

An Overview of the Torah

Supplemental material for “Through the Bible Book by Book” (1/3/25)

One of the top New Year’s resolutions, for Christians at least, is to read through the Bible! There’s no greater source or practice for spiritual growth. But in addition, as a church this year we’re going through the Bible book by book — from Genesis to Revelation each Sunday over the next 11 months. That’s 66 books in 43 weeks which means some of the short books will be grouped together.

We’re not sure if any church has done this before, but we think it’s going to be a powerful learning experience together. We need to be a people of the Book because Scripture is foundational to our faith & everything we believe & do! It’s God speaking to us, so we need to love it, learn it & live it! We miss out on much of what God wants us to know if we’re biblically illiterate.

A few weeks ago, we prepared for this with a series called “5 Weeks in the Word.” You can hear those 6 message on our website or podcast (Oct. 27-Dec. 1). In that series we covered the importance, reliability, & authority of the Bible, as well as how to interpret & understand it. Some resources are available on our website & on a table in the lobby.



WEBSITE



PODCAST



5 WEEKS RESOURCES

We’d also encourage you to get a good Study Bible that has background & commentary notes so you can better understand the purpose & context of each book. It helps greatly to know the 5 W’s – Who wrote it & to whom? When & Where is it taking place? What kind of book is it? Why is it being written?

Understand that the Bible is not laid out chronologically, but grouped in sections. The two main divisions are the Old Testament & New Testament. While Christians recognize both, Jewish people only recognize the Old — but they don’t call it “Old” since they don’t have a “New.” So it can be good to refer to them instead as the Hebrew Scriptures & Christian Scriptures.

The Hebrew Scriptures are made up of 3 main sections often called by the Hebrew acronym: “TaNaKh” -- Torah (Law), Neviim (Prophets), & Ketuvim (Writings). The Law books are the first 5 written by Moses. The Prophets is further divided into Former Prophets which are some of the history books, & Latter Prophets which include both the Major Prophets (longer books) & Minor Prophets (shorter books). The Writings include poetic books, some history books, & some prophetic books.

The New Testament references them as “the Law & Prophets” or as just “the Scriptures.” Jesus said, “...Everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” (Luke 24:44 ESV). Notice, He uses a category called “Psalms” which is interchangeable with “Writings.” This category is also called the Wisdom Books.

But more commonly they’re grouped into 5 sections:

1. **Law** (English); or Torah (Hebrew), or Pentateuch (Greek, which means 5 volumes) = Genesis to Deuteronomy, covering the time from Creation to the death of Moses. They lay down the foundational commands, teachings & narratives that instruct & guide God’s chosen people — the Hebrews.
2. **History** = Joshua to Esther, covering the time from Israel entering the Promised Land to their Exile from the Promised Land to their return to the Promised Land.
3. **Poetry** = 5 books of “wisdom” literature from Job to Song of Solomon.
4. **Major Prophets** = the longer ones from Isaiah to Daniel
5. **Minor Prophets** = the shorter ones from Hosea to Malachi.

Poetry & Prophets are not chronological but fall within timeline of the History books. A Chronological Bible version will intersperse them in order like that.

To better understand the flow of biblical history, you can watch the message “What’s the Point of the Bible’s Plot?” (Jan. 1, 2023) which features a special memory device (from Gary Olsby) to help you get a handle on the big picture overview & timeline of the Bible: “Beep Slowly Jake Carries Cocoa.”



Jesus referred to the Torah also as “the book of Moses” (Mark 12:26) because all 5 books were considered one “book.” He even simply used “Moses” as shorthand for the Torah: “Has not Moses given you the law” (John 7:19). Jews, Christians, & Muslims all affirmed Mosaic authorship with no real argument against it until the 18th century when liberalism spread through modernist scholarship in universities pushing the idea that various anonymous authors living centuries apart with different agendas wrote various portions pieced together long after time of Moses.

That thinking still dominates scholarly discussions. But it’s really just based on naturalistic Darwinian thinking which was gaining ground at the time. Since they would often rule out supernatural revelation from God, they supposed these books must have evolved over time. But no good reason supports such speculation other than some variations in writing styles, repetition of a few stories, & the use of different names for God. But in more recent times, the same kinds of things have been noted in other

ancient literature. It may seem a bit odd to us today, but it was apparently common then despite what your typical liberal university professor or mainline denominational pastor says. So if Jesus says Moses is the author, that's good enough for us .

It's actually nothing new. You may remember during Jesus' time, two main Jewish groups — Pharisees & Sadducees — disagreed over Scripture. The Pharisees were conservatives who accepted all the Hebrew Scriptures, while the Sadducees seemed to be liberals who rejected all except those first 5 books of Moses. Yet both groups rejected Jesus! He told them: "For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words" (John 5:46-47)?

Moses wrote Genesis sometime around 1430 BC during the time he was leading the Israelites after their Exodus from Egypt. Most likely he's writing while traveling through wilderness for 40 years on way to Promised Land which traditionally took place 1446-1406 BC. This date is based on 1 Kings 6:1 which says King Solomon began to build the Temple 480 years after the Exodus, & we know that was around 966 BC. You should know the liberal scholars also dispute this too. They would say it happened later in 1290 BC based on some further speculative reasons. But there's no real reason to doubt the Bible's dating.

GENESIS

Genesis is most likely the oldest book in the Bible, though it's possible that Job may be older. Moses' original audience was the Israelites to remind them of their history from the beginning & their heritage as God's chosen people. But Genesis is for all of us.

The first 11 chapters are prehistoric (not recorded by eyewitnesses) & can be poetic in places, but it's written as historical narrative, not as mythology. Making portions poetic would have made it easier for earlier generations to remember & pass down. But did Moses know about the prehistoric information because he was relying on older written sources & oral traditions? We don't know exactly how Moses got this information, but if it was passed down from Adam onward, God surely guarded the transmission of these truths until Moses could record them as inspired Scripture.

But also remember that God revealed many things to Moses when he was on Mt. Sinai for 40 days (twice)! That's a long time to receive revelations from God. Just as God would reveal the future, He could reveal the past. So its possible God simply told Moses all that happened "in the beginning." To review more about these first 11 Primeval chapters, you can watch our 4-part series from 2023 called "First Things" which covers the 4 key periods of Creation, Corruption (the Fall), Catastrophe (the Flood), & Confusion (Tower of Babel).



GENERATIONS

The word "generations" (or "account") appears 10 times in Genesis, each time signaling a new section. Structured in 11 units, each begins with "These are the generations of..." Intro 1:1-2:3 / Heaven & earth 2:4-4:26 / Adam 5:1-6:8 / Noah 6:9-9:29 / Sons of Noah 10:1-11:9 / Shem 11:10-26 / Terah 11:27-25:11 / Ishmael 25:12-18 / Isaac 25:19-35:29 / Esau 36:1-37:1 / Jacob 37:2-50:26

Many genealogies appear — Adam "begat" Seth; Seth begat Enosh, & on & on & on! These long lists may seem boring to us now, but lineage was very important to show God in his mercy was allowing humanity to continue on. Ancient genealogies didn't necessarily list every single generation. They would abbreviate for symbolic value by omitting some in order to highlight the important ones. The word "begat" doesn't necessarily indicate a direct descendent, but can also mean "became the ancestor of." If every generation is actually listed, then humanity would only be about 6,000 years old, but by skipping generations it may be up to 10,000 years old, who knows?

God allowed people back then to have very long lifespans of more than 900 years. Even with intermarrying, the early earth was not yet experiencing all the ill effects of sin through deformities & disease. The pre-Flood world was different. It wasn't until after Noah's Flood that God said people would only live up to 120 years (Gen. 6:3). By the end of Genesis, Joseph lives only 110 years. In modern times, the oldest documented person lived to 122 (in 1997). Psalm 89:10 suggests the average life span is 70-80 years.

If there are no gaps in the genealogies, then Adam (who died at 930 years old) was still alive up to the time of Methuselah who would have died at 969 years in the year of the Flood. So in terms of passing down knowledge, Adam would have told Methuselah who then told Noah. Then about 1,000 years with 15 generations passed between Noah & Moses writing it down.

TIMELINE

?	Creation Adam & Eve, Cain/Abel/Seth Noah & the Flood Tower of Babel
2100 BC	God's Covenant with Abraham Destruction of Sodom & Gomorrah Isaac
2000 BC	Jacob (Israel) Joseph (12 sons of Jacob)
1900 BC	Jacob's family enters Egypt
1800 BC	Joseph's death