

*"This shall be written for the generation to come:  
and the people which shall be created shall praise  
the Lord."*  
—Psalm 102:18

**BIBLE STUDY SERIES – VOLUME 1**

# **The Bible**

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## THE BIBLE — WHAT IS IT?

### Old Testament



#### DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** The Bible is God's Word (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** The Bible contains God's promises to us (2 Corinthians 1:19-20; 2 Peter 1:4).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** The Bible is true (Psalm 119:160; John 17:17).
- ❑ **Thursday:** The Bible gives guidance (Psalm 32:8; 119:9-11, 105).
- ❑ **Friday:** God's Word is forever (Psalm 119:89; Isaiah 40:8).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Jesus is the Word in the flesh (John 1:1; John 1:14).

#### God's Words to Man

On day six of Creation, "God created man in his own image" (Genesis 1:27). Since the beginning, it has been God's desire to talk to men and women. God walked and talked with Adam "in the cool of the day" (Genesis 3:8). He told Noah exactly how to build the ark, and He called Abraham out of the land of Ur. Not only did God talk to people, but He also wanted His words written down and preserved for future generations to read. When Amalek fought against Israel, God told Moses to "Write this for a memorial in a book" (Exodus 17:14). Why? So the people would not forget. God knew the importance of the written Word: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

It is in the Scriptures that we find hope, for they "testify of" Jesus (John 5:39). Without Jesus we would not have the Bible. Jesus is the heart and soul of this precious Book. He is the link between the Old Testament and the New Testament. He is the theme of the whole Bible. All of the Old Testament, in some way, proclaims, "Jesus is coming." The first 4 books in the New Testament tell us, "Jesus has come," and the last 23 books proclaim, "Jesus will come again."

#### Two Testaments

When you read your Bible, you will find that it is not a single book, but it is a library of 66 books. The word *Bible* is from the Greek word *biblia*, which means "library" or "books." This Book is separated into two sections, called the Old Testament and the New Testament. Another word for "testament" is *covenant*. The word *covenant* describes the close relationship God entered into with man. It is God's promise to man. The New Testament is also called the "second" (Hebrews 8:7) and "better" (Hebrews 7:22) testament.

The Old Testament is a foundation for the New Testament. The New Testament builds on that foundation. We could not completely understand either Testament without the other. Prophecies in the Old Testament came true in Jesus; they could not be completely understood until Jesus came, lived, died, and rose from the dead. There are at least 250 Scriptures from the Old Testament quoted in the New Testament. The Book of Revelation alludes (makes an indirect reference) to the Old Testament more than 500 times. Both Testaments are needed! "In the Old Testament the New is concealed, in the New Testament the Old is revealed" (Tertullian, 2<sup>nd</sup> century Christian writer).

### New Testament



#### God's Word Is Settled

The Bible was written in 3 different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), over a time period of more than 1500 years, by at least 40 different authors. Many people say that the Bible is just the words of men, but God let us know "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16). In other words, Scriptures were not written "by the will of man," but were written by men who were "moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21). These men came from many different stations of life (some were kings, prophets, shepherds, priests, and fishermen). None of them wrote with all the other books at hand. Yet, there are no contradictions or errors. All the books together have a unified message and purpose: the story of redemption through Jesus Christ. This could only happen because God is the true Author!

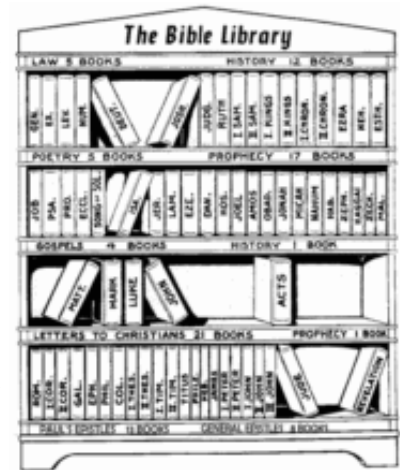
Although the Bible was written a long, long time ago, it still fits every age, need, and problem. Hebrews 4:12 says the Word is "quick," or alive. It is often called the "Living Word" because it still speaks to us today. Have you ever experienced a problem or trial and found a Scripture that helped you? That is how the Bible speaks to you!

No book has ever been as hated as this Book. Caesars, kings, and other rulers have tried to stamp it out and burn it. Nations have set rules and laws against it, trying to utterly banish it. Yet, it has been the best-selling and most widely distributed book of all ages! Regardless of what man has tried to do, God's Word "is settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89); it "shall not pass away," or perish (Matthew 24:35).

### Arrangement of the Bible

The books of the Bible are not arranged in chronological order (order of occurrence) but are arranged by categories. Many scholars believe Job is the oldest book in the Bible. Job lived in early Bible times, but because of the style of this book (poetry or literature), this book is grouped together with Psalms and Proverbs. The first 5 books of the Bible are called the Law, and the next 12 books are considered Old Testament History. Then there are 5 books of Poetry, and the last 17 books of the Old Testament are called Prophecy.

The first 4 books of the New Testament are called the Gospels. The Book of Acts is often considered New Testament History. The next 21 books are called Epistles (or Letters). Of these 21 Epistles, 13 are believed to have been written by the Apostle Paul and are called the "Pauline Epistles." The last book of the Bible is the Book of Revelation. This book of prophecy tells of past, current, and future events concerning God's Church. It is also called "The Apocalypse of John" (a prophetic revealing).



### Jesus Is the Word

Most important of all, what is the Bible to you? If you never read this amazing love letter from God, it will be meaningless. If you read it, but never let it make you what God intended, it is a waste. Jesus came down from Heaven in the form of a man so that we could understand what God had been trying to tell us all along. Jesus is called "the Word" (John 1:1) because He became the living example of God's words. He became the Bridge between God and mankind. Without His Sacrifice, the Bible would just be words on paper. Jesus brought life to those words!

Do you hear God's Spirit speaking to your heart when you read your Bible? Is reading the Bible boring, or is it a Living Word to you? The difference is Jesus. You need Him in your heart to help you understand and appreciate this awesome Book!

### The Man and the Birds

This is a story about a man who worked hard and treated his family well. To all outward appearances, he was a good man. There was one thing he could not do—he could not believe the story of how God came to earth as a man. So, he stayed at home when his family went to church.

One winter evening, after the man's family had left to attend the worship service, it began to snow heavily. After a while the man heard several strange thuds outside his window. When he looked outside, he could see a flock of birds who were trying to find shelter in the storm.

The man thought of his barn. It would provide a warm, safe place for the birds until the storm was over.

The man put on his coat and boots and hurried to his barn. He opened the doors and even turned on a light inside so the birds could see where to go. But the birds would not go in. The man brought bread crumbs from his kitchen, trying to entice the birds into the safety of the barn, but they only ignored the crumbs.

Finally, the man realized the birds were afraid of him. "How could I get them to trust me?" he wondered. His every move only frightened the birds more. The man thought to himself: "If only I could become a bird and speak to them in their language, they would understand. They would come into my barn and be safe from the storm."

At that moment, the man could hear the bells of the local church begin to ring. At last he understood. That is what God had done. God sent His Son Jesus to earth as a man so that people would finally understand that God wanted to save them. Jesus showed people the way, just as the man had wanted to show the birds the way. The man knelt in the snow and gave his heart to God.

*"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us . . ." (John 1:14).*



## THE BIBLE — THE LAW

### DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** The first commandment is broken (Genesis 3:1-6).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** God gave the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** God will not accept unholy worship (Leviticus 10:1-7).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Israel's unbelief brings punishment (Numbers 14:30-34).
- ❑ **Friday:** The Law was a glimpse of good things to come (Hebrews 10:1; 8:6).
- ❑ **Saturday:** God's laws are written in our hearts (Hebrews 10:16-18).



### The Law of Moses

The first five books of the Old Testament are commonly called "The Law," "The Five Books of Moses," and the "Pentateuch" (which means five volumes). In the Hebrew language these books are called the "Torah" (which means the law, or instruction). Joshua called them the "book of the law of God" (Joshua 24:26); Judah was taught from the "book of the law of the LORD" (2 Chronicles 17:9); Jesus called them the "law" (Matthew 12:5); Luke said it was the "law of the Lord" (Luke 2:23); and Paul talked about the "book of the law" (Galatians 3:10).

Although it is not for certain, the author of these five books is commonly thought to be Moses. We know that at least a portion of these were written by Moses, because Scriptures refer to the "law of Moses" (1 Kings 2:3; Luke 2:22) and to the "book of Moses" (Mark 12:26). It is believed that Joshua wrote the last part of Deuteronomy, describing the death of Moses.

### Five Books of the Law

**GENESIS:** the very first book in the Bible is a book about beginnings. There we read of the beginning of the world, people, sin, civilization, marriage, languages, and nations, including the nation of Israel from which the Savior of the world would be born. We do not learn about God's beginning in this book, because God has no beginning or ending; He is eternal. In Genesis we read of the first commandment God ever gave to man (2:17). Genesis answers the question, "Where did I come from?" and it lays the foundation for the rest of the Bible. This is why atheists and evolutionists work so hard to disprove the stories of Genesis. If they can prove that Genesis is untrue, then the rest of the Bible could be discredited as well.

**EXODUS:** the name of this second book means "going out" or "departure." The story of how God delivered His people from Egyptian bondage is not only a historical account of the nation of Israel, but it also helps people to understand the story of redemption that came in the New Testament. Jesus paid the price to set every sinner free from the bondage of sin through His death on the Cross. This book also contains the many laws (or commandments) God gave to His people. One well-known set of those laws is the Ten Commandments, sometimes called the "Decalogue" (which means ten words or sayings).

**LEVITICUS:** the third book contains commandments for the Levites (priests) concerning worship, sacrifices, and offerings to the Lord. It also contains commandments to the people concerning their worship and their everyday living. God is a holy God who wants His people to be clean and separate. He gave these laws so that His people would know the difference between clean and unclean, between holy and unholy. At first, Leviticus might seem like a hard book to read, but without this book and its laws, we could never fully understand the final and ultimate sacrifice Jesus made at Calvary.

**NUMBERS:** the fourth book is also known as the "Book of the March" or "Roll Call." The Hebrew title is "In the Wilderness." In this book you will read how Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years because of their unbelief. A census (numbering) of the Israelites is recorded twice in this book: before leaving Mt. Sinai (Chapter 1) and before entering Canaan (Chapter 26). When reading this book, you will learn that God hates sin and that there is a punishment for sin. But you will also read of a God who is faithful and who is patient.

**DEUTERONOMY:** the last book of the Law is also called the "Second Giving of the Law." In three separate speeches, Moses told the people of Israel to remember the commandments given by God to His people. The last part of this book is a description of the death of Moses. Jesus quoted the words of Deuteronomy 6:4-5 when He answered a scribe in Mark 12:29-31. Also, the Ten Commandments are restated in Chapter 5.

**PRONUNCIATIONS:**  
**Pentateuch** (PEN-tuh-took)  
**Decalogue** (DEK-uh-log)

## The Importance of the Law

God placed great importance on His people knowing the commandments He had given in these five books. Over and over they were told to "remember." God told parents to teach His laws to their children and to their grandchildren. "This book of the law" was to be kept in "side of the ark of the covenant" (Deuteronomy 31:26). Many times Israel came together to hear the Law read aloud (Joshua 8:34-35; Deuteronomy 31:9-13; Nehemiah, Chapter 8). Every king of Israel was to write out a copy of the Law and also to read it "all the days of his life" (Deuteronomy 17:18-19). God's people were commanded to write God's laws on the doorposts of their houses and on their gates (Deuteronomy 11:20). Why do you think God put such emphasis on hearing and knowing His commandments?

### Moral, Ceremonial, and Civil Laws

When you read the Pentateuch, you will find different kinds of laws. Some might seem strange, but it is important to understand why they were given at that time. The Mosaic Law (Law of Moses) can be divided into three parts: moral law, ceremonial law, and civil law. There are people who believe we should obey all of these laws still today, and then there are people who say we do not have to obey any of it because it is the old Law. Are either of these opinions true?

**MORAL LAWS:** these laws reveal God's character. They are a reflection of who He is. Moral laws are unchanging—just as God is unchanging (Malachi 3:6). When Adam and Eve disobeyed, when Cain killed Abel, when Jacob lied to his father—all these are examples of God's moral laws being broken. The moral laws are incorporated within the Mosaic Law (example: the Ten Commandments), but they were in effect long before Moses wrote them down. We can find God's moral laws restated in the New Testament. These laws are for everyone (not just the Jews).

**CEREMONIAL LAWS:** these laws were given to prepare people to worship a holy God. These laws include commandments about sacrifices, being clean and separate, and the institution of remembrance feasts and festivals. When Jesus died on the Cross, He became the Ultimate Sacrifice. It is through Him that we are clean and pure (not through ceremonial cleansing). These laws were temporary; under the New Covenant they were fulfilled in Jesus (Matthew 5:17-18).

**CIVIL LAWS:** these laws were given to govern the nation of Israel. They included punishments for people who broke these laws. Today, God's people live in many different nations, under different forms of governments. We are not bound by the civil laws that were given for Israel.



### Why Was the Law Given?

In Greek society families often had a slave who was in charge of supervising the master's children. His duties were to make sure the children went to school and did their homework. This slave would also make sure the children knew manners and social customs. The children could be disciplined by this slave when necessary. Yet, the slave was not the teacher. No doubt Paul was thinking of this when he wrote that the "law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ" (Galatians 3:24). Christ is the Teacher; the Law could only bring us to Him. We needed the Law to make us aware of our need of a Savior (Romans 3:20). The Law was merely a shadow (a rough outline) of what was to come (Hebrews 10:1).

Under the New Covenant we do not need God to write His laws on tables of stone (as the Ten Commandments were) nor are we commanded to write them on the doorposts of our houses. The Holy Spirit will write God's laws in our hearts and in our minds (Hebrews 10:16). The Old Covenant only brought guilt and punishment, but under the New Covenant we can find love and forgiveness.

### Questions to Consider

1. **The Ten Commandments were written on two tables of stone. It is believed that the first four commandments were on one table and the last six were written on the other. The first four describe man's duties to whom? The last six describe man's duties to whom?**
2. **What do evolutionists teach that is contrary to the stories in Genesis?**
3. **In 2 Chronicles, Chapter 34, the Book of the Law was found. When it was read, why did King Josiah tear his clothes? What did the king do in verse 31 concerning the words that were written in that book?**

## THE BIBLE — OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY



### DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Be strong, courageous, and obedient (Joshua 1:6-9).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:24-25).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** God makes a covenant with David (2 Samuel 7:12-16).
- ❑ **Thursday:** The kingdom is divided (1 Kings 12:12-17).
- ❑ **Friday:** The walls of Jerusalem are rebuilt (Nehemiah 6:1-3, 15-16).
- ❑ **Saturday:** The Jews are commanded to remember God's deliverance (Esther 9:26-28).

### Why Are These Books Important?

The second category of books in the Bible is called the "Books of History." These twelve books cover major events in Israel's history, including entering the land of Canaan, the need of judges (military leaders), the transition from a theocracy (governed by God) to a monarchy (governed by kings or queens), the division of the nation (northern kingdom and southern kingdom), the captivity of both kingdoms, and the people of the southern kingdom returning from Babylon.

Yet, these books are not just history lessons; from them we learn more about God—who He is, His relationship with His people, and how to please Him. As we read interesting stories about heroes of the faith (listed in Hebrews 11:4-40) and villains (described in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13), we are learning what God's perfect will is and what the consequences of sin are as well. Experience is the best teacher, and the wisest man learns from the mistakes of others. So, read those stories! Learn from the victories, failures, faith, and sins of people in the Bible.

As you read these books, keep in mind that all these stories took place before Jesus came and died on the Cross. They happened before Jesus preached the message of "love your enemies." The people in the Old Testament did not have Jesus living in their hearts to help them to live free from sin. Thankfully, examples of God's patience, grace, and forgiveness are found in these stories!

### God's Chosen People

When God made a covenant with Abraham, He told Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:5). In time, Abraham's descendants became known as the people of Israel (Israel was the name given to Abraham's grandson Jacob). These people are also known as Jews. It was through this nation of people that God promised to bring salvation to the entire world. Jesus would be born to Jewish parents. The hope of a coming Savior is woven throughout the entire Old Testament.

To understand the rest of the Bible, it is important that we learn about Israel's history. All these stories were written for our learning (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11). We can see a pattern developing throughout these books of history: when Israel was faithful to God, He blessed them and protected them from their enemies; when Israel turned to idol worship, God withdrew His blessings and protection.

Several events, people, and even objects point to Jesus' coming and great sacrifice on Calvary. The red cord that saved Rahab and her family from destruction in Jericho symbolizes the blood of Jesus that saves from sin. Joshua's name means "the Lord's salvation." Samuel was a prophet, priest, and judge, just like Jesus (Matthew 21:11; Hebrews 9:24-26; Romans 14:10). David was also a type of Christ in that he was born in Bethlehem, he was a shepherd, and he was a king. There are many more examples that foretell of Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection.

### The Twelve Historical Books

**JOSHUA:** in this book Joshua becomes Israel's leader after the death of Moses. Israel learns that victory comes through faith and obedience to God. The military campaigns under Joshua's leadership were successful because God gave Joshua exact instructions, and Joshua obeyed. The land of Canaan was divided among the twelve tribes of Israel.

**JUDGES:** after Joshua's death, the spiritual condition of Israel was not good. The people had failed to obey God and drive out their enemies. There was a great lack of faith and obedience (2:1-3). In this book there are seven cycles of oppression (by Israel's enemies), Israel's cry for help, and deliverance through judges appointed by God.



**RUTH:** this book tells a beautiful story of love, devotion, and redemption. Ruth was a Moabite (a descendant of Lot) who married into a Jewish family. Throughout this story thirteen times we read the word *kinsman*, which means "one who redeems" (to buy back). This story points to the price Jesus paid on Calvary to redeem every one of us from the slave master of sin. This book ends with a genealogy (a list of family names), letting us know that some day Jesus would be born of Ruth's family.

**1 & 2 SAMUEL:** the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles were each divided into two books when translated from Hebrew to Greek. In the first book of Samuel we read of Israel's last judge and first prophet: Samuel. He also helped Israel make the change from being ruled by God only to being governed by King Saul. (God was still the true King.) These books also tell the story of David and the important covenant God made with him in 2 Samuel 7:12-16.

**1 & 2 KINGS:** these two books begin with the death of King David and the crowning of King Solomon. They continue to tell of Solomon's accomplishments (including building the temple in Jerusalem) and also his failures. Solomon's pagan wives influenced him to no longer follow God with a perfect heart (1 Kings 11:4). Solomon had a divided heart. Sadly, under the harsh rule of his son Rehoboam, the nation of Israel divided into two kingdoms: the northern kingdom (Israel) and the southern kingdom (Judah). The success or failure of all the kings of these two nations depended on their obedience or disobedience to God's commandments. Second Kings ends with Israel being taken captive by the Assyrians and Judah being taken captive by the Babylonians.

**1 & 2 CHRONICLES:** the word *chronicles* means "the words of the days" (Hebrew) and "things omitted" (Greek). These two books cover much of the same history found in 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 2 Kings, but from a different viewpoint. It is believed that this was written when the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity and were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. It was written to encourage God's people, reminding them of the faithfulness, promises, and power of God. It also emphasizes the importance of worship and reminds the Jews that they were God's people.

**EZRA:** in this book we read of the first two returns of the Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem. The first return was led by Zerubbabel (appointed governor of Judah) to rebuild the temple; the second return was under Ezra's leadership, and it was to rebuild the spiritual condition of the people. This book is a beautiful portrayal of God's willingness to give second chances. We also see God protecting and preserving His people during their long years of captivity.

**NEHEMIAH:** the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one book or manuscript. The name *Nehemiah* means "the comfort of Jehovah." Nehemiah (cupbearer to the king) led the Jews on the third and final return to Jerusalem. There he organized the people in the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls. In spite of great opposition, the walls were rebuilt in 52 days! Even Nehemiah's enemies had to admit that it was the work of God (6:15-16). Although the physical rebuilding went quickly, restoring the spiritual condition of God's people took years under Nehemiah's leadership.

**ESTHER:** in this beautiful story, we read of Haman's plan to completely destroy the Jews. This was truly the plan of the devil, for if there were no Jews left, there could be no Savior born from the lineage of David (as God had promised). But God would not allow that to happen! His hand of protection is obvious throughout this book. God provided a deliverer through a brave young Jewish lady named Esther.

The Feast of Purim (9:1, 17, 22) continues to be celebrated yearly to remind the Jews of God's faithfulness and protection. Traditionally, the Jews listen to a reading of the Book of Esther during Purim. During the reading, each time Haman's name is spoken, the people stomp their feet and make noise. "The purpose of this custom is to blot out the name of Haman" (*JewFAQ.org*).



### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What is the pattern found all through the Books of History?
2. What determined if a king of Israel was successful or not?
3. There is a famous quote that says, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Why did God tell His people to pass all these stories down from one generation to the next (Joel 1:3)?

## THE BIBLE — POETRY



## DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Job did not sin when faced with great losses (Job 1:12-22).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Read a psalm of praise (Psalm 146:1-10).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Read wise sayings for everyday living (Proverbs 22:1, 7, 15, 24-29).
- ❑ **Thursday:** The preacher teaches knowledge and proverbs (Ecclesiastes 12:1, 9-14).
- ❑ **Friday:** Christ's bride is the Church (Song of Solomon 6:3; Ephesians 5:25).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Wisdom comes from God (James 1:5; James 3:17).

## Books of Wisdom

The five books of poetry are also called "Books of Wisdom" or "Books of Literature." In the Hebrew language the word *wisdom* means "skill for living." These books tell us how to live our everyday life. Like the Hebrews, other nations had their own "wisdom literature," but the Hebrew writings were unique because these writings centered on God (Proverbs 1:7). The authors of these books understood the importance of God-given wisdom. One author (Solomon), when asked of God what he wished above all else, chose wisdom.

Hebrew poetry is not found only in these five books. Several examples are found throughout the Old Testament. The first example is Lamech's psalm of lament (Genesis 4:23-24). A lament is a song or poem expressing deep grief or mourning. Sometimes poetry takes the form of a beautiful song (song of Moses; Exodus 15:1-18, 21), a prayer (Hannah's prayer; 1 Samuel 2:1-10), a riddle (Samson's riddle; Judges 14:12-14), or a lament (Jeremiah's lament; Book of Lamentations). Often in Bible poetry we read of the Jewish people's strong desire for a relationship with God.

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**Hebrews were  
descendants of Abraham.  
They are also called  
"Jews" and "Israelites."**

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**Parallelism is *thought*  
rhyme, not *word* rhyme.**

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## Poetry Types and Styles

In these Old Testament poetry books, we find songs (psalms), teaching poetry (proverbs about life and morals), and dramatic poetry (discussions of life's problems). Unlike much of today's poetry, these psalms and proverbs do not rhyme or have rhythm. Hebrew poems and psalms are divided into lines that are about the same length. The first line expresses a thought, then the second line repeats the thought with different words. This is called *parallelism*. Psalm 119:105 is a good example of this: *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.* Compare the words *lamp* & *light* and the words *feet* & *path*. The second line further explains the first line. Sometimes the second line describes consequences (Psalm 23:1), and sometimes the second line is a contrast to the first line (Psalm 30:5).

## The Five Books of Poetry

**JOB:** the name Job means "persecuted one." It is believed that Job lived during the time of the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). This book tells the story of Job's great losses (property and children) and personal affliction. It also shows us the suffering Job felt in his soul. We read many questions in this book whose answers are only found in Jesus Christ. This book has been called a "masterpiece of literature." The famous poet Lord Tennyson described this book as the "greatest poem of ancient or modern times." Two lessons that can be learned from this book are: (1) suffering can help you to become a better Christian, (2) suffering is a good way to witness to others of God's grace.

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**Several psalms are acrostics.  
Each line or group of lines is  
in alphabetical order (Hebrew  
alphabet). Psalm 119 is a  
good example of this. Psalms  
may have been written like  
this to help memorization.**

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**PSALMS:** the Hebrew title for this book was "songs of praise," and the Greek title was "songs set to music." This Hebrew hymnbook was used for praise and to worship God. Psalms were sung by the Israelites during worship, while traveling to Jerusalem, and when returning from Babylonian captivity. The many authors wrote psalms about the nation of Israel, nature, the coming Messiah, and sorrow for one's sins. There are also psalms about trusting God and about

God's blessings. Reading the psalms helps us to see how important it is to have a personal relationship with God. In the New Testament we are commanded to use psalms (Ephesians 5:19; James 5:13). Many times at the end of a psalm you will see the word *Selah*. What does that mean? The Amplified Bible says it means "pause and calmly think about that."

**PROVERBS:** this book is a collection of "words of the wise" (22:17). In the time of King Solomon (and also later), there were writers and teachers who were called "the wise men" or "the wise." Along with the priests and prophets, "the wise" helped guide the people of Israel (Jeremiah 18:18). They collected proverbs and taught them to the people. A common manner of teaching was to use parables or proverbs when delivering an unpleasant message. Many years later, Jesus also used the method of speaking in parables (Matthew 13:34). Although the Hebrews called this book the "Parables of Solomon," not all of Solomon's songs and proverbs were preserved (1 Kings 4:32). The wise sayings of this book cover every area of our lives—good manners, morals, discipline, relationships with others, and most importantly, our relationship with God.

**ECCLESIASTES:** this book is also called "the Preacher," which is defined as "one who addresses (speaks to) an assembly." This is a collection of several styles of literature: poetry, proverbs, and a narrative (a story). Many questions and observations about the meaning of life and why we are here can be read in this book. The author finished this book by writing, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments . . ." (12:13). There are many things in life that we might not understand. We must put our faith and trust in the One who has all the answers to our questions—God!

**SONG OF SOLOMON:** another name for this book is the "Song of songs" (or the best song). Compare this to the "God of gods" (Deuteronomy 10:17), "Lord of lords" (Psalm 136:3), and "King of kings" (Revelation 17:14). This book is a collection of love songs that are considered an allegory (a spiritual lesson taught by using people, things, or events). These love songs show the love God had for Israel and also the great love Christ has for His bride (the Church). Just as a husband and wife should have a close, personal, loving relationship, Christ also wants a close, personal, loving relationship with each one of us.

### Wisdom for Everyday Living

These books of poetry have been preserved to comfort, help, and challenge us. History tells us that psalms have been a great encouragement to God's people. Christian martyrs have recited psalms while burning at the stake. We can read stories of soldiers who sang psalms while marching and even while fighting on the battlefield. Many afflicted Christians have found comfort and hope while reading the Book of Job. In these books parents have found wisdom for raising their children, and the youth have found guidance for their future. God-given wisdom for every situation of life has been written down in these books. Have you found a verse in one of these five books that helped you through a difficult time in your life? Ask God to direct you to the verse or verses that will help you today.

## FIVE BOOKS OF PSALMS

In ancient times, the Book of Psalms was divided into five books, which correspond with the five books of the Torah (Law).

**Psalms 1-41** – THE GENESIS BOOK (psalms concerning man)

**Psalms 42-72** – THE EXODUS BOOK (psalms concerning Israel as a nation)

**Psalms 73-89** – THE LEVITICUS BOOK (psalms concerning the sanctuary)

**Psalms 90-106** – THE NUMBERS BOOK (psalms concerning Israel and other nations)

**Psalms 107-150** – THE DEUTERONOMY BOOK (psalms concerning God and His Word)

*The Companion Bible*

## THE BIBLE — THE MAJOR PROPHETS



### DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Isaiah proclaimed good tidings (Isaiah 61:1-11).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Jeremiah is called (Jeremiah 1:4-10).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Mercy shown in time of trouble (Lamentations 3:22-26).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Ezekiel receives a call and commission from God (Ezekiel 2:1-10).
- ❑ **Friday:** Daniel's wisdom comes from God (Daniel 2:16-23).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Prophecy comes from God (2 Peter 1:21).

### Division of Prophecy Books

The last 17 books of the Old Testament are books of prophecy (divinely inspired words of a prophet). Hebrew writings refer to these as "the Latter Prophets." Prophecies of "the Former Prophets" are found in the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. Most of the prophecies of the Former Prophets were not written down. These 17 books are often divided into two groups: major prophets (first 5 books) and minor prophets (last 12 books). This does not mean that some books were more important than others. The major prophetic books tend to be longer, and the minor prophetic books are shorter. (Note: the Book of Lamentations is not named after a prophet but is placed with the major prophetic books because of who wrote it.) It is important to remember these books are not always in chronological order and that events in these books occurred at the same time as the events of the books of history.

### Purpose of the Prophets

The word *prophet* in the Greek language means "one who speaks on behalf of another." Prophets were the mouthpiece of God (2 Kings 24:2). They were usually unpopular because of their messages. Those messages exposed sin, warned of coming judgment, called for the people to return to the law (moral, civil, and ceremonial), and also told of the coming Messiah (Jesus). Prophets were watchmen over the people of Israel (Ezekiel 3:17), warning of physical and spiritual dangers.

God gave His messages to His prophets through dreams, visions, angels, nature, and miracles. Other times God spoke plainly to His prophets. Most of the messages were to the northern and/or southern kingdoms (Israel and Judah). At least two prophets were given a message for Gentiles (non-Jews).

### Books of the Major Prophets

**ISAIAH:** the name of this book means "salvation is of the Lord." This is appropriate because the word *salvation* is used 26 times. (Compare this to how many times *salvation* appears in all the other prophetic books combined: seven.) The Book of Isaiah has been described as a miniature Bible. It has 66 chapters, and the Bible has 66 books. The first 39 chapters of Isaiah are often called the "Book of Judgment." This theme parallels with the Old Testament, which has 39 books. The second half of Isaiah (27 chapters) is called the "Book of Consolation," for it speaks of the hope and comfort of the coming Messiah. This parallels the New Testament, which has 27 books.

Isaiah was an educated man and a member of the royal family. His beautiful writing style reflects his education. Isaiah has been called the "prince of prophets." He is the most quoted prophet in the New Testament (66 times). Isaiah prophesied of Cyrus the Great more than 100 years before Cyrus was born (44:28; 45:1), and he prophesied of Christ more than 700 years before His birth (Chapter 53). These prophesies came true! Isaiah was primarily called to Judah (the southern kingdom). Other prophets who lived at the same time as Isaiah were Amos, Hosea, and Micah. Tradition tells us Isaiah died a horrible death at the order of King Manasseh (Hebrews 11:37).

**JEREMIAH:** God called Jeremiah to be a prophet to Judah when he was a very young man. Jeremiah was weak and timid, but through God's help Jeremiah's weaknesses became his strengths. He was hated and persecuted by his own family (12:5-6). His unpopular message brought threats and imprisonment. Many false prophets told lies that contradicted Jeremiah's messages (14:13-16; 28:10-17).

Jeremiah's message called for repentance and warned of coming destruction if the people did not repent. This message

can be seen through the repeated use of such words as "backsliding" (13 times), "return" (47 times), "scattered" (14 times), and "captive" or "captivity" (51 times). The people would not listen. They did not believe God would allow His temple to be destroyed or His people taken into captivity.

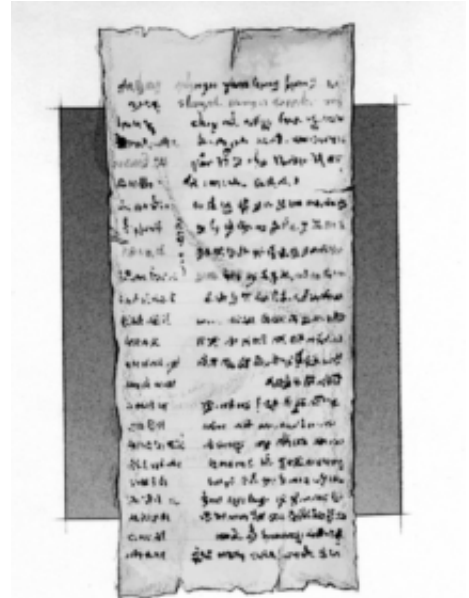
For more than 40 years Jeremiah spoke God's words to the unbelieving Jews. He is called the "weeping prophet," no doubt because the people would not take heed to his warnings. Jeremiah lived to see his prophecies come true when the Babylonians destroyed the city and the temple and took the Jews as captives. Jeremiah's ministry continued during and after the time of captivity (also called "the Exile"). Other prophets who lived at the same time as Jeremiah were Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Daniel, and Ezekiel.

**LAMENTATIONS:** a *lamentation* is also known as a "dirge" (funeral song). This book has been called "the funeral of a city." Tradition says Jeremiah wrote five dirges while viewing the destroyed city of Jerusalem, including Solomon's Temple. These five dirges became the five chapters of Lamentations. The first four chapters are acrostic poems. In the original Hebrew language, each chapter had 22 verses, and each verse began with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in order. The last chapter is a prayer for mercy and restoration.

**EZEKIEL:** the name of this prophet means "God will strengthen." This book is thought to have been written while Ezekiel and many of the Jews were in Babylonian captivity. Other prophets who lived during Ezekiel's time were Daniel (also a captive) and Jeremiah (who stayed in Jerusalem with other Jews). Daniel and Ezekiel were believed to have been the same age.

Ezekiel used prophecies, parables, signs, and symbols to convey his message. His message was this: captivity is a result of sin and the Jews needed to repent; judgment is not finished; and there is hope of restoration. Ezekiel also told of the promise of a coming King, but the Jews did not fully understand that the Messiah would be for all people (not just the Jews) and that it would be a spiritual deliverance from sin (not a physical deliverance from their enemies).

**DANIEL:** the name *Daniel* means "God is my judge." This book contains some of the most well-known stories in the Bible. It also contains dreams and visions of future historical events. Some have described this book as "history before it happened." Because future events are foretold with such accurate detail, many people do not believe Daniel wrote all of it. However, God knows the future, and it was He who revealed the details to Daniel. This book is also a great help when studying the Book of Revelation.



"... all things that are written  
by the prophets concerning the  
Son of man shall be accomplished."  
(Luke 18:31)



### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Books of prophecy were often written in a poetic style. Poetry speaks to the emotions and (like parables) conveys a message in less direct language. Read Isaiah 40:31. What do you think God is promising those who wait on Him?
2. God's prophets used object lessons to convey a message. When Jeremiah wore a yoke around his neck, what did the false prophet Hananiah do (Jeremiah 28:10)?
3. What message did Jeremiah have for Hananiah (Jeremiah 28:12-17)?

## THE BIBLE — THE MINOR PROPHETS



## DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Joel tells of the coming of the Gospel Day (Joel 2:28-32).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** God shows great mercy (Jonah 3:10; 4:9-11).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** The birthplace of the coming Savior foretold (Micah 5:2).
- ❑ **Thursday:** The just will live by faith (Habakkuk 2:1-4).
- ❑ **Friday:** Excuses given for not putting God first (Haggai 1:1-5).
- ❑ **Saturday:** "The Sun of righteousness" is coming (Malachi 4:1-6).

## The "Book of the Twelve"

In Hebrew tradition, the last 12 books of the Old Testament are called "Book of the Twelve" or "The Twelve-Prophet Book." The writings of these books were combined into one large scroll. (Possibly, this was because separate rolls of each book would have been easily lost.) Later, this "Book of the Twelve" was divided into 12 separate books. These books are written in a variety of styles, some are longer (Hosea has 14 chapters) and some are very short (Obadiah has 21 verses). They also cover a large span of time. Yet, a common theme throughout all the books of prophecy is "Thus saith the LORD." Each prophet received his message from God.

## Classification of the Prophets

**During King Rehoboam's reign  
Israel split into two kingdoms:  
Israel (the northern kingdom)  
Judah (the southern kingdom)**

All 17 prophetic books are not in chronological order. Because of this, it might be confusing when each prophet lived and who his message was for. There are a few prophets whose timeline placement is not easily established (Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah). Some historians disagree on exactly when these prophets lived. For the purpose of this lesson, we will place them before the time of captivity (Israel by the Assyrians and Judah

by the Babylonians).

**BEFORE CAPTIVITY:** Jonah and Nahum (to Nineveh); Amos and Hosea (to Israel); Joel, Isaiah, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk (to Judah); Obadiah (to Edom); and Micah (to Israel & Judah).

**DURING CAPTIVITY:** Daniel and Ezekiel (in Babylon).

**AFTER CAPTIVITY:** Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi (to Jerusalem).

From the time of Malachi to John the Baptist (at least 400 years), there was no true prophet proclaiming God's message. These years were called the "years of silence."



**HOSEA:** this name means "salvation." Commentators say Hosea's wife (Gomer) was unfaithful to him and left him for "her lovers" (2:7). This personal suffering helped Hosea understand God's grief when Israel (God's wife, spiritually speaking) worshiped idols (spiritual adultery). Hosea is believed to have bought Gomer back from slavery. In other words, he "redeemed" her. Years later, Jesus paid the ultimate redemption price by giving His life on Calvary.

**JOEL:** the name *Joel* means "Yahweh is God." (Yahweh is another name for Jehovah.) Huge swarms of locusts and a terrible drought had destroyed Judah's crops. Joel prophesied that something worse was coming. Joel also prophesied of a time when God's Spirit would be poured out on His people (2:28-32). This was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. Peter said, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:14-18).

**AMOS:** Amos was a shepherd who lived in Judah but was called to prophesy to Israel. His name means "to lift a burden" or "burden bearer." Amos carried the burdens of the people (the poor were often cheated and oppressed), and he also bore the burden of declaring coming judgment. Because Amos lived in a time of physical prosperity and Israel's enemies were weak, the people did not believe Amos' prophecies would



come true.

**OBADIAH:** this name means "worshiper of Jehovah." Through Obadiah God sent warnings of coming judgment to the people of Edom because of their sins against the people of Judah. (The Edomites were descendants of Esau.) In time these prophecies came true, and the nation of Edom was destroyed. We can also read of the promise of Israel's restoration in verses 19-21.



**JONAH:** the name *Jonah* means "a dove." (Perhaps the description of a dove in Hosea 7:11 and 11:11 is fitting.) Jonah was to take God's message to the people of Nineveh (the capital of Assyria). These were Israel's hated enemies who would later conquer and enslave the people of Israel. This book shows us that God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). The three days and three nights Jonah spent in the "great fish" (1:17) is a picture of the three days and three nights Jesus spent in the grave (Matthew 12:40-41). This is called a "type."

**MICAH:** Micah's message was of coming judgment because of sin. He also prophesied of coming restoration through grace. He foretold the birthplace of the Messiah (Bethlehem; 5:2). His name means "who is like Jehovah."

**NAHUM:** about 150 years after Jonah preached to Nineveh, God sent Nahum to Nineveh with a message concerning the coming destruction and the reason for it. Nahum's message was not received as Jonah's had been. The Ninevites did not repent. Previously, Israel had been captured by the Assyrians, and now Judah was being troubled by the Assyrians. Nahum's message of judgment against this wicked people was a comfort to the people of Judah. How fitting that Nahum means "comfort" or "consolation." The literal destruction of Nineveh happened just as Nahum prophesied.

**HABAKKUK:** this name means "the one who embraces." In other words, Habakkuk held on to God no matter what happened. Repeated calls to the people of Judah to repent were ignored. Soon after, 10,000 Jews were taken into captivity. The style of this book is a series of questions and answers to and from God. Habakkuk tells us "the just shall live by his faith" (2:4), a theme that is repeated by Paul (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11) and the Hebrew writer (Hebrews 10:38).

**ZEPHANIAH:** this prophet was a descendant of King Hezekiah, and his name means "Jehovah hides." He was a prophet during the early part of King Josiah's reign. (In the later part of his reign, a spiritual revival took place.) His message was of coming judgment, but to the faithful, Zephaniah brought words of comfort. Although this book begins with words of judgment, the last part of it has been described as "one of the sweetest songs of the Old Testament." The day of the Lord (the Gospel Day) is spoken of 20 times in this book.

**HAGGAI:** this prophet is believed to have been born in Babylonian captivity. He returned with many other Jews to Jerusalem. The rebuilding of the temple had ceased (1:2-4). The people made excuses (1:2), but truly they were more concerned with rebuilding their own houses. Haggai encouraged the people to put God first and finish rebuilding "the LORD'S house."

**ZECHARIAH:** this prophet worked with Haggai to encourage the people to rebuild the temple. His name means "Jehovah remembers," and God had not forgotten His covenant with His people. The last six chapters speak of the coming Messiah. Haggai and Zechariah were often described together as "the prophets of God."

**MALACHI:** the last Old Testament prophet's name means "messenger of Jehovah." During his ministry the people had only a form of worship (not from the heart). They also worshiped idols and married idol worshipers (2:11). The priests led the people into wickedness (2:1-8). In this book we read how Malachi cried out against these sins, but we also read prophecies of the coming of John the Baptist (called Elijah; 4:5) and of Jesus (4:1-3).

### The Greatest Prophet

Although the prophets told of the coming Messiah, they did not fully understand when or how this would happen (1 Peter 1:10-12). Moses told of "a Prophet" who would speak God's words (Deuteronomy 18:15-18). Peter told us that this was Jesus (Acts 3:20-22). Before Jesus came, God spoke through His prophets, but now "God . . . Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2). He is the greatest Prophet of all!

### Questions to Consider

1. Which nation enslaved the people of Israel, sometimes referred to as Ephraim (2 Kings 17:5-7)?
2. Which nation enslaved the people of Judah (2 Kings 25:21)?
3. Malachi 4:5 says, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD." Matthew 11:14 says, ". . . this is Elias, which was for to come." Who is the man both of these Scriptures are talking about?

## THE BIBLE — THE GOSPELS

### DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Jesus is the promised Messiah (Matthew 16:13-17).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Jesus came preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:37-39).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Jesus is rejected in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30).
- ❑ **Friday:** Jesus is the Word (John 1:1-14).
- ❑ **Saturday:** "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:24-29).

### Good News

The first four books of the New Testament are called the "Gospels." The word *Gospel* means "good news," and these books tell the good news of Jesus Christ. All throughout the Old Testament people were told of the coming Messiah. Now, the Gospel writers proclaimed, "He has come!" After reading Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 61:1-3) concerning the coming Christ, Jesus said, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). Jesus came to fulfill (bring to completion) things "written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms" (Luke 24:44). The old covenant was imperfect, but Jesus brought about a "better covenant . . . established upon better promises" (Hebrews 8:6).

The first three Gospels are often referred to as the "Synoptic Gospels." They are a synopsis (a general view of the same subject) or a common outline of Jesus' life. They are very similar in wording and content. The last Gospel (John) does not cover many of the events we read of in the other Gospels. Some of the events John did not include were important: the Temptation of Jesus, the Transfiguration, and the Lord's Supper. John let us know that "many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book" (John 20:30). He wanted his readers to truly know who Jesus is, "and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31).

### Why Do We Need Four Gospels?

The authors of these Gospels are believed to be Matthew (a tax collector), John Mark (a young Jewish man), Luke (a Gentile physician), and John (a fisherman). Because of these very different backgrounds, we find a variety of perspectives and purposes in their writings. Each Gospel focuses on different aspects of who Jesus is and why He came. Like the four parts in a musical chord, together all four authors provide a complete, harmonious picture of Christ.

When reading the Gospels, it is important to understand the background of the author and his intention for writing. Matthew's Gospel tells the Jews that the promised King-Messiah (Zechariah 9:9) has come. He showed how Jesus fulfilled that prophecy (Matthew 21:4-5). Mark's Gospel was written for the Romans. He wrote of the Servant-Messiah, a Savior who came "to minister" to others (Mark 10:45). Luke's Gospel was written for the Greeks, and He described the Messiah as the Son of Man who came "to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). John's Gospel is for everyone (John 3:16). He told of the Son of God who came to give spiritual life (John 10:10), a personal Savior.

When Jesus was crucified, a superscription (a board with the charge against Jesus written on it) was placed above His head on the Cross. This was written in three different languages—Hebrew, Latin, and Greek—the three main languages of that time. Likewise, we see a Gospel written to each of these cultures: Matthew to the Jews (Hebrew), Mark to the Romans (Latin), and Luke to the Greeks.



**Superscription in Three Languages**

### The Four Gospels

**MATTHEW:** it is fitting that this is the first book of the New Testament. This Gospel forms a bridge between the Old Testament (Messiah is coming) and the New Testament (Messiah has come). Matthew begins with a genealogical list (1:1-17), quotes the Old Testament (53 direct quotes and 76 allusions), and shows how Jesus was the prophesied Messiah ("son of David," 1:1; "King of the Jews," 2:2; "Son of the living God," 16:16). This book has been described as "written by a Jew, about a Jew, for the Jews." It has also been called "the Sayings" because it has recorded many sayings of Jesus.



**MARK:** tradition tells us that the author of this book (believed to be John Mark, spoken of in Acts 12:12, 25 and Acts 15:37) worked with the Apostle Peter, often translating his preaching. Historians have referred to this book as "Peter's Gospel." The style of this Gospel is very similar to Peter's addresses (sermons) in Acts and Peter's two Epistles. Peter's personality seems to be reflected in this Gospel with the frequent usage of such words as "immediately" or "straightway" (41 times in the Greek form). Mark seemed to have Gentiles (non-Jews) in mind when writing, explaining in detail Jewish customs, words, and places (7:3-4; 13:3), things that would have been common knowledge to a Jewish audience.

**LUKE:** the author of this Gospel is believed to be "the beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14) who traveled with Paul (2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24). Luke, the only Gentile writer of the New Testament, is also credited with writing the Book of Acts. Both books are dedicated to Theophilus (believed to be a high ranking Roman official). Luke was the only Gospel writer to explain his reason for writing this Gospel (1:1-4). He intended to record an accurate account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Luke was not an eyewitness to these events but is thought to have interviewed people who were eyewitnesses (including Jesus' mother Mary). The accuracy and eye for detail shows us that Luke's Gospel was written from a medical point of view. It was also written in the common Greek language. The non-Jewish audience Luke's Gospel was intended for would have been unfamiliar with many Jewish beliefs and practices.

**JOHN:** this book is said to have been written by John, the son of Zebedee, the brother of James. (John is also the author of three Epistles and the Book of Revelation.) John let us know the purpose of this book was to show Jesus as more than the Messiah. He is the "Son of God" (20:30-31). This book has been called "the spiritual Gospel," for it shows the heart of Christ. The word *world* is used 78 times in this Gospel (in the Greek language), letting us know the Son of God came to save "whosoever believeth in him" (3:16).

### These Are Written So That You Can Believe

The stories, sermons, and sayings found in the Gospels are not complete biographies of Jesus (John 21:25), nor are they "cunningly devised fables" (2 Peter 1:16). Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, eyewitness accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus were preserved for us today. These writings have provided guidance to Christians throughout the ages (people who were sometimes called "followers of the Way"), teaching us how to live, speak, and tell others of this "Good News."

Do you have a favorite Gospel? Many people believe that a new Christian should read the Gospel of John first. Why might that be? Regardless of preference, why not make it a goal to begin reading through all the Gospels? You will find that the more you read about Jesus, the more real He will become to you!

## SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

A car accident is witnessed by four people: a father, a mother, a young daughter, and a teenage son. Consider the possible differing viewpoints of the accident due to the age, background, and gender of each observer.

Compare this to the four Gospel writers and their different backgrounds. Why are multiple eyewitness accounts better than one? How might Deuteronomy 19:15 answer this question?



## The Four Gospel Writers

AUTHOR	AUDIENCE	BACKGROUND	THEME
<b>Matthew</b>	Jews	Tax Collector (Publican)	Messiah King
<b>Mark</b>	Romans	Young Jewish Man	Servant King
<b>Luke</b>	Greeks	Gentile Physician	Son of Man
<b>John</b>	Everyone	Fisherman Brother of James	Son of God

## THE BIBLE — NEW TESTAMENT HISTORY

### DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Jesus gives the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:6-8).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** The Holy Spirit is given (Acts 2:1-11).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** The church faces persecution (Acts 4:1-3; 8:1-4).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Saul is God's chosen vessel (Acts 9:10-16).
- ❑ **Friday:** Peter learns that "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:1-16, 34-35).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Saul and Barnabas are sent forth by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1-5).



### Acts of the Apostles

The fifth book in the New Testament is often classified as history. Since the second century it has been called "Acts" or "Acts of the Apostles." Some have stated a more accurate title would be "Acts of the Holy Spirit Working Through the Apostles." It was God's Spirit that made all the "Acts" possible.

This book was not written in the style of the Gospels (books before Acts) nor was it written in the style of the Epistles (books after Acts). The genre (category) of Acts was well known at that time: recording events, deeds, and words of people or places. Some scholars call this "historiography." Like other ancient histories, which would often include speeches, Acts contains more than 20 speeches.

The author of Acts is believed to be Luke, sometimes called "Luke the Evangelist." Luke is also said to be the author of one of the Gospels. When Luke first wrote this Gospel and Acts, they were a single book. Acts is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke. In this book the focus moves from "all that Jesus began both to do and teach" (1:1) to "the apostles whom he had chosen" (1:2). Both books are addressed to Theophilus. Luke addressing him as "most excellent" (Luke 1:3) causes commentators to state Theophilus was possibly a high ranking Roman official. His name means "one who loves God," causing some to believe he was a Christian.

**To give a commission is to give authority to carry out a certain task or duty.**

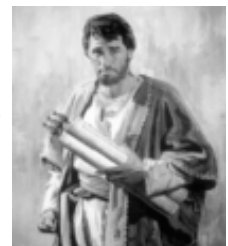
### "All One in Christ Jesus"

While Jesus was here on earth, He taught and gave guidance to His disciples. After He returned to Heaven, direction and guidance came through the Holy Spirit (1:1-3). At first the Apostles, filled with the

Holy Ghost, preached the Gospel in Jerusalem (primarily to the Jews). But in the Great Commission, Jesus instructed them to also preach in Judea, in Samaria, and to the whole world. The Gospel was not for only the Jews, but for the Gentiles as well.

The blending of Jews and Gentiles under the preaching of the Gospel was not always easy. For hundreds of years the Jews had been told that they were to be a separate people (to protect them from being affected by the idol-worshipping nations around them). But in Christ there is "neither Jew nor Greek [Gentile]" (Galatians 3:28). All people are the same in God's eyes. This truth was revealed to Peter in a vision of a sheet coming down from heaven with clean and unclean animals (10:9-15). God showed Peter that no one was to be called "common or unclean" (10:28).

It was not uncommon for some of the Christian Jews—"certain men" (15:1)—to expect Gentile converts to obey the old Law (15:1-5). Peter asked why the Jews wanted to put the "yoke" (burden) of the Law on these Gentiles, when they themselves had been unable to bear it (15:7-10). Salvation comes "through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" (15:11), not through the works of the old Law and Jewish rituals. The Apostle Paul (called of God to be an Apostle to the Gentiles; 22:21 and Ephesians 3:1) also made it clear that this was so. He wrote that it was not the outward appearance which made one a true Jew, "But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly" (Romans 2:28-29).



### The Gospel Spreads

Persecution caused the Gospel to spread. Christians left Jerusalem because many believers were being imprisoned. Yet, wherever they fled to, they continued to be "witnesses" for Jesus (1:8). "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every

where preaching the word" (8:4). In the second half of the Book of Acts, we read of Paul's missionary journeys. During these journeys, the Gospel was preached, and many people believed and were saved. The Great Commission was being fulfilled! Churches were "established in the faith, and increased in number daily" (16:5).

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**The Church is not a building,  
but it is the body of Christ.  
The Greek word for "church" is  
*ek k lesia*, which means "called out ones."**

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The last few chapters of Acts tell of Paul's imprisonment and journey to Rome (capital of the Roman Empire). Yet, this too was in God's divine plan (23:11). Paul had opportunities to witness to Claudius Lysias (a chief captain), Felix (a governor), Festus (a governor), and Herod Agrippa (a king). Paul's testimony and message was so powerful that King Agrippa said, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (26:28).

The last chapter of this book lets us know that although Paul was under the guard of a soldier (28:16), he was permitted to live in "his own hired house" (28:30). There Paul wrote many letters (Epistles) and also preached to many people who came "to him into his lodging" (28:23). Because of his ministry to the Christians in Rome, they were "much more bold to speak the word without fear" (Philippians 1:14).

Tradition tells us Paul eventually stood before Caesar. This was foretold to Paul by an angel (27:24). Bible dictionaries and commentaries state that it is commonly believed Paul was beheaded during the persecution of Christians by the Roman Emperor Nero. Although Paul died, the Gospel continued to spread. Because these "Acts," messages, and events were recorded, people yet today can hear the Gospel, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and . . . be saved" (16:31).

## **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit moved on men.  
In the New Testament the Holy Spirit lives in the hearts of men.  
How is this different?

Scriptures to consider:

1 Samuel 10:10  
Ezekiel 11:19  
John 7:39  
2 Peter 1:21  
Judges 13:25  
John 14:17

## THE BIBLE — THE EPISTLES OF PAUL

### DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Everyone has sinned (Romans 3:10-18, 23).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** We deserve death because of our sins (Romans 6:23).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Jesus paid the price for our sins (Romans 5:6-9).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Salvation is for all (Romans 10:9-13).
- ❑ **Friday:** Salvation brings a relationship with Jesus (Romans 8:1, 38-39).
- ❑ **Saturday:** We read of Paul's last words (2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18).

### Letters Sent to Encourage and Instruct

Following the four Gospels and the Book of Acts, there are 21 books in the New Testament called the "Epistles." (An *epistle* is a formal letter written to a person or group of people.) The first 13 are commonly attributed to Paul and are sometimes referred to as the "Pauline Epistles." These letters were written to encourage, warn, and give instruction concerning questions about the Christian faith. Some letters were written and sent to churches (groups of believers) that Paul had helped establish. Other letters were sent to churches Paul had been unable to visit, and some letters were sent to individuals.

If you count the number of churches Paul wrote letters to, you will find the answer is *seven*. These letters, at times called the "Church Epistles," were also named "Paul's Letters to Seven Churches." Although a letter was addressed to a specific church congregation, these letters were shared with Christians in other cities as well (Colossians 4:16). It is believed that after Paul's death, this practice continued, and reading Paul's letters became part of the worship service.



### Arrangement and Style of the Epistles

The Epistles are not arranged in chronological order as might be expected. The longer Epistles are first, with the shorter Epistles last. These letters can also be classified according to when, where, and to whom they were written. The "Early Letters" (1 & 2 Thessalonians) are said to have been written during Paul's second missionary journey. The "Great Epistles" (Galatians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, and Romans) are said to have been written during Paul's third missionary journey. The "Prison Epistles" (Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon) are commonly dated during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome. The "Pastoral Epistles" (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus) were written to young pastors.

During this time, letter writing was common, and letters often followed a certain pattern. The first part of a letter was the *salutation*. This included whom the letter was for, whom it was from, and greetings. Next, the letter contained a *prayer of thanksgiving*. The *body* of the letter explained the main reason for writing (answering questions, warning against false teachers, and giving instruction concerning the Christian life). The letter would end with greetings from other Christians and with a *benediction* (blessing and words of encouragement).

### Effects of the Pauline Epistles

In most cases, Paul wrote each Epistle to a specific congregation or person. Yet, those letters blessed, encouraged, instructed, and convicted so many more. There are many examples of men and women whose lives were greatly changed because of Paul's writings. Martin Luther (a Catholic monk at the time) received God-given understanding concerning Romans 1:17, and the Protestant Reformation began. Two hundred years later, John Wesley was greatly affected by Paul's letter to the Romans, and soon a great spiritual awakening took place, called the great



"Wesleyan Revival." Some Bible commentators have said that every great revival in the Christian Church began with the Epistles of Paul. What if Paul had not written these letters? Look at how his obedience to Jesus continues to help people even today!

### **The Thirteen Epistles Written by Paul**

**ROMANS:** this Epistle is considered the most understandable summary of the Gospel. The "Romans Road to Salvation" is a collection of verses from this book often used in explaining how one can be saved. (See Daily Readings.) Paul greatly desired to visit the Christians in Rome (the greatest city in the world at that time), but he felt the importance of visiting Jerusalem (1:10-13) instead. Paul sent this letter in place of a visit. Later, Paul would be imprisoned in Rome.

**1 CORINTHIANS:** the city at Corinth was well known for its wickedness. To "Corinthianize" was to be morally corrupt. A few years before writing the first Corinthian letter, Paul had labored in this city. It is thought that Stephanas and two friends (16:17-18) brought a letter to Paul with questions from the church at Corinth, and Paul wrote this letter to address those questions and other serious problems that had arisen.

**2 CORINTHIANS:** several months after writing the first letter to the saints in Corinth, Titus brought Paul good news concerning this church. However, he also said that false teachers were making terrible accusations against Paul. Paul wrote this Epistle (described by some as the "stern letter") to answer these attacks and also to encourage and challenge. Some call this the saddest of all the Epistles in the New Testament.

**GALATIANS:** Paul had visited the saints in Galatia at least twice (4:13). Upon hearing false men were teaching that to be a Christian one must keep the old Jewish laws, Paul wrote the truth in this letter: ". . . be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (5:1). Many commentators call this Epistle the "Magna Carta of Christian Liberty," because we have "liberty" in Christ Jesus (2:4). (*Magna Carta* is "any basic law that guarantees liberty.")

**EPHESIANS:** because this Epistle lacks the personal greetings the other letters include, it is believed that this was a "circular Epistle" (a letter intended for multiple congregations). In this letter Paul told of the love of God in the form of prayers (Chapters 1-3) and also gave instructions concerning how a Christian should live (Chapters 4-6). Tradition tells us the Apostle John labored in Ephesus during the latter years of his life.

**PHILIPPIANS:** the church at Philippi was begun during Paul's second missionary journey, approximately ten years before this letter was written. This congregation had been very caring of Paul during his imprisonment, and Paul included his thanks for this when writing to them. This very personal letter written by Paul is often suggested reading material during times of discouragement.

**COLOSSIANS:** while in prison, Paul was visited by Epaphras who brought news from the church in Colosse. This letter was written to bring understanding concerning problems and doctrinal questions, such as angel worship and obeying Jewish laws. Paul spoke of his desire to visit the saints in Colosse when writing to Philemon (Philemon 22), whose home was the gathering place of the "church" in Colosse (Philemon 1-2).

**1 THESSALONIANS:** Paul had worked with Silvanus (Silas) and Timotheus (Timothy) to begin a church in the city of Thessalonica in Macedonia. After being forced to flee the city by the Jews (Acts 17:10), Paul was concerned about the saints. Later, Paul wanted to return and visit, but knew he could not. As Paul traveled on to Berea, Athens, and Corinth, he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica. After hearing Timothy's report (3:6-9), Paul wrote this Epistle to clear up confusion over Christ's Second Coming (4:13-18) and also to deal with the false accusations that had been made against him (2:1-12).

**2 THESSALONIANS:** a few months after sending his first Epistle to Thessalonica, Paul heard that some of the saints were "troubled" (2:2), misunderstanding what he had written concerning the Second Coming. People had quit working, waiting for Jesus to come back. Paul told them that certain things would happen before Jesus came again (2:3) and that they needed to return to work (3:6-12). Paul gave them instructions on how to live while waiting for Christ's return.

**1 TIMOTHY:** Paul was like a spiritual father to Timothy, who had traveled with Paul and helped him during his first imprisonment. Some time later, Paul placed Timothy in charge of the church at Ephesus and then traveled on to Macedonia. Paul wrote this Epistle, giving Timothy instructions regarding doctrine and church government and also to warn against false teachers. We read in Philippians 2:19-22 that Paul thought very highly of this young man. You can read more about Timothy in Acts 16:1-3; 18:5; 19:22; and 20:4.

**2 TIMOTHY:** this Epistle, written shortly before Paul's death, is believed to be the last of Paul's Epistles. (If he wrote other letters, they were not preserved.) During this imprisonment, Paul was not kept in a rented house (as before) but is believed to have been kept in a dungeon. Paul encouraged Timothy to "be strong" (2:1), warned him of "perilous times" (3:1), and rejoiced in knowing that, although his end was near, he had "fought a good fight . . . finished my course . . . kept the faith" (4:7).

**TITUS:** Titus was another young man who had traveled and labored with Paul. This letter, written to Titus while he was in Crete, is believed to have been written after Paul sent his first letter to Timothy. This Epistle has instructions similar to

1 Timothy, dealing with qualifications of an elder, sound doctrine, and warning against false teachings.

**PHILEMON:** Onesimus (*o-NES-i-mus*), a slave of Philemon (*fi-LEE-muhn*), robbed his master and ran away from Colosse to Rome. After coming in contact with Paul, this slave heard the Gospel and was saved. For a time it is thought Onesimus helped Paul, but Paul knew Onesimus needed to make things right with Philemon. This letter from Paul to Philemon was written on behalf of Onesimus. Paul offered to repay the money himself and asked that Onesimus be received as a "brother beloved" (verse 16). Because of its length, Philemon has been called the first "postcard epistle."

## SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

A common Greek greeting was "grace," and the usual Jewish greeting was "peace" (shalom). Why do you think Paul often combined these two words in his greeting (Galatians 1:3)?

The Apostle John wrote letters to seven churches in Revelation. Seven is a Bible symbol of perfection or completion. Compare this to "Paul's Letters to the Seven Churches."



## THE BIBLE — THE GENERAL EPISTLES

### DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Jesus is our High Priest (Hebrews 8:1-6).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** James defines "pure religion" (James 1:22-27).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Peter encourages persecuted Christians (1 Peter 1:5-9).
- ❑ **Thursday:** John writes "that your joy may be full" (1 John 1:1-5).
- ❑ **Friday:** Jude writes a beautiful benediction (Jude 24-25).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Why were these things written (1 John 5:13-15)?

### What Is the Difference Between the Pauline Epistles and the General Epistles?

The 21 Epistles (formal letters) are divided into two categories: the Pauline Epistles (written by the Apostle Paul) and the non-Pauline Epistles (also called the "General Epistles"). While arranged as the Pauline Epistles (longest to shortest), the General Epistles are different in several ways.

The General Epistles have various authors, while the Pauline Epistles have the same author. Paul's Epistles are named according to whom the letters were addressed. The General Epistles (with the exception of Hebrews) were named according to their authors. The General Epistles have also been called the "Catholic Epistles" (*catholic* means "universal, widespread, non-localized"). These Epistles were intended for a larger, general audience than the Pauline Epistles with their specific audiences. It is thought that multiple copies of the General Epistles were made and distributed among the churches.

Another difference between the two sets of Epistles is that the General Epistles were intended mostly for a primarily Jewish audience, but Paul often wrote to the Gentile Christians. The majority (if not all) of the General Epistle authors were either leaders or elders of the church in Jerusalem. Paul was not. More than once Paul had to defend himself against accusations from some of the leaders of this church. Unlike Paul, the authors of the General Epistles were either one of Jesus' disciples (while He lived here on earth) or were related to Jesus in some way. The believed time of writing of these Epistles are an additional difference. The Epistles of Paul are believed to have been written before the intense persecutions began (under Emperor Nero), but the General Epistles are said to have been written later—during and after those great persecutions.

All of the General Epistles do not follow the formal letter style commonly found in Paul's letters. A variety of writing genres can be found in these eight Epistles. Hebrews is written as a sermon, but ends as a letter (13:19-25); James begins with a letter style but continues more like wisdom literature; 1 Peter is written as a pastoral letter to a large area of churches; 2 Peter is written as a goodbye letter; 1 John is also written as a sermon; 2 & 3 John and Jude are short letters.

Although different in style and intended audience, the General Epistles are very necessary. Combined with the Pauline Epistles, we have a more complete picture of how to live the Christian life. The different backgrounds, personalities, and life experiences of these authors bring differing viewpoints. Just as we have a better account of Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection because we have four Gospel writers, our understanding of the New Testament Church doctrines is more complete with the variety of authors who wrote the General Epistles.

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**EPISTLES WRITTEN BY:**  
**Paul are called the "Pauline Epistles."**  
**Peter are called the "Petrine Epistles."**  
**John are called the "Johannine Epistles."**

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### The Eight General Epistles

**HEBREWS:** there has been much disagreement concerning the author of this Epistle. Authorship has been attributed to Paul, Luke, Barnabas, Apollos, and others. Generally, this author is stated to be unknown. This letter was written to the Hebrews (Christian Jews) to prevent ones from returning to Judaism. The key word in this Epistle is "better." The author wrote that our High Priest (Christ) is "better than the angels" (1:4), "of more glory than Moses" (3:3), and greater than Aaron (5:1-10). Because of what Jesus did on Calvary, we have a "better covenant" (8:6) and a "better country" (11:16). We also read of the "Heroes of the Faith" in Chapter 11 (called the "Hall of Faith").

**JAMES:** tradition tells us the author of this Epistle is Jesus' earthly brother (Galatians 1:19) who became a believer after

the Resurrection (John 7:5; Acts 1:13-14). This is also supported by the similarity of the wording when compared with James' speech in Acts 15:13-21. This letter is sometimes called the "Proverbs of the New Testament" because of its writing style (wisdom literature). Historians call this author "James the Just" or "James the Righteous."

**1 PETER:** this Epistle was written to comfort and encourage the persecuted Christians. Rome (a city full of idolatry) is thought to be where this letter was written. The "church that is at Babylon" (5:13) very well might have been in Rome (Jewish writings often described Rome as "Babylon"), where Christianity would soon officially be declared a crime.

**2 PETER:** although both of Peter's letters were written to the same audience, the first letter deals with opposition or persecution from *outside* the church (Roman Empire) and the second Epistle warns of opposition or persecution from *within* the church ("false teachers"; 2:1). The styles of these two letters greatly vary, which could be due to the possibility that a scribe wrote the first letter (written in classical Greek) and that while in prison Peter physically wrote the second letter (written in the rough Galilean language). In this letter Peter also addressed building a Christian character and spoke of Christ's return. Tradition tells us that Peter, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, died a martyr's death (crucified upside down).

**1 JOHN:** this letter was written after the Apostle John returned from exile (on the Isle of Patmos). Because it is written so similar to John's Gospel, some have described this Epistle as a "companion to John's Gospel." John wrote of three main thoughts: **(1)** God is light (1:5–2:11), and we must "walk in the light" (1:7); **(2)** God is love (3:1–4:21), and "We love him, because he first loved us" (4:19); and **(3)** God is life (5:11-13), and "He that hath the Son hath life" (5:12). This letter was written to encourage "little [dear] children" (term was used nine times in this Epistle).

**2 JOHN:** because of its length, this has been called the second "postcard epistle." (The first "postcard epistle" was Paul's Epistle to Philemon.) Addressed to "the elect lady and her children" (verse 1), this letter is written as a personal letter. The "elect lady" has been said to be an actual woman and has also been said to represent the church and her converts. John warned against people who were "deceivers" (verse 7). He also rejoiced to hear that "thy children [are] walking in truth" (verse 4).

**3 JOHN:** this third "postcard epistle" is the last of the Apostle John's writings in the Bible. Believed to have been written at the same time as the other Johannine Epistles, John wrote of three men: **(1)** Gaius (*GAY-us*) who was walking in the truth (verses 1-8); **(2)** Diotrephes (*di-OT-ruh-feez*) who loved to be first, would not listen, and refused to receive "the brethren" (verses 9-11); and **(3)** Demetrius (*duh-MEE-tree-uhs*) who had a good report (verse 12).

**JUDE:** the author of this Epistle is said to be Jesus' brother Judas (not to be confused with Judas Iscariot). At first, Jude meant to write about "the common salvation" (verse 3), but God impressed him to write of the need to "earnestly contend for the faith" (verse 3). While Peter warned that false teachers *will* come (2 Peter 2:1), Jude wrote that false teachers *have* come (verse 4). This fourth (and last) "postcard epistle" ends with one of the most beautiful benedictions (divine blessing) in the New Testament (verses 24-25).



## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. John wrote at least 10 times to "little children." Was John writing to small children? If not, what do you think he meant by "little children"?
2. What is the difference between what Peter and Jude wrote about false teachers?
3. Why are the General Epistles included in our Bible? Why weren't the Pauline Epistles enough?



## THE BIBLE — NEW TESTAMENT PROPHECY

### DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** This is "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1:1-3).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** The Revelation was given to John (Revelation 1:4, 9-11).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** This book tells of things past, present, and future (Revelation 1:19).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Jesus is the "Alpha and Omega" (Revelation 1:11; 21:6; 22:13).
- ❑ **Friday:** The Gospel Day is divided into seven periods (eras) of time (Isaiah 30:26).
- ❑ **Saturday:** At the end of seven days, God will shut the door (Genesis 7:16; Matthew 25:10).

### Why Was the Revelation Given?

The only New Testament book wholly given for prophecy is the Book of Revelation. Another name for this book is the *Apocalypse*. In today's language this word means "a great disaster," but in the Greek language *Apocalypse* means "an uncovering." This book is to give understanding concerning the past, present, and future (1:19) of God's people (the Church) in the Gospel Day. Because this was given to John, who wrote it down in approximately A.D. 96, the majority of the events were in the future.

Before studying the Book of Revelation, it is important to understand who wrote it, who it is for, and the language (writing style) of the book. The Apostle John was exiled to the Isle of Patmos by the Emperor Domitian (*do-MISH-un*) during a time of intense persecution. While there on the island, he received this "Revelation of Jesus Christ." (As with Moses in the desert [Exodus, Chapter 3], Elijah in the wilderness [1 Kings, Chapter 19], and John Bunyan, who wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* while in prison, it was often in exile that God was able to speak clearly to His servants. No doubt, this was true with John as well.) John was told, "What thou seest, write in a book" (1:11). Who was this for? "His servants" (1:1)—all who are saved.

The Book of Revelation is written in symbolic language. The very first verse tells us it was "signified" (*signified* means "expressing or communicating by signs or symbols"). Symbolic language can also be found in other verses in the Bible. The disciples were called the "salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13) and "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). Jesus told us that He is "the door" (John 10:9). To understand the symbols of Revelation, keep in mind who was receiving the vision first. John was a Hebrew (Jew), so the understanding of the symbols can often be found in the Old Testament (Jewish history). A good key to understanding symbols in the Revelation is to find another Scripture that sheds light on that verse (Isaiah 34:16). A revelation (understanding) only comes by Jesus Christ, who said, "I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 13:35). Things that were once "secret" (not understood) are now being explained by Jesus.

**The Gospel Day is the period of time from the Day of Pentecost to the end of time. It is also referred to as "the last days," "the day of salvation," and "the accepted time."**

### The Seven Churches of the Revelation

In ancient times the number *seven* was regarded as the perfect number. This same number is used throughout the Bible to show that something is perfect or completed (Genesis 2:2; Exodus 12:15; Joshua 6:4, 15). In the Book of Revelation you will find that the number *seven* is used 52 times. The first time is in Chapter 1, verse 4, where we read that John wrote letters to "the *seven* churches which are in Asia." Do you think there were only *seven* congregations in Asia at that time? No! Those *seven* churches together represent God's (entire) Church during the Gospel Day. What John wrote was to help all of God's people.

The Gospel Day (A.D. 33 to the end of time) is divided into seven periods of time. Isaiah 30:26 prophesied that the Gospel Day would be as the "light of seven days." Each period of time is represented by one of John's letters. God chose each church carefully. He knew that the character, location, and spiritual problems of that individual congregation best represented what God's people would be dealing with in a later time period.

The *seven* congregations and the time periods they represent are:

- Ephesus** (A.D. 33 to 270)
- Smyrna** (A.D. 270 to 530)
- Pergamos or Pergamum** (A.D. 530 to 1530)
- Thyatira** (A.D. 1530 to 1730)
- Sardis** (A.D. 1730 to 1880)
- Philadelphia** (A.D. 1880 to 1930)
- Laodicea** (A.D. 1930 to end of time)

In the days of Noah, the people had *seven* days to get into the ark (Genesis 7:4) before the door was shut. It is the same during the Gospel Day: there are *seven* days (periods of time) for people to be saved before the door will be shut (Matthew 25:10) and eternity will begin.



### The Seven Series of the Revelation

Have you ever seen a textbook with transparent overlays? Perhaps of all the systems of the body? First, you see the page with the skeletal system overlay; then the digestive system is laid down; next, the circulatory system overlay is added. If you continue until all the systems are laid down together, you have a complete picture of the human body. The Book of Revelation is somewhat like that. There are *seven* series in this book, with each series giving additional information about God's people during the Gospel Day. For example, the first series is the *seven* letters to the *seven* churches (Chapters 2 and 3). When you look at all *seven* series together, you get a complete picture!

### The Seven Spirits of the Revelation

Another important instance of *seven* in the Revelation is the "*seven* Spirits of God" (3:1; 4:5; 5:6). Since there is only one Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:4), why does Revelation talk about *seven* Spirits of God? Just as the *seven* churches (congregations) represent the complete Church during the Gospel Day, the *seven* Spirits represent the Holy Spirit's complete work throughout the *seven* periods of the Gospel Day.

### Understanding the Revelation

Why do so many people misunderstand what the Revelation is about? First, for true understanding, you need to be saved (John 3:3; 2 Corinthians 13:5). God's Word tells us that God's truth is "sealed," or hidden, from people whose hearts are not right with God (Isaiah 29:11-14; Matthew 11:25). Second, true understanding comes through Jesus (Luke 24:45). If you have Christ in your heart, He will reveal truth to you. Third, you must put forth effort (2 Timothy 2:15). Daily Bible reading, Bible study, and prayer are some of the ways God can help you understand what so many other people try to comprehend, yet are "never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7). Ask God to help you. He wants to share the truth of His Word with you! Do not be discouraged if you do not understand it all at first. As you grow spiritually, God will give you a greater understanding (Hebrews 5:14).



### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What are the two different meanings of *Apocalypse* and which one describes the Book of Revelation?
2. What is the key word in verse 1 that tells us the writing style of Revelation?
3. What are the three requirements for understanding the Revelation?

## THE BIBLE — HOW DID WE GET IT?

### DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** The Law is to be read to the people (Deuteronomy 31:9-13).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Joshua is told to meditate on and to observe the Law (Joshua 1:5-9).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Ezra teaches God's laws to Israel (Ezra 7:6-10).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Jesus brings understanding concerning the Scriptures (Luke 24:44-45).
- ❑ **Friday:** Old Testament Scriptures are called the "word of God" (Luke 4:4; 5:1; 11:28).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Epistles were meant to be shared among the congregations (Colossians 4:16).

### The Old Testament

Have you ever wondered how the many parts of the Bible (books of law, history, and prophecy; psalms, gospels, and letters) all became the Bible you now read? Over a period of more than 1500 years, at least 40 different authors wrote words inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16). It was God who told each one what to write down and how to preserve His words for "the generation to come" (Psalm 102:18).

After Moses wrote the Law (Deuteronomy 31:9), a copy of it was kept in "the side of the ark of the covenant" (Deuteronomy 31:26). God wanted His words read to the people so they would not forget. Every seven years, the words of this Law were to be read to all of Israel "that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 31:10-12). Over time, God continued to inspire spiritual leaders to record events in Israel's history, words of praise and wisdom, and many prophecies. All these writings were carefully copied by scribes (ancient Jewish record-keepers) when the original copies wore out.

Around 450 B.C. Jewish tradition says that Ezra (priest and scribe) and many others began to organize all these writings into what Jesus called "the scriptures." Jesus classified them as the Law of Moses, the books of the prophets, and the psalms (Luke 24:44). In many places in the New Testament, we can read that these books were called the "word of God." In A.D. 90 the historian Josephus wrote that after the time of Malachi, no other material was added to the Old Testament.

About the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. the books of the Old Testament were translated from the original language (Hebrew and some Aramaic) to the more common language of that time (Greek). This ancient version was called *The Septuagint*, meaning "translation of the seventy," as it is said that 70 scholars began this translation. Traditionally, it is thought the king of Egypt asked for this translation so it could be added to the famous Library of Alexandria. At the time there were said to have been over 1 million Jews in Alexandria who spoke very little of the Hebrew language. Thus, there was a need to have the Scriptures in the language of the people. This version was commonly used during the time of Jesus and the Apostles.

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**The original Greek tells us  
"inspiration of God" means *God-breathed* (2 Timothy 3:16).**

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### The New Testament

Just as the first Old Testament book to be written was not Genesis (it was Job), so it is in the New Testament. The first book written was not Matthew's Gospel. Although the books and letters of the New Testament were not dated, it is commonly believed that Paul's letters were written first. These letters were passed from church to church (Colossians 4:16) and were read in addition to the Old Testament Scriptures during worship service (1 Thessalonians 5:27). They were recognized by God's people as writings that were inspired by God.

In the years following Jesus' return to Heaven, much of what Jesus did and said was spread by word of mouth. In time, a need arose for accurate, written records. No doubt, Luke was referring to this when he gave his reason for writing the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:1-4). Two authors of the Gospels (Matthew and John) were disciples who were eyewitnesses to what they wrote. The other two authors (Mark and Luke) worked closely with eyewitnesses. During this time the General Epistles were also being written. John's books were written last, and the last book of the Bible (chronologically) is 3 John.

### The Canon of the Bible

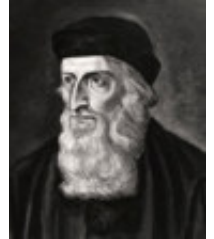
The word *canon* literally means "measuring rod." You might hear this word used in regard to the list of books included in the Bible. During the times of the Old Testament and New Testament, many books were written, some of which might have

seemed like they should have been included. How did God's people know the difference? Their "measuring rod" was to see if the writings were inspired of God by understanding who the authors were and if their writings contradicted other accepted books of the Bible. (The books that were not included have proven historical errors, were never quoted by Jesus and the Apostles, and some even teach ungodly principles.) From the beginning of time, God carefully planned that His Word would be preserved for you and me! God knew exactly which books should be included, for it was He who gave the inspiration for their writing.

### The Need for Translations

Could you read your Bible if it were written in Hebrew or Greek? Most of us could not. Yet, it is vital that every one of us be able to read the Bible for ourselves! For a thousand years, the standard Bible was in the Latin language after the entire Bible was translated into *The Vulgate* version. In time, many people considered Latin to be a "dead language," as it was no longer the language of the people. Only the educated could read it. The common people could not read the Latin Bible for themselves. Also, it was very rare for people to have their own copy of the Bible. Let us look at some of the brave men whose efforts brought about our English Bibles. (Reformers, such as Martin Luther, worked to translate the Bible into other languages as well.)

John Wycliffe (1320-1384) was 20 years old when he found an entire copy of the Bible in the University of Erfurt's library (in Germany). He said, "O God, could I but have one of the books, I would ask no other treasure." In 1380 Wycliffe translated the New Testament into the English language. His enemies claimed that "he was introducing among the multitude a book reserved exclusively for the use of priests." However, God's Word is for the multitudes, not just for a few priests. Forty-four years after Wycliffe died, the Pope was so angry by what Wycliffe had accomplished, he ordered his bones be dug up and burned. (Quotes from *Bible Readings for the Home Circle*.)



**Wycliffe**



**Tyndale**

William Tyndale (1494-1536) was another reformer who was convinced people should be able to read the Bible for themselves. When faced with opposition from the Catholic Church, Tyndale said, "I defy the Pope, and all his laws; and if God spares my life, I will cause the boy that drives the plow to know more of the Scriptures than the Pope himself!" Tyndale's translation of the Bible (from ancient copies of Hebrew and Greek into English) could not be done in England because of intense opposition. He fled to Germany and is believed to have worked with Martin Luther while working on the English translations. Eventually, Tyndale was betrayed, arrested, and put to death at the stake. His last words were, "Lord, open the king of England's eyes!" (Quotes from *GreatSite.com*.)

After Tyndale's death, in England the English Bible was declared illegal. However, God heard Tyndale's prayer! A few years after his death, King Henry VIII began to allow the Bible to be printed in English. Queen Elizabeth also allowed English Bibles to be printed. Then, in 1611 the King James Authorized Bible was printed. This Bible, commissioned by King James I, was the most commonly used English Bible for over 300 years!

Do you have a greater appreciation for your own Bible? God did an awesome job preserving these wonderful words of life so that you might be saved, encouraged, and strengthened in your daily walk with Him!



## THE BIBLE — IS IT ACCURATE?

### DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** God tells us how important His Word is (Psalm 138:1-2).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** God promises to keep and preserve His words forever (Psalm 12:6-7; Isaiah 40:8).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** God has preserved His words for future generations (Psalm 33:11; Isaiah 59:21).
- ❑ **Thursday:** God will not let His words pass away (Matthew 24:34-35).
- ❑ **Friday:** God's Word will accomplish His purpose (Isaiah 55:8-11).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Do not add or take away from God's Word (Deuteronomy 4:1-2; Revelation 22:18-19).

Have you ever wondered what the original manuscripts of the Bible might have looked like? We do not know for sure because none of the first manuscripts has survived. Over time, the materials they were written on would have worn out, and copies were made. How do we know those copies were accurate? Could something that was untrue have been added to the Scriptures? These questions could cause people to have doubts about God's Word. If you doubt the accuracy of the Bible, you might doubt the thousands of promises contained in the Bible as well. God does not want you to be confused or doubtful concerning whether the Bible is God's Word or just the words of men. Let us look at some "proofs" of the accuracy of the Bible.

### The Reliability of Ancient Jewish Scribes

One way we can be assured of the accuracy of the Scriptures is by studying how the manuscript copies were made. Jewish scribes made it their lifework to study and copy Old Testament Scriptures. When copying, rigid rules helped ensure the new copies were accurate. According to ancient Jewish law, some of these rules were:

- Scriptures must be written on skins of clean animals prepared by a Jew.
- columns could be no more than 60 lines and no less than 48 lines.
- the ink must be black, created only by using a special recipe.
- no word, letter, or yod (smallest letter of Hebrew alphabet) was to be written from memory.
- a scribe must sit in full Jewish dress when copying Scripture.
- if spoken to by a king while writing God's name, the scribe was to take no notice of the king.

These rules (and many more) reveal how important it was to make copies accurately and in a respectful manner. When a scribe finished his copying, additional precautions were taken to ensure accuracy. Verses, letters, and words of each book were counted. The middle letter, middle verse, and middle word were calculated and compared with the earlier manuscripts. If mistakes were found, the copy was burned, and the scribe started over. Because of this extreme carefulness in copying, the Hebrew Scriptures are considered more reliable than other ancient manuscripts.

### Archeology, History, and Science Confirm the Reliability of the Bible

Through the years, critics of the reliability of the Bible have made claims, such as: Moses could not have written the Pentateuch, as writing had not been invented at that time; the Hittites were not real, but had been made up by the Bible writers; King David, King Belshazzar, King Herod, and Pontius Pilate never existed; and the story of Joshua and the Israelites at Jericho could not be true, as Jericho did not exist that time. These claims (and others) have been disproved by archeological discoveries (for instance: coins with King Herod's name, historical writings speaking of Pontius Pilate, stone fragments called the "Tel Dan inscription" that describe the "house of David," and stone tablets with writing dated before the time of Moses have been found). These discoveries, further proving the stories of the Bible, should strengthen your belief and faith in the Bible!

Can science confirm the accuracy of the Bible? The Creator of the universe is also the Author of all the laws of nature, some of which He included in His Word. Three thousand years ago, ancient societies said that the earth was resting on the backs of several large elephants; God said that the earth "hangeth . . . upon nothing" (Job 26:7). For thousands of years, people believed that the earth was flat; God's Word describes the earth as a "circle [or sphere]" (Isaiah 40:22). Until recent times, the bottom of the ocean was believed to be sandy and shaped like a saucer; God's Word describes the sea as having "mountains" (Jonah 2:6) and "channels [valleys]" (2 Samuel 22:16). In every one of these instances, scientific discoveries have been consistent with God's Word!

## Ancient Manuscript Copies

The Bible has more ancient manuscript copies than many other accepted ancient works. Today we have more than 5600 ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. The advantage of such a large amount of ancient manuscripts is that they can be cross-checked for accuracy. Let us compare that number to the manuscripts of a few other ancient writers: Greek philosophers Plato (7 copies) and Aristotle (49 copies); Julius Caesar (10 copies); and Homer's *Illiad* (over 700 copies). Yet, these ancient writings are all recognized as genuine. How much more trustworthy is God's Word, the Bible!



## What Does the Bible Say?

Do you think it is important to God that His words were written accurately when He gave them to the authors of the Bible? Do you think God also found it important to preserve His words for the generations of people who would live after Bible times? A God who created everything (from the vastness of our solar system to the smallest atom), a God who knows all things, a God who hears every prayer ever prayed surely has kept His hand on His Word through countless copies and translations! God promised to "preserve [His words] from this generation for ever" (Psalm 12:6-7). He is concerned about every one of His words (Proverbs 30:5-6). God warned against adding to or taking away from His words (Deuteronomy 4:1-2; Revelation 22:18-19). Jesus promised that God's words would never "pass away" (Mark 13:31), that they "cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

To the critics who say the Bible is inaccurate, has not been preserved correctly, or has been disproved, the question is, Does God not care enough about His Word to protect and preserve it? Of course, the answer is YES! From the beginning of time, the devil has worked to bring doubt concerning God's Word. When speaking to Eve, he questioned God's commands (Genesis 3:1). When tempting Jesus, the devil twisted God's words (Matthew 4:6). The devil is still trying to make people doubt God's Word. Why? Because he realizes how powerful the Word of God is! If you will read it, believe it, and obey it, it will change your life. There is great power in God's Word! Is it working in your life?

## The Dead Sea Scrolls

**I**n 1946 or 1947 a shepherd (said to be searching for a missing goat) made a very important discovery in a cave close to the Dead Sea known as Qumran. This shepherd could not have known the value of what he found that day! In this cave he found jars containing manuscripts. He took some of these manuscripts (scrolls) home to show his family and visitors to his camp. Eventually, he sold a few of the scrolls to an antique dealer for a very small amount of money.



Within a year, these scrolls made their way into the hands of archeologists and scholars, who studied the scrolls and realized the manuscripts were very similar to ancient Biblical manuscripts. This led to further exploration of the area where the first manuscripts were found. Eventually, eleven caves were discovered, containing manuscript fragments, scrolls, pottery, cloth, and wood believed to be over 2000 years old!

As scholars studied these finds, they discovered parts or complete copies of every book in the Old Testament (with the exception of the Book of Esther). One of the original scrolls was a copy of the Book of Isaiah and is called "The Great Isaiah Scroll." This scroll has been dated to about 100 B.C. and is 1000 years older than any of the other Isaiah manuscript copies previously discovered. This was a great opportunity to compare this manuscript with more recent copies of Isaiah and check for accuracy in the multiple copies made since 100 B.C.

The Bible has had many critics, people who say the original content has not been preserved but has been corrupted through the process of copying and translating. So it was with great anticipation that many scholars began to study The Great Isaiah Scroll. Would it prove those critics right or wrong?

After years of study, it was determined that The Great Isaiah Scroll was almost identical to the much newer Isaiah manuscripts. The few variants (differences) were mostly due to spelling differences, and none of these changed the meaning of the Scripture. More than 95 percent of The Great Isaiah Scroll was identical—word for word—to more recent copies!

This amazing discovery should encourage your faith and belief that God's Word has been preserved, just as He promised it would be!

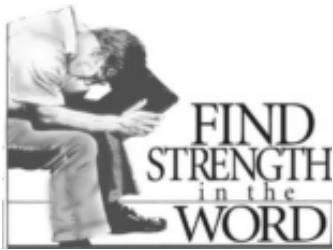
## THE BIBLE — WHY SHOULD I READ IT?

### DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** God's Word is our guide (Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 3:6).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** God's Word is our spiritual food (Matthew 6:11; 1 Peter 2:2; Hebrews 5:13-14).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** Read God's Word so you can "give an answer" (1 Peter 3:15-16).
- ❑ **Thursday:** God commands His people to read and meditate on His Word (Joshua 1:7-8).
- ❑ **Friday:** Read of God's promises to those who read and obey His commandments (Psalm 1:1-3; 19:7).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Your faith in Jesus will grow by reading God's Word (John 20:30-31; Romans 10:17).

### The Bible Gives Guidance and Understanding

Have you ever asked questions such as, "Why was I born?" "Why am I here?" or "What am I supposed to do with my life?" No doubt, since the beginning of time people have asked these same questions. Wouldn't it be wonderful if there was one book that held the answers to all your questions? There is! It is the Bible. It will give you understanding concerning every detail of your life. Psalm 119:105 promises that God's Word will shine a light on your path. In other words, it will show you the way you should be going. It is not in man "to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). If you will give God control of your life, "he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:6). When you make Bible reading an important part of your daily life, you will begin to hear God speaking to you about the decisions you need to make (Isaiah 30:21).



### The Bible Is Your Spiritual Food

How long do you think you would survive if you quit eating and drinking? You would not live very long. It is the same spiritually. In fact, Job said, "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12). The Bible often compares God's Word to food, emphasizing the fact that spiritual food is as vital to the life of the soul as physical food is to the literal body. When teaching His disciples how to pray, Jesus said they should ask God for their "daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). In John 6:35, Jesus explained that He was the "bread of life." Peter wrote that we should desire the "milk of the word" (1 Peter 2:2). Just as newborn babies can only drink milk (simple food), so newborn Christians at first can only understand the simple, basic truths of the Bible. However, as one grows up (both physically and spiritually), he or she can begin to eat solid foods. The Bible describes this as "meat" (Hebrews 5:14). Another food that the Word is compared to is "honey" (Psalm 19:9-10). When you read something in the Bible that helps and encourages you, it is sweet!

### Bible Reading Explains History, Culture, Laws, and Literature

Did you know that much of our culture has its basis in the Bible? As you become more familiar with the Bible, you will have a better understanding of historic landmarks and events, literary references, idioms (figures of speech), famous speeches, and many of America's laws. One famous landmark in the United States is the Liberty Bell, which is inscribed with the message of freedom found in Leviticus 25:10, "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof." In 1844 the first public message sent by telegraph in morse code (invented by Samuel Morse) was taken from Numbers 23:23—"What hath God wrought!" Many of Shakespeare's writings refer to Bible verses. Some say at least 1200 different times he referenced the Bible. It has been said that Shakespeare's plays refer to the opening chapters of Genesis so often that he must have had those chapters memorized.

Often we hear *idioms* used that come straight from the Bible. (An "idiom" is an expression that has a meaning separate from the individual word meanings; for example, "it is raining cats and dogs.") Perhaps you have heard many of these idioms without realizing their basis is in the Bible: "see the handwriting on the wall" (Daniel, Chapter 5); "at their wit's end" (Psalm 107:27); "a drop in the bucket" (Isaiah 40:15); "as old as the hills" (Job 15:7); and "by the skin of your teeth" (Job 19:20).

Many famous speeches have quoted directly from or referred to the Bible. Abraham Lincoln's famous words "A house divided against itself cannot stand" were spoken centuries earlier by Jesus (Matthew 12:25). The well-known speech, *I Have a Dream*, given by Martin Luther King referred to the books of Amos and Isaiah (Isaiah 40:4-5; Amos 5:24). It is important you understand

that many famous men and women were faithful Bible readers. Their faith in God and diligence to read His Word enabled them to become great leaders.

George Washington once said, "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible." The Bible is the foundation for many of the laws of the United States of America. Often people want to argue that this nation did not begin with Christian values and principles, but they are wrong. The Declaration of Independence tells us that all men are *created* (Genesis 1:1) *equal* (Galatians 3:28). It also speaks of "unalienable Rights" given by our "Creator," one of which is the right to "the pursuit of happiness" (Ecclesiastes 3:13). The three branches of our government (judicial, executive, legislative) are clearly described in Isaiah 33:22, which says, "For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king."

### Bible Reading Prepares You to Give an Answer

The Apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:15 of the importance to "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." Have you ever been asked questions about where you go to church, why you dress a certain way, or why you do not do some things? What was your answer? Did you say, "My church teaches it that way," or "My pastor preaches it that way"? Are those the answers Peter was talking about? Will those answers cause people to want to know more? Probably not. Your answer should be personal—a reflection of your own beliefs. How do you prepare for those questions? Read your Bible. "The heart of the righteous studieth to answer" (Proverbs 15:28). Just as one must read and study for a test in school, so you must prepare for the spiritual questions and tests. There are many people in this world who are truly searching for a better way—are you prepared to "give an answer"?



### Bible Reading Is Required

Possibly the most important reason you should read your Bible is because God says you should. There are many Scriptures that tell us of the value God places on reading, hearing, and mediating on the Bible (also called His words, laws, Holy Scriptures, precepts, and commandments). God commanded the Israelites to hear His words, keep them, teach them to their children, and write them on the doorposts of their houses and the posts of their gates. He told His people to think about His Word "day and night" (Joshua 1:8), and He has promised blessings to those who obey His commandments (Psalm 1:1-3; 19:7). God knows the importance of reading the Bible. Do you?

**T**he story is told of a young woman who tried to read a book but found it quite boring! She placed it on a bookshelf and forgot about it. Sometime later this young woman fell in love with a young man.

Imagine her surprise when she discovered he was the author of that "boring book." She again began to read that book and found she could not put it down—it was so interesting! What made the difference? She had fallen in love with the author.



## Quotes About Bible Reading

"My friend, if you are too busy to read the Bible every day, you are busier than Almighty God ever intended any human being should be, and you had better let some things go and take time to read the Bible."

(D. L. Moody)

"No one is saved by buying a Bible he does not read, nor is one saved by reading a Bible he does not obey."

(Truth Magazine)

"I am sorry for the men who do not read the Bible every day. I wonder why they deprive themselves of the strength and of the pleasure."

(Woodrow Wilson)

"Within the covers of the Bible are the answers for all the problems men face."

(Ronald Reagan)

"A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education."

(Theodore Roosevelt)

"A Bible that's falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't."

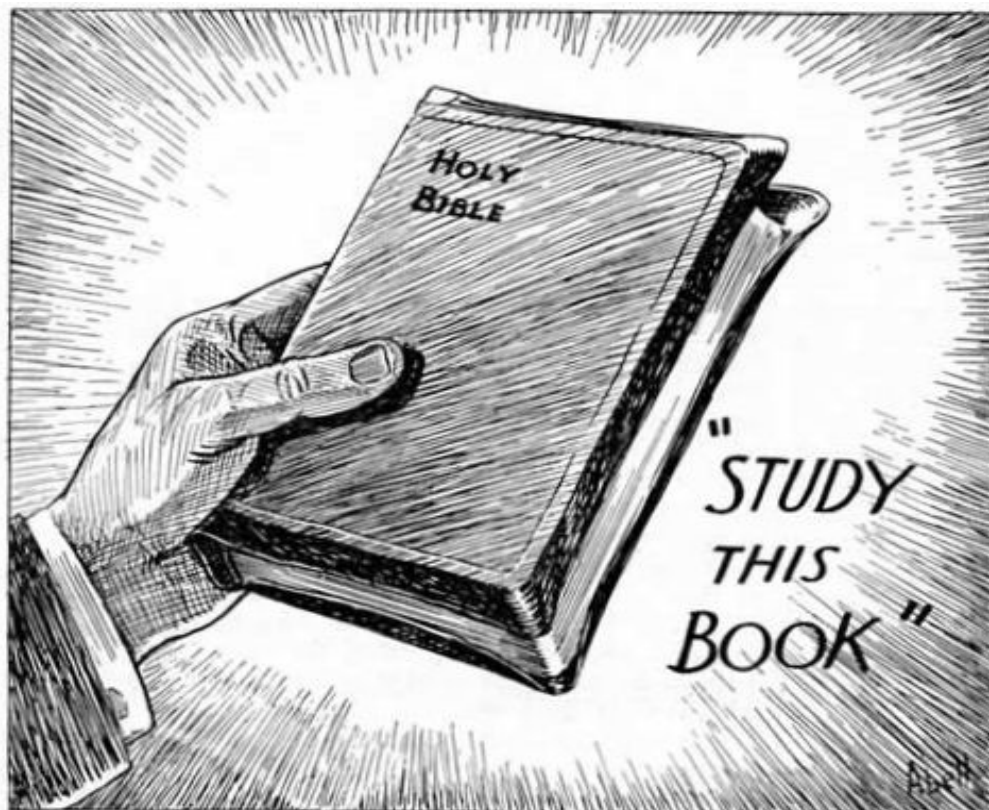
(Charles H. Spurgeon)

"Hold fast to the Bible. To the influence of this Book we are indebted for all the progress made in true civilization and to this we must look as our guide in the future."

(Ulysses S. Grant)

"In all my perplexities and distresses, the Bible has never failed to give me light and strength."

(Robert E. Lee)



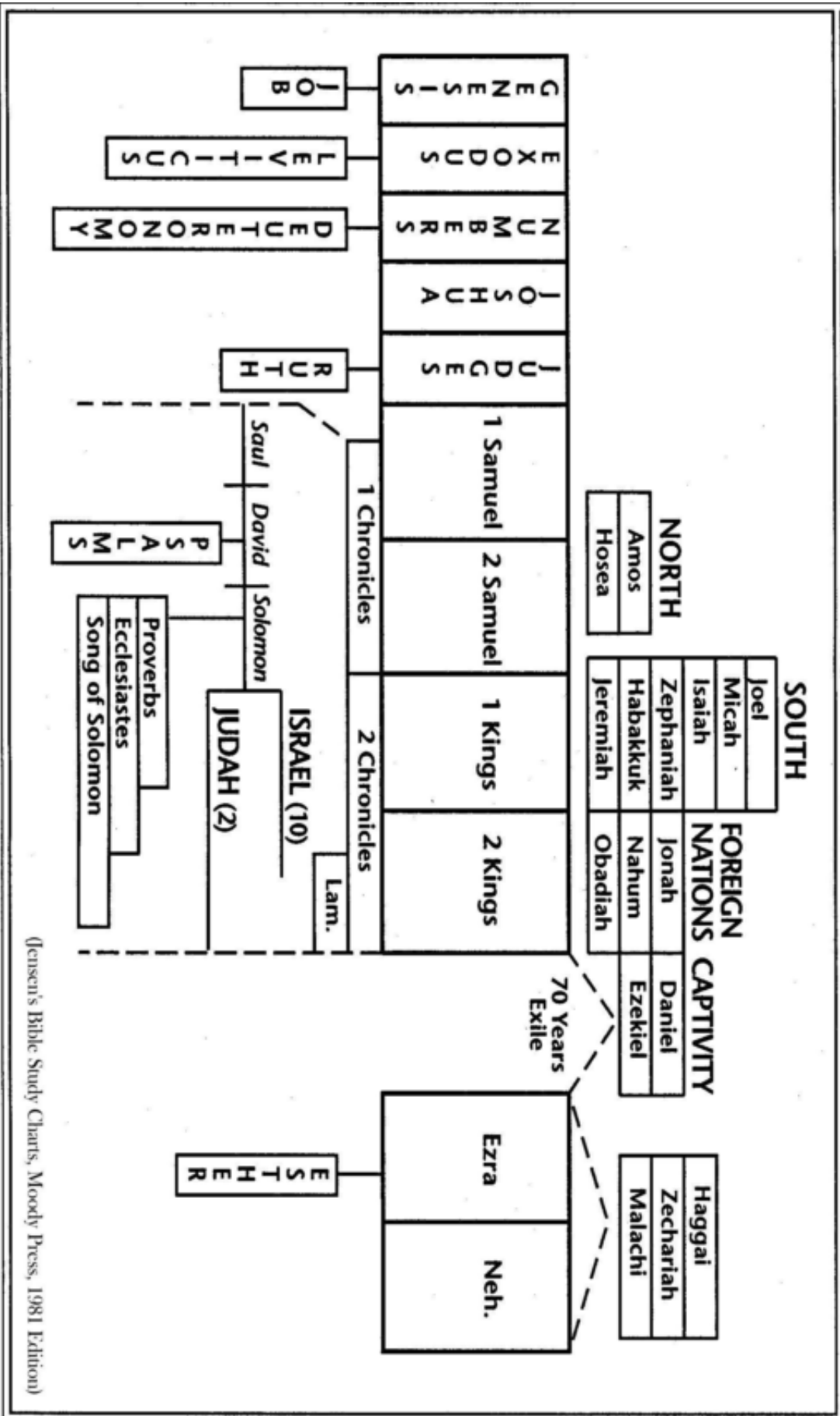
# THE KINGDOMS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH

SCALE OF MILES  
0 10 20 30 40

This map can be viewed at:  
[www.bible.ca](http://www.bible.ca)  
Steven Rudd (2007)



# CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER OF BOOKS



(Jensen's Bible Study Charts, Moody Press, 1981 Edition)

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