

The Old Testament (also known as the Jewish Tanakh) is the first 39 books in most Christian Bibles. The name stands for the original promise with God (to the descendants of Abraham in particular) prior to the coming of Jesus Christ in the New Testament (or the new promise). The Old Testament contains the creation of the universe, the history of the patriarchs, the exodus from Egypt, the formation of Israel as a nation, the subsequent decline and fall of the nation, the Prophets (who spoke for God), and the Wisdom Books.

Genesis

Genesis speaks of beginnings and is foundational to the understanding of the rest of the Bible. It is supremely a book that speaks about relationships, highlighting those between God and his creation, between God and humankind, and between human beings.

Exodus

Exodus describes the history of the Israelites leaving Egypt after slavery. The book lays a foundational theology in which God reveals his name, his attributes, his redemption, his law and how he is to be worshiped.

Leviticus

Leviticus receives its name from the Septuagint (the pre-Christian Greek translation of the Old Testament) and means "concerning the Levites" (the priests of Israel). It serves as a manual of regulations enabling the holy King to set up his earthly throne among the people of his kingdom. It explains how they are to be his holy people and to worship him in a holy manner.

Numbers

Numbers relates the story of Israel's journey from Mount Sinai to the plains of Moab on the border of Canaan. The book tells of the murmuring and rebellion of God's people and of their subsequent judgment.

Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy ("repetition of the Law") serves as a reminder to God's people about His covenant. The book is a "pause" before Joshua's conquest begins and a reminder of what God required.

Joshua

Joshua is a story of conquest and fulfillment for the people of God. After many years of slavery in Egypt and 40 years in the desert, the Israelites were finally allowed to enter the land promised to their fathers.

Judges

The book of Judges depicts the life of Israel in the Promised Land—from the death of Joshua to the rise of the monarchy. It tells of urgent appeals to God in times of crisis and apostasy, moving the Lord to raise up leaders (judges) through whom He throws off foreign oppressors and restores the land to peace.

Ruth

The book of Ruth has been called one of the best examples of short narrative ever written. It presents an account of the remnant of true faith and piety in the period of the judges through the fall and restoration of Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth (an ancestor of King David and Jesus).

1 Samuel

Samuel relates God's establishment of a political system in Israel headed by a human king. Through Samuel's life, we see the rise of the monarchy and the tragedy of its first king, Saul.

2 Samuel

After the failure of King Saul, 2 Samuel depicts David as a true (though imperfect) representative of the ideal theocratic king. Under David's rule the Lord caused the nation to prosper, to defeat its enemies, and to realize the fulfillment of His promises.

1 Kings

1 Kings continues the account of the monarchy in Israel and God's involvement through the prophets. After David, his son Solomon ascends the throne of a united kingdom, but this unity only lasts during his reign. The book explores how each subsequent king in Israel and Judah answers God's call—or, as often happens, fails to listen.

2 Kings

2 Kings carries the historical account of Judah and Israel forward. The kings of each nation are judged in light of their obedience to the covenant with God. Ultimately, the people of both nations are exiled for disobedience.

1 Chronicles

Just as the author of Kings had organized and interpreted Israel's history to address the needs of the exiled community, so the writer of 1 Chronicles wrote for the restored community another history.

2 Chronicles

2 Chronicles continues the account of Israel's history with an eye for restoration of those who had returned from exile.

Ezra

The book of Ezra relates how God's covenant people were restored from Babylonian exile to the covenant land as a theocratic (kingdom of God) community even while continuing under foreign rule.

Nehemiah

Closely related to the book of Ezra, Nehemiah chronicles the return of this "cupbearer to the king" and the challenges he and the other Israelites face in their restored homeland.

Esther

Esther records the institution of the annual festival of Purim through the historical account of Esther, a Jewish girl who becomes queen of Persia and saves her people from destruction.

Job

Through a series of monologues, the book of Job relates the account of a righteous man who suffers under terrible circumstances. The book's profound insights, its literary structures, and the quality of its rhetoric display the author's genius.

Psalms

The Psalms are collected songs and poems that represent centuries worth of praises and prayers to God on a number of themes and circumstances. The Psalms are impassioned, vivid and concrete; they are rich in images, in simile and metaphor.

Proverbs

Proverbs was written to give "prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young," and to make the wise even wiser. The frequent references to "my son(s)" emphasize instructing the young and guiding them in a way of life that yields rewarding results.

Ecclesiastes

The author of Ecclesiastes puts his powers of wisdom to work to examine the human experience and assess the human situation. His perspective is limited to what happens "under the sun" (as is that of all human teachers).

Song of Songs / Solomon

In ancient Israel everything human came to expression in words: reverence, gratitude, anger, sorrow, suffering, trust, friendship, commitment. In the Song of Solomon, it is love that finds words—inspired words that disclose its exquisite charm and beauty as one of God's choicest gifts.

Isaiah

Isaiah son of Amoz is often thought of as the greatest of the writing prophets. His name means "The Lord saves." Isaiah is a book that unveils the full dimensions of God's judgment and salvation.

Jeremiah

This book preserves an account of the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah, whose personal life and struggles are shown to us in greater depth and detail than those of any other Old Testament prophet.

Lamentations

Lamentations consists of a series of poetic and powerful laments over the destruction of Jerusalem (the royal city of the Lord's kingdom) in 586 B.C.

Ezekiel

The Old Testament in general and the prophets in particular presuppose and teach God's sovereignty over all creation and the course of history. And nowhere in the Bible are God's initiative and control expressed more clearly and pervasively than in the book of the prophet Ezekiel.

Daniel

Daniel captures the major events in the life of the prophet Daniel during Israel's exile. His life and visions point to God's plans of redemption and sovereign control of history.

Hosea

The prophet Hosea son of Beeri lived in the tragic final days of the northern kingdom. His life served as a parable of God's faithfulness to an unfaithful Israel.

Joel

The prophet Joel warned the people of Judah about God's coming judgment—and the coming restoration and blessing that will come through repentance.

Amos

Amos prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah over Judah (792-740 B.C.) and Jeroboam II over Israel (793-753).

Obadiah

The prophet Obadiah warned the proud people of Edom about the impending judgment coming upon them.

Jonah

Jonah is unusual as a prophetic book in that it is a narrative account of Jonah's mission to the city of Nineveh, his resistance, his imprisonment in a great fish, his visit to the city, and the subsequent outcome.

Micah

Micah prophesied sometime between 750 and 686 B.C. during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Israel was in an apostate condition. Micah predicted the fall of her capital, Samaria, and also foretold the inevitable desolation of Judah.

Nahum

The book contains the "vision of Nahum," whose name means "comfort." The focal point of the entire book is the Lord's judgment on Nineveh for her oppression, cruelty, idolatry, and wickedness.

Habakkuk

Little is known about Habakkuk except that he was a contemporary of Jeremiah and a man of vigorous faith. The book bearing his name contains a dialogue between the prophet and God concerning injustice and suffering.

Zephaniah

The prophet Zephaniah was evidently a person of considerable social standing in Judah and was probably related to the royal line. The intent of the author was to announce to Judah God's approaching judgment.

Haggai

Haggai was a prophet who, along with Zechariah, encouraged the returned exiles to rebuild the temple. His prophecies clearly show the consequences of disobedience. When the people give priority to God and his house, they are blessed.

Zechariah

Like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Zechariah was not only a prophet, but also a member of a priestly family. The chief purpose of Zechariah (and Haggai) was to rebuke the people of Judah and to encourage and motivate them to complete the rebuilding of the temple.

Malachi

Malachi, whose name means "my messenger," spoke to the Israelites after their return from exile. The theological message of the book can be summed up in one sentence: The Great King will come not only to judge his people, but also to bless and restore them.