Summaries of the Books of the Old and New Testaments

by

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GENESIS

Author and Dates: Moses wrote the book of Genesis while Israel was enslaved in Egypt (either 1446 B.C. or 1290 B.C.)

Purpose: To teach Israel that leaving Egypt and possessing Canaan was God’s design. To motivate ancient Israel and us to abandon that which enslaves and seek the destiny that God has intended.

Outline:
I. The primeval history (1-11)
   -creation (1-2)
   -fall of humanity (3)
   -covenant with Adam
   -flood (6-10)
   -covenant with Noah
   -tower of Babel (11)
II. The patriarchal history (12-36)
   -promise to Abraham (12)
   -covenant with Abraham (15)
   -circumcision (17)
III. Joseph and the migration to Egypt (37-50)
   -Joseph’s success in Egypt (39)
   -Jacob’s death and blessing (49)

Major Characters: God, Adam, Eve, Serpent, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph

Book Summary: Genesis is the story of the creation, of human disobedience and its tragic consequences, and of God’s choosing Abraham and his offspring—the beginning of the story of redemption. The book of Genesis is the recording of two significant histories. The primeval history (chapters 1-11) poetically describes the earliest chapters of humanity: creation, the fall, the spread of sin and judgment, and the introduction of salvation by the grace of God. The second history (chapters 12-50) records the growth of God’s people and presents their faithfulness and failures. This history ends with God’s people residing in Egypt at the time of Joseph.

Genesis begins the biblical story with God as Creator, human beings as created in God’s image but fallen, and God’s response through a redemptive creation of a chosen people—and doing so through all kinds of circumstances and despite their faults. The Genesis narratives go to great lengths to show that God alone would ultimately fulfill his covenant promises.

Themes:
Salvation - God entering into relationship with individuals and people.
Sin – What went wrong (and is wrong) with us and the universe.
Divine Grace – God shows unmerited favor and kindness toward sinners.
Faith – What it takes to get to the promise land.
Deliverance – God takes care of (delivers) his people.
Sovereignty – God is in complete control despite the apparent power of the opposition.
EXODUS

Author and Dates: The book of Exodus was written by Moses to the Israelites on the plains of Moab as they were preparing to enter the Promised Land (around 1410 BC or 1255 B.C., depending on the exact date of the exodus from Egypt).

Purpose: Divine authorization of Moses’ covenant order for the nation. To motivate the readers to trust in God’s deliverance, law, and instructions for worship under the authority of Moses.

Outline:

I. Deliverance Under Moses (1-18)
   - Israel in Egypt (1-11)
   - plagues (5-11)
   - Exodus to Sinai (12-18)

II. Law under Moses: Covenant and law (19-24)
    - covenant with Moses
    - 10 commandments (20)

III. Worship under Moses: Rebellion and renewal (25-40)
     - golden calf and Moses’ intercession (32-33)
     - Consecration of the Tent of Meeting (40)

Major Characters: Moses, Aaron, and Pharaoh

Book Summary: The book of Exodus reads like a great epic with the hero, Moses, continually at the center of events. Moses is born in the midst of toil and oppression. However his miraculous birth anticipates a life that will prove to be a tremendous blessing to Israel. Moses is eventually called by God to liberate the Israelites from the oppressive hand of imperial Egypt. This "exodus" is marked by a dramatic confrontation with Pharaoh and multiple examples of the power of God. Upon the acquisition of freedom, Israel embarks on a journey to Sinai where God gives Moses the 10 Commandments and the Book of the Covenant. This great encounter transitions into a prolonged discussion on worship, the construction of the tabernacle, and the organization of priests and religious life.

Exodus plays an important role in the biblical story since it tells the basic story of God’s saving his people from bondage. This exodus is a major foreshadowing of the promised “second exodus” in Isaiah 40-66 and thus for Jesus’ own departure (Luke 9:30).

Themes:

Suffering – The blessing of God when it hurts.
Loyalty – God is loyal to us, which causes us to be dedicated to God.
Deliverance – God’s desire to save people and rescue them from despair
Divine Presence – The tabernacle is the place of God’s presence and Israel’s worship.
Transcendence – A glimpse at the powerful, eternal, holy character of God.
Law – The revelation of God’s just and loving principles that should direct our lives.
Judgment – God is holy and his judgment of his people is righteous yet tempered with mercy.
Worship – The significance of worship and the benefits to the participants.
LEVITICUS

Author and Dates: The book of Leviticus was written by Moses to the Israelites on the plains of Moab as they were preparing to enter the Promised Land (around 1410 B.C. or 1255 B.C., depending on the exact date of the exodus from Egypt).

Purpose: To instruct Israel in proper worship both in the wilderness and the land.

Outline:
I. Regulations of sacrifice (1-7)
II. Regulation of Priests (8-10)
III. Regulations of Uncleaness and its treatment (11-16)
   - Day of Atonement (16)
IV. Prescriptions for practical holiness (17-27)
   - Regulations of Holy Living (17-25)
   - Blessings and Curses (26)
   - Regulations of Vows (27)

Major Characters: Israelite Priests, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu

Book Summary: The book of Leviticus is a fascinating retelling of the desired religious life for ancient Israel. Various rituals and practices are performed that symbolize and address a variety of practical and significant aspects of people’s life before God. Every aspect of this religious program was designed to reveal different aspects of God’s character as well as bring healing and blessing to those who have faith. While many of the customs appear unusual at first glance, Leviticus offers contemporary readers an alluring invitation to the cleansing, hopeful, personal, and social restoration, and intimate life with God that only the Creator could provide.

Leviticus is the part of God’s story where the Israelites are given instructions on how to be holy, on how to be truly acceptable to God and in right relationships with one another—which they could not achieve without God’s gracious provision.

Themes:
- Holiness – The various laws have to do with holiness before God and with love of neighbor.
- Repentance – The acknowledgment and turning away from sin.
- Forgiveness – The satisfaction and removal of sin.
- Restoration – The recovering of a meaningful relationship with God and others.
- Doubt and Assurance – Obedience flows from confidence in God’s promises.
NUMBERS

Author and Dates: The book of Numbers was written by Moses to the 2nd generation of Israelites on the plains of Moab as they were preparing to enter the Promised Land (around 1410 B.C. or 1255 B.C., depending on the exact date of the exodus from Egypt).

Purpose: To inspire the present generation of God’s people to avoid the failures of the past and trust Him for their victory and needs. To call the second generation of Israel to arms as the holy army of God.

Outline:
I. The Magnificent Collection of the First Generation: The people of God prepare to enter the promised land (1-10)
II. The Tragic Failure of the First Generation (10-25)
   - From Sinai to Kadesh (10-12)
   - Forty years near Kadesh (13-19)
   - Rebellion of the spies (13-14)
   - From Kadesh to the plains of Moab (20-22)
III. The Magnificent Collection of the Second Generation
   - Israel in the plains of Moab (22-36)
   - Balaam and Balak (22-24)

Major Characters: Moses, Miriam, Aaron, God, Korah, Balaak, Balaam, and Joshua

Book Summary: The book of Numbers picks up where the book of Exodus left off, with their departure from Sinai to their arrival at the edge of the Promised Land—namely the plains of Moab. The first ten chapters portray the collection of the fighting men of Israel. This group, exceeding numbers of 600,000, speaks loudly of the faithfulness of God as He protected and built a people once facing slavery and extinction. However, the story takes a dismal turn as this 1st generation of Israelites, who experienced such blessing from God, failed miserably in their rebellion.

Nevertheless, the tragedy turns into hope as the 2nd generation is assembled and prepares to conquer the Promised Land. The book of Numbers provides an insightful description of how humans tend to fail spiritually. Conversely, it is a tremendous book of hope and calls every generation of God’s people to embrace a new beginning and trust God.

The significant part of Israel’s story that is recorded in Numbers was retold throughout the rest of the Old Testament (Deut. 1-4; Neh. 9; Psalm 78, 105, 106, 135). This stresses the importance of God’s faithfulness to his people despite their repeated failures.

Themes:
   God’s covenant loyalty toward Israel.
   Israel’s repeated failure to keep covenant with God.
   The continuation and preservation of God’s people.
   The spiritual failures often experienced by God’s people.
   Despite failures, hope and a new beginning is possible.
   God turns all things for good for his people, including the curses of their enemies.
DEUTERONOMY

Author and Dates: The majority of the book of Deuteronomy was written by Moses to the Israelites as they were making plans to enter the promised land (around 1410 B.C. or 1255 B.C., depending on the exact date of the exodus from Egypt).

Purpose: To guide the nation in covenant renewal under Joshua. To offer God’s people a programmatic document that lovingly outlines the contours of God’s relationship with his people.

Outline:

I. Introduction: the covenant mediator (1:1-1:5)
II. God’s Generosity: the covenant history (1:6-4:49)
III. God’s Expectations: the covenant life (5-26)
   -The 10 commandments (5)
IV. Rewards and Punishments: the covenant ratification (27-30)
V. Succession of Leadership: Dynasty and covenant continuity (31-34)

Major Characters: God, Moses, Israelites, and Joshua

Book Summary: The book of Deuteronomy is a powerful document that outlines God’s great love for his people and the direction by which one can fully enjoy that love. Written in similar fashion to ancient Near Eastern treaties, the book speaks tenderly yet firmly to an audience asking the question "How do I develop and maintain a meaningful relationship with God?" Deuteronomy draws the reader to reflect upon God’s gracious acts in history and compels the reader to gratitude. The author’s main purpose in this book is to draw out the central message of the Sinai narratives.

This gratitude enables the individual to face life with the power of God. It contains instructions to leaders (prophets, priests and kings). It explains the "heart" behind the law and our obligation to defend the poor, the misfortunate, and the disenfranchised. It reveals God’s great desire to bless his people and his willingness to discipline his people for their ultimate benefit. The book concludes with the meaning and procedure of the succession of leadership, namely from Moses to Joshua.

Deuteronomy concludes the Pentateuch with constant reminders of God’s covenant love and faithfulness despite his people’s constant sinful rebellion.

Themes:

Love
Loyalty
Covenant
Law
Learning
Leadership
Justice
JOSHUA

Author and Dates: The book of Joshua is named for its leading character. The book's author, however, is not explicitly mentioned. A number of features point to a date of origin in the late second millennium B.C.

Purpose: To teach Israel how to live in the land that God has given them.

Outline:
I. The promised land conquered (1-12)
   -Jericho taken and cursed. Rahab spared (6)
II. The promised land distributed (13-22)
III. The promised land to be kept in covenant obedience (23-24)

Major Characters: God, Joshua

Book Summary: The book of Joshua shows that the Lord did fulfill his promises to Abraham (Gen. 13:15) and Moses (Ex. 3:8) in giving Israel the Promised Land. Thus, this book is a lesson on the faithfulness of God and his promises (cf. 21:43-45; 23:14). At the same time, the book of Joshua sets the stage for the beginning of a new era in God’s dealing with his people—namely, the history of Israel’s failure to trust God and live up to their covenant obligations as his people (cf. 23:15-16). This had been characteristic of Israel in the past as recorded in the Pentateuch and this characterizes the historical books that follow.

Themes:
- The partial conquest, distribution, and settlement of the promised land.
- The dangers of idolatry.
- Israel’s need for continuing covenant faithfulness to the one true God.

JUDGES

Author and Dates: The earliest the book of Judges could have been written is after the monarchy of Israel was established (1020 B.C.). However, it could have been written as late as the exile (586 – 538 B.C.). The book's author is not explicitly mentioned.

Purpose: To support the monarchy and give reasons why they needed a king (a king described in Deut 17). To inspire God’s people to resist their selfish impulses and trust God as their need for a king becomes apparent.

Outline:
I. Faltering conquest (1:1-2:5)
   -Joshua’s victory was only partial (Josh. 15:63, 16:10, 17:13, 24:16-20)
   -The conquest was incomplete and idolatry increased (Judges 2:12,14)
II. Cycles under the rule of “the Judges” (2:6-16:31)
   -cycle of oppression, retribution, mercy, deliverance, sin….
   -Samson (13-16)
III. Anarchy was rampant under Levites: religious and moral disorder (17-21).
Major Characters: God, Angel of the Lord, Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Abimelech, Jephthah, Samson, and Levites

Book Summary: The book of Judges is a fascinating collection of stories containing humor, tragedy, and irony. Following the successful endeavors of Joshua, the next generations are faced with the challenge of continuing the acquisition of the Promised Land. But in contrast to the faithfulness that marked Joshua’s generation, the present Israelites proved far more fickle. Several narratives are strung together with a rich diversity of characters.

Each story is comical and tragic. Despite God’s abiding presence and faithfulness, the Israelites choose to abandon God’s ways and seek their own desires. Each narrative records the great consequences of their actions and their plea to God for help. Revealing their folly and faithlessness, God continually rescued Israel from their self-afflicted plight.

Two central lessons are found in the book of Judges: First, the welfare of the nation depended directly on a knowledge of God’s will, the Torah; Second, God would punish his people for their unfaithfulness to his covenant.

Themes:
- The Nature of Humanity - humanity is capable of great goodness as well as the greatest shame
- The Abiding Presence of God - God is always with his people, despite the appearance of his absence
- Consequences - Acts of infidelity do render consequences despite God’s grace and forgiveness
- God’s Constant Rescue of his people.

RUTH

Author and Dates: The book of Ruth records events during the time of the Judges (pre-1020). It was probably written either at an early or late stage in David’s reign. The book supported David against those who insinuated that David was not a fully loyal and qualified Israeliite king because of his foreign ancestry.

Purpose: Through a wonderful story of redemption, the book of Ruth served to establish the legitimacy of David’s kingship despite his foreign ancestress.

Outline:
I. Naomi’s Bitterness (1)
II. Ruth Discovers Potential Redeemer (2)
III. Boaz agrees to be Redeemer (3)
IV. Boaz Acquires Right to be Redeemer (4:1-12)
V. Naomi’s Blessing (4:13-17)
VI. Ruth’s Genealogy (4:18-21)

Major Characters: Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz

Book Summary: The book of Ruth is a story of romance, redemption, and loyalty. The story begins with the character Naomi who has lost her husband and two sons, leaving her destitute in a foreign land. The
suffering is overwhelming as she turns bitter and angry against God. Nevertheless, Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, forgoes the safety and provision of her own extended family and pledges her allegiance to Naomi. As they struggle to survive, Ruth is discovered by Boaz, a relative of Naomi, who falls in love with Ruth. Boaz acquires the right to become her husband and delivers Ruth and Naomi from their plight. The book concludes with a genealogy that demonstrates that King David, and eventually Jesus, descends from the foreigner Ruth.

The book of Ruth tells the story of God’s faithfulness to his people in a specific case, as a Moabite woman becomes part of his story of redemption.

Themes:
- **Loyalty** – The power of loyalty in relationships is dramatically portrayed.
- **Redemption** – The salvation and deliverance of individuals who cannot save themselves.
- **Providence** – God’s direction of people’s lives despite the difficult times.
- **Transformation** – From bitterness and disappointment to faith and contentment

**1 & 2 SAMUEL**

Author and Dates: Samuel records events that took place sometime between 1100 B.C. and 970 B.C. The final form of the book did not take shape until after Solomon’s reign 940 BC and could have undergone revision as late as the exile (586 B.C.).

Purpose: To teach Israel that they should hope in the Davidic line, despite the trouble caused by David’s shortcomings. To instruct the readers to trust in God’s anointed leaders, despite apparent shortcomings, as they develop their own heart for God.

Outline:
- **I. The role of Samuel:** Foundation of the Kingdom (1 Sam 1-1 Sam 7)
- **II. The Failures of Saul’s Kingdom** (1 Sam 8-1 Sam 15)
  - David’s kingdom (1 Sam 16-2 Sam 20)
    - David’s ascent to the throne (1 Sam 17-2 Sam 4)
    - David’s kingship and its glory and accomplishments (2 Sam 5-9)
    - David’s kingship and its weakness and failure (2 Sam 10-20)
- **III. Future of the Kingdom** (2 Sam 21-2 Sam 24)
  - final reflections on David’s reign

Major Characters: Samuel, Saul, David, Jonathon, Bathsheba, Joab, Absalom, and Nathan

Book Summary: The book of Samuel tells the story of Israel’s transition from Judges’ rule to kingship. Samuel, the great prophet, plays a key role as God’s messenger and leader. Samuel anoints Saul as the first king of Israel but his life is characterized by fear and failure. The need for a king "after God’s own heart" becomes apparent and is eventually satisfied by David.

The book provides the most comprehensive account of David’s life, both his victories and struggles, politically as well as personally. David’s trust and reliance upon God define his rise to the throne. However his sin complicates his reign as difficulties are experienced in his relationships that threaten to undo him. The book calls for a complete trust in David as well as his royal line, a call that comes
directly from God as he promised to deliver His people through such a figure. But it also warns of the conflict, pain, and loss that follows sin and disobedience.

The book of Samuel takes God’s story into the monarchy, especially by means of the story of King David, a man of faith even while a man of weakness. God’s covenant with David is fulfilled finally in the ultimate Son of David, Jesus of Nazareth.

Themes:
- Kingship - God’s People are to be led by a king.
- Loyalty - Trusting the Davidic line.
- Retribution - Blessings and curses for acts of obedience and disobedience.
- God’s Presence - God dwelling among his people – the Ark of the Covenant, Jerusalem, with his people.

1 & 2 KINGS

Author and Dates: 1 & 2 Kings describe the period of the monarchy in ancient Israel (970–586 B.C.). While the books do not specify an author, they could not have been written before the sixth century B.C., since 2 Kings 25:27–30 describes the release of King Jehoiachin from prison in Babylon in 561 and the books must therefore date from some time after that.

Purpose: The nation deserved the exile, but restoration was possible through full repentance.

Outline:
I. Failure and hope in Solomon years (1 Kings 1-12)
II. Failure and hope in the Divided years (1 Kings 12- 2 Kings 17)
   - Jeroboam and Rehoboam - northern kingdom (“Israel”) and southern kingdom (“Judah”)
   - Israel is exiled (2 Kings 8- 2 Kings 17)
III. Failure and Hope in Judah’s final years (2 Kings 18-25)
   - Babylonian exile of Judah

Book Summary: The book of 1 & 2 Kings describes God’s faithfulness to his people despite their sin. Despite ending with the judgment of exile, there was still hope in God’s promises at the end of 2 Kings. God had made an eternal promise to David (2 Sam. 7:16) and at the close of the book the writer notes that the house of David was not only still intact but even flourishing in the house of the king of Babylon (2 Kings 25:28). This is meant to encourage God’s people to be hopeful and trust that God will ultimately fulfill all his promises.

Themes:
- The decline and eventual dissolution of the monarchy in Israel
- The fateful national consequences of Israel’s disloyalty to God
- The role of the prophets in speaking for God’s to his people
- The expulsion of God’s people from the land
1 & 2 CHRONICLES

Author and Dates: Chronicles was written by an unknown author after the Cyrus Edict (538 B.C.) freed the Israelites from slavery in Babylon and enabled them to return to their homeland.

Purpose: An account of history (from Adam to exile) written to direct the restoration of the kingdom during the post-exilic period. The Chronicler (we don't know his name) wrote this history of Israel to direct God’s people to take full advantage of the second chance God had given them and create for themselves a future of celebration and fulfillment.

Outline:

I. The Collection of God’s People: Genealogies of God’s people (1 Chronicles 1-9)
II. David as a Model: United Kingdom (1 Chronicles 10-2 Chronicles 9)
III. Solomon as a Model: Divided Kingdom (2 Chronicles 10-28)
IV. Mixed Examples of other Kings: Reunited Kingdom (2 Chronicles 29-36)

Major Characters: God, David, Solomon, and Kings of Judah

Book Summary: Chronicles begins with a profound introduction of genealogies. These genealogies place the post-exilic Israelites in line with God’s people from the beginning. They also contain names from all twelve tribes of Israel demonstrating that any future success will be dependent upon Israel’s willingness to include those different from themselves as well as a deliberate effort live in harmony. The genealogies are followed by selected episodes of David’s life. Most of the negative portraits of David recorded earlier in Kings is omitted, casting David in a positive light and an example for the post-exilic audience.

Similarly, the Chronicler writes extensively of Solomon and his success, hoping that his readers follow suit. The final portion of the book is an abbreviated history of the kings of Judah. This final section offers both positive and negative models for post-exilic Israel. The Chronicler anticipates many struggles common to people struggling with their faith. In short, Chronicles was written to help God’s people experience the kind of future that God intends, fully realizing the love and power of God.

Themes:
- The Future
- Personal Responsibility
- God’s Justice and Forgiveness
- Unity of God’s People
- Second Chances
- Worship
EZRA-NEHEMIAH

Author and Dates: The book was likely written in the 4th century B.C. after Nehemiah’s ministry serving as a guide to future generations.

Purpose: To defend the legitimacy of the Ezra-Nehemiah program of renewal (Ezra rebuilds temple and Nehemiah rebuilds city walls) and the need to continue it. To direct God’s people to re-establish their identity in God and give them the wisdom to nurture and protect that identity.

Outline:
I. Vision caste for a New Identity (1)
   II. Community Builds a New Identity (Ezra 2-Nehemiah 7)
       - Struggle and success for Zerubbabel (Ezra 2-6)
       - Struggle and success for Ezra (Ezra 7-10)
       - Struggle and success for Nehemiah (Neh 1-7)
   III. Celebration of Identity: Successes (Neh 7-12)
   IV. Continuing struggle for restoration (Neh 13)

Major Characters: Ezra, Nehemiah, Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Haggai, Zechariah, Darius, and Sanballat

Book Summary: This book offers dynamic accounts of the victories and struggles of God’s People as they attempt to rebuild their lives. Its content primarily describes the rebuilding and reform in postexilic Judah during the latter half of the fifth century B.C. Ezra returns to the land to lead the community in establishing the most significant priority known to humanity, that is, the worship of God. Despite opposition in the form of intimidation and seduction, the community is successful in locking in on their relationship with God through building the temple and studying God’s word.

Nehemiah follows Ezra with a building project in mind – namely rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. This wall would distinguish God’s people from the surrounding groups, but was not intended to separate them from the world entirely. Engaging in the world around them, God’s people would maintain their identity by nurturing their faith within community and wisely interacting with their surroundings.

Themes:
   Identity
   Community
   Opposition
   Prayer
ESTHER

Author and Dates: This book was written by an unknown author some time after the reign of Xerxes (post-465 B.C.) and before the conquests of Alexander the Great (pre-331 B.C.).

Purpose: The story of Esther was written to explain how God providentially protects his people.

Outline:

I. The Feasts of Xerxes: Esther and Mordecai in the Persian court (1-2)
   - a change of queens
   - Esther becomes queen and
   - Mordecai serves the king

II. The Feasts of Esther (2-7)
   - Trouble for Jews (2-4)
     - Haman’s plot
     - Esther’s and Mordecai’s plot
     - Esther’s intervention (5-7)
       - Haman honored; Haman threatens Mordecai; Mordecai protected by king; and
       - Haman killed.

III. The Feasts of Purim (8-10)
   - Victory for the Jews (8-9)
     - Esther and Mordecai honored
     - Jews celebrate victory
   - Esther and Mordecai in the Persian court (9-10)
     - Purim established and Mordecai is prominent in court

Major Characters: Esther, Mordecai, Xerxes, Haman, Vashti, and Zeresh

Book Summary: Few stories in the Bible display the drama, irony, and inspiration that the book of Esther contains. It is a literary masterpiece that reveals much about God, though God is mysteriously omitted from the book. Nevertheless the absence of any direct reference to God only highlights his powerful work behind the scenes. Esther is an orphaned girl entrusted to her Jewish uncle, Mordecai, who is a political activist with an emerging agenda of power and protection for his people.

Meanwhile, King Xerxes, an incompetent and crude king, becomes offended when his queen (Vashti) will not degrade herself before the king. Upon her banishment, the king recruits several young women to compete for the throne. Mordecai convinces Esther to offer herself. Xerxes is thrilled with the young Esther and makes her queen. Some time later, a plot to kill God’s people is revealed and is to be executed by the King’s highest official, Haman. The book reaches its climax as Esther intervenes, putting her own life at risk, thwarting Haman’s plans. The fate that Haman intended for the Jews becomes his own fate. A celebration follows Esther’s heroic acts which to this day is enjoyed annually (the feast of Purim).

Themes:
   - God’s Providence – his presence and control of the circumstances in our lives
   - God’s Protection – the unfailing protection of God’s people
   - Significance – leading a life that makes a difference
JOB

Author and Dates: The book of Job resists any particular dating. Scholars have suggested dates as early as 1400 B.C. and as late as 300 B.C. However, no evidence exists that allows any confident conclusions. The "timeless" quality of the book has always been recognized and renders the dating questions secondary.

Purpose: Encourage the reader to hold to the justice of God in the presence of suffering. To encourage readers to trust in the power, goodness, and wisdom of God even in the midst of terrible suffering and persecution. How can the character of God be defended in the face of suffering?

Outline:

I. Prologue: God-Satan challenge (1-2)
   II. Dialogue: Job’s conversation with three “friends” (3-28)
       - Job laments (3)
       - 3 cycles of dialogues (4-27)
       - poem on divine wisdom (28)
   III. Monologues (29-41)
        - Job’s monologue (29-31)
        - Elihu’s monologue (32-37)
        - God’s “answers” to Job (39-41)
   IV. Epilogue: Job’s closing remarks (42)

Major Characters: God, Job, Bildad, Elihu, Satan, Eliphaz, and Zophar

Book Summary: The story of Job has become synonymous with suffering for many centuries. It is difficult to read the narrative without feeling the pain and anguish of the faithful, yet frustrated Job. Caught in the midst of challenge between Satan and God, a challenge of which he is completely ignorant, Job must deal with the harsh realities of losing everything. His wealth, his health, even his friends and family are stripped from his life as he is left with an insufferable pain and a seemingly silent God.

Antagonized by self-assured friends who misunderstand and further his pain, Job must face the questions of suffering alone. As the saga continues, Job loses his confidence in God and demands a hearing before him. God responds not by answering Job's questions, but posing certain questions to Job that restores Job's faith. This restoration is followed by great blessing as God exhibits His love and compassion.

Wisdom is ultimately found in God alone. Human wisdom cannot on its own fathom the ways of God. God is not obligated to fallen humanity to explain all things. However, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of the path to true wisdom. Ultimately, the book of Job calls the people of God to trust God even in the most trying of situations.

Themes:
   Suffering
   Evil
   Faith
   Doubt
   Wisdom
PSALMS

Author and Dates: The Psalms were written during a thousand year period, approximately 1400 B.C. to 400 B.C. These prayer-songs emerged out of every possible human experience in every possible circumstance.

Purpose: A book of worship, praise, and prayer. The Psalms refer to God as the gravitational center of history and creation, but also of human life and emotion. There are 7 psalm styles- hymns, laments, thanksgiving psalms, psalms of confidence, psalms of remembrance, wisdom psalms, and kingship psalms.

Outline:
- Book 1 (Psalms 1-41)
- Book 2 (Psalms 42-72)
- Book 3 (Psalms 73-89)
- Book 4 (Psalms 90-106)
- Book 5 (Psalms 107-150)

Psalms and Emotions: The Psalms represent the full range of human emotions. Many Psalms are characterized by doubts and complaints, frustrations and pain. Other Psalms are expressions of praise and thanksgiving. The psalms and our emotions: the psalms arouse various emotions: reverence (5:7), shame (44:9), fear (56:3), sadness (6:6-7), anger (5:10), love (18:1), joy (16:11), doubt (73), and revenge (88).

The cure of the psalms: The psalms provide:
- a release for our emotions (especially the things we can only tell God)
- a rationality for our emotions (God allows for our emotions and makes sense of them for us)
- a relief for our emotions (we are aloud and designed to feel emotions deeply…and God loves it)

Book Summary: The Psalms have been called the "Hymnbook of the Bible," placing the singing and honesty of God's people at the very center of the faith. Throughout the Bible, but in particular in the Psalms, singing is not offered as merely a pleasure, but an essential ingredient to the healthy Christian life.

It is worth noting that each book in the Psalter culminates with a word of praise, a doxology (cf. Psalm 41:13; 72:18-19; 89:52; 106:48, 150). The book of Psalms concludes with five “Hallelujah” psalms (Ps. 146-150). The final compiler of the Psalms wanted to have the last word to be one of praise to God. The book of Psalms reminds God’s people of the central importance of worshipping God and recalling his goodness, love, and wondrous deeds on their behalf.

Themes:
- Singing – God desires His people to sing.
- Praise – Many of the Psalms praise God for His goodness, power, and royalty.
- Lament– Several Psalms are expressions of pain and frustration.
- Thanksgiving – The Psalms reveal the power of an appreciative heart.
- Wisdom – There are some Psalms that teach and observe that which is wise and prudent
PROVERBS

Author and Purpose: To teach importance of wisdom. To give “prudence to the simple, and knowledge and discretion to the young” (Prov 1:4), and to make the wise person wiser (Prov 1:5). These collections of proverbs originating with Solomon, and various wise men, were gathered and arranged for later generations by someone otherwise unknown.

Outline:

I. Preamble: purpose and theme (1:1-7)
II. Superiority of the Way of Wisdom (1:8-9:18)
III. Proverbs of Solomon (10-22)
IV. Saying of the Wise (22-24)
V. More proverbs from Solomon (25-29)
VI. The words of Agur and Lemuel (30-31)
VII. Poem to the virtuous woman (31)

Book Summary: The book of Proverbs is made up of six collections of proverbs, that is, wisdom sayings on how to live wisely in the world. The book provides practical guidance to help God’s people follow in the ways of the Lord and to live fruitful and beneficial lives.

Theme:
The key theme of Proverbs is described at the book's beginning (1:1–7). The book is supposed to instill wisdom in God’s people. Wisdom is rooted in the fear of the Lord and it works itself out in covenant life in the everyday situation and relationships.

ECCLESIASTES

Author and Dates: The early-daters place the book around 930 B.C. because they believe it to be written by Solomon. However, its language and topics make it more likely that it was written to Israelites living under the rule of Persia somewhere in the 400s or 300s B.C.

Purpose: To teach that the life lived by purely earthly and human standards is futile, but the God-centered life is the cure. Life not centered on God is meaningless and purposeless. Without God, nothing else can satisfy (Eccl 2:25). With God, all of life and God’s gifts are to be gratefully received and enjoyed to the fullest (Eccl 2:26 and 11:8). Ecclesiastes takes a solemn look at the unpredictability of the world and the frustration that it can cause in our lives. The author concludes that a life devoted to God is the only meaningful and enjoyable existence humanity can have.

Outline:

1. The struggle to accumulate things for the achievement of happiness is meaningless. (1:1-11)
2. Authors autobiographical monologue: life is to be enjoyed as a gift from God (1:12-12:7).…themes are wisdom, pleasure, folly, enjoyment, time, justice, human effort, religious words, wealth, life-span, death, piety, women, kings, and memory.
   -Solomon’s Quest for Meaning in Life (1:12-2:26)
   -Further Quest for Meaning in Life (3:1-6:12)
   -Advice on Meaning in Life (7:1-11:10)
   -Advice on Death and Dying (12:1-12:7)
3. Conclusion: Reverently trust and obey God (12:8-12:14)
Major Characters: Qohelet ("The Teacher" or "The Preacher") -- the author of the book.

Book Summary: The outlook of "The Teacher" is critical and even somewhat cynical at times. His perspective and his advice do not seem to square with the more optimistic book of Proverbs, and his utterly pragmatic approach to life can seem to some readers as almost faithless. However, Ecclesiastes simply takes a very honest look at the way the world operates, observing that God's promises and God's wisdom do not always come to pass in the ways we expect. Just like the Teacher, we know that the wicked often prosper, the righteous often suffer, the wise man and the fool alike die.

We also agree that nothing -- whether it be riches or power or fame or success or entertainment -- nothing which the world offers can ultimately satisfy us. In light of all this evidence, it is a testimony to the Teacher's faith that he never once questions God's goodness, power, or wisdom. Rather, he wants to know what difference our decisions could possibly make in the seemingly chaotic universe. He attempts to answer the ultimate question -- what is the meaning of life -- and concludes that only a life with God has any value or purpose. For the Israelites living in a tempting, thriving, strange Persian culture, this book is a startling reminder that there is only one pursuit that is worthwhile.

Theme:
   Meaninglessness: Everything in the world, in and of itself, is worthless and empty.
   Death is the one and only certainty in life. When done for oneself, work is toil that wastes life away. When done for God it can be a fulfilling act of worship. When sought after as a goal pleasure is elusive, and never satisfies. But enjoyment is a by-product of a life dedicated to God. Regarding wisdom: even a prudent, examined life sometimes yields pain rather than pleasure, and poverty rather than riches. It is not a magical formula that brings happiness and fulfillment. True wisdom includes understanding that the curse of sin brings frustration to the whole creation (Romans 8:20). The book of Ecclesiastes fits into the biblical story as a constant reminder of the brevity of human life in light of eternity.

SONG OF SONGS

Author and Dates: The Song of Solomon is almost impossible to date with any precision or assurance. The fact that it mentions Solomon (3:6-11; 8:10-12) assures us that it could not be written before his kingship, around 930 B.C. We know that Solomon's reign was characterized by renewed interest in wisdom and the arts, so it is plausible that it was written at that time. The latter section speaks of Solomon in the past tense, however, so it may well have been written some time later.

Purpose: To put sexuality in the context of pure love and not the extremes of sensuous lust or asceticism. To put sexuality in the context of the covenant of marriage. The Song of Songs is a poem that explores the composition of true love, and beautifully illustrates the virtues of healthy sexual relationships.

Outline:
   I. Anticipation (1:1-2:7)
   II. Found, and Lost (2:8-3:5)
III. Consummation (3:6-5:1)
   - Wedding processional (3:6-3:11)
   - Passionate expressions of love (4:1-5:1)
IV. Lost, and Found: Conflict and resolution (5:2-6:13)
V. More expressions of love (7:1-8:4)
VI. Affirmation (8:5-8:14)

Major Characters: The Lover, the Shunnamite Woman (the Beloved), the Daughters of Jerusalem (their friends).

Book Summary: This poem describes, in vivid and erotic metaphors, the pursuit and enjoyment of love between a man and a woman. At certain times in the Church's history the material was actually considered inappropriate for pious souls, and therefore was read as one grand metaphor of the love God has for His people. While this is certainly an application we can make from the book, there is no denying that the physical relationship between a man and a woman is at the heart of this magnificent piece of poetry, and that sexuality is an essential component of God's intentions for humanity. In this book we receive a picture of the context in which sexual love is to be enjoyed to the glory of God, its creator.

Themes:
    Love: It is more than, but certainly not less than, physical. It is based on honor and intimacy, and should indeed be a representation of the love God has for us (Eph. 5:22-23).

The Garden: The picture painted in the Song resembles the pristine purity and shamelessness of Eden.

The Senses: The Song describes the intimacy between the Lover and the Beloved with every sensory faculty man possesses: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touch.

ISAIAH

Author and Dates: Isaiah the prophet’s ministry was from about 740 to 687 B.C.

Purpose: Judah should gain hope from Isaiah’s ministry during the Assyrian crisis that Israel will be restored after the Babylonian captivity.

Outline:
   I. Overview of Isaiah’s ministry (1-6)
      - God has (with Assyria) and will (with Babylon) punish Judah, but there is hope for restoration
      - Judah should expect judgment and eventual restoration as Isaiah predicted for Judah.
   II. Isaiah’s response to Assyrian Crisis (7-39)
      - Isaiah is saying “My prophecies about an Assyrian invasion came true. My threat of a Babylonian exile will also come true.”
      - Judah should learn that Isaiah’s prophecies concerning Assyrian have come true and that the Babylonian threat is real.
   III. Isaiah’s response to Babylonian crisis (40-66)
-Babylon will destroy Judah, but God’s people will be restored. There will be release from captivity.
-Judah should take heart that the Babylonian crisis will end with restoration.

Book summary: The book of Isaiah describes God’s sovereign majesty and redemptive love for his people. The book of Isaiah looks forward to Israel’s judgment, to her redemption from exile through a second exodus, and, through her coming Servant King, to the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant that includes the nations in God’s salvation. The book ends with a picture of the final redemption of Israel and the nations in a new heaven and new earth, where God and his people meet in glory.

Themes:


God’s wrath is to be feared (5:25; 9:12, 17, 19, 21; 10:4–6; 13:9, 13; 30:27; 34:2; 59:18; 63:1–6; 66:15–16, 24)

God’s judgment will ultimately end with a joyful triumph of his grace (1:9; 6:1–12:6; 35:1–10; 40:1–2; 49:13–16; 51:3; 54:7–8; 55:12–13)

God’s servant is the only hope for the world. He is the promised Davidic king (4:2; 7:14; 9:2–7; 11:1–10), the servant of the Lord (42:1–9; 49:1–13; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12), the anointed preacher of the gospel (61:1–3), and the lone conqueror over all evil (63:1–6).

God's faithfulness ought to motivate God’s people toward faith and obedience (56:1–2; 62:1–64:12).

JEREMIAH

Author and Dates: Jeremiah ministered during the fall of Assyria and rise of Babylon, which places his ministry in the several years surrounding 600 B.C.

Purpose: Jeremiah was written to warn God's people of the danger of placing trust in anything other than Him, but also to comfort God's people that God will not abandon them no matter how far they have strayed.

Outline:

I. Oracles Concerning Judah (Jeremiah 1-25)

II. Biographical Narrative #1 (Jeremiah 26-29)

III. Book of Comfort (Jeremiah 30-33)

IV. Biographical Narrative #2 (Jeremiah 34-45)

V. Oracles Concerning Foreign Nations (Jeremiah 46-51)

Major Characters: God, Jeremiah, Baruch the Scribe, King Josiah, and King Jehoiakin.

Book Summary: Jeremiah was called to minister to the last surviving tribe of Israel, Judah, in a time of political and spiritual decay. He was born during an age of blessing and restoration as King Josiah re instituted God's law in the land and freed them from the oppression of Assyria, but succeeding kings
forsook God's law, presumed upon God's mercy, and suffered under the heavy hand of Babylon. Jeremiah exhorted God's people to repent of their dependence upon alliances with foreign countries and to renew their faith in the God who promised to defend and prosper them.

When those warnings fell on deaf ears, he warned of the destruction that would certainly fall upon Judah as a consequence of their disobedience, but reminded them that God would not abandon them forever. Even when the capital city of Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, Jeremiah preached hope that God would indeed restore Israel to its former glory.

In the same way, Christians face some menacing obstacles and suffer through seasons of faithlessness. Despite the disappointment, pain, and destruction our sin may yield, we know through Jeremiah's ministry that God does not abandon His people but rather promises to restore us when we return to Him. In the midst of Jeremiah's preaching, he also recounts in detail some of the significant events in his own life, particularly the persecution that he suffered because of his unwelcome message. In this book we have a vivid depiction of the life of a reluctant but faithful prophet in a dark season of Israel's history. Moreover, we have a fellow minister that we can relate to and learn from as we are called to preach a sometimes unpopular message to a stubborn people.

Themes:

Sovereignty: Jeremiah stresses God's ultimate control over the chaotic world events occurring in his day.

God's Word: Jeremiah was not a bold orator, but God promised to give him His words to say. Judah was overconfident in their standing before God and forgot that they were called to listen intently to His word delivered through His prophets.

Sin: Jeremiah is called the weeping prophet, and spends much of his ministry lamenting Judah's continuing sin.

Holiness: The reason why Judah's sinfulness disturbed Jeremiah so deeply was because He had a profound sense of God's holiness, his perfection in righteousness, justice, and mercy.

Covenant: Jeremiah uses many different images for Judah to illustrate that she is in an intimate relationship with God: His bride, His vineyard, His flock, and His inheritance.

The Un-Moses: Jeremiah, like Moses, was called by God but hesitated because of his lack of oratory skill. Moses was called to intercede for his people through prayer and save them from judgment; Jeremiah was commanded to stop interceding for his people because judgment was imminent. Moses left Egypt, but at the end of Jeremiah's life he returned to Egypt. This displays Israel's failure to reach their full destiny as the people of God.

Hope: Even when facing the direst circumstances, Jeremiah asserted God's faithfulness and encouraged Judah to hope for a bright future.
LAMENTATIONS

Author and Purpose: Through a gut-wrenching recounting of Jerusalem's destruction, Jeremiah paints a powerful picture of the seriousness of sin and God's hatred of it. Despite its sober message, it also reminds us that it is impossible for God's people to sink so far into sin that they should lose hope in His mercy and forgiveness.

Outline:
I. The City (1)
II. The Wrath of God (2)
III. The Compassion of God (3)
IV. The Sins of All People (4)
V. The Prayer (5)

Dates: Lamentations reacts to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, thus must have been written soon after 586 B.C.

Major Characters: God and Jeremiah

Book Summary: Lamentations is both a reactive and proactive book. On the one hand, it is a transparent account of Jeremiah's sorrow, disappointment, and horror as he surveys the pillaged ruins of once-mighty Jerusalem. At the same time, it is a heartfelt plea to God to forgive Israel for her many sins and restore her to her former magnificence. Although the book's title reflects its basic character of Lament and Woe, there is a quiet but undying hope in God's forgiveness and mercy that underlies the entire work and peeks up above the sorrow from time to time.

The book of Lamentations describes in poetry a significant turning point in the biblical story—the fall of Jerusalem. Despite the present judgment for his people’s faithlessness, Lamentations roots the hope of God’s people in the unchanging character of God.

Themes:
Suffering and God's Goodness: The destruction of Jerusalem was so brutal, and the inhabitants were treated so inhumanely, that Jeremiah is forced to consider the goodness of God much as did Job. Whereas Job was basically innocent, however, Jeremiah knew that Israel had brought this suffering upon herself.

Judgment: Lamentations considers the destruction of Israel by the Babylonians as a theological, rather than a political, event. God, who so often fought on Israel's behalf against her enemies, has now considered Israel His enemy because of their rebellion against Him, and has turned His holy armies against His own people.

Hope: Although it does not often appear, there are times when Jeremiah's trust in God's promises to be faithful and merciful to His people brings a ray of light into an otherwise dark work.
EZKIEL

Author and Dates: Although many of the OT books are hard to date, the book of Ezekiel contains many references to kings and world events so that we can know with some precision when He ministered. Ezekiel probably grew up listening to the prophecies of Jeremiah, and began his own ministry in the middle of the deportation of Israelites to Babylon, around 593 BC. For the next 20 years he continued to minister to these fellow exiles, until approximately 570 BC. He died without seeing Israel's restoration.

Purpose: Since Ezekiel’s judgment prophecies concerning Judah and the nations have taken place, therefore Judah should maintain hope in Ezekiel’s restoration prophecies and priestly reconstruction program. Through his ministry to Israel in dark times, Ezekiel encourages us to remember that God will never abandon His people even though it sometimes seems that He has. He will certainly keep His promises to bless those who trust in Him no matter how imperfectly we serve Him.

However, he also reminds us that there is no one but ourselves to blame for our dreary circumstances, and brings conviction to our self-righteous and indignant souls. He calls us to quit playing the blame game, admit our own guilt before God, and renew our trust and dedication to Him so that we can hope in Him with a clear conscience.

Outline:
I. Judgment against Judah (1-24)
   -The judgments against Judah have come true (i.e., Jerusalem fell as Ezekiel predicted)
II. Judgment against nations (25-32)
   -The judgments against the nations have come true (i.e., The nations feel as Ezekiel predicted)
III. Future Blessing for Judah: Restoration and reconstruction (33-48)
   -Judah will be restored as Ezekiel predicted

Major Characters: Ezekiel and God.

Book Summary: The glorious capital of Jerusalem, the only remaining Israelite city, has fallen to the Babylonian armies. The richest, most prominent, most intelligent, and most powerful in Jerusalem are taken as slaves to serve in Babylon, and the peasants are left to eke out an existence in the devastated ruins. Ezekiel was one of those deported to Babylon, and God called him to be a "watchman" for His people there, keeping them informed of God's movements and intentions, explaining to them the reasons for their plight, and renewing their hope in God's promises in spite of them.

Ezekiel does so, but in some very unorthodox ways. He often speaks in fables and allegories. He has extraordinary visions and dreams. He falls into trances, loses his ability to speak for a time, and engages in other strange behaviors such as tying himself to the ground for many days, shaving his head and burning the hair, cooking his food over human dung, just to name a few. Psychologists have diagnosed Ezekiel as schizophrenic, epileptic, catatonic, psychotic, narcissistic, masochistic, and paranoid. However, Ezekiel was not mentally deranged, just radically committed to communicating the seriousness of God's message so that Israel (and we) would pay special attention.

The book of Ezekiel tells of the final failure of God’s people as constituted by the first covenants, and looks forward to their being reconstituted by a new covenant that includes a true Shepherd and the gift of the Holy Spirit.
Themes:

God's Faithfulness and Mercy: Even after Israel's Promised Land had been taken, their freedom revoked, and the displeasure of their God communicated, Ezekiel encouraged Israel to hope in God's mercy, and faithfulness to His promises. He foresaw restoration because He knew God would never abandon his people.

Repentance: However, God had allowed circumstances to get this bad in order to express His peoples' need to repent.

God’s Wisdom: Ezekiel's experience of God seems to many modern readers as bizarre and fanciful. His life reminds us that the life of faith requires eyes that see beyond the physical realm, and that God's wisdom is above our wisdom. He often uses the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and sometimes calls us to use extreme and unpopular measures in order to communicate His gospel to the world.

**DANIEL**

Author and Dates: Daniel lived and ministered to the exiles during the period of Israel's captivity under Babylon, sometime between 586 and 538 BC.

Purpose: Those outside the land should learn from Daniel’s life how to remain devoted and have influence as they hope for the full restoration of Israel. The book of Daniel teaches us how to live a life faithful to God even when we are surrounded by a pagan culture.

Outline:

I. Stories of Daniel: Modeling behavior in captivity (1)
   II. Stories and Visions of Babylon’s Future (2-7)
      II. Visions of Israel’s Future Destiny (8-12)
         -What has happened to restoration program?
         -What is ahead for Israel?

Major Characters: Daniel (Belteshazzar), Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshech), Azariah (Abednego), King Nebuchadnezzar, King Belshazzar, and King Darius

Book Summary: The first half of the book of Daniel contains historical accounts of Daniel's life. It begins with the story of Daniel's own capture and deportation to Babylon, and his courage to live a holy life in the midst of their pagan rituals. His superior way of life earns him great respect in the Babylonian government. God, having blessed him with this position of honor and influence, gave him many visions which enabled him to help King Nebuchadnezzar know the future and rule more effectively. The book goes on to describe the arrogance and godlessness of Babylon's kings, who attempt to kill Daniel's friends Shadrach, Mechech, and Abednego in a furnace for worshiping their God rather than themselves. God, however, spares their lives.

Daniel is given visions to warn the King that God's judgment was coming upon him. They, however, do not repent and Babylon falls to the Medes. Darius, King of the Medes, instituted a policy where all Babylonians were required to pray to him and him only. Daniel refused to break the first commandment of Moses, and was thrown to the lions, but God preserved his life as well. The last half of the book is full of visions which predict the downfall of the Medes to the Persians, the Persians to the Greeks, and the Greeks to the Romans. They
predict that only at that time will God fully restore them (the time of Jesus -- Coincidence? I think not). Daniel is a book full of courageous acts and fantastic visions that show Christians how to live in a non-Christian environment. It encourages us to hold on to our beliefs and act them out in spite of the customs of our society. It comforts us that our hope in Christ's salvation is sure, but that our faith must endure awhile longer.

Themes:
Wisdom: It has often been suggested that Daniel is, in a sense, a wisdom book, since it so often teaches and displays how a wise man's lifestyle brings blessing upon him.

Good vs. Evil: Daniel paints the history of the world as a battle between two Kingdoms -- the Kingdom of God (envisioned as God's throne room) vs. The Kingdom of Man (envisioned as a beast) -- see Daniel 7. Daniel also asserts in no uncertain terms that the Kingdom of God will have victory over the Kingdom of man.

Patience: Israel would have liked Daniel to tell them that their freedom was around the corner, but he predicted a succession of Kingdoms before Israel's deliverance would occur. Likewise, our hope of salvation and blessing are sure, but not necessarily imminent.

Hosea

Author and Dates: Hosea ministered during the early years after Israel became a divided kingdom, with Jeroboam II ruling in the North and Uzziah (and later Hezekiah) ruling in the South. This dates his ministry somewhere around 750-700 BC.

Purpose: Judah may receive God’s judgment as Israel did, but Judah should still never lose hope of full restoration of God’s people. To illustrate God's unfailing love to his people even in the midst of their faithlessness.

Outline:
1. Marriage Metaphor: The Symbolic experience (1-3)
   - Judah should learn, from Hosea’s experience, God’s justice against infidelity. But they should have hope in God’s tender love.
2. Unfaithfulness: Sin and Forgiveness (4-9:9)
   - Israel’s Unfaithfulness (4:1-6:3) God executed justice just like God warned against Israel. But there is hope for restoration.
   - Israel’s Punishment: Prophetic Historical Reflections (6:4-10:15) Judah should learn by comparison with Israel’s past how severely God judges, but also how God loves.
3. God’s Faithful Love (11:1-14:8)
4. Call to consider (14:9)
   - Judah should contemplate how Israel’s experience warns and encourages them to be faithful.

Book Summary: Hosea ministered to the Northern Kingdom of Israel during a time when a long season of prosperity and peace was coming to an end. Jeroboam II was succeeded by a number of short-lived and inept rulers, and foreign nations were beginning to encroach on Israel's freedom. Rather than depending on God, they sought out alliances with pagan kings to provide themselves with safety and
security, and Hosea speaks out against their hasty abandonment of God's commands and promises. Even so, he continues to reassure them that God is faithful to them even in their faithlessness.

Themes:
Hosea dramatically illustrates how committed God is to His people despite their lack of commitment to Him, and His strong desire to bring them back into right relationship with Him. He describes Israel's relationship to God both as a Wife to her Husband and as a Child to his/her Father. Hosea emphasizes God's unfailing love for his people, even when he must punish them for their faithlessness. Hosea also lays out the prospect of hope beyond the judgment.

JOEL

Author and Dates: The book of Joel gives us very few clues as to when it was written or when the historical events in the book took place. This could be because it was used often in the worship of Israel, perhaps as a lament for times of disaster. Best guess? Either just before the fall of the Northern Kingdom (around the same time as Hosea, 750 - 720 BC) or just before the fall of the Northern Kingdom (around 625-600 BC).

Purpose: Judah should learn of their judgment, repentance, and hope from Joel’s ministry. To open the eyes of God's people to His warnings and rebukes concerning their persistent sin.

Outline:
I. Invasion and destruction: need to repent because of fear of judgment (1:1-2:15)
   - The Plague of Locust (1)
   - Coming Day of Judgment (2:1-2:14)
II. Hope and restoration: repent in hope of future restoration (2:15-3:21)
    - Salvation from the Locusts (2:15-2:27)
    - Salvation from the Day of Judgment (3)

From Judgment to Salvation in Joel -
1. Judgment- victory of enemies over Judah (1:2-20)
2. Repentance- “Who knows if God will have pity?” (2:1-14)
3. Repentance- God will have pity (2:15-32)
4. Salvation- victory of Judah over enemies (3:1-21)

Book Summary: Joel takes a very hard stance against Israel's stubborn and persistent rebellion against God, and points out that there are signs of God's displeasure that are being ignored (i.e. A plague of locusts) at the risk of much greater devastation and destruction.

Themes:
Sin: Joel does not candy-coat the severity of sin against a Holy God, and warns the people of God that He will not tolerate it forever.

Repentance: God’s judgment on sin provides a need for the repentance of God’s people.

Judgment: At times in human history, God's people become prideful and arrogant, assuming upon God's blessing and protection. Although God's love can certainly be counted upon through thick and
thin, Joel shows that God's love can come in some very tough forms, in order to dissuade us from our sinful ways.

**AMOS**

Author and Dates: Amos ministered to Northern Israel even before Hosea, during the prosperous early years of the divided kingdom, around 800-750 BC.

Purpose: Judah should learn that judgment is coming against Judah unless repentance takes place. To call God's people out of the complacency and pride that so often follow peace and prosperity.

Outline:

I. God’s people judged with the nations (1-2)
   - God will judge God’s people more severely than the other nations.

II. Announcements against God’s people (3-6)

III. Visions against God’s people (7:1-9:10)

IV. God’s people are blessed above all nations (9:11-9:15)
   - Judah should hope and learn that Israel will rise in a future restoration.

Book Summary: Amos warns Israel that the material prosperity which they are enjoying does not necessarily mean that God is well-pleased with them, and attempts to keep them from falling away from their calling as God's people. He tries to remind them that being the chosen people of God does not place them above the law, but more squarely under it! But they do not listen, and the book ends with a dialogue between God and Amos about the discipline God will invoke to get their attention.

Themes:

- Social Justice: True religion and social justice must go hand in hand. One of Israel's greatest sins during this prosperous time was that of discriminating against the less-fortunate. A wealthy upper class had formed, and they displayed no heart for the poor, but rather looked down upon them as inferior. This was in direct opposition to God's intentions for blessing them.

- Judgment and Salvation: As with all the prophets, we see in Amos a dual theme which stresses the danger of rebelling against God and bringing forth His discipline, and at the same time reassures God's people that the discipline is not condemnation, but that God ultimately desires repentance and restoration. God is the Lord over all the nations of the earth.

**OBADIAH**

Author and Dates: Obadiah gives us little clue as to when he wrote his book, but it seems that it must have occurred after Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC -- probably soon after.

Purpose: To illustrate that God will not be pleased with the mere avoidance of sin, but desires rather an active display of mercy, especially towards our immediate neighbors and fellow believers.

Outline:

1. Edom Summoned to Court (v.1)
II. Sentencing (v. 2-9)
III. Accusations (v. 10-14)
IV. The Day of the Lord (v. 15-21)

Book Summary: Obadiah, the shortest book of the Old Testament, consists of only one judgment oracle against the neighboring country of Edom. The Edomites were descendants of Esau, Jacob's older brother, and were thus "cousins" of Israel. Yet when Israel was in trouble and needed Edom's military support, Edom refused. Therefore Obadiah communicates God's displeasure at their unwillingness to lend aid to the people of God when they were in great need. "Am I my brother's keeper?" Cain asked God. Both in that story and in this one, God's answer is a definite "YES!"

Themes:
Sins of Omission: Much of what we hear about sin comes in the form of "don'ts." Obadiah's harsh message to Edom affirms that being faithful to God is very much more like a list of "do's." Edom didn't do the do's, and that's just as bad as if they did do the don'ts.

God's Universal Reign: God was not simply the God of Israel, and He is not now simply the God of the Church. He is the God of the Universe, and all peoples of all nations are under His rule and His law.

JONAH

Author and Dates: We learn from 2 Kings that Jonah was a prophet to the Northern Kingdom during the reign of Jeroboam II, 786 - 746 B.C. The book of Jonah is unique among the prophetic books of the Old Testament. Rather than being a collection of the oracles of the prophet, it relates episodes in his life. In the Old Testament, the prophet Jonah is mentioned outside the book only in 2 Kings 14:25, Matthew 12:38-41, Matthew 16:4 and 17, and Luke 11:29-32. Although the prophet lived in the eighth century BC there is dispute on the correct dating of the book. It is written in the third person, and no author is identified anywhere in the Bible.

Outline:
Part One
I. First Commission and Jonah's Response is to Flee (1:1-16)
II. God's Response to Jonah and Jonah Repents (1:17-2:10)

Part Two
III. Second Commission and Jonah's Response is to Obey (3:1-10)
IV. God's Response to Jonah and Jonah Resents (4:1-11)

Purpose: The purpose of the book of Jonah is to show God's people that His plan is exceedingly compassionate (God is gracious) and exceedingly certain (God is sovereign). In other words, "salvation belongs to the Lord" (Jonah 2:10). This is the central theme of the book of Jonah: that God loves in freedom. We should desire to understand, accept, and love God's sovereign grace, rather than oppose it or be resentful of it. The book of Jonah stresses the freedom and primacy of God and God's initiative and grace toward humanity. Christians, applying the theology of Jonah to the person and work of Jesus, could claim that Jesus Christ is the freedom of God acting in love toward humanity.

Book Summary: The story of Jonah is one of the most well-known Bible stories of all. Jonah is a narrative about God's compassion for some hated Gentiles by way of a Hebrew prophet who wanted
nothing to do with them. The reluctant prophet, Jonah, is commanded to go and preach to the Ninevites, Israel's sworn enemies, so that destruction might not fall upon them. Jonah would love nothing more than to see Nineveh destroyed, but he knows that God is compassionate and will forgive them if they repent, therefore he boards a ship heading the other direction away from Nineveh.

God's wrath follows the ship, until Jonah is thrown overboard by the other sailors and swallowed by a giant fish. While in the belly of the fish, he repents of his own disobedience and is delivered back onto shore, at which point he preaches against Nineveh's sin and commands them to repent. They do, in wholehearted fashion, and God relents from destroying them. The book ends with Jonah waiting in vain for Nineveh to be destroyed, bitter that God would show such kindness to a people who are at war with His own.

Themes:
1. Mercy—God's compassion extends even beyond what we would like, even to those whom we ourselves show no mercy.

2. God's Sovereignty—God’s plan will be carried out and cannot be avoided.

3. Resentment—The book is a vivid portrait of what bitterness and resentment against other people and against God's plan can do to a person's soul—even the soul of God's own prophet.

MICAH

Author and Dates: Micah's ministry began during the fall of Northern Israel at the hands of Assyria, around 722 BC, and continued through Hezekiah's reign in the Southern Kingdom, until about 700 BC.

Purpose: Micah preaches against substituting empty religious practices in place of real, vibrant spiritual life.

Outline:
I. Words of Judgment for Israel (Micah 1-3)
II. Words of Hope for Israel (Micah 4-5)
III. More Words of Judgment for Israel (Micah 6:1-7:7)
IV. More Words of Hope for Israel (Micah 7:8-20)

Book Summary: The book of Micah alternates between oracles of doom on Judah and Israel for their idolatry and social injustices and of future hope because of God’s covenant mercies. Having witnessed God's judgment upon the Northern Kingdom, Micah warns Judah that she is in danger of the same catastrophic demise unless her people seek the God of their forefathers in a real and meaningful way. If they do, God will surely protect them from such an end, but even if they refuse God will continue to seek them and restore them after they are judged for their sins.

Themes:
Judgment: God has given us many examples of people who refused to repent of their wicked ways and brought God's wrath upon them. Micah uses one such event to teach and warn his people about the very real possibility of it occurring to them.

Hope: God continues unwavering in His commitment to His people even when they rebel.
Experience: Micah calls on Israel to be observant to what God is doing around them, to learn from it and apply it to their own lives.

Religion vs. Faith: Micah teaches us that our faith is not mere ritual or outward conformity to certain rules, but is an inward disposition toward God.

NAHUM

Author and Dates: Nahum wrote of the decline of Assyria sometime between 660-620 B.C., just before their fall at the hands of the Babylonians.

Purpose - Judah should acknowledge God’s destruction of Nineveh and blessing for Judah. To display God's unwillingness to see His people mistreated and oppressed.

Outline:
I. Opening Hymn: God to punish Nineveh (1:1-1:8)
II. The Divine Warrior (1:9-1:15)
III. Oracles and Taunts against Nineveh and Judah is blessed (2:1-3:17)
IV. Woe to Nineveh: Concluding Dirge (3:18-3:19)

Book Summary: Nahum is the book that Jonah wished he could write. God's use of Assyria as a punishment for Israel's sin was over, as was his patience with Assyria's own evils. Nahum envisions God as a mighty warrior coming to conquer the enemies of His people and protect them from any other would-be oppressor.

Theme: Divine Warrior: Nahum draws on very common Old Testament imagery of God as a great warrior-king coming to the rescue of His helpless, lamenting citizens. Those who have set themselves against God's people will not escape the destruction at His hands. Nahum emphasizes God’s sovereignty over all the nations.

HABAKKUK

Author and Dates: Habakkuk ministered to the Southern Kingdom just before the exile, when their unrepentant sinfulness was at its height, around 625-604 B.C.

Purpose: Judah should learn how to react to Babylonian troubles through Habakkuk’s experience. To encourage God's people to live by faith, not by sight, and not to compromise their beliefs in order to conform with what seems to fit the circumstances.

Outline:
I. Habakkuk Complains and God responds: Lament and response concerning Judah (1:1-1:11) -exile is because of evil and rebellion
II. Habakkuk Complains and God’s Oracles against Judah’s oppressors: Lament and response concerning Babylon (1:12-2:20) -take joy in or hope for future defeat of enemies (Babylon)
III. Psalm of Faith: Prayer, praise, and submission (3:1-3:19)
   -trust God under Babylonian troubles

Book Summary: Habakkuk laments to God that Judah has turned away from His commandments, and wonders why there is no justice in the land, and no punishment for wickedness. God responds by telling Habakkuk that justice will come through the Chaldeans, who were poised to overthrow Judah. This causes Habakkuk to lament again, because he does not understand why the Chaldeans, a people even more wicked than Israel, would be given such a victory. God calls Habakkuk to have faith in Him, that Israel will in time be restored unto righteousness and their enemies would be punished, which causes Habakkuk to break into a song of faith and praise.

Themes:
Righteousness: God does not dole out blessings and punishments based on every person's level of righteousness at any point in time. Rather He always acts in such a way as to purify His people and conform them to His righteousness.

Faith: One of the Apostle Paul's favorite bible verses is Habakkuk 2:4, "The righteous shall live by faith." Habakkuk and Paul found strength to persevere on the same principle: live by faith in God's promises, not by what you see in the world.

God is a Redeemer God who will bring about the deliverance of his people, while they live in hope and trust in him alone.

ZEPHANIAH

Author and Dates: Zephaniah ministered around the same time as Habakkuk, during the last and darkest days of Judah's existence just before 600 B.C.

Purpose: Judah should look soberly at the impinging doom of Babylonian aggression, but also take heart in restoration promises. To assert that God has indeed set a day when He will come and rid His creation of the sin and evil that is practiced, and restore His people to their rightful place in that new world.

Outline:
I. Judgment against nations and especially Judah (1:1-2:3)
   -Judah should fear upcoming judgment (through Babylon)
II. Judgment against foreign nations (2:4-2:15)
   -Judah should be relieved to her of upcoming judgment against her enemies and her eventual possession of these nations
III. Oracle of Salvation for Judah (3:1-3:20)
   -Judah should fear her judgment but rejoice in the promise of restoration

Book Summary: Habakkuk laments to God that Judah has turned away from His commandments, and wonders why there is no justice in the land, and no punishment for wickedness. God responds by telling Habakkuk that justice will come through the Chaldeans, who were poised to overthrow Judah. This causes Habakkuk to lament again, because he does not understand why the Chaldeans, a people even more wicked than Israel, would be given such a victory. God calls Habakkuk to have faith in Him, that Israel will in time be restored unto righteousness and their enemies would be punished, which causes Habakkuk to break into a song of faith and praise.
Themes:

Day of the Lord: The prophets often refer to this "Day" as the future time of global judgment and restoration of God's people unto righteousness and blessedness. Zephaniah heard rumblings of this event as Judah's enemies closed in around her.

Remnant: The prophets also referred often to a group of people who would remain true to God through thick and thin, whom God would exalt as the faithful remnant, and who would constitute the new People of God after His enemies were destroyed.

The purpose of divine judgment is salvation. The focus of the message of salvation is the hope of the return from Babylonian captivity.

HAGGAI

Author and Dates: Haggai gave us very detailed information about the dates of his ministry by linking it to the second year of King Darius of Persia, and also to the annual festivals of Israel. His first oracle was delivered on August 29, the second on October 17, and the last two on December 18 -- all in the year 520 B.C.

Purpose: Continue the reconstruction of the temple with the expectation of restoration blessings. To emphasize the centrality of religion and corporate worship among God's people.

Outline:

I. Call to build: The Absence of a Temple (1:1-1:15)
II. The Glory of the Temple (2:1-9)
III. Call to continue: The Purity of the Temple (2:10-19)
IV. The Coming Messiah: Zerubbabel's power (2:20-23)

Book Summary: Babylon had been overthrown by the Persians, and King Cyrus of Persia had given the Israelites freedom to return to their land nineteen years earlier. Although many stayed in Babylon because of the lives they had established for themselves there, many returned to Jerusalem to re-establish homes and businesses. Haggai ministered to those returnees who, despite their labor, were suffering from crop failure. Haggai encouraged the restored people that their future was indeed bright, but advised them to set God's work in order before they attended any further to their own. Following Haggai's instructions, the people set out to rebuild the temple.

Theme:

The Temple—When God was angry with Israel, he told His servant Moses to go on and enter the land of promise without Him. Moses refused, knowing that it was God's presence that made the holy land holy, and that without Him in their midst they could look forward to no special blessing. Haggai, too, realized that God's temple was the highest priority for Israel's success, and quickly made provisions so that God would again have a dwelling-place among His people. In the New Testament, God calls us His temple (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor 6: 16) and promised that He would dwell wherever His people gathered (Matthew 18:20). And just as Israel's primary responsibility was to build a glorious temple for their God, so we are called to build His Church not with pure gold and precious stones but with pure hearts that praise and serve Him.
ZECHARIAH

Author and Dates: Zechariah ministered during the same time period as Haggai, about 20 years after the Israelites were released from their captivity in Babylon, around 520 - 518 B.C.

Purpose: The restored community should remain faithful to the Davidic program despite disappointments because God will one day bring it to full realization. The reconstruction has stopped (Ezra 4:24) and the people were in need of exhortation (Ezra 5:1). Zechariah is telling his audience, “Those who returned to the land before you acknowledged their need to repent and moved forward; you must continue for you have the same need.” To reassure God's people that the injustices in the world will be rectified by God's messiah -- a deliverer-king that God will send to accomplish all the promises that He has given to His people.

Outline:
I. Message about temple reconstruction: Zechariah’s exhortations to Joshua and Zerubbabel about protection and success came true according to obedience (1-8)
   - Call to Repentance (1:1-1:6)
   - Visions (1:7-6:8)
   - Priestly Ruler: Crowning of Joshua (6:9-6:15)
II. Message about Israel’s future trials and her future King/restoration (9-14)
   - Trust Zechariah’s visions of the future as God unfolds trials and eventual glory through the coming king.
   - Coming and Rejection of Messiah (9-11)
   - Coming and Redemption of Messiah (12-14)

Book Summary: Zechariah deals with Israel's complaint that they have experienced God's chastisement for their sin, but the surrounding nations have gone unpunished. Zechariah assures them that the other nations will indeed experience God's wrath and Israel will be vindicated. The people have questions concerning religious practices (especially fasting) in light of their new life in the Promised Land, and Zechariah advises them on the purpose of the law and religious duties. In order to inspire the Israelites and give them hope, Zechariah describes in remarkable detail the coming King who would bring full blessing and freedom to God's people.

Themes:
   Messiah: Zechariah focuses on a political / religious leader who will deliver Israel from all her sins, troubles, and enemies, and is quoted in several places throughout the passion narratives of the gospels as well as in the book of Revelation.

   God’s Spirit: The book of Zechariah reminds us that God’s presence by his Spirit is at the heart of the restored people of God.

MALACHI

Author and Dates: Malachi is the last of the Old Testament prophetic books to be written, covering events that occurred around 475-450 B.C. when Israel was becoming disillusioned about the prospects of renewed freedom and glory for the nation.
Purpose: Malachi challenges those that feel like God is unfaithful to them, showing that it is actually they who are being unfaithful to God.

Outline:
I. Disputation #1: Does God Love Israel? Malachi 1:2-5
II. Disputation #2: Has Israel Defiled God? Malachi 1:6 - 2:9
III. Disputation #3: Has Israel Been Unfaithful? Malachi 2:10-16
IV. Disputation #4: Is God Tired of Israel's Prayers? Malachi 2:17 - 3:5
V. Disputation #5: Has Israel Robbed God? Malachi 3:6-12
VI. Disputation #6: Has Israel Spoken Out Against God? Malachi 3:13 - 4:3

Book Summary: In 539 B.C., Israel was allowed to return to the Promised Land. In the years immediately following, Israel had high hopes that the glory and power of God would again be displayed through them, and that they would return to a time of freedom, peace, and prosperity even greater than that of Solomon. Generations later, Israel began doubting that they would see such a restoration, and complained that God was not following through on His promises.

Malachi is a running series of disputations between Israel and God wherein God makes an accusation, and Israel denies it. Then God goes on to illustrate how his statement or accusation is true and accurate, displaying that He has indeed been faithful, and it is Israel who is the unfaithful one. God gives them several examples of His love and faithfulness, and then points out that Israel has been unfaithful through their idolatry, improper worship, marital infidelity, failing to tithe, questioning God's righteousness, and making light Him.

Themes:
God's Faithfulness: Malachi asserts that God has not abandoned Israel, rather Israel has abandoned Him. Through the several disputations in the book, Malachi asserts that every aspect of God's character attests to His faithfulness: love, benevolent rule, infinite power, fatherhood, justice, unchangeableness, and truth all serve as proof of His faithfulness to Israel.

First fruits: One of the ways Israel was unfaithful to God was through halfhearted worship. They failed to offer to Him the best of what He had freely given them. Instead, they offered Him blemished and defiled animals for sacrifice, and they withheld their monetary gifts.

MATTHEW

Author and Date: Matthew probably wrote his gospel right around the time of the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans, in the mid to late 60s AD.

Location: Although it is hard to say with any degree of accuracy, most scholars suggest Antioch in Syria as the most likely place where Matthew wrote this gospel. Antioch had a large Jewish population, and was one of the first centers of outreach to the gentile world. This fits the character of Matthew's gospel nicely.

Purpose: Written to Jews to show the reality and significance of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Matthew was written primarily to Jewish Christians who were being persecuted because of their faith in
Jesus as Messiah, persuading them that, in Jesus, God is fulfilling the promises made to the nation of Israel, and encouraging them to follow God in this "new thing" called Christianity.

Outline:

I. The Person of Jesus (Matthew 1:1 - 4:16)
II. The Proclamations of Jesus (Matthew 4:17 - 16:20)
III. The Passion of Jesus (Matthew 16:21 - 28:20)

Summary of book: In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus is presented as the Son of God and the King of the Jews. Jesus is Immanuel, God with us, who preaches the gospel of the kingdom to all peoples—both Jew and Gentile. The entire book is composed of five large blocks of teaching (5:1-7:29; 10:11-42; 13:1-52; 18:1-35; 24:1-25:46). Jesus’ origins (1-2) and his preparation for ministry (3:1-4:11) are described at the beginning of the book. The story concludes with the Passion of the Christ: the trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus, (26-28), as well as the commissioning of his disciples to take the gospel to the nations.

Themes:

Cost of Discipleship: Matthew vividly expressed the sacrifices involved in being a follower of Christ, showing his audience that he understood their situation, yet still affirmed that the Kingdom of God is worth any price. (Mt 13:44-46)

Fulfillment: Matthew’s gospel contains more prophetic fulfillment language than any other gospel, showing that Jesus is the culmination of Israel’s hopes and dreams, convincing his audience that the time of waiting is over and the time for proclamation was at hand. (Mt 13:16-17)

Progress: Jesus’ preaching about the nature of the Kingdom was radically different from the teachings of that day, and Matthew made it clear that God was doing something new, and something better than Israel had ever seen before. (Mt 9:16-17)

The Church: Matthew is the only gospel to use the word "Church" (ekklesia), and he uses it two different times. He is committed to the idea that Christians should gather together for worship and encouragement. (Mt 18:19-20)

Authority: Matthew, as do the other gospels, explain Jesus’ miracles and teachings as powerful and authoritative. But Matthew puts extra emphasis on Jesus’ authority over all things, encouraging his readers that nothing can stand in the way of God’s forward-moving Kingdom. (Mt 16:18; 28:18)

MARK

Author and Date: Mark probably wrote his gospel in the late 50s or early 60s AD, when Nero was beginning his persecution of Christians in Rome.

Location: Rome seems the most likely situation in which Mark wrote his Gospel. Peter is known to have been situated at Rome, so Mark would probably have spent much time there with him. The gospel is almost certainly intended for a gentile audience like Rome, since Mark felt the need to explain most of the Jewish customs and idioms mentioned in the book.
Purpose: To describe the life of Christ with apocalyptic thrust and intensity. The gospel of Mark is the first and shortest of the four gospels. He was not an apostle himself, but was a disciple of Peter and was a missionary with both Peter and Paul. His gospel reflects the action-packed, speedy, urgent nature of the gospel ministry and shows us how Jesus calls us to a life of active faith.

Outline:
I. Preliminary Ministry (Mark 1:1-15)
II. Galilean Ministry (Mark 1:16 - 8:26)
III. True Nature of Ministry (Mark 8:27 - 10:52)
IV. Ministry in Jerusalem (Mark 11:1 - 13:37)
V. Passion Narrative (Mark 14:1 - 16:8)

Book summary: Mark’s gospel is concerned with the question and the identity of Jesus as the messianic Son of God. This picture is modeled on the suffering servant Messiah who is vividly described in Isaiah 53, the one who would come to deliver his own people but whom they would reject and scorn. Mark’s gospel begins with the statement that Jesus is the “Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). At his baptism, Jesus is confirmed to be the messianic Son of God by a voice from heaven, “This is my Son… listen to him!” (9:7). At the end of the book, the Roman centurion states “Surely this man was the Son of God” (15:39). The importance of Jesus’ final week is evidenced by the fact that Mark 11-16 is devoted solely to Christ’s final seven days in Jerusalem.

Themes:
Urgency: Mark includes very little of Jesus' teaching in his gospel. It moves very quickly from event to event, and describes them vividly but succinctly. One gets the sense from reading Mark that Jesus and his followers were always on the move, zealous to accomplish his purposes (Mark 1).

Secrecy: Although all gospels mention Jesus hushing the recipients of his miracles, Mark includes many more incidents than any other. Time and time again, Mark records Jesus ordering people not to speak of his miraculous acts of healing. Much of his ministry was discreet, just as God often works in mysterious and unseen ways in our lives (Mk 3:11; 5:35-39).

Incompetence of the Disciples: Mark is harsh in his depiction of the disciples, making frequent mention of their confusion, bickering, and selfishness. On the one hand, this shows the futility of trying to understand everything God is doing, and encourages obedience even before total comprehension. On the other hand, this encourages others who want to serve Christ, but don't feel adequately prepared or trained. The disciples were not especially gifted or especially attentive, yet they changed the world because they believed Jesus' message and received His Spirit (Mk 8:14-20; 9:31).

The Way: Mark uses the word "way" unusually often in his description of Jesus' travels, and many of the most significant events and discussions in the book happen "along the way" to somewhere or other. Mark seems to be saying that the journey of faith is as important as the destination, and that God is leading us down a particular path in order to prepare us for the next curve in the road (Mk 1:2; 8:27; 9:33; 10:32,52; 12:14).
LUKE

Author and Date: This gospel was the first of Luke's two-part narrative of early Christianity. The second in the series is Acts. Therefore, the gospel must have preceded the book of Acts. It is thought that Acts was written about 63 AD because the narrative of Acts ends with events that date only up to about 62 AD. Therefore Luke must have been written prior to that, but after Mark (late 50s-early 60s AD). It is likely that Luke wrote his two volumes within a short time span, so somewhere around 62 AD is a good guess for the writing of Luke's gospel.

Location: Luke was from Antioch, but traveled with Paul all over modern-day Southern Europe and the Middle East. It is written to "Most excellent Theophilus," a title usually ascribed to high-ranking Roman officials, which would suggest that it was sent to some Roman center of government like Rome or Antioch. Moreover, the emphasis Luke places on relationships between Jews and Greeks, rich and poor, etc., Make the diverse population of Antioch as likely a candidate as any.

Purpose: To stress the anthropological inclusiveness of the gospel. Luke is obsessed with the gospel going to all kinds of people (children, women, the poor, and disenfranchised). The gospel of Luke was written, as its introduction states, "since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." He records many historical facts that the other gospels do not, providing us with the most complete record of Jesus' birth and childhood. Luke places special emphasis on Jesus' social ministry -- to the poor, the oppressed, the lower class, the gentiles, the women, and the children. He shows that the gospel of the Kingdom should undo the inequalities present in society today, and gives hope to those who have little.

Outline:
   II. Jesus in Galilee (Luke 4:14 - 9:50)
   IV. Jesus In Jerusalem Luke (19:45 - 21:38)
   V. Jesus' Passion (Luke 22 - 24)


Themes:
   God's Passion: Luke uses very emotional terms in describing God's relationship to His people, and their response to Him. There is more mention of singing in this gospel than any other, and God's tenderness and compassion is highlighted (1:78; 7:34; 12; 15:7-10).

   The Poor: It is instructive to compare the Sermon on the Mount as it appears in Matthew (5-7) and Luke (6). Although Matthew's account is more extensive, Luke's is much earthier. Where Matthew says "Blessed are the poor in spirit," Luke records "Blessed are the poor." Luke emphasizes Jesus' concern for people's physical needs and station in life, as well as their souls and eternal destiny.
Those who have little in this life, Jesus promises much in the next, because of his compassion for them and his desire to correct the inequalities and injustices that people suffer in this life (4:18-19; 7:22; 12:16; 14:21; 16; 19:9).

The Outcast: Matthew's description of Jesus' birth includes a visit from some very rich, very noble wise men from the east. Luke, in contrast, tells the story of the shepherds in the field coming to see the baby Jesus. And throughout his gospel Jesus is not a haughty ruler-type, but the common man's messiah, a servant leader. Luke emphasizes Jesus' tendency to hang out with the unfavorable in Israelite society. The prostitutes, the drunkards, and the tax collectors received more attention from Jesus than did the Pharisees and scribes. Luke shows that Jesus did not come to be honored, or respected, or successful. He came to show that God does indeed love ALL of His people, even though the religious establishment does not (2:8; 4:27; 13 - 14; 15:1,11; 18:13; 22:37).

The Foreigner: Israel had come to resent foreigners, and who could blame them? First the Babylonians, then the Persians, then the Medes, then the Greeks, and now the Romans, all took their turn at lording it over them and ruling them harshly. But Luke makes sure that his audience understands that Jesus didn't come to destroy the enemy, he came to win them over. That the Kingdom of God isn't about geographical boundaries, it's about loyalty to the one true King of all the lands, Jesus. Therefore he emphasized the essential unity of all national and ethnic groups, and God's love for every one of them (3:6; 3:38; 4:26-27; 7:9; 10:30; 13:29; 17:15).

Women: Luke makes it a point to show the prominent role that women played in Jesus' ministry. This was very countercultural, as women were not even allowed to be trained by a rabbi in these days. It serves as one more example of God's heart for the oppressed, and of the universal scope of the gospel: it was for all men, and all women, excluding no one from the reach of God's love (2:38; 7:36; 8:1-3; 10:38; 15:8-10; 18:1-5; 23:27-31; 24:1-11).

Children: Not only does Luke give us the most information about Jesus' own childhood, but his is the only record of this wonderful saying of Jesus: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." (10:21) Luke defines the gospel again as for the humble, the meek, the small, and the uninitiated -- even the little children, who cannot fully understand, but can still believe with all their heart that Jesus is the savior of the whole world.


JOHN

Author and Date: John's gospel was the last of the four to be written by a good margin. The many references to being "thrown out of the synagogue" (9:22; 12:42; 16:2), the incorporation of certain themes from Greek philosophy, and the testimony that John lived a very long life, probably point to the decade of the 80s AD -- a time when Christians were no longer allowed in synagogues and were dispersed all over Asia minor after the sack of Jerusalem by Rome.

Location: All of the gospels were written in hopes that they would reach the widest possible audience, but each was written with a particular group in mind. Early Church fathers testify that John wrote this
gospel in Ephesus, and may have intended it for people in that city, or he may have intended it specifically for the many Jewish Christians living in Alexandria, Egypt, a center for Greek philosophy.

Purpose: To give an intimate portrayal of Jesus Christ. John wrote his gospel to Jewish Christians who were suffering from a "Jesus" gap. They had fled their homeland after Rome sacked Jerusalem and were now living in foreign lands, trying to maintain their faith while interacting with a pagan culture. Moreover, he wrote to a generation who had been born after Jesus' ascension to heaven, a generation who knows Jesus only through third- and fourth-hand reports. John wrote a gospel focused on Jesus himself in order to bridge that gap and reintroduce his audience to the Messiah, the God-man, Jesus.

Outline:
I. Introduction (John 1)
II. Jesus Discloses Himself through Signs (John 2-10)
III. Transition (John 11-12)
IV. Jesus Discloses Himself through Passion (John 13-20)
V. Conclusion (John 21)

Book Summary:
John’s gospel is the story of Jesus, the Messiah and the Son of God. John describes how Christ’s incarnation and death on the cross made God known and secured eternal life for all those who believe in him (cf. 20:30–31).

Themes:
The Divine Messiah: More than any other gospel, Jesus' divinity is asserted and emphasized (1:1; 8:52).

The Rejection of Jesus by Israel: John includes many confrontations between Jesus and "the Jews," and testifies that "his own did not receive him." In this way, the gospel may serve as a rebuke and final warning to certain Jewish people who had yet to receive Jesus as their messiah, or to encourage gentiles that Christianity is not just for the Jews (1:10-11).

The Trinity: John records much more information than any other gospel writer concerning the relationship between the Father and the Son, and also speaks at great length about the Holy Spirit's role in Jesus' ministry.

Light and Darkness: One of John's favorite metaphors for Jesus' ministry is Light in the darkness, representing the truth and life Jesus brings to a wayward and dying world (1:5; 8:12).

ACTS

Dates: As mentioned in the summary of Luke, Acts is usually dated around 63 or 64 A.D. because it ends with Paul in prison at Rome. Theoretically, Paul's release from prison would have served Luke's purpose in writing, and would have been included if the book was written after his release around 64 A.D.
Location: Luke was from Antioch, but traveled with Paul all over modern-day Southern Europe and Asia Minor. Like his gospel, this letter is addressed to Theophilus, probably an important Roman official of some sort, which would likely place him in Rome. The fact that the letter ends with Paul under house arrest in Rome, combined with Luke's frequent references to Roman courts finding no fault with him, might have served the purpose of a testimony in Paul's upcoming trial. If not, perhaps it was a more general appeal to Roman authorities arguing that Christians are law-abiding citizens unworthy of the persecution they suffer at Rome's hand.

Purpose: To stress the geographical inclusiveness of gospel. The book is outlined by the geographical spread of the gospel - “…throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria…” - “….as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch…” - “…throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia…” - “…over to Macedonia…” - “to Rome.” The Purpose of Acts resembles closely the purpose of the gospel of Luke, as it is was written by the same author as a companion volume to that gospel. Just as the gospel of Luke vividly displays the gospel demolishing social barriers, Acts chronicles its demolition of geographical barriers as it spreads throughout the Roman Empire.

Outline:
I. The Gospel in Jerusalem (Acts 1 – 5)
II. The Gospel in Judea and Samaria (Acts 6 – 12)
III. The Gospel in Asia Minor (Acts 13 – 15)
V. The Gospel in Rome (Acts 20 – 28)

Book Summary:
The message and mission of Jesus recorded in Luke and the message and mission of the church recorded in Acts are unified. Both Luke and Acts are addressed to the same man, Theophilus, who was probably some sort of governmental official. His title of “most excellent” is used for governors in other places in Acts (cf. Felix and Festus in 23:26; 24:3; 26:25). Would Theophilus align his life with the Mission of God or would he foolishly try to oppose God’s purpose?

Themes:
The Unhindered Gospel: Although Acts chronicles Peter, Paul, and many other ministers of the gospel meeting various obstacles on their missions, the spread of the gospel will not be thwarted. Even persecution and incarceration of the apostles only serves to spread the gospel further (6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5-6; 19:20; 28:30).

Leadership: As the church grew and spread, the apostles had to implement a leadership structure to insure a distributed yet unified church government (1:21-26; 6:3).

Fellowship: Another challenge for the growing church in Acts was maintaining relationships. Luke emphasizes the gathering together of believers for worship and fellowship, and the sacrifices made for the needy brothers among them (2:42-47; 4:32-36).

Confronting Culture: As the church moved out into a pagan culture, it was confronted with new ideas and new challenges. The apostles made an effort to understand these foreign cultures and express the gospel of Jesus Christ in a culturally relevant way. At the same time, they vigorously defended God's good news, and attacked ideas and systems that contradicted or confused it (2:1-18; 17:22-23).
ROMANS

Author and Dates: Although a precise date cannot be placed on this letter with any certainty, Paul definitely penned it at the end of his third missionary journey, somewhere around 57 AD. Eight years before, Claudius had expelled Jews from Rome because of their fierce debates over a man named "Chrestus," which relegated the Jewish Christians which started this church into an inferior social position. In light of these circumstances, it is no wonder why Paul felt the need to explain the role of both gentiles and Jews in God's family.

Location: Because of the lengthy and detailed personal information at the end of this letter, it is plain that Paul was writing from the city of Corinth, about to leave for Jerusalem (15:22-33). He is writing to the church in Rome, as not only the title but also his remarks in 1:7,15 and 15:24,28 suggest. We know of no apostles who planted the church in Rome. It seems that a large dispersion of Jews converted at Pentecost settled in Rome and began an evangelistic church there that saw many Roman converts. This would explain much of the confusion which the young church suffered trying to define what specific beliefs, rituals, and behaviors marked the true people of God.

Purpose: To declare power of the Gospel and the life that results.

Outline:
I. Righteousness of God and Unrighteousness of Humanity (Romans 1 – 4)
II. The Salvation of God (Romans 5 – 8)
III. The People of God (Romans 9 – 11)
IV. The Result of Grace (Romans 12 – 15)

Book Summary: The Book of Romans is a very theologically sophisticated letter that was written to a church formed by dispersed Jews converted to the faith at Pentecost. Paul discussed at length and in great detail God's view of both gentiles and Jews, suggesting that this Jewish-Christian church in the very heart of pagan culture and the entire Gentile world had stirred up much confusion and argument as to whom exactly God had called to be his people. Paul argues that both Jews and Gentiles alike are sinners, deserving of God's wrath, but receiving instead his undeserved mercy and grace, and should therefore live together in humility, service, and selflessness.

Themes:
Sin: A full 75% of Paul's uses of the word "sin" occur in this one letter. Paul stresses the fact that, even though the Gentiles were not given the Law of God, they were nevertheless guilty of breaking it because it was evident in the world around them and in themselves. Moreover, the Jews were not exempt from God's judgment because they were blessed with the Law; on the contrary, the Law was given to them to give them a more acute sense of their own sinfulness (Rom. 1-2). Not only did Paul assert that both Jew and Gentile alike were lawbreakers, but that they were alike under the curse of their common ancestor Adam. As our representative before God, Adam chose for his entire race a life of independence from and rebellion against God and His Will, and all humankind live with the consequences of that decision (Romans 5).

Faith in Christ: Paul stresses time and time again that righteousness is not achieved through human effort, but through faith in Christ. Only because of His righteousness, and His willingness to include us under His umbrella of righteousness, we are acceptable before God (Romans 4, 10, 1:17).
The Flesh and the Spirit: Paul recognized that the Holy Spirit which Christ had sent to empower His disciples caused a miraculous and fundamental change in those people whom God had chosen to further His gospel. Even so, there remained a vestige of the old, evil, rebellious nature that was in constant conflict with the Spirit (Romans 7).

Grace: Paul asserts that we are saved not on the basis of our own merits, nor on any other basis but His own good pleasure. It is because He, in His mysterious wisdom, chose to die for His enemies, and bless those who cursed Him, that we are saved. Thus there is no room for pride or boasting in our salvation, since we contributed nothing to it. Moreover, we need not suffer the insecurities of thinking that the gift must be earned or repaid, since God freely gave it to us out of the overflow of His love, unconditionally (Romans 9).

Israel: One of the complaints Paul seems to be addressing in this letter is, "Why did God abandon the Jews?" He counters that God has not at all gone back on His promises, but that all His promises were pointing to this very day when those who were Jewish by blood but not by faith were cut off from the people of God, and those who were children of God by faith, but not by bloodline, were grafted in. The promises of God directed toward the people of God always referred to those who were faithful to Him, and not to a particular nationality or ethnicity.

1 CORINTHIANS

Author and Dates: The apostle Paul wrote this letter. He was not one of the original twelve and was formerly named Saul (Acts 13:9). Paul had formerly been a zealous Pharisee (Acts 23:6; 26:5; Phil. 3:5) and persecuted the church (Acts 8:3; 9:1-2; 22:3-4; 26:9-11; 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:14,23; Phil. 3:5). He was converted and appointed to his apostleship by direct encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-19; 22:6-16; 26:12-18). Paul was one of the church’s earliest missionaries, and was especially commissioned to evangelize the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; 15:12; 18:6; 22:21; Gal. 2:9). He planted churches all over the Mediterranean world and authored more New Testament books than any other writer: Romans; 1 & 2 Corinthians; Galatians; Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians; 1 & 2 Thessalonians; 1 & 2 Timothy; Titus; Philemon.

Paul started the church at Corinth in the latter part of 49 AD, ministering there for 18 months before he continued on his missionary journeys. Other apostles visited Corinth and ministered to the saints there, and the Corinthians began to appreciate these men more than Paul, their absent founder. Therefore Paul began communicating to them through letters toward the end of his ministry in Ephesus, probably in early 55 AD.

Location: Corinth was a very large and wealthy port city throughout its history, being located very strategically in the area that joins the Peloponnesus to the mainland of Greece. However, it was destroyed by Rome in 146 BC and not rebuilt until 29 BC. It quickly regained its wealth and popularity, but with a completely new class of people. The city was so infamous for its sexual impropriety that "to Corinthianize" became the slang for having sex. In the letter, it is obvious that some of this kind of behavior crept into the church.

Purpose: The Corinthians did not like Paul at all and challenged his authority and desired “more than” the gospel. Paul is responding to this desire for “more than” the gospel. "First" Corinthians was actually the second letter that Paul had written to the Church at Corinth (5:9). The first, as best we can tell, was
badly misunderstood by the Corinthians. Therefore, Paul wrote them another letter clarifying his previous letter. He had received reports from friends (1:11) who had been in Corinth, including questions they had and problems they were experiencing. This letter is Paul's response to those questions (see chapters 7 and 8). Paul, with this letter, was trying to help encourage and lead a church that was going astray.

Outline of 1 Corinthians

I. Divisions in the Church (1 Cor 1–4)
II. Immorality in the Church (1 Cor 5–6)
III. Answering Questions (1 Cor 7–8)
IV. Christian Freedom (1 Cor 9–10)
V. Worship (1 Cor 11–14)
VI. Reminder of the Gospel (1 Cor 15)
VII. Closing Remarks (1 Cor 16)

Book Summary

The letter was probably written circa A.D. 54-56 from Ephesus during Paul’s third missionary journey. Paul wrote to the church in the city of Corinth, the capital city of the Roman province Achaia. Paul had planted this church during his second missionary journey only a few years earlier. The original audience in Corinth contained members from all levels of society, but consisted mostly of people who were neither rich, wise, nor of noble birth. The original audience had sat under the ministry of Paul, Apollos, and Peter. Subsequent to the ministries of Paul, Apollos, and Peter, the Corinthian church had begun to place improper value on worldly wisdom, including Greek philosophy. Paul wrote the letter largely to discuss the problems he saw in the Corinthian church, although he also included praise for certain things the church was doing well.

Themes:

Freedom from Sin: The Corinthian Church rationalized their own sinfulness by presuming upon God's grace and pridefully assuming God's favor. Paul, conversely, tells them that God has freed his people from slavery to sin so that they might be free from its destruction and free to love others rather than self.

Unity and Peace: The Corinthian church had split itself through factions and arguments. Different groups claimed different church leaders, and brothers litigated against brother in the Roman court system. Paul chastises the Corinthians for their selfishness and pride, which was jeopardizing the unity of Christ's body and Christ's testimony to the world (chapters 1, 3, 7, 11).

2 CORINTHIANS

Author and Date: Allowing for the new developments which Paul addresses for the first time in 2 Corinthians, as well as the visits which Paul's ministry partners made to the city after 1 Corinthians was delivered, this letter must be dated at least a year after 1 Corinthians was written -- probably sometime in 56 AD.

Location: Corinth was a very large and wealthy port city throughout its history, being located very strategically in the area that joins the Peloponnesus to the mainland of Greece. However, it was destroyed by Rome in 146 BC and not rebuilt until 29 BC. It quickly regained its wealth and popularity,
but with a completely new class of people. In this growing metropolis stood the church at Corinth. They were a zealous group of Christians, but the glamour of big-city life rubbed off on them and caused a number of recurring problems that Paul dealt with in his letters.

Purpose: 2 Corinthians was actually Paul's third (some say fourth) letter to the church at Corinth. His first addressed certain issues of church discipline, and his second (our 1 Corinthians) was a more broad corrective for several problems and misunderstandings in that church. He had intended to visit Corinth after 1 Corinthians was written, but decided against it after having heard about recent developments there. The Corinthian church had corrected many of the specific problems which Paul addressed, but their underlying worldliness remained unchanged. They became dazzled by certain traveling evangelists who were preaching a gospel different from Paul's, and discrediting Paul's ministry. 2 Corinthians is Paul's defense of his character and his message in order to keep the Corinthians from following these false apostles in their heresies.

Outline:
I. Reasons for Writing (2 Cor 1–2)
II. Paul's Defense of His Ministry (2 Cor 3–6)
III. Paul's Exhortations to the Corinthians (2 Cor 6–9)
IV. Paul's Critique of the False Apostles (2 Cor 10–13)

Theme:
True Leadership: Certain self-styled "super-apostles" had infiltrated the Corinthian church, discredited Paul and his ministry, and began preaching a different gospel. Over and over Paul asserts that apostleship is not a matter of written recommendation, lofty pay scales, or rhetorical skills, but a matter of calling, love, humility, and sacrifice. Paul demonstrates that Christian ministry is to be typified by humble servanthood.

GALATIANS

Author and Date: This letter was probably written by Paul in 48 AD, when the questions about what would be required of Gentile believers to enter the community of God was hotly debated, but not yet settled at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15).

Purpose: Paul's letter to the church at Galatia served as a warning to that church, and serves today as a warning for us, not to lose the heart of the gospel.

Outline:
Introduction (1:1-5)
Accusation (1:6-10)
Divine Nature of Paul's Gospel (1:11-2:5)
Authoritative Nature of Paul's Ministry (2:6-16)
God's Spirit is Received by Faith, not Ritual (2:17-4:8)
Ritual-Based Religion is contrary to God's Plan (4:9-5:12)
How to Live in God's Freedom (5:13-6:10)
Summary (6:11-18)
Book Summary: The church at Galatia had been getting some bad teaching from Jewish Christians (Paul calls them Judaizers) who did not understand the concepts of grace and freedom. They were teaching that God still required everyone to observe certain rituals and statutes in order to be accepted by Him as a father. Paul reminds the Galatians that they were accepted by God in the beginning not through rituals or obedience to strict behavioral codes, but through faith in Him which is given by the Spirit. He then asks them why they think God would suddenly change the rules! The book serves as a wonderful reminder that God loves us because He chose to love us even when we were totally unlovable. This great news can give us rest and peace since we don’t need to worry about earning it or losing God’s love.

Themes:
Christian Liberty: Paul vehemently defended the idea of salvation by faith. He refused to allow the Judaizers to convince the Galatians that God would not accept them or bless them unless they involved themselves in Jewish rituals, especially circumcision.

The Gospel: Paul takes great pains in this letter to show the Galatians that the gospel that he preached was not something he made up, nor was it something he heard from others, but something that God Himself taught him. Paul's gospel was God's gospel, and should not be warped or exchanged for any contradictory teaching.

Ethnic Diversity: Galatians, more than any other letter, stresses that Christian faith breaks the boundaries of ethnicity. There is no one cultural construct that is best fit for God's good news. Rather, the gospel can be accepted and applied in any cultural context, and this should not be done mechanically but with wisdom and sensitivity.

EPHESIANS

Author and Date: The most likely imprisonment that Paul refers to in this letter is his Roman custody, which dates the letter's composition around 60 AD.

Location: Paul's house arrest in Rome is chronicled in Acts 28:14-31, and this seems to be the circumstances in which the letter to the Ephesians was written.

Purpose: To expand the horizons of the Ephesians by emphasizing God’s eternal purpose, grace, and mysteries. Like Romans, the letter to the church at Ephesus addresses very lofty and widely applicable theological issues. This makes it extremely difficult to determine a specific purpose for the letter. It seems that Paul, having just written a letter to the church at Colosse, is moved to write the church at Ephesus as well and send the two letters by the same messenger (Tychicus: Eph 6:21; Col 4:7). His themes are broad and general, but certainly not lacking in application. Like Romans, Ephesians has become one of the church's most treasured books, displaying the universal and timeless relevance of the theological issues with which Paul and his churches were wrestling.

Outline:
I. Greetings (Eph 1:1-2)
II. God's Purpose in Christ (Eph 1:3-23)
III. Christ's Accomplishment: Relationship with God (Eph 2 – 3)
IV. Christ's Will: Relationships with each other (Eph 4 – 6)
V. Conclusion (Eph 6:21-24)
Book Summary: After describing the glorious calling to which God has called his people (Eph. 1-3), Paul describes how God’s people are to live out this calling in everyday life (Eph. 4-6). The main goal of the believer is to display the glory of Christ by showing love toward others in and outside the church.

Themes:

Sovereignty: Paul emphasizes God's initiative in bringing His people to Himself. In a grandiose run-on sentence (1:3-14) he rejoices in God's sovereign choice to rescue us from our own evil devices and the security that comes from knowing that the Almighty "works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will."

Christ's Supremacy: Jesus is presented as our elder brother and ruler, both an intimate friend and a powerful king (1:15-23).

Equality: In light of the fact that we are God's people based on His choice and not our inherent worth, Paul stresses the fact that we have no business judging others or looking down upon them, nor must we feel inferior to those who would do so to us. God has placed all His children on equal footing, and sees them all as equally lovely. (2:11-22; 4:1-6)

Relationships: Although we are all one in Christ, and equally loved, God calls us in our various relationships to model His gentleness and humility. Whether in positions of power or powerlessness, authority or servitude, in whatever role God has placed us in we are to honor Him by honoring the authority of our superiors and using our authority to benefit others (5:21-6:9)

Spiritual Warfare: Ephesians 6 is probably the most well-known passage of Scripture calling us to acknowledge the presence and influence of spiritual forces at work in our lives.

PHILIPPIANS

Author and Date: Philippians was one of the last letters Paul wrote, having penned it from Roman custody sometime around 61 AD. Paul's house arrest in Rome is chronicled in Acts 28:14-31, and this seems to be the circumstances in which the Philippians came to Paul's aid, and the circumstances in which Paul wrote his letter.

Purpose: Paul wrote the letter to encourage the Philippians in the middle of their suffering. Paul's primary motivation for writing this letter to the church at Philippi was to thank them for their generous financial gift they had sent to him while he was imprisoned in Rome. Like modern support letters, he includes not only his gratefulness, but also a report on his own condition and greetings to his close friends among them. However, as an apostle in the church, he takes this opportunity to encourage them as they faced persecution, internal struggles, and heretical teachers. To further these hopes, he recommends to them the faithful brothers—Timothy and Epaphroditus—who could ministry to them in a more specific and ongoing fashion.

Outline:

Chapter 1—Intro, Thanksgiving, and Paul's Situation
Chapter 2—Christ's Humility, Timothy and Epaphroditus
Chapter 3—Righteousness through Faith
Chapter 4—Unity for the Sake of the Gospel and Summary
Book Summary: Paul showed his gratitude to the Philippians for their generous gift to him (1:3-11), and then demonstrated through his own example why the Philippians should be thankful and joyful as well, no matter what their circumstances, because of God's generosity toward them (2:12-18; 4:4-19).

Importantly, the church at Philippi was not filled with the kind of sin that we see in such places as Corinth or heresy that we see in such places as Galatia. Paul briefly addresses a particular instance of discord within the body: two women, Eudia and Syntyche, are at odds with each other. Paul emphasizes the importance of reconciliation and agreement among God's people for the sake of the Gospel. For the most part, the church at Philippi was doing well. In his absence, Paul’s loving and gracious pastoral tone of affection warns them against a possible slide into heresy and is markedly different than his terse tone in some other New Testament letters.

Themes:

Joy: Paul writes the church about joy and how it can be found in the darkest and most painful seasons of life. Throughout the 104 verses of the letter, the key words that appear include “joy” or “rejoice,” “in Christ,” and “Gospel,” which appears more than in any of Paul’s other letters. Together, they reveal that the secret of our joy is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and it going out even through our pain, trial, and affliction. Thus, joy as presented in Philippians is less a feeling based upon our circumstances and more in experiencing the comfort and forgiveness that comes from faith in Jesus Christ and what he did for us. As illustrations of a life lived for joy, Paul includes the story of Jesus’ joy in suffering (2:6-11), along with his own (3:4-14). According to Paul, because of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, joy is possible in the midst of loneliness (1:1-11), suffering (1:12-18), death (1:19-30), humility (2:1-11), temptation (2:12-30), conflict (3:1-11), exhaustion (3:12-4:1), anxiety (4:2-9), and poverty (4:10-23). The Greek for “joy” is related to the noun charis, "grace, favor" or "that which delights." “Joy” (chara) means "the experience of gladness" or "rejoicing and merriness" and is similar its verb form (chairo), which means "rejoice, be merry." Sometimes Christians act as if Christianity were a sorrowful religion. It is not. It is a religion of joy and love. The leading thought of the letter is joy and gratitude for being in joint-participation in the furtherance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1:5-7). The words "rejoice " and “joy” appear sixteen times in the Letter. This epistle of joy rises to two great spiritual peaks in 2:5-11 where Paul presents the kenosis (the self-emptying or self-humiliation of Christ) and in 3:10-14 when he reveals the drive to know the resurrection and the call of God in Christ. The Judaizers, with their legalism and meanness, have followed Paul to Philippi and there is an echo in chapters one and three of their opposition to Paul and the message of the Gospel that brings joy.

Thanksgiving: Paul showed his gratitude to the Philippians for their generous gift to him (1:3-11), and then demonstrated through his own example why the Philippians should be thankful and joyful as well, no matter what their circumstances, because of God's generosity toward them (2:12-18 and 4:4-19).

Gospel: In Philippians, Paul has mentions the Gospel frequently: "the fellowship in the gospel" (1:5), "confirmation of the gospel" (1:7), "progress of the gospel" (1:12), "defense of the gospel" (1:17), "worthy of the gospel" (1:27), "striving for the faith of the gospel" (1:27), "service in the gospel" (2:22), "labor in the gospel" (4:3), and "the beginning of the gospel" (4:15).

“In Christ” and “in the Lord”: One of the characteristic phrases in Paul’s writings—and John's writings (Gospel of John, John 1, John 2, John 3, and Revelation)—is "in Christ" or "in the Lord," the common Greek prepositional phrases are en Christo or en kurio. Here the preposition
en is used to designate a close personal relation in which the object of the preposition is viewed as the control influence. We see this phrase again and again in Philippians.

Fellowship and Unity: The effect of the Gospel for human relationships is fellowship, unity, and selflessness. Koinonia is another keyword in Philippians. "Partnership" (NIV), "sharing" (NRSV), and "fellowship" (KJV) is the Greek noun koinonia, "close association involving mutual interests and sharing, association, communion, fellowship, close relationship." It is used often to describe relationships with God and with others in the Christian community, as it does here. It sometimes edges into the meaning of "participation, sharing," as in 3:10 "sharing his sufferings" and in the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 10:16). The Philippians, beloved as they are by Paul, have some bickering and dissention going on. You can see this thread going throughout the short letter, sometimes subtly, by inference, and sometimes head-on. Read these verses and discuss the topic of fellowship and unity.

COLOSSIANS

Author and Dates: The most likely imprisonment that Paul refers to in this letter is his Roman custody, which dates the letter's composition around 60 AD, the period in which he also penned Ephesians and Philemon.

Location: Paul's house arrest in Rome is chronicled in Acts 28:14-31, and this seems to be the circumstances in which the letter to the Ephesians was written. Colosse was a dying city. Several hundred years before, it had been a thriving metropolis, but the booming neighboring cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis diminished its economic importance. The church at Colosse was founded by Epaphras, a convert of Paul's. Perhaps it was the fact that this church was started by a young Christian rather than Paul himself made is especially vulnerable to false teachings like the one Paul is thwarting.

Purpose: To declare in extremely positive terms the superiority of Jesus Christ over other tempting powers.

Outline:
I. Introduction (Col 1:1-14)
   II. The Supremacy of Christ (Col 1:15-23)
   III. Paul's Labors (Col 1:24-2:7)
   IV. False Piety (Col 2:8-23)
   V. True Piety (Col 3:1-4:6)
   VI. Concluding Greetings (Col 4:7-18)

Book Summary: Paul's letter to the church at Colosse was to dispel errant teachings that had confused and misled many of the believers there. We don't know exactly what group was spreading this misinformation, but two particular aspects of the letter itself shed some light on the nature of the heresy, and suggest that some form of Jewish mysticism was being disbursed among the Colossians.

Themes:
The Supremacy of Christ: Probably in response to heretical teachings concerning angel worship or the exaltation of the Old Testament mediators, Paul emphasizes the qualitative difference between the Christ and the other significant messengers of God (1:15-20)

Wisdom: It seems that the false teachers were claiming some kind of secret knowledge of God, a knowledge that Paul speaks against. The simple beauty of the gospel is not something reserved for profound thinkers, but is for all men. It is not something to be hoarded in secret, but proclaimed (2:1-8).

Regulations: Part of the false teachers' doctrine included many strict rules and regulations about what must or must not be handled, eaten, or engaged in. Paul dismisses such false piety as an offense to Christ, who fulfilled the law in our stead and offers instead the Spirit to show us divine love, and lead us into spiritual maturity. Rules have no power to curb the sinful nature, but the knowledge and experience of God do. (2:20-23)

1 THESALONIANS

Author and Date: Many of the details in this letter correspond to accounts in Acts that place Paul in Corinth during the time of composition. This would suggest that the letter was written around 51 AD, making 1 Thessalonians one of Paul's earliest canonical writings.

Location: Thessalonica was the capital and largest city of Macedonia. Acts 17:19 tells us that Paul visited this city and began his ministry in the Jewish synagogue, but broadened his outreach to Gentiles as well. He was not able to stay long, thus the Thessalonian church was still quite young and untrained, and made some errors in applying Paul's teachings to their lives. Moreover, they may have felt a bit abandoned as Paul fled the persecution that they undoubtedly had to endure.

Purpose: Paul's first letter to the church at Thessalonica deals mostly with questions about what happens after we die and the nature of Christ's return. It seems that some confusion or misinformation about the last days were negatively affecting the church at Thessalonica, and Paul wrote this letter and another later letter in order to correct certain false doctrines about the second coming.

Outline:
I. Intro / Thanksgiving (1Th 1:1-10)
II. Defense of Paul's Ministry (1Th 2 – 3)
III. Doctrinal and Practical Corrections (1Th 4:1-5:22)
IV. Conclusion (1Th 5:23-28)

Book Summary: In this letter, Paul demonstrates loving concern for his friends in Thessalonica who were enduring suffering for the sake of the gospel. Paul calls them to pursue holiness in the area of sexual relationships because God's will for them is their sanctification. Paul calls them to be ready for the return of Christ, who will bring the present story to a glorious end.

Themes:
Paul's Ministry: Like in Galatians, Paul finds himself needing to justify his actions and his ministry, and insists that his behavior and his preaching testify to his pure motives and divine calling (2:5-12, 17-20).
The End: Paul has to clarify some of the teachings that the Thessalonians had misunderstood. It seems that the Thessalonians may have gotten a bit excited about preaching the end of the world, as Paul has to remind them to mind their own business, lead a quiet life, keep their day jobs, and not preach and wait too zealously for an imminent return of Christ (4:11-12; 5:1-11).

Resurrection: Another misconception that the Thessalonians had was that Christians would not have to die. They figured that Jesus would soon return and gather all those who believed in Him, and when members of their own church started to die, they didn't know what it meant. Paul revisits the doctrine of the resurrection to assure them that, when he returns, Christ will gather all those who believed in Him, both alive and dead (4:13-18).

2 THESSALONIANS

Author and Date: This letter is very similar to 1 Thessalonians both in style and content. This would suggest that the letter was written not long after the first, later in 51 AD.

Location: Thessalonica was the capital and largest city of Macedonia. Acts 17:19 tells us that Paul visited this city and began his ministry in the Jewish synagogue, but broadened his outreach to Gentiles as well. He was not able to stay long, thus the Thessalonian church was still quite young and untrained, and made some errors in applying Paul's teachings to their lives. They appreciated Paul's first letter, but sent further questions with the bearer of the letter, Timothy.

Purpose: Paul's second letter to the church at Thessalonica is very similar to the first—that is, it again deals mostly with questions about the end times. It seems that Paul's first letter raised more questions than it did answers, and the response that Paul received from the Thessalonians prompted him to write another letter and address their concerns.

Outline:
I. Intro / Thanksgiving (2 Th 1:1-12)
II. Doctrinal Correction (2 Th 2)
III. Practical Instruction (2 Th 3)
IV. Conclusion (2 Th 3:16-18)

Book Summary: Paul reassures his readers that Jesus Christ alone holds the key to the future and his people ought to trust in Him alone to defeat the enemy once and for all. In the meantime, believers are to love one another and serve one another.

Themes:
The Second Coming: Paul again has to clarify some of the eschatological (end-times) teachings that the Thessalonians had misunderstood, along with some unfounded rumors that were being spread. It seems that someone tried to convince them that Jesus had already returned, and Paul instructed them more precisely about God's plan (2:1-12).

Diligence: The Thessalonians were still counting on Jesus to return in the very near future. In light of this firm belief, they had evidently quit their jobs and spent their time looking into the sky. While not discouraging them from waiting on the Lord, he exhorted them to work hard, be self-sufficient,
and be a model of diligence and responsibility for their neighbors, rather than being idle and lazy and hoping that Jesus would rescue them from their daily business. (3:6-15)

1 TIMOTHY

Author, Date, and Location: Sometime soon after Paul left Ephesus for Macedonia, in the early 60s AD. Timothy was in Ephesus when he received this letter. For information on that city, see the summary sheet on the book of Ephesians. It seems that they were having problems with false teachings about the role of law in the Christian life, and a lack of leadership to deal with the problems.

Purpose: Written to legitimate young Timothy’s leadership and to direct the young church. Paul wrote this letter to his trusted but inexperienced friend and co-worker Timothy because he was afraid he wouldn't be able to return to Ephesus in time to help Timothy deal with the doctrinal and organizational issues that were cropping up at the time.

Outline:
I. Confronting False Teachers of the Law (1Tim 1)
III. Prayer for Leaders (1Tim 2:1-7)
III. Proper Conduct for Christian Leaders (1Tim 2:8-3:16)
IV. Exhortation to Confront False Teachers (1Tim 4)
V. Dealing with Different Kinds of People (1Tim 5:1-6:2)
VI. Final Warnings (1 Tim 6:3-21)

Book Summary: Paul wrote this letter as a manual for the young pastor Timothy. Paul emphasizes the importance of sound doctrine that leads to godly living and warns him of the inherent dangers of church life in a fallen world, especially false teachers and false doctrine. Thus the church and its leadership should prepare themselves for the work of the ministry by choosing competent leaders and avoid deceitful ones.

Themes:
The Gospel: Paul refers to it as a precious object placed in Timothy's trust, and commissions him as its guardian and pupil at the same time.

Leadership: At this stage in the Church's history there were still many organizational questions to be answered, and Paul offers his advice as a guide for Timothy's own "leadership development program."

False Teachings: Paul is very descriptive when referring to the damage false teachings can do to the spiritual well-being of a Christian, or a church. He also gives practical guidance as to the best way to address and eliminate it.
2 TIMOTHY

Author and Date: This was Paul's last known letter, written just before his death in 67 AD.

Location: Paul was in jail in Rome when he wrote this letter, facing an imminent execution.

Purpose: Paul wrote this letter to his trusted but inexperienced friend and co-worker Timothy from a Roman prison that he was convinced he would never leave. It expresses the concerns of a man contemplating the end of his life, but the ongoing vitality of his life work.

Outline:
I. Paul's Concern for Timothy (2 Tim 1:1-14)
II. Paul's Instructions for Timothy (2 Tim 2)
III. Paul's Description of the Last Days (2 Tim 3)
IV. Paul's Charge (2 Tim 4:1-8)
V. Paul's Final Requests (2 Tim 4:9-22)

Book Summary: In times of trouble, Paul encourages Timothy to passionately and unashamedly devote himself to the ministry of the gospel. Paul exhorts Timothy to continue in his ministry despite the opposition of false teachers. He is to remain faithful until the end. As the final canonized letter from Paul, 2 Timothy functions like the Apostle’s last will and testament of the Apostle. Paul is entrusting in this letter the things that are precious to him, namely the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of David (2:8).

Themes:
Relationships: Paul's main concern throughout this letter is for his friends and co-workers, and for those who have fallen away from the faith. Whether helpful or hurtful, the relationships he had formed throughout his life and ministry are at the forefront of his mind during his last days on earth.

Perseverance: Paul recounts his sufferings at the hands of the enemies of the gospel, yet does not steer Timothy away from that path. Rather, he encourages Timothy that the trials, though certain, cannot thwart the gospel ministry, and calls him to endure such opposition staunchly.

Fear and Shame: In light of such persecution and adversity facing Timothy, Paul calls him to cast out all fear, uncertainty, doubt and shame, and instead be bold, joyful and confident in the promises of Christ.

TITUS

Author and Date: Probably around 63-65 AD, in the period of active ministry between his two imprisonments.

Location: Crete, an island in the Mediterranean Sea, was notorious for their immoral lifestyles. Although we have no record of Paul ministering there (he made a stopover there on his way to Rome in Acts 27, but did not stay long) it seems that he and Titus spent some time there on another occasion, introducing them to the Christian faith.
Purpose: Paul wrote this letter to his trusted friend and co-worker, Titus, in order to organize the church that he and Paul had established there, and to encourage Titus to continue his good work despite the harsh words of Jewish teachers concerning Titus' uncircumcision (Titus was a gentile).

Outline:
I. Greetings (Titus 1:1-4)
II. Leadership Qualities (Titus 1:5-9)
III. False Teachers (Titus 1:10-16)
IV. Dealing with Diverse Groups of People (Titus 2:1-3:2)
V. False Teachings (Titus 3:3-11)
VI. Concluding Remarks (Titus 3:9-15)

Themes:
Leadership: Like 1 Timothy, Paul's goal is to help the church at Crete function more smoothly and effectively, and give it structural protection against the challenges it faced. He does so by outlining the character traits of qualified "elders," governors of the truths of the faith.

Flexibility: In the fledgling church, there were all kinds of new situations that had to be handled in unique ways. Paul describes all kinds of different people groups and situations that needed to be handle in very specific ways, and his advice to the leaders of the Cretan church do not exactly match those he gave to the Ephesian church through Timothy. This illustrates the fact that, as Christians, we are not given a comprehensive, inflexible code by which we live, but rather principles of goodness, love, and righteousness that we apply with wisdom to each individual circumstance.

False Teachings: Everywhere Paul went, and in almost every letter he wrote, he combats the false teachings spread (in most cases) by Judaizing Christians who import much of the old system's laws, codes, rituals, and regulations into the new system of grace and spirit. In this book, it is especially important for Paul to disarm these teachers, since their attack was personal—Titus was himself an uncircumcised gentile.

PHILEMON

Author and Date: Philemon lived in Colosse, and this letter was probably sent to him along with the letter to the church there, around 60 AD.

Location: Paul was under house arrest in Rome when Onesimus came to see him.

Purpose: Paul wrote this short letter to his friend Philemon because one of his slaves, Onesimus, had run away and sought refuge with Paul. During his stay with Paul, he became a Christian, and Paul gently instructs Philemon how he might want to handle this interesting situation.

Outline:
I. Greetings (v 1-3)
II. Thanks and Prayer (v 4-7)
III. Paul’s Plea for Onesimus (v 8-21)
IV. Conclusion (v 22-25)
Themes:
Two Worlds: Onesimus had become a "new man in Christ," and thus called for a new kind of relationship with his owner.

Appeal not Command: Paul used a well-known style of Roman rhetoric to persuade Philemon to treat Onesimus well, as his brother.

Divine Intention: Although Philemon undoubtedly viewed Onesimus' actions as unjust and rebellious, Paul sees it as divinely ordained, in order to bring Onesimus into the family of faith.

HEBREWS

Author: Although some include the Book of Hebrews among the Apostle Paul's writings, the certain identity of the author remains an enigma. Missing is Paul's customary salutation so common to his other works and the suggestion that the writer of this epistle relied upon knowledge and information provided by others who were actual eye-witnesses of Christ Jesus (2: 3) makes Pauline authorship doubtful. Some attribute Luke as its writer; others suggest Hebrews may have been written by Apollos, Barnabas, Silas, Philip, or Aquila and Priscilla. Regardless, Hebrews speaks with the same canonical authority as the other sixty-five books of the Bible.

Date: The early church father Clement quoted from the Book of Hebrews in 95 A.D., however, internal evidence such as the fact that Timothy was alive at the time to epistle was written and the absence of any evidence showing the end of the Old Testament sacrificial system that occurred with Jerusalem's destruction in 70 A.D. indicates the book was written around 65 A.D.

Purpose: Written in the context of suffering to Alexandrian/Hellenistic Jews. Because of severe suffering some were thinking about “going back” to their former beliefs and practices. Many of the early Jewish believers were slipping back into the rites and rituals of Judaism in order to escape the mounting persecution. This letter, then, is an exhortation for these persecuted believers to continue in the grace of Jesus Christ.

Outline:
I. Introduction (1:1-3)
II. The Supremacy of God’s Son (1:4-4:13)
III. The Supremacy of the Son’s High Priesthood (4:14-10:18)
IV. Final Exhortations to Perseverance (10:19-12:29)
V. Concluding Practical Exhortations and Greetings (13:1-25)

Book Summary: The writer of Hebrews continually makes mention of the superiority of Christ in both His person and work. In the writings of the Old Testament, we understand the rituals and ceremonies of Judaism symbolically pointed to the coming of Messiah—the rites of Judaism were but shadows of things to come. Hebrews tells us that Christ Jesus is better than anything mere religion has to offer. All the pomp and circumstance of religion pales in comparison to the person, work, and ministry of Christ Jesus. It is the superiority of our Jesus that remains the theme of this letter.

The writer of Hebrews gives ample encouragement to believers, but there are five solemn warnings: there is the danger of neglect (Hebrews 2:1-4), the danger of unbelief (Hebrews 3:7-4,13), the danger of spiritual immaturity (Hebrews 5:11-6,20), the danger of failing to endure (Hebrews 10:26-39), and the
inherent danger of refusing God (Hebrews 12:25-29). In Hebrews we find a magnificently rendered portrait of Jesus Christ—the Author and Finisher of our great salvation (Hebrews 12:2).

Themes:
- Jesus is a great and faithful high priest
- Warning to believers to persevere
- Holiness is to be pursued in the Community of Faith

**JAMES**

Author: The author identifies himself as James. He was probably the brother of Jesus and the leader of the Jerusalem council. James the brother of John was put to death by Herod Agrippa I about AD 44 (Acts 12:2). But James the brother of Jesus (Gal 1:19) was still alive and became a leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17), presiding over the conference in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13-21) and writing the message from the conference to the Gentile churches (Acts 15:22-29). He was still the leading elder in Jerusalem on Paul’s last visit (Acts 21:18-25).

At first, James did not did not believe in Jesus and even challenged him and misunderstood his mission. Like the other brothers of Jesus, James once disbelieved Jesus’ claims to be the Messiah (John 7:6), but he was won by a special vision of the risen Christ (1 Cor 5:7) and was in the upper room before Pentecost (Acts 1:14). Nevertheless, James met a violent death that was described by the Jewish historian Josephus. Ananus, the high priest, ordered James to be stoned. James’ death, however, came at the hands of the priests who threw him from the roof of the temple, and after he survived the fall he was beaten to death by people with clubs.

Date and Location: The book of James was written between AD 48-50 to believers in Christ among the Jewish Diaspora. James was stoned about AD 62. As leader of the Jerusalem church, James wrote as a pastor to instruct and encourage his dispersed people in the face of their difficulties. The book is addressed to “the 12 tribes which are of the Dispersion” (James 1:1). As the leading elder of the great church in Jerusalem and as a devout follower and half-brother of Jesus, the message of James had a special appeal to the widely scattered Jewish Christians.

Purpose: This epistle of James is one of the most instructive writings in the New Testament. Being chiefly directed against particular errors at that time brought in among the Jewish Christians, it does not contain the same full doctrinal statements as other epistles, but it presents a summary of the duties of believers.

Outline:

I. Trials, Temptations, and Christian Maturity (1:1-18)
II. True Faith is Seen in its Works: Listening and Doing (1:19-27)
III. True Faith is Seen in its Works: Favoritism Forbidden (2:1-13)
IV. True Faith is Seen in its Works: Faith and Deeds (2:14-26)
V. Taming the Tongue (3:1-12)
VI. Two Kinds of Wisdom (3:13-18)
VII. Warning Against Worldliness (4:1-17)
VIII. Warning to Rich Oppressors (5:1-6)
IX. Waiting Patiently in God (5:7-11)
X. Applying Spiritual Principles (5:13-20)

Book Summary: James is the New Testament counterpart of the Old Testament’s wisdom tradition. The first thing we are to do with our faith, according to James, is to wisely live by it, especially when we undergo trials and temptations.

Themes:
The letter is concerned mainly with the practical aspects of the faith, consisting of statements and advice and counsel for everyday conduct and life. There is little reference to any of the central doctrines of the faith. The letter discusses true faith, true living, and true wisdom. In the very first verse he places Jesus on the same level as God (“the Lord Jesus Christ”). In 2:1 he presents Jesus as the object of faith: “as you believe in out Lord Jesus Christ, who is the glory.” Here Jesus is referred to as the Shekinah glory of God. James refers to Jesus as “Lord” frequently (James 1:1, 2:1, 3:9, 5:11, and 5:14). This refers to the ascended Christ who is full of glory.

The book of James does not refer to the cross or resurrection, but he alludes to the murder of Jesus (James 5:6) and his second coming (James 5:8). The main aim of the letter is to strengthen the faith and loyalty of scattered Christians in the face of persecution from those who were oppressing them. It is the picture of early Christian life in the midst of difficult social conditions. The glory of the New Testament is that the revelation of God meets our problems today because it did meet those problems of the first century. James is concerned mainly with the ethical and social aspects of the gospel that the followers of Christ may base their lives on.

James and Paul use the same words (faith, works, justify), but they mean different things by them. James and Paul do not contradict each other. Paul talks about “justifying” meaning that Christians are “declared righteous” before God because of Jesus’ work. James talks about “justifying” meaning that Christians are to demonstrate the gift of this righteousness before others. Paul is referring to the reception of righteousness. James is referring to showing that true faith exists in us by displaying the proof of it, which is good works.

James is answering the issue of obedience (James 2:14). Paul is answering the issue of salvation and redemption (Romans 1:17). Both refer to Abraham. Paul points to Gen 15 when Abraham is justified before God. James points to Gen 22 when Abraham is justified before humans. We are saved by faith alone, but a saving faith will not be alone.

1 & 2 PETER

Purpose: To encourage Christians in their suffering. 1 Peter 5:12 sheds light on the overall purpose of the epistle. Peter sees Christians in danger of persecution (1:6) and not prepared for it (4:12). In the light of this he aimed to do two things: to encourage and to testify to the true grace of God (5:12) in which he urged his readers to stand. These two purposes are intertwined as Peter gives encouragement by declaring God’s gracious acts in Christ, made known and mediated by his Spirit.

Author: In the four lists of the twelve apostles in the New Testament (Matt. 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:13-16; Acts 1:13), Peter is always mentioned first. “Peter’s original name was apparently the Hebrew Simeon (Acts 15:14; 2 Pet. 1:1): perhaps, like many Jews, he adopted also “Simon”, usual in the NT, as a Greek name of similar sound. His father’s name was Jonah (Mt. 16:17); he himself was married (Mk.
1:30), and in his missionary days his wife accompanied him (1 Cor. 9:5). The fourth Gospel gives Bethsaida, just inside Gaulanitis, and a largely Greek city, as his place of origin (John 1:44), but he had also a home in Capernaum in Galilee (Mark 1:21ff.). Both places were at the lakeside, where he worked as a fisherman, and in both there would be abundant contact with Gentiles. His brother’s name is Greek. Simon spoke Aramaic with a strong N-country accent (Mark 14:70), and maintained the piety and outlook of his people (cf. Acts 10:14), though not trained in the law (Acts 4:13; literacy is not in question). It is likely that he was affected by John the Baptist’s movement (cf. Acts 1:22): his brother Andrew was a disciple of John (John 1:39ff.).

Peter was one of the first disciples called; he always stands first in the lists of disciples; he was also one of the three who formed an inner circle round the Master (Mk. 5:37; 9:2; 14:33; cf. 13:3). His impulsive devotion is frequently portrayed (cf. Mt. 14:28; Mk. 14:29; Lk. 5:8; Jn. 21:7), and he acts as spokesman of the Twelve (Mt. 15:15; 18:21; Mk. 1:36ff.; 8:29; 9:5; 10:28; 11:21; 14:29ff.; Lk. 5:5; 12:41). At the crisis near Caesarea Philippi he is the representative of the whole band: for the question is directed to them all (Mk. 8:27, 29), and all are included in the look that accompanies the subsequent reprimand (8:33).

On any satisfactory interpretation of Mk. 9:1 the transfiguration is intimately related to the apostolic confession which precedes it. The experience made a lasting impression on Peter: 1 Pet. 5:1; 2 Pet. 1:16ff. are most naturally interpreted of the transfiguration, and, for what they are worth, the Apocalypse and Acts of Peter show that their authors associated the preaching of this subject with Peter. In a measure, the disastrous boast of Mark 14:29ff. is also representative of the disciples; and, as Peter’s protestations of loyalty are the loudest, so his rejection of the Lord is the most explicit (Mk. 14:66ff.). He is, however, specially marked out by the message of the resurrection (Mk. 16:7), and personally receives a visitation of the risen Lord (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5).

Location: Peter wrote his epistle to Christians scattered throughout the region of Asia Minor, that is, modern-day Turkey (cf. 1 Peter 1:1-2). The letter of 1 Peter is addressed to Christians residing in Pontus, Cappadocia, Galatia, Asia, and Bithynia, a vast area of approximately 129,000 square miles. As a comparison, the state of California covers about 159,000 square miles.

Outline:

First Peter
I. Salutation (1:1-2)
II. The Identity of the People of God (1:3–2:10)
III. The Responsibilities of the People of God (2:11–4:11)
IV. The Responsibilities of a Church and its Elders in the Midst of Trials (4:12–5:11)
V. Concluding Remarks (5:12-14)

Second Peter
I. Greeting (1:1-2)
II. The Certainty of Salvation (1:3–21)
III. False Teachings (2:1–3:16)
IV. Conclusion (3:17-18)

Book Summary: Those who originally received this letter were Christians who were in danger of losing their way. Their new-found faith had severed the ties which had bound them to their non-Christian
relatives and neighbors and was itself being tested because they were facing suffering. This situation was probably not what they had expected when they had first heard the gospel, and it is an experience faced by every generation since then.

Peter met their needs by reassuring them of the gospel. Father, Son and Holy Spirit work together to bring us a new life (1:3–5; 2:2; 4:1–6) in which the past is forgiven (2:24; 3:18), the present is protected (1:5) and motivated (4:2), and the future assured (1:4, 7). This is a way of life to be lived out in practical terms (1:13–16) and in everyday relationships (2:16; 3:1, 7). It equips the followers of Jesus for living in the real world of the here and now (4:1–4) and for that world of eternal glory for which Jesus is even now preparing us (5:10).

So Peter’s response to the question of suffering is that it is a part of the journey of faith. It tests the seriousness of our discipleship (1:7), joins us to our fellow-Christians (5:9), and will be vindicated on the day of judgment (4:16–19). Though believers are ‘strangers’ and ‘scattered’ in this world (1:1), they are part of the pilgrim people of God (2:5, 9), journeying to the Father’s home (1:4). They look forward to the day when Jesus will return for his own (1:7; 2:12; 5:4). These are truths which can motivate today’s Christians to live for God’s glory, just as they encouraged Peter’s original readers. Peter writes as one whose heart has lost none of the fire of love stirred up by the Master at the Sea of Tiberias (cf. Jn. 21:1, 15–19 with 1 Pet. 1:8). In this letter there is all the vividness of the personal recollections of a follower of Jesus Christ.

Themes:

Peter wrote with a practical purpose, and would no doubt have been surprised if asked about the letter’s theological content. He did not write to set out a theology (as Paul did in Romans or Colossians) but, as a pastor, he based his advice on his knowledge of the character of God. So the doctrines set out in the letter are those that provide a motive for Christian living.

**Doctrine of God**—In 1:1–2 Peter clearly sets out the practical relationship between the three persons of the Trinity. God is sovereign, and so can be trusted (4:19). He is holy, and so is to be copied (1:15–16). He is a Father, and so his children must live up to the family name (1:17), and the fact that he has redeemed his people is a ground for assurance (1:18–21).

**Doctrine of Christ**—Christ is sinless, obedient and prepared to suffer to the limit. This is an example for us (2:21–24). He died and rose again, so we must die to sin and live by his risen power (2:24; 4:1). His work is described in terms of redemption (1:18–19), reconciliation and being the sin offering and the substitute (3:18), and he was predestined for this very purpose by the Father’s love (1:20–21). He is also the foundation of God’s church, providing the ground of faith and hope, and inspiring to holiness and love (2:16; 1:21–22).

**Doctrine of the Holy Spirit**—The Holy Spirit is seen as the agent of sanctification (1:2), the author of Scripture (1:11), the enabler of Christian ministry (1:12) and the encourager of Christians undergoing persecution (4:14).

**Doctrine of Scripture**—The authority of Scripture is stressed by the way Peter appeals to the OT to support his teaching (e.g. 1:24–25; 2:6–8; 3:10–12; 4:18). Its source is seen to be in the guiding of the writers by the Holy Spirit (1:11; cf. 2 Pet. 1:21) and its enduring quality is underlined by a quotation from Is. 40:6–8 (1:23–25). Scripture is also pictured as a seed, by which the new birth is effected in human lives as people hear and respond to the preaching of the
gospel (cf. 1:23 with 25), and as the means of Christian growth (if 2:2 is translated ‘milk of the word’).

Doctrine of the church—Peter has a high regard for the corporate nature of the people of God, entered into by the individual believer at his or her new birth (2:2–5; cf. 1:22–23). The church is God’s building, on the foundation of Christ himself (2:4–8), and as such it is the inheritor of the blessings promised to Israel (2:9–10). Its twofold function is to offer worship to God and witness before people (2:5, 9). Already in Peter’s day the church had a corporate eldership, seen as a responsible and sacred office (5:1–4), but also encouraged the development and use of spiritual gifts by each member (4:10–11).

Doctrine of the last days—Peter writes as one who looks forward to the great unveiling in the last days, and he uses the Greek root *apocalyp*—(‘revelation’) to describe the return of Christ. So he reminds his readers that the unseen Christ is never far away, and points them to the glories they will share when Christ is revealed. Their salvation will be fully realized and they will enter into their full inheritance (1:5). Their faith will be finally honored (1:7; 4:13), and the full extent of God’s grace discovered (1:13). Christ’s glory will be shared (5:1) and faithful service rewarded (5:4). The expectation of Christ’s return is a most compelling argument for holy living and careful stewardship now (4:7–11, 17–18).

**1 JOHN**

Author and Date: The author of the Gospel of John is the same John who wrote 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John. There is hardly a new thought in 1 John that is not already found in the Gospel of John. There is similarity between these two in vocabulary, syntax, style, and ideas. The author of 1 John is John son of Zebedee—the apostle and the author of the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation. He was a first cousin of Jesus. The letter is difficult to date with certainty. But, it was probably written around AD 90.

Location: In light of John’s substantial ministry in Ephesus, the epistles were probably written to churches located in or around Asia Minor. 1 John mentions no addressee and contains no specific greetings or thanksgivings that usually are found in first century letters. However, we may infer from John’s frequent reference to “my dear children” that he is addressing first or second generation Christians. Also, the lack of direct quotes form the OT seems to point to a predominantly Gentile audience rather than Jewish Christians.

Purpose: False teachers were trying to mislead the first-century Christians by denying, among many things, the true humanity of Jesus Christ. The view that Jesus was not truly human was a belief of false teachers called Gnostics. There are two passages in which the false teachers are specifically rejected (1 John 2:18 and 1 John 4:1–6). The Gnostics also claimed superior knowledge of the truth. But nine times John describes what it means to know the truth (2:3, 2:5, 3:16, 3:19, 3:24, 4:2, 4:6, 4:13, 5:2).

Outline:

1. The Reality of the Incarnation (1:1-4)
2. Fellowship with the Father and Son (1:5-2:28)
   A. Fellowship with God (1:5-2:6)
   B. The New Commandment (2:7-17)
   C. The Christian and antichrists (2:18-29)
3. Children of God (2:29-3:19)
   A. Divine Sonship (2:29-3:10)
   B. Love one Another (3:11-18)
   C. Confidence in God (3:19-24)

   A. Testing the Spirits (4:1-6)
   B. God is Love (4:7-21)
   C. Faith’s Victory (5:1-5)
   D. The Witness to the Son (5:6-12)


Book Summary: This epistle is a discourse upon the principles of Christianity, in doctrine and practice. The design appears to be to refute and guard against erroneous and unholy tenets, principles, and practices, especially such as would lower the Godhead of Christ, and the reality and power of his sufferings and death, as an atoning sacrifice; and against the assertion that believers being saved by grace, are not required to obey the commandments. While the Gospel of John was written to prove that Jesus was God, 1 John was written to prove Jesus was a real human too. John was also encouraging his readers in the truth and life of Christ. John had two main purposes in mind: 1) to expose false teachers and 2) to give believers assurance of their salvation. In keeping with his purpose to combat the Gnostic false teachers (who taught that the spirit is entirely good and flesh or matter is entirely evil), John struck at their lack of morality. By giving his eyewitness testimony to the incarnation, he wanted to confirm his readers’ belief in the incarnate Christ.

Theme:
A major theme in 1 John is “Light and Darkness.” In view of the “light and darkness” teaching in 1 John, we can say that the “new age” has started as night is yielding to day and light is subduing darkness. The Gnostics of the time taught that light and darkness were two equal forces. But in John’s letter, “light” is the “world of God”- the redeemed world, and darkness is the “world”- the world of humans who lie in the realm of the evil one (1 John 5:19). But the light is already and presently overcoming the darkness and will be complete when Jesus returns. The world of darkness, which is in rebellion toward God, is being subdued by the world of light that is the ransomed people of God.

2 JOHN

Author and Date: The apostle John is the author this letter. He most likely wrote the book at about the same time as 1 John (about AD 90). Note these obvious similarities between 1 John and 2 John (2 John 5 and 1 John 2:7; 2 John 6 and 1 John 5:3; 2 John 7 and 1 John 4:2-3; 2 John 12 and 1 John 1:4).

Purpose: During the first two centuries of the early church, the gospel was taken from place to place by traveling evangelists and teachers. Believers customarily took these missionaries into their homes and gave them provisions for their journey when they left. Since the Gnostic false teachers also relied on this practice, the book of 2 John was written to urge discernment in supporting traveling teachers.
Audience: There is no way to tell if “the elect lady” is a specific woman or a church. The obvious way of taking it is that it written to a woman of distinction in one of the church, like “the co-elect lady in Babylon” (1 Peter 5:13)—Peter’s wife who traveled with him (1 Cor 9:5). Some think that it refers to a specific church to which the letter was sent. The letter refers to the elect woman and her children. This can mean real children (like in 1 Tim 3:4) or the spiritual children of the church (like in Gal 4:19 and Gal 4:25 and 1 Tim 1:2). It is more consistent to take this reference as referring to the local church as a whole. Feminine personifications of the church abound in the writings of the apostles (1 Peter 5:13, 1 Cor 11:2, Ephesians 5:25-29).

Outline:
1. Greeting (verses 1-3)
2. Exhortation for their Love (verses 4-6)
3. Warning against Deceivers (verses 7-11)
4. Conclusion (verses 12-13)

Book Summary: 2 John is all about living in the love of God in accordance with the truth of Jesus Christ.

Theme: John writes of how important it is for Christians to love one another. To love means to obey God’s commandments, and God’s commandments in turn tell us to live lives of love. John emphasizes the importance of the teaching that Jesus is God’s Son—both God and man. Christians should separate themselves from those who teach that Jesus is not God’s Son.

3 JOHN

Author and Date: This letter was probably written about the same time as 1 John and 2 John. A comparison of 2 John and 3 John suggests that the apostle John was the author of both letters. John functioned as an elder in his later years, and he begins both 2 John and 3 John with that title. John uses identical phrases in both books: “love in the truth” (2 John 1 and 3 John 1) and “walking in the truth” (2 John 4 and 3 John 4).

Purpose: Traveling teachers sent out by John were rejected in one of the churches in the province of Asia by the leader, Diotrephes. This man had gone so far as to excommunicate members who showed hospitality to John’s messengers. John wrote to Gaius, his friend and a leader in the church. He writes to praise and thank Gaius for his help and to give him encouragement. He also reproves Diotrephes for not cooperating and for rebelling against John’s leadership. In a later visit John will deal with him personally.

People: We do not know which Gaius this is. There are three friends of Paul with this name: Gaius of Corinth (1 Cor 1:14), Gaius of Macedonia (Acts 19:29) and Gaius of Derbe (Acts 20:4). Gaius was a very common name in the time of the letter’s writing. It is possible that 3 John 9 is referring to 2 John and, if so, then both letters went to individuals in the same church (one to a loyal woman and one to a loyal man). Three persons are described in 3 John. Gaius is the dependable layman in the church, Diotrephes is the dominating official, Demetrius is the kind messenger from Ephesus with the letter.
Outline:
1. Greeting and Encouragement to Gaius (verses 1-8)
2. Condemnation of Diotrephes (verses 9-10)
3. Exhortation to Gaius (verse 11)
4. Example of Demetrius (verse 12)
5. Conclusion (verses 13-14)

Book Summary: This letter is very similar to 2 John, with one difference: where 2 John deals with general principles, 3 John gives concrete examples in the life of a specific congregation. John encourages his readers to walk in Christ, brotherly love, and to avoid false doctrine.

JUDE

Author: The author identifies himself as Jude. He was most likely Judas, the brother of Jesus. Jude or Judas was a very common name. In the New Testament we have Judas Iscariot and Judas son or brother of James (John 14:22 and Luke 6:6), Judas of Galilee (Acts 15:22), Judas of Damascus (Acts 9:11), Judas Barsabbaas (Acts 15:22). Jude calls himself a slave of Jesus, just as James did, and he adds that he is also a brother of Jesus. Jude and James both seemed to not emphasize being called the brothers of Jesus. Maybe to them it claimed too much authority.

Date: The letter of Jude is similar to 2 Peter. Compare Jude 3-18 to 2 Peter 2:1-18. The letter was probably written about AD 65. Some interest arises from a comparison of Jude and 2 Peter. Jude 3-18 is almost identical with 2 Peter 1:5 and 2:1-18. One or the other writer certainly had before him the work of the other. It is probable that Jude found that a part of Peter's epistle expressed his ideas so well that he modified it somewhat and inserted it in his letter. It is more likely that Jude would thus honor an apostolic letter of the renowned Peter than that Peter would borrow from Jude. If this is so then the epistle of Jude was written between A. D. 65 and 70, or shortly before the siege of Jerusalem.

Purpose: Jude started as a personal letter from a leader in the apostolic church to one or more of the congregations dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. The dangers facing the church at this time were not those of persecution but of heretics and distorters of the faith and false teachers. Although Jude was eager to write to his readers about salvation, he thought he must instead warn them about certain immoral men circulating among them who were perverting and using the grace as an excuse to sin. Apparently these false teachers were trying to convince believers that being saved by grace gave them permission to sin. The recipients of Jude are unknown, but they were probably Jewish because of the many OT references: the exodus, angels, Sodom and Gomorrah, Cain, Balaam, Korah, and Enoch.

Outline:
1. Introduction and Greeting (verses 1-2)
2. Occasion for the Letter: The Danger (verse 3-4)
3. Warning against False Teachers: The Dangerous Men (verses 5-16)
4. Exhortation to Believers: Practical Advice (verses 17-23)
5. Doxology: Concluding Praise (verses 24-25)

Book Summary: The book of Jude warns readers against the clever devices of the false teachers among them. Their false teaching may be new, but their error is as old as time. Jude warns his readers to remain
faithful to the doctrine they have already been taught and to look to God the Father and the Lord Jesus who are be able to strengthen them amidst the last days.

Themes: This epistle is addressed to all believers in the gospel. Its design appears to be to guard believers against the false teachers who had begun to creep into the Christian church, and to scatter dangerous tenets, by attempting to lower all Christianity into a merely religious outward profession. They taught their disciples to live in sinful courses, at the same time flattering them with the hope of eternal life.

REVELATION

Author and Date: Revelation was written between 65-95 A.D. by John (1:1, 4, 9), traditionally identified as the apostle, the son of Zebedee.

Purpose: Written to help explain the significance of the kingdom of God and its history. Written in the context of suffering to give hope for future by describing the drama of redemption.

Outline (7 parallel sections):
   I. Christ and the seven lamp stands (1-3)
   II. The seven seals (4-7)
   III. Christ vs. Dragon and his allies (12-14)
   IV. The seven bowls of wrath (15-16)
   V. The fall of the dragon’s allies (17-19)
   VI. Victory through Christ (20-22)

Book Summary: Revelation is a Christian prophecy, filled with Old Testament language, written in apocalyptic style and imagery and put into letter form. It deals with the suffering and ultimate salvation of God’s people and reminds that God’s wrath will come upon his enemies. Revelation concludes with a vision of the future restored paradise in the new heavens and the new earth where God’s people will dwell securely in God’s presence forever (22:1-5).

Themes:
   God is sovereign over the course of history.
   The Church’s salvation is secure.
   The glory of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God and the Lion of Judah.