earliest form of the Bible in English.

Some fifty years later **Venerable Bede**, the outstanding ecclesiastical scholar of early England, translated the Lord's Prayer into Anglo-Saxon and wrote commentaries on many books of the Bible. Anxious that the common people might have the Bible in their own tongue instead of Latin, he started to translate the Gospel of John. There is a beautiful story told that on the eve of Ascension Day in 735, even as the great man lay dying, he continued to dictate to his disciple. When Ascension morning dawned there remained only one chapter to be finished. The boy did not want to press the master, but Bede would not stop. "It is easily done; take thy pen, and write quickly." As the sun was going down, the boy reminded him, "There is yet one sentence unwritten, dear master." "Write it quickly," was the answer. "It is finished now." Requesting his companion to lay him on the floor of his cell, he repeated the Gloria and died.

No copy of Bede's Gospel remains, but his work represents the beginning of the English translation. In the next two centuries there followed such Anglo-Saxon versions as King Alfred's Psalter and Aelfric's Old Testament, which brought the message of the Bible in the language of the common people.

At that time, as in all earlier ages, writing of every description had to be done laboriously by hand. All originals of the Scriptures, therefore, appeared in manuscript form, written on papyrus and other perishable materials.

The price of manuscript Bibles was almost prohibitive. For instance, in the reign of Edward I of England (1250) the price of a fairly written Bible was \$185. At the same time the hire of a laborer was three cents a day, so that it would have taken the labor of more than nineteen years exclusive of Sundays to purchase a single copy.

The first whole Bible in English was translated by **Wycliffe** and **Nicholas de Hereford** about 1380, and manuscript copies of this work *are* in existence in many public libraries. The entire translation was republished at Oxford in four handsome quartos in 1850. In the year 1429 a copy of Wycliffe's New Testament in manuscript cost something over \$200.

The earliest rendering of any book of Scripture into English prose was a translation of the Psalms by William of Shoreham, England, about 1327.

In 1382-3, a version of the Bible was made from the Vulgate by John Wycliffe (b. 1324— d. 1384), aided by his friend Nicholas de Hereford, who translated a large part of the Old Testament. A revised version of Wycliffe's Bible was made in 1388, four years after Wycliffe's death, by his helper, John Purvey.

In 1484, **William Tyndale** was born. With his labors in translating the Scriptures the direct history of the English Bible begins. Tyndale's New Testament was begun in Cologne in 1525, and finished at Worms in 1525 to 1526. In 1534 he published at Antwerp a revised edition, with a translation of extracts from the Old Testament. In 1530 his translation of the Pentateuch appeared and in 1531 the Book of Jonah.

Miles Coverdale's version in 1535 was the first publication of the whole Bible in English. It is not, strictly speaking, an original version, but a compilation from the Vulgate, Tyndale's, Luther's, the German-Swiss version of Zurich and Pagninus's Latin. Matthew's Bible was published in 1537. The name Matthew is a pseudonym for John Rogers, the real author, who was the first martyr in Queen Mary's reign. Rogers was born about 1500, and burned alive at Smithfield in 1555. In 1539 a revised edition of Matthew's Bible was published by Richard Taverner (b.1505 d. 1575), a layman.

The Geneva Bible was published in 1560. It was the work of eminent scholars exiled from England by the persecutions which raged during the reign of Mary. Among these were John Knox, the Scottish reformer; Miles Coverdale, the experienced translator; and William Whittingham, Calvin's brother-in-law.

The version known as the **Bishops Bible** was published in 1568. Its promoter was Archbishop Parker, who with eight bishops, several deans and professors highly reputed for learning, set themselves to produce "one other special Bible for the Churches." The Rhemish Version of the New Testament is an English translation published in 1582 at Rheims in France. It was executed by Roman Catholic scholars. This version, and a revised edition of the Rhemish Testament, constitute the "Douai" Bible.

The Authorized (King James) Version was published in 1611, the product of forty-seven scholars appointed by James I. Seven years were spent on this classic which has exerted a **tremendous** influence on the English language and literature.

The **Revised Version** (British, 1881), was a revision of the King James Version. The American Standard Version (1901), based on the British revision, was adapted by the American Committee of that work.

The **Revised Standard Version (RSV)**, is a revision of the American Standard Version, and was first published complete in 1952. It is the product of thirty-two American scholars, assisted by an Advisory Committee representing fifty-two co-operating denominations.

The New English Bible which leading British Protestant scholars joined in making and is being published abroad and in the United States (New Testament, 1961; complete Bible 1966).

*Rev. David J. Fant, Litt. D., **Simple Helps and Visual Aids to the Understanding of the Bible**, Revised standard version, Collins World, New York.

INTERPRETING A TEXT

- Select a text
- Read the text carefully
- Identify the key terms
- Situate the text in the whole passage, chapter or book
- Classify the text in terms of its literary form
- Identify the historical situation
- Learn from the text
- State the message for the original listeners
- State the message for today

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament records a sacred history, to both Jews and Christians, because in these historical experiences, the ultimate meaning of human life is disclosed. From Israel's perspective, this history is not just the ordinary story of wars, population movement, and cultural advance or decline. Rather, the unique dimension of these historical experiences is the disclosure of God's activity in events, the working out of God's purpose in the career of Israel. It is the faith that transfigures Israel's history and gives to the Bible its peculiar claim to be sacred scripture. The Old Testament is Israel's witness to its encounter with God.

For this reason, we cannot begin to understand the Old Testament so long as we regard it merely as great literature, interesting history, or the development of lofty ideas. The Old Testament presents the history of God's participation in the history of a particular people. All human history is the sphere of God's sovereignty and nature too displays the Creator's handiwork; but God became particularly involved in the career of a comparatively , obscure people, thereby initiating a historical drama that has changed human perspectives and has altered the course of human affairs.

When seeking to understand the meaning of our individual life stories, we do not actually begin with birth or infancy, even though one's written autobiography may start at that point. Rather, we view or review our early childhood in the light of later experiences that are impressed deeply on the memory. In the same way, Israel's life-story did not really begin with the time of Abraham or even with Creation, although the Old Testament in its present form starts there. Rather, Israel's history had its true beginning in a crucial historical experience that created a self-conscious history community — an event so decisive that earlier happenings and subsequent experiences were seen in its light.

This decisive event was the Exodus from Egypt. Even today the Jewish people understand their vocation and destiny in the light of this revealing event which made them a people and became their undying memory. Just as Christians remember and relive the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, so Jews recall and make contemporary the Exodus as they celebrate the Passover. This act of worship is not just a retreat from the present into the unrecoverable once-upon-a-time. Rather, believing Jews see themselves as participants in that experience; this event of the past enters into the present with deep meaning.

CATEGORIES OF BOOKS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Historical Books (17)

Here we see God's action in human history in order to liberate a chosen people. We see God teaching this people and giving meaning to their national history.

Genesis	Deuteronomy	I Samuel	I Chronicles	Esther
Exodus	Joshua	II Samuel	II Chronicles	
Leviticus	Judges	I Kings	Ezra	
Numbers	Ruth	II Kings	Nehemiah	

Prophetic Books (17)

God intervenes in history through the prophets, entrusted with the task of communicating God's message.

Isaiah	Joel	Habakkuk
Jeremiah	Amos	Zephaniah
Lamentations	Obadiah	Haggai
Ezekiel	Jonah	Zechariah
Daniel	Micah	Malachi
Hosea	Nahum	

Wisdom Books (5)

These books highlight the importance of an individual's formation and efforts in order to become a responsible person and a firm believer.

- Job
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes
- Song of Solomon

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

GENESIS

Genesis means origin. The book tells about the creation of the universe, the origin of humankind, the beginning of sin and suffering in the world, and about God's way of dealing with persons.

Genesis can be divided in two main parts:

Chapters 1-11 *The creation of the world and the early history of the human race — Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Rock and the Flood, the Tower of Babylon.*

Chapter 12-50 *The history of the early ancestors Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel and the founders of the tribes of Israel. Special attention is given to Joseph and the events that brought Jacob, his other son's and their families to live in Egypt.*

Genesis was written to record the stamp of a people's faith and to help keep that faith alive. Throughout the book, the main character is God who judges and punishes those who do wrong, leads and helps His people, and shapes their history.

EXODUS

The name Exodus means departure, and refers to the most important event in Israel's history, which is described in this book — the departure of the people of Israel from Egypt, where they had been slaves.

The book has four main parts:

- 1) the freeing of the Hebrews from slavery;*
- 2) their journey to Mount Sinai;*
- 3) God's covenant with his people at Sinai, which gave them moral, civil, and religious laws to live by; and*
- 4) the building and furnishing of a place of worship for Israel, and laws regarding the priests and the worship of God.*

Above all, this book describes what God did, as he liberated his enslaved people and formed them into a nation with hope for the future.

The central human figure in the book is Moses, the man who God chose to lead his people from Egypt. The most widely known part of the book is the list, of the Ten Commandments in chapter 20.

LEVITICUS

Leviticus contains regulations for worship and religious ceremonies in ancient Israel, and for the priests who were responsible for carrying out these instructions.

The main theme of the book is the holiness of God and the ways in which His people were to worship and live so as to maintain their relationship with the holy God of Israel.

*The best known words from the book, found in 19.18, are those which Jesus called the second great commandment: **Love your neighbor as you love yourself.***

NUMBERS

The book of Numbers tells the story of the Israelites during the nearly forty Years from the time they left Mount Sinai until they reached the eastern border of the land that God had promised to give them. The name of the book refers to a prominent feature of the story, that is, the census which Moses took of the Israelites at Mount Sinai before their departure, and again in Moab, east of the Jordan, about a generation later. In the period between the two censuses the Israelites went to Kadesh Barnea on the southern border of Canaan, but failed to enter the promised land from there: After spending many years in that area, they went to the region east of the Jordan River, where part of the people settled and where the rest prepared to cross the river into Canaan.

The book of Numbers is an account of a people who were often discouraged and afraid in the face of hardship, and who rebelled against God and against Moses, the man God appointed to lead them. It is the story of God's faithful, persistent care for His people in spite of their weaknesses and disobedience, and of Moses' steadfast, if sometimes impatient, devotion both to God and His people.

DEUTERONOMY

The book of Deuteronomy is organized as a series of addresses given by Moses to the people of Israel in the land of Moab, where they had stopped at the end of the long wilderness journey and were about to enter and occupy Canaan.

Some of the most important matters recorded in the book are as follows:

- 1) Moses recalls the great events of the past forty years. He appeals to the people to remember how God has led them through the wilderness and to be obedient and loyal to God.*
- 2) Moses reviews the Ten Commandments and emphasizes the meaning of the First Commandment, calling the people to devotion to the Lord alone. Then he reviews the various laws that are to govern Israel's life in the promised land.*
- 3) Moses reminds the people of the meaning of God's covenant with them, and calls for them to renew their commitment to its obligations.*
- 4) Joshua is commissioned as the next leader of God's people. After singing a song celebrating God's faithfulness, and pronouncing a blessing on the tribes of Israel, Moses dies in Moab, east of the Jordan River.*

The great theme of the book is that God has saved and blessed His chosen people, whom he loves; so His people are to remember this, and love and obey him, so that they may have life and continued blessing.

The key verses of the book are 6:4-6, and contain the words that Jesus called the greatest or all commandments: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

JOSHUA

*The Book of Joshua is the story of the Israelite invasion of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, the successor of Moses. Notable events recorded in this book include the crossing of the Jordan, the fall of Jericho, the battle at Ai, and the renewal of the covenant between God and his people. One of the best known passages in the book is, **Decide today whom you will serve.. As for my family and me, we will serve the Lord** (24.15).*

JUDGES

The Book of Judges is composed of stories from the lawless period of Israel's history between the invasion of Canaan and the establishment of the monarchy. These stories are about the exploits of national heroes called judges, most of whom were military leaders rather than judges in the legal sense of the word. One of the better known of them is Samson, whose deeds are recorded in chapters 13-16.

The great lesson of the book is that Israel's survival depended on loyalty to God, while disloyalty always led to disaster. But there was more than this: even when the nation was disloyal to God and disaster came, God was always ready to save his people when they repented and turned to Him again.

RUTH

The story of Ruth is set in the violent times of The Book of Judges. Ruth, a Moabite woman, is married to an Israelite. When he dies, Ruth shows uncommon loyalty to her Israelite mother-in-law and deep devotion to the God of Israel. In the end she finds a new husband among her former husband's relatives, and through this marriage becomes the great-grandmother of David, Israel's greatest king.

The stories of Judges show the disaster that come when God's people turned away from him. Ruth shows the blessing that came to a foreigner who turned to Israel's God and in so doing, became part of his faithful people.

I SAMUEL

The book of First Samuel records the transition in Israel from the period of the judges to the monarchy. This change in Israel's national life revolved mainly around three men: Samuel, the last of the great judges; Saul, Israel's first

king; and David, whose early adventures before coming to power are interwoven with the accounts of Samuel and Saul.

The theme of this book, like that of other historical writings in the Old Testament, is that faithfulness to God brings success, while disobedience brings disaster. This is stated clearly in the Lord's message to the priest Eli in **2:301 will honor those who honor me, and I will treat with contempt those who despise me.**

The book records mixed feelings about the establishment of the monarchy. The Lord himself was regarded as the real king of Israel, but in response to the people's request, the Lord chose a king for them. The important fact was that both the king and the people of Israel lived under the sovereignty and judgment of God (2.7-10). Under God's laws the rights of all people, rich and poor alike, were to be maintained.

II SAMUEL

Second Samuel, the sequel to First Samuel, is the history of David's reign as king, first over Judah in the South (chapters 1-4) and then over the whole nation, including Israel in the North (chapters 5-24). It is a vivid account of how David, in order to extend his Kingdom and consolidate his position, had to struggle with enemies within the nation as well as with foreign powers. David is shown to be a man of deep faith and devotion to God, and one who was able to win the loyalty of his people. Yet he is also shown as being sometimes ruthless and willing to commit terrible sins to serve his own desires and ambitions. But when he is confronted with his sins by the Lord's prophet Nathan, he confesses them and accepts the punishment that God sends.

The life and achievement of David impressed the people of Israel so much that in later times of national distress, when they longed for another king, it was for one who would be a **son of David**, that is, a descendant of David who would be like him.

I KINGS

First Kings continues the history of the Israelite monarchy which begun in the books of Samuel. It may be divided into three parts:

- 1) The succession of Solomon as king of Israel and Judah, and the death of his father David.
- 2) The reign and achievements of Solomon. Especially noteworthy is the building of the Temple in Jerusalem.
- 3) The division of the nation into the northern and southern kingdoms, and the stories of the kings who ruled them down to the middle of the ninth century B.C.

In the two books of Kings each ruler is judged according to his loyalty to God, and national success is seen as depending on this loyalty, while idolatry and disobedience lead to disaster. The Kings of the northern kingdom all fail the test, while the record of Judah's kings is mixed.

Prominent in the book of First Kings are the prophets of the Lord, those courageous spokesmen for God who warned the people not to worship idols and not to disobey God. Especially notable is Elijah and the story of his contest with the priests of Baal (chapter 18).

II KINGS

Second Kings continues the history of the two Israelite kingdoms where First Kings leaves off

The book may be divided into two parts:

- 1) The story of the two kingdoms from the middle of the ninth century B. C. down to the fall of Samaria and the end of the northern kingdom in 721 B.C.
- 2) The story of the kingdom of Judah from the fall of the kingdom of Israel down to the capture and destruction of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia in 586 B.C.

The book ends with an account of Gedaliah as governor of Judah under the Babylonians and a report of the release of King Jehoiachim of Judah from prison in Babylon.

These national disasters took place because of the unfaithfulness of the kings and people of Israel and Judah. The destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of many of the people of Judah was one of the great turning points of Israelite history.

The prophet who stands out in Second Kings is Elijah's successor Elisha.

I CHRONICLES

First and Second Chronicles are largely a retelling of events recorded in the of Samuel and Kings, but from a different point of view. Two main purposes govern the account of the history of the Israelite monarchy in the books of Chronicles:

- 1. To show that in spite of the disasters that had fallen upon the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, God was still keeping his promise to the nation and was working out his plan for his people through those who were living in Judah. As a basis for this assurance, the writer looked to the great achievements of David and Solomon, to the reforms of Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah, and to the people who remained faithful to God.*
- 2. To describe the origin of the worship of God in the Temple at Jerusalem and especially the organization of the priests and Levites, by which the worship was carried out. David is presented as the real founder of the Temple and its ritual, even though it is Solomon who builds the Temple..*

II CHRONICLES

Second Chronicles begins where First Chronicles ends. It describes the rule of King Solomon, records the revolt of the northern tribes led by Jeroboam against Rehoboam, King Solomon's son and successor, and continues an account of the history of the kingdom of Judah until the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

EZRA

The Book of Ezra, as a sequel to Chronicles, describes the return of some of the Jewish exiles from Babylon and the restoration of life and worship in Jerusalem. These events are presented in, the following stages:

- 1) The first group of Jewish exiles return from Babylonia at the order of Cyrus, the Persian emperors:*
- 2) The Temple is rebuilt and dedicated, and the worship of God - restored in Jerusalem.*
- 3) Years later another group of Jews return to Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra, an expert in the Law of God, who helps the people reorganize their religious and social life in order to safeguard the spiritual heritage of Israel.*

NEHEMIAH

The Book of Nehemiah may be divided into four parts:

- 1) The return of Nehemiah to Jerusalem, where he has been sent by the Persian emperor to govern Judah.*
- 2) The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.*
- 3) The solemn reading of the Law of God by Ezra and the people's confession of sin.*
- 4) Further activities of Nehemiah as governor of Judah. A notable feature of the book is the record of Nehemiah's deep dependence on God and his frequent prayers to Him.*

ESTHER

*The events of The Book of Esther, which take place at the winter residence of the Persian emperors, center around a Jewish heroine named Esther, who by her great courage and devotion to her people saved them from being exterminated by their enemies. The book explains the background and meaning of the Jewish festival of **Purim**.*

JOB

The Book of Job is the story of a good man who suffers total disaster — he loses all his children and property and is afflicted with a repulsive disease. Then in three series of poetic dialogues the author shows how Job's friend and Job himself react to these calamities. In the end, God himself whose dealings with mankind have been a prominent part of the discussion, appears to Job.

The friends of Job explains his sufferings in traditional religious terms. Since God, so they assume, always rewards good and punishes evil, the sufferings of Job can only mean that he has sinned. But for Job this is too simple; he does not deserve such cruel punishment, because he has been an unusually good and righteous man. He cannot

understand how God can let so much evil happen to one like himself, and he boldly challenges God. Job does not lose his faith, but he does long to be justified before God and to regain his honor as a good man.

God does not give an answer to Job's questions, but He does respond to Job's faith by overwhelming him with a poetic picture of His divine power and wisdom. Job then humbly acknowledges God as wise and great, and repents of the wild and angry words he had used.

The prose conclusion records how Job is restored to his former condition with even greater prosperity than before. God reprimands Job's friends for failing to understand the meaning of Job's suffering. Only Job had really sensed that God is greater than traditional religion had depicted Him.

PSALMS

The book of Psalms is the hymnbook and prayer book of the Bible. Composed by different authors over a long period of time, these hymns and prayers were collected and used by the people of Israel in their worship, and eventually this collection was included in their Scriptures.

These religious poems are of many kinds: there are hymns of praise and worship of God; prayers for help, protection, and salvation; pleas for forgiveness; songs of thanksgiving for God's blessings; and petitions for the punishment of enemies. These prayers are both personal and national; some portray the most intimate feelings of one person, while others represent the needs and feelings of all the people of God.

The psalms were used by Jesus, quoted by the writers of the New Testament, and became the treasured book of worship of the Christian Church from its beginning.

PROVERBS

*The book of Proverbs is a collection of moral and religious teachings in the form of sayings and proverbs. Much of it has to do with practical, everyday concerns. It begins with the reminder that **to have knowledge, you must first have reverence for the Lord**, and then goes on to deal with matters not only of religious morality, but also of common sense and good manner. Its many short sayings reveal the insights of ancient Israelite teachers about what a wise person will do in certain situations. Some of these concern family relations, others, business dealings. Some deal with matters of etiquette in social relationships, and others with the need for self-control. Much is said about such qualities as humility, patience, respect for the poor, and loyalty to friends.*

ECCLESIASTES

*The book of Ecclesiastes contains the thoughts of the Philosopher, a man who reflected deeply on how short and contradictory human life is, with its mysterious injustices and frustrations, and concluded that **life is useless**. He could not understand the ways of God, who controls human destiny. Yet, in spite of this, he advised people to work hard, and to enjoy the gifts of God as much and as long as they could.*

Many of the Philosopher's thoughts appear negative and even depressing. But the fact that this book is in the Bible shows that Biblical faith is broad enough to take into account such pessimism and doubt. Many have taken comfort in seeing themselves in the mirror of Ecclesiastes, and have discovered that the same Bible which reflects these thoughts also offers the hope in God that gives life its greater meaning.

SONG OF SONGS

The Song of Songs is a series of love poems, for the most part in the form of songs addressed by a man to a woman, and by the woman to the man. In some translations, the book is called the Song of Solomon, because it is attributed to Solomon in the Hebrew title.

These songs have often been interpreted by the Jews as a picture of the relationship between God and his people, and by Christians as a picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church.

ISAIAH

The Book of Isaiah is named for a great prophet who lived in Jerusalem in the latter half of the eighth century B.C. This book may be divided into three principal parts:

Chapters 1-39 come from a time when Judah, the southern kingdom, was threatened by a powerful neighbor, Assyria. Isaiah saw that the real threat to the life of Judah was not simply the might of Assyria, but the nation's own sin and disobedience toward God, and their lack of trust in him. In vivid words and actions the prophet called the people and their leaders to a life of righteousness and justice, and warned that failure to listen to God would bring doom and destruction. Isaiah also foretold a time of worldwide peace and the coming of a descendant of David who would be the ideal king.

Chapters 40-55 speak to a time when many of the people of Judah were in exile in Babylon, crushed and without hope. The prophet proclaimed that God would set His people free and take them home to Jerusalem to begin a new life. A notable theme of these chapters is that God is the Lord of history, and his plan for His people includes their mission to all nations, who will be blessed through Israel. The passages about **the Servant of the Lord** are among the best-known in the Old Testament.

Chapters 56-66 are for the most part addressed to people who were back in Jerusalem, and who needed reassurance that God was going to fulfill His promises to the nation. Concern is expressed for righteousness and justice and also for Sabbath observance, sacrifice, and prayer. A notable passage is 61.1-2, words used by Jesus at the beginning of his ministry to express his calling.

JEREMIAH

The prophet Jeremiah lived during the latter part of the seventh century and the first part of the sixth century B.C. During his long ministry he warned God's people of the catastrophe that was to fall upon the nation because of their idolatry and sin. He lived to see this prediction come true with the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, the destruction of the city and the Temple, and the exile to Babylonia of Judah's return of the people from exile and the restoration of the nation.

The book of Jeremiah may be divided into the following parts:

- 1) The call of Jeremiah.
- 2) Messages from God to the nation of Judah and its rulers during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiachim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah.
- 3) Material from the memoirs of Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary, including various prophecies and important events from the life of Jeremiah.
- 4) Messages from the Lord about various foreign nations.
- 5) A historical appendix, giving an account of the fall of Jerusalem, and the exile to Babylon.

Jeremiah was a sensitive man who deeply loved his people, and who hated to have to pronounce judgement upon them. In many passages he spoke with deep emotion about the things he suffered because God had called him to be a prophet. The word of the Lord was like fire in his hearth — he could not keep it back.

Some of the greatest words in the book point beyond Jeremiah's own troubled time to the day when there would be a new covenant, one that God's people would keep without a teacher to remind them, because it would be written on their hearts (31.31-34).

LAMENTATIONS

The book of Lamentations is a collection of five poems lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., and its aftermath of ruin and exile. In spite of the mournful nature of most of the book, there is also the note of trust in God and hope for the future. These poems are used by the Jews in worship on the annual days of fasting and mourning which commemorate the national disaster of 586 B.C.

EZEKIEL

The prophet Ezekiel lived in exile in Babylon during the period before and after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. His message was addressed both to the exiles in Babylonia and to the people of Jerusalem. The book of Ezekiel has six principal parts:

- 1) God's call to Ezekiel to be a prophet.

- 2) Warnings to the people about God's judgment on them and about the coming fall and destruction of Jerusalem.
- 3) Messages from the Lord regarding his judgment upon the various nations that oppressed and misled his people.
- 4) Comfort for Israel after the fall of Jerusalem and the promise of a brighter future.
- 5) The prophecy against God.
- 6) Ezekiel's picture of a restored Temple and nation.

Ezekiel was a man of deep faith and great imagination. Many of his insights came in the form of visions, and many of his messages were expressed in vivid symbolic actions. Ezekiel emphasized the need for inner renewal of the heart and spirit, and the responsibility of each individual for his own sins. He also proclaimed his hope for the renewal of the life of the nation. As a priest, as well as prophet, he had special interest in the Temple and in the need for holiness,

DANIEL

The Book of Daniel was written during a time when the Jews were suffering greatly under the persecution and oppression of a pagan king. Using stories and accounts of visions, the writer encourages the people of his time with the hope that God will bring the tyrant down and restore sovereignty to God's people. The book has two main parts:

- 1) Stories about Daniel and some of his fellow exiles, who through their faith in God and obedience to him triumph over their enemies. These stories are set in the time of the Babylonian and Persian Empires.
- 2) A series of visions seen by Daniel, which in the form of symbols present the successive rise and fall of several empires, beginning with Babylonia, and predict the downfall of the pagan oppressor and the victory of God's people.

HOSEA

The prophet Hosea preached in the northern kingdom of Israel, after the prophet Amos, during the troubled times before the fall of Samaria in 721 B.C. He was especially concerned about the idolatry of the people and their faithlessness toward God. Hosea boldly pictured this faithlessness in terms of his own disastrous marriage to an unfaithful woman. Just as his wife Gomer turned out to be unfaithful to him so God's people had deserted the Lord. For this, judgment would fall on Israel. Yet in the end God's constant love for His people would prevail. and He would win the nation back to Himself and restore the relationship. This love is expressed in the moving words: **How can I give you up, Israel? How can I abandon you? ... My heart will not let me do it! My love for you is too strong (11.8)**

JOEL

Little is known about the prophet Joel, and it is not clear just when he lived. But it seems likely that the book comes from the fifth or fourth century B.C., during the time of the Persian Empire. Joel describes a terrible invasion of locusts and a devastating drought in Palestine. In these events he sees a sign of the coming Day of the Lord, a time when the Lord will punish those who oppose his righteous will. The prophet conveys the Lord's call to the people to repent, and His promise of restoration and blessing for His people. Noteworthy is the promise that God will send His spirit upon all the people, men and women, young and old alike.

AMOS

Amos was the first prophet in the Bible whose message was recorded at length. Although he came from a town in Judah, he preached to the people of the northern kingdom of Israel, about the middle of the eight century B.C. It was a time of great prosperity, notable religious piety, and apparent security. But Amos saw that prosperity was limited to the wealthy and that it fed on injustice and on oppression of the poor. Religious observance was insincere, and security more apparent than real. With passion and courage he preached that God would punish the nation. He called for justice to **flow like a stream**, and said, **Perhaps the Lord will be merciful to the people of this nation who are still left alive (5.15).**

OBADIAH

This short book comes from some undetermined time after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., when Edom, Judah's age-old enemy to the southeast, not only rejoiced over the fall of Jerusalem but took advantage of Judah's plight to loot the city and help the invader. Obadiah prophesied that Edom would be punished and defeated, along with other nations that were the enemies of Israel.

JONAH

The Book of Jonah is unlike other prophetic books of the Bible in that it is a narrative, describing the adventures of a prophet who tried to disobey God's command. God told him to go to Nineveh, the capital of the great empire of Assyria, Israel's deadly enemy. But Jonah did not want to go there with God's message, because he was convinced that God would not carry out his threat to destroy the city. After a series of dramatic events, he reluctantly obeyed, and finally sulked when his message of doom did not come true.

The book portrays God's absolute sovereignty over His creation. But above all it portrays God as a God of love and mercy, who would rather forgive and save even the enemies of His people, than punish and destroy them.

MICAH

The prophet Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, was from a country town in Judah, the southern kingdom. He was convinced that Judah was about to face the same kind of national catastrophe that Amos had predicted for the northern kingdom, and for the same reason God would punish the hateful injustice of the people. Micah's message, however, contains more clear and notable signs of hope for the future.

Passages especially worth noting are the picture of universal peace under God (4.1-4); the prediction of a great king who would come from the family line of David and bring peace to the nation (5.2-4); and, in a single verse (6.8), the summary of much that the prophets of Israel had to say: What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God.

NAHUM

The Book of Nahum is a poem celebrating the fall of Nineveh, the capital city of Israel's ancient and oppressive enemy, the Assyrians. The fall of Nineveh, near the end of the seventh century B.C., is seen as the judgment of God upon a cruel and arrogant nation.

HABAKKUK

*The words of the prophet Habakkuk come from near the end of the seventh century B.C., at a time when the Babylonians were in power. He was deeply disturbed by the violence of these cruel people, and asked the Lord, **So why are you silent while they destroy people who are more righteous than they are?** (1.13). The Lord's answer was that he would take action in his own good time, and meanwhile those **Who are righteous will live because they are faithful to God** (2.4).*

MALACHI

The Book of Malachi comes from some time in the fifth century B.C. after the Temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt. The prophet's main concern is to call priests and people to renew their faithfulness to their covenant with God. It is clear that there is laxity and corruption in the life and worship of God's people. Priests and people are cheating God by not giving Him the offerings that are rightly due him, and by not living according to His teaching. But the Lord will come to judge and purify His people, sending ahead of Him His messenger to prepare the way and to proclaim His covenant:

SURVEY OF OLD TESTAMENT TIMES

PERIOD	LIFE EXPERIENCES	AFFIRMATIONS OF FAITH	RESPONSES
EXODUS 1250 BC References Genesis Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy Joshua Judges	A. IN EGYPT (EXODUS 1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • slavery and bondage • oppression and suffering B. IN THE WILDERNESS (Exodus 16) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • problems and difficulties • murmurings • distrust and betrayals C. IN THE PROMISED LAND (Exodus 3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • freedom • one God • sufficient land • community • identity • self-determination 	A. GOD (Exodus 3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lord of history • Liberator/Savior • takes the side of the oppressed • active, known by what She/He does B. PEOPLE OF THE COVENANT (Exodus 24; Deuteronomy 6, 7) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have their own identity as a people • a liberated people • relates with Yahweh C. PURPOSE OF THE LAW <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to establish justice in the Promised Land • to restore/maintain harmonious relationship • to provide instruction and guide for living 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the struggle for liberation and transformation of persons and communities

PERIOD	LIFE EXPERIENCES	AFFIRMATIONS OF FAITH	RESPONSES
SETTLEMENT 1200 - 1100 B.C.	Israel took possession of the land through: <i>infiltration</i> They came out of the desert or in the areas between the territories of the city states or in the central hill countries. <i>conversion and treaties</i> The people made friends with those who lived there (Joshua 9, 24) <i>battles against the city states</i> Joshua and his men took some cities by waging war against them.	A. GOD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • asserts Lordship • warrior God; fights for the oppressed (Joshua 6:10:10; 11:20 ; Exodus 15) B. LEADERSHIP (Judges) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • chosen by God, empowered, sent • not magistrates but liberating chieftains • for the people • no dynasty, emerged out of conflict and need (Judges 6) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to assert the people's right to the land • to establish unity among the people against the enemies (not fulfilled until the reign of King David)

PERIOD	LIFE EXPERIENCES	AFFIRMATIONS OF FAITH	RESPONSES
References Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	THE SITUATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yahweh as King (theocracy) • tribes bound by covenant (Joshua 24) • tribal confederacy formed 	C. LAND H <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • symbol of the covenant • a blessing from God • not only source of life but life itself (Psalm 137; Leviticus 25:23; Joshua 21: 	

Joshua Judges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • land revolts against city states • Canaanite fertility cults • cycle of prosperity, sinfulness, punishment, repentance, deliverance, restoration 	43-45)	
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THE NEW TESTAMENT

Christianity - set out to evangelize the world at a time of unprecedented political, social and cultural change. In Rome, Augustus came to power ostensibly - to restore the law and political process of the Republic [the form of government in effect before Julius Ceasar's seizure of power] which had led to a political struggle culminating in the murder of Ceasar by his opponents. Roman society in the period of the republic was hierarchical.

- *At the bottom were the slaves and subject peoples, devoid of personal rights or legal status.*
- *Social rank was based on wealth, with specific requirements in personal assets. One had to possess 250,000 denarii, for example, to be a senator. The total number of senators out of the estimated 50 million subjects of the empire has been figured at about 11500 or .1 percent.*
- *Slaves who had been granted freedom, no matter how great their wealth, could not move up the social ladder.*
- *Rural people . lived on the brink of disaster, victimized by absentee owners of the land they tilled by taxes, and by marauders who swept through their villages unchecked.*
- *In the cities, the rich and the powerful lived in great houses; the poor in terrible slums. , The rich set aside. open space in the cities and provided public entertainment, often dens and theaters which did little to ease the pain of poverty, and merely aggravated the awareness of the gulf between the powerful and the hopeless poor.*

In an attempt to gain some kind of identity, city dwellers organized neighborhood associations:

- *Craftsmen lived in clusters in sections of the cities (for example, the potters' quarters) and were organized politically as well as for parades, festivals, and community events.*
- *Others — especially those from distant lands transplanted to an unfamiliar city or town — sought to overcome their sense of alienation by joining with devotees of a deity, such as Dionysus of Isis.*

In commercial cities such as Ostia, Antioch or Corinth, cult centers for dozens of non local deities sprang up, attesting to the yearning for personal identity through joining with others of like conviction and commitment.

The imperial policy of sending into exile or demanding the suicide of those who opposed the ruling group produced profound anxiety. Even the wealthy began to seek solace in the worship of an exotic god or goddess, and many turned to magic as a way of guaranteeing protection for themselves against their enemies.

Religious Leadership

The official Jewish religious leadership, the priesthood, had become thoroughly secular, to the point that designation and confirmation of the High Priest was negotiated with the pagan rulers. The wealthy class in Palestine was indistinguishable in its way of life — villas, theaters, baths, gymnasia — from the rich of any pagan city or empire. The people of the land of Israel were exploited by absentee landlords. At issue in the minds of faithful Jews were not the future of their people and the criteria for participation in the covenant relationship with the God of Israel, but the reality of His power and the credibility of His covenant promises as well.

Early Christianity

As Christianity spread across the Roman Empire, its message was heard in a variety of ways. The common factor was the search for identity, but the specific questions and inspirations of those who heard and responded to the story of Jesus were deeply affected by their cultured and social background. This was clearly evident in the range - of ways in which the New Testament writers explained who Jesus was and what God's purpose through him was.

But it was not only the conceptual aspects of Christianity that was affected by the environment of the hearers. Equally diverse were the ways in which the early Christian communities themselves developed. Group leadership as well as group structure varied from place to place and from time to time. Some of the leaders relied on-association with Jesus; some on personal charisma, some on divine revelation, some on wisdom, and others On-proper ecclesiastical credentials. Variety is evident in the way in which the literature of the New Testament functioned, both among those for whom it was first written and then among subsequent generations. Some of the writings were personal letters. Others seem to be official declarations. Some were intended for a wide readership; others seem to have been written for the inner group only. We must therefore explore not only the literary forms employed by New Testament writers, but also the functions these writings were meant to serve.

CATEGORIES OF BOOKS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Gospel (4)

The word gospel means good news. These are the books in which Jesus' apostles wrote what they had seen and learned from Him.

Matthew

Mark

Luke

John

Acts of the Apostles (1)

This books tells about the witness of the apostles.

Letters (22)

These were written by the apostles and Christians addressed to the first Christian communities.

Romans	Titus
I Corinthians	Philemon
II Corinthians	Hebrews
Galatians	James
Ephesians	I Peter
Philippians	II Peter
Colossians	I John
I Thessalonians	II John
II Thessalonians	III John
I Timothy	Jude
II Timothy	Revelation

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

MATTHEW

The Gospel according to Matthew tells the good news that Jesus is 'the promised Savior, the one through whom God fulfilled the promises lie made to His people in the Old Testament. This good news is not only for the Jewish people, among whom Jesus Was born and lived, but for the whole world.

Matthew is carefully arranged. It begins with the birth of Jesus, describes his baptism and temptation, and then takes up his ministry of preaching; teaching, and healing in Galilee. After this the Gospel records Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem and the events of Jesus' last week, culminating in his crucifixion and resurrection.

This Gospel presents Jesus as the great Teacher, who has the authority to interpret the Law of God, and who teaches about the Kingdom of God. Much of his teaching is gathered by subject matter into five collections:

- 1) the Sermon on the Mount, which concerns the character, duties, privileges, and destiny of the citizens of the Kingdom of heaven (chapter 5-7);*
- 2) instructions to the twelve disciples for their mission (chapter 10);*
- 3) parables about the Kingdom of heaven (chapter 13);*
- 4) teaching on the meaning of discipleship (chapter 18); and*
- 5) teaching about the end of the present age and the coming of the Kingdom of God (chapters 24-25).*

MARK

The Gospel according to Mark begins with the statement that it is the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Jesus is pictured as a man of action and authority. His authority is seen in his teaching, in his power over demons, and in forgiving people's sins. Jesus speaks of himself as the Son of Man, who came to give his life to set people free from sin.

Mark presents the story of Jesus in a straightforward, vigorous way, with emphasis on what Jesus did, rather than on his words and teachings. After a brief prologue about John the Baptist and the baptism and temptation of Jesus' ministry of healing and teaching. As time goes on, the followers of Jesus come to understand him better, but Jesus' opponents become more hostile. The closing chapters report the events of Jesus' last week of earthly life, especially his crucifixion and resurrection.

The two endings to the Gospel, which are enclosed in brackets, are generally regarded as written by someone other than the author of Mark.

LUKE

*The Gospel according to Luke presents Jesus as both the promised Savior of Israel and as the Savior of all mankind. Luke records that Jesus was called by the Spirit of the Lord **to preach the Good News to the poor**, and this Gospel is filled with a concern for people with all kinds of need. The note of joy is also prominent in Luke, especially in the opening chapters that announce the coming of Jesus, and again at the conclusion, when Jesus ascends to heaven. The story of the growth and spread of the Christian faith after the ascension of Jesus is told by the same writer in the book of Acts.*

Parts 2 and 6 (see the outline below) contain much material that is found only in this Gospel, such as the stories about the song of the angels and the shepherds' visit at the birth of Jesus, Jesus in the Temple as a boy, and the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Lost Son. Throughout the Gospel great emphasis is placed on prayer, the Holy Spirit, the role of women in the ministry of Jesus, and God's forgiveness of sins.

JOHN

The Gospel according to John presents Jesus as the eternal Word of God who became a human being and lived among us. As the book itself says, this Gospel was written so that its readers might believe that Jesus is the promised Savior, the Son of God, and that through their faith in him they may have life (20.31).

After an introduction that identifies the eternal Word of God with Jesus, the first part of the Gospel presents various miracles which show that Jesus is the promised Savior, the Son of God. These are followed by discourses that explain what is revealed by the miracles. This part of the book tells how some people believed in Jesus and became his followers, while others opposed him and refused to believe. Chapters 13-17 record at length the close fellowship of Jesus with his disciples on the night of his arrest, and his words of preparation and encouragement to them on the eve of his crucifixion. The closing chapters tell of Jesus' arrest and trial, his crucifixion and resurrection, and his appearances to his disciples after the resurrection.

The story of the woman caught in adultery (8.1-11) is placed in brackets because many manuscripts and early translations omit it, while others include it in other places.

*John emphasizes the **gift** of eternal life through Christ, a gift which begins now and which comes to those who respond to Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life. A striking feature of John is the symbolic use of common things from everyday life to point to spiritual realities, such as water, bread, light the shepherd and his sheep, and the grapevine and its fruit.*

ACTS

*The Acts of the Apostles is a continuation of The Gospel according to Luke. Its chief purpose is to tell how Jesus' early followers, led by the Holy Spirit, spread the Good News about him **in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth** (1.8). It is the story of the Christian movement as it began among the Jewish people and went on to become a faith for the whole world. The writer was also concerned to reassure his readers that the Christians were not a subversive political threat to the Roman Empire, and that the Christian faith was the fulfillment of the Jewish religion.*

Acts may be divided into three principal parts, reflecting the ever widening area in which the Good News about Jesus was proclaimed and the church established:

- 1) the beginning of the Christian movement in Jerusalem following the ascension of Jesus;*
- 2) expansion into other parts of Palestine; and*
- 3) further expansion, into the Mediterranean world as far as Rome.*

An important feature of Acts is the activity of the Holy Spirit, who comes with power upon the believers in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost and continues to guide and strengthen the church and its leaders throughout the events reported in the book. The early Christian message is summarized in a number of sermons, and the events recorded in Acts show the power of this message in the lives of the believers and in the fellowship of the church.

ROMANS

Paul's Letter to the Romans was written to prepare the way for a visit Paul planned to make to the church at Rome. His plan was to work among the Christians there for a while and then, with their support, to go on to Spain. He wrote to explain his understanding of Christian faith and its practical implications for the lives of Christians. The book contains Paul's most complete statement of his message.

*After greeting the people of the church at Rome and telling them of his prayers for them, Paul states the theme of the letter: **The gospel reveals how God puts people right with himself; it is through faith-from beginning to end (1.17).***

Paul then develops this theme. All mankind, both Jews and Gentiles, needs to be put right with God, for all alike are under the power of sin. People are put right with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Next Paul describes the new life in union with Christ that results from this new relation with God. The believer has peace with God and is set free by God's Spirit from the power of sin and death. In chapters 5-8 Paul also discusses the purpose of the Law of God and the power of God's Spirit in the believer's life. Then the apostle wrestles with the question of how Jews and Gentiles fit into the plan of God for mankind. He concludes that the Jewish rejection of Jesus is part of God's plan for bringing all mankind within the reach of God's grace in Jesus Christ, and he believes that the Jews will not always reject Jesus. Finally, Paul writes about how the Christian life should be lived, especially about the way of love in relations with others. He takes up such themes as service to God, the duty of Christians to the state and to one another, and questions of conscience. He ends the letter with personal messages and with words of praise to God.

I CORINTHIANS

Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians was written to deal with the problem of Christian life and faith that had arisen in the church which Paul had established at Corinth. At that time Corinth was a great cosmopolitan Greek city, the capital of the Roman province of Achaia. It was noted for its thriving commerce, proud culture, widespread immorality, and variety of religions.

The apostle's chief concerns are with problems such as divisions and immorality in the church, and with questions about sex and marriage, matters of conscience, church order, gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the resurrection. With deep insight he shows how the Good News speaks to these questions.

Chapter 13, which presents love as the best of God's gifts to his people, is probably the most widely known passage in the book.

II CORINTHIANS

Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians was written during a difficult period in his relation with the church at Corinth. Some members of the church had evidently made strong attacks against Paul, but he shows his deep longing for reconciliation and expresses his great joy when this is brought about.

In the part of the letter Paul discusses his relationship with the church at Corinth, explaining why he had responded with severity to insult the opposition in the church and expressing his joy that this severity had resulted in repentance and reconciliation. Then he appeals to the church for a generous offering to help the needy Christians in Judea. In the final chapters Paul defends his apostleship against a few people at Corinth who had set themselves up as true apostles, while accusing Paul of being a false one.

GALATIANS

As the good news about Jesus began to be preached and welcomed among people who were not Jews, the question arose as to whether a person must obey the Law of Moses in order to be a true Christian. Paul had argued that this was not necessary — that in fact, the only sound basis for life in Christ was faith, by which all are put right with God. But among the churches of Galatia, a Roman province in Asia Minor, there had come people who opposed Paul and claimed that one must also observe the Law of Moses in order to be right with God.

Paul's Letter to the Galatians was written in order to bring back to true faith and practice those people who were being misled by this false teaching. Paul begins by defending his right to be called an apostle of Jesus Christ. He insists that his call to be an apostle came from God, not from any human authority, and that his mission was especially the non-Jews. Then he develops the argument that it is by faith alone that people are put right with God. In the concluding chapters Paul shows that Christian conduct flows naturally from the love that results from faith in Christ.

EPHESIANS

*Paul's Letter to the Ephesians is concerned first of all with **God's plan...to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head** (1.10). It is also an appeal to God's people to live out the meaning of his great plan for the unity of mankind through oneness with Jesus Christ.*

In the first part of Ephesians the writer develops the theme of unity by speaking of the way in which God the Father has chosen his people, how they are forgiven and set free from their sins through Jesus Christ the Son, and how God's great promise is guaranteed by the Holy Spirit. In the second part he appeals to the readers to live in such a way that their oneness in Christ may become real in their life together.

Several figures of speech are used to show the oneness of God's people in union with Christ: the church is like a body, with Christ as the head; or like a building, with Christ as the cornerstone; or like a wife, with Christ as the husband. This letter rises to great heights of expression as the writer is moved by the thought of God's grace in Christ. Everything is seen in the light of Christ's love, sacrifice, forgiveness, grace and purity.

PHILIPPIANS

Paul's Letter to the Philippians was written to the first church that Paul established on European soil, in the Roman province of Macedonia. It was written while the apostle was in prison, and at a time when he was troubled by the opposition of other Christian workers toward himself and was distressed by false teaching in the church at Philippi. Yet this letter breathes a joy and confidence that can be explained only by Paul's deep faith in Jesus Christ.

The immediate reason for writing the letter was to thank the Philippian Christians for the gift which they had sent to help him in his time of need. He used this opportunity to reassure them, so that they may have courage and confidence in spite of all his troubles and their own as well. He pleads with them to have the humble attitude of

Jesus, rather than to be controlled by selfish ambition and pride. He reminds them that their life in union with Christ is a gift of God's grace which they have received through faith, not through obedience to the ceremonies of the Jewish Law. He writes of the joy and peace that God gives to those who live in union with Christ.

This letter is marked by its emphasis on joy, confidence, unity, and perseverance in the Christian faith and life. It also reveals the deep affection Paul had for the church at Philippi.

COLOSSIANS

Paul's Letter to the Colossians was written to the church at Colossae, a town in Asia Minor east of Ephesus. This church had not been established by Paul, but was in an area for which Paul felt responsible, as he sent our workers from Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province of Asia. Paul had learned that there were false teachers in the church at Colossae who insisted that in order to know God and have full salvation one must worship certain spirit rulers and authorities. In addition, these teachers said, one must submit to special rites such as circumcision and must observe strict rules about foods and other matters.

Paul writes to oppose these teachings with the true Christian message. The heart of his reply is that Jesus Christ is able to give full salvation and that these other beliefs and practices actually lead away from him. Through Christ, God created the world and through him he is bringing it back to himself. Only in union with Christ is their hope of salvation for the world. Paul then spells out the implications of this great teaching for the lives of believers.

It is noteworthy that Tychicus, who took this letter to Colossae for Paul, was accompanied by Onesimus, the slave on whose behalf Paul wrote Philemon.

I THESSALONIANS

Thessalonica was the capital city of the Roman province of Macedonia. Paul established a church there after he left Philippi. Soon, however, there was opposition from Jews who were jealous of Paul's success in preaching the Christian message among the non-Jews who had become interested in Judaism. Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica and go on to Berea. Later on, after he reached Corinth, Paul received a personal report from his companion and fellow worker Timothy about the situation in the church at Thessalonica.

Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians was then written to encourage and reassure the Christians there. He gives thanks for the news about their faith and love; he reminds them of the kind of life he had lived while he was with them, and then answers questions that had arisen in the church about the return of Christ: Could a believer who died before Christ's return still share in the eternal life that his return will bring? And when will Christ come again? Paul takes this occasion to tell them to go on working quietly while waiting in hope for Christ's return.

II THESSALONIANS

Confusion over the expected return of Christ continued to cause disturbances in the church at Thessalonica. Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians deals with the belief that the day of the Lord's coming had already arrived. Paul corrects this idea, pointing out that before Christ returns, evil and wickedness will reach a climax under the leadership of a mysterious figure called **the Wicked One**, who would be opposed to Christ.

The apostle emphasizes the need for his readers to remain steady in their faith in spite of trouble and suffering, to work for a living as did Paul and his fellow workers, and to persevere in doing good.

I TIMOTHY

Timothy, a young Christian from Asia Minor, was the son of a Jewish and a Greek father. He became a companion and assistant to Paul in missionary work. Paul's First Letter to Timothy deals with three main concerns.

The Letter is first of all a warning against false teaching in the church. This teaching, a mixture of Jewish and non-Jewish ideas, was based on the belief that the physical world is evil and that one can attain salvation only by special secret knowledge and by practices such as avoiding certain food and not marrying. The letter also contains instructions about church administration and worship, with a description of the kind of character that church leaders and helpers should have. Finally, Timothy is advised how to be a good servant of Jesus Christ and about the responsibilities that he has toward various groups of believers.

II TIMOTHY

Paul's Second Letter to Timothy consists largely of personal advice to Timothy, as a younger colleague and assistant. The main theme is endurance. Timothy is advised and encouraged to keep on witnessing faithfully to Jesus Christ, to hold to the true teaching of the Good News and the Old Testament, and to do his duty as teacher and evangelist, all in the face of suffering and opposition.

Timothy is especially warned about the dangers of becoming involved in foolish and ignorant arguments that do no good, but only ruin the people who listen to them.

In all this, Timothy is reminded of the example of the writer's own life and purpose — his faith, patience, love, endurance, and suffering in persecution.

TITUS

Titus was a Gentile convert to Christianity who became a fellow worker and assistant to Paul in his missionary work. Paul's Letter to Titus is addressed to his young helper in Crete, who had been left there to supervise the work of the church. The letter expresses three main concerns.

First, Titus is reminded of the kind of character that church leaders should have, especially in view of the bad character of many Cretans. Next, Titus is advised how to teach the various groups in the church, the older men, the older women (who are, in turn, to teach the younger women), the young men, and the slaves. Finally, the writer gibes Titus advice regarding Christian conduct, especially the need to be peaceful and friendly, and to avoid hatred, argument, and division in the church.

PHILEMON

Philemon was a prominent Christian, probably a member of the church at Colossae and the owner of a slave named Onesimus. This slave had run away from his master, and then somehow he had come in contact with Paul, who was then in prison. Through Paul, Onesimus became a Christian. Paul's Letter to Philemon is an appeal to Philemon to be reconciled to his slave, whom Paul is sending back to him, and to welcome him not only as a forgiven slave but as a Christian brother.

HEBREWS

The Letter to the Hebrews was written to a group of Christians who, faced with increasing opposition, were in danger of abandoning the Christian faith. The writer encourages them in their faith primarily by showing that Jesus Christ is the true and final revelation of God. In doing this he emphasizes three truths:

- 1) Jesus is the eternal Son of God, who learned true obedience to the Father through the suffering that he endured. As the Son of God, Jesus is superior to the prophets of the Old Testament, to the angels, and to Moses himself.*
- 2) Jesus has been declared by God to be an eternal priest, superior to the priests of the Old Testament.*
- 3) Through Jesus the believer is saved from sin, fear, and death; and Jesus, as High Priest, provides the true salvation, which was only foreshadowed by the rituals and animal sacrifices of the Hebrew religion.*

By citing the example of the faith of some famous persons in Israel's history (chapter 11), the writer appeals to his readers to remain faithful, and in chapter 12 he urges his readers to continue being faithful to the end, with eyes fixed on Jesus, and to endure whatever suffering and persecution may come to them. The book closes with words of advice and warning.

JAMES

*The Letter from James is a collection of practical instructions, written to **all God's people scattered over the whole world**. The writer uses many vivid figures of speech to present instructions regarding practical wisdom and guidance for Christian attitudes and conduct. From the Christian perspective he deals with a variety of topics such as riches and poverty, temptation, good conduct, prejudice, faith and actions, the use of the tongue, wisdom, quarreling; pride and humility, judging others, boasting, patience, and prayer.*

The letter emphasizes the importance of actions along with faith, in the practice of the Christian religion.

I PETER

*The First Letter from Peter was addressed to Christians, here called **God's chosen people**, who were scattered throughout the northern part of Asia Minor. The main purpose of the letter is-,to encourage the readers, who were facing persecution and suffering for their faith. The writer does this by reminding his readers of the Good News about Jesus Christ, whose death, resurrection, and promised coming gave them hope. In the light of this they are to accept and endure their suffering, confident that it is a test of the genuineness of their faith and that they will be rewarded on **the Day when Jesus Christ is revealed**.*

Along with his encouragement in time of trouble, the writer also urges his readers to live as people who belong to Christ.

II PETER

*The Second Letter from Peter is addressed to a wide circle of early Christians. Its main concern is to combat the work of false teachers and the immorality which results from such teaching. The answer to these problems is found in holding to the true knowledge of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, knowledge which has been conveyed by persons who themselves have seen Jesus and have heard him teach. The writer is especially concerned with the teaching of those who claim that Christ will not return again. He says that the apparent delay in Christ's return is due to the fact that God **does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants all to turn away from their sins**.*

I JOHN

The First Letter of John has two main purposes: to encourage its readers to lie in fellowship with God and with his Son, Jesus Christ, and to warn them against following false teaching that would destroy their fellowship. This teaching was based on the belief that evil results from contact with the physical world, and so Jesus, the Son of God, could not really have been a human being. Those teachers claimed that to be saved was to be set free from concern with life in this world; and they also taught that salvation had nothing to do with matters of morality or of love for one's fellow-man.

In opposition to this teaching the writer clearly states that Jesus Christ was a real human being, and he emphasizes that all who believe in Jesus and love God must also love one another.

II JOHN

The Second Letter of John was written by the Elder to the dear Lady and to her children, probably meaning a local church and its members. The brief message is an appeal to love one another and a warning against false teachers and their teachings.

III JOHN

The Third Letter of John was written by the Elder to a church leader named Gains. The writer praises Gains because of his help to other Christians, and warns against a man named Diotrephes.

JUDE

*The Letter from Jude was written to warn against false teachers who claimed to be believers. In this brief-letter, which is similar in content to 2 Peter, the writer encourages his readers **to fight on for the faith which once and for all God has given to his people**.*

REVELATION

The Revelation to John was written at a time when Christians were being persecuted because of their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. The writer's main concern is to give his readers hope and encouragement, and to urge them to remain faithful during times of suffering and persecution.

For the most part the book consists of several series of revelations and visions presented in symbolic language that would have been understood by Christians of that day, but would have remained a mystery to all others. As with the themes of a symphony, the themes of this book are repeated again and again in different ways through the

various series of visions. Although there are differences of opinion regarding the details of interpretation of the book, the central theme is clear: through Christ the Lord, God will finally and totally defeat all of His enemies, including Satan, and will reward His faithful people with the blessings of a new heaven and a new earth when this victory is complete.