

# The Books of the Bible at a Glance

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I created these notes while I taught through each book of the Bible, each book in a session of about 30 minutes. I am accustomed to long serial expositions of a book that take months or even a year to two years. During 2025-2026, I wanted to review each Bible book with our church but only take a single message doing so. This would help us to grasp the big picture of the book and introduce us to the entire Bible without taking years to do so. Following are the notes that I used to do this. Each book has three to four pages and each follows the same outline, with a summary of the book and its message, a list of key verses, some doctrines contained in the book, literary features, date of writing, related Bible verses, the outline, and then some practical applications from the book.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the NKJV, © Thomas Nelson, 1982.

## Genesis

### Summary and Message

Genesis is the book of the beginning of all things. It records that God created the world and all things in it. Genesis records a summation of the early history of humanity including its initial failure to follow God, and its large-scale sinful behavior that led to the catastrophic judgment of the global flood. Genesis explains the origin of the nations, languages, and the Hebrew people. Minor focus is placed upon the early history of the Ishmaelites and Edomites. It sets the stage for Exodus by explaining how Israel came to be living in Egypt.

### Key Verses

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.<sup>1</sup>

Genesis 1:28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Genesis 6:5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.

Genesis 8:22 “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease.”

Genesis 9:6 “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; or in the image of God e made man.”

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture is quoted from the New King James Version.

Genesis 11:9 Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

Genesis 12:1-3 Now the LORD had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. 2 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Genesis 15:6 And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Genesis 50:20 “But as for you, you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive.”

## Doctrine

As the book of beginnings, Genesis introduces us to the doctrines of God, man, sin, angels, Satan, creation, the Holy Spirit, Israel, and salvation.

## Literary Features

Most of the book is in narrative form, with some reported speech in poetic form. There is a debate amongst theologians as to the form of Genesis 1-2. Some claim it is “elevated narrative” or “exalted prose” or even poetic. It is clearly a narration of events. The “elevation” has to do with the events described in the text. Assigning the text a genre other than narrative makes it easier to dismiss the text as myth or legend or as some other non-literal expression of the events.

The text is carefully arranged and organized according to the major sections shown in the outline below. It is clearly aiming for an understanding of the birth of the nation of Israel, which will lay the foundation for the remainder of the Old Testament and really for the entire Bible.

## Date Written and Timeline

Conservative theologians understand that Moses was the author of the first five books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). As such, Genesis was probably written between 1445 to 1405 B.C.

The remainder of the Bible affirms Mosaic authorship: 2 Kings 14:6, Daniel 9:11, Mark 12:26, Matthew 19:8, among many other passages. This makes sense because Moses was highly educated (Acts 7:22).

Before the events of Genesis, there was no history. There is no such thing as “pre-historic” in the sense that Genesis covers the earliest period of history in broad strokes. Although there are no contemporaneous human written records, Moses had access to not only oral traditions but to God’s special revelation to ensure his record was accurate.

Technically, historians classify pre-history as that period of human existence before written records exist. That would take us back before the development of writing “technology” around 3300 B.C. Keep in mind that verified artifacts may be later than the actual development of the writing system, assuming that earlier artifacts have been destroyed by the ravages of time.

## Related Scriptures

A very interesting connection to the remainder of Scripture is the one that concerns Melchizedek. He appears very briefly in Genesis 14:18-20, and then in Psalm 110:4 and Hebrews 5-7. Those are the only mentions of this enigmatic character.

The remainder of the Bible references, quotes, alludes to, or is based on Genesis. The connections are too numerous to list.

## Place in the Bible’s Storyline

### WRITE

#### Outline

The key term for outlining the book is “history” or “generations.” It occurs 13 times in the book and divides Genesis into 10 major sections. The outline below reflects these sections by using the word “History” in each outline point. The three “extra” references to the word “generations” are found in the middle of their respective sections at 10:32, 25:13, and 36:9. The first 11 chapters concern ancient history. The remaining chapters concern the history of the patriarchs of Israel.

1. Creation, 1:1-2:3
2. History of Creation through the Fall and Cain and Abel, 2:4-4:26
3. History of Adam’s family through the spread of evil, 5:1-6:8
4. History of Noah through the flood, 6:9-9:29
5. History of Noah’s Sons, Table of Nations, Tower of Babel, 10:1-11:9
6. History of Shem’s family to Terah, 11:10-11:26
7. History of Terah’s family through Abraham, 11:27-25:11
8. History of Ishmael’s family, 25:12-18
9. History of Isaac’s family, account of Jacob, 25:19-35:29
10. History of Esau’s family, the Edomites, 36:1-36:43
11. History of Jacob’s family, Joseph, and travel to Egypt, 37:1-50:26

## Lessons

We learn from Genesis:

1. The deep impact of sin on our world. Man was intended to share a relationship with God, as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. But sin separated Adam and Eve from God, and continues to separate humanity from Him. It resulted in death and all kinds of other disasters.
2. The foreshadowing of a coming salvation in the first gospel (Gen. 3:15), God's provision of a substitutionary sacrifice for Isaac.
3. The wrath of God against sin in the Flood and at Sodom and Gomorrah.
4. The people of God worshipped Him. We see this in Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Melchizedek.
5. The effect of worldly influences. For example, Lot choose Sodom while Abraham graciously took the leftover region. Some of Lot's family was destroyed with the others in the city; his wife was drawn back to that place as well and she was destroyed.
6. The providential care of God in the life of Joseph, and how God uses trials to shape a man for His service.
7. The power of trusting God's sovereignty and of forgiveness toward those who meant evil.

## Exodus

### Summary and Message

The book of Exodus is a narration of events from roughly Moses's birth until around his 80<sup>th</sup> year when he led the people of Israel out of Egypt. The book describes Israel's circumstances in Egypt, their departure from Egypt, and the beginning of their time at Mount Sinai where they received various instructions from God including how to build the tabernacle as their place of worship.

### Key Verses

Exodus 3:14 And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' "

Exodus 4:11 So the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? *Have* not I, the Lord? <sup>12</sup>Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say."

Exodus 5:1 Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.' "

Exodus 14:13-14 And Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace."

Exodus 19:5-6 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth *is* Mine. <sup>6</sup>And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These *are* the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

Exodus 20:3-17 records the 10 Commandments, which I will not replicate here for space.

Exodus 31:16-17 Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. <sup>17</sup>It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for *in* six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.’ ”

## Doctrine

A key doctrine in Exodus is the sovereignty of God, which is “The biblical teaching that God is king, supreme ruler, and lawgiver of the entire universe” (Elwell, p. 1131). Sovereignty is an attribute of God, inherent in God’s being. It is connected to His decree and its accomplishment (Eph. 1:11) as well as to His omnipotence because nothing is too hard for Him to do or, thus, to rule over (Jer. 32:17). In short, God rules over everything. He made it, He has power over it, He can destroy it, He can prosper it, guide it, etc.

God exercised His power over the world’s superpower at the time, Egypt, when He destroyed that nation with the plagues in order to free His people from bondage.

Another key doctrine in Exodus is the holiness of God. This means that God is completely sinless and separate from sin. From Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:5) to the holy garments on Aaron suitable for priestly ministry (Exodus 40:13), the word *holy* is used over four dozen times in the book. The idea permeates the book.

Another key Bible teaching we find in Exodus is that God is faithful to His promises. In Genesis He told Abraham that his descendants would be oppressed for four centuries in a foreign land and then God would deliver them (Genesis 15:13-14, Acts 7:6). This indeed occurred just as God had said.

We see once again the perversity of human nature throughout the book of Exodus as we read of the people’s many complaints against God, and particularly when Moses was absent for a while and the people began to worship a gold calf (Exodus 32).

The doctrine of election is controversial. But the text shows that God chosen Israel to be a special people for Himself (Exodus 4:22, 19:5-6). This does not mean there are not other “people of God” or that Israel are better or more human than others, but there is this particular nation for which God has special plans. Through them God has given the Law, and promises, and the temple service, and from them comes the Messiah (Romans 9:4-5).

## Literary Features

Exodus is narrative in form. Chapter 15 records the Song of Moses which is written in poetic form. In later chapters, there are very detailed building plans for the Tabernacle with dimensions and many other specifics.

## Date Written and Timeline

Like Genesis, Exodus was penned by Moses with God's superintendence. He wrote after the events occurred in 1445 B.C. but before he died around 1405 B.C. The many references to the "Law of Moses" in the New Testament as well as the Old Testament attest to the fact that Moses was the author (Luke 2:22, 24:44, John 1:45, 7:19, 7:23, Acts 13:39, 15:5...). Exodus portrays the writing to be roughly contemporaneous with the events themselves, not as if the book were written centuries later.

I take the early date of the Exodus as a better fit for the Biblical timeline. This is because 1 Kings 6:1, which we can tie to around 966 B.C., states that the Exodus occurred 480 years earlier. The chronology of Exodus is that around 1445 B.C. God called out the people from Egypt after the 10 plagues. Because of the initiation of the Passover holiday in Exodus 12, we can know that the Exodus finally did occur in the springtime of the year, with the plagues occurring in the preceding months.

## Related Scriptures

The New Testament quotes or cites Exodus directly nearly 30 times, and alludes to or echoes Exodus nearly 200 times. For examples: Exodus 3:6 and Matthew 22:32, Exodus 20:12 and Ephesians 6:2-3, Exodus 20:13-14 with James 2:11, and Exodus 32:1 with Acts 7:40.

The Lord Jesus taught on "watered down" versions of some of the commands in the Law. The Pharisaical approach was that you could love your neighbor but hate your enemy. But the Lord teaches us to love our enemies as well. He also taught that the commands against murder and adultery were more far-reaching than just the actual act of doing those things (Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28, 43-45).

## Place in the Bible's Storyline

### WRITE

### Outline

- I. Israel in Egypt, 1:1-12:36
- II. Exodus from Egypt to Sinai, 12:37-18:27
- III. Israel at Sinai, 19:1-40:38

### Lessons

Exodus teaches us that even in the worst of times, God watches out for His people and hears their cry when oppressed. Sometimes He will provide deliverance.

There is the matter of hardening of Pharaoh's heart. The theology of this is debated, but I believe that God made use of the sin already in Pharaoh's heart and let him go down a self-destructive pathway.

Although the direct rule of the Law of Moses does not extend down to us today, it does reveal to us the holiness of God and provides not only principles that are applicable today but also a direct check-up on the human conscience. This is particularly true of the 10 Commandments.

God gives us examples of living by faith in the midst of persecution. Moses's parents did what they could to preserve the life of their little boy. The midwives did what they could to save babies because they feared God.

Moses was tempted by Pharaoh to compromise—just some of you go out, or go just a little way into the desert to worship your God. But God called for a total freedom for the people. Moses could have taken the compromise to get some of what he had demanded, but instead God kept him on the path to achieve total victory.

What we learn in Exodus can be applied to ourselves, even if only to warn us away from things we should *not* do (1 Cor. 10:6-11).

We must remember that Exodus is not just about the Exodus. It is about the God of the Exodus, who was faithful to His promises, who cared for His people, who led them through a human mediator, who provided the very basic necessities for them, who gave them spiritual guidance through the Law, and who received their worship. This is the God that Christians worship today.

## Leviticus

Leviticus is generally considered one of the most difficult books of the Bible to read and understand. It contains specific regulations and instructions from a time so different from our own that it can be hard to process.

### Summary and Message

Leviticus continues the account of how God created the nation of Israel for its significant role in redemption and world history. Leviticus delineates the regulations for the people of God in Israel to interact properly with Him now that they have a basic constitution and the central worship site has been constructed and is operational. He required them to follow precise instructions as to various offerings at the tabernacle, the annual feast calendar, the life of the priests, and ceremonial cleanliness (for example, with childbirth, leprosy, and sexual purity). If they followed these instructions, they could be forgiven for their offenses against the theocracy and live in a way that pleased God. God would bless them, but if they disobey, God will punish them (chapter 26).

### Key Verses

Leviticus 4:20 So the priest shall **make atonement** for them, and **it shall be forgiven** them.

Leviticus 11:45 For I *am* the Lord who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. **You shall therefore be holy, for I *am* holy.**

Leviticus 17:11 For **the life of the flesh is in the blood**, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it *is* the blood *that* makes atonement for the soul.

Leviticus 19:2 “Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: **‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God *am* holy.’**”

Leviticus 19:16 **You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people**; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I *am* the Lord.

Leviticus 19:18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but **you shall love your neighbor as yourself**: I *am* the Lord.

Leviticus 19:37 Therefore **you shall observe all My statutes and all My judgments**, and perform them: I *am* the Lord.’ ”

## Doctrine

By sheer count of word occurrences, it is evident that God emphasizes his holiness throughout the book (78 verses). Holiness refers to God’s moral perfection and his transcendent distinctness from all of creation. He is light, and in Him is no darkness whatsoever. He has no sin. This is the same God worshipped by Christians.

The reader cannot miss that God is holy and He demands that His people also be holy in all their conduct. This holiness extends to interpersonal relationships, but especially to interactions with God in terms of the cleanliness laws and the sacrificial system. The laws were not primarily enacted for health reasons. They concerned separate of the people from the surrounding nations and pagan idolatry to the true God.

Blood, life, and sacrifice are important themes in Leviticus. As we saw in Lev. 17:11, the life of the flesh is in the blood. Heb. 9:22 summarizes the Old Testament pattern: without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.

The different types of offerings enacted in Leviticus (guilt, burnt, grain, sin, trespass, peace) cover various aspects of a worshippers relationship to God. The work of Christ handles all of these aspects in one great sacrifice. How it does so is a topic which merits further exploration.

## Literary Features

A portion of the book narrates the actions of Moses, Aaron, and others like Nadab, Abihu (chapters 8 to 10) and the man who blasphemed God (chapter 24). The majority of the text, about 85 to 90%, is direct speech by God. This is called “divine discourse” and makes Leviticus the Bible book with the most such revelation from God. You will find “the LORD spoke to Moses” or some variation of that nearly 40 times in the book.

This fact bears on the question of the doctrine of inspiration. Sometimes people will think that the way God delivered the Bible to humanity was through dictation. That is true in some portions like Leviticus, but God did not use that method for much of Scripture. The miracle of inspiration was in many cases more “organic” in terms of how the Spirit of God

superintended the thoughts and writings of the prophets and apostles to ensure that what they wrote was exactly the word of God.

The large portions of the book which are law can be considered under two types. The first is command law (or apodictic law). This consists of “do’s and don’ts”. Then there is case law (casuistic law). These laws are if-then laws that specify *if* something happens, *then* this other thing must be done in response.

Often, interpreters have suggested that the laws in the Pentateuch can be divided into three categories: civil, moral, and ceremonial. The people of Israel did not seem to follow this three-fold schema. Instead, they took the law as a whole as God’s will.

The curses pronounced for disobedience in Leviticus 26 sound prophetic of the future Assyrian and Babylonian captivities.

The English title of the book derives from the title given to it by Greek translators in the time shortly before Christ came to earth. It is something like “Pertaining to the Levites” or “Matters Concerning the Levites.”

## Date Written and Timeline

Moses wrote the book of Leviticus after the Exodus in 1445 B.C. but before he died around 1405 B.C. More precisely, Israel finished the tabernacle in the first month of the second year, so one year after they exited Egypt (Exodus 40:17). Leviticus probably was revealed to Moses in that month. Numbers follows, starting in the first day of the second month. The many references to the “Law of Moses” in the New Testament as well as the Old Testament attest to the fact that Moses was the author (see the section on Exodus above). See also Lev. 27:34. Leviticus portrays the writing to be roughly contemporaneous with the events themselves, not centuries later.

## Place in the Bible’s Storyline

### WRITE

## Related Scriptures

See Genesis 9:4 about the life of the flesh being in the blood. It is interesting that in John 6:53-54 Jesus refers to flesh, blood, and life as well.

1 Peter 1:16 repeats the instruction to be holy, because God is holy.

The book of Hebrews (7:27, 9:7) contrasts the Old Covenant instructions for sacrifices and cleanliness with the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ which obsoletes all of the old ritual. That is why we do not worship in the way specified in Leviticus. But we are profited by understanding the ideas of sin and atonement by means of sacrifice.

Jesus’s parents offered two birds at the temple (Luke 2:24), showing their obedience to the ancient law in Lev. 1:14, 5:7, 12:8, 14:22, 15:14, 15:29.

A number of times in Leviticus is the truth that the remnants of a sacrificial offering are taken outside the camp and burned (Lev. 4:12, 4:21, 6:11, etc.). Hebrews 13:11 reminds us that Jesus was similarly crucified “outside the gate” and that as we come to him for salvation, we are bearing His reproach and exiting our “city” here.

## Outline

- I. Law of Offerings and Instructions for the Priests, 1:1-7:38
- II. The Priestly Ministry, 8:1-10:20
- III. Various Regulations, 11:1-20:27
- IV. Regulations for the Priests, 21:1-22:33
- V. Weekly and Annual Feasts, 23:1-44
- VI. Various Laws, 24:1-25:55
- VII. Blessings and Curses, 26:1-46
- VIII. Redemption of property and persons dedicated to God, 27:1-34

## Lessons

It seems hard to apply Leviticus to the modern day because much of it has been rendered obsolete by the work of Jesus Christ, *and* that it was given specifically to a Jewish nation as opposed to the Gentile nations of the world. But there are lessons that we can learn.

One lesson is that God is particular about how we worship. Coming to Him with “strange fire” (Leviticus 10:1-7) is unacceptable. This should cause us to be cautious with worship and other facets of their church services. Some Christians strictly follow the *regulative principle* of worship, which states that if something is not explicitly commanded in Scripture, then it is forbidden. The *normative principle* is more relaxed in that it states that anything not explicitly forbidden in Scripture is permissible. Whichever view one takes, it is clear that mixing worldly or self-invented elements into worship is not pleasing to the Lord.

The way to the Lord is specific. In the Law of Moses, there were exacting requirements to be rightly related to God. In the church age, there is also a specific way to God—namely Jesus Christ is the *only* way to the Father.

## Numbers

### Summary and Message

The fourth book of Moses, Numbers, recounts the preparation for entry into the promised land and the failure of the people to obey God and actually enter it. It then summarizes key events in the 40 years of wilderness wandering.

### Key Verses

Numbers 6:24-26, the Aaronic Blessing: “The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.”

Numbers 12:3 (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.)

Numbers 14:18 The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation.

Numbers 14:30-32 Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in. <sup>31</sup> But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. <sup>32</sup> But *as for* you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness.

Numbers 21:8-9 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

Numbers 23:19 “God *is* not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”

## Doctrine

Numbers is frequently referenced in theology. For example:

In Numbers 20:16 the Angel of Yahweh is distinguished from God. This supports the doctrine of the Trinity.

Numbers 25:2-3 records the people of Israel falling into idolatry with the gods of Moab, particularly Baal of Peor. God’s wrath was aroused at this violation of the Law.

Numbers 35:29-34 teaches the principle of two or three witnesses being required to establish a matter, particularly if an alleged murderer is to be put to death.

Numbers contains several sections of law. For example, in chapters 28-29, God gives Moses the details of the offerings for each day, for the Sabbath, for each month, for Passover, for the feast of weeks, trumpets, the day of atonement, and feast of tabernacles.

An interesting matter of jurisprudence is outlined in chapter 35, where cities of refuge are set aside for someone who accidentally kills another person. These are **places of mercy** to spare the life of someone who has been involved in the death of another, say through an accident. They are also **places of judgment**, because those cities would have to adjudicate the matter and decide if the person was worthy of staying in the city or was guilty and should be given the death penalty. They are also **places of penalty** because if a person was involved in the death of another but was not worthy of death, they still had to reside in that city until the death of the present high priest. There was a significant consequence, a limitation of their freedom. Human life is precious and this penalty would help to deter carelessness that could lead to death.

## Literary Features

The book of Numbers is a lengthy narrative starting in the second year of their travels from Egypt after the Exodus continuing to just before Israel does enter the land nearly 40 years later. Besides a few sections in chapters 23-24 that contain prophetic utterances of Balaam in poetic verse, the rest of the book is prose.

## Date Written and Timeline

Like the other books of Moses, Numbers seems to have been written during and immediately after the events that it records. The references to dates in the book place the events it records between 1445 B.C. and 1405 B.C. near the death of Moses. Early in the book are several references to the second year after Israel left Egypt (Num. 1:1, 9:1, 10:11). Then in 33:38, Aaron died in the 40<sup>th</sup> year after Israel had come out of Egypt. The book contains frequent mentions of the word of the Lord coming to Moses and 33:2 and 36:13 specifically mention that he wrote text for the book.

## Related Scriptures

A good understanding of the events in Numbers helps us to understand things said in the gospels and Acts. For example, Paul preaches in Acts 13:18 that God put up with the people in wilderness. This is covered in Numbers 14:34 and surrounding text.

John 3:14-15 refers to Numbers 21:8-9. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

John 19:36 says that none of the Lord's bones were broken when or after He was crucified. The OT passage often connected to this is Psalm 22:17 or perhaps 34:20. But probably more on point is Exodus 12:46 and Numbers 9:12 about the proper treatment of the Passover lamb.

Numbers 30:2 about keeping your vows is referenced by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount at Matthew 5:33.

Paul teaches us that the Old Testament accounts are in the Bible so we can learn to avoid the sins they committed (1 Cor. 10:6, compare to Numbers 11:4, 34).

See also Numbers 16:5 with 2 Tim. 2:19; Numbers 14:21-23 with Hebrews 3:11.

Deuteronomy 21:23 teaches that a body was not to hang on a tree overnight lest the land be defiled. Thus Jesus was not permitted to remain on the cross overnight.

## Place in the Bible's Storyline

### WRITE

### Outline

I. The First Generation, 1:1-25:18

- A. Census of able-bodied men  $\geq$  20 years old (603,550) without Levites, 1:1-54
- B. Configuration of the camp, 2:1-34
- C. Census of Levites ( $\geq$  one month old, 22,000), Duties, and 30-50 year olds, 3:1-4:49
- D. Various Laws, 5:1-6:21
- E. Tabernacle Dedication and operation, 7:1-8:26
- F. Passover kept, 9:1-14
- G. The cloud over the tabernacle and its guidance, 9:15-23
- H. Journey from Sinai to wilderness of Paran, 10:1-36
- I. The burden of caring for the people, 11:1-34
- J. Aaron and Miriam Complain, 11:35-12:16
- K. Israel's rebellion and failure to enter the promised land, 13:1-14:45
- L. Additional Laws, 15:1-31
- M. Rebellion of Korah, 16:1-50
- N. More Laws, 18:1-19:22
- O. Moses fails to honor God, 20:1-12
- P. Continued Journeys, 20:14-21:35
- Q. King Balak of Moab and False Prophet Baalam, 22:1-25:18

## II. The Second Generation, 26:1-36:13

- A. Census, 26:1-65
- B. Law of Inheritance (Daughters of Zelophehad, Part 1), 27:1-11
- C. Moses to view the promised land and anoint Joshua, 27:12-23
- D. Laws of offerings, 28:1-30:16
- E. Battle with the Midianites, 31:1-54
- F. Inheritance of Reuben and Gad and half of Manasseh east of Jordan, 32:1-42
- G. Summary of Journeys from Egypt through the wilderness, 33:1-49
- H. Directions for conquest of Canaan, 33:50-36:13
- I. Law of Inheritance (Daughters of Zelophehad, Part 2), 36:1-13

## Lessons

In Numbers 20:7-12, God directed Moses and Aaron to speak to a rock and He would bring forth water. Instead, Moses, struck the rock twice with his staff. God graciously provided water for the people, but Moses had disobeyed God's clear instruction and thus he did not honor God before the people of Israel. He experienced a serious consequence in that God did not permit him to enter the promised land with the people. Otherwise, he could have done so because he was not diminished in strength and vitality despite being 120 years old. We learn from this incident that disobedience to God not only impacts yourself, but it affects how others revere God. That is a very good reason to be obedient to Him.

In Numbers 14, the people and many of their representatives who spied out the land did not trust God. They were fearful and carried on with weeping that they would die in the attempt to conquer the promised land. But it was *promised*—by God. Only Caleb and Joshua believed the Lord. Then when they learned that God was going to punish them for

their unbelief, they turned around and tried to enter the land, but it was too late. God had already given the sentence and there was no going back into the promised land until a total of 40 years had passed. Let us trust God's promises instead of doubting them and disobeying God.

In addition, note how the people worried that they would become victims, and particularly their wives and children (14:3). What they should have "worried" about was that they would not *victimize* their wives and children by their disobedience. It turns out that trusting and obeying God is the *safest* thing you can do for your kids, even if it seems hard or "unsafe" at the time. Not doing so ended up putting those kids into the wilderness for 40 years. Then later, the children that they worried about enjoyed the promised land, which they did not.

Some within Israel rebelled against Moses, including Korah (ch. 16) and Aaron and Miriam (ch. 12). God was displeased with this rejection of His appointed authority. We must be aware of an anti-authority bent in our own hearts.

God gave the Levites ongoing support as their inheritance in exchange for the spiritual work that they performed (see Num. 18). This principle applies today to those who are serving the Lord, particularly those full time in vocational ministry, but to some extent those part time as well (1 Cor. 9:11, 13-14).

Numbers 22 and following recount Balaam's prophecies against Israel. It can sometimes be confusing as to whether he was a real prophet or not: he listens to God, he disobeys God, he blesses God's people, then advises Israel's enemies how to get Israel to fall with foreign women (31:16). The overall storyline makes it clear that he was a false prophet (2 Peter 2:15) but it can seem somewhat subtle.

## Deuteronomy

### Summary and Message

The title of the book in English comes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It is from *deut* which means two or second, and *nomos* which is the Greek word for Law, so Christians often think of Deuteronomy as a record of the second giving of the law. This makes some sense because Moses rehearses the Law that was given to them years earlier in Exodus and Leviticus for the purposes of teaching the next generation. But we must be careful to note that Deuteronomy is not a "second law." If anything, it is a review or second giving of the *original* law.

The Hebrew title of the book reflects the opening text: "These are the words." The words record Moses leading the people up to the end of his life, reminding them of the law of God, and calling them to faithfulness to the covenant. Some interpreters therefore call Deuteronomy a "covenant renewal document."

## Key Verses

Deut. 6:4-5 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord *is* one! <sup>5</sup>You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

Deut. 7:7-8 The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; <sup>8</sup>but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Deut. 8:3 So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every *word* that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

Deut. 10:16 Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.

Deut. 18:15 The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear.

Deut. 30:6 And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Deut. 28:1-2 Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. <sup>2</sup>And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God:

Deut. 28:15 But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:

## Doctrine

In the key verses above, I cited Deut. 10:16 and 30:6. The doctrine of heart circumcision refers to what we call today *regeneration*. It reflects that a person's heart has been changed, that they have become a new creature in Christ (Deut. 5:29). This truth is also reflected in Ezekiel 36:26 when it speaks of a heart of stone being replaced by a heart of flesh.

The promises in Deut. 28 about blessing and cursing are not directly transferrable to Christians. These were for Israel living under the regime of the Law, what we call the Mosaic covenant. Since we are not under the regime of Law, we draw *principles* from it about general blessing for obedience and trials if we walk out of line with God, but the specifics are not necessarily the case for us today. They *were* the case for the Israelites living back then, and they found that out throughout their history when they disobeyed God. We read of this in the remainder of the Old Testament of our Bibles. Another good passage to ponder along this line is Deut. 30:15-20. There God says that He Himself is their life and length of days.

The doctrine of God’s presence with the nation (Deut. 31:6, 8) and its new leader Joshua (Deut. 31:23) is a precious reminder for us that God will not leave His people today (Heb. 13:5).

God demanded holiness from His people (Deut. 7:6, 14:2, 28:9).

God does exhibit the emotion of anger, particularly against idolatry or other evil (Deut. 4:25).

Deut. 19:15 reiterates the principle from earlier in the law about the requirement of two or three witnesses to confirm a matter, especially a capital offense.

God is righteous and there is no unrighteousness or injustice in Him (Deut. 32:4).

Deut. 33:2 indicates that there is a huge number of angelic beings (“holy ones”, not “saints” in the sense of Christian people).

God is jealous in a completely holy sense, that He does not wish for His people to go after other gods (32:16-17).

There is an interesting doctrine in Deut. 1:39 about children who have “no knowledge of good and evil.” This does not mean that they do not have the *capacity* to understand right and wrong, but likely they do not have the life experience of doing terrible sins. Jonah 4:11, Isaiah 7:15, and Rom. 9:11 point in a similar direction.

An important doctrine is in Deut. 24:16 where God explains that the father must not be punished for the sins of the son, nor the son for the sins of the father. Each is responsible for his own sin.

## Literary Features

The book is mostly narrative with long segments of case law and command law. See the section on the literary features of Leviticus for a bit more about those two types of law. Chapter 32 is a song which is appropriately formatted as poetry. Large portions of the book are speeches of Moses which some consider to be sermon-like in nature with their review of the law and reminders.

## Date Written and Timeline

Like the other books of the five-book group called the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy was written by Moses, except probably the account of his death in chapter 34. It was written about 1405 B.C. at the end of the wilderness wandering when Israel was about to enter the promised land under the leadership of Joshua.

## Related Scriptures

Deuteronomy is foundational to the rest of the Bible. It is quoted by a number of New Testament books and cited or alluded to dozens of times. Here are some examples.

Jesus used “man shall not live by bread alone” during His temptation in the wilderness (Matt. 4:4, Deut. 8:3). He also cited “you shall not tempt the LORD your God” (Matt. 4:7,

Deut. 6:16). Again, in His third rebuttal of Satan, Jesus reflected the teaching of Deut. 6:13 in Matt. 4:10 about worshipping and serving God only and no other god.

When Jesus gave the sermon on the mount, he referenced laws given in Deuteronomy about murder, adultery, and divorce (Matt. 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 48 which refer to Deut. 5:17, 18, and 24:1, 23:21, 19:21 and 18:13, respectively).

James similarly cited adultery and murder (2:11) which is right out of Deut. 5:17-18.

Regarding wages for gospel ministers, Paul uses the principle of not muzzling the ox (1 Tim. 5:18, Deut. 25:4).

Paul reminds us that the principle of the law to obey our parents is still true today (Eph. 6:2-3, Deut. 5:16).

Jeremiah 4:4 speaks of heart circumcision, as Deut. 10:16 and 30:6 do.

It is just as important today to love God with our whole hearts as it was in the Old Testament times (Matt. 22:37, Deut. 6:5).

The ultimate prophet which was the target of Deut. 18:15 is Jesus Christ. Stephen mentions that passage in Acts 7:37 in his convicting message to the San Hedrin. It is part of the Pharisees questioning of John the Baptist, who is not that prophet. But Jesus is that prophet, because God wanted His people to “hear Him” (Matt. 17:5).

## Place in the Bible’s Storyline

Deuteronomy records how the nation of Israel transition from a nomadic people to a settled lifestyle, with a law adapted slightly to fit the new situation. For example, the law now recognized that some people would live very far away from the Tabernacle and would not be able to kill animals there for food. The major feasts become pilgrimages. The judgment and blessing theme in chapter 28 sets the stage for the remainder of the Old Testament. The prophets continuously call the people of Israel back to the standard of loving God with all their heart, soul, and strength.

## Outline

- I. Introduction to Moses’ speeches to Israel, 1:1-4
- II. Moses Reviews Israel’s History After the Exodus, 1:5-3:29
- III. Teaching the Law Again, 4:1-26:19
- IV. Instructions for when Israel enters the land, 27:1-34:12

## Lessons

The simple fact that Moses was reviewing the law reminds us that it is critical to teach God’s word constantly and to review our God-given responsibilities regularly. Parents need to be teaching these things to our children at home, in the church, etc.

Although we do not have the exact promises of blessing and cursing that Israel did, their choice remains before us today as relevant as ever: “choose life” (30:19-20). This is not the pro-life bumper sticker slogan; it is to choose to live for God instead of for self.

There are some things that God has disclosed to humanity, and there are other things which will remain a mystery (Deut. 29:29). This serves to keep us in our place. We must be humble because we are finite and sinful creatures.

Deut. 18:10-22 reminds us that witchcraft, sorcery, child sacrifice, etc. are capital offenses in God's eyes. This should keep us far from such material in books and media today. It is not as if the passing of the Mosaic Law has lessened God's hatred of these things. Similarly, Deut. 22:5 teaches that dressing as the opposite sex is an abomination to God, and so similar to the previous point, we should stay as far away from that sort of behavior as possible, not even joking about it.

Deut 6:13 teaches that God is the only one who is to receive worship. Yet Jesus Christ accepted worship which is evidence of His deity (Matt. 14:33, 15:25).

There is an interesting law of debt cancellation every seven years (Deut. 15:1). This would serve to help those who were financially in over their heads, but it was also a brake on the extension of excessive credit.

## Joshua

### Summary and Message

The text of Joshua records how Joshua, the successor to Moses, led the people of Israel into the land of Canaan or "Palestine" as it is now called, but more properly "Israel" or "the promised land." They crossed from the other side of the Jordan near the city of Jericho and took that city, followed in fairly rapid succession by defeating city-states both north and south of that location. Quite a few chapters are spent in explaining how the conquered land was distributed among the 12 tribes. The directions to conquer it were directly revealed from Heaven. The directions to divide into tribal allotments was first by Moses on the east side of the Jordan, and on the west under Moses and then Joshua's direction by the casting of lots (Number. 33:50-54).

### Key Verses

Joshua 1:5-9 <sup>5</sup>No man shall *be able to stand* before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. **I will not leave you nor forsake you.** <sup>6</sup>**Be strong and of good courage**, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. <sup>7</sup>Only **be strong and very courageous**, that you may **observe to do according to all the law** which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. <sup>8</sup>**This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it.** For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. <sup>9</sup>Have I not commanded you? **Be strong and of good courage**; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for **the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.**"

Jericho resident Rahab commented in Joshua 2:11, “for the Lord your God, He *is* God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”

Joshua 21:45 **Not a word failed** of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.

Any list of key verses in Joshua would be incomplete without the next one.

Joshua 24:14-15 “Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! <sup>15</sup>And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, **choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve**, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But **as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.**”

## Doctrine

Two things about God stand out in the book of Joshua: His faithfulness to His promises, even to a very imperfect people, is one. The second is God’s judgment against evil, which is displayed in the destruction of many of the pagan city-states.

The story about Rahab shows that salvation comes by faith in the God of Israel, not by a spotless record of life conduct.

For the modern reader, the most difficult issue in Joshua is what has been labeled as the genocide of the Canaanite city-states. Professor Kyle Dunham has written extensively on this issue, and you can find his article “YAHWEH WAR AND HEREM: THE ROLE OF COVENANT, LAND, AND PURITY IN THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN” in [Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal 21 \(2016\):7–30](#). God’s sovereign right, as creator and ruler of all the nations, extends to justly punishing the wicked. That is divine justice. And the nations of Canaan were wicked. Consider this text:

Genesis 15:13-14,16 Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 16 But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

That iniquity included, among other things, child sacrifice. There is a body of evidence both from Scripture and archaeological discoveries that support the fact of child sacrifice. God did not want those pagan practices to continue, much less to infiltrate the Israelite community. Unfortunately, some southern and northern kings in Judea and Israel did practice child sacrifice. For example:

2 Kings 16:3 But he [Ahaz] walked in the way of the kings of Israel; indeed he made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out from before the children of Israel.

The underlined portion is key Biblical evidence for the Canaanite practice at the time of the conquest.

King Manasseh did the same (2 Kings 21:6), as did multiple of the northern kings (2 Kings 17:17). King Josiah stopped the practice and defiled the place where it was done so it would not be done there again (2 Kings 23:10).

God considered the practice an abomination and forbade it (Lev. 18:21, 20:2-5, Deut. 18:10). It was so reprehensible God says that it did not come into his mind—as if He would never even think such a thing (Jer. 19:5, 32:35). This is true despite God’s test of Abraham regarding sacrificing his son Isaac (Genesis 22) because God never intended for Isaac to lose his life—it was only a test.

The point of all this is that God was well within His right as divine judge to punish the vile wickedness of those who were offering or allowing their children to be offered as sacrifices.

Another difficulty concerns whether Joshua conquered the entire land of promise or not. In 11:23 the Bible says, “So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord had said to Moses; and Joshua gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. Then the land rested from war.”

Just a chapter later in 13:1, the text says, “Now Joshua was old, advanced in years. And the Lord said to him: “You are old, advanced in years, and there remains very much land yet to be possessed. <sup>2</sup>This is the land that yet remains...”

The most satisfactory solution seems to be that the large body of land had been conquered, and Israel was living throughout it, but there were pockets of resistance dotting the landscaping that had to be resolved. Judges 1:27-36 records how the Israelites did not complete the task that God had assigned to them. This led to future infiltrations and compromise with the idolatrous peoples of the region and was a point of downfall for Israel.

## Literary Features

Joshua is historical narrative, which means it is a straightforward account of the events described. There are some miracles reports as well. It is also sometimes called a conquest account. Joshua contains land grants from superior to inferior, and it is a covenant-fulfillment document, where the Lord fulfills His promise to the nation Israel.

## Date Written and Timeline

There is no hard data available, but it seems that the book was written by Joshua or a close partner sometime around 1405-1385 B.C. See Joshua 8:32 and esp. 24:26 that show his propensity to write. It appears to be written before David was king several hundred years later, because the Jebusites were currently dwelling in Jerusalem when the book was written (Joshua 15:63).

There is dispute about the timeline of Joshua and its relation to an early or late exodus from Egypt. Some archaeological findings (or lack of findings, for example, regarding Egypt and the Exodus) seem to contradict it. There also was an earlier misidentification of the historical site of the city of Ai by W. F. Albright in 1924, who suggested Ai was the present-

day Et-Tell. The publication *Biblical Archaeology Report* writes this in April of 2019: “Between 1995 and 2017 the Associates for Biblical Research (BibleArchaeology.org) excavated at Khirbet el-Maqatir and meticulously uncovered a fortified settlement from the time of Joshua that had been destroyed by fire.”<sup>2</sup>

## Related Scriptures

Joshua 22:5 reflects earlier teaching about loving God and keeping His commandments, which is also reflected in Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:29-30, and Luke 10:27. Logos Bible software lists the NT texts as allusions to Joshua, but it would be much better to see Joshua and the NT texts *both* reflecting earlier teaching from the Pentateuch.

The matter of Joseph’s remains is mentioned in Joshua 24:32 and repeated in Acts 7:16.

One of Paul’s sermons alludes to the events of the distribution of the land (Acts 13:19, Joshua 14:1).

Rahab appears in the “hall of faith” in Hebrews 11:31 (see Joshua 2:11-12, 6:21-25). Her faith was alive—it “worked” at James 2:25 says (Joshua 2:4, 2:15, 6:17).

The “I am with you” in Joshua 1:5 appears again in Hebrews 13:5.

## Place in the Bible’s Storyline

Joshua records how God fulfilled His land promise to Abraham by leading the nation in victory over the Canaanite city states. Israel thus becomes a people that possesses land as opposed to its prior nomadic status. This lays the groundwork for the remainder of Israelite history.

## Outline

- I. Preparation and initial entrance to promised land, 1:1-5:12
- II. Conquering the nation-states of the promised land, 5:13-13:6
- III. Division of the Land, 13:7-22:34
  - A. East of Jordan: Reuben, Gad, ½ Manasseh, 13:7-33
  - B. West of Jordan: 9 ½ tribes, 14:1-22:34
  - C. Cities of refuge, 20:1-9
  - D. Cities for the Levites, 21:1-42
  - E. God’s promise fulfilled, 21:43-45
  - F. Reuben, Gad, and half Manasseh return east, 22:1-9
  - G. Controversy over memorial altar, 22:10-34
- IV. Close of the period of conquest and Joshua’s charge, 23:1-24:33

## Lessons

An important and timeless lesson from Joshua is a couple of pages after Joshua, in Judges 2:7-10. Verse 10 closes with these words: “another generation arose after them who did

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<sup>2</sup> <https://biblearchaeologyreport.com/2019/04/12/biblical-sites-ai/>

not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel.” It is curious why they did not now about what the LORD had done. Their parents were instructed to pass on the Lord’s word and work to their children, not as mere cultural history, but as truth and faith, as a shaping element to their lives. The nation was to tell their children not only the law of God (Deut. 6:4-9) but also the wonderful works of the Lord (Psalm 78:4). This is a lesson for us. Let us tell our children and grandchildren of what God has done for us personally and for our church, and of His word.

## Judges

### Summary and Message

The book of Judges recounts the history of Israel between Joshua and Samuel, about 350 years until God chose Saul to be the first king of the nation. During the period prior to Saul and the Davidic monarchy, Israel was governed theocratically, without a human king but with God leading them through the Law and the priesthood, as well as specially chosen people who were called judges. They were deliverers in times of oppression by foreign nations. This oppression was punishment from God for their violation of His law and in fulfillment of His word that He would punish them in this way.

### Key Verses

Judges 2:16 Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them.

Judges 2:17 Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the Lord; they did not do so.

Judges 2:18 And when the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them.

Judges 2:19 And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way.

Some variation of this wording occurs in eight verses: “And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD and served Baals.” 2:11, 3:7, 3:12, 4:1, 6:1, 8:33-34, 10:6, 13:1.

About five times this phrase repeats: “the children of Israel cried out to the LORD.” 3:9, 3:15, 4:3, 6:6-7, 10:10.

Variations on this wording, or the first clause of it, occurs in four verses: “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25.

Finally, “the land had rest” or similar wording occurs four times (3:11, 3:30, 5:31, 8:28).

## Doctrine

God's justice and God's mercy are on repeated display throughout the book. God fulfilled His promises multiple times. Leviticus 26:17 says that if they do not obey God, their enemies will defeat them and reign over them. That happened time and time again in the centuries summarized by Judges. Plainly speaking, there are consequences for rebelling against God, for following after idols, for being stiff-necked, etc.

In Judges 6:11, 14 we are reminded of the Angel of the Lord, who is the LORD himself. The Angel of the Lord appears many times throughout the Old Testament as the preincarnate Messiah.

The narrative about Jephthah reminds us not to make rash oaths and instead to be measured in our walk with the Lord.

The Lord is active in history, even in times of spiritual decline. In nearly 200 verses of the book we read of the Lord guiding his servants, revealing information, and other things.

## Literary Features

A commonly noted feature of the book is its cyclical nature, as it recounts the history of failure and deliverance of the nation of Israel. We might chalk up the cyclical nature of the book to the simple fact that it mirrored the cycles in the nation's history. The cycle was that Israel disobeyed God, God fulfilled His promise of punishment, Israel cried out to the Lord, and the Lord delivered them.

There is an interesting array of material including poetry, fables, riddles. There is very excellent story-telling.

The order of events in the book is not strictly chronological. It follows rather a geographical ordering, starting from the south with the allotted region for the tribe of Judah northward to Dan.

A search of the phrase "judged Israel" reveals the many times that God raised up a judge to deliver the nation from its idolatrous depravity. The list of judges that we learn from these verses and some others includes Othniel (3:10), Ehud (3:15-4:1), Shamgar (3:31), Deborah assisted by Barak (ch 4-5), Gideon (ch. 6-8), Abimelech (8:31-9:56), Tola (10:1-2), Jair (10:3-6), Jephthah (ch. 11-12), Ibzan (12:8), Elon (12:11), Abdon (12:13), Samson (15:20, ch. 13-16). This is a total of 10, with Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson getting special emphasis in terms of the length of their narrative sections.

## Date Written and Timeline

The author is not named in the book, as with some of the other historical books. Samuel is as likely as any other possibility, and Jewish tradition points to him as the author.

Since the Jebusites were still in charge of Jerusalem at the time of writing (Judges 1:21), it seems that the book had to be written during Saul's reign, before David conquered Jerusalem around 1004 B.C. (2 Samuel 5:6-7). Dating the specific instances of oppression is difficult.

## Related Scriptures

Some interpreters connect Samson the Nazirite to Jesus of Nazareth, but this connection is tenuous at best (Matt. 2:23, Judges 13:5). Samson is definitely similar to John the Baptist (Luke 1:15, Judges 13:4).

Acts 13:20 quotes Paul saying in his sermon that God gave them judges for about 450 years. This number is quite different than what I cited above. Why is that? 1 Kings 6:1 says that it was 480 years after the Exodus that in Solomon's fourth year he began to build the temple. Less David's 40 year reign makes it 430 years. Subtracting Saul's reign of 40 years (Acts 213:21) puts the distance about 390, less than the 450 cited by Paul. Paul is giving an estimate in his sermon, which may include Saul's reign until the real, official monarch began to reign, which was King David. With Ruth, and the overlapping timeline of some of the judges, these numbers are in-exact approximations. But they do give an idea of the scope of time that passed before Israel had a formalized government.

Hebrews 11:33 alludes to Samson's strength with regard to lions, although the Hebrews passage could also be a reference to Daniel in the lion's den.

## Place in the Bible's Storyline

Judges is situated between Joshua and Ruth and the start of the monarchy. In Joshua, the people began to conquer the land and were generally faithful to God. But Judges 1-2 tells us that they did not finish the task. They served the Lord as long as Joshua and the elders were alive, but then they fell into spiritual decline and eventually idolatry. As such, Judges is preparatory for what God was going to do to set up a king.

## Outline

### I. Introduction, 1:1-3:4

- A. Further, but partial, conquest of the land, 1:1-36
- B. Summary of the book of Judges, 2:1-3:4

### II. Cycles of Apostasy, Oppression, and Relief, 3:5-16:31

- A. Mesopotamia/Othniel, Moab/Ehud, Philistia/Shamgar, 3:5-3:31
- B. Canaan/Deborah and Barak, 4-5
- C. Midian/Gideon (Jerubbaal), 6-8
- D. Abimelech the non-judge, 9
- E. Tola, Jair, 10:1-5
- F. Ammon/Jephthah, 11-12:7
- G. Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, 12:8-12:15
- H. Philistia/Samson, 13:1-16:31

### III. Examples of Apostasy, 17-21

- A. Micah's images, priest, and the Danites, 17-18
- B. The Levite, his concubine, and the Benjamites, 19-21

## Lessons

You and I can relate to the spiritual cycles of life. We have failed, God has been gracious, and we have been restored, only to repeat the cycle again.

People have a built-in tendency to think that what they are doing is right. They follow their own self-centered moral code, even when they have been told it will lead to destruction.

The judges that God used were almost all very flawed people. Think of Samson, Gideon, and Jephthah. They are cautionary tales for us. And their leadership was not as good as it could have been because of their sinfulness.

Incomplete obedience leads to serious problems. The people of Israel did not fully drive out the pagan inhabitants of the land. They became thorns in Israel's side and temptations that led them to sin.

Godly leadership is needed to help God's people do what is right. But its effect is only temporary, until the good leader is gone, and then "reversion to mean" happens again. It takes spiritual work and diligence to stay "above the mean" of human depravity.

In Israel's case, that "mean" was a departure from the living God and a return to idolatry, a violation of the opening commandments of the Decalogue.

## Ruth

### Summary and Message

Naomi lost her husband and two sons to death while fleeing from famine at home and living in the land of Moab. But she but gained a faithful daughter-in-law named Ruth. They found a kinsman-redeemer named Boaz who redeemed the land of Ruth's deceased husband by taking Ruth as his wife, and by extension of Naomi's deceased husband, and caused Naomi to move from bitter to blessed, from full to empty and back to full. Through these events the Lord raised up the Messianic line through righteous Boaz via Obed, Jesse, and then David the king.

### Key Verses

1:16-17 But Ruth said: "Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. <sup>17</sup> Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried.

1:20 But she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

2:11-12 And Boaz answered and said to her, "It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and *how* you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before. <sup>12</sup>The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge."

3:11 And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you *are* a virtuous woman.

3:18 Then she said, “Sit still, my daughter, until you know how the matter will turn out; for the man will not rest until he has concluded the matter this day.”

4:10 Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, I have acquired as my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brethren and from his position at the gate. You *are* witnesses this day.”

4:14 Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed *be* the Lord, who has not left you this day without a close relative [redeemer, go-el]; and may his name be famous in Israel!

4:18-21 Now this *is* the genealogy of Perez: Perez begot Hezron; <sup>19</sup> Hezron begot Ram, and Ram begot Amminadab; <sup>20</sup> Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon; <sup>21</sup> Salmon begot Boaz, and Boaz begot Obed; <sup>22</sup> Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David.

## Doctrine

The **kinsman-redeemer** or family redeemer was a person who came to the aid of financially distressed family members. If they had to sell property because of some hardship, as in Naomi’s case, the redeemer had the legal right to purchase the property back at any time, with a pro-rated price due to the automatic return of property to the family at the year of jubilee every 50 years. This way he could bring the property back into the family’s control before the Jubilee. See Leviticus 25:23-34. This arrangement focused on *property*.

According to Deuteronomy 25:5-10, the **levirate marriage** law required that if a man died with no children, his brother was to marry the widow and their first son would inherit the dead man’s property. “Brother” here is understood to be a biological brother, or if none of them remained marriageable, then a family relative. This law did not require redemption/purchase of land, but it did include *descendants* and *property*.

In the story of Ruth, Boaz offers to purchase the property of Ruth’s dead husband from a purchaser to whom Naomi had sold it before. Boaz *also* offered to marry Ruth and raise up a descendant to return the family inheritance to the family. This situation created a merger of the kinsman-redeemer and levirate marriage functions in one person (see See Ruth 3:9, 12, 4:1, 3, 6, 8, 14 for uses of the word “goel.”). Though he was not technically required to be property redeemer (goel) *and* raise up the descendant of the dead, it meets the spirit of the law and God’s love for His people.

## Literary Features

Ruth is narrative history. Some call it a “short story” but it is true history, not fiction. Sometimes readers focus on the drama of the story about Naomi and Ruth and Boaz, and the love story that unfolds between the latter two. The love-story facet may be somewhat over-drawn by the modern western reader, because the arrangement of levirate marriage and redemption of property was not so much a romantic thing as it was a practical

arrangement for property and security (3:1). However, Boaz does seem to have a “spiritual attraction” to Ruth because she is a woman of excellent character (3:11). He adds that she is younger than he is which was impressive to him (3:10). We can easily imagine young widow Ruth really hoping for the arrangement to come to pass and her modest proposal at the threshing floor confirms this desire, but the author does not tell us her innermost feelings on the matter.

## Date Written and Timeline

Tradition amongst the ancient Jews ascribed authorship to Samuel. He was alive for some time after anointing David to be king and would have been able to come into the knowledge of the genealogy and history of David’s family. David’s father was Jesse, and Jesse’s father was Obed, so Boaz and Ruth were King David’s great grandparents. They likely were not alive during much if any of David’s life, but their memory had not long been gone in Jewish terms where genealogy was very important.

All that said, it is not certain that Samuel was the author.

The book is written during the period of the judges (1:1), a span of time which covers at least 300 years. The conquest began around 1400 B.C. and it was not until 1050 B.C. that Saul reigned, so that puts the entire period at 350 years. David was born around 1040 B.C., and assuming somewhat normal lifespans, Jesse would be maybe born around 1070, Obed around 1100, so this would put Ruth and Boaz somewhere around 1150 to 1100 B.C., toward last third of the period of judges.

Since the author knew about David, this would put him somewhere around 1000 B.C., recounting events that were 100-200 years before him but which had certainly passed down through oral tradition.

## Related Scriptures

The genealogy of David includes Boaz in 1 Chronicles 2:12. Boaz does not appear again until Matthew 1:5 and Luke 3:32 in the genealogy of Jesus. There are no other references that I am aware of to the book of Ruth in the New Testament.

## Place in the Bible’s Storyline

The history recorded in the book of Ruth is important to the Bible’s storyline because it shows King David’s family origin. The genealogy at the end of the book starts with Perez, who was the son of Judah by Tamar. The connection to Judah would have been common knowledge among informed Israelites of those days. King David’s lineage, in turn, is important for the Messianic center of the Bible’s story of kingdom and redemption.

## Outline

- I. Naomi Widowed and Ruth Comes into Israel, 1:1-1:22
  - A. Deaths of Elimelech, Mahlon, Chilion in Moab, 1:1-5
  - B. Orpah Returns; Ruth Stays with Naomi, 1:6-18
  - C. Naomi and Ruth Return to Bethlehem, 1:19-22

## II. Boaz Shows Kindness to Ruth and Naomi, 2:1-23

- A. Ruth Happens Upon the Field of Boaz, 2:1-7
- B. Kindness of Boaz to Ruth, 2:8-16
- C. Naomi Advises Ruth, 2:17-23

## III. The Marriage Proposal, 3:1-18

- A. Naomi Advises Ruth Again, 3:1-5
- B. Ruth Discreetly Proposes Levirate Responsibility to Boaz, 3:6-9
- C. Boaz Takes Responsibility, If Nearer Relative Will Not, 3:10-18

## IV. The Redemption of Ruth, 4:1-21

- A. Boaz Makes Arrangements Before the City Elders, 4:1-12
- B. Boaz Marries Ruth and They Have a Son, Obed, 4:13
- C. Blessedness of Naomi, 4:14-17
- D. The Lineage of David the King, 4:18-22

## Lessons

Ruth shows us that God uses unlikely characters in the outworking of His plan. In the genealogy of Jesus, we see Tamar (Perez's mother), and Rahab (Boaz's mother), and Ruth (as well as Bethsheba). Three of these were prostitutes, and Ruth was a Moabite. Moabites were generally not permitted to come into the assembly of Israel because of their opposition after the Exodus from Egypt (Deut. 23:3-6). But Ruth had distanced herself from her Moabite background and believed in the God of Israel (1:16-17, 2:11). In any case, God can use the least likely of characters to do his work.

Ruth's love for her mother-in-law and her adopted people, as well as Boaz's kindness and use of his wealth are a model for us. Ruth pictures conversion from paganism to the worship of God. She was "all in" even to death, not just for a little while or for convenience. Boaz shows what God is like, particularly in his redeemer role in the story. He takes up the cause of the widow and cares for those in need. Boaz redeemed the needy, as Jesus Christ redeems us from bitter circumstances to blessed circumstances. He buys us out of sin to freedom. Thankfully, God receives former enemies, of whatever ethnicity, into His family regardless of how badly they have behaved, just like Boaz received a Moabite convert.

The account of Ruth shows the real bitterness that happens in earthly life, but also what God can do in transforming people from sin to righteousness, like He did with Boaz.

Boaz is very much unlike some of his predecessors in the book of Judges who were disobedient and faithless. Ruth gives us hope that even when many people "did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25, the very last verse before Ruth 1:1), there were some who did what was right in God's eyes!

The astute reader knows that when Naomi says in 3:18 to Ruth to wait to see "how the matter will turn out" that God's providence is at work behind the scenes. We must remember God is sovereign and works out His plan even when we do not understand what

He is doing. God arranged everything in the book of Ruth, including the deaths of Naomi's husband and two sons, in order to bring a Moabite woman into the Jewish family and have her take part in the lineage of Messiah.

# 1 Samuel

## Summary and Message

The book of 1 Samuel recounts the story of Samuel, his relationship to the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David, and the history of the start of the monarchy. Samuel is the main character and has the roles of prophet (Acts 13:20, 1 Samuel 3:20), priest, judge, and de-facto leader of the nation as it transitioned from the anarchy of the judges to a monarchy first under King Saul, and then to King David.

## Key Verses

1 Samuel 1:27-28 For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. <sup>28</sup>Therefore I also have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the Lord."

1 Samuel 8:7 And the Lord said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.

1 Samuel 12:22 For the Lord will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you His people.

1 Samuel 12:23-25 Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way. <sup>24</sup>Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you. <sup>25</sup>But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king."

1 Samuel 13:14 The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him *to be* commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you."

1 Samuel 16:7 But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For *the Lord does not see as man sees*; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

1 Samuel 15:22-23 So Samuel said: "Has the Lord *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *and to heed than the fat of rams*. <sup>23</sup>For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from *being* king."

1 Samuel 17:45-47 Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. <sup>46</sup>This day the Lord will deliver you into my

hand...that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. <sup>47</sup>Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle *is* the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands.”

## Doctrine

The work of the Holy Spirit is notable in 1 Samuel 10 and 16. In chapter 10, the Spirit of God came upon Saul. The Spirit is mentioned in connection with Saul again 11:6. But then in chapter 16, when Samuel anoints young David as the next king of Israel, the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward, but in verse 14 the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul. This ministry of the Spirit is not one attached to salvation, but one associated with leadership. It is called by some theologians the “theocratic anointing.” It can come upon a person or go from them, as evidenced here. King David even prays that God will not take the Spirit from him, by which he means the leadership anointing of the Spirit (Psalm 51:11).

It is invalid based on this verse to construct a teaching that says that in the Old Testament time, the Holy Spirit would come and leave the saved person's life, whereas in the New Testament era the Spirit comes permanently to indwell a person. If that doctrine were true, it is definitely not based of these texts. These texts deal with the special case of a ruler in Israel and are not about the Spirit's ministry in salvation.

As in most of the Bible's books, divine revelation plays an important role in 1 Samuel. God speaks to Samuel as a boy, and then delivers revelation to him throughout his lifetime to guide the nation of Israel.

God's control over history is clearly shown in the narration of the book, from Hannah's answered prayer for a son to raising up David as king, and protecting him against all human odds in the battle with Goliath and with Saul.

1 Samuel 12:22, cited above, promises that God will not forsake His people. It is God's good pleasure—despite Israel's hardness of heart—to honor His own name by making them His people. Part of the honor of it comes from the display of magnanimous grace, thus showing how great God is even when disrespected. Paul reflects the unchanging truth of God's promise to Israel in Romans 11:2. This undercuts replacement theology which deletes Israel from the future in God's program in favor of (only) the church.

1 Sameul 15:29 speaks about the character of God, that He will not lie or relent. The appeal here is to God's immutability as it applies to the promised judgment upon Saul for his unfaithfulness. There is nothing that could change that declaration.

## Literary Features

1 Samuel is straightforward narrative in chronological order. The first two chapters tell the emotional story of a mother who longs for a child, and then makes the sacrificial decision to commit that child to the Lord's work at the tabernacle. It is this child who is Samuel, appointed by God to lead the nation of Israel. His name reflects that God heard his mother's prayer for a son.

1 Samuel covers another tumultuous time in the history of the nation (see Judges for the prior such era). The Philistines gain the ascendancy for a time and the priesthood under Eli falls into total disrepair. Israel's first king has an auspicious beginning but quickly and utterly fails. God slates him for replacement, but drama unfolds as he attempts to murder his God-ordained successor.

The manuscript history of 1 Samuel is poor compared to other Scriptural texts. There are some places where the Hebrew text has very difficult readings, including with some numbers. The Septuagint and ancient versions can help in discerning the correct original reading.

## Date Written and Timeline

2 Samuel was originally combined with 1 Samuel as a single book. It retains the name from which it originated even though its title character, Samuel, dies in what we now call 1 Samuel. In the Greek translation and Vulgate, the name of these two books is actually 1 and 2 Kings or Kingdoms. The books we know as 1 and 2 Kings are called 3 and 4 Kings in that arrangement.

The human author is not known. Samuel died too early to write. Other prophets like Nathan and Gad (1 Chronicles 29:29) probably lived after the events of 1 Samuel, but could have had involvement in the recording of events that were then put together posthumously under their name since they were the main characters or authors of their respective works.

1 Samuel 27:6 mentions Ziklag belonging to the kings (plural) of Judah, indicating two facts: first that there had already been multiple kings (at least Saul and David and reasonably one or several more); and second since Judah is mentioned, the author seems to have known about the split of the kingdom after Solomon. This would put the final composition after 931 B.C.

Samuel was born around about 1105 B.C., so including his lifetime, Saul's reign 1052-1011 B.C., and David's reign 1011-971 B.C., 1 and 2 Samuel cover about 135 years of Israel's history.

## Related Scriptures

The New Testament alludes to or echoes 1 Samuel, but does not directly quote from it.

Jesus refers to David eating the showbread in order to respond to the Pharisee's criticism of "working" on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:3-4, 1 Samuel 21:1-6).

Bible students have also noticed the similarity between Mary's words in her *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-56) with Hannah's prayer (1 Samuel 2:1-10).

Both Jesus and Samuel grew in stature, and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:52, 1 Samuel 2:26). It may be that Luke is intending for us to see in Jesus a similarity to Samuel since both were servants of the LORD from their youth.

A similar kind of allusion is found in Acts 20:33 where Paul said he had coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Samuel reflected the same sentiment in 1 Samuel 12:3. Unfortunately, Samuel's sons did not follow his ways.

Paul reflected the broad outline of 1 Samuel in Acts 13:20 and he used 1 Samuel 8:5-19 in his preaching in Acts 13:21.

David is mentioned in Acts 13:22 and 1 Samuel 13:14 as a man after God's own heart.

It *may* be that David is one of those who "stopped the mouths of lions" (Heb. 11:33, in 1 Samuel 17:34-36).

## Place in the Bible's Storyline

1 Samuel introduces us to King David which sets the foundation for God's choice of David's line for the monarchy of the nation Israel, and for the Messiah.

## Outline

- I. The Birth of Samuel and His Call to the Prophetic Office, 1:1-3:21
- II. Loss of the Ark to the Philistines and Its Recovery, 4:1-7:17
- III. Selection of Saul, His Reign, Battles, and Disobedience, 8:1-15:35
- IV. Selection of David and the Conflict Between David and Saul, 16:1-30:31
- V. Death of Saul, 31:1-13

## Lessons

King Saul had at least four major issues of disobedience to God. He offered unauthorized sacrifices in violation of Samuel's instructions (13:8-14). He spared the life of King Agag of the Amalekites, in direct violation of God's command (chapter 15). Then, he consulted the medium to conduct a séance, in direct violation of the Law of Moses and even inconsistent with his own government's position on mediums and spiritists (chapter 28). Finally, throughout the latter half of 1 Samuel, the text records Saul trying multiple times to kill David but failing in all his attempts because God protected David. In the end, Saul died a terrible death when he should have, as God's chosen king, died in peace and full of years. A simple moral lesson for us is to avoid the kind of failures that Saul had.

This moral lesson does not exhaust the meaning of what we read about Saul in 1 Samuel because it is not behavior that brings someone into favor with God. The underlying problem with Saul was that he did not love God with all his heart. He did not trust God. He was not a "saved" man. He was chosen as king, but was not a true follower of God.

His rebellion is distinct from King David's in that there is no evidence in Saul's case of true repentance. He may have regretted some decisions. Also, it is distinct from David in the length and repeated nature of the crimes. David committed major crimes, but he repented. Saul did not.

In chapter 8, the people of Israel expressed a desire for a king so they could be "like all the nations." They were destined to have a king (Deuteronomy 17:14-20 shows that). But their motivation for a king was wrong. They should have desired a king in God's time and God's

way, to help them do God's will, not to be like other nations. They were rejecting God's theocratic method of ruling them and ultimately were rejecting God himself because they lacked faith in Him.

## 2 Samuel

### Summary and Message

The book of 2 Samuel recounts the history of King David and the early monarchy that was started in 1 Samuel. The entire focus is on King David, who secures his rule over Judah and Jerusalem, and later over the remainder of the nation of Israel. He learns of God's covenant promise to him and his descendancy. Then he extends the kingdom with victories over the Philistines, Ammonites and Syrians. But the story is marred by the sin of God's people, as usually the case in human history, including David's sin with Bathsheba and Uriah, Absalom's coup, and David carrying out the improper census.

### Key Verses

2 Samuel 5:4-5 David was thirty years old when he began to reign, *and* he reigned forty years. <sup>5</sup> In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years over all Israel and Judah.

2 Samuel 6:6-7 records how Uzzah died when he touched the Ark of God, which was supposed to be carried by hand instead of on a cart. "And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out *his hand* to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. <sup>7</sup> Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for *his error*; and he died there by the ark of God."

2 Samuel 6:12 Now it was told King David, saying, "The Lord has blessed the house of Obed-Edom and all that *belongs* to him, because of the ark of God." So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with gladness.

2 Samuel 7:8 Now therefore, thus shall you say to My servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: "I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel.

2 Samuel 7:16 "And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever."

2 Samuel 7:22 <sup>22</sup> Therefore You are great, O Lord God. For *there is* none like You, nor *is there any* God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears.

2 Samuel 9:1 Now David said, "Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" This shows David's heart.

2 Samuel 11:27b But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.

2 Samuel 12:13-14 So David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. <sup>14</sup> However, because

by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also *who is* born to you shall surely die.”

2 Samuel 15:10 Then Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, “As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then you shall say, ‘Absalom reigns in Hebron!’ ”

2 Samuel 16:11 Regarding the cursing of Shimei, <sup>11</sup> And David said to Abishai and all his servants, “See how my son who came from my own body seeks my life. How much more now *may this* Benjamite? Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the Lord has ordered him.

2 Samuel 22:31 *As for* God, His way *is* perfect; the word of the Lord *is* proven; He *is* a shield to all who trust in Him.

## Doctrine

Scripture teaches us that we make an error if we directly attribute all illness or bad things to specific sins that a person does. The opening verses of John 9 and the book of Job are clear on this. Scripture is also clear that all illness, death and bad things in the world are at least an indirect result of sin, for before sin, God created everything to be very good, and there was no death nor disease. But sometimes, Scripture gives examples of showing that specific sins lead to specific consequences. This is the case in 2 Samuel 12:10 where “the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised [the LORD] and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.” And “I will raise up adversity against you from your own house” in v. 11. Also: “the child who is born to you shall surely die” in 12:14. A similar thing happened in 1 Samuel where God removed Saul from being king because he rejected the word of the Lord (1 Sam. 15:23).

In more general terms, 2 Samuel shows how a man can do great things for God, and yet have significant failings as well.

An important theme in 2 Samuel is God’s covenant with David which we call the Davidic covenant. It joins the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and New Covenants as the major history-shaping covenants of Scripture. 2 Samuel 7:8-16 records this expansive divine promise about David and his seed. This then impacts the remainder of the Old and New Testaments, with Jesus being the ultimate Seed who is the permanent fulfillment of the Davidic covenant in the future. It remains as yet unfulfilled in all its particulars, so we still await the Davidic king to be enthroned in Jerusalem.

The exact reason that David’s census was displeasing to the Lord is debated because the text does not explain David’s motivation. 2 Samuel 24:10 tells us clearly that David’s heart condemned him after he numbered the people. He admitted sinning because he acted foolishly. Earlier in verse 3, Joab tried to talk him out of it, indicating that Joab clearly recognized the sin as well. In 1 Chronicles 21:1, the text tells us that Satan incited David to take the census. All of this points to the fact that whatever the motivation was, it was sinful. Furthermore, since taking a census had been commanded in Israel’s past (Exodus 30:11-12) simply counting the people was a sin in every case. I believe it was most likely the prideful motivation of David that was the problem, perhaps coupled with a plan that he

was forming as to how to use his army in further exploits that were not commanded by the Lord. David likely had a failure of trust and was violating the principle of Psalm 20:7, proudly relying on military strength or his own wisdom for guidance.

Forgiveness is an important teaching in 2 Samuel. We cited above 12:13-14 which refers to God's gracious forgiveness of David's sin. It is clear that David did not *deserve* this mercy, but God granted it despite that.

## Literary Features

Once again, most of this book is simple historical narrative. There are poetic parts that contain lamentation or psalm-type material in chapter 1, 3, 22, and 23.

## Date Written and Timeline

The timeline is about 1010 B.C. until about 970 B.C. These are the 40 years that cover David's reign. It was originally united with 1 Samuel as a single book and was likely completed after 931 B.C. by an unknown author. See the section "Date Written and Timeline" for 1 Samuel for more details.

## Related Scriptures

2 Samuel 12 is parallel to Psalm 32 and 51.

2 Samuel 22 is nearly identical to Psalm 18.

The Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7) is referred to as the "sure mercies of David" in Isaiah 55:3 and Acts 13:34.

When David repented of his sin in 2 Samuel 12, he also wrote Psalm 51.

## Place in the Bible's Storyline

2 Samuel helps us to understand the place of King David (ruled 1010-970 B.C.) in the history of Israel. He was the first monarch in the Davidic line which continued until the Babylonian destruction of the temple in 586 B.C. approximately 424 years.

1 and 2 Samuel together serve to document the history of the nation concerning its request for a king and the eventual change from Saul to David, along with the divine promises for a glorious Davidic dynasty. This reminds the future generations that they did ask for a king, and would encourage them that God will not forget His promise to sustain the monarchy and the nation as a whole.

The history here also shows us how God brought to full flower the nation that He had promised to build into a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6), but they did not embrace this calling.

## Outline

I. David Secures the Kingdom over Southern and Northern Tribes, 1:1-7:29

II. David Extends the Kingdom, 8:1-10:19; 12:26-31

A. War against Philistia, Moab, Syria, Ammon, Amalek, 8:1-18

B. David shows kindness to Mephibosheth, Saul's son, 9:1-13

C. War against Ammon, Syria, 10:1-19; 12:26-31

III. David's Sin with Bathsheba, 11:1-12:25

IV. Absalom's Revolt Against David, 13:1-19:14

V. David Re-Secures the Kingdom, Last Words, and Failure with the Census, 19:15-24:25

## Lessons

David could not be king until Saul's reign was fully over, and David made every effort to not touch the Lord's anointed one. He had to wait patiently until God's promise was fulfilled. We too can patiently wait for God's timing. If you run ahead of God you will get into some kind of trouble.

Why does the Bible contain a verse like 2 Sam 23:20? It records the deeds of Benaiah, a man God made to be very strong and brave. He was one of many such men who protected King David. We could surmise that the Scripture records his deeds to show that God prepares men to do spectacularly in the mundane things of life in order to protect His people for the ultimate outworking of His plan. Just because you are not a king or other "public person" does not mean that you cannot do great things for the Lord.

Notice 2 Sam 6:1-7 where the Ark is carried on a wagon; Num 7:1-9 and 4:4-6 clearly say that the Ark and the other furniture of the tabernacle was to be carried by hand by the Kohathites, and not on wagons. There were severe consequences for Uzzah because of this. David had the heavy weight of responsibility for it as well because though the priests *should* have arranged for proper transport, the King surely should have done so.

# 1 Kings

## Summary and Message

1 Kings recounts the history of Israel from the death of David through Solomon's reign (971-931 B.C.) until Jehoshaphat in the southern kingdom (reign 873-848 B.C.) and Ahaziah in the north (853-852 B.C.), covering a time span of roughly 120 years. The main topics in 1 Kings are the rise and reign of Solomon, the building of the temple and its dedication, Solomon's departure from the Lord, the division of the kingdom into north and south because of Solomon's disobedience and Rehoboam's foolishness causing the northern tribes' secession (1 Kings 11:35-36; 12:16-17), and the early kings of both kingdoms.

## Key Verses

1 Kings 3:9 Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"

1 Kings 8:23-24 and he said: "Lord God of Israel, *there is* no God in heaven above or on earth below like You, who keep *Your* covenant and mercy with Your servants who walk before You with all their hearts. <sup>24</sup> You have kept what You promised Your servant David my

father; You have both spoken with Your mouth and fulfilled *it* with Your hand, as *it is* this day.

1 Kings 8:27 “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!

1 Kings 9:6-7 But if you or your sons at all turn from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, <sup>7</sup> then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them; and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight.

1 Kings 11:4 For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as *was* the heart of his father David.

1 Kings 11:9-11 So the Lord became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, <sup>10</sup> and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the Lord had commanded. <sup>11</sup> Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, “Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant.

1 Kings 12:16-17 Now when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, saying: “What share have we in David? *We have* no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Now, see to your own house, O David!” So Israel departed to their tents. <sup>17</sup> But Rehoboam reigned over the children of Israel who dwelt in the cities of Judah.

1 Kings 18:21 And Elijah came to all the people, and said, “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord *is* God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” But the people answered him not a word.

1 Kings 18:36-38 And it came to pass, at *the time of* the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, “Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You *are* God in Israel and I *am* Your servant, and *that* I have done all these things at Your word. <sup>37</sup> Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that You *are* the Lord God, and *that* You have turned their hearts back *to You* again.” <sup>38</sup> Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that *was* in the trench. <sup>39</sup> Now when all the people saw *it*, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The Lord, He *is* God! The Lord, He *is* God!”

1 Kings 19:11-12 <sup>11</sup> Then He said, “Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, *but* the Lord *was* not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, *but* the Lord *was* not in the earthquake; <sup>12</sup> and after the earthquake a fire, *but* the Lord *was* not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

1 Kings 19:14, 18 <sup>14</sup> And he said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and

killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.” ...[God replies] <sup>18</sup>Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

## Doctrine

The history of Kings recapitulates in the nation of Israel the larger human story. It starts out promising with King David and the glorious reign of Solomon. But it quickly degrades as Solomon disobeys God’s instructions regarding marriage and accumulation of wealth. The kingdom splits and there is war and infighting and idolatry and all manner of sin as the nation decomposes into two parts that are eventually taken away in captivity. This fulfills God’s promises in the Law that if the nation disobeyed God, they would be removed from the blessing of their land.

God raised up prophets like Elijah to confront the idolatry and wickedness of the people and to call them to faithfulness to Yahweh. A school of prophets including Elisha and many lesser-known prophets began during these years (1 Kings chapters 18 through 22). God used them as ministers to the people and especially the leaders of the northern and southern kingdoms.

## Literary Features

Originally 1 and 2 Kings were a single book, but were divided into two by the Greek translators in the 100s B.C. or so. This book is a historical narrative. It is sometimes very selective and other times more detailed in what it records.

## Date Written and Timeline

1 and 2 Kings record events up to 561 B.C. during the middle of the captivity in Babylon. The book does not record the end of the Babylonian captivity, so 1 and 2 Kings must have been completed before 538 B.C. The author is unknown. Some have postulated Jeremiah was the author, but he did not go to Babylon and would have had to hear of those events remotely, which is not impossible but seems somewhat unlikely. He also would have been quite old by that time. It could be that an obscure prophet from the school or line of the prophets put together all the sources that were available to him.

Elijah’s prophetic ministry was to Ahab and started around 870 B.C. and continued until the end of Jehoshaphat’s reign around 847 B.C.

## Related Scriptures

Romans 11:3-4 quotes from 1 Kings 19:10, 14, 18. As it was during those days, so it is today. It may seem that there are virtually no believers following God. But God has a people scattered around and quiet. There is always a remnant according to the choice of God’s grace.

Jesus refers to the queen of the south in Matthew 12:42 (// Luke 11:31), a reference to the incident that was recorded in 1 Kings 10.

There is quite similar language in 1 Kings 17:18 and Mark 5:7 about “What have I to do with you...” but one is applied to Elijah by a woman whose son died, and the other to Jesus by a demon.

The sheep-without-a-shepherd motif is present in Mark 6:34 as well as in 1 Kings 22:17, but again in very different contexts.

Jesus refers to Elijah and the widow of Zarephath in Luke 4:25-26. This portion in 1 Kings 17:1 has to do with a lengthy drought in the land. This enraged the listeners in the Nazareth synagogue, because it elevated a Gentile above the Jews!

Jesus raised the man at Nain from the dead and presented him to the mother, like Elijah raised the child in 1 Kings 17:22-23.

Stephen preached about Solomon’s temple in Acts 7:47, alluding to 1 Kings 6 and surrounding context.

James 5:17 encourages us to pray earnestly, like Elijah who God used to pronounce the famine in 1 Kings 17:1. Then he prayed and God brought rain (1 Kings 18:42, James 5:18). This is similar to what the two witnesses do in Revelation 11:6.

## Place in the Bible’s Storyline

1 and 2 Kings together explain to the Jewish people what happened in their past that left them in such a sorry state in Babylon after such a glorious beginning with David and Solomon. They would be able to look back on this summary of the glory days of the kingdom followed by the folly of Solomon and his son and understand it from God’s point of view.

Prosperity was not guaranteed if the people left behind religious faithfulness. 1 Kings explains the results of unfaithfulness—exile—which in turn sets the stage for the return of the nation from the exile in some of the minor prophets. The author reviews the kings of the north and south and gives a summary of their conduct. None of the northern kings make the grade, and only a few of the southern kings showed themselves to be faithful to the Lord.

## Outline

- I. Death of David and Transfer of Kingdom to Solomon, 1:1-2:46
- II. Solomon’s Activities, 3:1-11:43
  - A. Marriage to Pharaoh’s daughter, 3:1-2
  - B. Prayer for wisdom, 3:3-28
  - C. Solomon’s court, wealth and wisdom, 4:1-34
  - D. Solomon’s pact with Hiram of Tyre, 5:1-18
  - E. The building of the temple and other buildings, 6:1-7:51
  - F. The dedication of the temple, 8:1-66
  - G. Renewal of Davidic covenant, 9:1-9
  - H. Solomon’s fame, wisdom, prosperity, 9:10-10:29
  - I. Solomon’s many wives, idolatry, and God’s anger, 11:1-13

- J. Solomon's enemies aroused by the Lord, 11:14-25
- K. Rise of Jeroboam, 11:26-40
- L. Death of Solomon, 11:41-43
- III. The Kingdom Splits, 12:1-33
  - A. Rehoboam made king, 12:1-15
  - B. Revolt and Jeroboam made king of north (Israel), 12:16-24
  - C. Jeroboam plunges Israel into idolatry, 12:25-33
- IV. Reigns of Israelite and Judean Kings, 13:1-16:34
  - A. Jeroboam of Israel, 13:1-14:20
  - B. Rehoboam of Judah, 14:21-31
  - C. Abijam of Judah, 15:1-8
  - D. Asa of Judah, 15:9-24
  - E. Nadab of Israel, 15:25-31
  - F. Baasha of Israel, 15:32-16:7
  - G. Elah, Zimri of Israel, 16:8-20
  - H. Omri of Israel, 16:21-27
  - I. Ahab of Israel, 16:28-34
- V. Elijah's Prophetic Career, 17:1-19:21
- VI. Ahab's Reign, 20:1-22:40
- VII. Further Kings, 22:41-22:53
  - A. Jehosphaphat of Judah, 22:41-50
  - B. Ahaziah of Israel, 22:51-53

## Lessons

1 Kings serve as a teaching curriculum for the children of Israel, as it does for us so that we would not pursue evil things like they did.

One of those evils that God demands His people to reject is idolatry. Baal is one of the idols that the people worshipped at Mt. Carmel in the northern kingdom (northwest Samaria). There were the gods of the Sidonians, Ammonites, and Moabites for which Solomon built altars. There was Ashtoreth, Astarte, Molech, Chemosh, and Milcom are all mentioned in 1 Kings.

The kings of Israel are summarized in a few words as to whether they did right in the sight of the Lord or did evil in the sight of the Lord. We are not talking about minutiae here. We are talking about the big picture, the pattern, the overall scope. If objective observers were to observe your life, what short summary would they put on it?

1 Kings keeps the God-centered view of life in front of our eyes. Everything is about the Lord, up to kings and kingdoms.

Even with Solomon's wisdom and vast wealth, there is one much greater than Solomon in the person of our Savior (Luke 11:31).

# 2 Kings

## Summary and Message

2 Kings continues seamlessly where 1 Kings left off, with Ahaziah and the departure of Elijah. Elisha is the main prophet in the first half of 2 Kings. Chapter 17 records that the northern kingdom was taken captive by the Assyrians (about 722 B.C.), and the southern kingdom comes to a similar demise at the end of chapter 25 (586 B.C.). God did this to the nation because it continued to practice idolatry instead of following the 10 commandments.

The message of 2 Kings is united with that of 1 Kings: to show the Israelites of later generations what happened to their earlier glorious nation, that it happened because of rebellion and idolatry against God, and thus how a similar fate can be avoided in the future.

## Key Verses

2 Kings 2:11 Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

2 Kings 6:16-17 So he answered, “Do not fear, for those who *are* with us *are* more than those who *are* with them.”<sup>17</sup> And Elisha prayed, and said, “Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.” Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain *was* full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

2 Kings 8:19 Yet the Lord would not destroy Judah, for the sake of his servant David, as He promised him to give a lamp to him *and* his sons forever.

2 Kings 17:22-23 For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them,<sup>23</sup> until the LORD removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, as it is to this day.

2 Kings 18:4-7 [Hezekiah] removed the high places and broke the *sacred* pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan.<sup>5</sup> He trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him.<sup>6</sup> For he held fast to the Lord; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the Lord had commanded Moses.<sup>7</sup> The Lord was with him; he prospered wherever he went.

2 Kings 23:25 Now before him [Josiah] there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did *any* arise like him.

2 Kings 23:27 And the Lord said, “I will also remove Judah from My sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, ‘My name shall be there.’ ”

2 Kings 24:19-20 He [Zedekiah] also did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. <sup>20</sup> For because of the anger of the Lord *this* happened in Jerusalem and Judah, that He finally cast them out from His presence.

2 Kings 25:8-11 And in the fifth month, on the seventh *day* of the month (which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. <sup>9</sup> He burned the house of the Lord and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire. <sup>10</sup> And all the army of the Chaldeans who *were with* the captain of the guard broke down the walls of Jerusalem all around. <sup>11</sup> Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive the rest of the people *who* remained in the city and the defectors who had deserted to the king of Babylon, with the rest of the multitude.

2 Kings 25:27-29 Now it came to pass in the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah...*that* Evil-Merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, released Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison. <sup>28</sup> He spoke kindly to him, and gave him a more prominent seat than those of the kings who *were with* him in Babylon. <sup>29</sup> So Jehoiachin changed from his prison garments, and he ate bread regularly before the king all the days of his life.

## Doctrine

God promised Abraham a descendants, land, and blessing. They have a "perpetual lease on the land from God" (Thomas Constable in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary Old Testament*, ed. Walvoor and Zuck, p. 485) but they will only occupy the land to the extent that they are faithful to God. 1 and 2 Kings show that God kept His word on this, responding to the people's disobedience as it merited.

By the end of 2 Kings, it may seem that the demise of the nation of Israel is permanent. But God did not cast off His people forever (Psalm 94:14, Jeremiah 33:23-26). There is a small evidence of this in the kindness God arranged for Jehoiachin. He had reigned very briefly in Jerusalem, did evil in God's sight, and was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C. But years later, he was treated kindly by the Chaldean king Evil-Merodach (2 Kings 25:27-30).

God's long-suffering is always in the background as He permitted the people to go their own way for a long time. But the "severity" of God (Rom. 11:22) is also evident in the harsh judgment that He poured out on the people.

God's sovereignty is also evident as He controlled history. "The LORD removed Israel." Assyria or Babylon were only God's instruments to accomplish His purpose. He was faithful to His word, and did not forget His people.

Human sin is on full, un-edited display in the books of the kings. They did not "do right in the sight of the Lord." Thus the need for repentance, which is modeled by Hezekiah and called for by all the prophets.

Yet notice the grace of God in 2 Kings 13:23—But the Lord was gracious to them, had compassion on them, and regarded them, because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not yet destroy them or cast them from His presence.

We encounter the Angel of the Lord in 2 Kings 19:35, when He killed the Assyrian army. This is the preincarnate second person of the Triune God.

## Literary Features

2 Kings is a straightforward historical narrative that records the famous accounts of Elisha's miracles, the widow's oil, the resurrection of a dead child, the healing of Naaman the Syrian from leprosy, the vision of the Lord's army around Elisha protecting him from the Syrians. (The presence of miracles does not undermine the claim that the genre is narrative.)

2 Kings records the death of many kings and relatives of the kings of Israel and Judah, Athaliah's reign and death, and the sequence of rulers for over 250 years of Israel's history. It also covers the drama of Hezekiah's reign and Sennacherib's attack, the role of Isaiah in promising deliverance, and Sennacherib's death as well as that of his large army (2 Kings 19:35). One particularly touching instance is Josiah's tenderness of heart when the Law of the Lord was re-discovered in the temple as it was being repaired. Later, Josiah behaved foolishly when he fought against Pharaoh Necho. Finally, Zedekiah is taken to Babylon, but first he is blinded and his sons are killed.

The purpose of 1 and 2 Kings was not just to record history but to teach lessons concerning the history to the exiles and post-exilic Israelite nation. The message is connected back to the Mosaic Law as the measuring stick. The history recorded in these books shows the nation's decline through idolatry and rebellion against God. As the kings went, so the people went, and so the kingdom went. The author wants the people to learn from past.

The author also wants the people to see God's faithfulness to His promises, including the promises of disaster.

1 & 2 Chronicles have a different focus than the Kings. The books of the Kings focus on the kings and the prophets whereas the Chronicles seem to be more concerned with the viewpoint of the temple in Jerusalem and whether the kings were loyal to it.

## Date Written and Timeline

The entire book covers a period from about 850 B.C. until 586 B.C., followed by some events concerning Gedaliah and Jehoiachin in captivity up to 561 B.C., 289 years, for a total of about 409 years for the combined 1 and 2 Kings.

It is helpful to understand the history of the empires in the area at the time. In 609 B.C. Pharaoh Necho killed Judah's king Josiah as he was on his way to join the weakened Assyrians to face the Chaldeans under Nebuchadnezzar. Babylon defeated both Assyria and Egypt at Carchemish in 605 B.C., thus reshaping the power structure of the entire region which had formerly been under the sway of Assyria or Egypt.

Another timeline issue has to do with the chronological problems of the kings. The years do not easily “add up.” This is explained by coregencies, customs as to when a king’s reign officially began, and different calendar years in the north and south. A book by Edwin R. Thiele entitled *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* goes a long way to answering this chronological problem.

But these major dates are assured: The 931 B.C. division of northern and southern kingdoms; the 722 B.C. exile of the northern kingdom to Assyria and the repopulation of the region; the 605 B.C. and 597 B.C. Babylon victories over Judah; and the 586 B.C. destruction of the southern kingdom by Babylon. One more date is Jehoiachin’s release from prison around 561 B.C. which is in the “middle” of the Babylonian captivity which ended around 538 B.C.

The consistent style of the books indicates single authorship. As mentioned in the notes on 1 Kings, perhaps Jeremiah was the author, but he was not in Babylon and died in Egypt. More likely the author could have been Ezekiel or Ezra who were in Babylon for extensive periods of their lives. But in the final analysis the human author is unknown. It had to be completed after 561 B.C. when Jehoiachin was released from prison in Babylon.

It is evident that the author used source materials: 11 times the chronicles of the kings of Judah is mentioned; and 11 more times the chronicles of the kings of Israel is mentioned. A few more times these chronicles are mentioned in 1 Kings (4 for Judah, 7 for Israel, another 11, for a total of 33 references). In each case, the chronicles of Judah are associated with southern-kingdom kings; and the chronicles of Israel are associated with northern-kingdom kings.

As an aside, these chronicles are probably the royal records of the time, not the actual Bible books of 1 and 2 Chronicles. The Bible books focus on the southern kingdom.

## Related Scriptures

There are no direct quotations from 2 Kings in the New Testament. But there are some allusions or echoes of the book in the NT.

Luke 24:19 alludes to the fact that Jesus is like Elijah and Elisha, a powerful prophet before God.

John’s clothing in Matthew 3:4 reminds us of Elijah in 2 Kings 1:8.

Jesus ascended into Heaven, which is reminiscent of how Elijah was caught up as well, though by a different transport method.

In Luke 4:27 Jesus refers to Naaman the Syrian who was healed of leprosy (2 Kings 5). He was not a Jew, but rather a Gentile. Elisha sent him to wash in the Jordan (2 Kings 5:10), like Jesus later told the blind man to wash his eyes in the pool of Siloam (John 9:6).

Jesus raised the dead (Luke 7:15) like Elijah and Elisha did (1 Kings 17:23, 2 Kings 4:35).

Disciples James and John thought that they could be like Elijah and call fire down from Heaven (Luke 9:54, 2 Kings 1:10, 12, like 1 Kings 18:38).

Jezebel is a very wicked character in the narrative of 2 Kings. She comes up again in Revelation 2:20.

2 Kings 23:10 recounts the transformation of Topheth in the valley of Hinnom into a garbage dump, later in history to be used as an illustration of the continual burning of Hell (Mark 9:47-48).

## Place in the Bible's Storyline

See the corresponding section in 1 Kings.

## Outline

Instead of forcing the outline to follow the order of the text, I have outlined the book more thematically, especially in the middle section that has to do with the northern and southern kings and kingdoms.

- I. Further Kings of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms; Elijah and Elisha, 1:1-10:36
- II. Southern Kings, 11:1-12:21; 14:1-22; 15:1-7; 15:32-16:20
- III. Northern Kings of Jehu's Dynasty, 13:1-13:25; 14:23-29; 15:8-12
- IV. Decline and Fall of the Northern Kingdom, 15:13-31; 17:1-41; 18:9-12
- V. Hezekiah of Judah and His Sons to Josiah of Judah, 18:1-8; 18:13-21:26
- VI. Josiah of Judah and His Sons to the Fall of Jerusalem, 22:1-25:30

Another helpful way to outline 2 Kings is like this:

- I. Kings of Judah and Israel up to the Assyrian Exile, 1:1-17:41
- II. Further Kings of Judah up to the Babylonian Exile, 18:1-25:7
  - A. Hezekiah, 18-20
  - B. Manasseh and Amon, 21
  - C. Josiah, 22-23
  - D. Judah's Exile and Babylonian Rule, 24-25

One other outline that might be helpful concerns the kings of the northern kingdom (Israel) which can be divided into four dynasties and one last one that covers the period of the northern kingdom's fall:

- A. First dynasty: Jeroboam I, Nadab
- B. Second dynasty: Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Tibni
- C. Third dynasty: Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, Joram
- D. Fourth dynasty: Jehu, Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam II, Zechariah
- E. Kings of the fall of Israel: Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, Hoshea

## Lessons

God warns people repeatedly through the prophets and today through His word. When those warnings are ignored, there are serious consequences.

Good leaders are essential to the well-being of a nation, or a church, or a home. The leadership has an out-sized impact on how the nation fares.

God remains faithful even when His people Israel fail miserably. And God will not fail to keep His promises, even those promises to Israel. In fact, His keeping of those promises will highlight and exalt His grace and mercy because of the undeserving nature of the recipients of the promises.

Hezekiah and Josiah are, for the most part, good examples of repentance and following God. They had their later failings, but God was pleased with their overall direction and the inclination of their hearts. Let us seek the Lord like them so that we will not fail but rather be faithful as God is faithful.

# 1 Chronicles

Summary and Message

Key Verses

Doctrine

Literary Features

Date Written and Timeline

Related Scriptures

Outline

Lessons

2 Place in the Bible's Storyline

# 2 Chronicles

Summary and Message

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# Ezra

## Summary and Message

The book of Ezra records the initial return from exile of Zerubbabel and Ezra, the rebuilding of the temple, the opposition to the Jews and their work, and Ezra's moral reforms. It demonstrates God's provision and protection and reiterates His call for holiness among His people that they should implement by following His word, something Ezra desired to do himself.

## Key Verses

Ezra 1:1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also *put it* in writing, saying...[with the text of the decree following.]

Ezra 1:5-6 Then the heads of the fathers' *houses* of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord which *is* in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> And all those who *were* around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with precious things, besides all *that* was willingly offered.

Ezra 3:3 Though fear *had come* upon them because of the people of those countries, they set the altar on its bases; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, *both* the morning and evening burnt offerings.

Ezra 3:10 When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel.

Ezra 3:12-13 But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' *houses*, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy, <sup>13</sup> so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off.

Ezra 4:4-5 Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, <sup>5</sup> and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Ezra 6:16 Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy.

Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do *it*, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Ezra 9:1-2 When these things were done, the leaders came to me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of

the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites... <sup>2</sup> For they have taken some of their daughters *as wives* for themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the peoples of *those* lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this trespass.”

Ezra 9:13-15 And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You our God have punished us less than our iniquities *deserve*, and have given us *such* deliverance as this, <sup>14</sup> should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people *committing* these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed *us*, so that *there would be* no remnant or survivor? <sup>15</sup> O Lord God of Israel, You *are* righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as *it is* this day. Here we *are* before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before You because of this!”

Ezra 10:10-12 Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, “You have transgressed and have taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel. <sup>11</sup> Now therefore, make confession to the Lord God of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives.” <sup>12</sup> Then all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, “Yes! As you have said, so we must do.

## Doctrine

The sovereignty of God once again is on display. Unlike Esther which does not mention God at all (though His sovereignty is evident nonetheless), Ezra has the word *Lord* in 28 verses and *God* in 81 verses. It is fascinating to read of the involvement of the secular government in the construction project and how God moved the spirit of Cyrus (1:1), Darius (6:22), and Artaxerxes (7:27-28) to support the rebuilding of the temple and city.

The book contains a great example of faith. In 8:21-23, Ezra proclaimed a fast and prayed for safety in the long journey (with lots of money and possessions in tow). He did not want to ask the king for protection, although he could have done so.

The doctrine of prayer is further highlighted in 9:3-15. Ezra was like other leaders and prophets of Israel (Nehemiah 9, Daniel 9).

Holiness is a big part of Ezra’s story, particularly the concern with intermarriages to non-Jewish people who had not converted to believe in the God of Israel. That was a clear violation of God’s law and had to be corrected if God’s blessing was to be enjoyed.

The doctrine of the Word of God stands at the center of Ezra’s life. He not only wanted to study God’s law and obey it, and then to teach it throughout Israel. This is a call for us today, particularly pastors, to be teaching the Bible at every opportunity.

## Literary Features

Ezra is a historical-theological narrative of the events surrounding the first two waves of the return of exiles to Israel.

It records seven governmental letters in chapters four through seven. The chapter four letters happened later in history but Ezra chose to place them here in a topical arrangement to show the opposition that was all over their work. To follow the narrative

chronologically, you would read up to 4:5, and then jump ahead to 5:1 to pick up the flow of thought in timeline order.

<b>Passage</b>	<b>Letter From and To</b>
1:2-4	This is not a letter from one party to another, but instead it is a general proclamation to all the regions under Cyrus's dominion. He wrote that God had commanded Him to build the temple and that the Jewish people, the people of Yahweh, should go and assist in the work.
4:6	(LATER) Regional enemies wrote to King Ahasuerus/Xerxes (486-464 B.C.) to accuse the Jews and stop the work. The content of this letter is not recorded in Ezra.
4:9-16	(LATER) Rehum, et al. wrote to King Artaxerxes I (464-423 B.C.) to request stoppage of the work on rebuilding Jerusalem under Nehemiah.
4:17-22	(LATER) King Artaxerxes replies to stop the work on the city.
5:6-17	Governor Tattenai to King Darius (522 to 487 B.C.) to request search of records to see if Cyrus did decree a rebuilding of the house of God in Jerusalem. This was around 520 B.C. Notice that this is an earlier event than those recorded in chapter 4.
6:1-12	King Darius replies that his governor must keep away from the Jewish work (under pain of death) and that the governor will supply, at the king's expense, construction materials and sacrificial animals.
7:11-26	Artaxerxes gave Ezra a letter to permit priests to return to Jerusalem, with finances, plus other finances from the treasurers "beyond the River." He also created a tax exemption for the priests and so forth and encouraged the teaching of the law of God.

## Date Written and Timeline

In chronological terms, Ezra comes after 2 Chronicles 36:22-23. In fact, the decree of Cyrus first seen there is repeated in Ezra 1:1-4 as well as 6:3-5 (looking back from a later point in history). This is a very important decree in Israelite history, as it marked the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy of the end of the 70 years of captivity (25:11-13, 29:10).

Ezra is a contemporary of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

Note the following historical information:

<b>Three Phases of Exile</b>	<b>Three Phases of Return</b>	<b>Focus of Return Phase</b>
605 B.C. (Daniel)	538 B.C. (Zerubbabel)	Rebuild the temple
597 B.C. (Jehoiachin)	458 B.C. (Ezra)	Rebuild the people
586 B.C. (Zedekiah)	444 B.C. (Nehemiah)	Rebuild Jerusalem

King Cyrus reigned over Persia from 559 B.C. until 530. But he did not conquer Babylon until 539/538 B.C. This is what Ezra 1:1 calls “the first year of Cyrus king of Persia” because it was the first year that he reigned over the empire that held Israel captive.

At the beginning of his reign, the historian Josephus wrote that the elderly prophet Daniel read Isaiah 44:28 to Cyrus:

Who says of Cyrus, ‘*He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, “You shall be built,” and to the temple, “Your foundation shall be laid.”*’

If true, this is a moving circumstances that shows one way that God fulfills His promises: by using his prophet to influence the secular leader by showing him the prophetic word.

Cyrus was followed by Cambyses II, who reigned until 522 B.C. Darius then took the kingdom back from a usurper named Gaumata and reigned from 522 to 487 B.C. The events of Ezra 6 therefore could not have happened before 522 B.C., and probably one or more years later, say in 520 B.C. Following this, the temple was a few more year in reconstruction until 516 B.C. when it was completed and dedicated. Then the next year the Passover was celebrated, in 515 B.C.

Between these events and when Ezra arrived is a gap of approximately (515 – 458) = 57 years between the events recorded in chapter 1-6 and the events starting in chapter 7.

## Related Scriptures

It appears that Ezra is not quoted or referenced in the New Testament.

Its historicity is assumed in the Bible books Haggai (520 B.C.) and Zechariah (520-518 B.C.), whose names also appear in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14.

There is an interesting sub-plot in 2:59-63 where some men cannot demonstrate their lineage from Levi, so they were excluded from the priesthood because of the critical importance of genuine priests from the tribe of Levi. On that requirement, see Deuteronomy 10:8 and Numbers 18:1-7. These men had to await the arrival of a priest to consult with God. Ezra was such a priest, but he came many years later and I am not sure that the earlier question was settled. We do see a son of Koz later in Scripture (Neh. 3:4, 21; see also Nehemiah 7:63-65).

## Place in the Bible’s Storyline

After long absence due to their disobedience, the Jewish people were back in their land. This history, along with Nehemiah with which it was originally paired, explains how God was still working in the nation for moral and religious reform, and He was also working outside of the nation with pagan kings, in order to preserve and restore His people. The temple that these people built was eventually expanded into a beautiful edifice in the first century A.D. when Jesus came to it. See Nehemiah for more details on the place of Ezra and Nehemiah in the Bible’s storyline.

## Outline

- I. First phase of return: Zerubbabel leads in rebuilding of temple, 1:1-6:22
  - A. Decree of Cyrus and return of temple items, 1:1-11
  - B. Roll of returnees, 2:1-70
  - C. Worship re-instituted in Jerusalem, 3:1-6
  - D. First phase of temple re-construction, political obstacles, 3:8-4:5
  - E. Later opposition, 4:6-24
  - F. Second phase of temple re-construction, and more politics, 5:1-6:15
  - G. Passover re-instituted in Jerusalem, 6:16-22
  
- II. Second phase of return: Ezra's reforms, 7:1-10:44
  - A. Summary of Ezra's role in Jerusalem, 7:1-10
  - B. Artaxerxes commission of Ezra and Ezra's thanksgiving, 7:11-28
  - C. Roll of returnees, 8:1-14
  - D. Preparation of Levites returning with Ezra, 8:15-30
  - E. Arrival of Ezra in Jerusalem, 8:31-36
  - F. Ezra's confession, 9:1-15
  - G. Illegal marriages dissolved, 10:1-44

## Lessons

God's work continues despite severe opposition, whether that includes political elements or threats of physical violence.

The doctrine of marriage has a significant role at the end of Ezra and the importance of being "equally yoked." This section challenges a superficial doctrine of marriage, divorce, and remarriage because of the improper way the marriages were initially contracted.

I encourage the reader to go back and visit the section on Doctrine. Think through each point and ask yourself what lesson you could draw from it for your own life. Each of those truths—God's sovereignty, faith, prayer, holiness, and God's word—have deep implications for how we live, trusting the sovereign God to orchestrate events in our lives for our good and His glory, living holy, and giving serious attention to God's word.

## Nehemiah

### Summary and Message

The book of Nehemiah covers the third phase of the return of the Jewish exiles. In this phase of the return, the rebuilding of the city and especially the wall is the focus. Nehemiah enacted reforms in the political, economic, and spiritual reforms as well.

## Key Verses

Nehemiah 1:3 And they said to me, “The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province *are* there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem *is* also broken down, and its gates *are burned* with fire.”

Nehemiah 2:4 Then the king said to me, “What do you request?” So I prayed to the God of heaven.

Nehemiah 2:8 and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king’s forest, that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which *pertains* to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy.” And the king granted *them* to me according to the good hand of my God upon me.

Nehemiah 2:18 And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king’s words that he had spoken to me. So they said, “Let us rise up and build.” Then they set their hands to *this good work*.

Nehemiah 4:6 So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its *height*, for the people had a mind to work.

Nehemiah 5:15 <sup>15</sup> But the former governors who *were* before me laid burdens on the people, and took from them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver. Yes, even their servants bore rule over the people, but I did not do so, because of the fear of God.

Nehemiah 6:3 So I sent messengers to them, saying, “I *am* doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?”

Nehemiah 6:15 So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth *day* of Elul, in fifty-two days. <sup>16</sup> And it happened, when all our enemies heard *of it*, and all the nations around us saw *these things*, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God.

Nehemiah 8:8 So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped *them* to understand the reading.

Nehemiah 8:9-10 <sup>9</sup> And Nehemiah, who *was* the governor, Ezra the priest *and* scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day *is* holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn nor weep.” For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. <sup>10</sup> Then he said to them, “Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for *this day is* holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Nehemiah 9:1-3 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads. <sup>2</sup> Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. <sup>3</sup> And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God *for one-fourth* of the day; and *for another* fourth they confessed and worshiped the Lord their God.

Nehemiah 9:17 But You *are* God, Ready to pardon, Gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, Abundant in kindness, And did not forsake them.

## Doctrine

The sovereign hand of God is evident throughout Nehemiah. He responded to the prayer and used the administrative leadership of Nehemiah and the hard work of the people to accomplish a task that seemed impossible to the people and also to their enemies.

Prayer is highlighted. Note how Nehemiah prays in 1:8-9. Notice that he is not focused on the land or the city, but on their relationship with God. Yes, the sad state of Jerusalem is the occasion for his prayer, but he hardly mentions it. When faced with difficulty, he turns to prayer in 4:4. He offers quick prayers in 2:4, 6:9, and 13:22, showing that he was centered very much on the LORD.

The sinful nature of humanity is demonstrated once again in Nehemiah. Humanity depravity is shown through political and antisemitic opposition.

Chapter 9 particularly shows the doctrine of confession of sin and seeking God's pardon and forgiveness.

## Literary Features

As with the nearby books in the Protestant canon, Nehemiah is a historical narrative of events surrounding Nehemiah's leadership in the nation of Israel during the 445 B.C. timeframe. An interesting feature is that it has long sections written from the first-person perspective.

It has an encouraging refrain concerning "Remembering" in Neh. 5:19, 6:14, 13:14, 13:22, 13:29, and 13:31. The hand of God figures prominently in the book (Ezra 7:6, 28 mentioned it; also Neh. 2:8, 18).

Chapters 4 through 6 are interesting because they give a view of external as well as internal conflict. Nehemiah faced both. In chapter 6, the opposition makes up the claim that Jerusalem will revolt against the king (6:5-7). This sounds familiar (Ezra 4:12-13).

Ezra has a several lists in chapters 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 10, 11, and 12. These lists included articles returned from the temple, exiles, genealogical information, heads of household, descendants of the priests, builders, those who signed the covenant, citizens, and priests and Levites. This "list characteristic" makes it seem much more likely that Ezra was the man who compiled the Chronicles as well. (Some of you who like to make lists can sympathize with Ezra!)

## Date Written and Timeline

It is likely that Ezra is the human author of the book by not only his own name, but that of Nehemiah as well. Much of the material must have been drawn from Nehemiah's personal notes or recollections of the situation as he saw it in Susa as well as in his administration of the wall building. The two books were together as a single volume originally and some even call the books 1 and 2 Ezra. Ezra's authorship is supported by learnedness, his

personal access to the events and also apparent access to the royal archives evidenced by the copies of official letters that are included in the text of the books. Ezra could also have compiled 1 and 2 Chronicles.

Composition around 430 B.C. is a reasonable estimation of the book's origin.

Ezra had firsthand knowledge of many of the events as he was in the leadership of Israel and he appears not only in Ezra 7-10 but also throughout Nehemiah 8-12. It appears he was present for all the time of Nehemiah's initial rule in Israel.

Nehemiah served his first term as governor from 445-433 B.C, a period of 12 years, according to 5:14. The first year or so is the focus of the first 12 chapters of Nehemiah. Then there appears to be a long gap between chapters 12 and 13.

Nehemiah left Israel around 432 B.C. and then returned again about 7 years later (Nehemiah 13) when he found moral and social conditions had worsened. He implemented more reforms at that time. His second term was from 424 to possibly as late as 410 B.C. (5:14, 13:6).

A set of documents called the Elephantine Papyri, discovered in 1903, mention Sanballat and Johanan and also show that Nehemiah was not the governor of Judah after 408 B.C. These confirm once again that the Bible reports accurate history.

## Related Scriptures

Nehemiah 9 records a prayer where several historical events are mentioned: God's provisions of manna and water (9:15), the hardening of the hearts of the Israelites (9:17), and the gift of the promised land (9:36).

There are many references to antecedent Scripture or events in the history of Israel in chapter 9. The entire reason that the city is in ruins is that Israel was unfaithful to her covenant, and God punished her for it with the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities.

Nehemiah refers to or is connected to Ezra in several places. Notice the relationship of Nehemiah 7:64-65 and Ezra 2:62-63.

There appear to be no direct quotations of Nehemiah in the New Testament.

## Place in the Bible's Storyline

See Ezra above for the timeline of events that help to locate Nehemiah in the larger historical context. The book begins in late 445 B.C. in chapter 1. The decree "to restore and to build Jerusalem" (Daniel 9:25) was made in 444 B.C. You recall that this date is important in Biblical prophecy because 483 prophetic (probably 360-day) years from this decree, Daniel prophesies that "Messiah the Prince" will appear and will be killed (Daniel 9:25-26).

The events of Ezra and Nehemiah bridge the gap between the exile and return, and set the stage for the silent years until the appearance of John the Baptist, with the nation of Israel troubled but retaining residence in the land despite being occupied several times by foreign governments. This set things in place for the perfect timing of Jesus's coming.

Without the events of Nehemiah, it is doubtful that those events could have occurred as they did, or else God would have had to raise up someone else at another time to establish Jerusalem in preparation for the first coming of Messiah. Once again, this book shows that God preserves His people.

The historical narrative of Ezra and Nehemiah give helpful context to understand some of the minor prophets, such as Haggai and Malachi.

## Outline

- I. Third phase of return: Nehemiah leads in rebuilding the wall, 1:1-7:73
  - A. Nehemiah's prayer to re-gather Israel around Jerusalem, 1:1-11
  - B. Artaxerxes I grants favor to Nehemiah to rebuild the city, 2:1-10
  - C. Nehemiah convinces the people to build, and opposition, 2:11-20
  - D. The list of people who built, 3:1-32
  - E. Opposition and Nehemiah's response, 4:1-23
  - F. Economic reforms (in Nehemiah's first term as governor), 5:1-19
  - G. More opposition and completion of the wall, 6:1-19
  - H. The people who returned in the first phase (Zerubbabel), 7:1-73
- II. Further Reforms involving Ezra and Nehemiah, 8:1-13:31
  - A. Reading of the Law; re-institution of feast of booths, 8:1-18
  - B. Prayer of Levites (review of God's goodness, confession), 9:1-38
  - C. Resolve to keep the law and provide for Levites, 10:1-39
  - D. Census of people living throughout Israel, 11:1-36
  - E. Records of priests and Levites who came in the first wave, 12:1-26
  - F. Walls Dedicated; temple functions re-instituted, 12:27-47
  - G. More reforms of Nehemiah in his second term, 13:1-31

## Lessons

Do not repeat sinful history so that you can avoid the natural or theological consequences (13:23-27).

Keep prayer as your first response in trouble or need.

As the old saying goes, "Attempt great things for God, expect great things from God." This takes prayer, but also practical vision, leadership, sacrifice, delegation, and focus.

Do not let opposition derail you from the work God has called you to do. Strengthen yourself in the Lord when difficult things come.

Sometimes there is nothing to a project but good old-fashioned hard work and inconvenience.

Nehemiah was a leader of the people, but he was not a selfish leader. He gave of himself and his financial means to help others and to reduce the load on the people. Many leaders today could take a cue or two from him.

Ezra the scribe prioritized the public reading of Scripture and the teaching of it. This should also be very important to us.

Corporate confession of sin is an important element in chapter 9, and we can do the same for our own corporate settings as it becomes necessary.

In those days, a city without walls was defenseless, so it was important to have good walls. Today this is not an important issue, particularly in western nations, but it is important to put boundaries around your family and your own personal conduct to protect yourself.

## Esther

### Summary and Message

In His good providence, God arranges that Esther became queen to King Ahasuerus so that she could rescue the Jewish people from planned extermination by Haman. God saw fit to record the account of this history for His people to remind them of the origin story of Purim. More importantly, the book shows God's providential care for Israel once more.

### Key Verses

Esther 2:20 *Now* Esther had not revealed her family and her people, just as Mordecai had charged her, for Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him.

Esther 3:7 In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that *is*, the lot), before Haman to determine the day and the month, until *it fell on the twelfth month*, which *is* the month of Adar.

Esther 4:14 “For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?”

Esther 4:16 Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which *is* against the law; and if I perish, I perish!

Esther 5:2 So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, *that* she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that *was* in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter.

Esther 5:14 Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, “Let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high, and in the morning suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it; then go merrily with the king to the banquet.” And the thing pleased Haman; so he had the gallows made.

Esther 7:3-4 Then Queen Esther answered and said, “If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. <sup>4</sup>For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be

annihilated. Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king's loss."

Esther 7:9-10 Now Harbonah, one of the eunuchs, said to the king, "Look! The gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai, who spoke good on the king's behalf, is standing at the house of Haman." Then the king said, "Hang him on it!"<sup>10</sup> So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's wrath subsided.

Esther 8:17 And in every province and city, wherever the king's command and decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday. Then many of the people of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews fell upon them.

Esther 9:26-27 So they called these days Purim, after the name Pur. Therefore, because of all the words of this letter, what they had seen concerning this matter, and what had happened to them,<sup>27</sup> the Jews established and imposed it upon themselves and their descendants and all who would join them, that without fail they should celebrate these two days every year, according to the written *instructions* and according to the *prescribed* time.

## Doctrine

One doctrine that has become very controversial in our own time is the doctrine of Israel. The Bible's teaching on Israel is extensive in terms of its history, persecutions, covenant promises, failure, and future. Israel is situated at the root of God's promises and as such its concerns also touch the Gentiles, for salvation is from the Jewish nation and consists of Gentiles being grafted into the olive tree of Abraham's promises (Romans 11:16-23). Additionally, God brings the Gentiles near to the covenants of promise (Ephesians 2:13). The survival of the historical nation was essential for the promise of salvation to all people. The continuing survival of the nation is essential still today for the fulfillment of the covenants and promises that God has made for the future.

It is interesting to read that many people in the Persian empire "became Jews," that is, proselytes to the Jewish faith (Esther 8:17). They rejected paganism and turned to Yahweh. The reason for this was because "the fear of the Jews fell upon them." They saw that the favor of God was manifestly upon the Jewish people and that the Jews could not be destroyed by a very cunning and conniving foe, Haman. The favor of the government, and of God Himself, was upon the nation of Israel. People wanted a piece of that action instead of being on the losing side as the enemies of the Jewish people were destroyed. In fact, the history here records that tens of thousands of Gentiles who hated Israel were killed as the Jews defended themselves.

Because Christianity is the natural extension and fulfillment of the Jewish promises in the Hebrew Bible, we do not call people today to "become Jews." Rather, we call them to become Christ followers. As such, they share the faith of the Jewish patriarch Abraham, and can be called "sons of Abraham" because Jesus is a son of Abraham, and Christians are *in* Him. This does not make Christians into ethnic Jews. Nor did it make the ancient Persians under Ahasuerus's rule into ethnic Jews. Christians today retain their ethnic

heritage, and the Persians were still Gentiles, but they were religiously Jewish, proselytes, and God-fearing.

Human depravity is on full display in the book. The carnal way that the king selects his wife is one way we see depravity at work. Even worse is Haman's raw display of hatred and planning the murder of thousands of people because he dislikes the behavior of one of their kindred.

On the other hand we see that people can act with great bravery. This is not necessarily a godly virtue, however, as it can be done simply for self-preservation, without regard for whether God is honored in it or not. But in this case, Esther stuck out her own neck for the lives of others of God's people.

## Literary Features

Esther is a dramatic historical narrative of the persecution of the Jewish people and how God rescued them using Mordecai and his adopted daughter Esther (Hadassah). God is not mentioned in Esther, but the believing reader can easily discern the providential hand of God in this portion Israel's history.

Surprisingly, by 5:12-13 it appears that Haman still does not know the lineage of Esther. The reader would expect that Haman would not care to go to a feast with a queen if he knew that she were Jewish. But he could have overlooked it since she *was* the *queen*. This illustrates the tension that was present for over a year—that Esther was “under cover” as far as her identity. She could not let it be known lest she become imperiled. This tension as well as the tension of “what will happen” shows some very good story-telling.

The term “Jew” or “Jews” occurs in 72 verses in the Old Testament, and 45 of those times are in Esther!

The ironic reversals are notable as well—Vashti is out as queen, Esther (a Jewess) is in; Haman is out as an advisor to the king, Mordecai (a Jew) is in. Then, there are the enemies of the Jews who go down to terrible defeat, and the presumed victims the Jews are victorious. The circumstances led to more people being in favor of the Jewish people than before.

## Date Written and Timeline

The king reigning at the time is Ahasuerus, also known as Xerxes I, who reigned from about 486-465 B.C. This means that the events of Esther occur in the 57-year gap between Ezra chapters 6 and 7. In other words, Esther happened after the first phase of the return in 538 B.C. under Zerubbabel, but before Ezra returned from exile in 458 B.C.

As far as the writing of the book, we are not certain who the human author was, but it could have been Mordecai. He was educated, was in the King's court, and was an eyewitness or nearly an eyewitness of all the events recorded.

## Related Scriptures

There are no quotations of Esther in the New Testament.

There is one echo or allusion in Mark 6:23 which records Herod's promise to his step-daughter that he would give her "up to half of my kingdom." King Ahasuerus made a similar promise in Esther 5:3, 6, and 7:2.

## Place in the Bible's Storyline

Esther is a crucial piece of history that gives the background of the Purim commemoration. But it also adds to the weight of historical information that shows how the Jewish people have been targeted for extinction multiple times over the past 2,500 years.

Without the saving of the Jews in the time of Esther, none of the remainder of God's promises through them—the coming of Messiah, etc. could come to fruition. Remember, the threat of Jewish extermination was a world-wide threat. Had it occurred, it could have been even worse than the Holocaust in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>3</sup>

## Outline

- I. Esther Ascends to the Office of Queen, 1:1-2:23
  - A. Feast for the nobility in the kingdom, 1:1-9
  - B. Queen Vashti disobeys her husband, 1:10-12
  - C. Ahasuerus considers and decides how to respond, 1:13-22
  - D. Esther selected as new queen, 2:1-18
  - E. Mordecai saves the life of the king, 2:19-23
  
- II. Haman's Plot to Kill the Jews, 3:1-5:14
  - A. Mordecai refuses to worship Haman, 3:1-4
  - B. Haman enraged and wants to kill *all* the Jews, 3:5-6
  - C. Haman makes the plan and requests of the king, 3:7-11
  - D. The plan is published to the kingdom, 3:12-15
  - E. Mordecai enlists Esther's help, 4:1-17
  - F. Esther arranges to speak to the king at the first banquet, 5:1-8
  - G. Haman thinks well of himself, 5:9-14
  
- III. Mordecai Honored by the King and Haman Hanged, 6:1-7:10
  - A. The King finds no reward had been given to Mordecai, 6:1-3
  - B. Haman ironically is commanded to honor Mordecai, 6:4-11
  - C. The downfall of Haman is foreshadowed, 6:12-14
  - D. At the second banquet, Esther reveals the problem, 7:1-6
  - E. The King orders Haman hanged, 7:7-10

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<sup>3</sup> For the reader's general knowledge: Consider this: today the world's Jewish population is about 15.8 million. In 1939, it was 16.7 million. That is, the population has not *yet* recovered, 85 years later. Estimates vary based on birth rate, but if the Holocaust had not happened, the Jewish population today could be double what it presently is—somewhere around 26 to 32 million. This is a devastating loss that ranks at the top of all demographic losses in world history. Its effects are still felt to the present day, almost a century later.

- IV. Esther Helps the Jews Survive the Attempted Genocide, 8:1-10:3
  - A. Esther and Mordecai provide help for the Jewish people, 8:1-17
  - B. The Jews overpower those who hate them, 9:1-17
  - C. The Feast of Purim instituted to celebrate their survival, 9:18-32
  - D. Closing statement about Mordecai and King Ahasuerus, 10:1-3

## Lessons

Even if it seems that God is silent in the midst of potentially deadly and Satanic tribulation, He is not absent. Esther demonstrates how He acted on behalf of His people with zero fanfare, simply using providential means “behind the scenes” to orchestrate the rescue of the Abrahamic family.

Concerning the way that the king chose his new wife, there does not seem to be much choice on Esther’s part. We do not read any actions that she or Mordecai took to avoid the very carnal way of the king choosing a wife, and maybe there were not any, under pain of death for disobeying the king’s command. Sometimes unpleasant things happen, but we have to trust the Lord that He can walk with us through a situation in a way that we do not disobey Him. And, we must face the fact that sometimes God’s people do not do what they are supposed to do.

For women especially, a lesson from Esther is how one woman can make a world-changing difference in the lives of her people. That can be a large group of people, or as small as your own home.

## Jeremiah

Jeremiah is the longest book in the Bible by word count—about 33,000 words. Genesis falls just behind it, and Psalms ranks third in terms of length by word count. Jeremiah prophesied when the exile of the southern kingdom began, through all three phases of the exile and beyond.

### Summary and Message

The book of Jeremiah is the record of Jeremiah’s prophecies about the southern kingdom and surrounding nations, as well as some narrative about what happened during those days with Jeremiah himself, with the Rechabites (ch. 35) for example, and Jeremiah’s interactions with King Zedekiah and other officials in the royal court. The book is focused on judgment as well as future restoration. It is a big call to repentance, like many of the other prophets. Like them, Jeremiah was largely rejected (Jer. 20:7-10) and suffered because of His work for God. Jeremiah was able to see many of his judgment prophecies come to pass, but not the restoration ones. Jeremiah had no wife nor children (Jer. 16:2).

### Key Verses

Jeremiah 1:5 “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.”

Jeremiah 9:23-24 Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty *man* glory in his might, Nor let the rich *man* glory in his riches; <sup>24</sup> But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I *am* the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,” says the Lord.

Jeremiah 13:23 Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil.

Jeremiah 17:7-8 “Blessed *is* the man who trusts in the Lord, And whose hope is the Lord. <sup>8</sup> For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, Which spreads out its roots by the river, And will not fear when heat comes; But its leaf will be green, And will not be anxious in the year of drought, Nor will cease from yielding fruit.

Jeremiah 17:9-10 The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; Who can know it? <sup>10</sup> I, the Lord, search the heart, / test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.

Jeremiah 18:4 And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. [God is the potter, and the house of Israel is the clay; if they repent, God will restore them.]

Jeremiah 20:9 Then I said, “I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name.” But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not.

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. [This verse is often taken out of its context. It is in a letter from Jeremiah to the exiles, instructing them how to live in Babylon and promising that God will bring them out after the 70 years captivity. It is not a general promise to all of God’s people in all ages. It does show us the kind of God that our God is, but His plan may not be so wonderful for each individual person.]

Jeremiah 30:15 Why do you cry about your affliction? Your sorrow is incurable. Because of the multitude of your iniquities, because your sins have increased, I have done these things to you.

Jeremiah 31:29-30 In those days they shall say no more: ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ <sup>30</sup> But every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.

Jeremiah 33:3 Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know. [God is inviting Jeremiah to pray to him.]

## Doctrine

The new covenant introduced in Jeremiah 31:31-40 is a prominent theme throughout the Old and New Testaments. The extent and timing of this covenant are subject of much discussion.

The holiness of God underpins the entire book. God had promised a curse if the people of Israel disobeyed His word, and they managed to do that very frequently and on an increasing basis over the years.

God is omnipresent and infinite (Jer. 23:24).

The evil of mankind is presented as well, including cruel punishments to Jeremiah in the stocks (Jer. 20:2-3) and the miry pit (38:4-6).

## Literary Features

Jeremiah used the services of Baruch as his scribe to write down the prophecy and narratives (Jer. 36). He also read it aloud in the temple and became a fugitive from the king because of the words in the book. The king burned the scroll piece by piece, but then God commanded Jeremiah to take another scroll and write the book again, only this time a revised and expanded version (Jer. 36:32).

As far as form, the book contains a lot of prose narration but even more poetry.

## Date Written and Timeline

Jeremiah ministered from approximately 627 B.C. until 570 or even a bit later. He was in Judah and Jerusalem until the third phase of the exile. He then was forced to go to Egypt with those who remained in the land after the destruction of Jerusalem. This makes him a prophet through all phases of the exile and a little bit into the 70 years of captivity. He was contemporary with Daniel (605–536 B.C.) and Ezekiel (593–572 B.C.). He ministered about 80 or more years after Micah, who is mentioned in Jer. 26:18. Like Ezekiel, he was a priest (1:1).

The kings mentioned or alluded to in the opening verses are:

<b>King</b>	<b>Dates of reign</b>
Josiah son of Amon	640–609 (Jeremiah starts in year 13, about 627)
Jehoahaz (not mentioned by name in Jeremiah 1)	Reign of 3 months in 609 (2 Chronicles 36:1-2)
Jehoiakim son of Josiah, also called Eliakim	609–597
Jehoiachin (not mentioned by name in Jeremiah 1)	Reign of 3 months and 10 days in 597 at age 18.
Zedekiah son of Josiah, originally named Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle	597–586 (until 11 <sup>th</sup> year, exile in 5 <sup>th</sup> month)

Jeremiah records very specific time markers for many of his prophecies and for events mentioned in the book. Because the chapters are not laid out in time order, a chronological Bible reading plan has you read Jeremiah out of chapter order. Here are the prophecies and events in approximately chronological order:

<b>Passage</b>	<b>Calendar Date</b>	<b>Text</b>
1:2	627 B.C.	13 <sup>th</sup> year of Josiah, son of Amon
25:3	627 B.C. to 604 B.C., though Jeremiah's ministry was much longer than this.	For 23 years, from the 13 <sup>th</sup> year of Josiah son of Amon
26:1, 27:1	609 B.C.	Beginning of Jehoiakim's reign
25:1	About 605/4 B.C. Note this is chronologically <i>before</i> 24:1. This was when Nebuchadnezzar took the throne of Babylon.	Fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah
25:11, 29:10	605–535 B.C., although there were three deportations and at least three large groups who returned at various times, making the length of captivity somewhat variable.	Seventy years of captivity are promised by God
45:1, 46:2	605 B.C. Early in Baruch's scribal career, about 605 B.C.	4 <sup>th</sup> year of Jehoiakim
36:1	605 B.C., around the time of the first deportation to Babylon	4 <sup>th</sup> year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah
49:34	597 B.C. at 21 years of age, reigned 11 years	Beginning of the reign of Zedekiah
24:1	Sometime after 597 B.C.	After Nebuchadnezzar carried away Jeconiah, son of Jehoiakim
29:2	596? B.C.	Shortly after Jeconiah, et al. were taken to Babylon
28:1	593 B.C.	4 <sup>th</sup> year of Zedekiah's reign

51:59	593 B.C. but it wasn't until the 11 <sup>th</sup> year of Zedekiah that Jerusalem was taken.	4 <sup>th</sup> year of Zedekiah's reign (?)
39:1, 52:4	585 B.C. Siege of Jerusalem begins	9 <sup>th</sup> year of Zedekiah king of Judah, 10 <sup>th</sup> month, 10 <sup>th</sup> day of the month
32:1	587 B.C., counting from 597 B.C. and 605 B.C. respectively.	10 <sup>th</sup> year of Zedekiah, 18 <sup>th</sup> year of Nebuchadnezzar
1:3	587/6 B.C.	11 <sup>th</sup> year of Zedekiah, son of Josiah
39:2, 52:6	587/6 B.C. Siege successful, city overrun; famine had been so bad that there was no food left.	11 <sup>th</sup> year of Zedekiah, 4 <sup>th</sup> month, 9 <sup>th</sup> day
52:12	587/6 B.C. 19 <sup>th</sup> year of King Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuzaradan burned the temple and the king's house, walls of Jerusalem broken down.	11 <sup>th</sup> year of Zedekiah, 5 <sup>th</sup> month, 10 <sup>th</sup> day of the month
41:1	586 B.C. About 3 months after the Babylonian takeover	7 <sup>th</sup> month
52:31	561 B.C., Evil-Merodach, King of Babylon, released Jehoiachin from prison.	37 <sup>th</sup> year of Jehoiachin's captivity, 12 <sup>th</sup> month, 25 <sup>th</sup> day of the month

## Related Scriptures

The Last Supper narratives mention the New Covenant (Matt. 26:28, Mark 14:24, Luke 22:20). Paul refers to the same in 1 Cor. 11:25 when he instructs the Corinthian church about the proper practice at the Lord's Table service.

Paul speaks of his ministry as a new covenant sort of ministry in 2 Cor. 3:6.

Hebrews 8-9 and 12 speak of the New Covenant replacing the old covenant, and Jesus being the mediator of that covenant.

Daniel 9:2 explains that Daniel read Jeremiah and grasped the meaning of his prophecy about the 70 years of desolation for Jerusalem during the captivity. Ezra 1:1 and 2 Chronicles 36:21-22 refers to the same thing.

2 Chronicles 35:25 and 36:12 mention Jeremiah as well. The former concerns his lament for King Josiah who died after foolishly going out to battle against Pharaoh Necho. 36:12 says that King Zedekiah did not humble himself before Jeremiah.

Matthew 2:17 records how the people in Ramah wept because their children were no more. He drew an analogy from Jeremiah 31:15 where the mothers of Israel wept over their deceased sons who were lost in battle against Babylon. The babies in Matthew's time did not suffer in the same situation, but they nonetheless died and the parents' mourning was substantially similar to that which happened centuries before.

The populace of Israel was well aware of Jeremiah, because some of them thought that Jesus was Jeremiah returned from the dead (Matt. 16:14).

Jeremiah also receives mention in Matt. 27:9 where Judas had some remorse and returned the betrayal money to the temple because he recognized that Jesus had been innocent. 30 pieces of silver was the price of a slave—that is all that the nation's leaders thought of Jesus. He was worth no more than a slave.

## Place in the Bible's Storyline

Jeremiah calls the Jewish people to faithfulness, but when they do not respond, he counsels them to submit to God's judgment and live under the hegemony of Babylon to preserve the nation for a time of restoration in the future. God promises through Jeremiah a new and permanent covenant to replace the old one which they could not keep, with glorious promises regarding the nation's spiritual and physical prosperity. Through this means, God planned to preserve the nation for a glorious future in the Messianic Kingdom.

## Outline

- I. Preparation of Jeremiah, 1:1-19
- II. Judgment Against Judah, 2:1-45:5
- III. Judgment Against the Nations, 46:1-51:64
- IV. Summary of the Fall of Jerusalem, 586 B.C., 52:1-34

## Lessons

What are some important lessons or applications to the Christian from the book of Jeremiah?

Jeremiah 38:4-6 record that Jeremiah was confined to a dungeon where he sank into the mire. Unfortunately, sometimes God's messengers are severely mistreated for telling the truth. This has happened time after time throughout world history. People disregarded Noah, did not listen to Joseph's dreams, rebelled against Moses, etc.

As with other prophets, God employs Jeremiah to write about the impending and ongoing judgements against His chosen people Israel. But He also promises future restoration. Our own lives may be in a place of chastisement or judgment at the present, but if we trust in Christ, we can be assured that there will come a time of rest and blessing. Jeremiah offers hope.

# Haggai

Haggai is the second shortest book in the Old Testament. Only Obadiah is shorter. Haggai and Zechariah prophesied about the same time.

## Summary and Message

The short book of Haggai consists of four prophetic messages from God to the leaders and people of Israel who had returned from the exile. These messages center around the call to rebuild the temple (despite the prevailing opposition) and the blessings and curses that are associated with either rebuilding or not doing so. The people of Israel obeyed the prophetic message to rebuild. The final message has to do with the defeat of the Gentile kingdoms and the elevation of Zerubbabel as God's servant. The promises of future glory served to encourage the people who were only able to construct a far less glorious temple.

## Key Verses

Haggai 1:5, 7 Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways!"

Haggai 1:12 Then Zerubbabel...and Joshua...the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet...

Haggai 1:14 "So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel..., governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua...the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God.

Haggai 2:5 According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!

Haggai 2:9 'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of hosts.

## Doctrine

- The doctrine of God's faithfulness, particularly to His covenant 900 years earlier.
- The priority of loving God above our own comforts, like dwelling in our paneled houses while the house of the Lord lies in ruins.
- What is missing from Haggai is mention of the idolatry that plagued Israel before the exile. It is often said that the people were cured of that idolatry. But what took its place was a more subtle form, that of comfort and self-focus that is not as easy to recognize as idolatry, but it still puts God in second place.
- Haggai alludes to the second coming of Messiah in 2:6 and 2:21 and possibly with the "Desire of All Nations" phrase in 2:7.
- God's power and glory will be manifest openly.

## Literary Features

The book is arranged chronologically in four prophetic announcements as they come to Haggai from the Lord.

Four times the Lord calls the people to consider, to think deeply about what he is saying. See 1:5, 1:7, 2:15, and 2:18.

Haggai uses the phrase “the LORD of hosts” in 12 of his 38 verses.

## Date Written and Timeline

Haggai received the prophecies from God in August through December of 520 B.C. It was probably written shortly after that.

- Around 539 B.C. the Babylonian empire was defeated and the Persians took over. Their policy was to return exiles to their original homelands, the reverse of the Babylonian and Assyrian policies.
- 538 B.C. – Ezra 1:1-4 – Cyrus makes a proclamation that the temple is to be rebuilt. People return to the land.
- 537/536 B.C. – Ezra 3:8 – Zerubbabel and Joshua begin to rebuild the temple.
- 535-521 B.C. – Ezra 4:1-5, 23 – Through the reign of Cyrus until the reign of Darius, the efforts of the people are opposed.
- 520 B.C. – Haggai ministers and exhorts the people to finish the temple. The building of the temple began anew, but the temple was not dedicated until four years later.
- 520-464 B.C. – Ezra 4:6-23 – Opposition to the work on the city continues throughout the reigns of Darius (521-486 B.C., 35 years) and of Ahasuerus (485-465 B.C., 20 years).
- 516 B.C. – the temple is dedicated. It had been destroyed in 586 B.C., so the length of time was 70 years as prophesied by Jeremiah.
- 464-423 B.C. – Artaxerxes I reigns over Persia.
- 458 B.C. – Ezra returns to Jerusalem.
- 444 B.C. – Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem. Opposition continues through the building of the walls of the city. The work of God is opposed constantly throughout the period from 535 to 444, about 90 years.
- 433 B.C. – Nehemiah makes another trip to Jerusalem.
- 433-424 B.C. – Malachi writes his prophecy. He and Nehemiah may have overlapped.

## Related Scriptures

The coming Messiah is a descendant of Zerubbabel (Matthew 1:12).

The cursing/blessing theme from Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 is relevant in Haggai.

Ezra 4 describes opposition to the rebuilding projects. Ezra 5 mentions Haggai and Zechariah who encouraged the temple project and helped them to complete it. Ezra 6:14 records that Haggai and Zechariah observed the completion of the temple construction.

Hebrews 12:26-27 quotes Haggai 2:6 and 2:21.

## Place in the Bible's Storyline

### WRITE

#### Outline

- I. First Message: Rebuild the Temple for the Glory of God, 1:1-15
- II. Second Message: Encouragement with a Promise of God's Future Glory, 2:1-9
- III. Third Message: Defilement Removed and Blessing Comes, 2:10-19
- IV. Fourth Message: Destruction of the Nations and Elevation of Zerubbabel as God's ruler, 2:20-23

#### Lessons

For those under the rule of the Mosaic covenant who were rebellious against God, He withheld his blessing of rain, fruit, grain, and livestock. Though we do not live under the rule of the Law today, we live under the same God and can expect difficulties if we live wickedly (Prov 13:15). (We can also expect difficulties if we live godly lives.)

Haggai reminds us that when God asks for something to be done, it needs to be done faithfully, not half-heartedly or lazily or after much delay. Obedience is important for the children of God. This is true alongside the doctrine of God's grace. That is, grace does not make a call for obedience to be "legalistic."

## Malachi

### Summary and Message

God critically evaluates the spiritual condition of Israel and finds the people living far from Him. They were giving defiled sacrifices, the priests were not following God's way, they were offering fake worship, dissolving marriages, not supplying the required offerings, speaking harshly against God among other evil things. God promises a great blessing for repentant obedience and also promises the coming of the Messiah to judge and cleanse Israel. The glorious kingdom age seemed to the people to be slow in coming and this was disheartening, yet they were slow to recognize their own sinfulness was the cause of their poor conditions.

### Key Verses

Malachi 1:11 "For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, my name *shall be* great among the Gentiles."

Malachi 2:7 "For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and *people* should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts."

Malachi 3:1 "And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant."

Malachi 4:5 “I will send to you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.”

## Doctrine

- God’s sovereign free choice of Jacob over Esau (1:2-3).
- God is loving (1:2).
- God’s greatness (1:11).
- The coming of the Messiah (3:1).
- God’s immutability (3:6).
- The Mosaic covenant and its Levitical subset was the standard of Israelite behavior even in this late stage of Jewish history (*covenant* is found a half-dozen times in the book). God was once again calling them back to Exodus 19.

## Literary Features

Malachi records how the people pushed back against God by asking Him questions. You can read their questions in 1:2, 1:6, 1:7, 2:14, 2:17, 3:7, 3:8, 3:13, 3:14.

God asked them several questions of His own. For example, see 1:6, 1:8, 1:13, 3:2. At least one seems to come from Malachi himself (2:10).

The book is characterized by disputation and prophecy.

Malachi uses the phrase “the LORD of hosts” in 24 times.

## Date Written and Timeline

Malachi wrote at the end of the Old Testament era, about 433-424 B.C. but we cannot be certain about these dates. The events of Nehemiah may have come shortly after Malachi or shortly before. Malachi and Nehemiah describe some of the same sins in Israel which supports the supposition that they overlapped in time.

One hundred years before Malachi’s prophecy, the nation had begun to return from exile. They delayed in rebuilding the temple, instead focusing on themselves (see Haggai about this). But by the time of Malachi, the temple was built, the city was built, and the wall was recently or soon to be rebuilt.

About 450 years later, John the Baptist announced the coming of the kingdom and the need for repentance (Matthew 3).

## Related Scriptures

Was the messenger promised in Malachi 3:1 the same as John the Baptist, or does this prophecy await fulfillment in the end times?

## Place in the Bible's Storyline

### WRITE

#### Outline

- I. Introduction, 1:1
- II. God Rebukes Israel, 1:2-2:17
  - A. God's love for Israel and opposition to Edom, 1:2-5
  - B. God's rebuke for priestly failure, 1:6-2:9
  - C. God's rebuke for various covenant offenses, 2:10-17
- III. God Promises Judgment and Restoration, 3:1-4:6
  - A. The second coming of Christ for judgment, 3:1-5
  - B. God calls for repentance and promises covenant blessing, 3:6-18
  - C. The second coming of Christ for restoration, 4:1-6

#### Lessons

We are reminded again in Malachi of God's faithfulness to His covenant and His mercy toward people who fail. That He would even have a prophet write this book to alert His people to their problems is itself a mercy from God. We have the Bible, a sign of God's mercy to us!

Like in Haggai, we see in Malachi's prophecy the corruption and apathy of God's people. We too often fall into the same pattern of thinking and behavior about the church and the Word of God.

## Matthew

### Summary and Message

The gospel of Matthew is an account of the birth, life, and death of Jesus of Nazareth. Matthew, also known as Levi and a tax collector, wrote about the birth of Israel's Messianic king, described the early announcement of the kingdom and the teaching of its king and his followers, recorded authenticating signs done by the king, explained how he was rejected by the leaders and many of the people of the nation, his further teaching to his followers, the persecution he experienced, and his death at the hands of the Romans and Jews, after which he arose from the dead and left important instructions for his followers to carry out in his long-but-temporary absence from the earth.

Matthew's message to the church is that we need to become followers of this king and obey his teaching, and then persuade our neighbors to do the same.

### Key Verses

Matthew 1:1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.

Matthew 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 3:2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (The message of John the Baptist, as well as Jesus, Matt. 4:17).

Matthew 5:3... Blessed *are* the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...

Matthew 5:17 Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

Matthew 6:9-13 In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...

Matthew 6:19-20 Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Matthew 6:33-34 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day *is* its own trouble.

Matthew 7:7-8 Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Matthew 7:13 Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.

Matthew 11:28 Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 16:18 Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Matthew 22:37-40 Jesus said to him, “ ‘*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*’ This is *the* first and great commandment. And *the* second *is* like it: ‘*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

Matthew 28:19-20 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” Amen.

## Doctrine

The book of Matthew is very Jewish. Chapter 10 discusses on a mission for the disciples that is only for the nation of Israel (10:6). The opening verses are a genealogy, very reminiscent of the Old Testament genealogies. The genealogy ties Jesus back to David and Abraham to show that He has the right to the Davidic throne. The kingdom is mentioned in 55 verses and is the subject of many more.

Speaking of the kingdom, Matthew writes how John the Baptist and Jesus offer the kingdom to the Jewish people, but it is clear by chapter 12 that they reject it (see 12:24). Matthew 21:43 records Jesus saying that the kingdom would be taken from that nation and given to a nation that bears kingdom fruit, by which I understand Jesus to mean a future edition of the nation of Israel, one that exhibits repentance over their sin.

A key feature in the book is the Lord's teaching in parables, which starts in chapter 13. The gospels altogether record 43 of our Lord's parables. Parables are meant to reveal truth to those who are desirous to learn it, and at the same time to conceal truth from those who are not serious about following Jesus. They are at one and the same time both a blessing and a judgment.

Matthew writes about the Lord's ministry which sits at the intersection of the historical eras of the Law and the beginning of the Church, with the added complexity that He is preaching about the kingdom which was offered but then postponed and awaits a future day, *and* that there are elements of the future especially focused on Israel. Because of this, it can be somewhat confusing as to what applies to us in the church and how. Here are some guidelines:

1. The Sermon on the Mount contains teaching that is broadly applicable to us in the church, but some parts await the establishment of the kingdom of Christ to be fully operational. Some of the teaching at that time will be a little obsoleted. A part of it instructs us to pray for the kingdom to come (6:9-13) which will be unnecessary when Jesus returns and has established His kingdom. Matthew 5:39 tells us to turn the other cheek, which is a good teaching for individuals to follow in general, but without guardrails could be taken by an abusive person to an extreme against God's people. The righteous government of the kingdom will prevent such teachings from being exploited, and our governments today should do the same. But a vast majority of the teaching is directly applicable to us because it outlines conduct of citizens who are fit for Christ's kingdom, and Christians today *are* future kingdom citizens and should live as such.

2. The Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 and 25 often confuses modern readers. These chapters are Jewish centric, speaking mostly of a time to come in which there will be great tribulation on the earth, just before the return of Jesus. The Jewish people are called to be wise and faithful during that time, which applies similarly to us in our own time. The judgment recorded in Matthew 25 has to do with the *nations* of the world (25:32) which will be judged based on their treatment of "the least of these My brethren" which we understand to be the Jewish people. The people of the nations will give evidence of their faith and love for the Lord by their conduct toward the Jewish nation during its time of trial.

3. The whole idea of the kingdom has confused Christians for most of the history of the church, leading to fuzzy thinking on the matter. For clarity, consider the following. The kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven are the exact same thing (Matt. 19:23-24). The kingdom is different than the church—Matthew 16:18 says that Jesus will build His church, *and* He will give the keys of the kingdom to him. The authority of the kingdom conveyed here has to do with loosing/binding and the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 18:18 and John 20:23). This text need not be read to equate the church and the kingdom; in fact they are

separate entities, though with an overlapping relationship because the church people will be members of the kingdom, and the head of the church is also the king of the kingdom.

Matthew records Jesus calling Himself the “Son of Man” about 30 times. This phrase does not merely refer to His humanity, but to His deity, as the preeminent man, the perfect man, and the one who will come on the clouds of heaven to receive the kingdom from the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:13-14).

## Literary Features

Matthew’s book is a “gospel” which is a unique genre. It can be classed under the heading of narrative, but it is a theological narrative and a biography of Jesus’s teaching including parables, His miracles, and the response of people. It is also unique in that it is written about events that occurred before the beginning of the church, but the book is written *for* the church. It is not a typical biography, however, in that it omits most of 30 years of the person’s life and does not give specific dates. It is composed for the specific purpose of introducing the audience to Jesus and the most significant points about Him.

Matthew contains Jesus’s five major teaching sections called “discourses.” They are:

1. Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7)
2. Commissioning of the 12 for Jewish ministry (Matthew 10)
3. Kingdom Parables (Matthew 13)
4. Discourse on Humility and Sin (Matthew 18)
5. The Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24–25)

## Author, Date Written, and Timeline

Church tradition from the earliest times ascribes this gospel to Matthew’s authorship. His name means “gift of the Lord” from its Hebrew roots. Origen states that the first of the gospels was written by Matthew the tax collector and that its intended audience consisted of converts from Judaism.

It appears that the book was written before the temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. It is thought to have been written quite soon after the Lord’s ascension, perhaps as early as 50 AD. It covers events from the birth of Christ (around 4 BC?), four major appearances at Passover (27-30 AD), up to His death and resurrection in the spring of 30 AD.

## Related Scriptures

Matthew shows a mastery of the Old Testament. Besides more distant echoes, he quotes or cites from at least 33 chapters in the Old Testament: Exodus 3, 20, 21, Numbers 30, Deut. 5, 6, 8, 19, 24, Leviticus 18, 19, 20, Psalm 6, 8, 22, 78, 91, 110, 118, Isaiah 6, 7, 9, 13, 29, 40, 42, 53, 56, Jer. 31, Hosea 6, 11, Micah 5, Zechariah 9, Malachi 3. And this is a major feature of the book: Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophetic Scriptures about the Messiah and God’s kingdom.

## Place in the Bible's Storyline

### WRITE

#### Outline

- I. Messiah's Royal Credentials and Birth Narrative, 1:1-2:23
- II. Early Ministry of the Messiah, 3:1-10:42
- III. Rejection of Messiah, 11:1-12:50
- IV. Messiah's Post-Rejection Ministry, 13:1-20:34
- V. The Last Week of Messiah's Pre-Cross Ministry, 21:1-25:46
- VI. Passover, Betrayal, Death, 26:1-27:66
- VII. Resurrection and the Great Commission, 28:1-20

Some suggest outlining the book around the phrase "from that time" (NKJV translation) so that the book is divided into three segments: introduction to the Messiah (1:1-4:16), Messiah's ministry (4:17-16:20) and the completion of the Messiah's ministry (16:21-28:20). But this seems to miss the key hinge point of the nation's rejection of the Messiah.

#### Lessons

We cannot miss the most important message having to do with Jesus as the Messiah who died for the sins of the world. He gave himself as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). He gave His body and blood for the remission of sins (Matt. 26:28). He invites and urges and commands us to repent of our sin and believe in Him.

The Gospel of Matthew takes us through a comprehensive account of Jesus's life, ministry, miracles, teaches, death, burial, and resurrection. This is enough information to believe in Him, perhaps without any other information at all.

The book of Matthew presents a radically different way of living than the world lives. Being a bright moral light, not craving the things the world desires, forgiving people for their sin, looking for God's kingdom, sacrificing for others, not allowing lust or anger to find a home in our hearts...all these and many more are big changes from a life lived for self and the world.

Several parables teach about the need for readiness in light of the Lord's imminent return. During His absence, He calls us to be good stewards of all the resources He has left in our care (Matt. 25:14-30).

Jesus did not leave any doubt about his view of religious hypocrisy. Pretending to be righteous but not actually being so in your heart is very displeasing to God the Father.

The last words of our Lord, known as the Great Commission, are our marching orders today. If He thought it was important, so should we!

# Mark

## Summary and Message

Mark is the “gospel of the servant.” It is the shortest of the gospels. It omits the birth narrative of Christ and begins with the public ministry of John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus. It covers many of Jesus’s miracles and teachings, particularly concerning the kingdom of God being near and the need to repent and believe the gospel of the Son of God. Mark also records some of Jesus’s parables, but Matthew and Luke have much wider coverage of that style of Jesus’s teaching (and three times as many parables).

## Key Verses

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the **Son of God**.

Mark 3:11 And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, “You are the **Son of God**.”

Mark 15:39 So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, “Truly this Man was the **Son of God!**”

Mark 1:11 Then a voice came from heaven, “You are **My beloved Son**, in whom I am well pleased.”

Mark 9:7 And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is **My beloved Son**. Hear Him!”

Mark 1:14-15 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, <sup>15</sup> and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

Mark 7:18-20 So He said to them, “Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, <sup>19</sup> because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, *thus* purifying all foods?” <sup>20</sup> And He said, “What comes out of a man, that defiles a man.

Mark 8:29 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and said to Him, “You are the Christ.”

Mark 8:34-37 When He had called the people to *Himself*, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? <sup>37</sup> Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Mark 9:24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”

Mark 10:45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Some have outlined the book using this verse: the first part of the gospel is about Jesus as a Servant, and the second about Jesus as a ransom. This is interesting, but a big part of His service was to give His life. He served humanity by dying for us, so a hard line of division at the word *and* is not entirely warranted, as if before the *and* is one topic, and after is a different topic.

Mark 12:29-31 Jesus answered him, “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.’<sup>30</sup> And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment.<sup>31</sup> And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Mark 14:36<sup>36</sup> And He said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.”

Mark 16:6 But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him.

## Doctrine

At 6:1-6, Mark indicates a hindrance to the work of the Lord due to unbelief. The text says, “He could do no mighty work...” Christians understand this to refer to the fact that God is not usually pleased to work mightily apart from faith. He can overcome unbelief any time He wishes, and can work in spite of it. There is no limitation in God or reduction of His sovereign power in the face of unbelief.

Mark, although shorter than the other gospels, almost the same number of miracles as Matthew and Luke. John covers many fewer, as his focus is elsewhere. These miracles were not only authentication of Jesus’s ministry, but helped many people with desperate needs. These miracles showed Jesus had power over leprosy, fever, general sickness, weather, demons, paralysis, death, bleeding, stroke (withered hand), food production, water (walking on it), seizures, blindness, trees, deafness and muteness, and several variations on these.

Jesus has power not only over physical afflictions, but also sin. Mark records his teachings about forgiveness in four different chapters.

Mark opens with an emphasis on Jesus as “the Son of God.” We see above the three times in the gospel where Jesus is referred to that way, and twice as “My beloved Son.”

## Literary Features

Mark seems to write the gospel with a focus on a Gentile audience. He omits the genealogical material and the birth narrative that would be important to the Jews. He jumps right into the public teaching and miracles of the Lord Jesus in order to focus on the most pertinent information for Gentiles in the present age.

Mark’s text is a gospel, that is, a theological narrative about the life and ministry of Jesus.

Mark is a fast-paced account. He uses the word “immediately” 24 times.

The last twelve verses of the gospel are disputed as to their originality. They certainly are of a different style than before, so many versions of the Bible put “brackets” around those verses to indicate there is uncertainty as to the originality of those words. The earliest manuscripts lack these verses.

## Author, Date Written, and Timeline

Although not explicitly named, Christians from all the way back to the early church have considered the author to be John Mark, who was associated with Paul and Peter. He had first-hand knowledge of the circumstances of Jesus’s life and ministry as well as being an associate of Peter, Paul and Luke. It is generally believed that Mark is speaking of himself in 14:51-52, and if that is the case, then he was present at the arrest of Jesus and must have been closely watching the events surrounding the crucifixion and resurrection.

We do not know information that can pinpoint the date of writing, but it seems to be well after the events and some reflection on them. Scholars suggest the years of 50-60 AD. It was likely the first gospel written. The gospel seems to have been written before the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

Mark may have written from Rome, as suggested by Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria (late second century).

## Related Scriptures

Mark records several OT texts being quoted by Jesus.

Mark 4:12	Isaiah 6:9-10
Mark 10:7-8	Genesis 2:24
Mark 11:9-10	Psalms 118:25-26
Mark 12:26	Exodus 3:6, 15
Mark 13:24-25	Isaiah 13:10, 34:4
Mark 15:34	Psalms 22:1

## Place in the Bible’s Storyline

### WRITE

### Outline

- I. Prologue, 1:1-13
- II. Ministry in Galilee, Capernaum, and nearby regions, 1:14-7:23
- III. Ministry in Tyre, Sidon, Decapolis, Caesarea, etc., 7:24-10:52
- IV. The Last Week of Pre-Cross Ministry, Jerusalem, 11:1-16:20

Mark gives an extensive record of Jesus’s ministry around the Sea of Galilee and in general the northern region around Israel. Six of Mark’s 16 chapters focus on the last week of our Lord’s life, including the Triumphal entry, teaching of the final days, Lord’s Supper, crucifixion, and resurrection.

## Lessons

Very often Jesus tells his miracle-recipients to *not* tell others about Him! (1:34, 44; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36–37; 8:26, 30; 9:9).<sup>4</sup> This seems strange, but a simple practical reason could account for this: if many people knew about His healing power, the crowds could become unmanageable. Like many famous people today, it becomes hard for them to move about without a lot of difficulty. A theological reason is also at play: Jesus’s main mission was not to heal people. He did it to show He was really the Messiah, and did miracles almost “on the side” to help people, but His main mission was to teach the good news and die for sinners. He was not a healer primarily, nor a political deliverer. This reminds us that our focus should not be on deeds of mercy or political reform, but rather the proclamation of the gospel.

Regarding 6:1-6 and the hindrance of unbelief, let us resolve by God’s grace not to disbelieve, so that we may experience the full power of God’s work in our lives and church.

## John

### Summary and Message

John conveniently tells us his message in 20:31. He wrote about the signs that Jesus did in order that the reader may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by so believing would have eternal life through Him.

### Key Verses

John 1:1-2 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

John 3:16-17 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

John 13:35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

John 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.

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<sup>4</sup> Kendell H. Easley, [Ultimate Bible Guide](#), Revised & Expanded, Ultimate Guide Series (Holman Reference, 2018), 260.

## Doctrine

The opening verses of John's gospel, along with many other verses throughout, show the deity of Jesus. He is the Son of God and God the Son. He is worshipped, He is omniscient, all powerful, etc. The many "I am" statements in John further demonstrate this truth, in which John shows us the connection between Jesus and the "I AM" of Exodus 3:14.

1. John 6:35 And Jesus said to them, "**I am the bread of life**. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. (Also John 6:48, 51).
2. John 8:12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "**I am the light of the world**. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." Also John 9:5 As long as I am in the world, **I am the light of the world.**"
3. John 8:24 Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that **I am He**, you will die in your sins." (Also John 8:28, 13:19, 18:5-6, 18:8)
4. John 8:58 Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, **I AM.**"
5. John 10:7 Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, **I am the door** of the sheep. (Also John 10:9).
6. John 10:11 "**I am the good shepherd**. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. (Also John 10:14)
7. John 10:36 do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, '**I am the Son of God**'?"
8. John 11:25 Jesus said to her, "**I am the resurrection and the life**. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.
9. John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "**I am the way, the truth, and the life**. No one comes to the Father except through Me.
10. John 15:1 "**I am the true vine**, and My Father is the vinedresser. (Also John 15:5).
11. John 18:37 Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that **I am a king**. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

## Literary Features

John writes in very plain language, but at the same time it is very profound.

Following the summary verse in 20:31, it is fruitful to look at the key points of John's gospel narrative regarding signs, belief, and life. He elevates the miracles ("signs") as a key point. There are seven of them, followed by the resurrection, and then one more in the epilogue.

1. John 2:1-11 Turn water into wine. John 2:11 This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.
2. John 4:46-54 Heal the nobleman's son at Capernaum. John 4:54 This again *is* the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee (in Cana).
3. John 5:1-16 Heal the paralyzed man at the Sheep Gate.

4. John 6:5-14 Feed 5000 men, plus women and children. John 6:14 Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.”
5. John 6:18-20 Walk on the water.
6. John 9:1-41 Heal the blind man with mud and a washing at Siloam. John 9:16 It became a debate among the people as to whether Jesus was from God or not. The signs indicated He was.
7. John 11:40-43 Raise Lazarus from the dead. John 12:18 Many people came to see Jesus because they heard about this sign.
8. John 20:1-29 Rise from the dead as He promised in John 2:18-21. This was the ultimate “sign” which answered the unbelieving query of the Jewish leaders when they demanded a sign, and Jesus said no sign would be given to them except the sign of the prophet Jonah (Matt. 12:38-39, 16:1-4).
9. John 21:1-4-7 Large catch of fish.

It is interesting to note that John was more selective than the other gospel writers. Each of them recorded at least twice the number of miracles as John. John considered his selection and variety of miracles sufficient to prove His point—that Jesus had to be the Son of God, thus deity, because He miraculously healed the sick, fed the hungry, transformed plain water into wine, had power over nature and even death.

The signs Jesus did were widely publicized (John 3:2), and some people believed in Jesus during His early ministry (John 2:23) and but many did not believe in Him despite the clarity of the signs (John 12:37).

Besides the signs that Jesus did, John emphasized the ideas of belief (100 times) and life (nearly 50 times) that would come to one who truly believed. John uses the word “believe” far more often than the other gospels. Take note, however, that this does not mean John is downplaying the doctrine of repentance. The kind of belief John is talking about is repentant faith, not un-repentant faith. That doctrine had been well established by the other gospels and the book of Acts by the time John wrote his gospel.

## Author, Date Written, and Timeline

The author of the gospel has traditionally been understood by the church to be the apostle John. This is primarily because John’s disciple Polycarp (70-160 AD) passed on the information of his authorship to Irenaeus (130-200 AD). The former overlapped with John’s lifespan by as many as nearly 30 years, and the latter with his mentor 30 years. Therefore, up to 100 years after John’s life, there were only two generations of witnesses to the original author of the epistle. He also refers to himself indirectly as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” but never by name, unlike the other gospels which refer to John by name many times. A process of elimination can be used in John’s gospel to figure out who the author is, for he seems to be one of the twelve, one of the inner circle, and the one who is called the disciple whom Jesus loved.

John likely wrote from Ephesus, after the fall of Jerusalem, sometime 80 to 90 AD, before his shorter letters and Revelation.

John wrote well after the other gospel writers, and added new material and new emphases that they did not. Mature theological reflection over the course of decades, along with a close walk with the ascended Christ, brought him to the point that he could do this.

## Related Scriptures

John records six miracles that the other gospel writers do not. He also writes about the feeding of the 50,000 and Jesus walking on Sea of Galilee, which are also found in at least two of the synoptic gospels.

John 12:13 quotes the triumphal entry celebrants as they call out in the words of Psalm 118:25-26 “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!”

John also refers to the voice of one crying in the wilderness, zeal for God’s house eating up the Messiah, bread from heaven, about the King coming on a donkey’s colt, John 12:38 quotes Isaiah 53:1, and John 12:40 quotes Isaiah 61:10. John refers to Judas as the one who lifted up his heel against the Lord (Psalm 41:9 in John 13:18). He also references causeless hatred (Ps. 35:19), the lots cast for Jesus’s clothing (Ps. 22:18), none of his bones being broken (Ex. 12:46, Num. 9:12, Ps 34:20), and how in the future Israel will look upon the one Whom they pierced (Zech. 12:10).

John mentions the kingdom specifically in 3:3, 3:5, and 18:36, but nowhere else. This is quite different than in Matthew, Mark, and Luke who refer to the kingdom many dozens of times. For John, the kingdom has an other-worldly character and it is not present at this time. The Lord’s words while on earth confirmed this, but with the destruction of Jerusalem years prior to John’s writing of the gospel, it was clear that the kingdom was not now. The quick-kingdom expectations in the minds of the early disciples had likely matured now to a point where they realized their Acts 1:7-8 ministry was focused on the church, not the kingdom. They were not to focus on the times or seasons of that age, but instead on the present age of the Spirit’s ministry.

## Place in the Bible’s Storyline

John provides an important addition to the synoptic gospels, focusing less on the large number of miracles and parables and more on the person and work of Jesus and its meaning. It is sometimes called the “spiritual” gospel because of this different focus. It adds some information that the other gospels do not provide. It has been universally received by the church as part of the canon of Scripture.

## Outline

- I. Prologue, 1:1-18
- II. Beginning of Jesus’ Public Ministry, 1:19-4:54
- III. Mixed Response to Jesus’ Ministry, 5:1-12:50
- IV. Upper Room Discourse: Preparing the Disciples, 13:1-17:26
- V. Suffering of Christ, Death, and Resurrection, 18:1-21:25

## Lessons

In John 20:24-29 we learn a lesson about doubt and belief. God is gracious with doubting unbelief, and Thomas soon came to believe in Jesus and His resurrection. He also blesses people who have believed yet not seen.

We learn the lesson of humility from John the Baptist. In John 1:27 he said he was not worth to loose the sandal from Jesus's foot. Then in 3:30 he says that Jesus must increase, but He must decrease. That is true for all of us.

John invites us to think deeply about spiritual things. His references to light and life in the first chapter (1:4) as well as in 8:12 cause us to pause and think about darkness and death and our relationship to those things.

Another lesson we learn from John is about grace. Jesus came full of grace and truth. He was the Lamb of God (John 1:29 and 36) who takes away the world's sin. Jesus came to save, not to condemn, and this should impact our witness in a positive way for Him. We are not about condemning in the first place, but about offering eternal life.

## Acts

### Summary and Message

The book of Acts is a letter to a man named Theophilus, who may have been a patron of Luke, supporting his travels and writing. Acts records how the Lord Jesus Christ worked to build His church in fulfillment of His promise in Matthew 16:18. It is the continuance of Luke's carefully researched history of the events of the Lord's birth, ministry, death, and resurrection in the Gospel of Luke. Those things recorded in Luke's gospel were what "Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). It is clear that Luke wants us to understand that Acts covers what "Jesus *continued* to do and teach." This continued ministry was through the Holy Spirit instead of through the direct presence of Jesus. His ministry through the apostles spread the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome and to other farther-flung parts of the Roman empire.

### Key Verses

Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Acts 4:12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Acts 6:2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.

Acts 10:28 But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

Acts 16:14 Now a certain woman named Lydia heard *us*. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.

Acts 16:30-31 And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.

Acts 20:27 For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

Acts 20:28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

## Doctrine

The sovereign purpose of **God** and the responsibility of man are found in a single verse, Acts 2:23, which says, "Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death."

The role of **Jesus as Messiah** is emphasized numerous times in Paul's preaching.

The ministry of the **Holy Spirit** is everywhere in the book, from guiding the apostles in the days after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus to the birth of the church, to further guiding the church in its first decades (Acts 1:2, 5, 8; 2:17, 33, 38; 4:8, 31; 5:3, 32; 6:5, 10; 10:44 and many other passages).

We might not think of **missions** as a "doctrine" but it is an important doctrine of the church. Missions does not just mean sharing the gospel to far away places, because it started at home (Jerusalem). But then the gospel did move out in farther geographical rings as God's people took it to the uttermost parts of the earth. The early verses of Acts 13 alert us that the church should be ready to send out its own to minister the gospel in other places more needy.

The **church** is prominent in Acts. Its "birthday" in Acts 2 marks the first time the church ever existed. It is made up of believing, baptized people who gather for worship, instruction, fellowship, and evangelism. The church shares together when needed. Churches are planted throughout the Roman empire. Because the apostles focused on the work of the church, we are justified to believe that we should do the same until the Lord returns.

God's **impartiality** is an important theme especially in chapters 10-11. Peter learned that salvation has come to all people, not just the Jewish nation.

Fulfilled prophecy is an important teaching in Acts. Many times throughout the book we learn that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament (see Related Scriptures below).

## Literary Features

Acts is a historical-theological narrative. It follows the early ministry of the apostles, especially Peter, and then focuses on the missionary work of the Apostle Paul.

Luke records 16 sermons or sermon summaries:

1. Peter, 5 sermons, 2:14-40, 3:12-26, 4:8-12, 5:29-32, 10:34-43.
2. Stephen, 1 sermon, 7:2-43.
3. Paul, 9 sermons, 13:16-41, 14:14-17, 17:22-31, 20:17-35, 21:40-22:21, 23:1-6, 24:10-21, 26:1-29, 28:23-28. Three other times Luke mentions that Paul preached, but he does not record extensive content: 9:20 (Christ is the Son of God), 13:5 (to Jews in the synagogues), 20:7 (at Troas until midnight).
4. James, 1 sermon, 15:13-21.

There are sections of the book where “we” is a prominent pronoun. Luke is at those times with Paul, and this fits with a process of elimination for other possible associates of Paul. There are other sections of the gospel which Luke writes in the third person because he was not present for the events.

## Author, Date Written, and Timeline

Acts covers about 30 years of history right after Jesus was raised and ascended to Heaven. Tradition passes down to us that the human author is Luke, who refers to it as his second book, a “part 2” follow-on to the Gospel of Luke. Luke likely wrote a journal during the subsequent years as he circulated among the early Christians and traveled with Paul, compiling the book along the way, and finishing when Paul was imprisoned in Rome for two years under house arrest. This would put the book’s completion in the early 60s A.D. This understanding is strengthened by the fact that Luke does not mention certain key historical events like the destruction of Jerusalem, or the persecution under Nero. Acts does end somewhat abruptly and we could wish for more. God ordained what we have to be enough for the church to go on for the remainder of this age.

## Related Scriptures

Especially in sermons recorded in Acts we read numerous quotations from the Old Testament. These demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ, and that God is at work now among the church. For example:

Old Testament	New Testament	Quotation
Psalms 69:25	Acts 1:20	Let his dwelling place be desolate...
Psalms 109:8	Acts 1:20	Let another take his office.
Joel 2:28-32	Acts 2:17-21	And it shall come to pass...that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh...

Psalm 16:8-11	Acts 2:26-28	...You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your holy one to see corruption...
Psalm 110:1	Acts 2:34-35	The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make your enemies Your footstool."
Genesis 22:18	Acts 3:25	In your seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed.
Deut. 18:15	Acts 3:22, 7:37	The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren...
Deut. 18:19	Acts 3:23	And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words...
Psalm 118:22	Acts 4:11	The Stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.
Psalm 2:1-2	Acts 4:25-26	Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves...against the LORD...
Genesis 12:1	Acts 7:3	Get out of your country, from your family...
Ex 32:1, 23	Acts 7:40	Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses,...we do not know what has become of him.
Amos 5:25-27	Acts 7:42-43	Did you offer Me sacrifices...You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch...
Isaiah 66:1-2	Acts 7:49-50	Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool...
Isaiah 53:7-8	Acts 8:32-33	He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent...
Psalm 2:7	Acts 13:33	You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.
Hab. 1:5	Acts 13:41	I will work a work in your days which you would not believe...
Amos 9:11-12	Acts 15:16-17	I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David...
Exodus 22:28	Acts 23:5	You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.
Isaiah 6:9-10	Acts 28:26-27	Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand...

## Place in the Bible's Storyline

### WRITE

#### Outline

The outline of Acts follows a geographical progression as the church expands outward from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the rest of the known world (Acts 1:8).

- I. The Birth of the Church in Jerusalem, 1:1-3:26
- II. The Early Troubles of the Church in Jerusalem, 4:1-8:3
- III. Growth of the Church into Samaria, Damascus, and Caesarea, 8:4-12:25
- IV. Progress of the Church Throughout the Roman Empire, 13:1-21:14
- V. Paul's Imprisonment in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome and the Advance of the Gospel Through It, 21:15-28:31

#### Lessons

Acts shows that the church experienced cyclical periods of rest and persecution. Some instances of persecution were tough enough to warrant being called out in great detail, as with Herod's persecution in chapter 12. The church has continued to experience this pattern throughout its history and we should not be surprised if we experience the same.

Acts mentions the word of God spreading, being received, growing and multiplying (6:7; 8:4; 11:1; 12:24; 13:49; 15:35; 19:10, 19:20). We should pray for and expect and work for the same in our day.

The outline above (point V.) alludes to the fact that despite Paul's imprisonment, the gospel advanced anyway. He confirms this in Philippians 1:12. God uses what might seem to us to be strange circumstances to advance His work. In this case, Paul got access to the highest levels of leadership in Judea and Rome by being a prisoner under examination.

## 1 John

### Summary and Message

John's first epistle or general letter offers many tests of eternal life by which God's people can be assured that they are truly born again. These tests are not "works" that we do to obtain or prove that we have eternal life, but rather they are evidences that flow naturally out of the life of a saved person. The tests are both doctrinal and practical. They have to do with what we believe and how we live.

### Key Verses

1 John 1:5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 2:1-2 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. <sup>2</sup>And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

1 John 2:3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

1 John 2:28 And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

1 John 3:16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.

1 John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

1 John 5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

## Doctrine

We learn some great truths about God:

God is LIFE      1 John 1:1

God is LIGHT    1 John 1:5

God is TRUTH    1 John 4:6

God is LOVE     1 John 4:8

A good portion of the book concerns the doctrine of perseverance in the faith, and more specifically how we know that we have true salvation. In my studies, I have distilled the tests down to these:

1. Has our attitude toward and practice of sin changed (1:5-2:2)?
2. Do we keep God's commands (2:3-6, 5:2-3)?
3. Do we love God first and love others as ourselves (2:7-17)? Or do we love the world?
4. Do we believe the doctrine of Christ (2:18-28)?
5. Do we practice righteousness (2:29-3:10a)?
6. Do we love our brother (3:11a-24, 4:7-10, 5:1-2)?
7. Do we have the Spirit of God (3:24, 4:13)?

8. Do we agree that Christ came in the flesh (4:1-6)?
9. Do we believe the gospel testimony about Jesus that He is Christ, Son of God, and is incarnate (5:1-13)?

I have often heard the teaching of 1 John 5:13 taken out of context: “These things I have written...” It is true that John wishes for us to know that we have eternal life, but the first part of the verse is *key*. There are specific things he has written that condition that assurance. It is not an empty “you can know” statement. It is “you can know IF these evidences are present”—not just that you say you are a Christian.

Another key doctrine in the book concerns *fellowship*. Some teach that a believer can be in and out of fellowship. But the language that John uses of the people who do not share in the fellowship with other believers indicates that these people are not believers at all. They are liars, have not seen God, of the devil, in darkness, blind, does not know God (2:4, 3:6, 3:10, 2:9, 2:11, 4:8). In other words, all true believers are in John’s *fellowship*, and if you are not in fellowship, you are not a Christian. Of course, there are many believers at any given time who are share in the fellowship of divine life, but they are walking out of accord with God’s will. God is displeased with that, and that is a situation that must be remedied promptly.

Another important doctrine in 1 John is the humanity of Jesus, 1 John 4:3.

## Literary Features

One little word is very prominent in the book: “if.” John uses it 21 times (NKJV), with 5 of those in chapter 1, and 6 in chapter 2. These “if’s” invite us to consider our viewpoint on the matters of which John speaks. For example 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins.” Do we? Or 1 John 4:20, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother.” Do we love God? Do we hate our brother? These are really incisive statements to get us to evaluate if we are truly real in our faith or if we are just pretending. 1 John 3:13 says, “do not marvel...if the world hates you.” Do you sense that antipathy from the world toward yourself *because* you are a Christian?

## Author, Date Written and Timeline

The signature of John the apostle might as well be on the letter because of the “from the beginning” phrase. The style matches well with John’s gospel, which also starts with “in the beginning.”

External evidence supports this conclusion. Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a direct disciple of John, and Irenaeus writes that Polycarp testified that John wrote his gospel from Ephesus. It seems that he wrote the letters at a similar time, but later, in his older years. It was probably written around 90 AD. A more precise date is not available because of the general nature of the epistle.

## Related Scriptures

Isaiah 2:5 sounds very similar to 1 John 1:7.

Psalms 32:5 and Proverbs 28:13 are echoed in 1 John 1:9.

Deut. 15:7-8 is reflected in 1 John 3:17.

## Place in the Bible's Storyline

### WRITE

#### Outline

I. Introduction, 1:1-4

II. Evidences of Eternal Life, 1:5-5:13

- A. Walking in the light: a new relationship to sin, 1:5-2:2
- B. Keeping God's commands, 2:3-6
- C. Loving God and loving others, not the world, 2:7-17
- D. Believing the doctrine of Christ, 2:18-28
- E. Practicing righteousness, 2:29-3:10a
- F. Loving our brothers, 3:10b-24
- G. Discerning false doctrine, 4:1-6
- H. Loving God and loving others, 4:7-21
- I. Believing that Jesus is the Christ, Son of God, 5:1-12

III. Epilogue, 5:13-21

- A. Purpose statement of John's letter, 5:13
- B. Assurance in prayer, 5:14-15
- C. Praying about a sinning brother, 5:16-17
- D. The believer is preserved from sin and the Devil, 5:18-20
- E. Exhortation to stay away from idols, 5:21

### Lessons

God takes sin seriously, and so should we. We need to confess our sin.

Not everyone who says they are a Christian is a true Christian. At some points in the letter, John seems to be saying "talk is cheap." See Matt. 7:21.

Examining yourself to make sure you are in the faith is important; it does not run counter to the doctrine of assurance. Whether you are truly saved is the most important question you can ponder.

There are a lot of false teachers and teachings out there. We must be discerning about teaching to make sure that it matches Scriptural truth.

John urges us to love one another. 46 times in 26 verses he uses the word *love* in this book.

## 2 John

### Summary and Message

John writes to commend the lady and her children for walking in truth and love and also to warn her that there are many antichrists propagating false teaching about Jesus. They were spreading their teaching and John was trying to protect his friends and their churches from falling into error. They had to take care to maintain their full reward by *not* receiving the false doctrine or offering it aid and comfort by means of hospitality.

### Key Verses

2 John 6 This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.

2 John 7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

2 John 9 Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.

### Doctrine

Love and truth are major emphases in this short letter. John loved his friend in the sphere of truth; they had fellowship with all those who know the truth, and the truth lives in the people of God. Truth and love were the “fences” around the grace, mercy, and peace of his greeting in verse 3. Truth *and* love. Not truth *or* love, or truth without love, or love without truth.

John emphasizes the Christian teaching concerning Jesus. False doctrine can be seductive. In this case, the false doctrine was that Christ was “made into a god” or was a man who became the adopted Son of God at a later point, or that he was merely a man, a good teacher. It has a ring of “sensibility” to it because the orthodox teaching seems too hard to grasp, unclear to the unredeemed mind, against logic, or requiring too much “miracle.” Thus John says in verse 8 that we must watch out so that we are not drawn away into error. The fact is that Christ is fully God and fully man, and without this, there is *no Christianity*. Teaching Christ is not God is *a very serious error*—heresy, in fact. If believed, it shows that one does not have God (v. 9), that is, is not regenerate.

### Literary Features

2 John follows the typical style of a letter, with from, to, greetings, body of letter, and closing.

This is a very short letter written to an “elect lady” and her children. I understand this to be a particular individual known to the author who has children, and John is happy to hear that some of her children are walking with Christ. Some interpreters suggest the lady is a code name for a church with its members (children), but this metaphor is not clear and it is a non-literal way to interpret the text.

It is a blessing to see the tender care of the author and recipient's relationship in the final verses where he says he has a lot to write, but hopes instead to see her soon. This face-to-face fellowship in the Lord would enhance their joyful relationship. I do not think there is a romantic element here.

## Author, Date Written, and Timeline

“The Elder” is a title that is used only in 2 John 1 and 3 John 1. Elder probably conveys multiple ideas—advanced age, office in the church, and spiritual maturity. Only the second and third of these is part of being a pastor in a local church.

The age aspect of “elder” is interesting because John was a very young man when he met Jesus and started out with the 12 disciples. He was not much older when Jesus turned over the care of his mother to the disciple whom he loved (John 19:26-27). By now, however, he is an old man, and has quite possibly been an elder in one or more churches in Asia Minor from around 66 to 95 AD. This would put him to around 80 years old, which was very old for that time. (The average lifespan was 25-30, but that is skewed because so many died during childhood. Many did reach their 50s to 60s and some even into their 70s.)

There are no clues in the letter that give away a specific date, but typically theologians understand John to have written 1, 2, and 3 John around the same time, around 90 AD, likely during his Ephesus ministry.

It is sad to observe that only 50-60 years after Jesus lived, false doctrine had exploded. There were people who rejected Jesus as coming in the flesh. This was absolutely ridiculous to John, who was an *eyewitness* of Jesus. He heard, saw, observed, and touched this Word of Life (1 John 1:1). This makes it clear how he could be so stringent that the lady and children would not be deceived by these false teachers, or even offer them hospitality. If they are going to continue in their wrong teaching, then they can be on their own and do their own thing. If they want Christian hospitality, they will need to become Christians!

## Related Scriptures

In relation to 2 John 5 about the “new commandment,” we find several linked verses in the New Testament.

John 13:34 A **new commandment** I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

1 John 2:7 Brethren, I write no **new commandment** to you, but an **old commandment** which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning.

1 John 2:8 Again, a **new commandment** I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.

This old/new commandment language is initially confusing. But I believe John is speaking about the fact that the command to love one another is not really new at all. It is as old as the Law of Moses and really as old as humanity. It represents a very basic part of the character of God that we should reflect in our relationships with others. But with the

coming of Christ, we see the commandment to love in a new light, in bold colors. One came from so high to a place so low, to die a death so terrible in order to rescue us from a place so low to bring us to a place so high! No one has a greater love than that!

So, we are called to love one another with a pure heart—and fervently so (1 Tim. 1:5, 2 Tim. 2:22, 1 Peter 1:22). We are called to love our wives as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25). We are called to love our enemies (Luke 6:27).

Verse 7 speaks of an antichrist, which is not *the* Antichrist. But there are many antichrists out and about (1 John 2:18).

## Place in the Bible's Storyline

### WRITE

#### Outline

##### I. Introduction, 1:1-3

- A. Author and recipients, 1:1-2
- B. Greeting, 1:3

##### II. Body of the Letter, 1:4-11

- A. John rejoices that the lady's children are walking in truth, 1:4
- B. John pleads that we love one another and obey God's commands, 1:5-6
- C. John warns about deceivers who deny the doctrine of Christ, 1:7-11

##### III. Closing, 1:12-13

- A. John hopes to see her face to face, 1:12
- B. Greetings sent from the lady's believing sister, 1:13

### Lessons

John teaches us that sometimes hospitality is not permissible! Usually hospitality is commanded, so it sounds mean to reject hospitality, but if you offer aid to someone who *rejects* the doctrine of Christ taught in Scripture, that He is the Son of God, that He is worthy of worship, that He in fact is the second person of the Triune God (see the introduction to John's gospel), then you are sharing in his evil. Christians do not want to share in evil. You do not help the enemy, in physical war, nor in the very real spiritual war. Such comfort not only aids their evil work but confuses others as to your views. Your hospitality is far better invested in someone who is a true Christian minister. There is so little help for true Christians that they need our focused attention. It is easy if you are a nice or generous person to be taken advantage of, so we must exercise discernment. (The same goes for financial support—be discerning. Ask if there is a better or more needful way to support God's work, and if your donation is really all that necessary to a secular organization when there is a far larger audience that will donate to such a cause whereas there is a far smaller audience to donate to a conservative Christian cause.)

All of this warns us against ecumenism, which is an ever-present threat to the church today (and all the more common with recent events in the fall of 2025).

In the first section of the letter we read about commandments and love. These are not contrary to each other, and in fact, Christian teaching is not adverse to commandments at all. It is not like the Old Testament (with its 10 commandments and 600+ laws) is a law-based religion, and the New Testament is a grace religion with no commandments. The OT was full of grace, as is the New, and the NT has a lot of imperatives just like the Old. There is a continuity...of God...of grace...of expectations...of holiness.

John is concerned with truth, the truth of the gospel and of the Scripture. We too must be eminently concerned for the truth. The boundaries of Christian love are therefore circumscribed by truth. We can love enemies and the lost, to be sure, but we do not share with them the same kind of love we share with fellow Christians because real love walks in God's commandments.

Verse 8 shows that we lose reward for unfaithful conduct, such as messing around with heretical teachers.

## Revelation

For a summary of the Apocalypse, see the sermon notes at <https://www.fbcaa.org/Docs/bulletins/MeaningOfRevelation.pdf>.

Revisit at the very end of the series, and take the above and summarize it using the outline I have done for every other section.

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