

Summary of the Books of the Bible

2 Timothy - Paul writes a second letter to Timothy how he should personally conduct himself as the leader of a church, particularly in the face of false doctrine. This is Paul's last letter, written from a Roman prison shortly before his martyrdom.

Titus - Paul writes to Titus as a church leader with instructions regarding the establishment of order in the church in Crete.

Philemon - Onesimus was a slave who had run away from Philemon, Paul's coworker and friend. But Onesimus had been won to Christ through Paul while Paul was in jail. Paul sends him back to Philemon with this letter, instructing Philemon to receive Onesimus no longer as a slave, but as a beloved brother.

General Epistles

The books in this group were written by various authors to scattered groups of Christians to encourage them in particular aspects of their faith.

Hebrews - This is the only book in the New Testament with an unknown author. He writes to Christians of Jewish background who are considering returning to their Jewish roots to avoid persecution. He presents Christ as the fulfillment of all the Old Testament pictures and superior to the old ways in every respect.

James - This epistle is written by James to show that good works are a necessary outcome of faith. In so doing, he describes in very practical terms how a Christian lives out his faith.

1 Peter - The Apostle Peter writes to Christians facing persecution, telling them first who they are and what they have in Christ. He then assures them that persecution is an expected part of the Christian life and that their testimony for

Christ under these circumstances is more important than their personal suffering.

2 Peter - After telling his readers to be sure of their own salvation, Peter warns them of false teachers and their destruction. He concludes with a reminder that the Lord will come and justice will be done for all.

1 John - The Apostle John writes his first letter to believers to give them assurance of their salvation by the changes that have occurred in their understanding of God, their moral conduct, and their love for their fellow Christians.

2 John - John's second epistle is a brief letter to an unnamed church, reminding them to love each other and to turn away from false teachers.

3 John - John writes briefly to his friend Gaius, commending him for his faithfulness and love, and warning him of the actions of Diotrophes, who is causing division by his gossip and controlling ways.

Jude - In this last epistle in the New Testament, Jude warns against false teachers and apostates, giving many of their identifiable characteristics.

Revelation - The Apostle John, now an old man and in exile for his faith, receives a vision of the risen Christ, who then dictates letters to each of seven churches commending them for the good in them and warning them of their faults. He then receives many visions of the end times, including the second coming of Christ, the final judgement of unrighteous people, and the eternal state of the believer.

WHWilder

Summary of the Books of the Bible

The Bible is a truly unique and remarkable book. It begins with the creation of the universe and ends with a series of dramatic visions that carry the reader to the end of time and beyond. Yet it is not one book, but sixty-six books, written by more than forty men over a period of fifteen hundred years. It consists of many different kinds of literature: history, biography, poetry, wise sayings, recorded speeches, and personal letters. But with all this variety, it has one author: God Himself; one theme: the relationship of God and the people He created; and one great hero: Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

This diversity of writers and broad span of time combined with the Bible's singularity of focus and total coherence is at once the greatest testimony to its divine authorship and the greatest hindrance to its understanding. God could have used one person to write a shorter, simpler version of the story, but this would have lacked the richness and depth that His character deserves. He could have made it so complex and mystical as to be totally beyond human understanding, but then it would have been of no benefit to mankind. Instead, He chose to ground it in the reality of historical events, the lives of real people, and His interaction with them, all recorded without contradiction or error.

As you begin to read the Bible, it will be very helpful to understand how these sixty-six books were put together. The Bible is divided into two major sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Old Testament, consisting of thirty-nine books, is primarily about the Jewish people and God's covenant with them to be His chosen people. They are the people to whom He gave His great revelations, who recorded and preserved His word, and they are the community into which He sent His Son to be the savior of the world. The Old Testament is still the sacred book of the Jewish faith. This section of the Bible ends about 400 years before the birth of Jesus Christ.

The twenty-seven books of the New Testament record the birth of Jesus Christ, His three years of ministry, His death, burial, resurrection, and His return to heaven. It also records the growth of the early Christian Church and its foundational

theology.

The Old and the New Testaments are further divided into groups of books of similar types. These are explained in the following pages along with a summary of each book of the Bible.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Pentateuch

The first five books of the Bible are known as The Pentateuch, or the books of the law. They were all written by Moses, approximately 1400 years B.C. (Before Christ). They carry the history of the people of Israel up to the point where they are ready to move into Canaan, the land God has promised to them for their homeland. God also reveals Himself by the name "Yahweh," which is generally indicated in the English Bible as LORD.

Genesis - Genesis begins with God and His acts of creation, tells the history of man's fall and continuance in sin, God's judgement on the world by the flood, and His promises of redemption. The focus then shifts to the patriarchs of Israel and God's covenant relationship with them, from the call of Abraham to Jacob and his family living in Egypt.

Exodus - Jacob's family had grown very large (2 million) and had become slaves in Egypt. By performing a number of miracles through Moses, God brought them out of Egypt to Mt. Sinai, where He gave them His laws for personal conduct, worship, and government.

Leviticus - The priests were to be the intermediaries who presented the people to God. Leviticus provides the priests with the instructions for carrying out this responsibility. In so doing, it emphasizes

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the Holiness of Yahweh by showing what the people must do to approach Him, to obtain forgiveness, and to walk in His favor.

Numbers - As the Israelites prepare to leave Mt. Sinai to journey to the Promised Land, they take a census of the people. Despite various complaints against Moses, the people journey to the southern end of Canaan. They send in twelve spies who report that it is a good land, but will be difficult to conquer. Rather than trusting God to fulfil His promise, as two of the spies recommend, the people turn back. Under God's judgement, they wander for forty years in the wilderness until that generation dies. They then come to the Jordan River and prepare to enter the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy - As the Israelites prepare to enter the promised land, Moses addresses them in a series of six messages, reviewing their history and affirming the LORD's requirements for the future. The people then affirm their covenant relationship to Yahweh. Joshua is appointed successor to Moses, and Moses dies.

The Historical Books

The next twelve books of the Old Testament are historical books. They continue the history of the twelve tribes of Israel from the time they enter the promised land, through their growth into a united and powerful nation, division of the kingdom, defeat and exile, and the restoration and rebuilding of the temple.

Joshua - Joshua leads the Children of Israel across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land. God gives them victory after victory over their enemies, as long as they are faithful to Him. The land is then apportioned among the twelve tribes and settled. In his last days, Joshua reminds the people to be obedient and faithful to Yahweh. Joshua and the people are continually admonished to "be strong," "be of good courage," and "be not afraid."

Judges - After the death of Joshua and those leaders whom he had trained, Israel turned away from the LORD. The book of Judges chronicles a series of cycles in which Israel turns away from the LORD; He judges them with oppression from other nations; they repent and plead for His help; and He sends a deliverer to rescue them. The book illustrates man's continual tendency to sin and God's everlasting patience and forgiveness when man repents. One key to the book is the statement "every man did what was right in his own eyes"

Ruth - Ruth is a Moabitess, and the widow of an Israelite. She accompanies her mother-in-law, Naomi, as she returns to Bethlehem, and marries her husband's kinsman Boaz, according to the law of the Kinsman-redeemer. The story is a beautiful illustration of the LORD's mercy on His people and Christ's redemption of lost sinners.

1 Samuel - This book records the transition from the rule of Israel by the Judges to the Kings. The dominant personality in the book is the prophet Samuel, the last of the judges, and a priest. At the people's request and God's direction, he anoints Saul the first king of Israel. But Saul is disobedient, and God directs Samuel to anoint David as the next king. After his anointing, Saul turns against David, tries to kill him, and pursues him when he flees. The book ends with the death of Saul in battle

2 Samuel - This book is the record of David's life as the king of Israel, the establishing of Israel as a powerful nation and Jerusalem as the center of worship. It also records David's personal life and the LORD's covenant with him establishing his throne forever.

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Romans - Paul had not yet visited the church in Rome when he wrote this epistle, his most comprehensive statement of the gospel. In the first eight chapters he lays out the need, means, and results of justification by faith. In the next three chapters he discusses the past, present, and future relationship of God and Israel. The last five chapters show the outworking of salvation in the lives of believers.

1 Corinthians - The church in Corinth was filled with problems, and turned to their founder to address the issues. Paul responds to their letter and some verbal questions as well. This letter addresses problems of divisions in the church, the importance of the Holy Spirit in understanding spiritual issues, handling sin in the congregation, issues of divorce and singleness, the Lord's Supper, the appropriate use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians - In this letter Paul responds to criticism of his ministry, with the conclusion that God's grace is sufficient for him to stand strong in all circumstances. It is the most personal of all his church epistles.

Galatians - Paul had founded a number of churches in the province of Galatia. Now Judaizers were following his footsteps, teaching that following Jewish ceremonial laws, including circumcision, was necessary for a right relationship with God. Paul responds that while the law had a purpose in bringing us to Christ, we are fully saved by grace alone.

Ephesians - After spending nearly three years founding the church in Ephesus, Paul later writes to them from prison in Rome to remind them of their glorious position in Christ and their unity in the church. He then shows them what it means to walk

worthy of their calling and to live in the fullness in the Spirit. In the last chapter he describes the weapons the believer has to fight spiritual warfare.

Philippians - To the church in Philippi, Paul writes from a Roman prison about the joy of life in Christ, regardless of the circumstances. Chapter two offers a marvelous statement of the humiliation and exaltation of Christ, and Chapter 3 shows the intensity of Paul's desire to follow Christ.

Colossians - Paul writes to the church in Colosse to warn against some human philosophies creeping into the church. He does this by exalting Jesus Christ as the supreme creator, Savior, and sustainer of the universe, and the total solution for man's needs both for time and eternity. He then urges the believers to set their hearts and minds on heavenly things to guide their lives here on earth.

1 Thessalonians - After commending the young church at Thessalonica for their faith, Paul reminds them of his ministry among them as an example of how they should act, and encourages them by telling them about the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians - Paul again writes to the Thessalonian church to encourage them in the persecution they are experiencing and teach them regarding the Day of the Lord.

1 Timothy - Paul writes to Timothy as the leader of the church in Ephesus, with instructions about church order and discipline and how he must conduct himself as the leader of the church.

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THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Gospels

The New Testament begins with four books about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Each is written to a different audience and for a different purpose, but all glorify Him as the unique Son of God, come into the world to save sinners. Each was written by the man whose name it bears.

The first three gospels are called the synoptic gospels because they often report the same events. The Gospel of John seems to record events ignored by the other three writers.

Matthew - Matthew was one of the twelve disciples and wrote primarily to a Jewish audience to prove that Jesus Christ was indeed their promised Messiah and king.

The key word is “fulfilled” as he shows how Jesus fulfilled many Old Testament prophecies. Matthew emphasizes the sermons of Jesus. His record of the birth of Jesus appears to be more through the eyes of Joseph.

Mark - This writer was an early follower of Jesus, though not one of the twelve disciples. He was a close associate of the Apostle Peter, who is the primary source of Mark’s information.

The Gospel of Mark is written for the Roman mind; it emphasizes Jesus actions and miracles more than His dialog, showing Him as the faithful servant of God. The key word is “immediately.”

Luke - Luke is the only gentile (non-Jew) to write a book of the Bible. He was a close associate of Paul who “carefully investigated” all the stories of Jesus and wrote an “orderly account” (Luke 1:3).

Luke addressed his gospel primarily to the Greek mind, presenting Jesus as the Son of Man, with emphasis on His parables and His compassion, contacts with gentiles, women, the poor and the outcast. Luke’s birth narrative appears to be from Mary’s viewpoint.

John - The writer of this gospel account is the Apostle John, one of Jesus inner circle of three disciples. He emphasized Jesus as the Son of God, writing with the purpose that the reader “may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.”

The stories in John are generally longer, emphasize Jesus teachings and the opposition of the Jewish religious leaders. The key word is “believe,” as after each story he gives and assessment of who believed in Jesus.

Acts - The Book of the Acts of the Apostles is the second book written by Luke, and is in a category by itself in the New Testament as a book of history.

Acts begins with the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven forty days after His resurrection, and records events in the history of the early church for the following thirty years as it expanded from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, as Jesus commanded in Acts 1:12. The book ends with the Apostle Paul in prison in Rome.

The Pauline Epistles

The next thirteen books are all letters (epistles) written by the Apostle Paul. Most of them were written to the church in a particular city, as indicated by the name; for example, Romans was written to the church in Rome. A few of his epistles were written to individual men who were church leaders.

These letters were generally written in response to problems or questions from a church. So each letter addresses a limited area of Christian theology; but because they are written to real churches, they also show how the theology is lived out in the real world.

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1 Kings - This book begins with the death of David and the reign of his son Solomon. After Solomon, the kingdom is divided into Judah and Israel. The remainder of the book records the apostate condition of most of the succeeding kings of Judah and Israel. God sends Elijah and other prophets to warn the kings of the error of their ways.

2 Kings - In the first seventeen chapters, this book records the history of Israel and Judah as two separate, often warring, nations. The ministries of the prophets Elijah and Elisha predominate in the first eight chapters. The history of the kings is one of continual disobedience to the prophets' voices until Israel is finally defeated and carried away captive by Assyria.

The remainder of the book tells the history of Judah until the time they are defeated and taken into captivity by Babylon. Two kings, Hezekiah and Josiah, initiate reforms and bring God's blessing on the people; unfortunately, they are both followed by evil kings, and the revival and blessing are lost.

1 Chronicles - This book was written after the Babylonian captivity, when the Jews returned to rebuild Jerusalem, to give them a true sense of their spiritual history as Yahweh's covenant people. It reviews the history of Israel up to David in the form of genealogies, which also show that their God is the true creator of all mankind. The story of King David's reign, including the organization of his government and the temple worship, is described in detail to show the legitimacy of their government and its basis in Yahweh's covenant.

2 Chronicles - This book reviews the splendor of Solomon's reign, particularly the Temple, followed by the sad history of his successor kings and their decline into idolatry. This serves to explain the captivity in Babylon as God's just judgement, while giving them a valid basis for the restoration of the kingdom.

Ezra - The book of Ezra records the return of the exiles under Zerubbabel, their rebuilding of the temple, and his own return eighty years later to teach obedience to the law of God.

Nehemiah - Shortly after the events in Ezra, Nehemiah leaves his position in the court of Persia to return to Jerusalem as governor and to rebuild the walls of the city and to restore the people to obedience to God's law.

Esther - The events in the book of Esther occur during the early years of the return from exile, fitting between chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra. It tells the story of a faithful Jewish girl in a heathen court who, by her bravery, saves many of her people from execution.

The Poetical Books

The next five books are written in the form of Hebrew poetry, and include epic poems, wisdom literature, and prayers.

Job - In the prologue, Job, who is a righteous man, is afflicted with the loss of his possessions, his family, and his health. Unknown to him is the fact that these losses are brought about by Satan with God's permission. Then follows a series of dialogues with four friends, and then with God Himself. In the epilogue, Job is restored and blessed more abundantly than at the beginning.

Psalms - The Psalms were written at various times throughout the history of Israel, from Moses to Nehemiah. Many of the Psalms can be related to specific historical events and people, others are unknown in their origin. The Psalms record the thoughts and emotions of the Old Testament believers in their spiritual conflicts, their triumphs and failures, their joys and their sorrows.

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Proverbs - Most of Proverbs is contemporary with the early chapters of 1 Kings, and were written or collected by King Solomon. Proverbs is a series of discourses and succinct sayings that translate divine wisdom into human practice.

Ecclesiastes was written by King Solomon in the latter part of his reign. Ecclesiastes is a series of discourses showing the folly of man trying to achieve happiness by pursuing it in his own ways. It is only through acknowledging God as sovereign and submitting to Him that a person can be truly content with life.

Song of Solomon - This book is a series of love poems showing the beauty of a pure love. It tells of the love of Solomon for a Shulamite woman, their courtship and subsequent marriage.

The Major Prophets

The next five books were written by the major prophets of Israel. Prophets were men to whom God gave His revelations directly. Their messages include calls to the people to return to their God, warnings to other nations, and prophecies of the future of the nation of Israel and their coming Messiah.

Isaiah - Isaiah prophesied primarily in Judah during and after the time that Israel was taken captive, warning of a similar fate for Judah. He also spoke of the comfort that The LORD would be to Judah after their captivity. He was the first prophet to provide detail of the coming Messiah and his reign.

Jeremiah - This book describes the last days of Judah. Jeremiah's prophecies and warnings, and his own struggles with his mission. For over forty years of ministry he lived a life of total devotion to duty and left a record, in human terms, of complete failure. All his warnings and teachings were continually rejected, and he finally died at the hands of the people he had served so faithfully.

Lamentations - The book was written by Jeremiah immediately after the fall of Jerusalem. It consists of five poems lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of the people.

Ezekiel - The prophet Ezekiel began his ministry seven years before the final destruction of Jerusalem. Ezekiel teaches the people in Babylonia about the reasons for their captivity and reminds them that The LORD is still sovereign over the nations. He also reminds them of God's standards of obedience, and prophecies of the great future yet in store for Israel.

Daniel - The prophet Daniel was a young prince of the Israelites and was one of the captives who was carried to Babylon. He rose in power and influence in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, and retained his position through the reign of Belshazzar and then under Darius the Mede as he conquered Babylon. This book shows God's sovereign rule over both Israel and the Gentile nations. It also provides much practical description of the behavior of a Godly man in an ungodly society. Daniel also contains some vivid end-time prophecies.

The Minor Prophets

The contents of the next twelve books are similar to the Major Prophets. The only difference is the books are shorter.

Hosea - The prophecies of Hosea are contemporary with the latter kings of Israel. God uses the circumstances of Hosea's marriage to a prostitute and subsequent events as a living parable of His love for the people of Israel, the punishment that He must subject them to, and their ultimate restoration.

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Joel - The prophet speaks to Judah in the years prior to the captivity. An extraordinary plague of locusts causes Joel to call for repentance. He then uses the plague to symbolize God's future judgement of nations.

Amos - The prophecies of Amos are contemporary with the latter kings of Israel. Amos first announces the LORD's judgement against surrounding nations for their sins against other peoples. He then announces judgement against Israel for their violations of the Law of Moses. The book ends with a brief prophecy of Israel's ultimate restoration.

Obadiah - The prophet Obadiah appears to be contemporary with King Jehoram of Judah. The book consists of a single prophecy of the doom of Edom (descendants of Esau) for their pride and aid to Israel's enemies, and of the ultimate triumph of Israel.

Jonah - This book is written some 60 years before Israel is defeated and taken captive. The LORD calls Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach against their sin. Jonah tries to flee by sea, is caught in a storm, swallowed by a great fish, and finally goes to Nineveh. There he preaches that the LORD will soon judge the people for their wickedness. The people repent and God withholds his judgement. Jonah's obedience is grudging to the end, and the LORD shows him the measure of His compassion for all people.

Micah - The prophecies of Micah are contemporary with the latter kings of Israel. The book consists of three cycles of prophetic messages, each including an indictment for sins, a judgement, and a promise of restoration. The warnings are against Israel and Judah, both to the leadership and the common people.

Nahum - The book of the prophet Nahum consists of a single prophecy of the doom

of Nineveh for the cruelty of Assyria to those nations they had defeated. It occurs about 150 years after the book of Jonah.

Habakkuk - This prophecy was written to Judah in the last years before the Babylonian captivity. It consists of a dialog between Habakkuk and the LORD about the lawless of the people and their judgement. Habakkuk replies with a prayer of worship and faithful obedience.

Zephaniah - The book was written during the last days of Judah. Zephaniah's warning of approaching judgement is used as a picture of the Day of The Lord, followed by a promise of restoration.

Haggai - The messages of Haggai occur some 18 years after the people have begun to return from captivity. They have turned away from rebuilding the temple, and are trying to build comfortable lives for themselves. The LORD reminds them through Haggai that the reason they are struggling is that they have neglected to put His work first. If they would change their priorities, He would bless their other labors more fruitfully.

Zechariah - Zechariah prophesied to the people of Jerusalem in the early years of the return from captivity. His seeks to motivate the people to continue work on the temple by showing the future glory that the LORD would bring to His people and their land.

Malachi - Malachi speaks to the people of Jerusalem approximately 100 years after their return from exile. Malachi speaks to a people grown cold in their worship, telling them of God's love and desire to bless them, and reminding them of the awfulness of His judgement.