



OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT



The following guide will give you a brief overview of the Bible. The Bible is composed of sixty-six books, divided into two major sections, the Old Testament and the New Testament. Within each major section, the books are topically arranged to help the reader to more easily understand the overall message.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. The Pentateuch or Torah: Genesis to Deuteronomy. Pentateuch means “5 books.” Torah means “law” or “teaching.” These first five books in the Old Testament were written by Moses. Genesis deals with the fall of man and God’s selection of His people, the Jews, to be the channel for His great plan of redemption. The rest of the Pentateuch deals with Israel’s deliverance from Egypt (first half of Exodus) and detailed explanation of God’s Law: 1) The ceremonial law (no longer applicable for today) and the moral law (still relevant for today for loving God and your neighbor). **Key books for study: Genesis and Deuteronomy (loaded with important principles for living).

2. The Historical Books: Joshua to Ezra: These books deal with Israel’s conquest of the Promised Land and their general failure to fulfill their covenant obligations to God. Their disobedience ultimately

brings God’s judgment as He disperses Israel (721 BC.) and allows Judah to be taken into the Babylonian captivity for 70 years (586 BC.).

3. The Poetic Books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations: These books deal with a variety of life’s issues. Psalms is a book of prayer and praise. Proverbs deals with how to live life skillfully. Job deals with the problem of pain and Ecclesiastes deals with the problem of pleasure. Song of Solomon is a portrayal of married love. Lamentations features Jeremiah’s laments over the fall of Jerusalem. **Key books for study: Psalms and Proverbs.

4. The Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel: These books focus on the sins of God’s people, God’s judgment, and the future promises of the New Covenant through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. **Key book for study: Daniel (how to stand alone for God in a sinful society).

5. The Minor Prophets: Hosea through Malachi: Denounces sins of God’s people, means of God’s judgment, and gives ultimate hope through prophecies of Christ’s coming and redemptive work.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. The Gospels: Matthew to John: The Gospels are designed to tell us about Christ’s ministry (His doings and teachings) with a special focus on His birth and death. (Note how much space is devoted to the last week of His life.) They are divided into two sections: the Synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke--which share much of the same material) and the fourth gospel, the Gospel of John. Why so many



gospels? The O.T. law required two or three witnesses to establish a fact, and because each writer has a different audience with different perspectives that require a unique emphasis.

Matthew—Writes as a Jew to Jews. He represent Jesus as the Messiah who fulfilled the O.T. prophecies (note the numerous O.T. quotations). Key section for study is the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7, which contains kingdom principles not only for the future--but for living life here and now.

Mark—Writes to the action-minded Romans. He represents Christ as the busy Servant of God who demonstrates supernatural power over nature, disease, demons, etc. This book is the shortest--yet most active of the Gospels. Key section for study is Jesus' warning against legalism in Mark 7 (very pertinent for believers today).

Luke—Writes to the Gentiles, picturing Christ as full of compassion for the poor and sinful. The most complete gospel, written entirely in chronological order.

John—Gives a theological portrait of Christ. He does this by demonstrating through several key signs and speeches that Jesus is Deity come in humanity in order to save His people from sin. John states his purpose very clearly in John 20:3 to bring readers to saving faith in Jesus Christ. (No wonder so many have been saved through passages like John 1:12 and 3:16!)

2. The Acts: Luke wrote this book as a sequel to his gospel (Acts 1:1-2). It is a book of missionary history as it follows the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. Its major emphasis is the continued acts of Jesus from heaven by the Holy Spirit through His Church. It provides important background for the principal writers of the epistles or letters to the churches. The key elements of the Gospel are repeated throughout the book in the preaching. It is important to remember that Acts is a transitional book--not a doctrinal treatise.

3. The Epistles (Letters): Includes the letters of Paul, Peter, John, James, Jude, and the writer of Hebrews. Most of these letters were written to churches, but some were written to individuals. **The epistles are where the great doctrines of the faith are explained in their greatest detail--both theologically

and practically.

Paul's Letters (Romans through Philemon)

Romans—Written to the believers at Rome, setting forth the need for and the plan of salvation (Romans 1-11) and the practical implications of this salvation for godly living. Chapter 12 contains a discussion of gifts and ends with a powerful section on how to relate to people (especially unbelievers) who mistreat you. Chapter 13 is a key passage for the Christian's relationship to the state. Chapters 14 and 15 contain some vital principles on how to handle non-essential differences with other believers (i.e. the issues of Christian liberty). Romans 14:23 contains one of the most important principles relating to decision-making--specifically the "holding principle."

I Corinthians—Deals with church problems such as church cliques and factions (1-3), incest and the need for church discipline (5), believers taking believers to court (6), sexual sin (6), marriage and divorce (7), Christian liberty (8, 10), abuses of the Lord's Supper (11), spiritual gifts (12-14), and a right approach to giving (16). It is a great book to turn to for answers to common church problems.

II Corinthians—A defense of Paul's apostleship and his motivation for ministry. Chapter one has some helpful information on comfort and affliction. Chapter two deals with how to re-assimilate a disciplined church member. Chapter four deals with how to overcome difficult circumstances that could otherwise lead to depression. Chapter five underscores the goal and motivation for the Christian life. Chapter six warns against being unequally yoked with unbelievers. Chapters eight and nine deal with Christian giving. And chapter twelve states that the reason for the sign gifts (tongues and healing) was to authenticate the Apostles and their message.

Galatians—Combats the problem of legalism and asserts Christian freedom through justification by faith alone. Chapter five speaks of the struggle in the Christian life, the works of the flesh, and the fruit of the Spirit. Chapter six opens with the mandate for all Christians to counsel.



Letters Written During Pauls' Imprisonment (Ephesians-Colossians)

Ephesians—Reveals the eternal plan and purpose of God in salvation (chapters 1-3) and how it forms the basis for the believer's walk with God and his fellow Christians (chapters 4-6). Chapter 4:22ff. Explains the process God uses to change believers and then illustrates how it works in solving the problems of communication that tend to divide believers. Chapter five gives the basic pattern for dealing with life dominating sins (v. 18) and then goes on to deal with God's pattern for marriage. Chapter six covers parent-child responsibilities and the Christian work ethic as well as the armor of God.

Philippians—Written to assure the believers of God's unfailing purpose through Paul's imprisonment. It contains important instructions throughout on how to handle rivalry and jealousy between believers (esp. chapter 2). Chapter four covers perhaps the key passage for overcoming worry (vs.6-9).

Colossians—Overlaps with much of the content of Ephesians. Both deal with the Church as Christ's body, but Colossians stresses Christ's role as the Head. Contains some great passages on the sufficiency of Christ! Further develops how Christians grow (only as we put off the habits of the flesh and put on God's new ways of thinking and handling life).

I Thessalonians—Contains a key passage on sexual purity in chapter four as well as the great passage on the second coming of Christ and the rapture of believers.

II Thessalonians—Corrects errors regarding Christ's second coming.

Paul's Letters Written to Church Leaders (Timothy and Titus)

I Timothy—Important instructions on how to have a healthy church. It covers issues like the role of women in the church (2), guidelines for spiritual leadership (3), the importance of the pastor's own walk with God (4), and vital instructions about attitudes toward money (6).

II Timothy—Paul's "swan song." It contains a great chapter on the sufficiency of Scripture--even in the most challenging of times (3).

Titus—Instructions to Titus on how to organize a new church in a pagan society. Has a great section on Christian ethics in chapter two.
Philemon--Paul's letter in behalf of a runaway, converted slave. It gives a good model of how to raise a "sticky" issue with another believer.

Letters From Other Writers

Hebrews—Author unknown. It teaches the superiority of Christ to all that these Jewish believers left behind in Judaism. The danger of defecting is sounded throughout. Chapter five explains why believers fail to grow (5:11-14). Chapter ten gives a challenge for believers to minister to each other. Chapter eleven is the great chapter on faith. Chapter twelve explains God's purpose in discipline.

James—Covers God's purpose in trials (1)--to make His people mature and complete. Shows that man's own desires are his greatest enemy (1), deals with partiality (2), the importance of controlling the tongue (3), and how that desires gone awry are at the root of interpersonal conflicts (4).

I Peter—Teaches believers how they can endure suffering for Christ in a way that pleases God. It focuses on suffering especially in the context of failing relationships--with legal authorities and workplace authorities (2), and with spouses (3).

II Peter—Warns against the infiltration of false teachers--and how to identify them.

I John—Key book on how to have a Biblically based assurance of salvation.

II John—Letter of encouragement to a Christian woman; warns against aiding false teachers.

III John—Short work on Christian hospitality.
u. Jude--Warns against false teachers--and how to rescue those who have been influenced by them.

4. The Revelation: Deals primarily with the second coming of Jesus Christ and the final act in God's unfolding drama of redemption! The first three chapters contain direct words from Jesus to His church. His observations, commendations, and warnings are relevant to churches in every age!

Books of the Bible

OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS

