

You Could Try Reading It for Yourself

Jim Swift
Copyright 2021

A note about copyrights

Bible quotations are taken from these translations:

New Testament and Prophets – NASB

Psalms – NKJV

Lamentations and all others – ESV

Intention is to comply with fair use doctrine.

As for this work:

Copies may be freely made for personal use.

Copies may be made and distributed to others for their personal use.

Distributor may collect reimbursement for cost of copying and shipping.

If intending to sell at a profit, contact me and we'll work something out.

You Could Try Reading It for Yourself.

We often encounter the Bible in little bits and pieces, like sprinkles on a cupcake. We find Bible verses lifted out of their context and inserted into sermons, political speeches, books, articles, coffee cups, cards and calendars. We even find phrases from the Bible mentioned in everyday conversation (“handwriting on the wall,” or “good Samaritan”).

And yet, these bits and pieces are part of a larger whole. How do we know we’re getting an accurate picture from these tidbits? Really, is it possible to get an accurate picture of *any* book (or play or movie) this way?

“Ah,” we might think, “I’ve hired an expert – my pastor – to read the book and tell me what’s in it.” Well, here’s the thing: pastors are sorely tempted to tell you what you want to hear. After all, they’re human. Like us, they like getting paid, and they like to keep getting paid. And telling your customer that he or she is a sinner, is not good business.

Even if you are fortunate to have a pastor who gives it to you straight, you are still getting the information second-hand. By all means, avail yourself of your pastor’s sermons and insights. But realize there is just no substitute for experiencing the book first-hand.

Look, the Bible is supposedly an important book. It claims to be God-breathed. Here’s a provocative thought: consider reading it for yourself.

Perhaps you've already tried to read the Bible and failed. There could be several reasons for this.

1. You are reading the King James Version Bible. There is nothing wrong with this translation. But it reflects the English language as it existed in 1769, including such words as “thee” and “thou.” The language is beautiful but difficult to understand.

Don't make this any harder than it needs to be. The Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Greek and a little Aramaic; not English. Since you're reading a translation anyway, you may as well read one that is translated into today's English. If you're partial to the *King James Version*, consider getting a *New King James Version*.

2. You are starting at the beginning and reading forward from there. On the one hand, what else would you do? On the other hand, realize that the Bible is not really one book, but a library of sixty-six little books. And just like a library, the books are arranged by type of literature. For example, all the prophetic books are grouped together into one section. The four histories of the life of Jesus (gospels) are grouped together into another section.

You wouldn't walk in to your local library and try reading everything by starting with the first book to the left of the door and working your way around to the right. Neither is it necessary to read the Bible that way. We will walk you through an arrangement that presents the different topics and types of literature without getting bogged down in any one, and in a way that makes chronological sense.

3. *You are pushing yourself to read the whole thing in one stretch.* Now, this isn't a bad thing of course, but the task is rather daunting. Again, the Bible is sixty-six little books. We advise you to read them one at a time, drawing encouragement at the completion of each one.

By comparison, Louis L'Amour, the prolific author of American Westerns, wrote over 80 novels. If you were to read and enjoy *Sackett's Land*, for example, would you be discouraged that you still hadn't read *To the Far Blue Mountains*, or simply look forward to exploring what's next? Likewise with the Bible – just focus on reading the next book, and don't worry about all the books you haven't read. Glass half full.

4. *Even worse, you are trying to follow one of those read-the-Bible-in-a-year plans.* Those plans, well-intentioned though they may be, almost seem designed to make you feel like a failure. We have never met anyone who was able to keep up with one. There is a legend that years ago, someone was able to do it. His name was Frank. You are not him.

Now, it is important to set aside time for reading, whether you want to read the Bible or *A Tale of Two Cities*. Designate some time every day, or every other day, or several times a week for reading. (Okay, fine – once a week.) Try to stick to it. But don't worry about your progress. Again, take one little book at a time.

5. *You got bogged down in Leviticus.* As they say, the Bible is “the good book.” But there are some demanding parts. Exodus contains, among other things, precise instructions *with measurements* for building a tabernacle. Leviticus contains detailed rules for priests to follow when offering sacrifices. A portion of Joshua is essentially a title deed. And then there are the genealogies. We will alert you to those sections, so that if you prefer, you can speed read or skim them – enough so that you understand the importance of the information, but without becoming overwhelmed with details.

6. *You don't like reading.* Fair enough. Try listening. Visit www.bible.is for audio options.

Overview of the Bible

The Bible is divided into two major parts – the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament emphasizes the ancient nation of Israel. The New Testament focuses on Jesus Christ and the early church.

The books of the Old Testament are arranged as follows:

Books of Moses					
Genesis	Exodus	Leviticus	Numbers	Deuteronomy	
Historical Books					
Joshua	Judges	Ruth			
1 Samuel	2 Samuel	1 Kings	2 Kings		
1 Chronicles	2 Chronicles	Ezra	Nehemiah		
Esther					
Wisdom Books					
Job	Psalms	Proverbs	Ecclesiastes	Song of Solomon	
Large (Major) Prophetic Books					
Isaiah	Jeremiah	Lamentations	Ezekiel	Daniel	
Small (Minor) Prophetic Books					
Hosea	Joel	Amos	Obadiah	Jonah	
Micah	Nahum	Habakkuk	Zephaniah		
Haggai	Zechariah	Malachi			

The books of the New Testament are arranged as follows:

Historical Books					
Matthew	Mark	Luke	John		
Acts					
Letters (Epistles) by Paul					
Romans	1 Corinthians	2 Corinthians			
Galatians	Ephesians	Philippians	Colossians		
1 Thessalonians	2 Thessalonians				
1 Timothy	2 Timothy	Titus			
Philemon					
Letters (Epistles) by Others					
Hebrews	James				
1 Peter	2 Peter				
1 John	2 John	3 John			
Jude					
Prophetic Book					
Revelation					

Here is how these books fit into an historical time line. (Wisdom and prophetic books are italicized.)

Events	People	Books
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation, Rebellion • Flood • Patriarchs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adam, Eve • Noah • Abraham, Isaac, Jacob 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genesis • <i>Job</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 400 years 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Departure from Egypt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moses, Aaron 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conquest of Canaan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joshua 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joshua
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gideon, Samson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judges, Ruth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Samuel • Saul, David 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel / 1 Chronicles • <i>Psalms</i> *
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Division of kingdom into Israel and Judah • Israel taken into exile by Assyria, 722 BC • Judah taken into exile by Babylon, 587 BC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solomon, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah • Elijah, Elisha 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Kings, 2 Kings / 2 Chronicles • <i>Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon</i> • <i>Isaiah, Jeremiah</i> • <i>Hosea – Zephaniah</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exile • Persians conquer Babylonian Empire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nebuchadnezzar, Darius, Ahasuerus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Lamentations, Daniel, Ezekiel</i> • <i>Esther</i> **
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Return from exile 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zerubbabel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ezra, Nehemiah • <i>Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greeks conquer Persian Empire, 333 BC • Romans conquer Jerusalem, 63 BC 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life of Jesus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matthew, Mark, Luke, John
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early church • Romans destroy Jerusalem, 70 AD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter, Paul 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acts • (letters) • <i>Revelation</i>

* About half of the Psalms were written by David.

** The events of Esther took place between chapters 4 and 5 of Ezra.

In order to make the book more digestible, we have broken the Bible up into nine sections:

1. Moses
2. Gospel
3. David
4. Jesus
5. Prophets
6. Church
7. Joshua
8. End Times
9. Temple

Five of the sections are from the Old Testament; four are from the New Testament. They alternate back and forth. Furthermore, we will intersperse these sections with Old Testament wisdom books (Psalms, Proverbs, etc.)

Lest you think this is heresy, realize that the Hebrew Bible is arranged differently than our Old Testament – it is arranged into three sections: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Or as Jesus referred to it in Luke 24:44:

the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms

One could argue, then, that the Bible you have is already “out of order.” So we have good grounds to approach it with yet another arrangement.

Before we begin, here are a couple notes:

As you read, realize that the chapter and verse divisions were imposed on the text centuries after the Bible was written. They are there simply to help people find specific passages. Try to ignore them. Many translations also have chapter and paragraph titles. You can ignore those too. Focus on the text.

We recommend the *New American Standard Version* and the *English Standard Version* translations. Be cautious about *The Message*; it is a paraphrase written by one man – you would be reading his opinion of what the Bible says, instead of what it actually says. It’s another form of second-hand information.

If you are using a Catholic or Eastern Orthodox Bible, note we are not covering the deuterocanonical books, such as Tobit or 1 Maccabees.

Now, let’s read the Bible.

Prologue

Proverbs

To whet our appetite, we will read Proverbs, one of the Old Testament wisdom books. Most of the book is the proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel. Solomon lived around 950 BC.

It is from Proverbs that we get the words:

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.

Proverbs is 31 chapters:

1 – 9	Wisdom
10 – 24	Solomon
25 – 29	Solomon (Hezekiah)
30	Augur
31	Lemuel

1. Moses

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Malachi

Genesis

Genesis is the very beginning. It also begins a five book sequence, through Deuteronomy, written by Moses, called the Law or the Torah.

Genesis is 50 chapters:

1 – 6:8	Adam
6:9 – 11:26	Noah
11:27 – 25:11	Abraham
25:12 – 35	Isaac
36 – 50	Jacob (Israel)

There are some genealogies sprinkled throughout, but nothing too treacherous.

Things to know:

“Genesis” means “beginnings.”

“Adam” means “man.”

“Israel” means “struggles with God.”

Moses

Exodus

Four hundred years have passed. As the book of Exodus opens, we find the numerous descendants of Jacob (also known as Israel) living in the land of Egypt.

Exodus is the second of the five books of Moses. Its 40 chapters are a mix of narrative, law, and building instructions:

1 – 18	Salvation	narrative
19 – 24	Covenant	law
25 – 31	Plans for the Tabernacle	building instructions
32 – 34	Rebellion	narrative
35 – 40	Building the Tabernacle	building instructions

Challenging: the building instructions are very detailed. And chapters 35 – 40 are somewhat repetitive of chapters 25 – 31. But don't miss the very end of the book.

Things to know:

“Exodus” means “going out.”

“Moses” means “draw out.”

Things to note:

In chapter 12, the Passover

In chapter 19, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation

In chapter 20, the Ten Commandments

In chapter 34, the LORD reveals His glory and proclaims His name to Moses

Leviticus

Leviticus follows the events in Exodus. For the most part, it is a series of laws. Many pertain to the activities of Aaron and his sons, the priests. But there are also laws on other topics, such as the treatment of the poor. It is from Leviticus that we hear the words:

You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

Leviticus is 27 chapters:

1 – 7	Laws for offerings	law
8 – 10	Aaron & sons consecrated	narrative
11 – 27	More laws	law

Challenging: the first 7 chapters contain very detailed instructions for bringing various offerings.

Things to know:

“Leviticus” refers to the fact that the priests are of the tribe of Levi.

Things to note:

In chapter 16, the scapegoat

Numbers

Numbers brings the Israelites from Mount Sinai (or Horeb) where they received the Ten Commandments, through the wilderness to the plains of Moab across the Jordan river from the promised land. It takes forty years.

It is from Numbers that we get the words:

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you.

Numbers is 36 chapters:

1 – 25	First generation
26 – 36	Second generation

Challenging: Numbers switches back and forth between narrative and law several times.

Things to know:

“Numbers” refers to the fact that the book begins with a census.

Things to note:

In chapter 21, the bronze serpent

In chapters 23 – 24, Balaam’s oracles

Malachi

We’re going to defer Deuteronomy until later. For now, let’s read Malachi.

Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament, and the last in a series of twelve “minor” prophets beginning with Hosea. The reason they’re called minor is because the books are shorter in length than those of the major prophets, such as Isaiah or Jeremiah.

Malachi was written around a thousand years after the events of Numbers. Much has happened. The Israelites are dwelling in the promised land, and they have a permanent temple rather than a mobile tabernacle. Still, the prophet calls them to a proper observance of the law of Moses.

Malachi is 4 chapters.

First Interlude

Psalms 1 – 41 (Book I)

Psalms is an Old Testament wisdom book. Each chapter is a “psalm” or song, often used in worship.

Psalms divides itself into five “books”. For now, we will read the first one, chapters 1 – 41. David (Solomon’s father, who lived around 1000 BC) wrote nearly all of these.

Some famous psalms in this book are:

- Psalm 8 *What is man that You are mindful of him?*
- Psalm 16 *Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.*
- Psalm 19 *The heavens declare the glory of God.*
- Psalm 22 *My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?*
- Psalm 23 *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

The book concludes with the words:

*Blessed be the LORD God of Israel
From everlasting to everlasting!
Amen and Amen.*

Things to know:

“Jacob” is often used by Biblical writers as another name for Israel.

“Zion” is often used by Biblical writers as another name for Jerusalem.

2. Gospel

Mark

Romans

1 Peter

Galatians

2 John

2 Corinthians

Titus

Gospel

Mark

We move forward in time to the first century AD, about 400 years after the book of Malachi. The land of Israel is under Roman control. The region of Galilee, including the cities of Nazareth and Capernaum, is in the north. The region of Judea, including the capital city of Jerusalem, is in the south.

Mark is one of four books, called “gospels,” at the beginning of the New Testament that recount the life of Jesus. It begins with a title:

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God

Mark is 16 chapters:

1 – 8:30	Who is Jesus?
8:31 – 16	What is his destiny?

Things to know:

“Gospel” means “good news.”

“Jesus” means “savior.”

“Christ” means “messiah,” “anointed one,” “king.”

“Son of Man” is a reference to a figure in Daniel 7 who would receive dominion, glory and an everlasting kingdom.

“Disciple” means “learner.”

“Jews” were Israelites. The name is taken from the tribe of Judah. They populated Galilee and Judea. Jesus and his disciples were Jews.

Things to note:

In verses 1:9-11, the Trinity

Gospel

Romans

Romans is a New Testament letter written by the Apostle Paul to the Christians in Rome.

This letter is Paul's great explanation of the gospel. It begins with the wrath of God (1:18) and ends with the love of God (8:39). The means of getting from one to the other is Jesus Christ.

Romans is 16 chapters:

1 – 8	The gospel (good news)
9 – 11	What about Israel?
12 – 16	How then should we live?

Things to know:

“Apostle” means “one who is sent,” or “emissary.”

“Righteousness” and “justify” / “justification,” though different in English, are related words in the Greek language used in the original text.

“Propitiation” is a payment made to satisfy a person who has been offended or wronged.

1 Peter

1 Peter is a New Testament letter written by Peter, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. He writes to encourage Christians who are suffering.

1 Peter is 5 chapters.

Things to note:

In verse 1:2, the Trinity

Galatians

Galatians is a New Testament letter written by the Apostle Paul to the Christians in Galatia, a region in Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey. It was part of the Roman Empire.

Paul is concerned that the Galatians are leaving the gospel message that he taught them, in favor of a requirement that Christians must be circumcised.

Galatians is 6 chapters.

Things to know:

Circumcision was a sign of the covenant that God made with Abraham, back in Genesis 15 – 17.

“Cephas” is another name for Peter.

2 John

2 John is a New Testament letter written by John, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus.

2 John is 1 chapter.

2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians is a New Testament letter written by the Apostle Paul to the Christians in Corinth, a city in Greece. It was part of the Roman Empire.

Paul is trying to repair a damaged relationship between himself and the Corinthians.

2 Corinthian is 13 chapters:

1 – 7	Paul defends his ministry
8 – 9	Paul discusses giving
10 – 13	Paul defends his apostleship

Things to note:

In verse 13:14, the Trinity

Gospel

Titus

Titus is a New Testament letter written by the Apostle Paul to Titus, one of his apprentices in ministry.

Titus is considered a “pastoral” letter because Titus served as a pastor in Crete, and Paul is advising him.

Titus is 3 chapters.

Second Interlude

Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes is an Old Testament wisdom book. The bulk of the book is the words of “the Preacher,” the son of David, king in Jerusalem. According to tradition, this is Solomon. In addition, the book appears to be bracketed by a separate narrator.

It is from Ecclesiastes that we get the words:

All is vanity.

And:

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under the heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die.*

Ecclesiastes is 12 chapters:

1	Narrator’s introduction
2 – 12:7	The Preacher
12:8-14	Narrator’s conclusion

3. David

1 Samuel

2 Samuel

1 Kings

2 Kings 1 – 14

Hosea

2 Kings 15 – 25

Jeremiah

Lamentations

1 Samuel

We now return to the Old Testament, several hundred years after Moses, but well before the time of Malachi.

1 Samuel is the first book in a four book sequence that runs through 2 Kings. It is a record of the history of the nation of Israel, as it transitioned from rule by judges to its first kings (Saul and David).

1 Samuel is 31 chapters:

1 – 7	Samuel, the last judge
8 – 15	Saul anointed king
16 – 24	David anointed king
25 – 31	After Samuel

Things to know:

“Samuel” means “God has heard.”

2 Samuel

2 Samuel picks up where 1 Samuel left off. It is the record of the reign of King David.

2 Samuel is 24 chapters:

1 – 9	David is established
10 – 11	David's sin
12 – 20	Absalom's rebellion
21 – 24	Epilogue

Things to note:

In chapter 7, God's promise to David

1 Kings

The history continues into 1 Kings. It is the record of the reign of Solomon, the division of the kingdom into two kingdoms (Israel and Judah), and the reigns of the subsequent kings.

It is from 1 Kings that we get the description of Israel as:

sheep that have no shepherd

1 Kings is 22 chapters:

1 – 11	Solomon
12 – 14	Rehoboam and Jeroboam
15 – 16	Kings of Judah and Israel
17 – 22	Elijah and Ahab

Things to know:

In the New Testament, Samaria is a region. But in the Old Testament, it is a city – the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel.

Things to note:

In chapter 13, the prophecy concerning the altar at Bethel, pronounced by the man of God

In chapter 19, the promise made by the LORD to Elijah

2 Kings 1 – 14

2 Kings follows the events of 1 Kings. It begins by showing the judgment of God, carried out by Elisha, Jehu and Hazael, as promised to Elijah.

It is 25 chapters, but for now we will read the first 14:

1 – 13	Elisha, Jehu, and Hazael
14	Kings of Judah and Israel

Hosea

We're putting 2 Kings on pause to read the first minor prophet – Hosea.

Hosea is a call to the northern kingdom of Israel to return to the LORD. The LORD illustrates Israel's unfaithfulness by commanding the prophet to take a wife "of harlotry" and have children by her. It is from Hosea that we get the famous saying:

For they sow the wind and they reap the whirlwind.

Hosea is 14 chapters.

Things to know:

Hosea uses "Ephraim" as another name for the northern kingdom of Israel.

"Baal" was a false god that Israel worshiped in its idolatry.

2 Kings 15 – 25

Now we finish reading 2 Kings. The kingdom of Israel lasts until they are carried into exile by Assyria in 722 BC. The kingdom of Judah lasts longer, until carried into exile by Babylon in 586 BC.

15 – 17	Kings of Judah and Israel
18 – 20	Hezekiah
21 – 25	Last kings of Judah

Things to note:

In chapter 23, the judgment of God carried out by Josiah against the altar at Bethel

Jeremiah

Jeremiah is a major prophetic book. He prophesied during the final days of Judah. It is Jeremiah who declared that Judah's exile would last 70 years.

Jeremiah is 52 chapters:

1 – 20	Days of Josiah
21 – 38	Days of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah
39 – 45	Fall of Jerusalem and its impact on Jeremiah
46 – 51	Judgment on the nations
52	Fall of Jerusalem

Things to note:

In chapter 31, the new covenant

In chapter 33, David never lacks a man to sit on the throne of Israel

Lamentations

Lamentations is a lament over the fall of Jerusalem. According to tradition, it was written by Jeremiah. It is from Lamentations that we get the words:

*The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.*

Lamentations is 5 chapters.

Third Interlude

Psalms 42 – 72 (Book II)

We now read the second book within the Psalms, chapters 42 – 72. Seven of the first eight were written by the sons of Korah, while most of the remainder were written by David.

The sons of Korah were descended from the man who rebelled against the LORD in Numbers 16. They apparently learned from their ancestor's mistake. Samuel was one such descendant.

A famous psalm in this book is:

Psalm 51 *Create in me a clean heart, O God.*

The book concludes with a psalm by Solomon, followed by the words:

The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.

4. Jesus

John
Philippians
Hebrews
Colossians
Philemon

Jesus

John

We return to the first century AD, to the book of John. It was written by John, the disciple of Jesus.

John is another of the four gospels that recount the life of Jesus. Matthew, Mark and Luke share a fair amount of similar material. John, on the other hand, is mostly information that is not in the other three.

According to the end of chapter 20, the author recognizes that much has been written about Jesus. But the things he writes:

these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

John is 21 chapters:

1 – 11	Several feasts
12 – 19	Final Passover
20	First day
21	Breakfast

Things to know:

The region of Samaria lay in the middle between Galilee (in the north) and Judea (in the south). The people living there were not well regarded by the Jews.

John often uses “the Jews” to refer to the Jewish religious leaders.

Things to note:

John famously contains seven “I am” statements. Call us rebels, but we count twelve:

4:25-26	I am the Messiah (the Christ)
6:35	I am the bread of life
8:12	I am the Light of the world
8:23	I am from above/ not of this world
8:58	Before Abraham was born, I am
10:7	I am the door of the sheep
10:11	I am the good shepherd
11:25	I am the resurrection and the life
14:6	I am the way, and the truth, and the life
15:1	I am the true vine
18:5	I am (Jesus the Nazarene)
18:37	I am a king

Philippians

Philippians is a New Testament letter written by the Apostle Paul to the Christians in Philippi, a city in Greece. It was part of the Roman Empire.

Paul encourages the Christians to stand firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving together. Specifically, two people named Euodia and Syntyche weren't getting along.

Philippians is considered a "prison" letter, because Paul wrote it while in prison.

Philippians is 4 chapters.

Hebrews

Hebrews is a New Testament letter written to Jewish Christians who were tempted, because of persecution, to abandon their Christian faith and return to the old covenant.

Hebrews is 13 chapters:

1 – 2	Jesus is better than angels
3 – 4:13	Jesus is better than Moses
4:14 – 7	Jesus is a great high priest
8 – 10:18	Jesus mediates a better covenant
10:19 – 13	Have faith

Colossians

Colossians is a New Testament letter written by the Apostle Paul to the Christians in Colossae, a city in Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey. It was part of the Roman Empire.

Paul is concerned that the Colossians might abandon Christ, to be taken in by empty philosophies.

Colossians is considered a “prison” letter, because Paul wrote it while in prison.

Colossians is 4 chapters.

Things to note:

In chapter 4, the names Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Epaphras, Luke and Demas

Philemon

Philemon is a personal letter written by the Apostle Paul to a man named Philemon. The letter concerns Onesimus, a slave who apparently ran away from Philemon. Under Roman law, Philemon could have Onesimus executed.

Philemon is considered a “prison” letter, because Paul wrote it while in prison. It was probably delivered along with the letter to the Colossians.

Philemon is 1 chapter.

Things to know:

“Onesimus” means “useful.”

Things to note:

The names Onesimus, Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke

Fourth Interlude

Esther

Some years after Judah was carried into exile by Babylon, the Persians, led by Cyrus the Great, conquered the Babylonian empire.

Esther is not a wisdom book. Rather it is an historical book describing events occurring to the Jews while they were living in exile under Persian domination. These events led to the establishment of the Feast of Purim.

Esther is 10 chapters.

5. Prophets

Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Isaiah
Habakkuk
Zephaniah

Prophets

Amos

We return to the days of the kings of Israel, as described in 2 Kings.

Amos is the third minor prophet.

Amos is a shepherd. Like Hosea, he writes concerning the northern kingdom of Israel. He begins by circling his target – he pronounces judgments on the surrounding nations, then on Judah, and finally on Israel, upon whom he dwells for the remainder of the book.

In 722 BC, Assyria invaded Israel and carried the inhabitants of the northern kingdom into exile.

Amos is 9 chapters.

Obadiah

Obadiah is the fourth minor prophet.

Obadiah pronounces judgment on the nation of Edom. According to Genesis, Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. Jacob was renamed “Israel,” and his descendants are that nation. The descendants of Esau became the nation of Edom, a neighbor to Israel.

Obadiah is 1 chapter.

Jonah

Jonah is the fifth minor prophet.

Jonah is the famous narrative of the prophet being sent to the city of Nineveh (capital of Assyria) and being swallowed by a great fish. The prophet was from the northern kingdom of Israel; he is mentioned in 2 Kings 14, describing the time of King Jeroboam II.

Jonah is 4 chapters.

Micah

Micah is the sixth minor prophet.

Micah pronounces judgment on both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. The prophet served in Judah. He is mentioned in Jeremiah 26, describing the time of King Hezekiah. Micah is the one who identifies Bethlehem as the birthplace of a future ruler of Israel.

Micah is 7 chapters.

Prophets

Nahum

Nahum is the seventh minor prophet.

Nahum pronounces judgment on the city of Nineveh (capital of Assyria), the same place Jonah reluctantly visited.

Nahum is 3 chapters.

Isaiah

We now switch over to Isaiah, a major prophet. His concern is centered on Judah, situated in the midst of the surrounding nations, including Babylon.

Isaiah is 66 chapters:

1 – 35	Book of judgment	prophecy
36 – 39	Hezekiah	narrative
40 – 66	Book of comfort	prophecy

Things to note:

In chapter 6, the vision of the Lord on His throne

In chapter 9, the child who is born Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace

In chapter 45, the naming of Cyrus

In chapter 53, the servant who suffers for our iniquities

Habakkuk

Habakkuk is the eighth minor prophet.

Habakkuk is a conversation with God. It is from Habakkuk that we get the famous saying:

The righteous will live by his faith.

Habakkuk is 3 chapters.

Prophets

Zephaniah

Zephaniah is the ninth minor prophet.

Zephaniah, a descendant of King Hezekiah, pronounces judgment on Judah.

In 586 BC, Babylon invaded Judah, and carried its inhabitants into exile.

Zephaniah is 3 chapters.

Fifth Interlude

Psalms 73 – 89 (Book III)

We continue with the third book within the Psalms, chapters 73 – 89. Most of these were written by Asaph. According to 1 Chronicles 16, Asaph was a Levite whom David appointed as chief musician to give thanks and praise before the ark of the LORD.

The book concludes with the words:

*Blessed be the LORD forevermore!
Amen and Amen.*

6. Church

Luke

Joel

Acts

Ephesians

James

1 Corinthians

1 John

1 Timothy

3 John

Luke

We again return to the first century AD, to the book of Luke. One of the four gospels about the life of Jesus, it was written by Luke, a companion of the Apostle Paul.

According to the beginning of the book, Luke has investigated everything carefully, and he compiled the information from eyewitnesses into an orderly account.

Luke begins a two book sequence that continues into Acts.

Luke is 24 chapters:

1 – 2	Births
3 – 9:17	Galilee
9:18 – 19:27	Journey to Jerusalem
19:28 – 24	Jerusalem

Joel

We make a quick diversion to the Old Testament, to read Joel, the second minor prophet.

Joel declares a coming time of judgment, the “day of the LORD.” It is from Joel that we get the famous description:

*The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood
before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.*

Joel is 3 chapters.

Church

Acts

The account of Luke continues into the book of Acts. It is the narrative of the apostles being witnesses of Jesus:

in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.

Acts is 28 chapters:

1 – 7	Jerusalem
8 – 9	Judea and Samaria
10 – 28	To the remotest part of the earth
10	Peter
13	Paul and Barnabas
16	Paul and Silas
20	Paul and Luke

Things to note:

Places to which New Testament letters are written:

Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, Rome

Ephesians

Ephesians is a New Testament letter written by the Apostle Paul to the Christians in Ephesus, a city in Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey. It was part of the Roman Empire.

Paul describes how God brought Gentile believers together with Jewish believers to form His church, the body of Christ.

Ephesians is considered a “prison” letter, because Paul wrote it while in prison.

Ephesians is 6 chapters.

James

James is a New Testament letter written by James, the brother of Jesus.

James encourages believers to treat each other properly, especially in situations in which some are rich and some are poor.

James is 5 chapters.

1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians is a New Testament letter written by the Apostle Paul to the Christians in Corinth, a city in Greece. It was part of the Roman Empire.

For the most part, Paul is answering specific questions addressed to him by the Corinthians. It is from 1 Corinthian that we get the words:

Love is patient, love is kind.

1 Corinthian is 16 chapters:

1 – 4	Divisions in the church
5 – 6	Sexual immorality
7	Marriage
8 – 10	Food offered to idols
11	Worship
12 – 14	Spiritual gifts
15	Resurrection
16	Collection for the saints

Things to note:

In chapter 15, the gospel

1 John

1 John is a New Testament letter written by the John, the disciple of Jesus.

John writes in order that his readers might have fellowship with each other, and with God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

1 John is 5 chapters.

1 Timothy

1 Timothy is a New Testament letter written by the Apostle Paul to Timothy, one of his apprentices in ministry.

Like Titus, 1 Timothy is considered a “pastoral” letter because Timothy served as a pastor in Ephesus, and Paul is advising him.

1 Timothy is 6 chapters.

Church

3 John

3 John is a personal letter written by John, the disciple of Jesus, to a man named Gaius.

3 John is 1 chapter.

Sixth Interlude

Job

Job is about a man who loses his wealth, family and health. Then, even worse, his friends come alongside and advise him. The bulk of the book is a dialogue between Job and his friends over the cause of his troubles.

It is from Job that we get the words:

I know that my redeemer lives.

Job is 42 chapters:

1 – 3	Prologue
4 – 14	Round 1
15 – 21	Round 2
22 – 31	Round 3
33 – 37	Elihu
38 – 41	The LORD gets the last word
42	Epilogue

7. Joshua

Deuteronomy

Joshua

Judges

Ruth

Deuteronomy

We return to where the book of Numbers left the Israelites, on the plains of Moab across the Jordan River from the promised land. These are the final words of Moses, before he hands the reigns to Joshua.

It is from Deuteronomy that we get the words:

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

And:

Man does not live by bread alone.

Deuteronomy is 34 chapters:

1 – 4	History reviewed
5 – 26	Covenant reviewed
27 – 34	Looking forward

Things to know:

Deuteronomy is the second (“deutero”) telling of the law (“nomy”).

Things to note:

In chapter 18, a prophet like Moses

Joshua

Joshua continues the history, describing how Joshua led the Israelites in the conquest of the promised land.

Joshua is 24 chapters:

1 – 12	Conquest of the land
13 – 21	Division of the land
22 – 24	Epilogue

Challenging: much of chapters 13 – 21 is essentially a title deed.

Judges

Judges is the record of the years after the death of Joshua, in which there is a repeated sequence of events:

1. The Israelites rebel against the LORD.
2. The LORD hands them over to their enemies.
3. The Israelites cry out to the LORD.
4. The LORD raises up a judge to deliver them.

It is in Judges that we meet Gideon and Samson.

Judges is 21 chapters.

Things to know:

“Judges” in ancient Israel did not govern as kings. Rather their role was more limited. They:

- Led the effort to expel foreign forces
- Settled disputes between the people, as Moses did in Exodus 18

Ruth

Ruth is really the story of Naomi, which occurred during the time of the judges. Out of the bitterness and chaos of that time, the LORD redeems her situation and ultimately brings forth David.

Ruth is 4 chapters.

Seventh Interlude

Psalms 90 – 106 (Book IV)

We now read the fourth book within the Psalms, chapters 90 – 106. Moses wrote the first one of these. For most of the remainder, no author is given.

Some famous psalms in this book are:

Psalm 91 quoted by the devil to tempt Jesus to jump off the top of the temple

Psalm 95 *I swore in My wrath, “They shall not enter My rest.”*

The book concludes with the words:

*Blessed be the LORD God of Israel
From everlasting to everlasting!
And let all the people say, “Amen!”
Praise the LORD!*

8. End Times

Matthew
1 Thessalonians
2 Thessalonians
2 Peter
Daniel
Jude
Revelation
2 Timothy

Matthew

We make a final visit to the first century AD, to the book of Matthew. One of the four gospels about the life of Jesus, it was written by Mathew (also called Levi), one of the twelve disciples of Jesus.

Matthew writes to show that Jesus is the Messiah, the King of the Jews. Job one is to trace Jesus' ancestry from the line of the kings descended from David, which is how Matthew begins the book.

Matthew is 28 chapters:

1 – 4:16	Preparing the way
4:17 – 7	Teaching on righteousness
8 – 10	Teaching disciples
11 – 13	Teaching by parables
14 – 18	Teaching servants
19 – 25	Teaching on the end times
26 – 28	Death and resurrection

Things to know:

“Son of David” identifies a descendant in the line of King David.

Things to note:

In chapter 5, the beatitudes

In chapter 28, the great commission (and the Trinity)

1 Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians is a New Testament letter written by the Apostle Paul to the Christians in Thessalonica, a city in Greece. It was part of the Roman Empire.

Paul writes to remind the Thessalonians of the instructions he gave them when he was with them.

1 Thessalonians is 5 chapters.

Things to note:

In chapter 4, the rapture

In chapter 5, the day of the LORD

2 Thessalonians

2 Thessalonians is a follow-up letter by Paul to the Thessalonians.

2 Thessalonians is 3 chapters.

Things to note:

In chapter 2, the Antichrist

2 Peter

2 Peter is a New Testament letter written by Peter, the disciple of Jesus. He writes to assure his readers that Jesus will come back, despite what scoffers might say. It is from 2 Peter that we hear the words:

With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.

These are the last words of Peter.

1 Peter is 3 chapters.

Daniel

Daniel is an Old Testament prophetic book. Daniel lived in Babylon. He was one of the first to be forced there from Israel, toward the end of the time of Judah's kings. It is from Daniel that we get the expression:

handwriting on the wall

Daniel is 12 chapters:

1 – 6	Events in the life of Daniel
7 – 12	Visions given to Daniel

Things to know:

Daniel contains many symbols. But usually the symbols are explained shortly afterwards.

Things to note:

In chapter 7, the Son of Man

In chapter 9, a mention of Jeremiah

Also in chapter 9, the seventy weeks prophecy

Jude

Jude is a New Testament letter written by Jude, the brother of James (and by extension, the brother of Jesus).

Jude encourages his readers to contend for the faith against those who would pervert it.

Jude is 1 chapter.

Revelation

Revelation is the New Testament prophetic book and the last book in the Bible. It is a vision given to John, the disciple of Jesus. It is from Revelation that we hear the words:

I am the Alpha and the Omega.

These are the last words of John.

Revelation is 22 chapters:

1	Things which you have seen
2 – 3	Things which are
4 – 22	Things which will take place after this
6	Seven seals
8	Seven trumpets
15	Seven bowls
19	All things new

Things to know:

Revelation contains many symbols. As in the book of Daniel, the symbols are often explained shortly afterwards. There are also many references and allusions to the Old Testament.

Things to note:

In chapter 22, the tree of life

2 Timothy

2 Timothy is a New Testament “pastoral” letter written by the Apostle Paul to Timothy, one of his apprentices in ministry. Paul charges Timothy to commit what he has received from Paul to faithful men, who in turn can teach it to others.

These are the last words of Paul.

2 Timothy is 4 chapters.

Eighth Interlude

Song of Solomon

Also called Song of Songs. This book is an expression of romantic love between a man and a woman.

Want to rekindle the spark? Read this book out loud to your spouse.

Song of Solomon is 8 chapters.

9. Temple

1 Chronicles

2 Chronicles

Ezekiel

Ezra 1 – 4

Haggai

Zechariah

Ezra 5 – 10

Nehemiah

Temple

1 Chronicles

1 Chronicles is the first book in a four book sequence that runs through Ezra and Nehemiah. It looks back upon the time of David, from the perspective of a people returning from exile, whose temple has been destroyed.

1 Chronicles is 29 chapters:

1 – 9	Genealogies
10 – 16	Ark brought to Jerusalem
17 – 20	David's enemies defeated
21 – 29	David prepares for the temple

Challenging: even after the genealogies in chapters 1 – 9, there are many lists of people sprinkled throughout.

2 Chronicles

The history continues into 2 Chronicles. It is from 2 Chronicles that we find the words:

If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray

2 Chronicles is 36 chapters:

1 – 9	Solomon builds the temple
10 – 35	The temple under the kings of Judah
36	The temple destroyed.

Temple

Ezekiel

Ezekiel is a major prophetic book. Ezekiel was of the priestly line, and he prophesied during the final days of Judah and afterwards.

Ezekiel was in exile, having been taken to Babylon along with King Jehoiachin. When Ezekiel was taken, Daniel was already in exile, while Jeremiah was still in Judah.

It is from Ezekiel that we hear the words:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean

Ezekiel is 48 chapters:

1 – 33:20	Israel's watchman
2	Rebellious Israel
24	Siege of Jerusalem
25	Nations mistreating Israel
33:21-33	Fall of Jerusalem
34 – 39	Israel sanctified
40 – 48	Temple undefiled

Things to note:

In chapter 1, a vision of God

In chapters 10 – 11, the glory of God leaves the temple

In chapter 34, the good shepherd

In chapter 37, the dry bones

In chapters 38 – 39, the battle with Gog and Magog

In chapter 42, the glory of God returns to the temple

Ezra 1 – 4

Ezra is the third book in the four book sequence that began with 1 Chronicles. It is the history of the rebuilding of the temple, by the Jews returned from exile.

Ezra is 10 chapters, but for now we will read the first 4.

Things to note:

In chapter 3, the laying of the foundation

Temple

Haggai

We're putting Ezra on pause to read a couple minor prophets, starting with Haggai, the tenth minor prophet. He encourages Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest to finish building the temple.

Haggai is 2 chapters.

Zechariah

Zechariah is the eleventh minor prophet. He also writes a book of encouragement. It is from Zechariah that we get the words:

“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the LORD of hosts.

Zechariah is 14 chapters:

1 – 6	Visions
7 – 14	Words

Things to note:

In chapter 9, the king riding into Jerusalem on a donkey

In chapter 11, thirty pieces of silver

In chapter 12, him whom they have pierced

In chapter 13, striking of the shepherd, and scattering of the sheep

Ezra 5 – 10

Now we finish reading Ezra. In this portion Ezra himself, a priest, finally shows up. Herein we find the words:

Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.

5 – 6	Temple completed
7 – 10	Ezra

Temple

Nehemiah

The history continues into Nehemiah. Nehemiah, appointed governor of Judah, directs the building of the wall around Jerusalem.

Nehemiah is 13 chapters.

Things to note:

The last statement in the book.

Epilogue

Psalms 107 – 150 (Book V)

We conclude with the fifth book within the Psalms, chapters 107 – 150. David wrote about a third of them. For most of the remainder, no author is given.

Some famous psalms in this book are:

Psalm 110 quoted by the Jesus to stump the Pharisees

Psalm 118 *The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.
/ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!*

Psalms 120 – 134 songs of ascents

The last five psalms begin and end with the words:

Praise the LORD!

Afterword

Now what?

As they say in the shampoo trade:

Lather, rinse, repeat

Prologue: Proverbs

1. Moses

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Malachi

First Interlude: Psalms 1 – 41 (Book I)

2. Gospel

Mark
Romans
1 Peter
Galatians
2 John
2 Corinthians
Titus

Second Interlude: Ecclesiastes

3. David

1 Samuel
2 Samuel
1 Kings
2 Kings 1 – 14
Hosea
2 Kings 15 – 25
Jeremiah
Lamentations

Third Interlude: Psalms 42 – 72 (Book II)

4. Jesus

John
Philippians
Hebrews
Colossians
Philemon

Fourth Interlude: Esther

5. Prophets

Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Isaiah

Prophets (continued)

Habakkuk
Zephaniah

Fifth Interlude: Psalms 73 – 89 (Book III)

6. Church

Luke
Joel
Acts
Ephesians
James
1 Corinthians
1 John
1 Timothy
3 John

Sixth Interlude: Job

7. Joshua

Deuteronomy
Joshua
Judges
Ruth

Seventh Interlude: Psalms 90 – 106 (Book IV)

8. End Times

Matthew
1 Thessalonians
2 Thessalonians
2 Peter
Daniel
Jude
Revelation
2 Timothy

Eighth Interlude: Song of Solomon

9. Temple

1 Chronicles
2 Chronicles
Ezekiel
Ezra 1 – 4
Haggai
Zechariah
Ezra 5 – 10
Nehemiah

Epilogue: Psalms 107 – 150 (Book V)