

## LAYING THE GROUNDWORK: AN OLD TESTAMENT OVERVIEW

The Old Testament consists of thirty-nine books. The most venerated portion of the Old Testament is the Torah, the five books of Moses known also by the Greek word, Pentateuch.

The Torah consists of five books:

1. **Genesis** is the book of beginnings—the word itself means “the beginnings.”
2. **Exodus** follows, and it describes the birth of the nation.
3. **Leviticus** details the laws of that nation.
4. **Numbers** tracks the wanderings in the wilderness—the forty years before the new nation was able to enter the land that God had set aside for them.
5. **Deuteronomy** is a review of the laws; it is also the book that Jesus quotes from the most.

The Torah is pivotal to everything we will be dealing with.

The Torah is followed by twelve historical books which are divided by a major event in Israel’s history—the Babylonian captivity. Joshua to 2 Chronicles are pre-exile (or pre-Babylonian captivity); Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther are post-exile.

6. **Joshua** succeeded Moses and conquered Canaan.
7. Then came the three hundred years known as the period of the **Judges**.
8. During this time a fascinating little four-chapter book called **Ruth** was written. Ruth is one of the most important books in the Old Testament. You won’t understand the book of Revelation unless you understand the book of Ruth.

After the Judges are the records of the kingdom itself:

9. **1 Samuel**—the birth of the kingdom.
10. **2 Samuel**—the reign of King David.
11. **1 Kings**—the kingdom divided after David dies, the death of Solomon and the civil war which follows, dividing the kingdom permanently.
12. **2 Kings**—the history of the divided kingdom.
13. **1 Chronicles**—the reign of David.
14. **2 Chronicles**—the history of the southern kingdom.

The post-exile history books include:

15. **Ezra**—the return from the Babylonian captivity.
16. **Nehemiah**—the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem.
17. **Esther**—the escape from extermination under the Persian Empire.

The five books of poetry—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs—are the poetry, hymns, and wisdom of the nation.

18. **Job**—"peaking behind the curtain."

19. The book of **Psalms** (which is actually five books) is the hymnbook of the nation, which not only contains beautiful hymns and praise but includes some incredible prophecies.

20. **Proverbs** contains, but is not limited to, the Wisdom of Solomon.

21. **Ecclesiastes**, also written by Solomon, talks of the vanity of life.

22. **Song of Songs** is a mystical book about wedded love and other topics.

Next in line are the five Major Prophets:

23. **Isaiah** is the Messianic prophet.

24. **Jeremiah** deals primarily with the desolation of Jerusalem.

25. **Lamentations** is Jeremiah's dirge over the loss of Jerusalem. These three books are mostly pre-exile, though Lamentations splits the pre- and the post-exile Major Prophets.

26. **Ezekiel** is in captivity, but in his book he talks about the rebuilding of the Temple and the restoration of Israel when they return to the land. He also describes what appears to be a great war—when Israel is invaded from the north.

27. **Daniel's** theme is "the times of the Gentiles." Daniel is unique in portraying an overview of all Gentile history—from Babylon until the day that God sets up His own kingdom on earth.

The Major Prophets are followed by twelve Minor Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah. The last three of the twelve—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—prophesied after the return from Babylon.

28. **Hosea** focuses on the apostasy of the Northern Kingdom (many of the situations are similar to modern-day America).

29. **Joel** speaks of "the day of the Lord," a climax which is also in the future.

30. **Amos** speaks of the ultimate rule of the dynasty of David on the planet earth.

31. **Obadiah** focuses on the destruction of Edom.

32. **Jonah** is a warning to Nineveh, capital of the pagan world empire at the time.

33. **Micah** is best known for prophesying that Bethlehem would be the birthplace of the Messiah.

34. **Nahum** describes the destruction of Nineveh. Like Jonah, Nahum was sent to Nineveh, but this time they didn't repent.

35. **Habakkuk** contains, among other things, the very interesting phrase "the just shall live by faith," which becomes the cornerstone of three New Testament epistles.

36. **Zephaniah** prophesies many things, one being that when Israel is restored they will again speak Hebrew, and since May 14, 1948, they have.

37. **Haggai** predicts the rebuilding of the Temple.

38. **Zechariah** has a number of fascinating prophecies about the Second Coming of Christ.

39. **Malachi** has a final message to a disobedient people, and he sets the stage for John the Baptist who comes in the spirit and power of Elijah.

That's the Old Testament. The key idea is of a single, integrated design. You'll find that the more you know about these books, the more inseparable they are. As you begin to develop respect for the integrity of the whole, you'll be amazed at how any confusion, the many seeming paradoxes, and quibbles evaporate.

## LAYING THE GROUNDWORK: A NEW TESTAMENT OVERVIEW

The New Testament consists of twenty-seven books. The first five are historical books—the four Gospels and the book of Acts. Twenty-one interpretive letters called the Epistles are next. The New Testament ends with the climactic book, the book of Revelation. Thirteen epistles were written by the Apostle Paul and eight were written by and to Hebrew Christians.

The four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—are parallel yet distinctive.

1. **Matthew** presents Jesus Christ as the Lion of the tribe of Judah.
2. **Mark** presents Jesus Christ as the Suffering Servant.
3. **Luke** presents Jesus Christ as the Son of Man.
4. **John** presents Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

Each of the four Gospels presents a particular perspective—they overlap in many ways yet they each have distinctive vocabularies, emphases, and genealogical perspectives. Each is very skillfully designed to present a particular aspect.

5. **Acts** describes the formation of the church in the first thirty years. The book of Acts could really be called “The Acts of the Holy Spirit.”

The Pauline Epistles are interpretive. They explain the relevance of what has gone before—including both the Old and New Testament. Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians are one group, each book was written to churches with the intention that they would be circulated. Paul also wrote four letters to pastors called the Pastoral Epistles: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon.

6. **Romans**, called by some the “Gospel According to Paul,” is the definitive statement of Christian doctrine in the New Testament; it is comprehensive, well-organized, and one of the most profound books in the New Testament.

7–8. **1 Corinthians** and **2 Corinthians** are letters Paul wrote to help establish order in the church.

9. **Galatians** was probably the key book in the Reformation, distinguishing between law and grace—it is by grace that we are saved, not by keeping the law.

10. **Ephesians** could be considered the high ground of the New Testament. It could be called “The Church in the Heavenlies.”

11. **Philippians** is “joy through suffering.”

12. **Colossians** teaches that Christ is pre-eminent above all things.

13. **First Thessalonians** declares the mystery of what we call the “Rapture.”

14. **Second Thessalonians** clarifies some confusion about the Rapture. Both letters focus on Second Coming aspects; they are end-times epistles.

15–17. **First Timothy, Second Timothy, and Titus** give pastoral advice.

18. **Philemon**, though a short letter, is a model of intercession on behalf of a runaway slave. There are many lessons in this one-chapter book.

These are followed by eight Jewish epistles: Hebrews; James; two by Peter; three by John; and one by Jude.

19. **Hebrews** amplifies the New Covenant. The authorship of Hebrews has been a question among many scholars. Many people believe Hebrews was written by Paul; others notice that it seems deliberately anonymous. One clue may be Habakkuk 2:4: “the just shall live by faith.” Romans quotes from this passage and specifically deals with justification: Who are “the just”? How do you become just before God? Galatians discusses how the just “shall live,” a call out of religious externalism. Hebrews tells us the just shall live “by faith.” Habakkuk 2:4 is the cornerstone of each of these three epistles, which implies that Paul really was the writer of Hebrews. Even more remarkable is how the Holy Spirit guided the structure of these epistles.

20. **James** talks about faith demonstrated.

21. **First Peter** talks about the persecuted church.

22. **Second Peter** talks about the coming apostasy and the end times.

23. **First John** is the classic epistle on love.

24. **Second John** warns about false teachers.

25. **Third John** speaks on the preparation of helpers.

26. **Jude**, like 2 Peter, discusses the apostasy, except Jude has some Old Testament roots that are fascinating in their own right.

The final book and, in fact, the climactic book of the entire Bible, is the book of Revelation.

27. **Revelation** is more than just the close of the Bible; it is the consummation of all things. Everything that started in Genesis finds its end in the book of Revelation. It is the only book in the Bible that has the audacity to pronounce a special blessing on the reader. The book’s 404 verses contain over eight hundred allusions from the Old Testament. So if the book seems strange to our understanding, it’s because we haven’t done our homework in the Old Testament. Some of it is in code, but every code is unraveled for you somewhere else in Scripture, and that’s the challenge of this incredible Book.

**The New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed; the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed.**