

INTRODUCTIONS TO THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

OLD TESTAMENT

GENESIS: The book of beginnings describes creation, the first rebellions against God, and God's choosing of Abraham and his family.

EXODUS: God rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and led them to the wilderness of Sinai. There, he gave Moses the laws to govern the new nation.

LEVITICUS: God set up laws for the Israelites, mostly regarding holiness and worship.

NUMBERS: Because of their rebellion and disobedience, the Israelites wandered in a wilderness for 40 years before entering the promised land.

DEUTERONOMY: Before his death, Moses made three farewell speeches, recapping history and warning the Israelites about making more mistakes.

JOSHUA: After Moses' death, Joshua commanded the armies that conquered much of the territory in Canaan.

JUDGES: The new nation fell into a series of dismal failures. God raised up leaders called "judges".

RUTH: This story of love and loyalty between two widows shines out brightly during a dark period of Israel's history.

1 SAMUEL: Samuel appointed Israel's first king, Saul. After his own failures, Saul tried to prevent God's chosen king, David, from taking the throne.

2 SAMUEL: David, a man after God's own heart, brought the nation together. But after committing adultery and murder, he suffered family and national crises.

1 KINGS: Solomon succeeded David as king. At his death, a civil war tore apart the nation. Successive kings were mostly bad, and the prophet Elijah had dramatic confrontations with King Ahab.

2 KINGS: This book records the actions of the rulers of the divided kingdom. None of the northern kings followed God consistently, so Israel was destroyed by Assyria. The southern kingdom, Judah, lasted longer, but Babylon conquered Judah and deported its citizens.

1 CHRONICLES: The book includes the most complete genealogical record in the Bible, plus many incidents from the life of David.

2 CHRONICLES: This book records the history of the rulers of Judah, emphasizing the good kings.

EZRA: After being held captive in Babylon for decades, the Jews were allowed to return to their homeland. Ezra, a priest, led the people as they rebuilt the temple.

NEHEMIAH: Nehemiah returned from Babylon after the temple had been rebuilt. He focused on rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem and joined Ezra in leading a religious revival.

ESTHER: This story is set among captives Jews in Persia. A courageous Jewish queen stopped a plan to exterminate her people.

JOB: Job suffered great personal tragedy. The entire book deals with the question, "Why do people suffer?"

PSALMS: These prayers and hymns cover the full range of human emotion; together, they represent the personal journal of how to relate to God. Some were also used in public worship services.

PROVERBS: The proverbs offer advice on every imaginable area of life. The style of wise living described leads to a fulfilled life.

ECCLESIASTES: This book reminds us that a life without God leads to meaninglessness and despair.

SONG OF SONGS: This beautiful poem celebrates romantic and physical love.

ISAIAH: The most eloquent of the prophets, Isaiah looked at the failures of all the nations around him and pointed to a future Messiah who would bring peace.

JEREMIAH: Jeremiah told the people they had to return to God. He spoke to Judah in the last decades before Babylon destroyed the nation.

LAMENTATIONS: All Jeremiah's warnings about Jerusalem came true, and Lamentations records five poems of sorrow for the fallen city.

EZEKIEL: Ezekiel spoke to the Jews who were captives in Babylon. He often used dramatic stories and acted out illustrations to make his point.

DANIEL: Although he was a captive in Babylon, Daniel rose to the office of prime minister. Daniel lived a life of obedience even when he faced pressure from others.

HOSEA: By marrying a woman who was unfaithful to him, Hosea lived out his message: Israel had committed spiritual adultery against God.

JOEL: Beginning with a recent catastrophe in Judah (a locust plague), Joel foretold God's judgment on Judah.

AMOS: A country boy, Amos preached to Israel at the height of its prosperity. He told the people that God would judge them for not helping the poor.

OBADIAH: Obadiah preached a warning to Edom, a nation bordering Judah.

JONAH: Jonah reluctantly went to Nineveh and found Israel's enemies responsive to God's message.

MICAH: Micah exposed corruption in every level of society. But he ended his book with a promise of forgiveness and restoration.

NAHUM: Long after Jonah had preached in Nineveh, Nahum foretold the mighty city's total destruction.

HABAKKUK: Habakkuk addressed his book to God, not people. In a frank dialogue with God, he discussed problems of suffering and justice.

ZEPHENIAH: Zephaniah focused on the coming day of the Lord, which would destroy Judah. But God would restore Jerusalem and bring hope to his people.

HAGGAI: After returning from the Babylonian captivity, the Jews began rebuilding the temple of God. But they set aside that task to work on their own homes. Haggai reminded them to put God first.

ZECHARIAH: Writing around the same time as Haggai, Zechariah also urged the Jews to work on the temple. He described how the temple would point to the coming Messiah.

MALACHI: The last Old Testament prophet, Malachi faced a nation that had grown indifferent to God. He tried to turn them back to God.

NEW TESTAMENT

MATTHEW: Written to a Jewish audience, this Gospel links the Old and New Testaments. It presents Jesus as the Messiah and King promised in the Old Testament. Matthew emphasizes Jesus' authority and power.

MARK: Mark's Gospel stresses action and gives a straightforward, detailed account of Jesus' work on earth.

LUKE: A doctor, Luke was also a fine writer. His Gospel provides many details of human interest, especially in Jesus' treatment of the poor and needy. A joyful tone characterizes Luke's book.

JOHN: John has a more reflective style than the other Gospels. Its author selected seven signs that pointed to Jesus as the Son of God and wove together everything else to underscore that point.

ACTS: Acts tells what happened to Jesus' followers after he left them. Peter and Paul soon emerged as leaders of the rapidly spreading church.

ROMANS: Written for a sophisticated audience, Romans presents theology in a logical, organized form.

1 CORINTHIANS: A very practical book, 1 Corinthians addresses the problem in the church in Corinth: marriage, factions, immorality, public worship and lawsuits.

2 CORINTHIANS: Paul wrote this follow-up letter to defend himself against accusations by false teachers.

GALATIANS: A short version of the message of Romans, this book addresses legalism. It shows how Christ came to bring freedom, not bondage to a set of laws.

EPHESIANS: Although written in jail, this letter is Paul's most optimistic and encouraging. It tells of the advantages a believer has in Christ.

PHILIPPIANS: The church at Philippi ranked among Paul's favorites. This friendly letter stresses that joy can be found in any situation.

COLOSSIANS: Written to oppose certain cults, Colossians tells how faith in Christ is complete. Nothing needs to be added to what Christ did.

1 THESSALONIANS: Composed early in Paul's ministry, this letter gives a capsule history of one church, as well as Paul's direct advice about specific problems.

2 THESSALONIANS: Stronger in tone than his first letter to the Thessalonians, the sequel goes over the same topics, especially the church's questions about Christ's second coming.

1 TIMOTHY: As Paul neared the end of his life, he chose young men such as Timothy to carry on his work. His two letters to Timothy form a leadership manual for a young pastor.

2 TIMOTHY: Written just before Paul's death, 2 Timothy offers Paul's final words to his young assistant.

TITUS: Titus ministered in Crete, a notoriously difficult place to nurture a church. Paul's letter gave Titus practical advice on how to handle the challenge.

PHILEMON: Paul urged Philemon, owner of runaway slave Onesimus, to forgive his slave and accept him as a brother in Christ.

HEBREWS: No one knows who wrote Hebrews, but it probably was directed to Christians in danger of slipping back into Judaism. It interprets the Old Testament, explaining many Jewish practices as symbols that prepared the way for Christ.

JAMES: James, a man of action, emphasized the right kind of behavior for a believer. Someone called "Christian" ought to act like it, James believed, and his letter spells out specifics.

1 PETER: Early Christians often met violent opposition, and Peter's letter comforted and encouraged Christians who were being persecuted for their faith.

2 PETER: In contrast to Peter's first letter, this one focused on problems that sprang up from inside the church. It warned against false teachers.

1 JOHN: John could fill simple words-- light, love, life-- with deep meaning. In this letter, he elegantly explains basic truths about the Christian.

2 JOHN: Warning against false teachers, John counseled churches on how to respond to them.

3 JOHN: Balancing 2 John, this companion letter mentions the need to be hospitable to true teachers.

JUDE: Jude gave a brief but fiery expose of heretics.

REVELATION: A book of visions and symbols, Revelation is the only New Testament book that concentrates on prophecy. It completes the story, begun in Genesis, of the cosmic battle between good and evil being waged on earth. It ends with a picture of a new heaven and new earth.