

THE BIBLE: BOOK BY BOOK

G. Michael Cocoris

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most basic observations that can be made about the Bible is that it consists of 66 different books. Each individual book of the Bible is a different and distinct literary unit. Therefore, the Bible should be studied, first and foremost, book by book.

When beginning to read a book, it is helpful to know a few things about it. It is profitable to know about the author and the audience for which it was written. The title, or subtitle, is often a tip-off as to the subject of the book. The table of contents reveals the development of that subject. What authors of a well-written book have to say can be summarized in one sentence, called their thesis or message. In the introduction, the author frequently indicates the purpose of writing.

To say the same thing another way, *authors* write to a specific *audience* to deliver a *message* (thesis) for a *purpose*.

Authors write to a *specific audience* or with specific recipients in mind. It is the recipients' situation that provoked the author to write. Therefore, it is important to know as much as possible about the original recipients because that information indicates the situation that motivated the author to write.

Authors write to deliver a *message* to a particular situation. That message (thesis) consists of a subject and what is said about that subject. The message can be summarized in a single sentence. Authors develop their message in a variety of ways.

Authors write for a *purpose*. Some write to entertain. Serious authors put pen to paper to inform, persuade, exhort, etc.

The Bible is the Word of God. God moved men to write (2 Pet. 1:21); all Scripture is inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16). At the same time, God used human authors and the book format to write. In other words, while the books of the Bible were inspired by God, they are, after all, books. Hence, God intends for us to read the books of the Bible like a book.

Many years ago, I preached a series of sermons called "The Bible: Book by Book," nicknamed "Route 66." In that series, I answered five questions on each book of the Bible. Who was the author? Who were the original recipients? What is the subject? What is the structure (the development of the subject)? What is the purpose? This material is a condensed version of those studies. There is, however, one refinement. In the original study, I discussed the subject in a separate section and made the thesis part of the summary statement. In this slight revision, I have renamed the subject section the "message" and included in it the subject and what is said about the subject. The message of a book of the Bible is a one-sentence summary or its *thesis*. Needless to say the message and its development (i.e., structure or outline) are the most important issues.

At the beginning of the discussion of each biblical book, significant things said about that book are noted. If need be, the name of a book is explained. Under the heading of author, well-known cases of denial of the correct view of authorship called the "critical view" (for example, the criticism that Moses did not write Genesis) are briefly addressed. In the recipient section, the date is determined and the situation concerning the recipients is described. The message section succinctly states the subject and the message, that is, the subject and what is said about the subject is summarized in a single sentence. The structure section briefly explains the literary structure and an outline of the book shows how the

author develops the message. In the case of a narrative book, like Ruth, the story is outlined, assuming the development of the message is embedded in the story. At the end of each chapter, a summary statement sums up these basic facts about the book. A brief statement of the spiritual lesson of that biblical book concludes the chapter.

My thanks go to Gladys Watchulonis, who proofread this material and to Teresa Rogers, who worked on the revised manuscript.

May these introductions to each book of the Bible be used by the Spirit of God to enable the child of God to understand the Word of God.

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GENESIS: THE BOOK OF THE ELECTION OF GOD

Genesis has been called “the book of beginnings,” “the book of election” (Ironsides in *Except Ye Repent*, p.19), “the indispensable introduction to the entire Bible” (Unger), “the seed plot of the whole Bible” (Bullinger), “the most important book in the Bible” (Lee), and “one of the most interesting and fascinating portions of Scripture. There is no more beautiful and lovable little book” (Melancthon).

The name Genesis is taken from the Septuagint (LXX, a Greek translation of the Old Testament ca. 250 BC), which took it from the Hebrew word for “in the beginning.” Genesis means “birth, origin.” It records the beginning of the earth, man, sin, and Israel.

Author

Moses wrote the book of Genesis, as indicated by: 1) The Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible) is a unit (see “and” in Ex. 1:1) and the Pentateuch claims Moses is its author (Ex. 17:14; 24:4, 7; 34:27; Num. 33:1-2; Deut. 31:29). 2) Other Old Testament books testify to the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (Josh. 1:7, 8; 8:32, 34; 22:5; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; 21:8; Ezra 6:18; Dan. 9:11-13; Mal. 4:4). 3) The New Testament confirms the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (Mt. 19:8; Mk. 12:26; Jn. 5:46, 47; 7:19; Rom. 10:15). 4) Jewish and Christian tradition claim Moses wrote it.

The structure of Genesis is marked by “these are the generations of” (“book” in Gen. 5:1 indicates these were written records). Moses used these sources, which is not incompatible with the doctrine of inspiration (see comments on the Books of Kings and Chronicles). Thus, the events recorded in Genesis came from firsthand testimony.

Wellhausen popularized the critical theory that Genesis (and the entire Pentateuch) was composed from a number of documents dating centuries after the time of Moses but containing Mosaic traditions. He speculated that an unknown author, who called God Jehovah, wrote *some* of the material in Genesis. He designated that author as “J.” Other material came from another unknown author who knew God only as Elohim. That author was “E.” The content of Deuteronomy came from still another ghostwriter whom he called “D.” Finally, the material concerning the priesthood was the work of still another author called “P.” Thus, the “J-E-D-P theory” was formulated. These authors did not write in the first millennium BC; they wrote as late as the fourth century before Christ.

Archeological discoveries, however, have found that customs practiced in the second millennium BC (1000-2000 BC) were not practiced in the first millennium BC (1-1000 BC; for example, the price of a slave). How would an author have known of these customs unless he had lived during the earlier period? The critical theory on these and other grounds has been proven false.

Recipients

If Moses was the author of Genesis, it obviously had to have been written during his lifetime. It is unlikely that he wrote it before the Exodus. Perhaps he wrote it sometime during the wanderings in the wilderness or maybe even in the plain of Moab. He probably wrote it between Egypt and Sinai. (Leupold suggests that the bulk, if not nearly all of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, was written after the fashion of a journal, especially the

parts embodying specific words and directions given by God.) If so, the date is about 1446 BC.

The exodus generation, no doubt, had many questions. They probably wanted to know, “Where did we come from? How did we get to Egypt? Why is Moses leading us out of Egypt? Where is he taking us? Why is he taking us there?”

Message

The subject is the election of God. The message is God, the Creator of the universe, chose the Patriarchs and their descendants to give them the land of Palestine and bless the world through them, but they ended up in Egypt.

Structure

The structure of the book is a series of histories. Eleven times the phrase, “These are the generations of” occurs (Gen. 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2). Those sections can be grouped together, resulting in the following outline.

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| I. God’s Election in the Primeval History of Humanity | 1:1-11:26 |
| A. The Creation of the Earth | 1:1-2:3 |
| B. The Development of Sin | 2:4-6:8 |
| C. The Judgment of the Flood | 6:9-9:29 |
| D. The Descendants of Noah | 10:1-11:26 |
| II. God’s Election in the Patriarchal History of Israel | 11:27-50:26 |
| A. The Story of Abraham | 11:27-25:11 |
| B. The Story of Isaac | 25:12-26:35 |
| C. The Story of Jacob | 27:1-37:1 |
| D. The Story of Joseph | 37:2-50:26 |

Purpose

The purpose of Genesis is to inform the Israelites in the wilderness about God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (that they would get the land of Canaan) and to explain how they got to Egypt.

Summary: Moses wrote to the exodus generation to tell them that the sovereign Creator elected to give Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their seed the land of Palestine and bless the world through them, but they ended up in Egypt (Gen. 12:1-3, which is the seed plot of the Bible).

God, the Creator, elects, justifies, and blesses. Justification is by faith (Gen. 15:6), that is, faith is counted for righteousness.

EXODUS: THE BOOK OF THE REDEMPTION OF GOD

Exodus has been called “the book of the departure” or “the going out” (Gray) and “the book of redemption” (Lee).

The name *Exodus*, which means “way out,” comes from the Septuagint.

Author

Moses wrote the book of Exodus. The reasons for saying that are: 1) The book itself indicates that Moses wrote it (Ex. 17:14; 24:4-7; 34:27). 2) It has been attributed to Moses since the time of Joshua (Ex. 20:25; Josh. 8:30-32). 3) Jesus said Moses wrote it (Mk. 7:10).

Recipients

The date of the Exodus, that is, the event, not the book, has been a proverbial football among scholars. It has been kicked all over the historical landscape, but there are two principal views. The first view places the events around 1447 BC. The second view places the events around 1290 BC. Which one is correct? First Kings 6:1 says that Solomon began building the Temple in the fourth year of his reign, which is said to be 480 years after the Exodus from Egypt. Solomon reigned 40 years (1 Kings 11:42). The fourth year was about 967 BC. Adding 480 to 967 gives 1447 as the date of the Exodus. The book of Exodus was probably written shortly thereafter, about 1446 BC.

In many, if not most of the books of the Bible, the condition of the recipients was the need for the book. There are cases where that is not true. Exodus seems to be one of them. In this case, the people had experienced the events in Egypt, the exodus from Egypt, and the extraordinary care God gave them in the wilderness. This book, then, does not seem to be answering any questions or problems that they had. Exodus was not so much written for the people who received it first as much as it was written for the generations that came after them.

Message

Many say the subject is redemption. Granted, the first part of the book records the redemption of Israel, but the key to the subject of Exodus is the end of the book. The last 15 chapters deal with the Tabernacle. After it is completed, God descended to personally inhabit it. Thus, the subject of Exodus is not just redemption but the purpose of the redemption of God. The message is God redeemed Israel and made a covenant with them, which included giving them His Law and dwelling among them.

Structure

While there is a geographical progression in the first part of Exodus (Ex. 12:1, 37; 14:11-12; 19:1), the book is structured around God’s redemption and covenant.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| I. God Redeemed Israel from Egypt | 1:1-18:27 |
| A. God Prepared a Leader | 1:1-6:30 |
| B. God Challenged the Egyptians | 7:1-12:36 |

C. God Redeemed Israel from Egypt	12:37-18:27
II. God Made a Covenant with Israel	19:1-40:38
A. The Acceptance of the Covenant	19:1-25
B. The Book of the Covenant	20:1-23:33
C. The Ratification of the Covenant	24:1-18
III. God Established the Tabernacle	25:1-40:38
D. The Plan for the Tabernacle	25:1-31:18
E. The Breaking of the Covenant	32:1-34:35
F. The Construction of the Tabernacle	35:1-40:38

Purpose

The purpose of Exodus is to remind the exodus generation that God redeemed Israel from Egypt so He could give them His Law and His presence. Redemption is clearly a major theme in Exodus. In chapters 1-12, they were in Egypt in sin and, worse yet, in slavery. God, by blood and power, redeemed them and delivered them from bondage. There is, however, more to the story. He then made a covenant with them, then gave them His Law (Ex. 19-24) and instructions for the Tabernacle so that He could dwell among them (Ex. 25-40).

Thus, God's purpose in redeeming Israel was not just negative, that is, to deliver them from Egyptian slavery, but was positive, so that Israel could know God's will and have God's presence dwelling in their midst.

Summary: Moses wrote to the exodus generation to remind them that God redeemed them and made a covenant with them, which included giving them His Law and dwelling among them.

God redeems us so He can give us His Word and His personal presence.

LEVITICUS: THE BOOK THE HOLINESS OF GOD

Leviticus has been called “the greatest book in the Bible” (S. H. Kellogg) and “the most important book of the Bible” (Albert C. Dudley). Dr. Parker says, “Considered it is embracing the history of one month only, this may claim to be the most remarkable book in the Old Testament.” It has also been called “the book of atonement” (Unger) and “a manual for the priest” (Ryrie).

The title of the book comes from the Septuagint and means “pertaining to the Levites.” The priests were from the tribe of Levi and this book served as their handbook.

Author

Leviticus 1:1 claims that Moses is the author. Fifty-six times in 27 chapters, God is said to have imparted these Laws to Moses. Jesus alludes to Leviticus and attributes it to Moses (Lev. 14:1-4; Mt. 8:2-4). Furthermore, there is a uniform, ancient testimony to the Mosaic authorship of Leviticus.

Recipients

The new calendar of Israel began with the first Passover (Ex. 12:2). The Tabernacle was completed exactly one year later (Ex. 40:17). According to Leviticus 1:1, the book of Leviticus picks up the story at that point and takes place in the first month of the second year (Lev. 25:1; 26:46; 27:34). The book of Numbers opens at the beginning of the second month (Num. 1).

The conclusion is that Leviticus takes place in one month. The book was written after the children of Israel camped at Sinai. Since the Exodus occurred in 1447, this book was probably written in 1446 BC.

At this point, the Exodus generation had been delivered from Egypt, taken to Sinai, given the Law and the instructions for the Tabernacle. As they looked at the Tabernacle, they no doubt wondered what they were to do with it. That is one of the major questions Leviticus is designed to answer. It gives the instructions for the sacrifices and ceremonies surrounding the Tabernacle.

Message

The subject is the holiness of God. God is holy and He desires that His children be holy (Lev. 11:44-45). The Hebrew word “holy” means “to separate or set apart.” The message is God gave ceremonial and moral laws to Israel so that they might be set apart unto Him for fellowship.

Structure

Leviticus is the manual for the Old Testament rituals. There is no neat organizational literary structure. The closest thing to it is the repetition of the phrase, “And the Lord said to.” That phrase occurs 33 times (Lev. 1:1; 8:1; 11:1; 12:1; 13:1; 14:1; 15:1; 16:1; 17:1; 18:1; 19:1; 20:1; etc.).

I. Ceremonial Laws for Israel's Holiness	1:1-16:34
A. The Sacrifices	1:1-7:38
B. The Priesthood	8:1-10:20
C. Clean and Unclean	11:1-15:33
D. Day of Atonement	16:1-34
II. Moral Laws for Israel's Holiness	17:1-27:34
A. Concerning the People	17:1-20:27
B. Concerning the Priest	21:1-22:33
C. Concerning the Feast	23:1-24:23
D. Concerning the Land	25:1-27:34

Purpose

An obvious and immediate purpose of the book of Leviticus is to instruct the exodus generation on how to perform the rituals connected with the Tabernacle. At the same time, it must be remembered that the Tabernacle was the dwelling place of the presence of God. So the issue in this book is not just the function of the Tabernacle, it is the very presence of God. The purpose of Leviticus, then, is to instruct Israel on how to live as a nation in fellowship with God.

Summary: Moses wrote to the exodus generation to inform them that God gave ceremonial and moral laws to Israel so that they might be set apart unto Him for fellowship. God is holy and desires that His people be set apart (sanctified) to Him for fellowship.

NUMBERS: THE BOOK OF THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

Numbers has been called the “Pilgrim’s Progress” of the Bible, “a handbook for pilgrims,” and “the book of testing” (Unger). The Hebrew title, *B’midbar*, comes from the Hebrew word in the first verse, which means “in the wilderness.” The English title, “Numbers,” was given to the book by the Greek translation (LXX) because on two separate occasions in the book, a census was taken (Chapters 1 and 26).

Author

Moses wrote the book of Numbers (Num. 33:1, 2). More than 80 times, the book says, “The Lord spoke to Moses.” Other parts of the Old Testament attribute the book to Moses (*cf.* Ez. 6:10 with Num. 3:6, 8:9). There are also a number of New Testament passages that cite events from Numbers and associate them with Moses (Jn. 3:14; Acts 7:13; 1 Cor. 10:1-11; Heb. 3-4 and Jude 11). Furthermore, there is a universal ancient tradition to the Mosaic authorship of Numbers, including the Jews, the Samaritans, and the early church.

Recipients

The new Jewish calendar began with the first Passover (Ex. 12:2). The Tabernacle was completed exactly one year later (Ex. 40:17). Leviticus covers a period of one month (*cf.* Ex. 40:17 with Num. 1:1). During that month, the children of Israel camped at Sinai (Lev. 25:1; 26:46; 27:34). The book of Numbers picks up where Leviticus leaves off. It records the last 19 days at Mt. Sinai (Num. 1:1; 10:11). It reveals Israel’s journey from Sinai to Kadesh-Barnea and traces Israel’s trip through the various places in the wilderness and finally to the Plain of Moab across the Jordan River from Jericho. The book covers a period of 38 years and nine months. The date is approximately 40 years after the Exodus, somewhere around 1407 BC.

Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus were all originally received by the exodus generation. This is the first book of Moses for which that is not true, for the exodus generation all died in the wilderness. Numbers was received by the *new* generation that lived through the experiences described in it. If there was a need among them for this book, it was as a reminder of what unbelief will do.

Message

The subject is the faithfulness of God. In the book of Genesis, God promised the land to Abraham and his seed. In Exodus, He redeemed Israel and instructed them. Leviticus continued the instruction. Now, in Numbers, God, who is faithful to His promise, prepares to take Israel into the land. Yet, they refuse to go. The message of Numbers is God faithfully prepared Israel for entrance into the land, but because of unbelief, they disobeyed, so He disciplined the disobedient and, faithful to His covenant, He prepared a new generation to inherit the land.

Structure

The key to the structure is the two numberings in chapters one and twenty six.

I. God Faithfully Prepares Israel for Departure	1:1-10:10
A. Numbering of the People	1:1-4:9
B. Spiritual Organization of the People	5:1-6: 27
C. Closing Events at Sinai	7:1-9:14
D. Signal for March	9:15-10:10
II. God Faithfully Disciplines Israel	10:11-25:18
A. Sinai to Kadesh-Barnea—unbelief	10:11-14:45
B. Kadesh-Barnea to Moab—wandering	15:1-25:18
III. God Faithfully Prepares the New Generation	26:1-36:13
A. Numbering of the People	26:1-65
B. Laws	27:1-30:16
C. Allotment of the Land	31:1-32:42
D. Recapitulation	33:1-56
E. More Laws	34:1-36:13

Purposes

One of the purposes of Numbers is to trace Israel’s history. There is a sense in which Numbers was written to trace the history of Israel’s wanderings from Sinai to Moab, but there is obviously more to this book than that. The fact that there are almost no records of the 38 years of wandering and the presence of so many laws and regulations shows that Numbers is a very thematic history.

Another purpose of Numbers is to teach God’s faithfulness. God was faithful to prepare the exodus generation to enter the land. They failed. God was faithful to discipline the disobedient and to raise up another generation to fulfill the promise.

Finally, there is a purpose to warn against unbelief. The writer to the Hebrews explains that (Heb. 3:7-14). They hardened their hearts and, consequently, did not enter the Land.

Summary: Moses wrote to the new generation to teach them that God faithfully prepared the Jews for entrance into the land, but because of unbelief, they disobeyed. So God disciplined the disobedient and, faithful to His covenant, He prepared a new generation to inherit the land.

God is faithful to fulfill all His promises, including disciplining the disobedient.

DEUTERONOMY: THE BOOK OF OBEDIENCE TO GOD

The book of Deuteronomy has been called “the greatest book in the Old Testament.” It is often referred to as the “second Law,” though it does not contain a second Law but a restatement and explanation of the Law. It has been called a “book of remembrance and retrospect,” a “book of hope and prospect” (Unger), and “the book of experience and obedience” (McGee). The title Deuteronomy, which means “second Law,” comes from the Septuagint.

Author

The book itself indicates that Moses wrote it (Deut. 31:9). There are various first-hand references to Moses’ experiences (Deut. 5:6; 9:22; 25:17). The rest of the Old Testament attributes the book to Moses. Jesus indicated that Moses was the author (Mt. 19:8), and tradition confirms that.

Deuteronomy 34 records Moses’ death. Some claim the Lord revealed his death to him so he could incorporate it into the book. The traditional view is that Joshua probably wrote the account of Moses’ death shortly after Moses died (as with various other editorial comments in the book).

Recipients

The book of Deuteronomy takes place on the Plain of Moab, due east of Jericho, across the Jordan River (Deut. 1:1, 29:1) and covers a period of only about one month. (*cf.* Deut. 1:3, 34:8 with Josh. 5:6-12). It was written at the end of the 40-year period in the wilderness, that is, about 1407 BC.

The book was written to the “second” generation. The exodus generation had received the Law, but they had all died in the wilderness. This new generation needed to be taught, or at least reminded, about God’s Law before entering the land. The approaching death of Moses probably provided the initial basis for the renewal of the covenant. Moses’ role had been so significant that for many of the people, Moses and the covenant must have seemed inseparable. Now the time of his death was approaching, not simply as a result of old age, but precipitated in part by his own disobedience. Because he had struck the rock twice, he had been forbidden to enter the land. The exhortation to obedience throughout the book is against this background.

Message

The subject is not “the second Law,” as some suppose. Instead, it is a series of sermons exhorting the people to obedience. The essence of the book is an appeal for obedience to God. The message of Deuteronomy is God reminds Israel of what He has done and said and exhorts them to obey Him.

Structure

There is a sense in which the literary structure of Deuteronomy is simple. It records what Moses said to the people in the Plain of Moab (Deut. 1:1; 5:1; 27:1; 29:1; 31:1; 31:30;

33:1; 34:1). A number of arrangements have been suggested. A common way to view Deuteronomy is to see it as a series of sermons.

I. First Sermon: The Historical Appeal for Obedience	1:1-4:49
A. Wilderness Journey	1:1-3:29
B. Exhortation to Obedience	4:1-49
II. Second Sermon: The Legal Basis for Obedience	5:1-26:19
A. The Basic Commandment	5:1-11:32
B. Specific Legislation	12:1-26:19
III. Third Sermon: A Prophetical Exhortation for Obedience	27:1-30:20
A. Covenant Renewal Commanded	27:1-26
B. Blessing and Cursing	28:1-68
C. A Concluding Charge	29:1-30:20
IV. Transitional Details	31:1-34:12
A. Joshua and Law	31:1-30
B. Song of Moses	32:1-52
C. Blessing of Moses	33:1-29
D. Death of Moses	34:1-12

Purpose

The purpose of Deuteronomy is for Moses to address Israel before he died and they entered the land (Deut. 1:1, 3:5). He urges the people to obey the Lord (Deut. 26:16-19). If they did so, they would be blessed. If they didn't, they would be cursed (Deut. 27-30, esp. 30:11-18). He also needed to settle transitional details before he died, such as: 1) Joshua was appointed as Moses' successor, both in public ceremony (Deut. 31:7-8; 34:9) and privately in the tent of meeting (Deut. 31:14-23). The succession of human leadership was neither a power struggle nor a democratic process; it was a matter of divine appointment. 2) Instructions were given regarding the deposition of the text of the Law (Deut. 31:9, 26). 3) General instructions were given for the covenant renewal procedure in the more distant future. (Deut. 31:10-13).

In Exodus and Leviticus, God speaks to Moses; in Deuteronomy, Moses speaks to the people. In Genesis, a sovereign God elects. In Exodus, a powerful God redeems. In Leviticus, a holy God sanctifies. In Numbers, a faithful God disciplines. In Deuteronomy, a gracious God instructs.

Summary: Moses wrote Deuteronomy to remind Israel of what God has done and said and to exhort them to obey God. Then he turns over the leadership to Joshua.

God blesses the obedient and disciplines the disobedient. Obedience is the condition for blessing.

JOSHUA: THE BOOK OF POSSESSION

Joshua is the “invaluable appendage” to the preceding five books (Josh). It is the book of realization. Until now, the land was a promise to Israel. In Joshua, the land becomes the possession of Israel. Joshua is the book of the conquest of the land.

Author

The same man, Moses, wrote all the books up to Joshua. With Joshua, for the first time, someone writes a book of the Bible other than Moses. Technically, the book of Joshua is anonymous, but there are reasons to believe that Joshua wrote it: 1) An eyewitness wrote it (Jos. 5:1, 6). Such events as the sending out of the spies, the crossing of the Jordan, the capture of Jericho and Ai (Jos. 6-8), etc., are described with great vividness of detail. Joshua, of course, was definitely an eyewitness. 2) Rahab was still alive (Jos. 6:25). 3) Joshua wrote at least parts of the book (“we,” “us” sections in Jos. 5:1, 6; 18:9; 24:26). 4) Tradition assigns the book to Joshua.

Joshua was the best-qualified person to write the book as Israel’s leader and as an eyewitness to most of the events. Some believe that three small portions, however, must have been added after his death: 1) Othniel’s capture of Kirjath-Sepher (Jos. 15:13-19; Judges 1:9-15), 2) Dan’s migration to the north (Jos. 19:47; Judges 18:27-29) and 3) Joshua’s death and burial (Jos. 24:29-33). Eleazar, the priest, and his son, Phinehas (Jos. 24:33), may have inserted these later in the time of Judges.

The critics apply their documentary hypothesis to Joshua. They claim J and E were the primary sources of chapters 1 through 12, revised later by Deuteronomy writers. Chapters 13-22 were said to be a priestly source and were added to J-E-D about 400 BC.

The problem with all of that is that there is no historical evidence that Joshua was ever thought of as being part of the Pentateuch. Years later, when the Samaritans split away from Judaism, they took only the Pentateuch, which could have been inconceivable had Joshua at the time formed a Hexateuch, and especially so when the book apparently favors the Samaritans by its reference to Shechem (Jos. 24:1, 32).

Recipients

The Exodus took place in 1447 BC. The conquest began 40 years later in 1407 BC. According to Caleb, the conquest was completed in 7 years (Jos. 14:7, 10). Thus, Joshua was written around 1400 BC or possibly shortly thereafter. The new generation, which was still in the land, received the book.

Message

The subject is “possessing your possessions” (Jos. 1:11). The word “possession” occurs no less than 22 times. There is a difference between ownership and possession. Israel’s ownership over the land was completely unconditional (Gen. 15:7-21, etc.), but her possession of the land was conditional (Deut. 29:9, 30:20). God told Joshua, “You’ve got it (Jos. 1:2-3), now go get it” (Jos. 1:5-6). The message of Joshua possessing your God-given possession is a long, hard battle, but it’s worth it.

Structure

Like Exodus and Deuteronomy, there is a great deal of geographical material in the book of Joshua. Yet there is also narrative and beyond that, the details of the division of the land, as well as a farewell address. The geography is one of the unifying factors throughout the book.

I. Entering the Land to Possess it	1:1-5:15
A. The Charge to Joshua	1:1-18
B. The Commissioning of the Spies	2:1-24
C. The Crossing of the Jordan	3:1-17
D. The Construction of the Memorial	4:1-24
E. The Consecration of the Israelites	5:1-15
II. Conquering the Land to Possess it	6:1-12:24
A. The Central Campaign	6:1-8:35
B. The Southern Campaign	9:1-10:43
C. The Northern Campaign	11:1-5
D. The Review of the Victories	11:6-12:24
III. The Division of the Land to Possess it	13:1-21:45
A. The Division of the Land	13:1-19:51
B. The Cities of Refuge	20:1-9
C. The Cities of the Levites	21:1-45
IV. Appendix	22:1-24:33
A. The Dismissal of the Eastern Tribes	22:1-34
B. The Farewell of Joshua	23:1-24:33

Purpose

The purpose of Joshua is to document how God led the Israelites into the land, and how they conquered and divided it. Joshua carries on the geographical and chronological story of Israel from Abraham to Malachi. Without this book, there would be gaping holes in our understanding of the history of Israel. How they got into and settled the land would be unknown.

Summary: Joshua wrote to the new generation to remind them of how God had led them into the land, conquered it and divided it. He then said farewell.

When God's people trust Him and obey Him, they possess their possessions. We need to trust the Lord and obey His Word so that we can possess our God-given possessions.

JUDGES: THE BOOK OF APOSTASY

Judges has been called “one of the saddest books in the Bible” (Scroggie). In Joshua, there is victory; in Judges, there is defeat. In the former, there is progress; in the latter, there is decline. In the first, there is faith; in the second, there is unbelief. In one, there is freedom; in the other, there is bondage. Numbers is a sad book, recording 40 years of wilderness wanderings because of unbelief, but Judges is “far more sad and solemn” (Lee), because their failure spans better than eight times 40 years.

The title of this book is the name of the civil and military leaders (judges) during this period when the nation was a loose confederacy.

Author

The author is anonymous. The Talmud attributes the book to Samuel, who was an author (1 Sam. 10:25). Samuel or one of his prophetic students probably wrote it.

Recipients

Judges was written after the death of Samson, for the book records his death. He died in 1051 BC. The book repeatedly says, “In those days there was no king in Israel” (Judges 17:6; 21:25; 18:21; 19:1), implying that, at the time of writing, there was a king. So, the book must have been written after the commencement of Saul’s reign and before the division of the kingdom. The most helpful clue to the dating of the book is Judges 1:21. It says that the Jebusites were dwelling in Jerusalem “to this day.” That means it was written before 1004 BC, which is when David disposed of the Jebusites (2 Sam. 5:5-9). Thus, Judges was written between 1043 BC (the beginning of Saul’s reign) and 1004 BC (David’s capture of Jerusalem), probably about 1040 BC.

By the way, the chronological notices in the book total of 410 years. That is a problem. First Kings 6:1 says the fourth year of Solomon’s reign was 480 years after the Exodus. Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years and the conquest took seven. There may have also been a gap of a few years between the conquest of the land and the beginning of the first judge. To those figures needs to be added forty years for Saul and forty years for David, plus four years of Solomon’s reign. The total of these is at least 131 years ($40+7+40+40+4 = \text{at least } 131$), leaving only 349 + years for the period of the Judges ($480-131-? = 349 +$).

The solution to this apparent discrepancy is to conclude that some of the judges ruled contemporaneously, reducing the total length of the period from 410 years to about 350 years. For example, Judges 10:7 clearly implies that Jephthah and Samson ruled simultaneously since one delivered oppressed Israel from the Ammonites and the other from the Philistines. In other words, not all the judges in the book of Judges ruled over the *whole* land as our President does the whole nation. Instead, they were like our governors, ruling over smaller areas and, at times, some of them ruled at the same time over different areas. Thus, the entire period of the Judges was only about 350 years, from about 1390 BC until about 1043 BC, when Saul became King.

The recipients of the book of Judges lived either just before or just after the first king was crowned in Israel. When they didn't have a king, everyone did that which was right in his own eyes. There was a need for a king to give order and stability to Israel.

Message

The subject is apostasy, departure from the Lord. The passage that explains the book is Judges 2:11-19. The message of Judges is departure from the Lord (sin) leads to degeneration (servitude), but supplication leads to deliverance (salvation).

Structure

The book is not in chronological order. Chapters 17-21 precede chapters 3-16 in time. The literary structure revolves around a repeated phrase, "The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord" (Judges 3:7, 3:12; 4:1; 6:12; 10:6; 13:1). The book then reaches a climax in chapters 17-21 with the last verses being a fitting summary.

I. Introduction: Israel Departed from the Lord	1:1-3:6
A. Politically: Failure to Completely Conquer	1:1-3:6
B. Spiritually: Departure, Degeneration, Defeat, Deliverance	2:1-3:6
II. The Judges: Departure, Defeat and Delivered by a Judge	3:7-16:31
A. First Apostasy: conquered by Mesopotamia (Othniel)	3:7-12
B. Second Apostasy: conquered by Mesopotamia and the Philistines (Ehud and Shamgar)	3:12-31
C. Third Apostasy: conquered by Jabin (Deborah and Barak)	4:1-5:31
D. Fourth Apostasy: conquered by Midians (Gideon, Tola and Jair)	6:1-10:5
E. Fifth Apostasy: conquered by the Philistines and the Ammonites (Jephthah, Ibzan and Abdon)	10:6-12:15
F. Sixth Apostasy: conquered by the Philistines (Samson)	13:1-16:31
III. Appendix: Departure, Depravity, Desire for a King	17:1-21:25
A. The Idolatry of Dan	17:1-18:31
B. The Crime of Benjamin	19:1-21:15

Purpose

The purpose of the book of Judges is to show that departure from the Lord leads to defeat, degeneration and even though God delivered them through Judges, the desire for a king. Defection led to people doing that which was right in their own eyes and the need for a king (Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

Summary: Samuel (?) wrote to the generation in Israel that first had a king to show that departure from the Lord led to defeat, degeneration, and even though God delivered them through judges, the desire for a king.

Departure from the Lord leads to defeat and depravity, but God, in His grace, delivers when we turn back to Him. Sin leads to servitude, but supplication brings salvation.

RUTH: THE BOOK OF REDEMPTION BY A KINSMAN

Ruth has been called “the most essential book of the Old Testament, the most important document in the Old Testament” (McGee), “a literary and spiritual gem” (Lee), “a love story” (Baxter), a “delightful book,” and “the beautiful book in the Old Testament” (Walvoord).

Author

Like Judges, the author of Ruth is anonymous. There is not the slightest hint or clue in the book as to who wrote it. The author is simply unknown.

The Talmud attributes it to Samuel. That is possible, but there is a problem with that view. The problem is that Ruth 4:17 traces the lineage of Ruth to David, but Samuel died *before* David became king (1 Sam. 25:1).

Samuel, however, did anoint David as king. Samuel could have written Ruth after he anointed David. Samuel lived from 1105 BC until 1015 BC. David reigned from 1011 BC to 971 BC. Samuel could have written Ruth then about 1016 or 1015 BC. In the final analysis, the authorship of Ruth is uncertain.

Recipients

The events of the book took place during the period of the Judges (Ruth 1:1), which was between 1375 BC and 1043 BC, but the book traces the lineage of Ruth to David (Ruth 4:17). That extends beyond the period of the Judges well into the period of the Kingdom. At the same time, if it were written after David’s reign, it probably would have included Solomon. It does not mention Solomon. So it was written before David’s death. David reigned from 1011 through 971 BC.

If Samuel wrote Ruth, it was written about 1016 BC, which means it was written years after the events took place. That is why the author explains the shoe covenant (Ruth 4:7-8). By the time the book was written that custom was no longer practiced in Israel.

All that can be said about the recipients of this book is that they were not the people who lived during the period of the Judges, but rather they were the Jews who lived during David’s day.

Message

There is a sense in which the subject is Ruth. She is a Moabite girl who ends up in Israel. Yet the issue is not just her story. She was a stranger who was redeemed by a near-kinsman. Thus, the subject is redemption by a near-kinsman. The message of Ruth is God redeems by a kinsman.

Structure

Ruth is almost pure narrative. If there is a literary structure, it revolves around places.

I. Ruth follows Naomi to Bethlehem	1:1-22
II. Ruth gleanes in Boaz's Field	2:1-23
III. Ruth seeks to marry Boaz	3:1-18
IV. Ruth marries Boaz	4:1-22

Purposes

Many have connected Ruth with the book of Judges suggesting that it forms a contrast to that period. While there is clearly a striking contrast between Judges and Ruth, the purpose of this book is not to be a supplement to Judges. It was not written until many years after that period! Ruth serves several purposes.

One purpose of Ruth is to introduce the line of David. The key to the purpose of Ruth is Ruth 4:17. Ruth 4:18-22 connects Perez, the son of Judah, with David, who is connected to the tribe of Judah. The line, of course, passes through Boaz, the husband of Ruth. So the purpose of Ruth is to introduce the line of David. McGee suggests that this makes Ruth one of the most important and essential books of the Old Testament.

The second purpose of Ruth is to identify the line of Christ. The importance of introducing the line of David is that Christ is in the Davidic line. Therefore, the object is not just the genealogy of the great David but also the genealogy of the great David's great Son.

The third purpose of Ruth is to illustrate redemption by a near-kinsman. Ruth was under the condemnation of the Law from her birth. The Mosaic Law forbade a Moabitess from entering the congregation of the Lord (Deut. 23:3). The Law provided, however, for a near-kinsman to redeem a brother and his inheritance (Lev. 25; Num. 35; Deut. 19, 25).

Summary: Samuel (?) wrote to the Jews of David's day to introduce the line of David, which identifies the line of the Messiah and illustrates redemption by a near-kinsman.

God redeems by a kinsman, His Son. In Exodus, redemption is by the blood of a lamb. In Ruth, redemption is by a near-kinsman. Jesus Christ qualifies for both types of redemption. He is a near-kinsman, the Son of God and He is the Lamb of God (see Jn. 1:29).

1 SAMUEL: THE BOOK OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE KINGDOM

Originally 1 and 2 Samuel were one book. Even though they were one continuous record, the Septuagint divided Samuel into two books. The division artificially breaks up the history of David. It has been said that 1 and 2 Samuel “constitute some of the finest historical writing in all literature” (Unger). First Samuel is often said to be “the book of transition from the Theocracy to the Monarchy” and has been called “unsurpassed” for sheer interest (Baxter).

Author

The author of 1 Samuel is anonymous. Jewish tradition, however, says that Samuel wrote it. He may have written 1 Samuel 1-24, but he did not write the remainder of 1 Samuel or 2 Samuel because his death is recorded in 1 Samuel 25:1. Samuel did write a book (1 Sam. 10:25), and he probably wrote the first part of what is now called 1 Samuel. First Chronicles 29:29 refers to the “book of Samuel, the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad, the seer.” Those three men were said to have recorded the acts of David from the first to the last. Perhaps all three of these men contributed to 1 and 2 Samuel.

Recipients

The book of 1 Samuel covers 94 years from the birth of Samuel to the death of Saul (about 1105-1011 BC), but 1 Samuel was not written independently of 2 Samuel. So the time frame of 2 Samuel must also be considered. The book of 2 Samuel covers a period of 40 years. That extends to almost the time of the death of David. Considering the fact that 1 and 2 Samuel were originally one book and that 2 Samuel goes to the end of the life of David, 1 Samuel could not have been written before David’s death.

Furthermore, there is internal evidence that 1 Samuel could not have been written prior to the death of Solomon. In 1 Samuel 27:6, a reference is made to the divided kingdom which didn’t exist until after the death of Solomon. Yet the book was evidently not written too far after the death of Solomon. According to Keil and Delitzsch, the contents and style of the books point to the earliest time after the division of the kingdoms. The date is probably about 925 BC.

Samuel was not written because of any “urgent” need on the part of the recipients. Rather, God wished to remind the nation of Israel of how the kingdom came to be established, as well as teach them some spiritual truths.

Message

The subject is the establishment of the kingdom. It covers the transition of leadership in Israel from the Judges to the Kings, from a theocracy to a monarchy. Samuel was the last judge and the kingmaker who anointed the first two rulers of the united kingdom of Israel. Saul disobeyed God, but David was the first theocratic king. He allowed God to rule through him. The message of 1 Samuel is God established a kingdom in Israel.

Structure

The literary structure of 1 Samuel is clearly people, namely Samuel, Saul, and David. The first two are introduced by their human lineage; the third is only introduced by the fact that he is chosen of God (1 Sam. 1:1; 9:1; 16:1).

I. Samuel: Transition of Leadership from Eli to Samuel	1:1-8:22
A. His birth and boyhood	1:1-2:10
B. Eli's rejection and Samuel's call	2:11-3:21
C. The Philistines and the Ark	4:1-7:17
D. Israel's Demand for a King.	8:1-22
II. Saul: Establishment of the Kingdom under Saul	9:1-15:35
A. Received and reigning	9:1-12:25
B. Rebuilding and rejected	13:1-15:35
III. David: Establishment of the Kingdom under David	16:1-31:13
A. David's rise as a shepherd	16:1-17:58
B. David's service as a courtier	18:1-19:24
C. David's training as a fugitive	20:1-31:13

Purpose

The purpose of 1 Samuel is to record the establishment of the kingdom. It traces the transition of leadership in Israel from Judges to Kings. For the first time, Israel has a king and becomes a kingdom. Israel was now not only a priestly nation but also a royal nation.

The Lord also raised up prophets to stand by the kings and make known to them His will and counsel. It has been suggested that Samuel was the pivot on which the history of Israel turned. That is true in that Samuel was the last judge and the first prophet (1 Sam. 3:20; Acts 13:20). He also established a school of the prophets (1 Sam. 19:20; 2 Kings 2:3-5; 4:38).

Summary: An unknown author, or authors (probably Samuel, Nathan, and Gad), wrote to Israel about 925 BC to record the fact that God called Samuel to be a prophet and instructed him to anoint first Saul and then David as king. Samuel, the last judge, anointed the people's choice for king and then, God's choice for king. In short, God established a kingdom in Israel.

In God's kingdom, He rules through people using prophets to reveal His will.

2 SAMUEL: THE BOOK OF THE EXPANSION OF THE KINGDOM

Originally 1 and 2 Samuel were one book (see the introduction to 1 Sam.). Second Samuel has been called “a record of greatest importance, and of thrilling interest” (Scroggie), “distinctively the book of David’s forty-year reign” (Baxter).

Author

Technically, the author of 2 Samuel is anonymous. Jewish tradition says Samuel wrote it. He may have written 1 Samuel 1-24, but he did not write the remainder of 1 Samuel or 2, Samuel, because he died by 1 Samuel 25:1. Perhaps, Samuel wrote part of 1 Samuel. He did write a book (1 Sam. 10:25). Nathan and Gad probably wrote the rest (1 Chron. 29:29). No one knows which of them wrote what. Maybe, they gleaned some of the material from the book of Jashar (2 Sam. 1:18).

Recipients

Second Samuel could not have been written before the death of Solomon and the division of the kingdom because 2 Samuel 27:6 refers to the divided kingdom. On the other hand, there is no mention of the Assyrian captivity of the Northern Kingdom, nor is there any allusion to the decay of the kingdom. Thus, the content of these books points to the early time after the division of the kingdom. Second Samuel was probably written around 925 BC.

The content of 2 Samuel indicates that this book was not written to correct something in the lives of the recipients. Rather, it was written to instruct the recipients concerning the consolidation of the kingdom, as well as spiritual truths.

Message

Like 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel is more than a biography of a man. More specifically, the subject is the consolidation of the kingdom. With God’s blessing, David consolidated and expanded the kingdom, but his sin weakened it. The message of 2 Samuel is God wants to expand His kingdom (rule).

1 Samuel	2 Samuel
Establishment of kingdom	Consolidation of kingdom
King after the people’s heart	King after God’s heart
David in school	David on the throne

Structure

The literary structure of 2 Samuel is like Ruth. It is a story. The book is a narrative that records one story or event after another. The phrase “and it came to pass” occurs several times (2 Sam. 1:1; 2:1; 7:1; 7:4; 8:1; 10:1; 11:1; 11:14; 13:1; 15:1).

I. David's Triumphs: The Consolidation of the Kingdom	1:1-10:19
A. King over Judah Only—at Hebron	1:1-4:12
B. King over All Israel—at Jerusalem	5:1-10:19
II. David's Troubles: In the Consolidated Kingdom	11:1-24:25
A. In His Family	11:1-18:33
B. In His Nation	19:1-24:25

Purposes

There are three purposes of 2 Samuel.

First, the purpose of 2 Samuel is to trace the consolidation of the kingdom. As 2 Samuel opens, David is made king, but only over Judah. By the end of chapter 4, he is king over all of Israel. So part of the purpose of this portion of 2 Samuel is to trace the consolidation of the kingdom.

Second, the purpose of 2 Samuel is to trace the expansion of the kingdom. With his rule established over the kingdom, David's rule expands to the boundaries originally promised to Abraham.

Third, the purpose of 2 Samuel is to trace the effects of David's sin in his house and kingdom. Second Samuel does not end with the expansion of the kingdom. It goes on to tell of David's nosedive. He fell into sin and that sin affected his family and the nation.

Summary: An unknown author or authors (probably Nathan and Gad) recorded for Israel around 925 BC that David, with God's blessing, consolidated and expanded the kingdom, but his sin weakened it.

God wants to use us to expand His Kingdom (rule).

1 KINGS: THE BOOK OF THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM

Like 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings were originally one volume. The Septuagint divided Samuel and Kings. It called Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings and Kings, 3 and 4 Kings. First Kings has been called the “book of the Disruption” (Baxter). It is about division.

Author

The author of Kings is unknown. The Talmud contends that Jeremiah wrote it. There is evidence to indicate that might be the case: 1) there are linguistic similarities between Kings and Jeremiah, 2) both have a similar sober view of history, 3) both have a preference for phrases from the Pentateuch, 4) both have allusions to earlier prophets.

Whoever the author was, one thing is certain. He used sources, including: the book of the acts of Solomon (1 Kings 11:41), the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel (1 Kings 14:19), the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah (1 Kings 14:29; 15:7), probably Isaiah 36-39 and perhaps an official court record (2 Kings 18:18). That does not mean that 1 Kings was not inspired, because inspiration only means truth was recorded.

Recipients

First Kings covers a period of about 123 years, from the death of David to the death of Jehoshaphat (971 to 848 BC). The generation that received it was after Jehoshaphat.

It must be remembered that originally 1 and 2 Kings were one volume. Second Kings covers a period of about 266 years, from the reign of Ahaziah of Israel (Ahab’s son) to the Babylonian captivity (852 to 586 BC). Furthermore, 2 Kings 25:7 extends to about 26 years beyond the captivity.

In 1 Kings 8:8 and again in 12:19, the author says, “to this day.” Some have argued that this phrase indicates a time of authorship prior to the Babylonian captivity (586 BC).

So some of the evidence indicates that the book was written before the captivity (“to this day”) and other evidence indicates that it was written after (2 Kings 25:27). What is the solution to the conflict of evidence? Kings could have been written to the remaining kingdom of Judah before and after the Babylonian captivity. If so, most of it was compiled by a contemporary of Jeremiah or by Jeremiah himself. Thus, the date is ca. 600-570 BC.

The book was not finished until after the beginning of the captivity. In reviewing the history of how Israel went from being a united kingdom to captivity, the author is reminding the children of Israel in captivity of pertinent spiritual truths.

Message

The subject is the division of the kingdom. A faltering King David, in the midst of palace intrigue, chooses his son Solomon to succeed him. At the outset Solomon is promising, but later develops a divided heart. Ultimately, the monarchy is divided. This division is traced in its successive kings, the kings of the north and the south, as the monarchy decays at the core. A divided heart in Solomon led to a division in the kingdom. The message of 1 Kings is sin leads to decline and division.

Structure

The structure on which 1 Kings hangs is chronology. For example, 1 Kings 1:1 says that David was old. First Kings 2:1 says, “Now the days of David drew nigh.” More specifically, it is the reign of kings (1 Kings 4:1; 11:41-43; etc.).

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| I. The United Kingdom (Reign of Solomon) | 1:1-11:43 |
| A. Solomon’s Rule Established | 1:1-4:34 |
| B. Solomon’s Temple and Palace Built | 5:1-8:66 |
| C. Solomon’s Fame and Glory | 9:1-10:29 |
| D. Solomon’s Downfall and Death | 11:1-43 |
| II. The Divided Kingdom (Reign of Kings) | 12:1-22:53 |
| A. The Division of the Kingdom | 12:1-24 |
| B. Reign of Jeroboam in Israel | 12:25-14:20 |
| C. Reign of Rehoboam in Judah | 14:21-41 |
| D. Reign of Abijam in Judah | 15:1-8 |
| E. Reign of Asa in Judah | 15:9-24 |
| F. Reign of Nadab in Israel | 15:25-31 |
| G. Reign of Baasha in Israel | 15:32-16:7 |
| H. Reign of Elah in Israel | 16:8-14 |
| I. Reign of Zimri in Israel | 16:15-20 |
| J. Reign of Omri in Israel (Ministry of Elijah) | 16:29-22:40 |
| K. Reign of Jehoshaphat in Judah | 22:41-50 |
| L. Reign of Ahaziah in Israel | 22:51-53 |

Purpose

First Kings gives an account of the reign of the kings from Solomon to Jehoshaphat (Judah) and Ahaziah (Israel). It records the division of the kingdom. It was written by a prophet to give us God’s point of view on what happened. In other words, Kings is not just recording history, but rather history from God’s point of view. It evaluates the kings of the divided kingdom. Each king is assessed individually. The author uses the voice of the prophet to judge sins, which reaches its climax in the time of Elijah. The standard is righteousness (1 Kings 11:6; 13:33; 14:22; 15:26, 34; 16:19, 25, 30; 22:52). In addition, each king is measured according to the standard of Jeroboam in Israel (1 Kings 13:33-34; 15:30, 34; 16:3-5; 16:326; etc.).

Summary: An unknown author, probably Jeremiah, wrote to the children of Israel about the time of the Babylonian captivity to remind them that a divided heart in Solomon led to a division in the kingdom.

Our sin leads to decline and division.

2 KINGS: THE BOOK OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE KINGDOM

Originally 1 and 2 Kings were one book (see 1 Kings). Second Kings records the destruction of that kingdom. It has been called “the book of Dispersion” (Baxter).

Author

Jewish tradition says that 1 and 2 Kings were written by Jeremiah. Some argue that Jeremiah ended his days in Egypt and could not have survived the last events recorded in 2 Kings, namely, the liberation of Jehoiachim from prison and his exaltation to royal honors by Evil-Merodach. He would have been 86 years old. The literary style of 2 Kings, however, is similar to Jeremiah. Also, if Jeremiah did not write Kings, the omissions of his ministry and the account of King Josiah and his successors are difficult to explain.

Jeremiah 43:1-8 says that the prophet was exiled to Egypt, not Babylon, but rabbinical tradition holds that Jeremiah was taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar after he conquered Egypt. Jeremiah died an old man, past 90. Thus, as the argument goes, most of the book was written before the exile, but Jeremiah wrote 2 Kings 25, 27-30 as an old man in Babylon (2 Kings 24:18-25:30 is almost identical to Jeremiah 52).

Recipients

If Jeremiah wrote Kings, or finished Kings in Babylon, the recipients were obviously the Jews taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel and Ezekiel were among them. Daniel definitely knew about the book of Jeremiah, for in Daniel 9:2 he refers to Jeremiah 25:11, 12. The date was probably around 600-575 BC. (See the discussion of the date of Kings in 1 Kings.) Imagine! The recipient of Kings was Daniel!

Second Kings records the miracle-filled ministry of Elisha. During this period, Amos and Hosea prophesied in Israel, and Obadiah, Joel, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah ministered in Judah.

Message

The content of 2 Kings gives an account of the reigns of various kings, but it is written selectively, not exhaustively. The subject is the defeat and destruction of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria and the Southern Kingdom by Babylon. The message of 2 Kings is disobedience leads to decay, defeat and destruction.

Structure

Like 1 Kings, 2 Kings hinges and hangs on chronology. It is an account of the reign of one king after another. The formula is “In such and such a year, so and so became king” (2 Kings 3:1).

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| I. The Destruction of the Northern Kingdom | 1:1-17:41 |
| A. Reign of Ahaziah in Israel | 1:1-18 |
| B. Reign of Jehoram in Israel (Ministry of Elisha) | 2:1-8:15 |

C. Reign of Jehoram in Judah	8:16-24
D. Reign of Ahaziah in Judah	8:25-29
E. Reign of Jehu in Israel	9:1-10:36
F. Reign of Athalia in Judah	11:1-16
G. Reign of Jehoash in Judah	11:17-12:21
H. Reign of Jehoahaz in Israel	13:1-9
I. Reign of Jehoash in Israel	13:10-25
J. Reign of Amaziah in Judah	14:1-22
K. Reign of Jehoboam II in Israel	14:23-29
L. Reign of Azariah in Judah	15:1-7
M. Reign of Zechariah in Israel	15:8-12
N. Reign of Shallum in Israel	15:13-15
O. Reign of Menahem in Israel	15:16-22
P. Reign of Pekohiah in Israel	15:23-26
Q. Reign of Pekah in Israel	15:27-31
R. Reign of Jothem in Judah	15:32-38
S. Reign of Ahaz in Judah	16:1-20
T. Reign of Hoshea in Israel	17:1-41
II. The Destruction of the Southern Kingdom	18:1-25:30
A. Reign of Hezekiah	18:1-20:21
B. Reign of Manasseh	21:1-18
C. Reign of Amon	21:19-26
D. Reign of Josiah	22:1-23:30
E. Reign of Jehoahaz	23:31-33
F. Reign of Jehoiachim	23:34-24:7
G. Reign of Jehoiachin	24:8-16
H. Reign of Zedekiah	24:17-25:21
I. Gedaliah, the Puppet Governor	25:22-26
J. The Release of Jehoiachin in Babylon	25:27-30

Purpose

A prophet, not a historian, wrote Kings. It is written from the prophetic viewpoint to teach that the decline and collapse of the two kingdoms occurred because of failure on the part of the rulers and the people to heed the warnings of God's messengers.

Summary: An unknown author, probably Jeremiah, wrote to the Jews in captivity in Babylon to teach them that habitual disobedience led to the decay, defeat, and destruction of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms in Israel.

The spiritual climate of a nation determined its political and economic conditions.

1 CHRONICLES: THE BOOK OF PREPARING FOR THE TEMPLE

Like 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles were originally one book. Also, like Samuel and Kings, the Septuagint divided Chronicles. Chronicles contains a different perspective concerning the same period covered by Kings. Kings was written at the beginning of the captivity. Chronicles was written afterward. A prophet wrote Kings; a priest wrote Chronicles. Chronicles has been called a “miniature Old Testament” (Ryrie).

The name “Chronicles” comes from Jerome’s translation of the Bible into Latin called the Vulgate (385-405 AD). It refers to the chronicles of the whole sacred history.

Author

The text of Chronicles does not identify the author. Jewish tradition says the author was Ezra, the priest, and there is evidence that supports that view. Chronicles closes where Ezra begins. Second Chronicles closes with the edict of Cyrus, which summoned the Jews to return to Jerusalem to build the Temple (2 Chron. 36:22-23). Ezra begins with the same edict, but gives it more completely than Chronicles (Ezra 1:2-4). Chronicles and Ezra may have been one continuous history, like Luke and Acts. Chronicles centers on the Temple worship and the priests. This fits the fact that Ezra was a priest (Ezra 7:11). Chronicles contains the style and Hebrew word choice similar to Ezra.

Whoever wrote Chronicles used sources. First Chronicles 29:29 lists three sources for 1 Chronicles: 1) the book of Samuel the seer, 2) the book of Nathan the prophet, 3) the book of Gad the seer.

Samuel, Nathan, and Gad probably wrote 1 and 2 Samuel. Does this mean that Ezra is quoting Samuel? The answer is, “No.” The material given in 1 Chronicles is not recorded in 2 Samuel, which means that if Nathan and Gad wrote our Samuel, they also wrote another work, which Ezra quotes.

Recipients

The first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles starts with Adam and extends to Zerubbabel, who led the first return of the Jews from exile in 538 BC. His two grandsons, Pelatiah and Jeshaiiah, are also mentioned (1 Chron. 3:21). Second Chronicles (remember, these two were originally one volume) ends with the edict of Cyrus, which officially ended the exile. Thus, the book had to be written after the exile. Ezra led some of the captives to Jerusalem in 458 BC. So, he probably completed Chronicles between 450-440 BC.

The recipients of Chronicles were the returned remnant from Babylon. The city and the Temple had been destroyed, and it was up to them to rebuild both, beginning with the Temple.

Message

The subject is the Temple. The message of 1 Chronicles is when God is present and He is acknowledged, things of lasting spiritual value are accomplished.

Structure

The literary structure of the first eight chapters is easy; see the phrase “the sons of” (1 Chron. 1:5, 1:28; 2:1; 3:1; 4:1; 5:1; 6:1; 7:1; 7:6; etc.). The ninth chapter contains a genealogy, but not under the phrase “the sons of.” It records the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the family of Saul. The structure of the rest of the book is chronological. For example, compare the phrase, “Now it came to pass” (1 Chron. 17:1; 18:11; 19:1; etc.).

I. The Preparation of the Temple: The History of Israel	1:1-9:44
A. Adam to Abraham	1:1-27
B. Abraham to Jacob	1:28-54
C. Jacob to David	2:1-55
D. David to Captivity	3:1-24
E. Genealogies of the Twelve Tribes	4:1-8:40
F. Jerusalem’s Inhabitants	9:1-34
G. The Family of Saul	9:35-44
II. The Preparation of the Temple: The History of David	10:1-29:30
A. David Becomes King	10-12
B. David Returns the Ark to Jerusalem	13-16
C. David Desires to Build a Temple	17:1-27
D. David Goes to War	18-21
E. David Prepares for the Temple	22-23:1
F. David Organizes the Levites	23:2-26:32
G. David Appoints Civil Leaders	27:1-34
H. David’s Final Acts	28-29

Purpose

The purpose of Chronicles is to demonstrate the importance of the Temple in the history of Israel. After the return of the remnant to Jerusalem, Ezra compiled the Chronicles in order to emphasize the importance of the Temple and the priesthood in Israel’s history. Yet it is not just the Temple, that is, the Temple past or Temple present; the Temple meant the presence of God.

Summary: Ezra wrote to the returning remnant to demonstrate that in the history of Israel, God, through David and Solomon, gave His presence to them in a Temple.

God is present with believers and when they acknowledge Him, things of lasting spiritual value are accomplished.

2 CHRONICLES: THE BOOK OF THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

Originally 1 and 2 Chronicles were one book (see 1 Chronicles). Chronicles has been called a “miniature Old Testament” (Ryrie). The name “Chronicles” comes from Jerome’s translation of the Bible into Latin called the Vulgate (385-405 AD). It refers to the chronicles of the whole sacred history.

Author

Chronicles is anonymous, but tradition assigns it to Ezra. There are reasons for supporting such a view (see 1 Chronicles).

Whoever wrote Chronicles used sources including 1) The book of Nathan the prophet (2 Chron. 9:29), 2) The Prophecies of Ahijah, the Shilonite (2 Chron. 9:29), 3) The Visions of Iddo (2 Chron. 9:29; 12:15; 13:22), 4) The book of Shemaiah, the prophet (2 Chron. 12:15), 5) The book of the kings of Judah and Israel (2 Chron. 6:11; 24:27; 27:7; 32:33; 33:18), 6) The book of Jehu (2 Chron. 26:22; 32:33), 7) Isaiah, the prophet (2 Chron. 26:22; 32:33), 8) The sayings of the seers (2 Chron. 33:18). Ezra may have had access to and used a large library owned by Nehemiah (mentioned in 2 Maccabees 2:13-15).

Recipients

There is no question that Chronicles was written after the exile. The last verse of 2 Chronicles makes the edict of Cyrus, which officially ended the exile, a thing of the past. Furthermore, the genealogies of Zerubbabel in 1 Chronicles 3:17-24 extends to at least a point very late in the life of Ezra or Nehemiah. Most conclusive of all is the fact that the work continues to the period after the return of the remnant in the cities and in Jerusalem (1 Chron. 9; also *cf.* 1 Chron. 9 with Neh. 1:21:3-32; 7:45 and 12:26, and Ezra 2:42). The date, then, is about 450-430 BC.

As the remnant returned to Jerusalem, there was a great need to rebuild the Temple.

Message

The subject is the Temple. Most of 2 Chronicles 1-9 is devoted to the building and consecration of the Temple. Chapters 10-36 omit the kings of Israel in the north because they had no ties with the Temple. Prominence is given to the reigns of Judah’s Temple-restorers (Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Hezekiah, and Josiah). The message of 2 Chronicles is when God is present and acknowledged, His blessings are experienced.

Structure

It would be tempting to say that the repeated phrase, “Now the rest of the acts” is the structure of the book. The problem is that the phrase does not occur consistently throughout the book. Rather, the structure is chronological (“Now this,” “then this,” “and it came to pass”).

I. The Temple in the Reign of Solomon	1:1-9:31
A. Solomon's Inauguration	1:1-17
B. Solomon's Temple	2:1-7:22
C. Solomon's Fame	8:1-9:28
D. Solomon's Death	9:29-31
II. The Temple During the Reigns of The Kings of Judah	10:1-36:21
A. Rehoboam	10:1-12:16
B. Abijah	13:1-22
C. Asa	14:1-16:14
D. Jehoshaphat	17:1-20:37
E. Ahaziah	21:1-20
F. Athaliah	22:1-9
G. Joash	22:10-23:15
H. Amaziah	25:1-28
I. Uzziah	26:1-23
J. Jotham	27:1-9
K. Ahaz	28:1-27
L. Hezekiah	29:1-32:33
M. Manasseh	33:1-20
N. Amon	33:21-25
O. Josiah	34:1-35:27
P. Jehoahaz	36:1-4
Q. Jehoiakim	36:5-8
R. Jehoiachin	36:9-10
S. Zedekiah	36:11-21
III. The Decree of Cyrus	36:22-23

Purpose

The purpose of Chronicles is to demonstrate that when Israel obeyed the ordinances of God, particularly the ordinances of worship, they experienced God's presence and blessing. The purpose explains the content. Kings centers around the throne, Chronicles around the Temple. Kings highlights the prophets, Chronicles the priests. Thus, Saul and the Northern Kingdom are passed over as being in the unfaithful line and extraneous to the author's purpose. Elijah is only mentioned once and Elisha is not mentioned at all. Yet just enough of the evil is recorded to show that it will be punished and to explain the captivity.

Summary: Ezra wrote to the returning remnant to demonstrate that in the history of Israel, God blessed those who obeyed His ordinances, especially the Temple worship.

God is present with believers and when they acknowledge Him, His blessings are experienced.

EZRA: THE BOOK OF RESTORATION

Ezra and Nehemiah were originally a single book. Ezra has been referred to as “the book of Restoration” (Baxter). It is a book of the return of the people, the rebuilding of the Temple and the reform of the people.

Author

Though he is not specifically mentioned as the author, it is obvious that Ezra wrote the book of Ezra. Ezra 7:28-9:15 is written in the first person from Ezra’s point of view. The vividness of the details and descriptions favors an author who was an eyewitness of the latter events of the book. Jewish tradition attributes the book to Ezra.

Tradition also holds that Ezra was the founder of the great synagogue where the canon of the Old Testament was settled. There is a tradition that he collected the biblical books into a unit and originated the synagogue form of worship.

Recipients

Ezra fits into the post-exilic period of Israel’s history. Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem in 605, 597, and 586 BC, taking the Jews into exile. In October of 539 BC, Cyrus overthrew Babylon and issued his decree allowing the Jews to return in 538 BC. The Temple was begun in 536 BC. (The 70-year captivity is dated from 605 BC to 536 BC.) Zerubbabel returned in 538 BC and was in Jerusalem in 516 BC (Ezra 1-6). During Zerubbabel’s time, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah ministered (around 520 BC and later). Ezra returned in 458 BC (Ezra 7-10). Nehemiah came back in 445 BC. Thus, Ezra probably wrote his book between 450-440 BC. During this period, Jautama Buddha was in India (560-450 BC), Confucius was in China (551-479 BC), and Socrates was in Greece (470-399 BC).

If Ezra wrote the book, the remnant that returned from Babylon received it. They also experienced the events of it. Ezra, no doubt, wrote to remind them and succeeding generations of what God had done.

Message

The remnant didn’t just return. They came back and restored, to some degree, the Israel of old. They rebuilt the Temple and reformed the people. Thus, the subject is restoration. The message of Ezra is: God restores His people to the place of worship and obedience.

Structure

Though Ezra, no doubt, wrote the book, he was more of a compiler than an author, for the book is a compilation and not a single narrative. Scroggie says that of 880 verses, 109 are narrative, 111 are registries, 44 are letters, 3 are proclamations, 3 are excerpts and 10 are prayers. Furthermore, it should be noted that chapters 4:8-7:18 and 8:12-26 are in Aramaic.

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| I. The Return and Rebuilding of the Temple under Zerubbabel | 1:1-6:22 |
| A. The Decree of Cyrus to Return | 1:1-11 |

B. The Census of the Returnees	2:1-70
C. The Commencement of Rebuilding of the Temple	3:1-13
D. The Cessation of Rebuilding of the Temple	4:1-24
E. The Resumption of Rebuilding of the Temple	5:1-17
F. The Completion of Rebuilding of the Temple	6:1-22
II. The Return and Restoration of the People under Ezra	7:1-10:44
A. The Decree of Artaxerxes	7:1-28
B. The Return of Ezra	8:1-36
C. The Confession of Ezra	9:1-15
D. The Confrontation of the People	10:1-44

Purpose

The purpose of Ezra is to show that the Lord fulfilled His promise announced by the prophets to return the people from Babylon, to rebuild the Temple, to restore the Temple worship according to the Law, and to preserve the reassembled community from relapses into idolatrous worship.

Summary: Ezra wrote to the returned remnant after the end of the 70 years of captivity to show how God had the Temple rebuilt in Jerusalem and the people restored.

God restores us to the place of worship and to obedience.

NEHEMIAH: THE BOOK OF CONTINUAL RESTORATION

Ezra and Nehemiah were originally a single book. It has been said that Nehemiah is “a gem of a book” in spiritual lessons (Baxter). Like Ezra, it is a book of return, rebuilding and reform, but the rebuilding is the wall, not the Temple, and the reforms take place more than once.

Author

Nehemiah 1:1 says, “These are the words of Nehemiah.” Thus, it is usually said that this book came from Nehemiah’s personal memoirs. All agree that Nehemiah 1:1-7:5, Nehemiah 12:27-43, and Nehemiah 13:4-31 are the words of Nehemiah, but beyond that, there are several theories: 1) Some think Nehemiah composed those portions and compiled the rest. 2) Others think Ezra wrote Nehemiah 7:6-12:26, as well as Nehemiah 12:44-13:3 and compiled the rest using Nehemiah’s diaries. 3) A third view is that neither wrote it. By the way, Nehemiah 7:5-73 is almost identical to Ezra 2:1-70. Both lists may have been taken from the same document.

Recipients

Nehemiah 2:1 indicates that Nehemiah served under Artaxerxes. Artaxerxes I of Persia reigned from 464-423 BC. Nehemiah 2:1 also says that Nehemiah left Persia in the 20th year of Artaxerxes, which was 445 BC. Nehemiah 13:5 informs the reader that Nehemiah returned to Persia in the 32nd year of Artaxerxes. That would be 432 BC. Thus, Nehemiah was in Jerusalem for 12 years. Nehemiah 13:6 also says, “After some time,” he left Persia and returned to Jerusalem, which was probably around 425 BC. The book could not have been completed until after his second visit to Jerusalem. Thus, Nehemiah wrote the book of Nehemiah about 425 BC.

The recipients of the book, the remnant in Jerusalem after the captivity, experienced the events of the book. Therefore, Nehemiah was not written to correct some need in them, but to remind them of what God had done among them.

Message

Nehemiah restores, leaves, returns, and restores the people again. The subject is continual restoration. Zerubbabel came and restored. Ezra came and restored. Now Nehemiah comes and restores twice. The message of Nehemiah is God continually restores and rebuilds.

Structure

The structure of Nehemiah is a series of events connected with Nehemiah’s return to the city of Jerusalem. Beyond that, the key to the structure is in Nehemiah 2:12 and Nehemiah 7:5. Those verses say that God put into Nehemiah’s heart to do two things: rebuild the wall and restore the population in Jerusalem. The book should be divided into two parts: the rebuilding of the wall (Neh. 1-6) and the restoring of the city (Neh. 7-13).

I. Rebuilding of the Wall	1:1-6:19
A. The Prayer of Nehemiah	1:1-11
B. The Planning of Nehemiah	2:1-20
C. The Perspiration of the People	3:1-32
D. The Persistence of the People	4:1-23
E. The Prescription of Nehemiah	5:1-19
F. The Perception of Nehemiah	6:1-19
II. Restoration of the Community	7:1-13:31
A. The Registry of the People	7:1-73
B. The Reading of the Law	8:1-18
C. The Repentance of the People	9:1-38
D. The Ratification of the Covenant	10:1-27
E. The Repopulation of the City	11:1-36
F. The Rededication of the Wall	12:1-47
G. The Restoration of the People	13:1-31

Purpose

The purpose of Nehemiah is to show that God not only restores, He repeatedly, constantly, and continually restores.

Under the leadership of Nehemiah, the remnant accomplished in 52 days what had not been done in 94 years since the first return under Zerubbabel. There is a sense in which Nehemiah furnishes the historical background for Malachi. He lived and ministered during Nehemiah's time. A comparison of their books reveals that many of the evils Nehemiah encountered were specifically denounced by Malachi. The cold-hearted indifference toward God, described in both books, remained a problem in Israel during the period between the Old and New Testaments.

Summary: Nehemiah wrote to the remnant that rebuilt the wall to record how God used him to rebuild the wall, repopulate Jerusalem, and reform the people.

Nehemiah restores, leaves, returns, and restores the people again. The subject of the book of Nehemiah is continual restoration. Zerubbabel came and restored. Ezra came and restored. Now Nehemiah comes and restores twice. The message of Nehemiah is that God continually restores and rebuilds.

ESTHER: THE BOOK OF THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

Esther has been called a “strange story” because God’s name is not mentioned in it (McGee) and a “crisis book” (Baxter). Esther could be called the book of feasts because all the events in the book revolve around three feasts, the Feast of Ahasuerus, the Feast of Esther, and the Feast of Purim.

Only two books in the Bible are named after women, Ruth was a Gentile who married a Jew and Esther was a Jew who married a Gentile.

Author

The author of Esther is unknown. What is known is that: 1) He was probably a Jew. The author at least had knowledge of Jewish customs. Jewish nationalism permeates the book. 2) He was probably a Persian Jew (not Palestinian). The author obviously had knowledge of Persian etiquette, customs, the palace of Susa, as well as the details of the events of the reign of Ahasuerus. 3) He wrote after the death of Ahasuerus (464 BC). Ezra 10:2-3 speaks of his reign in the past tense.

Mordecai was probably the author. Esther 9:20 says he was an author. Josephus held that Mordecai was the author. If he did not write it, whoever did certainly made use of his records. The author may have had access to the book of the Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia (Esther 2:23, 10:2).

Some have rejected Esther because: 1) It does not mention the name of God, faith, prayer, or godly virtues. 2) It is not necessary for the line of the Messiah. 3) Neither Jesus nor the New Testament quotes it. Nevertheless, Esther should be in the Bible because 1) It is not only in the Jewish canon, it has been venerated, second only to the book of Moses and has been used regularly in the observance of the Feast of Purim. 2) Jesus accepted it (Lk. 24:44). 3) The early church accepted it. God’s name does not occur in the Song of Solomon either (Deut. 31:18). God’s name is not seen, but His hand is.

Recipients

To determine the date of the book of Esther, the following factors must be considered: 1) Ahasuerus was king of Persia from 486-464 BC. 2) According to Esther 1:3, the feast of Ahasuerus took place in the third year, that is, 483 BC. The historian, Herodotus, referred to this banquet as the occasion of Ahasuerus’ planning for a military campaign against Greece. He was defeated by the Greeks at Salamis in 479 BC. 3) The contest and crowning of Esther was in 478 BC. Herodotus says that when the Greeks defeated Ahasuerus, he sought consolation in his harem. This corresponds to the time when he held a “contest” and crowned Esther queen of Persia (Esther 2:16-17). 4) According to Esther 3:7-12, the events of the rest of the book took place in 473 BC. That means that the events of the book span ten years from 483 (Esther 1:3) to 473 BC (Esther 3:7). 5) Esther 10:2-3 probably refers to the end of Ahasuerus’ reign, which was in 464 BC. 6) The palace at Susa was destroyed by fire about 435 BC. That is not mentioned at all in the book of Esther. Thus, the book of Esther was written between 464 and 435 BC.

The recipients were the Persian Jews who did not return to Palestine and who lived in Persia about 450 BC. Though they were disobedient by staying in Persia and though they did not enjoy the blessing of God in returning to Jerusalem, nonetheless, they were still God's children and He providentially cared for them.

Message

The subject is the providence of God. The doctrine of providence says that God works "behind the scenes." He hides Himself from view, but He works things out to take care of His own. God is never mentioned in the entire book of Esther, but everywhere in the book things just somehow "work out." Either luck is at work or the Lord is at work. The message of Esther is God providentially protects His children.

Structure

The literary structure of Esther, like Ruth, is almost pure narrative. The book of Esther is a story. The structure is the story itself.

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| I. The Danger to the Jews | 1:1-5:14 |
| A. The Divorce of Vashti | 1:1-22 |
| B. The Discovery of Esther | 2:1-23 |
| C. The Decree of Haman | 3:1-15 |
| D. The Decision of Esther | 4:1-5:14 |
| II. The Deliverance of the Jews | 6:1-10:3 |
| A. The Defeat of Haman | 6:1-7:10 |
| B. The Decree of Ahasuerus | 8:1-17 |
| C. The Defeat of the Enemy (Purim) | 9:1-32 |
| D. The Description of Mordecai | 10:1-3 |

Purpose

The purpose of Esther is to remind the Jews who remained in Persia of God's providential care. It also records the origin of the Feast of Purim, which was instituted by Mordecai at the suggestion of Esther in the memory of the deliverance of the Jews from the murderous plot of Haman.

"Purim" means "lots." The name was given to the feast because of the casting of lots by Haman to decide when he should carry out the decree issued by the king for the extermination of the Jews. It was probably given in irony.

Summary: Mordecai wrote to the Jews remaining in Persia to remind them that they were providentially delivered from extinction.

God providentially protects us.

JOB: THE BOOK OF THE SUFFERING OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Luther regarded Job as “the most magnificent and sublime than any other book of Scripture.” Tennyson called it, “the greatest poem whether ancient or modern literature.” Carlyle wrote, “I call that [Job] one of the grandest things ever written with pen.”

Author

The author of Job is anonymous. There is no consistent rabbinical tradition. Job, Elihu, Moses, Solomon, Isaiah, Hezekiah, Jeremiah, and Ezra have all been nominated. Job probably wrote the book that bears his name. He was a historical person (Ez. 14:14, 20; Jas. 5:11). He was acquainted with all the facts and lived 140 years after the events (Job 42:16). The land of Uz (Job 1:1) is adjacent to Midian, where Moses lived for forty years. Moses could have obtained the record left by Job. That would explain how the Israelites possessed this non-Israelite story and gave it canonical status.

Recipients

Pinpointing the date of Job is difficult. A number of factors point to the time of Abraham: 1) Job lived 140 years after the events of this book (Job 42:16). His total life span must have been close to 200 years. This fits the patriarchal period (Abraham lived 175 years; Gen. 25:7). 2) Job’s wealth was measured in terms of livestock (Job 1:3, 42:12), rather than silver or gold. 3) Like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Job was the priest of his family and offered sacrifices, which was not allowed after the Exodus. Also fitting Abraham’s time, the social unit in Job is the patriarchal family clan. 4) Job uses the characteristic patriarchal name for God, Shaddai, the Almighty, thirty-one times. This early term for God is only found seventeen times in the rest of the Old Testament. The rare use of Yahweh also suggests a pre-Mosaic date. Furthermore, there are no references to Israel, the Exodus, the Mosaic Law, or the Tabernacle. 5) The Chaldeans, who murdered Job’s servants (Job 1:17) were nomads and had not yet become city-dwellers. The evidence clearly seems to place Job, the man, during the patriarchal period.

The question is, “When was Job, the book, written?” If Job wrote it, it was probably written shortly after the events occurred, about 2000-1800 BC.

The recipients of this book depend on the date of its composition. If Job wrote it, the recipients were the people who lived during the period of the patriarchs. The content of the book, however, addresses a universal problem of all mankind in all ages.

Message

The subject is the suffering of the righteous. The message of Job is the righteous suffer, not to be punished for their sin, but to be purified and perfected.

Structure

The book of Job is a story. Unlike other stories in the Old Testament, this one is not just narrative; it is a story with a great deal of dialogue. It is more like a drama than a

narrative. The key to the structure, however, is the type of literature: Job 1:1-2:10 is prose. Job 2:11-42:6 is poetry and Job 42:8-17 is again prose.

The prologue tells of Job's piety and Satan's accusation against God. After that is a dialogue between Job and his three friends (Job 3-31). Then, Elihu speaks (Job 32-37) and God speaks (Job 38:1-42:6). The book closes with a prose epilogue (Job 42:7-17).

I. Prologue: A Righteous Man Severely Suffered	1:1-2:10
A. Job's Piety and Prosperity	1:1-5
B. Satan's Proposal	1:6-12
C. Job's Adversity: Loss of Children and Wealth	1:13-22
D. Satan's Persistence	2:1-6
E. Job's Affliction: Loss of Well-being and Wife's Sympathy	2:7-10
II. Dialogue: Why Do People Suffer?	2:11-42:6
A. With Friends--first cycle	3:1-14:22
B. With Friends--second cycle	15:1-21:34
C. With Friends--third cycle	21:1-31:40
D. With Elihu	32:1-37:24
E. With God	38:1-42:6
III. Epilogue: Sufferers Who Trust God Become More God-like	42:7-17

Purpose

The purpose of Job is to teach the righteous to trust a wise, sovereign God in the midst of their suffering.

Summary: An unknown author, probably Job, records the story of a righteous man who suffered not to be punished for sin, but to be purified and perfected.

"Why do righteous men suffer?" Job's three friends said suffering is the punishment for sin. According to Elihu, God uses suffering to instruct, to correct and to purify the righteous. None of these explanations constitutes the whole. When God speaks, He does not directly answer the question! He does, however, seem to be saying, "I'm sovereign and worthy of worship in whatever I choose to do." Suffering is sometimes a mystery. There is no rhyme or reason in life for why the innocent suffer. God's ways are sometimes incomprehensible, but He can always be trusted. Job had to learn to trust in the goodness of God in spite of outward circumstances.

Besides, even this blameless man (1:1) needed to repent when he became proud and self-righteous. Likewise, all need to repent of pride and trust God. Those who do will be blessed—if not in this life, in the next. They will definitely be godlier. The ancients asked, "How can people be godly if they suffer?" Christians ask, "How can people be God-like if they know nothing of suffering?" God allows the righteous to suffer and if they respond properly, they will be purified and perfected.

God allows believers to suffer to purify and perfect them.

PSALMS: THE BOOK OF PRAISE

The Psalms have been called “an epitome of the whole Scriptures” (Athanasius), “a compendium of all theology” (Basil), “a little Bible and a summary of the Old Testament” (Luther), “the most eloquent work extant in the world” (Melancthon), “the grandest book of devotion given to man” (Feinberg).

The title comes from the Septuagint. The Greek word Psalms means “songs sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument.”

Author

The superscriptions are not inspired, but they are very old and are probably accurate. Based on the information in the superscriptions, the authors are as follows: 1) David has seventy-three psalms assigned to him (Ps. 3-9; 11-32; 34-41; 51-65; 68-70; 86; 101; 103; 108-110; 122; 124; 131; 133; 138-145; the New Testament assigns two others: 2; 95; see Acts 4:25; Heb. 4:7. 2) Asaph wrote twelve (Ps. 50; 73-83). He was a Levite who headed the service of music (Ez. 2:41; see also 1 Chron. 16:4, 5, 7, 37). 3) The sons of Korah composed ten (Ps. 42; 44-49; 84-85; 87; see 1 Chron. 9:19). 4) Solomon contributed two (Ps. 72; 127). 5) Heman constructed one (Ps. 88; see 1 Chron. 25:1, 5-6). 6) Ethan penned one (Ps. 89; see 1 Kings 4:31.). 7) Moses authored one (Ps. 90). The inscriptions leave fifty psalms anonymous (Ps. 1-2; 10; 33; 43; 66-67; 71; 91-100; 102; 104-107; 111-121; 123; 125; 126; 128-130; 132; 134-137; 146-150). The New Testament identifies David as the author of two of these (Ps. 2, 95). Forty-eight are anonymous. The rabbis called those without a known author “orphan psalms.”

Recipients

The Psalms were written over an extended time span. Moses probably wrote Psalm 90 between 1447 and 1407 BC. About half of the Psalms were written by David around 1000 BC. Psalm 137 was written during the Babylonian captivity about 580 BC.

The Psalms were written to different audiences under different conditions. The Psalms themselves say they were written to 1) the Lord (Ps. 4:1; 5:1), 2) Israel (Ps. 78:1), 3) the righteous (Ps. 33:1), and 4) all mankind (Ps. 150:6).

Message

The subject is praise. The Hebrew Bible entitles the book “Praises.” The message of Psalms is godly people lament, praise God, and hope in His future blessing.

Structure

If by “structure” is meant the development of a subject (see Introduction) or even the divisions of a subject, there is no structure to the Psalter. A better word here is “arrangement.” The Midrash divides the Psalter into five parts and compares it to the five-fold division of the Torah. These divisions are marked by doxologies: Psalms 41:13; 72:18-19; 89:52; 106:48. The fifth book is concluded with a series of doxologies, namely Psalms 146-150. The reason for the separate collections is unknown.

I. Book One	1:1-41:13
II. Book Two	42:1-72:20
III. Book Three	73:1-89:52
IV. Book Four	90:1-106:48
V. Book Five	107:1-150:6

There are groups of psalms. Book One consists of Psalms of David (except Ps. 1; 2; 10; 22). Books Two and Three contain the collections of the Sons of Korah (Ps. 42-49) and of Asaph (Ps. 73-83) and Books Four and Five again have Psalms of David (Ps. 138-145), the Songs of Ascent (Ps. 120-134), the “Hodu” psalms, all beginning with a Hebrew imperative for “give thanks” (Ps. 105-107), and two groups of the Hallelujah psalms, all beginning and/or ending with the Hebrew imperative “Praise the Lord” or “Hallelujah” (Ps. 111-118; 146-150). There are also groups of psalms connected by obscure titles. For example, there are two groups of Maschil psalms (Ps. 42-45; 52-55) and one Michtam grouping (Ps. 56-60).

There have been two major methods of classification. The traditional method is to classify the psalms based on content, for example, national psalms, historical psalms and Messianic psalms. The second method is classification by function. It investigates the “type” (genre) of the psalm and traces that to its origin to determine its “setting in life” (German, *Sitz im Leben*; *Just as I am* has a *Sitz in Leben* of an invitation.). Psalm 24 was chanted at the gate of the Temple as the Ark was returning after a battle. Not all of the psalms have a liturgical origin and many were probably never used in the liturgy of the Temple. Psalm 23 is an example. Both the historical and form critical methods have made their contributions, but neither system alone is satisfactory.

Purposes

There are two purposes of the Psalms. One purpose of the Psalms is to inspire worship. Psalms is the inspired song/worship book of prayer and praise. In the midst of their doubts and fears, longings and hopes, joys and sorrows, believers praise God. They trust God to bless the righteous and punish the wicked. Another purpose is to provide prophecy. According to the New Testament, at least thirteen psalms are Messianic (Ps. 2; 8; 16; 22; 31; 40; 41; 45; 68; 69; 102; 110; 118). Over one-fourth of the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament are from the Psalms. However uncertain the times, the Lord will establish His kingdom through the future Messiah. That reassurance might not stabilize the time, but it will certainly stabilize the heart.

Summary: At least seven different authors over a period of 1000 years (but primarily David) composed songs of praise to worship God and express Israel’s future hope.

God is worthy of praise. The godly lament as well as praise.

PROVERBS: THE BOOK OF WISDOM

The Rabbinical writings called Proverbs “the book of wisdom.” Proverbs is one of the most ancient forms of teaching. The method was particularly valuable when books were few and costly. A clear, crisp sentence was easy to memorize.

Author

Like the Psalms, Proverbs has several authors: 1) Solomon. Proverbs 1:1 says “The proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, the king of Israel.” Solomon was certainly qualified to pen Proverbs. He asked for wisdom (1 Kings 3:5-9) and God granted it to him (1 Kings 4:29-31). According to Ecclesiastes 12:9, he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs. First Kings 4:32 says he spoke 3,000 Proverbs. 2) Wise men. Proverbs 22:17 and 24:23 indicate that sections of Proverbs are from “wise men.” 3) Agur and Lemuel. Agur wrote Proverbs 30 and Lemuel wrote Proverbs 31 (at least he wrote 31:1-9). Nothing is known about these two authors except that they wrote proverbs.

In 1888, Wallis Budge discovered an Egyptian work, *The Wisdom of Amenemope*. Kidner says the similarities between *The Wisdom of Amenemope* and Proverbs 22:17-24:37 are “too many and too close to be a matter of coincidence.” Who copied whom? The dating of Amenemope is difficult. Some date him before Solomon and others date him after. Even if Solomon copied him, that would in no way undermine inspiration. The use of pagan sources is not unknown, even in the New Testament. Paul did it several times (Acts 17:28 and Titus 1:12). If the material was borrowed, it was adapted. The polytheism of Amenemope is eliminated. Some have forcefully argued that Amenemope copied Proverbs. The Egyptian can be reconstructed based on the Hebrew, but it is not possible to reconstruct the Hebrew based on the Egyptian.

Recipients

Solomon lived and wrote about 950 BC. At least part of the book was addressed to his son, presumably Rehoboam (Prov. 1:8; 2:1; etc.). This applies to Proverbs 1:1-9:18 for sure and probably Proverbs 10:1-22:16. It more than likely does not apply to Proverbs 25:1ff. Proverbs 25:1 says that a larger portion of the book was compiled by the men of Hezekiah. That was not until 710 BC. Isaiah and Micah ministered during Hezekiah’s time. It has been suggested that they were involved in the collection of the Proverbs.

The primary recipients of most of the Proverbs were Solomon’s children (Prov. 1:8; 2:1; 4:1). Proverbs 8:1-5 indicates that the book was for all mankind in general. While God’s Law is assumed everywhere, Israel is never mentioned. There is a universality about this book. It is not a national, Jewish book. These proverbs apply to all people at all times in all places.

Message

The subject is wisdom. The Hebrew word for “wisdom” means “skill.” These short, pithy statements are wisdom for living. The wisdom in the book of Proverbs is not the wisdom of people but the wisdom of God. These proverbs are not so much popular sayings

as they are distillations of wisdom from those who knew the Law of God. The message of Proverbs is: wise people learn skill for living from God’s Word and from wise people.

Structure

The literary arrangement of Proverbs is clearly discernible. There are titles heading each section. These are sometimes obscured in the English translation, but they are obvious in the Hebrew text. Three times the title “The Proverbs of Solomon” appears. The first time (Prov. 1:1) it applies to the whole book and the other two occurrences (Prov. 10:1, 25:1) apply to the sections within the book. The first nine chapters contain discourses on the value of wisdom. Then follow two collections of the proverbs of Solomon. Two appendices supplement each collection.

I. Introduction	1:1-7
II. A Father’s Praise of Wisdom	1:8-9:8
III. The Proverbs of Solomon	10:1-22:16
IV. The Words of Wise Men	22:17-24:34
A. The Words of Wise Men	24:17-22
B. The Further Words of Wise Men	24:23-34
V. Hezekiah’s Collection of the Proverbs of Solomon	25:1-29:27
VI. The Words of Wise Men	30:1-31:31
A. The Words of Agur	30:1-33
B. The Words of King Lemuel’s Mother	31:1-31

Purpose

Proverbs is one of the few biblical books that states its purpose. According to the prologue of the book (Prov. 1:2-6), there are two purposes of Proverbs: a moral purpose and a mental purpose. The first and foremost purpose of Proverbs is to impart moral discernment (Prov. 1:2a, 3-5). The second purpose is to develop mental clarity and perception (Prov. 1:2b, 6).

The philosophy of this book is not “live and learn,” but “learn and live.”

Summary: Solomon et al. wrote short, pithy statements to assist the wise and unwise in developing mental acumen and wisdom for living.

If we are wise, we will learn skills for living from God’s Word and from watching wise people.

ECCLESIASTES: THE BOOK OF THE FUTILITY OF LIFE

Ecclesiastes has been called a “profound and problematic book” (Boa), “the most mysterious in all the Bible” (Scroggie), “the sphinx of Hebrew literature with its unsolved riddles of history and life,” “a much misunderstood book” (Baxter). It has been a “favorite book of Atheists,” such as Volney and Voltaire.

The title, given by the LXX, comes from the Hebrew word for preacher (Eccl. 1:1).

Author

The author identifies himself as the son of David, king in Jerusalem (Eccl. 1:1). Although the name of Solomon does not appear anywhere in the book, he is the only son of David, who was also a king in Jerusalem. Hence, the traditional view accepted by both Jewish and Christian scholars is that Solomon is the author of Ecclesiastes.

Recipients

There is an ancient Jewish tradition that says Solomon wrote the Song of Solomon in his youth, Proverbs when he was middle-aged, and Ecclesiastes in the evening of his days. If that is the case, he wrote on love as a young man, wisdom as he grew old, and futility as an old man. Several authors suggest Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes in 935 BC.

The book is not specifically addressed to anyone except to a “young man” mentioned in Ecclesiastes 11:9 and Solomon’s reference to “my son” in Ecclesiastes 12:12.

Message

The subject is vanity. The book begins and ends with that (Eccl. 1:2; 12:13-14). Vanity does not mean “foolish pride.” The Hebrew word means “breath, vapor, emptiness.” Transitory, frail, futile, unsatisfying is the idea. Seeing the futility of life, the author concludes people must fear God and keep His commandments. The message of Ecclesiastes is that even though life is futile, at the same time, it is a gift from God, which necessitates that we trust Him and obey Him.

There are basically three theories concerning the point of view of that author. The philosophical hypothesis says that the phrase “under the sun” means “apart from God” and that the author is a wise man who comes to faith by reason. The problem with that hypothesis is that the phrase “under the sun” does not mean apart from God (Eccl. 8:15). The experiential approach is that “under the sun” means life apart from God and that Solomon discovered as a backslider that life apart from God was empty. Again, the problem is that the phrase “under the sun” does not mean apart from God (Eccl. 8:15). The spiritual view contends that the author is not a philosopher or a repentant backslider but a deeply spiritual man. He is simply saying that life with or without God is a mystery. As an old and wise, godly man, he is saying, “When I see life, it seems to me it is empty and aimless.” There are aimless cycles (Eccl. 1:4 ff.) and inexplicable paradoxes (Eccl. 4:1; 7:15; 8:8). One might conclude that all is futile since it is impossible to discern any purpose in the ordering of events. Yet life is a gift of God and is to be enjoyed. The wise people

will live their lives in obedience to God, recognizing that God will eventually judge all human beings (Eccl. 3:16-17; 12:14).

Structure

The book begins with a prologue (Eccl. 1:2-11) and ends with an epilogue (Eccl. 12:8-12). It starts and stops with the same statement (Eccl. 1:2, 12:8). Beyond that, there seem to be four broad discourses, each ending with a conclusion: 1) Eccl. 1:12-2:26 (Eccl. 2:24-26), 2) Eccl. 3:1 -5:2 (5:18-20), 3) Eccl. 6:1 -8:17 (Eccl. 8:15-17), 4) Eccl. 9:1-12:7 (Eccl. 12:1-7). There are sections within these divisions, which themselves have conclusions, but these four seem to be the major divisions of the book (Eccl. 3:12, 22, 9:7-9 and 11:7-10).

I. Prologue: Life is Futile	1:1-11
II. The First Discourse: Futility of Wisdom, Pleasure, etc.	1:12-2:26
III. The Second Discourse: Futility of Various Areas of Life	3:1-5:20
IV. The Third Discourse: Futility of Attainments	6:1-8:17
V. The Fourth Discourse: Futility in Uncertainties and Old Age	9:1-12:8
VI. Epilogue: Fear God and Keep His Commands	12:9-14

Purposes

There seem to be two different purposes of Ecclesiastes. One is to demonstrate that life is futile. The phrase “under the sun” does not mean “apart from God” (Eccl. 8:15). It simply refers to all of life. Solomon is not saying that apart from God, life is futile; he is saying that life is futile with or without God. Life is filled with iniquities, uncertainties, changes in fortune, and violations of justice.

Another purpose of Ecclesiastes is to teach the reader to trust God in the face of the futility of life. The author is doing more than demonstrating the futility of life. He is declaring that even though life is futile, we are to trust God. He says that throughout the book, as well as at the end of it (Eccl. 3:14, 12:13-14). In fact, the book is really not pessimistic at all. It teaches that we are to enjoy life and trust God. In other words, Solomon is saying that God has not revealed everything. There is a mystery to life. We really only know what God has chosen to tell us, yet life is not basically a puzzle which wisdom unlocks. It is a gift given to us by God to enjoy and use in a responsible fashion.

Summary: An old man, Solomon, wrote to young men in general and his son, in particular, to say that godly wisdom teaches that even though life is futile, we are to fear God and enjoy life.

Even though life is futile, it is also a gift from God, which means that we should enjoy it and, at the same time, trust and obey the Lord.

SONG OF SOLOMON: THE BOOK OF LOVE

The Song of Solomon has been called “the most obscure book in the Old Testament” (Delitzsch), “one of the most misunderstood books in the Bible” (Lee), “a beautiful eulogy of love” (Boa). Its name is taken from the first verse. It is a Song of Solomon.

Author

The question of authorship is simple since Song of Solomon 1:1 says, “The Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s.” Solomon’s name appears seven times in the book (Song of Solomon 1:1, 5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11-12). Five of these are connected with the actual appearances of Solomon in action (Song of Solomon 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11-12), whereas 1:5 mentions “the curtains of Solomon” as a simile.

Many facts fit the view that Solomon wrote the book: 1) First Kings 4:32 says he wrote 1,005 songs. This was the chief (“song of songs” means “the best;” “Holy of Holies,” which means “holiest of all”), 2) First Kings 4:33 says he had an encyclopedic knowledge of trees and animals. The Song of Solomon contains twenty-one varieties of plant life and fifteen species of animals. 3) The book shows many evidences of royal luxury and the abundance of costly imported products such as spikenard (Song of Solomon 1:12), myrrh (Song of Solomon 1:13), frankincense (Song of Solomon 3:6), palanquins (Song of Solomon 3:9), cosmetic powders, silver, gold, purple, ivory, and beryl. 4) Cities from both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms are mentioned as if belonging to the same political realm, suggesting a date before the division of the kingdom.

Recipients

If Solomon wrote this book late in his life, there is a problem. How can a man with a harem of 140 women (Song of Solomon 6:8) extol a Shulamite as though she were his only bride? The answer to that problem may be that his relationship with her was the only pure romance he ever experienced. After all, the bulk of his marriages were political arrangements. On the whole, however, it is probably best to conclude that Solomon wrote the song early in his reign, about 970 BC.

There is no indication within the book as to who the readers were intended to be. The recipients were obviously the Jews who lived during the lifetime of Solomon.

Message

The subject is love. The message is that husbands and wives are to enjoy marital love.

There are three different primary interpretations of the Song of Solomon. The allegorical interpretation says fictional people and events are used as symbols to suggest a deeper or hidden meaning. *Pilgrim’s Progress* is a modern illustration. One allegorical treatment sees the Song of Solomon as an allegory on the history of Israel from the time of the Exodus to the coming of the Messiah. In the Jewish version of this view, the “beloved” is the Lord and the “maiden” is Israel. Christians who adopt this approach interpret the “beloved” as Christ and the “maiden” as the church. The Song of Solomon is not an allegory; it is historical.

The typological method differs from the allegorical method in that it maintains the historicity of the story. In an allegory, the events may or may not be historical. In a type, the events are always real historical events. Many who have followed this method for the Song of Solomon have insisted that the historical foundation of the book was Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter or some other princess and that the marriage typically represents the union of Christ and (the Gentiles) the church.

The literal view interprets the song as literally depicting the love of a man for a woman and stops short of seeing a deeper meaning. As has been said, "When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no further sense."

Structure

The form of the Song is somewhere between a loose connection of songs and a drama. Unger says it is a lyrical poem with a dramatic form of dialogue. Boa calls it a dramatic poem built on a dialogue. Bullock says it is a lyrical ballad, the point being that it is a unified lyrical song with a dramatic form.

What, then, is its structure? Delitzsch divides the book into six acts, with two scenes in each act (Ginsburg sees only five parts). This much is clear: three times, the maid adjures the daughters of Jerusalem (Song of Solomon 2:7; 3:5; 8:4) and the Song of Solomon 5:1 may also be a concluding formula.

I. First Stanza: Courtship	1:2-2:7
II. Second Stanza: Courtship continued	2:8-3:5
III. Third Stanza: Marriage and honeymoon	3:6-5:1
IV. Fourth Stanza: The honeymoon is over	5:2-6:9
V. Fifth Stanza: The marriage deepens	6:10-8:4
VI. Sixth Stanza: The maturity of love	8:5-14

Purpose

The primary purpose of the Song of Solomon is to exalt the joys of love in courtship and marriage. It offers a proper perspective of human love and avoids the extreme of lust and asceticism. It is a bold and positive endorsement by God of the marital love in all its physical and emotional beauty.

The literal interpretation does not mean that the book has no spiritual illustrations and applications. It certainly illustrates God's love for His covenant people Israel and anticipates Christ's love for His bride, the church (Eph. 5:31-32), but this is an application, not primary interpretation.

Summary: Solomon wrote a song about his love, courtship, and marriage to a Shulamite woman to exalt the joys of marital love and illustrate divine love. Those of us who are married are to enjoy marital love.

ISAIAH: THE BOOK OF THE SALVATION OF GOD

Isaiah has been called the “Gospel according to Isaiah,” “the Prophet of Redemption,” “the Messianic Prophet,” “the Fifth Evangelist,” “the bridge between the old and the new covenants,” “the Mount Everest of Hebrew prophecy,” and “a miniature Bible” (Boa). In the New Testament, Isaiah is quoted far more than any other Old Testament prophet. He is mentioned 21 times by name and chapter 53 is quoted or alluded to at least 85 times.

Author

Isaiah 1:1 claims that Isaiah is the author. The New Testament supports that. John 12:37-41 quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 and Isaiah 53:1, attributing them to Isaiah. Paul quotes Isaiah (in Romans 9:27, he quotes Israel 10:22-23 and Isaiah 1:9; in Romans 10:16-21, he quotes Isaiah 53:1 and Isaiah 65:2) and gives the credit to Isaiah. The same is true of Matthew 3:3, 12:17, Luke 3:4-6, and Acts 8:28. Furthermore, Jewish and Christian traditions have universally attributed the book to Isaiah.

In 1775, J.C. Doederlein denied that Isaiah wrote chapters 40-66, later called the “Deutero-Isaiah” theory. It says that the first section is rational and the second is emotional and that supernatural predictions are impossible. Thus, there were two authors.

Isaiah wrote all of Isaiah. The New Testament attributes both sections to Isaiah (Jn. 12:37-41 quotes Isa. 6:9-10 and Isa. 53:1). Moreover, an author may be rational in one place and emotional in another. Also, since Isaiah wrote under inspiration, he could predict the Babylonian captivity and the return under a Persian king 150 years in advance.

Recipients

Four kings are mentioned in Isaiah 1:1. Isaiah began his ministry at the end of Uzziah’s reign (790-739 BC) and continued through the reigns of Jotham (750-731 BC), Ahaz (735-715 BC), and Hezekiah (715-686 BC). He evidently outlived Hezekiah by a few years because chapters 37 and 38 record the death of Sennacherib in 681 BC. Thus, the generation who lived in the Southern Kingdom, about 680 BC, was the recipient of this book. Hosea and Micah were his contemporaries.

When Isaiah was a young man, Assyria was a menacing power. Other nations wanted to form a coalition against her. King Ahaz would not join them, so Syria and the Northern Kingdom attacked the Southern Kingdom to force her to cooperate with them against Assyria. Instead of trusting the Lord for help, Ahaz turned to Assyria for assistance! Assyria defeated the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC and the Southern Kingdom became a vassal state to her. Then Assyria attacked Judah. Isaiah told the people to trust the Lord, but others told the king to turn to Egypt for help. God gave Hezekiah the victory. At the very walls of Jerusalem, he miraculously defeated Sennacherib of Assyria (Isa. 37-38).

Isaiah lived during these turbulent times. He ministered primarily to the Southern Kingdom (Isa. 1:1, 2:1, 3:1, etc.). He warned Judah of judgment by Babylon, even though Babylon had not yet risen to power. He delivered a warning to the Northern Kingdom (Isa. 28:1), pronounced judgment on Gentile nations (Babylon, Moab, Damascus, Egypt, etc.), and spoke to all the nations and the people of the earth.

Message

The subject is the salvation of God. The word “salvation” appears twenty-six times. (It only appears seven times in all the other prophets combined.) “Isaiah” means “salvation is of the Lord.” The message of Isaiah is that God judges sin and brings salvation through the Messiah and the kingdom.

Structure

Most of the book is poetry. Chapters 1-35 are in the form of poems, followed by four chapters of history. Chapters 40-66 are again poetry.

I. Prophecies of Judgment and Restoration (Salvation)	1:1-35:10
A. Judgment on Judah	1:1-12:6
B. Judgment on the Nations	13:1-23:18
C. The Future Tribulation and Kingdom	24:1-27:13
D. Six Woes	28:1-33
E. The Future Tribulation and Kingdom	34:1-35:10
II. History under Hezekiah	36:1-39:8
A. Hezekiah’s Distress and Deliverance	36:1-37:38
B. Hezekiah’s Sickness and Sin	38:1-39:8
III. Prophecies of Restoration (Salvation)	40:1-66:24
A. The Comfort of God	40:1-48:22
B. The Servant of God	49:1-57:21
C. The Kingdom of God	58:1-66:24

Purposes

Isaiah has three purposes. The first purpose of Isaiah is to preach against (expose) sin. There was political corruption and moral depravity. Isaiah not only exposed these evils, but he also exposed the nation’s basic sin: its wrong attitude in relationship to God revealed in its idolatry.

The second purpose of Isaiah is to pronounce judgment on the sinner. He pronounced judgment on Babylon, Egypt, Moab, and Tyre, as well as Jerusalem. He prophesied that Babylon, not Assyria, would defeat Judah.

The third purpose of Isaiah is to predict the salvation of God. Isaiah predicted that Assyria would not take the Southern Kingdom (chapters 36-39). He also predicted the Kingdom of God and the Messiah.

Summary: Isaiah denounced the sins of Judah, pronounced judgment on Judah and surrounding nations, and predicted the ultimate salvation of God in the Messiah and the Kingdom.

God judges sin and brings salvation through the death of the Messiah.

JEREMIAH: THE BOOK OF THE JUDGMENT OF GOD

Jeremiah has been called the weeping prophet, the prophet of doom, and the prophet with a broken heart. The book has been called a “prophetic autobiography” and said to be “of immense importance” (Scroggie).

Author

Jeremiah dictated all of his prophecies to his secretary, Baruch (Jer. 36:1-4). That scroll was destroyed (Jer. 36:23). Jeremiah then dictated another edition, which included more material (Jer. 36:22). That edition is not the present book. Many sections show evidence of being composed in the latter part of his ministry. Our edition states that Jeremiah was the author (Jer. 1:1). Chapter 52 is almost identical to 2 Kings 24:18-25:30 and was probably added by Baruch.

Daniel refers to Jeremiah’s prophecy of the seventy-year captivity (Dan. 9:2; Jer. 25:11-14, 29:10). Second Chronicles 36:21 and Ezekiel 1:1 do the same. Even extra-canonical books mention Jeremiah’s prophecy. Ecclesiasticus attributes the destruction of Jerusalem to the rejection of Jeremiah’s warnings and prophecies. Josephus and the Talmud confirm these same facts. The New Testament makes explicit references to Jeremiah. Matthew 2:17 quotes Jeremiah 31:15. Matthew 21:13, Mark 11:17, and Luke 19:46 quote Jeremiah 7:11. Romans 11:27 amplifies Jeremiah 31:33 ff. Hebrews 8:8-13 quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34. Christian tradition attributes the book to Jeremiah.

Recipients

In 701 BC, Sennacherib attacked Jerusalem, but it was miraculously spared (Isa. 36 and 37). After that, the Southern Kingdom did not have much to fear from Assyria; however, it slipped away from the Lord. Wicked kings had even introduced idolatry. Jeremiah was called to be a prophet in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah (Jer. 1:1, 627 BC, about sixty years after the death of Isaiah). In 622 BC, the Law of Moses was rediscovered and Josiah, Israel’s last good king, instituted spiritual reforms.

Unfortunately, his efforts were not enough to stem the tide. After his death, the wickedness grew worse and worse. As the apostasy worsened, opposition to Jeremiah mounted. Jehoiachim destroyed his writings. In 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar took Palestine and deported key people like Daniel to Babylon. Jehoiachim was not a Babylonian vassal, but he rejected Jeremiah’s warnings and, in 601 BC, rebelled against Babylon. There was another invasion in 597 BC. Nebuchadnezzar overthrew Jerusalem in 586 BC. Jeremiah ended up in Egypt (Jer. 52) and maybe Babylon (tradition). Jeremiah’s ministry, then, stretched from 627 to ca. 580 BC. He was a contemporary of Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Daniel, and Ezekiel.

The main body of the book of Jeremiah is addressed to Judah and Jerusalem (Jer. 2:2; 4:2; 6:1; 7:1; etc.). In chapters 46-51, he prophesies against ten nations.

Message

The subject is the judgment of God. When Israel rejected Jeremiah's message and him, he warned of coming defeat at the hands of the Babylonians. Then he recorded that judgment. The message of Jeremiah is: even though God judges His people and the world, He will send the Messiah and establish His kingdom.

Structure

Jeremiah is a combination of history, biography, and prophecy. The closest thing to a literary structure is the fact that the book is a series of messages. In chapters 2-20, each message begins with the words "the word of the Lord came." In chapters 21-39, the same phrase is used and a historical reference is added. In almost every chapter from 21-39 (except those dealing with the restoration of Israel, namely Jer. 30, 31, 33 and three others, Jer. 23, 26 and 36), the coming of Nebuchadnezzar is mentioned. The one coming to judge is intimated earlier (Jer. 2:37; 4:6; 7, 12, 13; 5:6; 6:1-7, 22; 8:16; 13:21; 20:4), but he is not distinctly mentioned by name until Jer. 21:2. So, the structure of Jeremiah is topical, not chronological (not even necessarily logical).

I. Introduction: The Call and Commission of Jeremiah	1
II. Judgment against Judah and Jerusalem	2-45
A. Messages indicting the People	2-20
B. Messages announcing the Captivity	21-39
C. Messages to the Remnant after the Captivity	40-45
III. Judgment against the Nations	46-51
IV. Appendix	52

Purposes

There are several purposes of Jeremiah. One of the purposes of Jeremiah is to remind us that God judges His people and the world. When these messages were orally preached (and written piecemeal), the purpose was to get individuals to repent. The nation rejected that message and the messenger and judgment fell. After the judgment fell, Jeremiah wrote this book as we have it to remind future generations that God judges His people as well as the world. There will be trouble for Jacob and unparalleled tribulation for the world.

Another purpose of Jeremiah is to remind us that even though God has to judge, He will bring His program to pass. This book is dark, but it is not all dark. Hope flashes through its prophecies. Jeremiah revealed beforehand that the captivity would only last seventy years (Jer. 25:1-14). Even beyond that, there are better days ahead (Jer. 23:5ff; 30:4-11; 31:31-34; 33:15-18). The Messiah is coming and so is the Kingdom.

Summary: Jeremiah predicted judgment on Judah and the world and yet he saw hope in the near and distant future.

Even though God judges His people and the world, He will send the Messiah and establish His Kingdom.

LAMENTATIONS: THE BOOK OF LAMENT

Lamentations has been called “an acrostic Dirge” (Scroggie), the “Wailing Wall of the Bible” (McGee), “the most neglected Book in the Bible” (Wilber Smith), “an elegy written in a graveyard.”

Author

Nowhere in this brief book does the author give his name. Yet there is little doubt that the author was Jeremiah. Consider the following: 1) The book is a lament. Jeremiah wrote a lament for Josiah (2 Chron. 35:25). 2) The book was written by an eyewitness of Jerusalem’s siege, fall and destruction (Lam. 1:13-15; 2:6, 9; 4:1-12). Jeremiah not only witnessed the fall of Jerusalem but also remained behind after the captives were deported (Jer. 39). 3) Elements of style are similar to Jeremiah. The similarities are striking and numerous, especially in the poetic sections of Jeremiah (*cf.* Lam. 1:2 with Jer. 40:13; Lam. 1:15 with Jer. 8:21; Lam. 1:16, 2:11 with Jer. 9:1, 18; Lam. 2:22 with Jer. 6:25; and Lam. 4:21 with Jer. 49:12). The word “daughter” occurs about twenty times in each book. The same grief over Judah’s downfall is evident in both books. 4) A strong and persistent tradition from the third century BC maintains that Jeremiah wrote the book. The superscription to Lamentations in the Septuagint says, “And it came to pass after Israel had been carried away captive and Jerusalem had become desolate, that Jeremiah sat weeping and lamented with his lamentation over Jerusalem saying.” This is also the position of the Talmud, the Aramaic Targums of Jonathan, and the early Christian writers like Origen and Jerome. Reformers, such as Calvin, and numerous commentators support this view.

Recipients

Nebuchadnezzar’s siege on Jerusalem was from January 588 BC to July 586 BC. Jerusalem fell on July 18, 586 BC and on August 15, 586 BC, the city and the Temple were burned. Jeremiah probably wrote these five elegies not long after the destruction before he was taken into Egypt (Jer. 43:1-7). So the date is late 586 BC.

The recipients were the Jews who observed the destruction of Jerusalem (Lam. 1:12), The Lord (Lam. 1:20; 2:20; etc.), Judah and Jerusalem (Lam. 2:13; 3:40, 41, etc.) as well as Edom (Lam. 4:21-22).

Message

The subject is a lament over the destruction of Jerusalem. The term “lamentations” comes from a Greek word that means “to cry aloud.” The book consists of poems of mourning over the utter destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Babylonians. The message is sin brings lamentation, but God is faithful to His promise to be merciful.

Structure

The literary structure of the book of Lamentations is simple and obvious—in the Hebrew text. The book consists of five poems, one for each chapter. These five poems are acrostics. Each verse begins with a word whose first letter is successively one of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, except in chapter 3, where three verses are allotted to

each letter. Four chapters were also written in what is called “limping meter,” a cadence used in funeral dirges and thus most appropriate for this lament over the destruction of Jerusalem.

Isn't it strange that Jeremiah is overcome with emotion and yet he writes a lament in the form of an acrostic? Doesn't that seem to give the book a touch of unreality? Not necessarily. While obviously there is deep emotion on the part of the writer, what he writes is the product of reflection and deliberation.

I. The First Lament: the Desolation of Jerusalem	1:1-22
II. The Second Lament: the Destruction of Jerusalem	2:1-22
III. The Third Lament: Distress of Jeremiah	3:1-66
IV. The Fourth Lament: Defeat of Jerusalem	4:1-22
V. The Fifth Lament: Desire of Jeremiah	5:1-22

Purposes

There are three purposes of Lamentations. One purpose of Lamentations is to express mourning over Jerusalem's holocaust. For better than fifty years, Jeremiah warned of coming judgment. Now the holy city has been laid waste and desolate. God's promised judgment for sin has come, but instead of exalting over the fulfillment of his prophecy, Jeremiah mourns and weeps. Part of the purpose is to express the sorrow in the heart of Jeremiah over the destruction of Jerusalem.

A second purpose of Lamentations is to confess sins and acknowledge God's righteous judgment. There is not just mourning and misery, there is also confession. The attitude of the book is “we have sinned and God is holy. He is righteous to judge.”

A third purpose of Lamentations is to express hope in God's future restoration of His people. God has judged, but He will be faithful to His covenant promise (Lam. 3:22-23).

Summary: Jeremiah laments the destruction of Jerusalem but recognizes that God is righteous in judging and will be faithful to His people.

The lesson for us is that sin brings lament, but God is faithful to His promise to be merciful.

EZEKIEL: THE BOOK OF THE GLORY OF GOD

Ezekiel is said to be the prophet of the Spirit, as Isaiah is the prophet of the Son and Jeremiah is the prophet of the Father. Ezekiel has been called the prophet of glory and his book “a book many do not care to read” because they do not understand it (Lee).

Author

The author of Ezekiel was Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:3; 24:24). This autobiographical book uses the first person singular throughout. The internal evidence supports the unity and integrity of the book. The style, language, and thematic development are also consistent throughout.

Recipients

Because of the data in the book of Ezekiel itself, the date for its composition can be pinpointed fairly accurately. Ezekiel 1:1 mentions the thirtieth year. That is probably a reference to Ezekiel himself. If so, he was born about 622 BC.

In 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and carried off hostages, including Daniel and his friends. Ezekiel was sixteen years old at the time. Nebuchadnezzar returned in 597 BC and carried off 10,000 captives, including Ezekiel. In other words, when Ezekiel was about twenty-five years old, he was deported to Babylon.

When he was approximately thirty, he received his prophetic commission (Ezek. 1:2-3), that is, about 593 BC. In 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar made his final siege of Jerusalem. Ezekiel’s wife (they were still in Babylon) died as a sign to Judah when Nebuchadnezzar began his final siege (Ezek. 24:16-24). Ezekiel continued his ministry until at least 570 BC and probably died about 560 BC. He, no doubt, wrote the book shortly after the incidents recorded in it. His ministry lasted for at least twenty-two years (Ezek. 1:2, 29:17), so his book was probably completed by 565 BC.

The recipients of the book of Ezekiel were the Jews in captivity in Babylon, about 565 BC. He addresses the book to the children of Israel (Ezek. 2:3, 3:1), especially those in captivity (Ezek. 3:11; 11:25). There are also messages for the Gentiles (Ezek. 25:3; 27:3; etc.).

The Jews living in Babylon were captives, but they were treated more as colonists than as slaves. They increased in numbers and accumulated great wealth. Some of them even rose to high office. They also had religious freedom. During this period, they gave up idolatry. In fact, they gave it up forever. They sought out the books of the Law and inaugurated the synagogue worship system, which became so powerful in the years that followed.

The complaint of the discouraged exiles, however, was “the way of the Lord is not equal” (right or just; Ezek. 18:25, 29; 33:17, 20). Evidently, false prophets in Babylon led some of the first captives to believe that Jerusalem would not be destroyed, that their beloved city would be spared and they would soon return. Jeremiah heard that and wrote them a letter (Jer. 29). Ezekiel began his ministry the following year, endorsing all that Jeremiah said. He had to convince them that they had to return to the Lord before they could return to the land.

Message

The subject is the glory of God. Ezekiel sees the glory of God when he is called and commissioned (Ezek. 1:28; 3:12, 23). He records the departure of God's glory (Ezek. 9:3; 10:4; 18-19; 11:22-23) and the restoration of God's glory during the millennium (Ezek. 43:1-5; 44:4). The message is sin results in the departure of God's glory, but God's glory will return when Christ returns.

Structure

Ezekiel is obviously a series of messages (Ezek. 6:1; 7:1; 12:1; 13:1; 15:1; etc.). There are within the book visions, parables, an allegory, and a direct address, all used to give his message. Any "structure" is a topical arrangement of that material.

I. Introduction: Ezekiel's Call and Commission: Glory Revealed	1:1-3:27
II. Prophecies against Judah and Jerusalem: Glory Removed	4:1-24:27
III. Prophecies against the Surrounding Nations	25:1-32:32
IV. Prophecies of Israel's Restoration: Glory Restored	33:1-48:35

Purposes

There are two purposes of Ezekiel. The first is to show that God was justified in withdrawing His glory. The children of Israel were in captivity. Their complaint was that the Lord was not fair. Ezekiel writes to show that God was justified in withdrawing His glory and sending His people into captivity. Proof is presented that instead of blotting them out, as He had done to other nations who had committed similar abominations, he rather chastened them to correct them and to prevent them from doing this again.

It worked. The Babylonian captivity cured the Jews of idolatry. Until the time of their captivity, they continually fell into idolatry. From that time until this, whatever else they have been guilty of, they have not been idolatrous. Furthermore, the surrounding nations who were jubilant over their fall would be judged (Ezek. 25:32).

The second purpose is to assure them that God's glory would return. Though they were discouraged now, they could be encouraged for God's glory would return in the millennium.

Summary: Ezekiel informed the captives in Babylon that God was just in withdrawing His glory from Israel, but He would also judge the Gentiles and restore His glory to Israel.

Sin results in the departure of God's glory, but as promised, God's glory will return when Christ returns.

DANIEL: THE BOOK OF THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Daniel has been called “the book of the universal sovereignty of God” (McGee), “a prophetic philosophy of history,” “the greatest book in the Bible on godless kingdoms and the kingdom of God (Scroggie), an “indispensable introduction to New Testament prophecy” (Unger) and “the Apocalypse of the Old Testament.” Daniel is the most important prophetic book in the Old Testament.

Author

Daniel claims to be the author (Dan. 12:4) and uses the first person singular from Daniel 7:2 to the end. The Jewish Talmud agrees and Christ attributes it to him (Mt. 24:15; Dan. 9:27).

Critics reject the authorship of Daniel and attempt to establish a Maccabean date, that is, ca. 167 BC. They say that there are historical mistakes in Daniel. Daniel 1:1 says Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem in the third year of Jehoiachim. Jeremiah 25:1 states that the fourth year of Jehoiachim was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar. How could Nebuchadnezzar make an expedition in the third year of Jehoiachim if he didn't come to power until the fourth year? The answer is simple. Two different types of dating were used. It was the third year, according to Tishri reckoning and the fourth year, according to Nisan years (Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, p. 183).

Critics also claim that the literary features of Daniel prove it was written long after the sixth century BC. The Greek names of three musical instruments are said to “demand” a date after Alexander the Great, that is, ca. 332 BC. Jewish captives, however, were required to furnish music (Ps. 137:3). Surely Greeks from Cypress, Ionia, Lydia, and Cilicia were required to do the same. Daniel could have learned Greek terms from them.

Moreover, critics say Daniel's place in the canon indicates a later work. The book is placed among the *Writings*. Therefore, it was not in existence when the canon of the *Prophets* was closed between 300 and 200 BC. In the first place, how do they know the canon of the Prophets was closed between 300 and 200 BC? Furthermore, the books of the Prophets were all from men who held the *office* of prophet. Although Daniel had the prophetic gift (Mt. 24:15), he was an administrator in a court. He did not hold the office of prophet. Hence, his book was placed among “the Writings” and not the Prophets.

The problem is that critics don't accept the supernatural and Daniel predicts the future, so they invent a late date to explain away the supernatural prophetic element in Daniel.

Recipients

In the third year of king Jehoiachim (605 BC), Daniel was taken, along with others, to Babylon (Dan. 1:1-2). He was a teenager at the time. He ministered for the duration of the Babylonian captivity and after Babylon was overcome by the Medes and the Persians (539 BC). He was in the court of Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar) and Persia (Darius and Cyrus). He ministered at least until the third year of Cyrus (536 BC; Dan. 10:1). He probably wrote ca. 530 BC in his ninetieth year. This book, then, was received by the Jews

in Babylon. A Gentile nation had conquered Jerusalem. The Jews in captivity wanted to know what would happen to Israel and what to the Gentile nations.

Message

The subject is the sovereignty of God. The message is God is sovereign over all nations of the world throughout all history (Dan. 2:21; 4:17).

Structure

The two structural clues are: 1) The book is not in chronological order. Daniel 7:1 is the first year of Belshazzar, whereas Daniel 5:1 records his death. 2) The book is written in two languages. Daniel 1:1-2:3 and Daniel 8:1-12:13 are in Hebrew, while Daniel 2:4-7:18 is in Aramaic.

I. Introduction	1:1-2:3
II. The Sovereign God will Ultimately Judge Gentile Nations	2:4-7:28
A. The Great Image	2:4-49
B. The Gold Statue	3:1-30
C. The Gigantic Tree	4:1-37
D. The Gala Feast	5:1-31
E. The Ghastly Plot	6:1-28
F. The Grotesque Beast	7:1-28
III. The Sovereign God will Ultimately Resurrect and Reward Israel	8:1-12
A. The Vision of the Ram and Goat	8:1-27
B. The Vision of Seventy Weeks	9:1-27
C. The Vision of Israel's Future	10:1-12:13

Purpose

There are two purposes of Daniel. The first is to establish that a sovereign God will judge the Gentile nations. Babylon had conquered Israel, God's chosen nation. What happened to the promises of God? Daniel's answer is that Babylon will be conquered and so will those who conquer her, etc., until ultimately, God will judge all Gentile nations.

The second purpose is to establish that a sovereign God will restore and reward Israel. Israel is being punished. Is there an end? Daniel's message is both discouraging and encouraging. He predicts trouble ahead. Israel will suffer under Gentile powers for many years. The encouraging news is that this period is not permanent. The time will come when God will restore and reward Israel. He will establish His Messianic Kingdom, which will last forever.

Summary: Daniel assures the Jews in captivity that a sovereign God will ultimately judge the Gentile nations, restore and reward Israel, and establish His kingdom.

God is sovereign over all, including all the nations of the world.

HOSEA: THE BOOK OF THE LOVE OF GOD

Hosea has been called the book for backsliders (Hosea 11:7), “a clear treatise on repentance,” and “the most difficult of all the prophetic books” (Lee). Hosea himself has been called the “prophet of Israel’s zero hour” (Baxter).

Author

Hosea 1:1 says Hosea wrote the book. The divine authority and authenticity of the book is attested by numerous quotations in the New Testament (*cf.* Hosea 11:1 with Mt. 2:15; Hosea 6:6 with Mt. 9:13, 12:7; Hosea 10:8 with Lk. 23:30; Hosea 2:23 with Rom. 9:25; Hosea 13:14 with 1 Cor. 15:15; Hosea 1:9-10; and 2:23 with 1 Pet. 2:10).

Recipients

Hosea ministered in the Northern Kingdom (Hosea 5:1), called Ephraim after the largest tribe (Hosea 5:3, 5:11, 13). He dates his ministry by giving the names of four kings (Hosea 1:1): Jeroboam (Israel), 782-753 BC, Uzziah (Judah), 767-739 BC, Jotham (Judah), 750-731 BC, Ahaz (Judah), 735-715 BC, and Hezekiah (Judah) 715-686 BC. Even though Hosea ministered in the north, four southern kings are listed because only the rulers of the southern kings were recognized as the kings of God’s people. Jeroboam, the northern king, was the great-grandson of Jehu. God had called Jehu to the throne to root out the worship of Baal from Israel, in return for which Jehu received the promise that his sons would sit on the throne to the fourth generation (2 Kings 10:30).

Hosea began his ministry in the reign of Jeroboam II in the north and Uzziah in the south, ca. 755 BC. He prophesied until the time of Hezekiah, who did not start his reign until 715 BC, but his book has no mention of the destruction of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC. So even though he ministered longer, the date of the book is probably about 725 BC. His contemporaries were Amos in the North and Isaiah and Micah in the South.

When Hosea began his ministry, Israel was enjoying peace, plenty, prosperity and perversity (idolatry). When Jeroboam II died, his strong hand, which had curbed lawlessness, was removed and Israel began to crumble. Anarchy and assassination followed. Laxity and looseness characterized personal behavior. Courts were corrupt; judges made their living from bribes. Robbery, murder, and organized vice were visible everywhere. Even the priests were corrupt. They were at the head of organized bandit gangs! They led people into sin, making sinning attractive. Worship was formal and professional.

Message

The subject is the love of God. That theme crops up repeatedly, for example, see Hosea 2:1, Hosea 2:23, and especially Hosea 14:4. The message is even when we’re unfaithful, God loves us and wants to restore us to fellowship with Himself.

Structure

The overall literary structure of Hosea is easy. It is obvious that the overall structure of the book is Hosea’s marriage (Hosea 1-3) and Hosea’s message (Hosea 4-14). The details

are much more difficult. In those first three chapters, the main subject is Hosea's marriage, but the text repeatedly lapses into a discussion of Israel. Chapters 4-14 are even more difficult. There seems to be no order. Keil, however, suggests a three-fold division of chapters 4-14. Three promises make the three divisions (Hosea 4:1-6:3; 6:4-11:11; 11:12-14:9). Each of the three divisions contains something like a charge, a judgment and a promise of restoration.

- | | |
|--|------------|
| I. The Marriage of Hosea: His Love for an Unfaithful Wife | 1-3 |
| A. Hosea's Marriage | 1:2-2:1 |
| B. Hosea's Divorce | 2:3-2:23 |
| C. Hosea's Remarriage | 3:1-5 |
| II. The Message of Hosea: God's Love for Unfaithful People | 4-14 |
| A. Round One (Indictment) | 4:1-6:3 |
| B. Round Two (Judgment) | 6:4-11:11 |
| C. Round Three: (Restoration) | 11:12-14:9 |

Purposes

One of the purposes of Hosea is to exhibit God's case against spiritually adulterous Israel. The Northern Kingdom departed from the Lord and began to wallow in sin, especially idolatry. In Hosea, God levels His charge against Israel (Hosea 4:1). He lays out the charges like a lawyer laying out a case in court. Some have called the literary form of Hosea 4:1-3 a lawsuit. There does seem to be a charge, evidence, and judgment in these verses.

God not only exhibits the facts of the situation, but He also expresses His feelings. In having Hosea marry a harlot, God is explaining the way He feels about sin in Israel. For Israel to go after idols is like a wife prostituting herself with other men. Just as a faithful husband would feel justified in casting off such an unfaithful wife, so God is justified in judging Israel.

The other purpose of Hosea is to express God's loyal love for Israel. After statements of judgment, a word of grace follows in which Israel's future return is conceived (1:10-2:1; 6:1-3). God loved Israel like the husband of an unfaithful, adulterous woman who would go and reclaim his wife from the slave market (2 Tim. 2:11-13).

Summary: Hosea married a woman who became a harlot and he reclaimed her to illustrate Israel's unfaithfulness to God and her eventual restoration.

Even when we are unfaithful, God loves us and wants to restore us to fellowship with Himself.

JOEL: A BOOK OF THE DAY OF THE LORD

Joel has been called a “literary gem,” “arresting,” in vividness “scarcely equaled” (Baxter). This is the book of the Day of the Lord.

Author

Joel 1:1 says Joel, the son of Pethuel, was the author of the book.

Recipients

Dating Joel is a problem. There is no explicit time reference in it! The book has been variously placed from the division of the Kingdom, which was in 931 BC, until Malachi or even later.

Phoenicia, Philistia, Egypt, and Edom are mentioned in Joel. These countries were prominent in the ninth century BC but not later. There is also evidence of borrowing between Joel and Amos (*cf.* Joel 3:16 with Amos 1:2 and Joel 3:18 with Hosea 9:13). The context suggests Hosea, an eighth-century prophet, borrowed from Joel. Furthermore, Joel’s style is more like Hosea and Amos than the post-exilic writers. Many scholars, therefore, have concluded that overall the most likely time of Joel was during the reign of Joash (835-796 BC). Since there is no mention of idolatry, it may have been written after the purge of Baal worship and most other forms of idolatry in the early reign of Joash (830 BC). Jewish tradition supports this conclusion. Joel was a contemporary of Elisha, who ministered to the Northern Kingdom.

Joel is addressed to all the inhabitants of the land (Joel 1:2). Evidently, that refers to the land of Judah, which can be clearly seen from various references in the book, such as Joel 3:1, 3:17, etc. (in Joel 3:2, Israel is a prophetic reference to all twelve tribes). Special mention is made to old men (Joel 1:2), husbandmen and vine dressers (Joel 1:11), and priests (Joel 1:13).

Message

The subject is the Day of the Lord (Joel 1:15; 2:11, 2:31; 3:14). The message is since God judges now and will judge in the future, He calls people to repentance.

Structure

Though there is a repeated reference to the subject of the day of the Lord, there is no repeated phrase that is a clue to the literary structure of the book. The structure is like Hosea. In Hosea, the prophet began with a current situation, his marriage, and went on to make a spiritual application. Likewise, Joel begins with a current, local, locust infestation and uses that to talk about the future situation.

One wave of locusts after another devoured the land. What one wave of invaders left, the succeeding wave devoured, until the land had been stripped of everything green. They even gnawed the bark off the trees. This has been called the grandest description of locust devastation in all literature.

I. Introduction	1:1
II. The Day of the Lord Foreshadowed	1:2-20
A. The Destruction of the Locusts	1:2-14
B. The Destruction of a Drought	1:15-20
III. The Day of the Lord Foretold	2:1-3:21
A. The Judgment of God	2:1-11
B. The Invitation to Israel	2:12-17
C. The Coming of the Holy Spirit	2:18-27
D. The Judgment on Gentiles	3:1-16
E. The Blessing on Israel	3:17-21

Purposes

The first purpose of Joel is to call Judah to repentance. Joel is calling Judah to repentance as a proper response to the Lord's judgment of locusts and drought, lest a more devastating scourge come upon them.

The second purpose of Joel is to announce the Day of the Lord. Joel was also announcing the future Day of the Lord in which the Lord will judge the nations, deliver Israel and take up His dwelling in their midst. The unprecedented locust plague was only a foretaste of the future day of the Lord.

Summary: Joel uses a natural disaster as an illustration of an opportunity to announce the future Day of the Lord and call Judah to repentance.

God judges now and will judge in the future.

AMOS: A BOOK OF THE JUDGMENT OF GOD

Amos has been called a book that “ranks high among the writings of the prophets,” “a book of woe and judgment,” “one of the most wonderful appearances in the history of the human spirit” and “in vigor, vividness, and simplicity of speech” Amos “was not surpassed by any of his successors” (Scroggie). It is “distinguished by a peculiar forcefulness and rural freshness” (Baxter).

Author

Amos 1:1 says the author was Amos. The New Testament confirms that. Stephen quotes from Amos (Acts 7:42) and so does James (Acts 15:16).

Recipients

Amos’ ministry was during Uzziah’s reign in the South (767-739 BC) and Jeroboam’s reign in the North (782-753 BC; see Amos 1:1). Amos also says it was two years before the earthquake (Amos 1:1; see also Zech. 14:5). Thus, Amos’ ministry was between 760 and 755 BC, toward the latter part of the reign of Jeroboam II.

During the reign of Jeroboam II, there was expansion, freedom, activity, prosperity, and peace. No one feared an invasion. There was also idolatry. The golden calves of Jeroboam I were still worshiped at Bethel. There were idolatrous shrines at Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba. Corruption was the order of the day. The judges were dishonest. Government officials and even the priest were corrupt.

The recipient of Amos was Israel (Amos 1:1), a reference to the Northern Kingdom, as Amos distinguishes between Israel and Judah. There are a number of other references to Israel (Amos 2:6, 11; 4:12; 5:1, 4). Cities of the Northern Kingdom are also mentioned a number of times. Bethel and Gilgal are referred to as “centers of idolatry.” Yet, the message is a warning to the Southern Kingdom as well (Amos 3:1; 2:4; 5; 6:1).

Message

The subject is the judgment of God. The message is a sovereign God will judge sin and restore Israel.

Structure

There are several literary devices or clues used in the book. For example, Amos says, “For three transgressions and for four” (Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6), but that device does not follow throughout the whole book. The book itself consists of three parts. First, there is a series of judgments (Amos 1-2), then a series of sermons (Amos 3-6), and finally, there is a series of visions (Amos 7-9).

I. Introduction: Judgment is about to Come	1:1-2
II. Judgments Announced (Eight Judgments)	1:3-2:16
A. On Three Heathen Neighbors	1:3-10
B. On Three Kindred Neighbors	1:11-2:3
C. On the Sister Nation	1:4-5

D. On Israel	1:6-16
III. Judgment Amplified (Three Messages)	3:1-6:14
A. The First Message	3:1-15
B. The Second Message	4:1-13
C. The Third Message	5:1-17
D. The First Woe	5:17-27
E. The Second Woe	6:1-14
IV. Judgment Assured (Five Visions)	7:1-9:10
A. Visions of Locusts, Fire and Plumb Line	7:1-9
B. The Protest of Amaziah	7:10-17
C. The Vision of the Fruit Basket	8:1-14
D. Vision of the Lord by the Altar	9:1-10
V. Conclusion: God will Restore	9:11-15

Purposes

The first purpose of Amos is to pronounce judgment on Israel. Jeroboam II (793-753 BC) had enjoyed a brilliant career from the standpoint of military success. He had restored the boundaries of the Northern Kingdom to the limits that it had in 931 BC. As a result, wealth came from the booty of war and advantageous trade relations with Damascus and other cities, but along with the increase of wealth, there was materialism and greed among the nobility. They shamelessly victimized the poor and cynically disregarded the rights of those who were socially beneath them. A general disregard for the sanctions of the seventh commandment had undermined the sanctity of the family and had rendered offensive their hypocritical attempt to appease God by religious forms.

The way Amos delivers his message is shrewd. He begins with the nations surrounding Israel, naming them one by one and moving around, getting closer and closer to Israel (you can almost hear Israel saying “Amen!” “Amen!”). Then he names Judah (you can hear the Northern Kingdom shout, “Hallelujah! The Southern Kingdom is getting it!”). Then Amos hits his target—the Northern Kingdom. There is more than cleverness here. There is a concept that God does not condemn the sins of the sinner and condone the sins of the saint.

The second purpose of Amos is to prophesy the ultimate restoration of Israel. The vast majority of the material concerns judgment. The conclusion deals with restoration (Amos 9:11-15).

Summary: Amos pronounces judgment on the nations surrounding Israel and on Israel. He also predicts Israel will be restored.

A sovereign God will judge the sin of all and He will restore Israel.

OBADIAH: THE BOOK OF THE JUDGMENT ON EDOM

Obadiah has been called “the shortest book in the Old Testament” and “a brilliant prophetic cameo” (Lee). It may be the smallest book in the Old Testament, but it deals with one of the largest questions in life.

Author

The first verse declares, “This is the vision of Obadiah.” That’s all. There is no father, no king; nothing is given but his name. Consequently, nothing is known of his time, his town, or his family. He is an obscure prophet who probably lived in the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Recipients

Dating Obadiah is difficult. There is no reference to anything in the opening verse. To complicate matters, the book describes an attack on Jerusalem (Obad. 13, 14) that some feel could fit several different historical situations in the history of Israel. The only historical reference point in the book is in Obadiah 10-14. There were four significant invasions of Jerusalem in Old Testament times:

1. By the Egyptians (926 BC) in the reign of Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:24-25)
2. By the Philistines and Arabians (848-41 BC) in the reign of Jehoram (2 Chron. 21:16-17)
3. By Israel (790 BC) in the reign of Amaziah (2 Kings 14:13-14)
4. By Babylon (605-586 BC) in the reign of Zedekiah (2 Kings 24-25)

Frankly, no one knows for certain to which invasion Obadiah refers. Evidently, it is not absolutely necessary to know which invasion is referred to in order to understand the book. Most believe it is either number two or four above. Many scholars choose number two because of the place of Obadiah in the canon and because of the lack of reference to the captivity. Assuming that is the case, the date of the book is about 850 BC.

The content of the book concerns Edom (Obad. 1), but it is doubtful that Obadiah was speaking to the Edomites. They are addressed, but that does not mean Obadiah was speaking directly to them. Rather, Obadiah was speaking to Israel, more specifically the Southern Kingdom, about Edom. For dramatic effect, he was speaking as if he was talking to them.

Message

The subject is judgment on Edom (Obad. 1-2). The message is God judges those who mistreat Israel (Gen. 12:1-3) and will ultimately restore Israel.

Structure

There is no literary device that neatly divides Obadiah into parts. Rather, the content determines the structure.

I. Introduction: The Nations are called against Edom	1
II. The Destruction of Edom	2-14
A. The Certainty of Edom's Destruction	2-3
B. The Reason for Edom's Destruction	10-14
III. The Deliverance of Israel	15-21
A. The Day of the Lord in all Nations	15-16
B. The Day of the Lord in Israel	17-21

Purposes

The first purpose of Obadiah is to declare Edom's doom. Clearly, Obadiah is declaring doom on Edom (Obad. 1, 2, 4, 8). The situation was this: Edom and Israel were brothers. That was literally true. Isaac and Rebekah had twin boys named Jacob and Esau and out of those two sons came the two nations Israel and Edom. There had been rivalries between the two for many years, but about 850 BC, Edom did some rather unloving things toward Israel. The Edomites looked on with pleasure at the misfortune of the Judeans (Obad. 12). They took their possessions and even took part in a conflict against them (Obad. 14). Therefore, Obadiah says that God will judge Edom for her cruelty to Judah.

The second purpose of Obadiah is to declare Israel's deliverance. Obadiah 15-21 deals with the Day of the Lord. In verses 15 and 16, he says all nations will be judged, but he says in verse 17 that on Mount Zion, there shall be deliverance. The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions. In a word, God's justice will ultimately prevail.

Summary: Obadiah declares Edom's destruction because of her treatment of Israel, and the ultimate deliverance of Israel.

God judges those who mistreat Israel (Gen. 12:1-3) and He will ultimately restore Israel.

JONAH: THE BOOK OF THE GRACE OF GOD

Charles Reade has said, “Jonah is the most beautiful story ever written in so small a compass. It contains forty-eight verses and 1328 English words. There is a growth of character and a distinct plot worked out without haste or cruelty. Only a great artist could have hit on a perfect proportion between dialogue and narrative.” Cornell said, “This apparently trivial book is one of the deepest and grandest that was ever written.” It has been called “a perfect gem” (Lee).

Author

The first verse indicates Jonah, the son of Amitai, wrote this book. From the book itself, we know what happened to him when God told him to go to Nineveh. Apart from that, there is only one other reference to him in the Old Testament, that is, 2 Kings 14:25. A Jewish tradition says that Jonah was the son of the widow at Zarephath, whom Elijah raised from the dead (1 Kings 17: 8-24).

Recipients

Jonah lived and ministered under the reign of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25). Jeroboam II ruled from 782-753 BC. That was after the time of Elijah and just before the time of Amos and Hosea. So the date of Jonah is 760 BC.

Under Jeroboam II, Israel enjoyed a period of resurgence and prosperity. Nationalistic fervor was no doubt running high. During this time, Assyria was in a period of mild decline because weak rulers had ascended the throne. Yet Assyria still remained a threat and her cruelty had become legendary. Graphic accounts of their cruel treatment of captives have been found in ancient Assyrian records, especially in the ninth and seventh centuries BC.

At the same time, conditions at Nineveh made them receptive to Jonah. Under Semiramis, the queen regent and her son Adad-Nirari III (810-782 BC), there was monotheism under the worship of the god Nebo. Assyrian history records two plagues in 756 and 759 BC, as well as a total eclipse, which was regarded as an indication of divine wrath (763 BC). These natural phenomena may have prepared the Ninevites for Jonah’s message.

The ministry described in the book of Jonah was to the Gentile city of Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. The recipients of the book are not specifically stated, but there is no doubt that it was written to the Jews. After all, it is in the Jewish canon!

Message

If the subject were Jonah, the book would end at chapter 2. If the subject were Nineveh, it would end with chapter 3. The subject is the universality of God’s grace (Jonah 4:2, 10, 11). The message is God’s grace is extended to all who trust Him.

Structure

Is Jonah history or allegory? Because they deny the supernatural, the critics want to make it an allegory written about 430 BC. Jonah represents Israel, the fish depicts Babylon and the three days in the fish the Babylonian captivity.

Jonah is historical. He was a real person (2 Kings 14:25). Jesus treated his experience as factual, not fictional (Mt. 12:39-41). There have been numerous incidences in modern times of men being swallowed by a big fish and living to tell about it. This does not rule out the possibility that the historical incident may illustrate truth.

Jonah is historical, but it is different than all other prophetic books. All others are taken up chiefly with prophetic utterances. Jonah records little of his utterance. It is mostly his experience. The story of Jonah has been compared to the stories of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17-19; 2 Kings 4-6). It is clearly narrative rather than prophecy.

What is the structure? Some divide the book into four parts, a few three. It is probably more accurate to see only two (Jonah 1:2 and 3:1).

I. Jonah's Commission	1:1-2:10
A. Jonah's Commission	1:1-2
B. Jonah's Course	1:3
C. Jonah's Consequences	1:4-17
D. Jonah's Confession	2:1-10
II. Jonah's Recommission	3:1-4:11
A. Jonah's Recommission	3:1-2
B. Jonah's Compliance	3:3-4
C. Nineveh's Conversion	3:5-11
D. Jonah's Complaint	4:1-3
E. God's Curriculum	4:4-11

Purpose

The first purpose of Jonah is to demonstrate the extent of God's grace. God's grace extends beyond Israel to all Gentiles. It is universal.

The second purpose of Jonah is to expose the exclusivism of Israel. Though one major purpose of the book is to demonstrate the universality of God's grace, the book does not end with God's grace extending to Nineveh. It ends with God educating Jonah, who was angry with God for saving Nineveh. In adding this last chapter, Jonah is exposing the narrowness of himself and his nation.

Summary: Even after God twice commissioned Jonah to preach to Nineveh, and they repented, Jonah still did not think God should extend His grace to them.

God's grace is not national; it is universal. It extends to all who will trust Him.

MICAH: THE BOOK OF SUMMONS TO JUDGMENT

Micah has been called the “shorthand of Isaiah,” “the prophet of the downtrodden” (Boa).

Author

This book opens by saying that it is the word of the Lord that came to Micah, but the verse does not mention his father, which was usually done. His town is given. Moresheth was about twenty miles west of Jerusalem near Gath.

The fact that he is identified by location rather than lineage suggests a lowly background. His many allusions to the work of a shepherd may indicate that, like Amos, he was a shepherd. He was from the Southern Kingdom. Though a countryman, he ministered principally in the city. He is quoted in Jeremiah 26:17-19. Some feel he was one of the men of Hezekiah who, together with Isaiah, transcribed Solomon’s proverbs (Prov. 25:1).

Recipients

The dating of Micah is not difficult. Micah 1:1 informs the reader when he lived and lectured, namely, in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Jotham reigned from 750-731 BC, Ahaz from 735-715 BC, and Hezekiah from 715-686 BC.

Micah 1:1 also says the message concerned Samaria and Jerusalem. Micah, therefore, is the only prophet whose ministry was directed to both kingdoms. He predicted the fall of Samaria (Micah 1:6), which means much of his ministry took place before the Assyrian captivity in 722 BC. His strong denunciation of idolatry and immorality also suggests that his ministry largely preceded the sweeping religious reforms of Hezekiah. So, while he could have ministered from 750-686 BC, the major part of his ministry was probably between 735-710 BC.

He was a contemporary of Hosea in the North and Isaiah in the South. Isaiah prophesied seventeen or eighteen years before Micah. Isaiah and Micah contain one message in common (Micah 4:1-3 and Isa. 2:2-4). Isaiah ministered in the court, Micah to the common man.

The moral conditions during Micah’s time were corrupt. No class of people was exempt. Princes, prophets, priests, and people were all victims of social disorder and moral decay (Micah 2:2, 8, 9, 11; 3:1-3; 5:11). Yet they clung to religious ordinances and forms. Micah exposes the futility of it all (Micah 4:7-8).

In chapter 6, he addresses the Northern Kingdom as if it is still capable of escaping divine judgment through last-minute repentance. Jeremiah 26:18, 19 indicates that his earnest warnings against the reign of Hezekiah were taken seriously and made an important contribution to the revival, which took place under government sponsorship. Ultimately, they did not listen. Samaria fell in 722 BC.

Message

The subject is a summons to judgment on sin (Micah 3:12). The message is God judges the sins of His people, but He will ultimately bless them.

Structure

Micah uses the same repeated phrase, “hear,” to convey his message (Micah 1:2; 3:1; 6:1; 3:9 uses the phrase, but it is a repetition of 3:1). In each section, there is judgment and hope.

I. Introduction	1:1
II. Summon to the people	1:2-2:13
A. Judgment	1:2-2:11
B. Hope	2:12-13
III. Summon to the leaders	3:1-5:15
A. Judgment	3:1-12
B. Hope	4:1-5:15
IV. Summon to the mountains	6:1-7:20
A. Judgment	6:1-16
B. Hope	7:1-20

Purposes

The first purpose of Micah is to expose sin. Micah lived during a time of moral and spiritual decay. It was widespread and deep. The prophets and the people, the leaders and the laymen, were all involved. They had an outward show of “religion” and thus respectability, which, no doubt, blinded them to the seriousness and hideousness of their sin.

So one of Micah’s purposes is to expose sin for what it is. They had outward conformity to ritual. God wanted inward conformity to righteousness. Micah 6:6-8 is classic. Dean Stanley said that these verses are “one of the most sublime and impersonate declarations of spiritual religion the Old Testament contains.”

The second purpose of Micah is to pronounce judgment. Micah is not just a teacher. He is a prophet. He exposes sin and pronounces judgment. He predicts the destruction of Israel, which happened in 722 BC (Micah 1:6), and Judah, which occurred in 605 BC (Micah 1:9).

The third purpose of Micah is to promise hope. Yet, with all the sin and judgment in Micah, there is also hope. It keeps seeping through. Messiah will come (Micah 5:2), as will the Messianic Kingdom (Micah 4:1-2), and more important, mercy will too (Micah 7:18-19).

Summary: Micah summoned everyone (that is, all of Israel, North and South) to hear God’s judgment on their sin and His ultimate blessing on their nation.

God judges the sins of His people, but He will ultimately bless them.

NAHUM: THE BOOK OF THE JUDGMENT ON NINEVEH

Nahum has been called “a beautiful, vivid, pictorial poem” and “a perfect poem” (Lee). Two of the Minor Prophets ministered to Nineveh: Jonah and Nahum.

Author

Nahum 1:1 says that this book is the vision of Nahum. All that is known of him is what is said about him in this verse and it says very little. It does not tell us who his father was, or who the king was when he lived. It only tells of his town.

Recipients

There is no mention of the king in the opening verse, but there are several clues in the book as to its date. Nahum 3:8-10 refers to the fall of No-Amon (Thebes). That Egyptian city fell before the armies of Ashurbanipal in 664 BC. On the other hand, Nahum predicted the fall of Nineveh, which took place in 612 BC. So Nahum must be placed somewhere between 664 and 612 BC.

No-Amon was restored a decade after its defeat. Nahum’s failure to mention that has led to the conclusion that Nahum was written before 654 BC. The absence of any mention of a king in 1:1 may point to the reign of the wicked king Manasseh (695-642 BC). The date was probably about 655 BC when Nineveh was still in its glory.

Jonah preached to Nineveh about 760 BC. The city was converted, but evidently, the revival was short-lived. The Assyrians soon returned to their ruthless practices. Sargon II of Assyria destroyed Samaria in 722 BC. Under Sennacherib, the Assyrians came close to capturing Jerusalem during the reigns of Hezekiah (701 BC).

By the time of Nahum, that is, about 660 BC, Assyria reached the peak of its prosperity and power under Ashurbanipal (669-633 BC). Nineveh became the mightiest city on earth with walls 100 feet high and wide enough to accommodate three chariots riding abreast. Scattered around the walls were high towers that stretched an additional 100 feet in the air. A moat 150 feet wide and 60 feet deep surrounded the walls. Nineveh appeared impregnable and could withstand a twenty-year siege. Thus, Nahum’s prophecy of her overthrow seemed unlikely indeed. The book is *against* Nineveh (Nahum 1:1), but technically, it is *to* Judah (Nahum 1:15).

Message

The subject is the judgment of Nineveh. In the first verse of his book, Nahum says that the burden is against Nineveh. The message is God comforts His children by informing them that He will judge those who hurt them.

Structure

Nahum uses no literary device to reveal the structure of his thought. The content is the only clue.

I. Introduction	1:1
II. Nineveh's Judgment Decreed	1:2-15
A. The Divine Judge	1:2-7
B. The Divine Judgment	1:8-15
III. Nineveh's Judgment Described	2:1-13
A. The Siege and Capture	2:1-8
B. The Sacking of the City	2:9-13
IV. Nineveh's Judgment Deserved	3:1-19
A. Because of Her Sin	3:1-7
B. Because of Justice	3:8-19

Purposes

The first purpose of Nahum is to condemn Nineveh. Assyria and Nineveh were known for their power and cruelty. They were a nation of hunters and warriors, not artists and scientists. Most of their gods were gods of war. Nahum describes Nineveh's destruction in detail. It would be destroyed by a flood (Nahum 1:8, 2:6) and fire (Nahum 1:10; 2:13; 3:13, 15). The Temples and images would be profaned (Nahum 1:14). The city would never be rebuilt (Nahum 1:14, 2:11, 13). The leaders will flee (Nahum 2:9, 3:17). The fortress around the city would be easily captured (Nahum 3:12). The gates will be destroyed (Nahum 3:13) and there would be a lengthy siege and frantic efforts to strengthen its defenses (Nahum 3:14).

Historical accounts and archeological finds have verified that what Nahum predicted is exactly what happened. When Alexander marched by it in 331 BC, there was no evidence of its existence. In the second century AD, not a vestige of it remained. So complete was the destruction of Nineveh that the city was almost a myth for two millennia until its discovery by Layard and Botta in 1842.

The second purpose of Nahum is to vindicate God. Nahum was not overjoyed at Nineveh's destruction because of any nationalistic fanaticism or vengeful malice. Rather, as a man of God, he speaks of one who is wholly preoccupied with the Lord's cause on the earth. His earnest desire is to see God vindicate His holiness and justice in the eyes of the heathen.

The third purpose of Nahum is to comfort Judah. The primary purpose of Nahum was not just to condemn Nineveh but to comfort Judah. The Assyrians had defeated the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC. Judah had escaped at the time, but Assyria was still at the zenith of power. The question in the minds of the Jews was, "Would Judah be punished too? Would Assyria conquer Judah?" Nahum brings good news (Nahum 1:15).

Summary: Nahum pronounced judgment on Nineveh to vindicate God and comfort Judah.

God comforts His children by informing them that He will judge those who hurt them.

HABAKKUK: A BOOK OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

The book of Habakkuk has been called “pre-eminent for its literary beauty” (Lee).

The prophet himself has been called “the free-thinker among the prophets,” “the prophet of faith,” and “the Grandfather of the Reformation.” Paul got his statement “the just shall live by faith” from Habakkuk and Luther got it from Paul. Habakkuk has also been referred to as “The Doubting Thomas of the Old Testament.” McGee said, “He had a question mark for a brain.”

Author

Habakkuk is named as the author, not once but twice (Hab. 1:1; 3:1). Beyond that, virtually nothing is known about him except that he was a prophet (Hab. 1:1; 3:1). He is not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible.

Recipients

There is no explicit time reference in Habakkuk. No king is mentioned in the introduction, but the Babylonian invasion is pictured as an imminent event (Hab. 1:6; 2:1; 3:16). The descriptions indicate that Babylon had become a world power. The Chaldeans conquered Babylon in 612 BC, so it had to be after that. It is unlikely that the prophecy took place during the reign of Josiah (640-609 BC.), because the moral and spiritual reforms of Josiah do not fit the situation in Habakkuk 1:2-4.

The prophet’s concern for violence in Judah suggests a time after the death of Josiah during the wicked reign of Jehoiakim. The most likely date would be about 607 BC when Jehoiachim’s reign was still well underway and before Judah was invaded by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BC. Thus, Habakkuk was a contemporary of Jeremiah, prophesying with him in the Southern Kingdom as it plunged toward national collapse.

Josiah had brought reforms, but they abruptly ended with his death in 609 BC. The seeds of corruption planted by Manasseh quickly came to fruition under Jehoiakim. The nobles and even religious leaders were shamelessly robbing and oppressing the common people in Judah. Therefore, they were to be punished through the instrumentality of the Babylonians. In fact, the nobility was the first to be taken into captivity in the two preliminary deportations of 605 and 597 BC. The majority of the lower class was left in the land until the third deportation in 586 BC.

For Habakkuk, the Babylonians posed a serious theological problem. How can a Holy God use an unholy people as His instrument for the punishment of Israel? The Babylonians were bloody and ruthless people who had no respect for God’s moral law. Instead of falling into impatient cynicism, Habakkuk put the situation before the Lord (Hab. 2:1). The book is God’s answer to Habakkuk.

Message

The subject is the righteousness of God (or the holiness of God). Habakkuk is grappling with the question: how can God use a wicked instrument like the Chaldeans to execute His

purpose? Could the divine purpose be justified in such an event? God's righteousness needed vindicating to His people. How does wickedness seem to triumph while the righteous suffer? This is the question of the book of Job applied to the nation. The message is even though it sometimes seems that God is idle, indifferent, and inconsistent, He is righteous and the right way to respond to Him is to trust Him.

Structure

The literary structure of the book of Habakkuk is a conversation between the prophet and God.

I. Introduction	1:1
II. The Prophet's Problems: The Righteousness of God	1:2-2:20
A. First Problem: Israel's Sin and God's Silence	1:2-11
B. Second Problem: Babylon's Cruelty and God's Silence	2:12-20
III. The Prophet's Prayer: The Right Response to a Righteous God	3:1-19

Purpose

The purpose of Habakkuk is to vindicate God's righteousness in using one wicked nation to punish another. The immediate situation that Habakkuk speaks to is the sin of Judah. Why does God not judge her sin? When God answers that He is about to judge her sin by using Babylon, Habakkuk has a greater problem. How can God remain righteous and use one wicked nation to judge another wicked nation?

That's the immediate situation, but there is an abiding universal question here. Circumstances often seem to contradict God's revelation of His righteousness or His love. If He is righteous, how can He allow sin? If He is loving, how can He allow suffering? Habakkuk struggled when he saw a man flagrantly violating God's Law and distorting justice on every level without fear of divine intervention. He wanted to know why God was allowing growing iniquity to go unpunished.

God's answer, of course, is that Habakkuk could trust Him, even in the worst of circumstances, because of His matchless wisdom, goodness, and power. God's plan is perfect, and nothing is big enough to stand in the way of its ultimate fulfillment. In spite of appearances to the contrary, God is still on the throne as the Lord of history and the ruler of nations. Habakkuk must simply trust the Lord.

Summary: Habakkuk narrates his own struggle with the righteousness of God in order to vindicate God's righteousness.

Even though it sometimes seems that God is idle, indifferent, and inconsistent, He is righteous and the right way to respond to Him is to trust Him.

ZEPHANIAH: A BOOK OF THE DAY OF THE LORD

While this book begins with wrath, it ends with what has been called “the sweetest love song in the Old Testament” (Lee). As Jonah and Nahum are the only two books among the Minor Prophets that deal with Nineveh, so Joel and Zephaniah are the only two Minor Prophets whose subject is the Day of the Lord.

Author

Zephaniah 1:1 is a unusual verse. Ordinarily, the author gives his name and the name of his father. Zephaniah identifies himself and retraces his lineage back four generations to Hezekiah, who was no doubt Hezekiah the king. Zephaniah was thus the only minor prophet of the royal family. Being a distant cousin of King Josiah, Zephaniah evidently had access to the royal court and knew the religious climate around Jerusalem well.

Recipients

Zephaniah dates his book. In Zephaniah 1:1, he says in “the days of Josiah.” Josiah reigned from 640 BC to 609 BC. Zephaniah 2:13 indicates that the destruction of Nineveh was still future. That happened in 612 BC. So the book must be dated before that. The sins listed in Zephaniah 1:3-13 and 3:1-7 indicate a date prior to Josiah’s reform when the sins for the reign of Manasseh and Amon were still prominent. Zephaniah should be dated, then, around 630-625 BC. Jeremiah, Nahum, and Habakkuk were his contemporaries.

The evil reigns of Manasseh and Amon (totaling 55 years) had such an effect on Judah that it never recovered. Zephaniah probably played a significant role in preparing Judah for the revivals that took place in the reign of the nation’s last righteous king. Josiah’s reforms were too little too late and the people reverted to their crass idolatry and teaching soon after Josiah was gone. Nevertheless, Zephaniah was one of the eleventh-hour prophets to Judah.

Message

The subject is the Day of the Lord. Zephaniah used the term more than any other prophet (Scofield). The message is knowing that there is a coming Day of the Lord, including a day of judgment and the day of blessing, should cause all to seek the Lord.

Structure

Like Micah, Zephaniah comes out swinging. His book is pure preaching (Zeph. 1:2). The Day of the Lord includes judgment and blessing, the Tribulation, and the Millennium. Those are the two aspects of the Day of the Lord and they form the divisions of the book.

I. Introduction	1:1
II. The Day of the Lord—Judgment	1:2-3:7
A. Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem	1:2-2:3
B. Judgment on the Surrounding Nations	2:4-15
C. Judgment on Jerusalem	3:1-7
III. The Day of the Lord—Blessing	3:8-20

Purpose

The simple and single purpose of Zephaniah seems to be to compel Judah to repent. Zephaniah 2:3 is the key verse. In order to accomplish that purpose, Zephaniah does two things: 1) He announces coming judgment. He announces doom and destruction and urges them to seek the Lord that they “might be hidden in the day of the Lord’s anger” (Zeph. 2:3). Zephaniah means “the Lord hides, protects.” There is a sense in which his name captures the thought of the book. 2) He announces the coming blessing. Zephaniah does something else to accomplish his purpose. He announces the coming Kingdom and blessing (Zeph. 3:13). This truth is often neglected or forgotten. The goodness of God also leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4). Evidently, it worked. If Zephaniah prophesied early in the reign of Josiah, he contributed to the revival and reforms under Josiah. It was short-lived, but it worked.

Summary: Zephaniah announced the coming Day of the Lord in order to get Judah to seek the Lord.

Knowing that there is coming a Day of the Lord, including a day of judgment and a day of blessing, should cause all to seek the Lord.

HAGGAI: THE BOOK OF THE REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

Haggai has been called “business-like” (Lee), “second only to Obadiah in brevity among the Old Testament books” (Boa) and “a momentous little fragment” (Baxter).

Author

Haggai’s name appears in the first verse. Then, after that, it occurs eight times in the two chapters of this book! (Haggai 1:3, 12, 13; 2:1, 10, 13, 14, 20). He is known only from his book and from two references to him in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14. Haggai returned from Babylon with the remnant under Zerubbabel and evidently lived in Jerusalem. Haggai and Zechariah worked together to encourage the people to rebuild the Temple.

Recipients

Based on its government, the history of Israel can be divided into three periods. Israel was: 1) under judges from Moses to Samuel, 2) under kings from Saul to Zedekiah and 3) under priests from Joshua to the Destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. In relation to the captivity, the periods are 1) Pre-Exilic, 2) Exilic, and 3) Post-Exilic. In relation to the world Empires, the periods are 1) the Assyrian, 2) the Babylonian, and 3) the Medo-Perisan. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi ministered in the third of each of these.

Dating Haggai is not a problem. He gives the year, the month and the day of his ministry. In 538 BC, Cyrus of Persia issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to Palestine and rebuild their Temple. The first group led by Zerubbabel returned in 536 BC and began work on the Temple (Ezra 4-6). They were soon discouraged by the desolation of the land, crop failure, the hard work, and even hostility from their neighbors. Their work on the Temple ceased in 534 BC. The people became preoccupied with their own building projects. They used political opposition and a theory that the Temple was not to be rebuilt until sometime later (perhaps after Jerusalem was rebuilt) as excuses for neglecting the Temple.

God then called Haggai and Zechariah to convince the people to complete the Temple. Both are precisely dated. In fact, Haggai is one of the most precisely dated books in the Bible: Haggai 1:1 (August 29, 520 BC), Haggai 1:15 (September 21, 520 BC), Haggai 2:1 (October 17, 520 BC), Haggai 2:20 (December 18, 520 BC). Haggai is also the first prophetic book to be dated by Gentile kings (1:1 and also the fact this is the time of the Gentiles). In other words, this book spans four months. After fourteen years of neglect, work was resumed in 520 BC. By the way, the Temple was completed in 516 BC (Ezra 6:15).

Basically, the people who received this book were discouraged by the desolation of the land, crop failure, hard work, and even the hostility from their neighbors. They need to be encouraged to resume work on the Temple. The recipients were Zerubbabel, the governor, Joshua, the High Priest (Haggai 1:1; 2:2, 21), as well as all the people (Haggai 1:13; 2:2).

Message

The subject is the rebuilding of the Temple (Haggai 1:2-4, 8, 9, 14; 2:3, 7, 15). The message is joy and blessing comes from putting God and His work first.

Structure

The literary structure of Haggai is dated messages. The only difficulty is that some see only four messages, while others see five. The key phrase is “the word of the Lord came.”

- | | |
|---|----------|
| I. First Message: Neglecting the Temple | 1:1-15 |
| A. Rebuke for Neglecting the Temple | 1:2-4 |
| B. Results of Neglecting the Temple | 1:5-11 |
| C. Resolve to Rebuild the Temple | 1:12-15 |
| II. Second Message: the Glory of the Temple | 2:1-9 |
| A. The Glory of the Present Temple | 2:1-5 |
| B. The Glory of the Future Temple | 2:6-9 |
| III. Third Message: the Blessing of Rebuilding the Temple | 2:10-19 |
| A. Economic Blight of Neglecting the Temple | 2:10-17 |
| B. Economic Blessing of Building the Temple | 2:18, 19 |
| IV. Fourth Message: the Kingdom is Coming | 2:20-23 |
| A. Future Overthrow of Gentile Kingdoms | 2:20-22 |
| B. Future Authority of Zerubbabel’s Kingdom | 2:23 |

Purposes

The first purpose of Haggai is to encourage the people to rebuild the Temple. When Haggai came on the scene, the people were spiritually discouraged and indifferent. They were busy on their own houses (Haggai 1:4) and made excuses as to why they did not work on the Lord’s house (Haggai 1:2). Haggai came to motivate the people and the leaders to reorder their priorities and complete the Temple (Haggai 1:8).

The second purpose of Haggai is to enlighten the people as to God’s blessing. When Haggai began, the people were dissatisfied (Haggai 1:6). What they did not realize was that was a symptom of their spiritual disease. Haggai seeks to get them to consider their ways (Haggai 1:5, 7). Putting their self-interests first led to dissatisfaction. Only when they put God first and sought to do His will would He bring His people joy and prosperity.

Summary: Haggai preached four messages in four months to motivate the people and the leaders to rebuild the Temple in particular and to obedience in general (Haggai 1:12).

Joy and blessing come from putting God and His work first.

ZECHARIAH: THE BOOK OF THE FUTURE OF JERUSALEM

Zechariah has been called the encouraging prophet, “the prophet of restoration and glory,” “one of the greatest of the ancient inspired seers,” and “a great poet” (Lee)

Author

The opening verse of the book says that Zechariah wrote it. There are at least twenty-nine men in the Old Testament by the name of Zechariah. Zechariah, who was the author of this book, was born in Babylon. He was evidently of the priestly lineage (Zech. 1:1, 7; Ezra 5:1; 6:14; Neh. 12:4, 16), but the book calls him a prophet (Zech. 1:1, 7). When the Jewish exiles returned under Zerubbabel, Zechariah was among them.

According to Jewish tradition, Zechariah was a member of the great synagogue that collected and preserved the canon of Scripture. Matthew 23:35 indicates he was murdered between the Temple and the altar, the same way that an earlier Zechariah was martyred (see 2 Chron. 24:20-21).

Recipients

Zechariah 1:1 gives the date very clearly: “In the eighteenth month of the second year of Darius.” The verse records not only the year but also the month. To be exact, it was November 20, 520 BC. That means that Zechariah was a younger contemporary of Haggai the prophet, Zerubbabel the Governor, and Joshua the High Priest. Haggai began his ministry first (by two months), but it was their combined preaching which resulted in the completion of the Temple in 516 BC.

When did Zechariah’s ministry end? The last dated prophecy was in December 518 BC (Zech. 7:1-8:23). Some have dated it December 4, but chapters 9-14 are undated and should be put much later, probably about 480 BC, when the Greeks were rising to world power (Zech. 9:13). Darius I (521-486 BC) had been succeeded by Xerxes (486-464 BC), the king who deposed Vashti and made Esther queen of Persia.

Thus, Zechariah had a 40+ year ministry dating from 520-480 BC.

The Jews of the return received the book, more specifically, the remnant who had returned sixteen years before with high hopes of rebuilding the Temple. Local interference caused them to forsake the project. Then, they became a “me” generation, being absorbed with personal and domestic affairs. That brought the Lord’s chastening of crop failure and economic depression.

The recipients were all the people of Israel who returned from the captivity (Zech. 1:2, 4, 7:5, etc.). Some messages were especially addressed to Joshua, the High Priest (Zech. 3:8), and Zerubbabel, the governor (Zech. 4:6).

Message

The subject is the restoration of Jerusalem (Zech. 1:16; 2:2; 8:3; 9:9; 12:5; 13:1; 14:2). The message is God encourages and renews His people so they will do His work.

Structure

The literary structure of at least the first part of the book almost jumps out, even to the casual reader. The literary structure of Zechariah 1:7-6:8 is a series of visions (Zech. 1:8, 18; 2:1; 3:1, etc.). In Zechariah 6:9-8:23, he says, “The word of the Lord came unto me.” Chapters 7 and 8 contain questions. The last chapters, Zechariah 9-14, consist of two “burdens” (Zech. 9:1 and 12:1).

I. Introduction: A Call to Repentance	1:1-6
II. Visions	1:7-6:15
III. Questions	7:1 - 8:23
A. Questions about Fasts	7:1-3
B. The Four-Fold Answer	7:4-8:23
IV. Burdens	9:1-14:21
A. First Burden	9:1-11:17
B. Second Burden	12:1-14:21

Purposes

The first purpose of Zechariah is to stimulate the completion of the Temple by proclaiming the restoration of Jerusalem. In a sense, Zechariah is continuing the ministry of Haggai to get the Temple completed. Yet he and Haggai approach the goal differently. For one thing, Haggai uses rebuke, whereas Zechariah employs encouragement.

The second purpose of Zechariah is to promote spiritual revival so the people could call upon the Lord with humble hearts and commit their ways to Him. To a degree, Haggai and Zechariah differ here, too. Haggai’s chief task was to arouse the people to the necessity of the outward task for rebuilding the Temple, whereas Zechariah goes beyond that to seek an inward spiritual renewal of the people. Zechariah was not only interested in the physical rebuilding of the Temple but also in the spiritual renewal of the people.

Summary: By proclaiming the ultimate restoration of Jerusalem, Zechariah urges the people to rebuild the Temple and recommit themselves to the Lord.

God encourages and renews His people so that they will do His work.

MALACHI: THE BOOK OF THE CHARGES OF GOD

Malachi has been called “notable for its dialogue style” (Lee), “the last of the prophets” (Lee).

Author

Malachi 1:1 says the author was Malachi. The only Old Testament mention of him is in this verse. It reveals nothing about him, not even his father’s name. All that is known is that Jewish tradition says he was a member of the great synagogue. Malachi is attested by New Testament (*cf.* Mal. 4:5, 6 with Mt. 11:10, 14, 17:11, 12, Mk. 9:10, 11, and Lk. 1:17; also *cf.* Mal. 3:1 with Mt. 11:10, and Mk 1:2; and Mal. 2, 3 with Rom. 9:13).

Recipients

Malachi 1:1 does not mention his father, his hometown, or the king or kings who reigned during his ministry. Therefore, an exact date cannot be established. However, internal clues help fix an appropriate date: 1) The Edomites had been driven from Mt. Seir, but had not returned, necessitating a date after 585 BC (Mal. 1:3-4). 2) The remnant had returned, rebuilt the Temple, and they were offering sacrifices (Mal. 1:7-10; 3:8). The Temple was completed in 516 BC, so the book must have been written after that. 3) Evidently, many years had passed since the offerings were instituted because the priest had grown tired of them and corruption had crept into the system. 4) The moral and religious problems in Malachi are quite similar to those faced by Ezra and Nehemiah. 5) The Persian term for governor (*pechah*) is used in Malachi 1:8. By itself, all this indicates is that the book was written during the Persian domination of Israel (539-333 BC), but the verse indicates that this governor might be bribed. That would hardly be Nehemiah. Nehemiah returned to Persia in 433 BC, but came back to Palestine around 420 BC and dealt with the sins described in Malachi. Therefore, it is likely that Malachi proclaimed his message while Nehemiah was absent, almost a century after Haggai and Zechariah began their ministries (520 BC). All this leads to a date of about 430 BC.

According to the book itself, the recipients were the people of Israel (Mal. 1:1; 2:11; 3:6-7), the priests (Mal. 1:6, 2:1), and a faithful group (Mal. 4:2, 3). The remnant had returned to Jerusalem and the Temple had been rebuilt, but the people had become selfish and sensual. They had grown careless and neglectful in their spiritual duties. Perhaps, their interpretation of the glowing prophecies of the exilic and pre-exilic prophets had led them to expect the Messianic kingdom immediately upon their return. They were, therefore, discouraged and skeptical (Mal. 2:17). This doubt of divine justice had caused them to neglect vital religion and true piety and had given place to mere formality. They had not relapsed into idolatry, but a spirit of worldliness had crept in and they were guilty of many vices.

Message

The subject is God’s charges against His people. The message is God rebukes sin to get His people to turn to Him

Structure

One of the argumentation styles practiced in Jewish literature in the fifth century BC consisted of three elements: an abrasive statement, an anticipated objection or question and an elaboration of the original theme combined with the answering of the specific objections (Charles D. Isbell, *Malachi, A Study Guide Commentary*). Since Malachi used this basic rhetorical question-answer format, some called him the Hebrew Socrates.

Malachi contains a series of God's accusations against Israel: 1) You have doubted My love (Mal. 1:2). 2) You have despised My name (Mal. 1:6). 3) You have disobeyed My law (Mal. 2:14). 4) You have discredited My promise (Mal. 2:17). 5) You have defrauded My storehouse (Mal. 3:7, 8). 6) You have denied My blessings (Mal. 3:13). These are followed by questions, supposedly asked by the audience but actually stated by the author. These questions are then answered. Two are used in the same charge. Of the fifty-five verses in Malachi, twenty-seven are spoken by God, the highest proportion of all the prophets.

I. Introduction	1:1
II. The Charge against the Nation	1:2-5
III. The Charge against the Priests	1:6-2:9
IV. The Charge against the People	2:10-4:3
V. Conclusion	4:4-6

Purpose

The purpose of Malachi is to rebuke the sins of the priests and the people so that they would return to the Lord. To understand and appreciate the purpose of Malachi, it must be kept in mind that Israel had been, in the past, in idolatry. The exile had cured that. They were back in the land and the Temple had been rebuilt. The problem now was lethargy and stagnation. The priests and people, leaders, and laymen were callous spiritually. Malachi denounces the indifference and hypocrisy of the priests, the impure marriages, the Sabbath-breaking, the lack of personal godliness, the failure to pay tithes, and their skepticism. The critical issue was that they had outward religious form (the Temple), but they lacked inward heart-felt righteousness. They were indifferent and insensitive to their indifference. Haggai and Zechariah rebuked the people for their failure to rebuild the Temple. Malachi rebuked them for neglecting the Temple.

Summary: Malachi rebukes the sin of the priests and the people so that they would return to the Lord (Mal. 3:7). Malachi is the only prophet who ends his book with judgment, which is a fitting conclusion to the Old Testament because it underscores God's solution in the work of the coming Messiah.

God rebukes sin to get us to turn to Him.

MATTHEW: THE BOOK OF THE KINGSHIP OF JESUS CHRIST

Matthew has been called “the most important book of Christendom—the most important book that has ever been written” (Renan, the French skeptic) and “one of the most important” books ever written (Lee).

Author

The book does not identify its author, but the early writers of the church unanimously credit it to Matthew. He was not conspicuous among the apostles, so it would be strange for tradition to assign the Gospel to him if he did not write it. Furthermore, the freedom in the arrangement of great discourses is much more conceivable in the case of an apostle than a contemporary who depended upon others for information. This is an instance of an Internal Revenue agent writing a best seller!

Papias (ca. 95-110 AD; see Robert W. Yarborough, “The Date of Papias: A Reassessment,” *JETS*, vol. 26, pp. 181-82) is quoted by Eusebius as saying Matthew composed the logia in Aramaic. If Matthew wrote in Aramaic, he later wrote in Greek. Josephus wrote *Wars of the Jews* in Aramaic and later in Greek. Only the Greek edition of Matthew has survived.

Critics claim that Matthew depended on Mark. They point out that 92% of Mark appears in Matthew (606 of 661 verses). They speculate that Matthew is based on Mark and on an unknown document they call “Q” (Q comes from the German word *Quelle* which means “source”). Matthew did not depend on Mark (and “Q”). He was an apostle; Mark was not. Why should an eyewitness depend on second-hand information? The writings of the early church fathers are quite clear that Matthew was the first Gospel to be written.

Recipients

None of the Gospels are easy to date. The church was born and, at first, grew only in Jerusalem and Judea. Opposition soon developed (Acts 8:1-2). These circumstances suggest a need for a life of Christ, which would encourage persecuted Jewish believers to refute their opponents and prove to both that the gospel is not a contradiction of the Old Testament but a fulfillment. Matthew was written to a Jewish audience. Tradition says after 15 years of preaching in Palestine, Matthew departed for foreign nations but left behind his Hebrew (Aramaic) Gospel. This would give a date of roughly 45 AD for the Aramaic Gospel of Matthew. The Gospel of Matthew was written before 70 AD. Matthew refers to Jerusalem as “the Holy City” as though it were still standing (Mt. 4:5, 27:53). He refers to Jewish customs continuing “to this day” (Mt. 27:8; 28:15). Thus, Matthew was probably written from Syria, Antioch, or Palestine about 45-50 AD. Matthew wrote to Jewish believers to demonstrate that Jesus was the Old Testament Messiah. There are indications that these Jewish believers were undergoing persecution.

Message

The subject is Jesus Christ as Messiah, King of Israel. He is “the Son of David” (Mt. 1:1, 1:20; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9, 15; 22:45). The Magi seek the “King of the Jews” (Mt. 2:2). The prophecy of Micah 5:2 is applied to Him (Mt. 2:6). He is said to fulfill many prophecies and He is called the King (Mt. 21:5; 27:37). The message is Jesus is the Messiah Who was rejected by Israel, died, arose and commissioned His disciples to make disciples.

Structure

Five discourses dominate the book (60% of Matthew’s 1,071 verses contain the spoken words of Christ): 1) The Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7), 2) The Charge to the Twelve (Mt. 10), 3) The Parables of the Kingdom (Mt. 13), 4) The Teaching on Greatness and Forgiveness (Mt. 18), 5) The Olivet Discourse (Mt. 24-25). With slight variation, each of these discourses ends with the phrase, “Now it came to pass when Jesus had finished these sayings” (Mt 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). While not exactly the marker of the structure of the book, these discourses are a major part of this book. In the final analysis, the subjects covered in the book determine its structure. The book is not in chronological order.

I. Preparation of the King	1:1-7:29
A. His Person	1:1-2:23
B. His Preparation	3:1-4:11
C. His Principles	4:12-7:29
II. Power of the King	8:1-11:1
A. His Miracles	8:1-9:30
B. His Mandate	10:1-11:1
III. Opposition to the King	11:2-13:53
A. The Evidence of Rejection	11:2-30
B. The Illustration of Opposition	12:1-58
C. The Adaptation because of Opposition	13:1-53
IV. Reaction of King	13:54-19:2
A. Withdrawal	13:54-16:12
B. Instruction	16:13-19:2
V. Rejection of the King	19:3-26:1
A. Instruction	19:3-20:34
B. Presentation to the Nation	21:1-17
C. Rejection by the Nation	21:18-22:46
D. Rejection by Christ	23:1-39
E. Prediction by the King	24:1-26:1
VI. Death and Resurrection of the King	26:2-28:20
A. Crucifixion of the King	26:2-27:66
B. Resurrection of the King	28:1-20

Purpose

The first purpose of Matthew is to explain that even though Jesus was proven by prophecies to be the Messiah/King, Israel rejected Him, so the kingdom was postponed and

the church was inaugurated. Jewish believers faced a dilemma concerning Christ. The Jewish nation had expected a conquering prince who would set up a great Jewish kingdom. If Jesus were the Messiah, why was He rejected? What happened to the kingdom? How does the entity of the church fit into all of this? Was it the spiritual fulfillment of the Old Testament, or had God revoked the promises and covenants on the basis of Israel's rejection? They needed clarification concerning Christ's relationship to the Old Testament, the kingdom and to His new purpose to the church.

Matthew meets this need by pointing out repeatedly that Jesus did fulfill the Old Testament prophecies and promises concerning the Messiah. He uses more Old Testament quotes and allusions (about 130) than any other book to show that Jesus fulfills the qualifications for Messiah. Matthew also deals with the kingdom issue. He refers to the kingdom of heaven 33 times, but the exact expression does not occur anywhere else in the New Testament. He first shows that when they rejected their king, the Jews rejected an earthly kingdom (Mt. 21:28-22:10; 11:16-24). Then, He shows that His kingdom is postponed. The promises of Israel are not canceled, they are yet to be fulfilled (Mt. 19:28; 20:20-23; 23-39; 24:29-31; 25:31-46).

In the meantime, God has inaugurated an entirely new and previously unknown program, that is, the church. Matthew is the only Gospel in which the word "church" occurs. It appears three times (Mt. 16:18 and twice in 18:17). Because of the universal character of the church, Matthew also has an emphasis on Gentiles. This can be seen in many ways: in his mentioning two Gentile women in Christ's genealogy (Mt. 1:5), in his story of the wise men (Mt. 2:1-12), in his reproduction of the sayings that many from the east and west would sit down in the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 8:11-12), in his quoting the prophecy that Messiah would proclaim judgment to the Gentiles and that the Gentiles would hope in Him (Mt. 12:18-21), by use of the phrase "the field is the world" (Mt. 13:38), and by issuing the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28:19).

The second purpose of Matthew is to encourage persecuted Jewish Christians in their faith. Christ was rejected. Hence, His followers will also be. In Matthew, there are no songs of joy at His birth like those recorded in Luke. His mother is almost repudiated and left in disgrace by Joseph. The Jewish male children are slaughtered. Jesus is only saved by a flight to Egypt. He is a despised Nazarene. He is rejected by the nation of Israel, His own people. The account of the crucifixion does not contain a repentant thief or sympathy from anyone. His enemies revile Him. Even Matthew himself is a despised and rejected publican.

Summary: Matthew presents Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel, who was rejected, who died and arose and commissioned His disciples to make disciples among all nations.

If the Messiah, the King, is rejected, His servants will be too.

MARK: THE BOOK OF THE SERVANTHOOD OF JESUS CHRIST

Mark has been called the “Memoirs” or “Gospel of St. Peter” (Justin Martyr), “the most graphic, the most simple and direct of all the gospels” (Scroggie), “the shortest and simplest of the four gospels” (Boa).

Author

As in the other Gospels, the author is not mentioned in the book by name. In the case of Mark, there are relatively few passages that give any hint concerning his interests and personality, to say nothing of his identity. Church history, however, is different. There is early and unanimous evidence that John Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark. Papias writes that the apostle John said Mark wrote Peter’s words.

In 1835, Lachmann supposedly “discovered” the priority of Mark, that is, the theory that Mark wrote first and the Gospels of Matthew and Luke are nothing more than Mark plus additional material. Mark did not write first; Matthew did (see notes on Matthew).

Recipients

Mark was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, which occurred in 70 AD (Mk. 13:2). Beyond that, little is known. Even tradition disagrees as to whether it was written before or after the martyrdom of Peter. Clement of Alexandria says, “Mark was entreated by the Romans to record Peter’s preaching.” If so, the Gospel of Mark was written during his close association with Peter at Rome between 61 and 67 AD (Col. 4:10).

Mark clearly wrote for Roman readers: 1) It contains little emphasis on Jewish law and custom. 2) Latinisms are often used where Greek terms could have served (Mk. 4:21; 6:27; 12:14, 42; 15:15; 16:39). 3) Aramaic words are interpreted (Mk. 3:17; 5:41; 7:34, 15:22). 4) The style is terse, clear, and pointed. 5) Mark 15:21 mentions Simon the Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus. If this is the same Rufus as the one mentioned in Romans 16:13, there is a strong indication that Roman Christians are being addressed here. 6) Antiquity is unanimous in affirming that Mark wrote to Roman readers. 7) Mark, rather than Matthew, Luke, or John, corresponds to Peter’s address at Caesarea (Acts 10:34-43).

Message

The subject of Mark is Jesus Christ as a servant. Several factors in the book indicate this: 1) It has no genealogy, account of His virgin birth, or history of His childhood. A servant needs performance, not a pedigree. 2) Mark is a book of deeds. The emphasis in Mark is on works, not words. There are only a few discourses and only 4 of the 15 parables of Matthew are given. Jesus is pictured as a worker hastening from one task to another. The word “immediately” occurs over three dozen times. It appears seven times in Matthew and only once in Luke. In Mark’s Gospel, 14 of these are used of the personal activity of Christ as compared to two in Matthew and none in Luke. 3) The key verse is Mark 10:45: “To minister ... to give His life.” The dominant theme seems to be summarized in that verse.

The major subject does indeed seem to be Jesus’ servanthood, but that is not to say that other aspects of His person are ignored. For though Mark stresses the servant aspect of

Jesus' ministry, he is by no means silent concerning Jesus as teacher. Indeed, teaching is part of Jesus' work. His discourses grew out of His work, not His works out of His discourses. While Mark stresses the servanthood of Christ, he does not neglect the Sonship of Christ (Mk. 1:1). This Servant is the Son of God!

The message is Jesus is the Son of God, who came to serve, die for sin, be resurrected, and commission His disciples to preach the gospel in the entire world.

Structure

Although Mark and Matthew cover much of the same ground, Mark is not nearly as neatly organized as Matthew. There is not a repeated phrase that conveniently divides the book. However, unlike Matthew, Mark is, in the main, chronological. Apart from being basically chronological, the only other thing that can be said concerning its overall structure is that it is geographical. Mark covers Jesus' ministry in Galilee (Mk. 1:14-9:50) and His last week in Jerusalem (Mk. 11:1-16:8). Still, the topic of servanthood seems to be present throughout. An outline that captures the topical and geographical aspects is best.

I. Introduction	1:1-13
II. The Servant's Ministry in Galilee (to minister)	1:14-9:50
III. The Servant's Ministry in Judah	10:1-52
IV. The Servant's Ministry in Jerusalem (to give His life)	11:1-13:37
V. Conclusion: The Servant's Death and Resurrection	14:1-16:20

Purposes

One of the purposes of Mark is to present Christ as the Son of God who came to give His life in service and suffering. Another purpose of Mark is to encourage Roman Christians in their service and suffering. Why did the Roman Christians want Peter's preaching concerning the life of Christ? If Matthew wrote first, they had his record. Peter's preaching spoke to them not only about Christ but about themselves.

After five years of responsible rule (54-59 AD), Nero, the emperor of Rome, became a reckless despot, especially over the aristocracy. By heavy taxation on the estate of childless couples, false accusations followed by confiscation of wealth, and invitations to suicide at public banquets, he made life a reign of terror for men of wealth.

Then in the summer of 64 AD, a disastrous fire swept through Rome. It began among the clustered shops near the Circus Maximus. Fanned by a strong wind, it quickly spread to other wards of the city. After raging out of control for more than a week, it was brought under control only to break out a second time from the estate of Tigellinus, head of the Praetorian Guard. Of the fourteen wards of the city, three were reduced to ashes and rubble and in seven others, many of the oldest buildings and monuments were destroyed or seriously damaged. Only four wards were spared.

The rumors were that the fires were officially started. One ancient author reports that men crying that they were acting under orders threw torches in the fire. Nero helped the homeless and injured. He levied taxes for relief, lowered the price of grain to provide food, cleared the slums, widened the streets, provided new parks, and insisted that all new structures consist of fireproof material such as brick or stone. When none of these measures stopped the rumors and resentment, a scapegoat had to be found. The Christians were blamed for the fire. Nero had self-acknowledged Christians arrested. Then, on their

information, large numbers of others were condemned. Dressed in wild animal skins, they were torn to pieces by dogs, crucified, or made into torches to be ignited after dark as substitutes for daylight.

All of this is the backdrop for the Gospel of Mark who spoke to the situation of the Christian community in Nero's Rome. Reduced to a catatonic existence, they read of the Lord who was driven deep into the wilderness (Mk. 1:12ff). The detail, recorded only by Mark, that in the wilderness Jesus was with the wild beasts (Mk. 1:13) was filled with special significance for those called to enter the arena while they stood helpless in the presence of wild beasts. In Mark's Gospel, they found that nothing that they had suffered from Nero was alien to the experience of Jesus. Like them, He had been misrepresented to the people and falsely labeled (Mk. 3:21-30). If they knew the experience of betrayal from within the circle of intimate friends, it was sobering to recollect that one of the twelve had been Judas Iscariot who had also betrayed Him (Mk. 13:19).

Mark records that Jesus says, "Those who have no root in themselves but endure for a while, then after affliction or persecution arises on account of this world, immediately they fall away" (Mk. 4:17). While Jesus promised His followers "houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands," Mark notes that He had added the qualification "with persecutions" (Mk. 10:30). Christ spoke of cross-bearing, which Tacitus affirms was a literal reality for Mark's readers in Rome. Such had been the literal experience of Jesus preceded by a trial before a Roman magistrate, which included scourging and cruel mockery of the Roman guard (Mk. 15:15-20). It was the threat of such punishment that could move a man to deny Jesus. The explicit reference to Peter meant that the way was open for restoration for one who had denied the Lord (Mk. 14:66-72). Here is the basis for forgiveness for those who had denied that they were Christians when brought before the Tribunals of Rome. The situation in Rome was such that they would have read the Gospel in this light.

Summary: Mark presents Jesus as the Son of God who came to serve, die for sin, be resurrected, and commission His disciples to preach the gospel in the entire world.

Servants give their lives away. That is what Christ did; that is what we are to do (Eph. 5:24; Phil. 2:17). Servants suffer.

LUKE: THE BOOK OF THE HUMANITY OF JESUS CHRIST

Luke has been called “the most beautiful book in the world” (Renan), “the most comprehensive of the four gospels,” “the longest and most literary gospel” (Boa), “the longest book in the New Testament” (Geldenhuys) “the Gospel of Prayer” (Plummer) and the “gospel of womanhood,” because no other Gospel gives such a large place to women (Tidwell). It has been said that Luke “used more medical terms than Hippocrates, the father of medicine” (McGee) and that “more pictures have been painted from it than any of the others” (Lee). Luke was also an accurate historian. “According to Sir William Ramsay, Dr. Luke was a careful historian of remarkable ability” (McGee).

Author

The author does not identify himself by name, but from the earliest times, Luke has been universally recognized as the author. The internal evidence supports that tradition. The Gospel of Luke was written by a well-educated man. His prologue (Lk. 1:1-4) is the most classic piece of Greek in the New Testament. The medical language demonstrates the writer’s interest in sickness and the sick, which is consistent with the author being a physician. Colossians 4:14 calls Luke the beloved physician.

There is a documentary hypothesis for the Synoptic Gospels like there is for the Pentateuch. The critical view of the Synoptic Gospels begins by assuming that Mark wrote first and that the others copied and supplemented that work with other material, which they call “Q” (from the German word for “source”). Luke *says* he used sources (Lk. 1:1-4). Is Luke dependent on Mark and “Q”?

What Luke is saying in his prologue and what modern critics are saying about Luke are two vastly different things. Luke is saying: 1) Many have written a narrative of the life and ministry of Christ (Lk. 1:1, notice, these were *written* sources). 2) His information came from reliable sources (Lk. 1:2). He calls his sources “eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word.” In the Greek text, there is only one article indicating that these are not two different groups, but one group. Notice that these were *oral* sources. 3) His knowledge went back over a number of years (Lk. 1:3). He says he had perfect understanding of all things from the very first. Based on this, it is safe to assume that Luke had associated with apostles and eyewitnesses and possibly with personal friends of the Lord.

Conclusions: 1) Luke used sources, but that does not mean that he used the Gospel of Mark as a source. On the contrary, Luke says that he went to eyewitnesses. As we have seen, Mark wrote what Peter preached. 2) Using sources does not invalidate inspiration. Some Old Testament authors used sources. Revelation is truth revealed; inspiration is truth recorded; illumination is truth understood.

Recipients

No one knows for certain when the Gospel of Luke was written. It is certain that it was written before the book of Acts (Acts 1:1-3), which was written about 62 AD in Rome. Many have concluded that Luke wrote his Gospel toward the end of Paul’s Caesarea imprisonment, that is about 59 AD. For the two years, while Paul was in prison, Luke had an opportunity to interview eyewitnesses throughout Palestine.

Luke addresses his first volume to “most excellent Theophilus” (Lk. 1:3). The name Theophilus was common among both Jews and Gentiles. The epithet “most excellent” was an official title (Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25). Beyond that, nothing is known of him. He was no doubt a believer who needed instruction and confirmation. Though it is not stated, the book was obviously written for others beyond Theophilus. In Greek, the preface (Lk. 1:1-4) is written in a classical style which implies that what follows was meant for circulation.

From the content, we can see that it was written for Gentiles in general and for Greeks in particular. The genealogy of Christ is traced to Adam, not Abraham. Gentile words are used in place of Jewish terms, for example, “teacher” for “rabbi,” “lawyer” for “scribe,” etc. Jewish customs and geography are explained. Matthew wrote to the Jews. Mark wrote to the Romans, Luke to the Greeks.

Message

The subject of Luke is Jesus Christ as the Son of Man. Luke presents Jesus Christ as perfect humanity, the ideal man. Luke does not minimize Jesus’ deity or His suffering, but he does focus on the humanity of Jesus, who was the Son of Man, as well as the Son of God. A proper assessment of Christ must include both His divine and human natures.

The particulars paint the picture of Jesus’ humanity: 1) Luke puts Jesus in the context of history. John begins with “In the beginning was the Word,” placing Jesus in eternity past before He invaded time. Luke starts with the birth of John the Baptist, which is not recorded in Matthew or Mark. Three times in the early chapters, Luke notes political rulers at the moment (Lk. 1:5; 2:1; 3:1), again putting the story in historical perspective. 2) The genealogy traces Jesus’ lineage to Adam (Lk. 3:38). Matthew develops the line back to Abraham and stops because he was writing to Jews about their Messiah. Luke traces Jesus’ lineage to Adam because he is writing to Gentiles about the Son of Man. His lineage emphasizes human descent, not the royal line. 3) Luke alone records Jesus’ human growth and development (Lk. 2:40, 51, 52). He was subject to his parents (Lk. 2:52). 4) Throughout the book, Jesus is seen as having the feelings, sympathies, and powers of a man. He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit (Lk. 10:21). He wept over the city (Lk. 19:41). He prayed more earnestly and His sweat became, as it were, great drops of blood falling upon the ground (Lk. 22:44).

The message is Jesus is the Son of Man who came to seek the lost, die, be raised, and commission His disciples to preach the forgiveness of sins.

Structure

There is a sense in which Matthew, Mark, and Luke have the same structure. Each begins with the temptation and baptism of Jesus and they record His great Galilean ministry. Of course, they all end in Jerusalem with the crucifixion and resurrection. The Gospel of John is different. He begins with John the Baptist and most of his record centers on the activities of Jesus in Jerusalem.) So the literary structure of Luke, like Matthew and Mark, is topical yet geographical.

There is no repeated phrase as in Matthew, although Luke does have a repeated phrase in one section of his book. Matthew and Mark devote much material to the Galilean ministry and only a short space (two chapters in Matthew and one in Mark) for the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. In contrast, Luke spends ten chapters chronicling that trip, the longest part of his story (Lk. 9:51-19:44). Seven times within this extended section Luke

mentions something about the fact that Christ was headed “to Jerusalem” (Lk. 9:51; 13:22; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11, 28, 37).

I. Preface	1:1-4
II. The Preparation for the Son of Man	1:5-4:13
III. The Galilean Ministry of the Son of Man	4:14-9:50
IV. The Journey to Jerusalem of the Son of Man	9:51-19:20
V. The Jerusalem Ministry of the Son of Man	19:21-21:38
VI. The Passion and Resurrection of the Son of Man	22:1-24:53

Purpose

One purpose of Luke is to confirm and verify the true record of the life of Christ, especially for Gentile believers. Luke 1:1-4 gives the purpose of the book. Luke wrote that Theophilus and other Gentile believers might “know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.” The verb translated “instructed” is generally used in the New Testament of information, which is imparted formally rather than casually (Tenney). Perhaps this includes the stopping of false or spurious rumors.

In confirming the facts about Jesus, Luke portrays Him as the Son of God who became the Son of Man. Luke wrote to the Greeks. The Greek ideal of perfect manliness differed from that of the Romans. The Romans felt that it was their mission to govern. The Greeks felt it theirs to educate, elevate, and perfect man. The ideal of the Romans was military glory and governmental authority, but the Greeks’ ideal was wisdom and beauty. Luke wanted to confirm the record to strengthen their faith, so he wrote about the Divine Man as the Savior of mortal men. The perfect man died for imperfect men (Lk. 19:10).

Another purpose of Luke is to show that Christianity was not a subversive political sect. The Gospel of Luke is volume one of a two-volume set. Luke wrote volume two (Acts) to defend Christianity from political charges. Perhaps, that is part of what is going on here. He records Pilate’s acknowledgment of Christ’s innocence three times (Lk. 23:4, 14, and 22).

Summary: Luke presents Jesus as the Son of Man, who came to seek the lost, die, be raised, and commission His disciples to preach the forgiveness of sins to confirm the record and thus the faith of Gentile believers.

The followers of the Son of Man should, like Him, seek to save those who are lost.

JOHN: THE BOOK OF THE DEITY OF JESUS CHRIST

John has been called the “most wonderful of all biblical writings” (A. T. Robertson; see Baxter), “the deepest and most profound of all inspired writings” (Lee), “the most beautiful of all books, the supreme literary work of the world” (A. T. Robinson), “the most familiar and the best-loved book in the Bible,” and “the most profound gospel.” It is “probably the most important document in all of the literature of the world” (Erdman).

Author

The author of the fourth Gospel identifies himself, but not by name. In John 21:19-24, he refers to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved (that phrase occurs five times in John; Jn. 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7; 21:20). In the Upper Room, where only the apostles were present, the disciple whom Jesus loved was leaning on Jesus’ breast (Jn. 21:20). Hence, he had to have been one of the apostles. In addition, the “one whom Jesus loved” was part of the inner circle of Peter, James, and John (Mt. 10:2; 17:1; Gal. 2:9). It was not Peter. In the Upper Room, Peter asked the one whom Jesus loved, the one who was leaning on Jesus’ breast, a question. Only James and John are left. James was martyred too early to be the author (Acts 12:1-2). That leaves John. Furthermore, when referred to in the book, John is never called by name (Jn. 1:40; 13:23; 21:20, 24), but all the other Gospel writers name him. Therefore, the apostle John must be the author of the fourth Gospel. Tradition confirms this conclusion. Polycarp, a disciple of John, had a disciple named Irenaeus (ca. 185 AD). In his book against heresies, Irenaeus says, “John wrote a gospel.” Others also ascribe the book to John.

Recipients

Scholars usually date John between 85 and 95 AD. Their basic reason for doing so is that there is no reference to the destruction of Jerusalem. Therefore, they reason that the destruction of Jerusalem must have occurred a good many years *before* he wrote. A pre-70 AD date, however, has been suggested on the basis of John 5:2, which may indicate that Jerusalem had not yet been destroyed. That verse says, “Which is (present tense) in Jerusalem.”

There is an early and consistent tradition that John wrote from Ephesus at the request of the church there for a summary of his oral teachings on the life of Christ. Eusebius refers to a current opinion that John wrote after the other evangelists in order to supply an account of the early period of the Lord’s ministry, which they omitted. No particular readers are specified. The whole world is in view (Jn. 1:9-12; 3:16, 17-18; 21:23).

Message

The subject is Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. The message is Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who came to give eternal life to all who believe in Him, to die, to be raised, and commission His disciples to proclaim the forgiveness of sins.

Structure

The basic structure of John is chronological and geographical. John chooses “witnesses” to testify to the deity and Messiahship of Jesus.

I. Prologue	1:1-18
II. Witnesses During His Public Ministry	1:19-12:50
A. Witnesses During the Call of the Disciples	1:19-2:11
B. Witnesses During the Commencement of His Ministry	2:12-4:54
C. Witnesses During the Controversy	5:1-6:71
D. Witnesses During the Conflict	7:1-10:42
E. Witnesses During the Climax	11:1-12:50
III. Witnesses During His Private Ministry	13:1-17:26
A. Witnesses of the Foot Washing	13:1-30
B. Witness of His Announced Departure	13:31-14:41
C. Witness of the Discourse on Relationships	15:1-16:6
D. Witness of the Discourse of Why He Was Leaving	16:7-33
E. Witness of the Lord’s Prayer	17:1-26
IV. Witnesses During the Passion	18:1-20:31
A. Witnesses During the Arrest and Trial	18:1-27
B. Witnesses During the Trial Before Pilate	18:28-19:15
C. Witnesses During the Crucifixion	19:16-42
D. Witnesses During His Appearance	20:1-31
V. Epilogue	21:1-25

Purposes

John, records signs that his readers may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing they may have life in His name (Jn. 20:31). His primary purpose is evangelistic, but since all seven signs appear in the first half of the book (2:1-11; 4:46-54; 5:1-18; 6:5-14; 6:16-21; 9:1-7; 11:1-45; in 20:30 the resurrection is also called a sign), there must be other purposes. Several statements in the book indicate the intent of the author is to strengthen the faith of those who already believe (Jn. 2:11; 11:4; 11:15; 11:40-42; 13:19; 14:29; 16:30). There are also passages dealing with discipleship (Jn. 8:30-32; 13:1-17; 13:34-35; 14:12-26; 15:1-16:15; 17:26; 20:19-23; 19:24-29; 21:1-19). When all the evidence is considered, it indicates that the major purpose of the Gospel of John is evangelistic and the minor purposes are to strengthen the faith of believers and urge them to become disciples.

Summary: John presents Jesus as the Messiah/Son of God who came to give eternal life to all who believe in Him, die, be raised, and commission His disciples to proclaim the gift of eternal life.

If Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, believe Him. If you do, you will *have* eternal life. If Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, you can be *certain* that you have eternal life by believing in Him. If Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, abide in Him.

ACTS: THE BOOK OF THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY

Acts has been called “the continuation of Luke” (McGee), the “Fifth Gospel,” “a pivotal book of transitions” (Boa), “the only unfinished book in the Bible” (Lee), and “one of the most graphic pieces of writing in all literature” (Scroggie). Luke has been called “the greatest of all historians, ancient or modern” (Sir William Ramsey).

The title “Acts” comes from a word used in Greek literature to summarize the accomplishments of outstanding men.

Author

The author is not mentioned, but the first verse refers to the former treatise sent to Theophilus. Luke wrote his Gospel to Theophilus. Therefore, he is the author of Acts. The writer’s interest in sickness, as well as his use of medical language, supports the notion that the author was a physician. Tradition ascribes the book to Luke.

Luke evidently traveled with Paul (see the “we” sections, Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16). As a close companion of Paul, Luke had access to the principle eyewitnesses of chapters 13-28. Perhaps he also had the opportunity to interview key witnesses in Jerusalem, such as Peter and John, for the information in chapters 1-12. He may have used written sources as well (Acts 15:23-29 and 23:26-30).

Some critics have leveled charges against Acts. For example, they charge Luke with depending on Josephus for some of his material. Certain words that are common to both are cited as proof. These are mainly non-technical words of common use.

Recipients

Those who hold that Acts is dependent upon Josephus date the book late in the first century or even into the second century. Acts is not dependent on Josephus and such a late date is highly unlikely.

Luke abruptly ends the book with Paul awaiting trial in Rome. Therefore, Acts was completed prior to Paul’s trial. Furthermore, Acts gives nothing of the persecution under Nero in 64 AD, Paul’s death in 68 AD, or the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. So, since Paul came to Rome about 59 AD and had been there for two years when Acts closed, the book can confidently be dated 61 AD.

Acts was written to Theophilus, a Gentile government official who was also a Christian, but it is not a personal letter. It is a formal treatise intended for publication.

Message

The subject is the continuing work of Jesus Christ (see the “and” in Acts 1:1). The message is Jesus continues to work by the Holy Spirit through men, especially Peter and Paul, from the Jews in Jerusalem to the Gentiles in Rome.

Structure

There are two major ways to view the structure of Acts. One is geographical and the other is biographical. Geographically, Acts 1:8 spells out the structure of the book: Jerusalem (Acts 1-7), Judea/Samaria (Acts 8-12), and uttermost parts (Acts 13-28). Acts

1-7 takes place in Jerusalem. Acts 8:1 says they were scattered abroad throughout Judea and Samaria. Beginning in chapter 13, Paul commences his missionary journeys to the regions beyond. There is also a deliberate structuring of the material around the acts of Peter (Acts 1-12) and the acts of Paul (Acts 13-28).

- | | |
|--|------------|
| I. The Lord's Work by the Holy Spirit
through the Men in Jerusalem | 1:1-7:6 |
| II. The Lord's Work by the Holy Spirit
through the Men in Judea and Samaria | 8:1-12:25 |
| III. The Lord's Work by the Holy Spirit
through the Men to the Uttermost Parts of the Earth | 13:1-28:31 |

Purpose

One of the purposes of Acts is to chronicle the spread of the work inaugurated by Jesus, which He continued by the Holy Spirit through the men from Jerusalem to Rome. There was a need for an accurate and authoritative account of the activities of the leading figures, such as Peter and Paul and even John and James. God witnessed through them "both with signs and wonders, with various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will" (Heb. 2:4). Thus, the church was connected with the work of the risen and ascended Christ and authenticated. There was also the need to show that Christianity was one whether the believers were Jews, proselytes, Samaritans, Gentiles, or former followers of John the Baptist.

Another of the purposes of Acts is to defend Paul. Paul's authority is vindicated by demonstrating that he did everything Peter did. His experiences and his missionary labors, and especially his arrest and imprisonment, must be seen in the right light. Was he a traitor to his people and an apostate from the law? Was he an impostor who deserved all the opposition and persecution that he received? Was he an insurrectionist or an instrument in the hand of God?

Summary: Luke wrote to Theophilus to inform him of the continuing work of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit through men, especially Peter and Paul, from the Jews in Jerusalem to the Gentiles in Rome.

God wants believers to bear witness of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, beginning where they are and from there to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

ROMANS: A BOOK OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

Romans has been called “the profoundest piece of writing in existence” (Coleridge), “the chief book of the New Testament” (Luther), “the greatest document on our salvation” (McGee), “the gospel according to Paul” and “Paul’s masterpiece whether judged from an intellectual or theological standpoint” (Lee). Professor Findlay said, “For the purposes of systematic theology, it is the most important book in the Bible” (Baxter).

Author

The author not only calls himself Paul (Rom. 1:1) but describes himself in such a way as can only mean the apostle Paul (Rom. 11:13; 15:15-20). Tradition agrees.

Recipients

Romans was written to Roman believers (Rom. 1:7). No one knows when or by whom the church was founded. When Paul wrote this epistle, he had not personally visited Rome (Rom. 1:9-13; 15:22-29). From the Corinthian letters, the content of Romans and comment in Acts, it is evident that Paul wrote Romans from Corinth on his third missionary journey (Acts 16:23, which says that Gaius was his host with 1 Cor. 1:14, which says Gaius lived in Corinth; also Rom. 16:13).

When Paul wrote the Corinthian epistles, the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem was being accumulated (1 Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 8-9). When Paul wrote Romans, that task was completed and he was about to depart to Jerusalem to deliver it (Rom. 15:25-26). Paul left for Jerusalem from Philippi immediately after the Easter season (Acts 20:6). Since all the navigation on the Mediterranean Sea ceased after November 11 and was not resumed again until March 10, Romans was likely written before March 10.

All of this points to the time of writing as Paul’s stay at Corinth for three months on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:2-3). February 57 AD is probably an accurate date.

Not much is said about the recipients. It is evident that one segment was Gentile (Rom. 1:13; 11:13; 15:14, 16) and another was Jewish (Rom. 2:17, 4:1 and chapter 16, which includes the names of several who were Jewish). On the surface, it does not appear that any internal problem was the occasion of the epistle. However, there is some indication that the believers at Rome needed to be exhorted to live in harmony.

Message

The subject is righteousness. The message is God is righteous to justify, sanctify, and glorify Jews and Gentiles by grace.

Structure

The literary structure of Romans is that of a letter. The format of an ancient letter was salutation, thanksgiving, prayer, body, personal greetings, and benediction.

I. Salutation	1:1-7
II. Thanksgiving and Prayer	1:8-17
III. The Body of the Letter	1:18-15:13
A. Righteousness Needed	1:18-3:20
1. All are under Condemnation	1:18-32
2. The Jews are under Condemnation	2:1-3:8
3. Conclusion: All are Condemned	3:9-20
B. Righteousness imputed	3:21-5:11
1. Justification by Faith Explained	3:21-31
2. Justification by Faith Illustrated	4:1-25
3. Justification by Faith Enjoyed	5:1-11
C. Righteous Accomplished	5:12-8:39
1. Justification to Life	5:12-21
2. First Objection	6:1-14
3. Second Objection	6:15-7:6
4. Third Objection	7:7-25
5. The Solution	8:1-39
D. Righteousness Vindicated	9:1-11:36
1. Israel Past: Election	9:1-29
2. Israel Present: Rejection	9:30-10:21
3. Israel Future: Salvation	11:1-36
E. Righteousness Practiced	12:1-15:13
1. In the Church	12:1-8
2. In Society	12:9-21
3. Toward Government	13:1-14
4. Toward Other Believers	14:1-15:13
IV. Paul's Plans	15:14-33
V. Personal Greetings, Admonition and Benediction	16:1-27

Purposes

One purpose of Romans is personal. It is to prepare for Paul's journey to Rome and beyond to Spain. Paul expects aid from them to carry the gospel to Spain (Rom. 15:24).

Another purpose of Romans is educational. It is to teach that a sovereign God saves Jews and Gentiles by grace. Paul explains that God justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies.

Still, another purpose of Romans is pastoral. It is to exhort Jewish and Gentile believers to live in harmony. Evidently, there was some tension between the Jews and the Gentiles in the church. (Rom. 3:9, 29, 30; also *cf.* 3:1-2; 9:4-5 with 9-11 and 14-15).

Summary: Paul wrote to the Roman church to prepare for his journey there, to teach them that God is righteous to justify, sanctify, and glorify Jews and Gentiles by grace and to exhort both Jews and Gentiles to live harmoniously with each other.

Since God justifies us by grace through faith, we should obey Him by living a loving life.

1 CORINTHIANS: THE BOOK OF DISORDERS IN THE CHURCH

First Corinthians has been called “distinctly an epistle of reproof,” “intensely practical” (Lee) and “in some respects the most magnificent of his epistles” (Scroggie). It is said to “contains some of the greatest passages in the New Testament” (Tidwell). It is Paul’s longest letter.

Author

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:1; 1 Cor. 16:21; also 1:12-17; 3:4; 6:22). There is a strong, very early witness to the Pauline authorship of 1 Corinthians. In 95 AD, Clement of Rome wrote to the Corinthian church. He wrote, “Take up the epistle of the blessed Paul the apostle. What did he first write to you at the beginning of his preaching? With true inspiration, he charged you concerning himself and Cephas and Apollos because even then, you had made yourselves partisan.”

Recipients

First Corinthians 16:8 says Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus. He was planning to stay there until Pentecost and visit them after passing through Macedonia. From Corinth, he was planning to go to Jerusalem with the offering, which he was raising for the saints there (1 Cor. 16:3-4). Thus, it is generally agreed that this epistle was written in the spring of the last year of Paul’s ministry at Ephesus. Paul was in Ephesus from 53 to 57 AD. Thus, he wrote 1 Corinthians in the early spring of 57 AD.

On Paul’s second missionary journey, he established a church at Corinth (1 Cor. 3:6; 4:15; Acts 18:1-17). He stayed for 18 months (during 51-52 AD). After his departure, Apollos came (1 Cor. 3:6; Acts 18:24-28). While Paul was at Ephesus on his third missionary journey, he received reports from the household of Chloe concerning quarrels in the church of Corinth (1 Cor. 1:11). The church sent a delegation of three men (1 Cor. 16:17), who apparently brought a letter requesting Paul’s opinion on several issues (1 Cor. 7:1). From all this, it is obvious that: 1) There were factions among the believers at Corinth. 2) There was gross immorality in the church, even incest. 3) They were taking each other to court. 4) There were many practical matters that troubled them.

Message

The subject is disorders. The message is church disorders, including divisions, discipline problems, and various other difficulties, should be dealt with according to the particular characteristics of each problem with the ultimate aim of getting believers to live harmoniously in love.

Structure

The overall structure of 1 Corinthians follows the format of an ancient letter (see the discussion of the structure of Romans). The body corresponds to the report from Chloe’s household (1 Cor. 1:11), the common report (1 Cor. 5:1), and their letter (1 Cor. 7:1).

I. Salutation	1:1-3
II. Thanksgiving	1:4-9
III. The Body of the Letter	1:10-16-12
A. Reaction to Chloe's Report (Division)	1:10-4:21
B. Response to Common Report (Discipline)	5:1-6:20
1. Incest	5:1-13
2. Lawsuits	6:1-11
3. Fornication	6:12-20
C Reply to Corinthian Letter (Difficulties)	7:1-16:12
1. Marriage	7:1-40
2. Meats Offered to Idols	8:1-11:1
3. Women's Head Coverings	11:2-16
4. The Lord's Table	11:17-34
5. Spiritual Gifts	12:1-14:40
6. The Resurrection	15:1-58
7. The Collection	16:1-4
8. Travel Plans	16:5-12
IV. Personal Greetings, Admonition and Benediction	16:13-24

Purposes

The first purpose of 1 Corinthians is to correct the disorders existing in the church. A number of disorders existed in the Corinthian church, such as divisions, incest, lawsuits and fornication. Paul heard about the divisions from the household of Chloe. The rest was commonly reported. He wrote this letter as a corrective response, including a correction from a previous letter (1 Cor. 5:9). Paul also intended to teach a doctrine rejected by some (1 Cor. 15).

The second purpose of 1 Corinthians is to answer questions they had submitted to him. The Corinthians wrote Paul, asking him questions dealing with marriage, meats offered to idols, the veiling of women, the Lord's Table, spiritual gifts, the resurrection, and the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. He addresses these issues by instructing, rebuking, condemning, and commending them.

Summary: In response to a report from Chloe's household, rumors, and a request from them, Paul wrote to the Corinthians to correct disorders and to answer their questions on a variety of subjects according to the particular characteristics of each problem with the ultimate aim of getting believers to live harmoniously in love.

Believers should deal with problems according to the particular characteristics of each problem with the ultimate aim of living harmoniously in love.

2 CORINTHIANS: THE BOOK OF THE TRUE MINISTRY

Second Corinthians has been called Paul's "least systematic letter" (Lee), "the most autobiographical of all of Paul's epistles" (Hiebert), and "intensely personal" (Findlay).

Author

Like 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians begins by identifying the author as Paul (2 Cor. 1:1; also 2 Cor. 2:1). Tradition supports Pauline authorship.

Recipients

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians on his third missionary journey during his last year at Ephesus, which was probably in the early spring of 57 AD. Apparently, 2 Corinthians was written shortly after. All the events between the two epistles probably took place in seven or eight months. Thus, the date of 2 Corinthians is the fall of 57 AD.

Paul most likely sent 1 Corinthians to Corinth with Titus. After he sent that letter, he became deeply concerned about how the Corinthians would receive it (2 Cor. 7:8). He called them carnal (1 Cor. 3:1) and told them that some of them were proud (1 Cor. 4:18).

Paul left Ephesus and went to Troas, where he expected to meet Titus, but he did not find him there (2 Cor. 2:12-13). He then departed for Macedonia (2 Cor. 2:13) where he met Titus (2 Cor. 7:6, 7), probably at Philippi. Titus informed him that the church supported him, but some highly critical of Paul were casting doubts in the minds of the Corinthians concerning his integrity.

These opponents of Paul accused him of walking according to the flesh (2 Cor. 1:12, 17; 10:2) of being deceitful (2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2; 12:16), intimidating people with his letters (2 Cor. 10:9-10), unjustly mistreating someone to the point of ruining him (2 Cor. 7:2), and defrauding people (2 Cor. 7:2). More specifically, he had promised to return and didn't (2 Cor. 1:15-17, 23; 2:1-4), mishandled the discipline of the incestuous fellow (2 Cor. 7:2; 10:8; 13:7-10; also 2:5-11) and he didn't take money on his first trip, but was planning on "fleecing the flock" under the guise of a collection for the poor saints of Jerusalem on his next trip (2 Cor. 8:20).

This situation produced a number of problems. First and foremost, these accusations raised questions in the minds of the Corinthians. They began to withdraw from Paul, at least emotionally. Also, would he be discouraged? Furthermore, he needed to address the situation concerning those who were falsely accusing him.

Message

Second Corinthians is different from 1 Corinthians. First Corinthians is systematic, objective and practical, deliberate, and warns against pagan influences. Second Corinthians is not systematic. It is subjective and personal, impassioned, and warns against Judaizes. The subject of 2 Corinthians is the true minister. The message is the true minister cares for people, collects money from people for the ministry, corrects people, and sometimes must defend himself.

Structure

The overall structure of 2 Corinthians follows the format of an ancient letter (see the discussion of the structure of Romans).

I. Salutation	1:1-2
II. Thanksgiving	1:3-11
III. The Body of the Letter	1:12-13:10
A. Consolation (Comfort in the Ministry)	1:12-7:16
1. The Conduct of Paul	1:12-2:11
2. The Character of the Ministry	2:12-6:10
3. The Appeal to the Corinthians	6:11-7:16
B. Collection (The Ministry of Giving)	8:1-9:15
1. Arrangements for a Prepared Gift	8:1-9:5
2. Arguments for a Generous Gift	9:6-15
C. Vindication (Vindication of Paul's Ministry)	10:1-13:10
1. Readiness to Correct	10:1-12:18
2. Reluctance to Correct	12:19-13:10
IV. Personal Greetings, Admonition and Benediction	13:11-14

Purposes

One purpose of 2 Corinthians is to give instructions. There are several minor purposes, including 1) giving needed instruction regarding the penitent offender (2 Cor. 2:5-11), probably the man mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5, 2), furnishing further instruction regarding the offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 9:1-5), and 3) showing his care for them (2 Cor. 7:12).

The major motive and purpose is to defend and vindicate his apostolic authority. Paul's opponents had made a threefold assault on him. They attacked his person (2 Cor. 10:10, 11:6), his character (2 Cor. 1:11-17; 12:16-19), and his teaching (2 Cor. 2:17; 11:4). He was accused of fickleness (2 Cor. 1:17, 18, 23), of pride and boasting (2 Cor. 3:1; 5:12), of obscurity in preaching (2 Cor. 4:3), of weakness (2 Cor. 10:10), of rudeness of speech (2 Cor. 11:6), of being contemptible in person (2 Cor. 4:7-10; 6:4-10; 10:10; 12:7-10), of being dishonest (2 Cor. 12:16-19), of being hardly sound of mind (2 Cor. 5:13; 11:16-19; 12:6), and of being no apostle (2 Cor. 11:5; 12:12) (Scroggie). Paul answers each of these charges on his person (2 Cor. 10:7; 13:4) and on his character (2 Cor. 4:1 2; 1:15-24; 12:14-18; 7:2; 5:13).

Summary: Paul wrote to the Corinthians to demonstrate his care and concern for them, to give them some further instruction about the collection for the poor, and to vindicate his authority.

The true minister cares about people, is comforted in ministry, and sometimes must defend himself.

GALATIANS: THE BOOK OF FREEDOM FROM THE MOSAIC LAW

Galatians has been called “the Magna Carta of spiritual emancipation,” “the charter of Christian liberty” (Tenney), “the most profound, condensed and powerful argument ever expressed in writing” (Findley), and Paul’s “fighting epistle” (McGee). Luther said Galatians “is my epistle. I have betrothed myself to it. It is my wife.”

Author

Twice the author of Galatians calls himself Paul (Gal. 1:1, 5:2). Tradition uniformly supports the Pauline authorship.

Recipients

“Galatia” was used in two different ways 1) geographically of old Galatia in the north of Asia Minor, and 2) politically of the Roman province of Galatia in the south.

According to the North Galatian theory, Paul visited Galatia for the first time on his second missionary journey, on his way to Troas (Acts 16:6) and on his third missionary journey, he revisited them (Acts 18:23). He wrote Galatians either in Ephesus (54-57 AD) or Macedonia. The North Galatian theory is supported by the church fathers, but that is probably because of the use of the geographical sense of Galatia in the second century.

The South Galatian theory contends that the churches Paul had in mind were in the cities he evangelized on the first missionary journey with Barnabas (Acts 13:13-14:23). According to this view, Galatians was written in Syrian Antioch in 49 AD. The support for the South Galatian theory is 1) Paul consistently referred to locations by using the political designation (1 Cor. 16:1, 5, 15, 19). 2) There is no reference to the Jerusalem Council. 3) Barnabas is mentioned three times in Galatians 2. He accompanied Paul on his first journey but not on his second journey when the churches in North Galatia were supposedly established.

Neither theory can be proven conclusively. Fortunately, this is a matter of background and does not affect interpretation. Galatians was probably written from Syrian Antioch in 49 AD before the Jerusalem Council to the churches of South Galatia (Acts 13-14; the cities of Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe). Thus, Paul founded them (Gal. 4:19), confirmed them (Gal. 4:19), and visited them at least twice (Gal. 4:13). Shortly after his last visit (Gal. 1:6), Judaizers came saying Paul received his information from the apostles and perverted their teaching. These Judaizers taught that the Galatians must keep the Law, including the observance of days (Gal. 4:10) and circumcision (Gal. 5:1-12; 6:11-15). The Galatians started keeping the law (Gal. 4:9-10) and were about to be circumcised (Gal. 5:2; 6:12).

Message

The subject of Galatians is liberty, freedom from the Mosaic Law. The message is since the gospel of the grace of God, justification by faith is from God, confirmed by the apostles, and proven by experience as well as by the exposition of Scripture, believers should refuse the bondage of the Law and should use their freedom to live a life of love.

Structure

Galatians is in the form of an ancient letter with one significant exception. Paul omitted the thanksgiving. By so doing, he is subtly saying, “I’m not thanking God for those who would move away from the Gospel.” He did thank God for the Corinthians.

I. Salutation	1:1-5
II. Situation	1:6-10
III. The Body of the Letter	1:11-6:10
A. Personal (Paul got his Gospel from God)	1:11-2:21
1. Origin of the Gospel	1:11-24
2. Confirmation of the Gospel	2:1-10
3. Content of the Gospel	2:11-21
B. Doctrinal (the Gospel sets the believer free from the law)	3:1-4:31
1. Proven from the Experience of the Galatians	3:1-5
2. Proven from the Example of Abraham	3:6-9
3. Proven from the Nature of the Law	3:10-14
4. Proven from the Priority of the Promise	3:15-18
5. Proven from the Purpose of the Law	3:19-29
6. Proven from the Adoption of Sons	4:1-11
7. Personal Appeal	4:12-20
8. An Allegory	4:21-31
C. Practical (Stand in liberty and love)	5:1-6:10
1. Stand in Freedom	5:1-12
2. Love by Walking in the Spirit	5:13-26
3. Restore Fallen Brethren	6:1-5
4. Give and Do Good Works	6:6-10
IV. Personal Greetings, Admonition and Benediction	6:11-18

Purpose

Paul wrote primarily to refute the Judaizers and to keep the Galatians from getting circumcised. To do that, he had to defend his authority. Galatians was written to distinguish between Judaism and Christianity, to set forth grace in contrast to the Law and faith in contrast to works.

Summary: Paul wrote to the Galatians insisting that since the gospel of justification by faith apart from the law is directly from God and in accordance with the Old Testament Scriptures, they should stand in the freedom from the Law and not be circumcised.

As a saving and sanctifying principle, law-keeping and faith were mutually exclusive.

EPHESIANS: THE BOOK OF THE CALLING OF THE BELIEVER

Ephesians has been called “Paul’s third heaven epistle” for in it “he soars from the depth of ruin to the heights of redemption” (Pierson), the “Alps of the New Testament,” “the profoundest” of Paul’s epistles (Baxter), “the church epistle” (McGee), and Paul’s most “labored epistle” (Scroggie).

Author

Twice, the author of the epistle identifies himself as Paul (Eph. 1:1; 3:1). Tradition is unanimous that Paul wrote Ephesians.

Recipients

There is no doubt that Paul was in prison when he wrote Ephesians (Eph. 4:1). Four of Paul’s epistles refer to his imprisonment (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20; Phil. 1:7, 13, 14; Col. 4:3, 10, 18; Phlem. 9, 10, 13, 23). At least three of the four were no doubt dispatched at the same time (Eph. 6:21-23; Col. 4:7-9; Phlem. 10-12). Thus, these four epistles are commonly referred to as prison epistles.

The problem is that he was in and out of prison many times. So, during which imprisonment did he pen Ephesians? The prevailing view is that all four were written from Rome during Paul’s two-year imprisonment, as recorded in Acts 28:30-31. The support for this view is compelling. Paul says the gospel had spread to the whole Praetorian Guard (Phil. 1:13) and that “the saints in Caesar’s household greet you” (Phil. 4:22). Furthermore, he anticipated that his case would soon be settled, resulting in his release (Phil. 1:23-24). Onesimus would have been more likely to have gone to a city like Rome where he could drop out of sight as runaways today flee to Los Angeles. Assuming that Paul wrote from Rome, the date for Ephesians is 61 AD.

Ephesians 1:1 says he wrote to the saints “in Ephesus.” The two words “in Ephesus” are not in some Greek manuscripts, making this a general epistle. All the manuscripts, however, with the exception of three, have them. The early church believed that it was written to Ephesus. Furthermore, the “general view” is inconsistent with the contents (Eph. 1:15ff and 6:22 show that Paul had a definite group in mind). The words “in Ephesus” are genuine and, therefore, Ephesians was written to the church at Ephesus as well as to all believers everywhere (Eph. 1:1; also 2 Cor. 1:1; Col. 4:16).

Message

The subject of Ephesians is the believer’s calling (Eph. 1:18; 4:1). The message is since believers have been called to be in Christ in the church, they should live a worthy life in unity, righteousness, love, wisdom and submission, and stand against all the forces that would move them away from that lifestyle.

Structure

Ephesians is in the format of an ancient letter, but here, that is tricky. Paul begins with a thanksgiving and a prayer (Eph. 1:3-23). In the midst of the prayer, he develops several other themes. Then, he prays again (Eph. 3:1) and again wanders off on another subject

finally to come back and pray a second time (Eph. 3:14). No wonder this has been called Paul’s most “labored epistle” (Scroggie). Beyond that, the body of this epistle is divided into two parts: doctrine and duty, wealth and walk, calling and conduct.

I. Salutation	1:1-2
II. Thanksgiving	1:3-14
III. Prayer	1:15-23
IV The Body of the Letter	2:1-6:20
A. The Calling of the Church	2:1-3:21
1. Our Calling Individually (Regeneration)	2:1-10
2. Our Calling Corporately (Reconciliation)	2:11-22
3. The Revelation of this Calling (Revelation)	3:1-13
4. Prayer for Power and Perception	3:14-21
B. The Conduct of the Church	4:1-6:20
1. Walk in Unity (in church)	4:1-16
2. Walk in Righteousness (in the Flesh)	4:17-32
3. Walk in Love	5:1-7
4. Walk in the Light (in the World)	5:8-14
5. Walk in Wisdom	5:15-21
6. Walk in Submission (at home)	5:22-6:3
7. Walk in Strength, Stand in the Armor of God (Warfare)	6:10-20
V. Greeting and benediction	6:21-14

Purposes

The major purpose of Ephesians is to enlighten believers concerning their calling so they would walk worthy of it. Paul begins by blessing the Trinity for salvation. Believers are chosen by the Father (Eph. 1:3-6), redeemed by the Son (Eph. 1:7-12), and sealed by the Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14). Then, Paul prays that they would be enlightened (Eph. 1:18), so that they would know the hope of their calling. Obviously, Paul prays and writes to enlighten believers concerning their calling. They are called to fellowship with God and the church, which was a mystery, but is now being revealed (esp. Eph. 2:16a, 18; 3:6, 12). He also exhorts them to walk worthy of their calling to the church (Eph. 4:1).

A minor purpose of Ephesians is to encourage the recipients not to lose heart (Eph. 3:13). No doubt, Paul’s imprisonment discouraged many believers. Thus, he is saying, don’t feel sorry for me or discouraged by what has happened. God has especially blessed me in revealing to me the mystery of the church.

Summary: Paul wrote to the Ephesians to enlighten them concerning their calling in the church, to exhort them to walk worthy of it, and to encourage them not to lose heart.

Believers should walk worthy of their high calling.

PHILIPPIANS: THE BOOK OF LIVING WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL

Philippians has been called “one of the fairest and dearest regions of the book of God” (Bishop of Durham), “one of the sweetest of Paul’s writings” (Lee), “a love letter” (Lee), an “epistle of joy and encouragement in the midst of adverse circumstance,” “the disciple’s balance sheet,” because in it Paul shows the compensations of a disciple (Lee).

Author

Philippians 1:1 identifies the authors as Paul and Timothy, but evidently, Paul alone was the author. He immediately, and throughout the letter, speaks in the first person. When he does mention Timothy in chapter 2, it is in the third person. The external evidence for Pauline authorship, mainly tradition, is strong.

Recipients

It is evident from the epistle itself that Paul was in prison when he wrote (see “my chains” in Phil. 1:7, 13, 14). Furthermore, it seems clear that he was in prison in Rome, for he refers to the whole Praetorian Guard (Phil. 1:13) and Caesar’s household (Phil. 4:22). This was, no doubt, during his first Roman imprisonment, which took place in 62 AD.

Four epistles were written during that imprisonment,: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. All refer to Paul’s chains. Of the four, Philippians was probably written last, near the end of the two-year imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:30, 31). Paul had done considerable preaching since his arrival (Phil. 1:12-18). His case was on the verge of a final decision (Phil. 1:12, 13, 23-26). Time was needed for the events that lie between the Apostle’s arrival at Rome and the writing of the Epistle 1) News of Paul’s arrival in Rome had to travel to Philippi and the news of their concern for Epaphroditus had to get back to Rome. Luke and Aristarchus went to Rome with Paul (Acts 27:1). 2). They both send greetings to the Colossian Church (Col. 4:10, 14), but neither of them does so to the Philippian Church. This must mean that they were no longer with Paul when he wrote Philippians, for it would be very strange for Luke not to send greetings to a church that knew him so well if he had been with Paul at that time.

So, Philippians was written from Rome to the church at Philippi in 62 AD. Philippians 1:1 says the letter was written to “all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi with the bishops and deacons.” In other words, this epistle was written to the church at Philippi (“bishops” are elders, Titus 1:5). They were concerned about Paul (Phil. 1:12) and had sent Epaphroditus to Rome with financial support (Phil. 2:25; 1:5; 4:10, 14-16). They evidently had a small problem with unity (Phil. 1:27; 2:2; 3:16; 4:2-3, 9) and they were at least feeling some pressure from the Judaizers (Phil. 3:1-16). They were not only concerned about Paul; Paul was concerned about them (Phil. 2:19, 24).

Message

The subject is living worthy of the gospel. The message is believers should live worthy of the gospel by standing fast in it and striving together for it.

Structure

Philippians follows the format of an ancient letter.

I. Salutation	1:1-2
II. Thanksgiving	1:3-8
III. Prayer	1:9-11
IV. The Body of the Letter	1:12-4:21
A. Paul's Situation (prison resulted in the spread of the gospel)	1:12-26
B. Philippians' Situation (live worthy of the Gospel)	1:27-4:9
1. Live Worthy of the Gospel	1:27-30
2. Be Unified by Having a Humble Concern for Others	2:1-30
3. Stand Fast in the Lord	3:1-4:1
4. Live in Peace	4:2-9
C. Paul's Response (To their Support of his Gospel Ministry)	4:10-20
V. Greetings and Benediction	4:21-23

Purposes

The first purpose of Philippians is to express Paul's gratitude for their financial support. While there were obviously several reasons why Paul wrote this letter, the immediate purpose was to thank them for their financial support. The Philippian church had sent Epaphroditus with money to Rome for Paul (Phil. 2:25-30, esp. 2:25, 30). Paul wrote them to thank them for their gift (Phil. 1:5; 4:10-20).

The second purpose of Philippians is to explain his situation. The Philippians were not just concerned about his financial need but the prospects of his release from prison. He writes to explain that he is doing well. The gospel is being spread and he expects to be released (Phil. 1:12-26 and 2:24).

The third purpose of Philippians is to exhort them to live worthy of the gospel. They were concerned about him and he was concerned about them (Phil. 2:19). He wants them to live worthy of the gospel, which means being unified by having a humble concern for others, standing fast in the Lord and living in peace.

Summary: Paul wrote to the Philippians to thank them for their gift, explaining his situation and exhorting them to live worthy of the gospel.

Believers should live worthy of the gospel.

COLOSSIANS: THE BOOK OF THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST

Colossians has been called “the most Christocentric book in the Bible” (Boa) and “the antidote to heresy.” Ephesians and Colossians have been called twin epistles.

Author

The first verse (Col. 1:1) identifies Paul and Timothy as the authors of this letter, but evidently, the sole author was Paul, for he often refers to himself in the first person (Col. 1:25, 29; 4:7, 8; etc.) Three times Paul identifies himself as the author (Col. 1:1, 1:23; 4:18). The personal details in the letter and the close parallels with Ephesians and Philemon fit the Pauline authorship.

Recipients

In the discussion on Ephesians, it was pointed out that Paul wrote four epistles while imprisoned in Rome: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. In all four he mentions his chains (Eph. 3:1; Phil. 4:14; Col. 4:10; Philem. 9). Therefore, Colossians was written from Rome by Paul in 61 AD. Of the four, Colossians was probably written first. Paul wrote it because of the need. Later, after reflection, he penned Ephesians. It seems evident that Colossians and Ephesians were written before Philippians or at least that Philippians was written last.

Paul addresses the epistle to “the saints and faithful brethren in Christ, which are at Colosse” (Col. 1:2). In other words, Paul wrote to the church at Colosse, which was 100 miles east of Ephesus, only ten miles from Laodicea and 13 miles from Hierapolis (Col. 4:13, 16). There is no record in Acts of Paul visiting Colosse. Evidently, he had never met them (Col. 2:1). On his third missionary journey, he spent three years in Ephesus. Perhaps, during that time, Epaphras trusted Christ and carried the Gospel to the Lycus Valley (Col. 1:7; 4:12, 13). Sometime later, a heresy threatened the church at Colosse. So Epaphras journeyed to Rome to report to Paul on the conditions at Colosse. His visit prompted the letter. Basically, the believers at Colosse were saved, sound, and growing (Col. 1:3-8; 2:5). The heresy that threatened to sidetrack them was a mixture of Jewish legalism (Col. 2:16-17), mysticism (Col. 2:18-19) and asceticism (Col. 2:20-22).

Message

The subject of Colossians is the sufficiency of Christ for the spiritual life. The message is since Christ is the supreme Sovereign and sufficient Savior, believers should beware of any teaching that suggests they need something other than Jesus Christ, and they should see to it that Jesus Christ has the preeminence in everything.

Structure

Colossians is a perfect example of the pattern of an ancient letter. Beyond that, the body consists of doctrine, defense, and duty.

I. Salutation	1:1-2
II. Thanksgiving	1:3-8
III. Prayer	1:9-14
IV The Body of the Letter	1:15-4:6
A. Doctrinal: Sufficiency of Christ Declared	1:15-2:7
1. Christ Suffered to Bring Believers to Maturity	1:15-23
2. Paul Also Suffered to Bring Believers to Maturity	1:24-29
3. Paul Exhorted Believers to Grow toward Maturity	2:1-7
B. Defense: Sufficiency of Christ Defended	2:8-3:4
1. Stated Positively	2:8-15
2. Stated Negatively	2:16-3:4
C. Duty: Sufficiency of Christ Displayed	3:5-4:6
1. In Personal Life	3:5-14
2. In Church Life	3:15-17
3. In Home Life	3:18-21
4. In Business Life	3:22-4:1
5. In Social Life	4:2-6
V. Greetings and Benediction	4:7-18

Purposes

The first purpose of Colossians is to refute Judaistic, mystical asceticism. The false teaching threatening the Colossians is described in detail in Colossians 2:16-3:4. It was a mixture of Jewish legalism, Greek philosophical speculation, and Gentile asceticism. Paul's primary purpose in writing is to warn the believers against such (Col. 2:4, 8, 16, 18, 20). Christ is sufficient. You don't need rules, revelations, and regulations.

The second purpose of Colossians is to encourage believers to give Christ preeminence in everything. Paul's purpose in Colossians is like a coin—it has two sides. One is positive and the other is negative. The negative side is to refute the false teaching. The positive side is to encourage believers to grow, to go on to maturity, and to give Christ preeminence in everything (Col. 2:5-7).

Summary: Paul wrote to the Colossians to refute Judaistic, mystical asceticism and to encourage believers to give Christ preeminence in everything.

Believers should give Christ preeminence in everything.

1 THESSALONIANS: THE BOOK OF SANCTIFICATION

First Thessalonians has been called “one of the most gentle and affectionate of Paul’s letters” (Tidwell). It is “characterized by simplicity, gentleness, and affection” (Scroggie).

Author

First Thessalonians 1:1 says the authors were Paul, Silas, and Timothy. “We” is used of the authors (1 Thess. 1:2; 2:13; 2:17; 3:11; 4:1; 5:12), but the main author is Paul. He refers to himself by name (1 Thess. 1:1; 2:18) and uses “I” (1 Thess. 3:5; 4:13; 5:27).

Recipients

First Thessalonians 1:1 states that it was written to the church at Thessalonica. Paul, Silas, and Timothy went to Macedonia and established a church at Philippi. Probably leaving Timothy at Philippi, Paul and Silas traveled 100 miles to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-10). When persecution broke out, Paul and Silas left Thessalonica. Forty miles later, they stopped at Berea. Timothy joined them there. When the Jews from Thessalonica came to Berea, causing trouble, Paul left Silas and Timothy and went to Athens. Later, Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Athens and he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica. Timothy caught up with Paul in Corinth and gave him a good report concerning the Thessalonians. It was then that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians from Corinth in 51 AD.

Paul earnestly desired to visit Thessalonica again (1 Thess. 2:18, 3:10). Since that was not possible, he sent Timothy from Athens (1 Thess. 3:1-12), who brought back a good report to Paul (1 Thess. 3:6). This report was the occasion of the letter. The Thessalonians were doing well spiritually (1 Thess. 1:3-8), yet Paul was concerned about their faith (1 Thess. 3:2, 5, 10) and their sanctification, and especially their love (1 Thess. 4:3, 10). There was also a doctrinal question (1 Thess. 4:13-18) and there were difficulties in their meetings (1 Thess. 5:12, 19, 20).

Message

The subject of 1 Thessalonians is sanctification (1 Thess. 4:1-3; 5:23). The message is sanctification consists of faith, love, and hope in one’s personal life and church life.

Structure

First Thessalonians is a letter. It begins with a salutation (1 Thess. 1:1), followed by a thanksgiving (1 Thess. 1:2-12). A prayer would be expected next, but instead, Paul defends his ministry. Then, he returns to the thanksgiving (1 Thess. 2:13-16), after which he returns to a discussion of his relationship to them (1 Thess. 2:17-3:10). Finally, he prays (1 Thess. 3:11-13). In Ephesians, he interrupted his prayer. Here, he interrupted his thanksgiving. The subject of the book is sanctification (1 Thess. 5:23). Paul is concerned about their faith (1 Thess. 1:3, 8; 3:2, 5, 6, 7, 10), their love (1 Thess. 4:1-12), and their hope (1 Thess. 4:13; 5:8). Sanctification is growing to maturity in faith, love, and hope.

I. Salutation	1:1
II. Thanksgiving	1:2-10
III. The Body of the Letter	2:1-5:24
A. Personal (their Faith)	2:1-3:13
1. Paul's Past Character among Them	2:1-12
2. Paul's Thankfulness for Them	2:13-16
3. Paul's Present concern for Them	2:17-3:10
4. Paul's Prayer for Them	3:11-13
B. Practical (their Love)	4:1-12
1. General Exhortation	4:1, 2
2. Specific Applications	4:3-12
C. Prophetic (their Hope)	4:13-5:11
1. The Rapture	4:13-18
2. The Day of the Lord	5:1-11
D. Polity	5:12-24
1. Esteem the Elders	5:12, 13
2. Minister to Members	5:14, 15
3. Walk in God's Will	5:16-18
4. Discern True Doctrine	5:19-22
5. Prayer	5:23, 24
IV. Personal Greeting and Benediction	5:25-28

Purposes

The first purpose of 1 Thessalonians is to encourage believers in their faith. Jewish unbelievers charged that Paul used flattery to cover greed and that his motive was personal honor. His failure to return seemed to support their claim. Paul defends himself to encourage the believers in their faith.

The second purpose of 1 Thessalonians is to exhort them to grow in love. Because of moral problems, Paul exhorts them to be sanctified, that is, to grow in love.

The third purpose of 1 Thessalonians is to establish them in hope. After his departure, some died. Those remaining wondered what would happen to the departed at the Rapture. Paul writes to establish them in hope and comfort.

The fourth purpose of 1 Thessalonians is to enlighten them in church matters. There were also minor problems in their assembly. Paul tells them to esteem the elders, minister to one another, and handle the meetings properly.

Summary: Paul wrote to the Thessalonians to encourage believers to be more and more set apart unto the Lord in their personal and assembly life.

Sanctification consists of growing to maturity in faith, love, and hope.

2 THESSALONIANS: THE BOOK OF CORRECTION OF PROPHECY

Second Thessalonians has been called “a very short letter” (Baxter). Except for Philemon, 2 Thessalonians is the shortest of Paul’s epistles. It is the shortest of his nine letters to churches. It has been called “the theological sequel to 1 Thessalonians” (Boa).

Author

Second Thessalonians 1:1 says the epistle was written by Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Like 1 Thessalonians, “we” and “us” is used (2 Thess. 1:3; 2:1; 2:13; 3:1, 3:4, 3:6, 3:14; etc.). The letter ends with Paul speaking in the first person singular (2 Thess. 3:17). Paul is “the” author and Silas and Timothy are “linked together” with him. Second Thessalonians is quoted more frequently by the early church fathers than 1 Thessalonians.

Recipients

Paul visited Thessalonica on his second missionary journey. After he left, he eventually ended up in Corinth, where he stayed for 18 months. He wrote 1 Thessalonians from Corinth in 51 AD. All indications are that Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians a short time after 1 Thessalonians, which means he wrote it from Corinth in 51 AD. One author suggests that 1 Thessalonians was written in the early summer and 2 Thessalonians was written later the same year (Hoehner).

Whoever took the first epistle to Thessalonica remained long enough to notice the effects of Paul’s letter and to gain insight into the situation. Evidently, this messenger brought back a report with favorable and unfavorable news. The immediate occasion for the writing of 2 Thessalonians was the nature of this additional information.

They were making progress in faith and hope (2 Thess. 1:3) and they were remaining steadfast under repeated outbreaks of persecution (2 Thess. 1:4). In the first letter, Paul had relieved their distress about the death of their loved ones, but their expectation concerning the Second Coming of Christ had intensified. They concluded that the Day of the Lord had already arrived (2 Thess. 2:2) and thus were expecting the immediate return of Christ. Consequently, some quit working. With leisure time on their hands, some became busybodies interfering with those who wanted to work (2 Thess. 3:10-12).

Message

The subject is a correction of a prophetic misunderstanding. The message is although they were expecting persecution, they should not mistake that for the Day of Christ, they should not cease to work, and they should discipline those who do.

Structure

Second Thessalonians is in the form of a letter.

I. Salutation	1:1-2
II. Thanksgiving	1:3-10
III. Prayer	1:11-12
IV. The Body of the Letter	2:1-3:16
A. Instructor: The Day of Christ has not Come	2:1-17
1. Instruction (Do Not Be Soon Shaken)	2:1-12
2. Thanksgiving (Stand Fast and Hold to the Word)	2:13-15
3. Prayer	2:16-17
B. Injunctions: Pray and Withdraw from the Disorderly	3:1-16
1. Call to Prayer	3:1-5
2. Command to Discipline	3:6-15
3. Concluding Prayer	3:16
V. Personal Greeting and Benediction	3:17-18

Purposes

The first purpose of 2 Thessalonians is to comfort them in their persecution. Paul had been persecuted by unbelieving Jews while he was there and after he left. Now the believers Paul left behind were being persecuted (2 Thess. 1:4). They were doing well, but Paul was writing to encourage them. He does that by, among other things, letting them know he thanked God for them and was praying for them.

The second purpose of 2 Thessalonians is to correct a prophetic misunderstanding. Someone told them that the Tribulation had already begun (2 Thess. 2:2). This was confirmed (supposedly) by a spiritual revelation (see “spirit” in 2 Thess. 2:2) or a messenger, perhaps even a letter, from Paul (2 Thess. 2:2). The fact that they were going through persecution made all of this believable. Paul tells them that the Day of Christ will not be come until two events occur: 1) the apostasy, 2) the apocalypse of the man of sin.

The third purpose of 2 Thessalonians is to commend them in their practice. Paul also issues several commands: to pray (2 Thess. 3:1-5) and to withdraw from those who walk disorderly (2 Thess. 3:6-15). This second command is related to the misconception of prophecy. Because they were expecting the Lord to come at any moment, some quit their jobs and became busybodies. Paul says that if people will not work, neither shall they eat (2 Thess. 3:10), and you should withdraw yourself from them (2 Thess. 3:6).

Summary: Paul wrote a second letter to the Thessalonians to comfort them in their persecution and correct their prophetic misunderstanding and their practical misconduct.

The Lord is coming back, but we should work until He comes.

1 TIMOTHY: THE BOOK OF CONDUCT IN THE CHURCH

First Timothy is one of the “pastoral epistles,” an expression that originated in the 18th century. The other two pastoral epistles are 2 Timothy and Titus. First Timothy has been called a “leadership manual” (Boa).

Author

The opening verse declares that Paul is the author. Tradition supports that.

Recipients

As the title suggests, this was the first of two letters sent to Timothy at Ephesus, but Paul intended it for the church as well (see the plural “you” in 1 Tim. 6:20).

Acts closes with Paul in prison in Rome. The history of the remainder of his life must be put together from hints in the New Testament and a few statements outside of it. Apparently, he was released from his first Roman imprisonment. He anticipated that (Phil. 1:19, 25, 26; 2:24) and the pastoral epistles require it. Perhaps his Jewish accusers did not appear at his trial before Caesar, or he was found guilty and banished not *to* some place (like John on the Isle of Patmos) but *from* someplace, namely, Palestine.

He probably sent Timothy to Philippi with the good news as he had promised (Phil. 2:19-23). He went to Ephesus (in spite of his earlier expectation, Acts 20:38) and perhaps to other churches in the area, like Colosse (Philem. 22). Evidently, Timothy joined Paul in Ephesus.

As he had predicted to the elders (Acts 20:29, 30), when he returned to Ephesus, Paul found erroneous teaching. He personally dealt with the leaders of the trouble (1 Tim. 1:18, 19), but anticipated further difficulty (1 Tim. 1:3). So when he left for Macedonia, he put Timothy in charge (1 Tim. 1:3). Once in Macedonia, he saw he was going to be delayed, so he wrote 1 Timothy, possibly from Philippi in 62 AD.

From what is said in 1 Timothy as well as 2 Timothy and Titus, it is evident that some were going to the genealogies of the Old Testament (1 Tim. 1:7), which suggests they were Jewish, and constructing fables based on them (1 Tim. 1:4; 4:7; 6:20). From these fables, they taught things like you must abstain from marriage and meats (1 Tim. 4:3) and that godliness was a means of gain (1 Tim. 6:5). This kind of teaching was a departure from the faith, which was to produce godliness (1 Tim. 1:4, 1:19; 6:21), but it produced strife (1 Tim. 1:4; 6:4-5).

Message

The subject is the charge to Timothy on conduct at church (1 Tim. 1:4, 1:18; 3:14-15; 6:20; also, 1 Tim. 4:11; 6:2b). Timothy was an “apostolic representative.” He has been called him an “apostolic legate.” The message is church leaders are to refute error and teach truth, which leads to godliness.

Structure

First Timothy is a letter, but it does not follow the format precisely. For one thing, there is no prayer. For another, the thanksgiving is for what God has done for the author, not for the recipients, as is usually the case.

I. Salutation	1:1-2
II. Introduction (Paul's charge, esp. 1:18)	1:3-20
III. The Body of the Letter	2:1-6:21a
A. The Charge Concerning Church Meetings	2:1-15
1. Concerning Men	2:1-8
2. Concerning Women	2:9-15
B. The Charge Concerning Church Officers	3:1-13
1. Concerning Elders	3:1-7
2. Concerning Deacons	3:8-13
C. The Charge Concerning Church Doctrine	3:14-4:16
1. Concerning True Teaching	3:14-16
2. Concerning False Teaching	4:1-11
3. Concerning the Teacher	4:12-16
D. The Charge Concerning Church Members	5:1-6:19
1. Concerning the Old and the Young	5:1, 2
2. Concerning Widows	5:3-16
3. Concerning Elders	5:17-25
4. Concerning Slaves	6:1, 2
5. Concerning False Teachers	6:3-16
6. Concerning the Rich	6:17-19
E. Conclusion	6:20-21a
IV. Benediction	6:21b

Purpose

The first purpose of 1 Timothy is to exhort Timothy to refute error. Timothy did not need enlightenment concerning error (1 Tim. 1:3). He needed encouragement. Maybe his physical problem with his stomach made him sluggish (1 Tim. 5:23). At any rate, Timothy was to deal with error (1 Tim. 1:3, 1:18; 6:20).

The second purpose of 1 Timothy is to encourage Timothy to teach the truth. Paul never gives the negative without the positive. He wants Timothy to refute error, but also he wants him to teach the truth (1 Tim. 4:6, 4:11; 6:2b, 6:20). The truth, in this case, is the doctrine spelled out in 1 Timothy 3:16, which leads to faith, which leads to a pure life and a good conscience, which leads to godliness and love (1 Tim. 1:3-5).

Summary: Paul wrote to Timothy to charge him to refute error and to teach truth, which leads to godliness.

Truth produces faith, which results in a pure heart, a clear conscience, godliness, and love.

2 TIMOTHY: THE BOOK OF THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Second Timothy has been called Paul's "swan song," "the deathbed communication of Paul," "his final message" (McGee). It is the last inspired letter he wrote.

Author

Paul wrote this book (1:1). A whole host of ancient authors confirm that.

Recipient

Acts ends with Paul in prison in Rome. Evidently, he was released from that imprisonment and went to Ephesus, only to leave there for Macedonia, where he probably wrote 1 Timothy from Philippi in 62 AD. As he anticipated, he no doubt, returned to Ephesus (1 Tim. 3:14) and Macedonia. He then journeyed to the island of Crete, where he left Titus to continue the work (Titus 1:5). Apparently, after that, he traveled to Corinth from where he wrote Titus (Titus 3:13). After meeting Titus in Nicopolis (Titus 3:12), he went to Spain as planned (Rom. 15:24-28). After Spain, he visited Greece and Asia again (Corinth, Miletus, Troas; 2 Tim. 4:13-20) and may have been arrested in Troas.

Nero, emperor of Rome from AD 54 to 68, was responsible for the beginning of the Roman persecution of Christians. Rumors that he was responsible for the fire that destroyed a large portion of Rome caused him to use the unpopular Christians as his scapegoat. When Paul returned from Spain in 66 AD, his enemies used the official Roman position against Christianity against Paul. This time some believers failed to support Paul after his arrest (2 Tim. 1:15) and no one was with him at his first defense before the Imperial Court (2 Tim. 4:16). He was abandoned by almost everyone (2 Tim. 4:10, 11). He was in a cold Roman cell (2 Tim. 4:13), regarded "as a criminal" (2 Tim. 2:9) without hope of acquittal (2 Tim. 4:6-8, 17, 18). Under these conditions, Paul wrote 2 Timothy in the fall of 67 AD, hoping that Timothy would be able to visit him before winter (2 Tim. 4:21).

When Paul wrote 1 Timothy, Timothy was in Ephesus dealing with difficult disciples. That situation is the backdrop of 2 Timothy. In 2 Timothy, Timothy is still in Ephesus ("Greet the household of Onesiphorus" in 2 Tim. 4:19 with Onesiphorus, who is said to be a "resident of Ephesus" in 2 Tim. 1:16-18; also 2 Tim. 2:17 with 1 Tim. 1:19-20). Some of that old problem is left (2 Tim. 2:14-18), but the issue is not so much that as the dark days. For one thing, Paul was facing martyrdom, but beyond that, they were perilous days, indeed.

Message

The subject of 2 Timothy is: fulfill your ministry or be faithful to the ministry that God has given you (2 Tim. 4.5b and 1.6). Added to that, throughout the book, there is repeated reference to difficult days, that is, the persecution from without (2 Tim. 1:8, and maybe 3:1-9; 4:14), and the defection from within (2 Tim. 1:15; 2:14, 2:16-18, 2:25). The message is, in dark, difficult days, make sure you fulfill your ministry.

Structure

Second Timothy is an ancient letter with one minor exception. It does not have the customary prayer, which usually follows the thanksgiving. The body is a series of commands.

I. Salutation	1:1-2
II. Thanksgiving	1:3-5
III. Prologue	1:6-18
IV. The Body of the Letter	2:1-4:10
A. Commit the Word to Faithful Teachers	2:1-13
1. Be Strong	2:1
2. Commit the Word	2:2
3. Endure Hardness	2:3-13
B. Correct Errorists	2:14-26
1. Charge Them	2:14, 15
2. Avoid Empty Disputes	2:16-21
3. Pursue Righteousness	2:22-26
C. Continue in the Word	3:1-4:8
1. In Personal Life	3:1-17
2. In Public Ministry	4:1-8
V. Epilogue	4:9-10
VI. Personal Greetings and Benediction	4:19-22

Purposes

The first purpose of 2 Timothy is to strengthen Timothy. Rome had outlawed Christianity. The apostle Paul was about to be executed. Some had deserted him. Though Timothy was an experienced and seasoned veteran, under this pressure, especially in light of the fact that he was about to lose his spiritual father, he was susceptible to discouragement. Perhaps in chapter 1, there is a hint of the fear and shame he felt (also 2 Tim. 6:8). Thus, Paul writes to Timothy to strengthen and encourage him (see 2 Tim. 1:8-12; 2:3; 4:1-5).

The second purpose of 2 Timothy is to summon Timothy to Rome as soon as possible (2 Tim. 1:4, 4:1, 21a). Perhaps, Paul also needed Mark for ministry (2 Tim. 4:11), as well as his cloak, books, and parchments, which he left in Troas (2 Tim. 4:13).

Summary: Paul wrote to Timothy to encourage him to fulfill his ministry in spite of persecution and defection, and to summon him to come to Rome.

All believers are to be in the ministry (Eph. 4:12) and they should fulfill that ministry even in dark, difficult days.

TITUS: THE BOOK OF ORDER IN THE CHURCH

Titus has been called “a priceless and unrivaled manual of pastoral advice” (Farrar). Luther said, “This is a short epistle, but yet such a quintessence of Christian doctrine and composed in such a masterly manner, that it contains all that is needful for Christian knowledge and life.”

Author

Titus 1:1 says Paul was the author. The early church record supports that.

Recipients

First and 2 Timothy and Titus form a group called the pastoral epistles. They were written during the same period in Paul’s life and all of them deal with the same error. It is equally clear that they were written after the book of Acts closes.

Briefly, after Acts 28, Paul went to Ephesus and, then, to Macedonia (probably Philippi). After that, he journeyed to Crete, where he left Titus to continue the work there (Tit. 1:5). Apparently, he next traveled to Corinth, where he wrote the book of Titus. From there, he went to Spain and on a return trip, he was arrested. If that scenario is correct (and frankly, other itineraries are possible, for example, he left Rome and went to Spain and then went to Crete), the date of Titus is the same as 1 Timothy, 62 AD. Many have pointed out similarities between 1 Timothy and Titus, indicating that, like Ephesians and Colossians, they were written about the same time.

The churches on the island of Crete were in need of organization (Tit. 1:5). There were also other things that needed to be set in order. Jewish teachers needed to be rebuked (Tit. 1:10, 13). They were going to the genealogies of the Old Testament (Tit. 3:9) and constructing the fables (Tit. 1:14). From these myths, they drew commandments that turned people from the truth of God to the commandments of men. Furthermore, their motives were wrong and the results were not God-honoring. Their motive was money (Tit. 1:11). Their “ministry” produced disputes, contentions, and strivings about the law (Tit. 3:9), as well as subverting whole households. They needed instruction in godliness and good works.

Message

The subject of Titus is church order. That is clear from Titus 1:5. Paul left Titus in Crete to set things in order and this book tells him how to do just that. The message of Titus is putting things in order is ordaining elders, who see to it that the Word is taught, which produces godliness in good works.

Structure

Titus follows the form and format of an ancient letter, except that there is no thanksgiving or prayer. In the body of the book, Paul gives three commands, each followed by a reason for it (see Tit. 1:5 and *for* in 1:10; 2:1, *for* in 2:11; 3:1, and *for* in 3:3).

I. Salutation	1:1-4
II. The Body of the Letter	1:5-3:11
A. Ordain Elders	1:5-16
1. Qualifications for Elders	1:5-9
2. Reasons for Elders	1:10-12
3. Response to Errorists	1:13-16
B. Speak about Godliness	2:1-15
1. To the Older	2:2-5
2. To the Younger	2:6
3. To Yourself	2:7-8
4. To Slaves	2:9-10
5. Reason for Speaking	2:11-15
C. Remind about Good Works	3:1-7
1. Tell all to do Good Works	3:1, 2
2. Reason for Reminder	3:3-7
D. Conclusion	3:8-11
III. Personal Greetings and Benediction	3:12-15

Purposes

The first purpose of Titus is to instruct Titus. The church on the isle of Crete was in a mess. Jewish teachers were teaching things they ought not and their mouths needed to be shut (Tit. 1:11). Consequently, the people needed instruction in truth to produce godliness and good works. Paul wrote Titus to tell him how to put the church in order. He was to ordain elders, sharply rebuke the Jewish teachers, speak about godliness to each age group and remind all to maintain good works.

The second purpose of Titus is to impart personal information to Titus concerning Zenas and Apollos (Tit. 3:13) and to inform Titus of Paul's decision to spend the winter at Nicopolis (Tit. 3:12). The letter notified Titus that Paul was planning to send either Artemas or Tychicus to replace him and that he wished for Titus to join him at Nicopolis.

Summary: Paul wrote to Titus to instruct him to set things in order in the churches and to inform him about a few personal matters. Elders are to see that the word is taught, which produces godliness and good works.

As a result of the healthy teaching of the Word of God, there should be godliness and good works.

PHILEMON: THE BOOK OF AN EXAMPLE OF LOVE

Philemon has been called a “note for a friend” (Scroggie), “the briefest of Paul’s epistles,” “a gem” (Lee), “a model of courtesy, discretion and loving concern” (Boa), “a graceful little masterpiece of fine courtesy, exquisite tact, and even playful wit” (Baxter).

Author

The epistle itself not only claims Paul as its author but that he wrote it with his own hand (Philem. 1, 19). Three times the author identifies himself as Paul (Philem. 1, 9, 19). Furthermore, there has been a consistent tradition supporting Pauline authorship.

Recipients

When Paul wrote this letter, he was in prison. He repeatedly refers to his chains (Philem. 1, 9, 10, 13, 23). It is closely linked with Colossians. For example, Onesimus is specifically mentioned in Colossians (Col. 4:9), as are all the other people who sent greetings to Philemon (*cf.* Philem. 23, 24 with Col. 4:12, 10, 14). Thus, Paul wrote Philemon during his first Roman imprisonment, which was in 60-62 AD (Philemon, then, is one of the four prison epistles). It was no doubt written and sent at the same time as Colossians, that is, in 61 AD.

Philemon was addressed to Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and the church that met in Philemon’s house. Onesimus was a slave of Philemon. He apparently robbed his master and fled to Rome (Philem. 18). He met Paul in the Imperial City and Paul led him to Christ (Philem. 10). According to Roman law, Onesimus belonged to Philemon, so Paul sent him back. It is generally believed that Apphia was Philemon’s wife and Archippus was the “pastor” of the church in his house (Col. 4:17). Some have suggested he was also Philemon’s son, but there is no evidence for that.

Message

It would be tempting to conclude that the subject of Philemon is the return of a runaway slave, but that would be like saying the subject of Hosea is the career of a prostitute. No doubt, the substance of the story is slavery, but that is not the subject.

The subject of Philemon is love. Paul not only thanked God for Philemon’s love, but it is a major emphasis of his thanksgiving (Philem. 5-7). His appeal is based on love (Philem. 9). His request was an act of love (see “receive him back” in Philem. 12, “forever” in Philem. 15, and “as a beloved brother” in Philem. 16). Notice also that in verse 20 he says, “Refresh my heart in the Lord” and, in verse 7, he said, “Your love has refreshed the heart of the saints.” Luther said, “This epistle shows a right, noble, lovely example of Christian love.” Paul requested that Philemon forgive and restore Onesimus, his runaway slave, as an illustration of Christian love. The message is as Christ loved us and paid for our sins and order that we might be forgiven, we should forgive others even if we have to assume the cost.

Structure

Philemon is a letter, an ancient letter, with all the customary parts.

I. Salutation	1-3
II. Thanksgiving	4-5
III. Prayer	6-7
IV. The Body of the Letter	8-22
A. The Basis of Paul's Request	8-11
1. Not a Command	8
2. But Love	9-11
B. The Nature of Paul's Request	12-17
1. I wish I could Keep Him	13, 14
2. But I ask you to Receive Him	15, 17
C. The Payment for Paul's Request	18-22
1. The Payment	18, 19
2. The Profit	20-22
V. Personal Greetings	23-24
VI. Benediction	25

Purposes

One of the purposes of Philemon is to request that Philemon receive Onesimus, a runaway slave, as a beloved brother. Onesimus had been a slave of Philemon. Slaves were chattels. Onesimus was of Phrygia, where slaves were considered the lowest of all slaves. He ran away, apparently with money stolen from his master. In Rome, he came in contact with Paul, who led him to Christ (Philem. 10). Onesimus became a faithful brother (Col. 4:9), causing Paul to want to keep him around (Philem. 13), but Paul could not do that. Roman law said that Onesimus must go back. In addition, according to Roman law, a runaway slave merited severe punishment. Paul wanted to obey the law and he wanted to reconcile Philemon and Onesimus without humiliating Onesimus, to commend to the wrongdoer without approving the wrong. Therefore, Paul requested that the runaway slave be received as a beloved brother and if there was any debt, that it be put to his account.

Another purpose of Philemon is to illustrate Christian love and forgiveness and respect for the law. This is not a private letter. It was addressed to others, including the whole church. The reason Paul addressed the letter to the church is knowing Philemon would do what he asked, he intended for Philemon's action to be an illustration of Christian love and forgiveness and Onesimus' action being a demonstration of compliance to the law.

Summary: Paul requested that Philemon forgive and restore Onesimus, his runaway slave, as an illustration of Christian love.

As Christ loved us and paid for our sins in order that we might be forgiven, we should forgive others even if we have to assume the cost.

HEBREWS: THE BOOK OF THE SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST

Hebrews has been called “one of the greatest of two theological treatises in the New Testament” (Baxter) and “a profound work” (Boa).

Author

The author does not identify himself. The original readers knew who he was (Heb. 13:18-24). The two leading candidates are Paul and Barnabas. The arguments for the author being Paul are: 1) He was an educated Jew. 2) There is a similarity of thought between Hebrews and Paul’s epistles. 3) The author had been in bonds (Heb. 10:34), wrote from Italy (Heb. 13:24), and was closely associated with Timothy (Heb. 13:23). 4) Since Pantaenus (d. 190 AD), there has been a tradition that Paul wrote Hebrews.

The arguments for Barnabas being the author are: 1) He was a Levite. 2) He was familiar with the teachings of Paul. 3) He knew Timothy. 4) This is a word of exhortation (Heb. 13:22), the designation of Barnabas (Acts 4:36). 5) The earliest tradition (Tertullian) favors Barnabas. Barnabas was more than likely the author. All the arguments in favor of Paul fit Barnabas. Furthermore, Paul signed all his letters (2 Thess. 3:17), but Hebrews is anonymous. Barnabas would have stayed in the background, not signing his name. Origen said, “Who it was that really wrote the epistle, God only knows.”

Recipients

At the time Hebrews was written, the sacrificial system was still in operation (Heb. 8:4; 13; 9:6-9; 10:1-3). Therefore, since the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD, Hebrews must have been written before 70 AD. Also, Hebrews mentions Timothy (Heb. 13:23). If Paul is not the author, this suggests Paul was dead. Otherwise, Timothy would have been expected to join him. Hebrews was written between the death of Paul and the destruction of Jerusalem in 68 or 69 AD.

The recipients were Jewish Christians. The author’s polemic against the permanence of the Levitical system is best explained if the audience was Jewish and inclined to be swayed back to Judaism. Contrary to many, there is no doubt that the recipients were believers (“we” in Heb. 2:3 and “holy brethren” in Heb. 3:1; also 3:12; 5:12-14; 6:1, 3, 5, 9; 10:22-23, and “we” in 26, 30, 35, 36; 12:4, 5) in a certain locality (Heb. 3:7; 17-19; 22-24). They had been believers long enough to be teachers (Heb. 5:12), had successfully endured persecution (Heb. 10:32-34) and had financially assisted other Christians (Heb. 6:10), but they were dull of hearing (Heb. 5:11) and were in danger of drifting away (Heb. 2:1; 3:12).

Message

The subject of Hebrews is Jesus Christ as the Son, who is the King/Priest. As the divine king/priest, He is superior to Judaism. [The word “better” occurs 13 times: Heb. 1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6 (twice); 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40, 12:24.] The message is since Jesus is the divine King/Priest, who is superior to Judaism, believers should not go back to Judaism, but should, by faith, endure so that they will reach maturity and be rewarded.

Structure

The literary structure is “distinctive” (Hiebert). It is generally classified as an epistle, but it lacks a salutation, beginning more like an essay than an epistle. It ends like a letter. The contents of Hebrews suggest that it is a homily cast into an epistolary form.

I. Prologue	1:1-4
II. Jesus is the Son/King	1:5-2:18
A. Jesus is the King; Angels are Servants	1:5-14
B. First Warning: Don't Neglect (Pay Attention)	2:1-4
C. Jesus is the Captain Who Suffered	2:5-18
D. Jesus is the Apostle; Moses was a Servant	3:1-6
B. Second Warning: Don't Harden Your Heart (Hold on)	3:7-4:13
III. Jesus is the Son/Priest	4:14-10:39
A. Jesus is Our High Priest	4:14-16
B. Jesus is Our Qualified High Priest	5:1-10
C. Third Warning: Don't Fall Away (Go to Maturity)	5:11-6:20
D. Jesus is Superior to Aaron	7:1-28
E. Jesus has Superior Covenant	8:1-9:10
F. Jesus' is a Superior Sacrifice	9:11-10:18
G. Fourth Warning: Don't Willfully Sin (Draw Near)	10:19-39
VI. Therefore, Live a Life of Faith	11:1-13:17
A. A Life of Faith Gains a Better Way	11:1-40
B. Endure like a Son	12:1-17
C. Fifth Warning: Don't Refuse to Hear (Serve Him)	12:18-29
D. Serve Acceptably	13:1-17
VII. Personal Greetings and Benediction	13:18-25

Purposes

The first purpose of Hebrews is to check their drift from Christ back to Judaism. Christ is shown to be superior to prevent a drift back to Judaism.

The second purpose of Hebrews is to challenge them to steadfastness and maturity. They are to be steadfast (Heb. 3:14; 4:1, 14; 10:23-25, 35-36; 12:1-3) and mature (Heb. 6:1; 4:16; 5:12-14) so they will be rewarded (Heb. 10:35-36).

Summary: Barnabas wrote to Jewish Christians arguing that since Christ is the Son/King and Son/Priest, Who is superior to Judaism, they should not go back to Judaism, but should, by faith, endure so that they will be rewarded.

Believers who, by faith, endure will grow to maturity and be rewarded.

JAMES: THE BOOK OF HANDLING TRIALS

James has been called “the first book of the New Testament to be written” (McGee), “an intensely practical manual,” “the Proverbs of the New Testament” (Boa), “a right strawy epistle, having no true evangelical character” (Luther, but see Jas. 2:23.).

Author

The author of this epistle identifies himself as James and calls himself a servant (1:1) and a teacher (Jas. 3:1). Apparently, he was well known. There are three prominent men named James in the New Testament. James, the son of Zebedee, was the older brother of the apostle John (Mt. 10:2). He was not only an apostle, but he was also in the inner circle (Mt. 17:1). His martyrdom by 44 AD makes it unlikely that he wrote this epistle (Acts 12:2).

James, the son of Alphaeus, was the brother of Matthew (Mt. 10:3). He, too, was an apostle with the nickname of James the Less (Mk. 15:40). This James is comparatively obscure. Thus, it is doubtful that he is the authoritative figure behind this epistle. James, the son of Joseph, was the half-brother of Jesus Christ (Mt. 13:55). At first, he didn't believe (Jn. 7:5), but after the Lord appeared to him (1 Cor. 15:7), he became a believer (Acts 1:14) and one of the pillars of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 12:7; 15:3, 21:18; Gal. 2:12-19).

James, the half-brother of Christ, best fits the evidence as the author of the epistle: 1) There is no title, indicating that he was well known. The two other men named James were apostles, but they were not well known. James, the son of Zebedee, the only other likely author, is usually eliminated because of his early death. 2) It was written to scattered Jewish Christians. James, the half-brother of Jesus, was the leader of the Jerusalem church. When those believers were scattered, he was the most likely one to write them. 3) The vocabulary of this book resembles the vocabulary of James' speech in Acts 15. 4) Tradition says that James, the half-brother of Jesus, was the author.

Recipients

The recipients were Jewish (Jas. 1:1) Christians (Jas. 2:1). The book is addressed to “the twelve tribes, which are scattered abroad.” This is probably a reference to the Jewish Christians who were scattered abroad because of the persecution in Acts 8:4 (Acts 9:2; 11:19). If so, they were as far as Syria (Acts 11:19) and the date of James is about 45 AD.

From the book itself, it is obvious that these Jewish Christians were still meeting in synagogues (“assembly” in Jas. 2:2 is the Greek word “synagogue”) and had elders (Jas. 5:14). Strangers sometimes attended their meetings (Jas. 2:2-4). Some of them were rich (Jas. 1:10) and some were even traveling traders (Jas. 4:13ff). The majority, however, were probably poor (Jas. 1:9; 2:6; 5:1-6). They were having various kinds of trials. The rich were oppressing them by hauling them before the courts (Jas. 2:6, 7) and wrongfully withholding their wages (Jas. 5:4). These believers were also having trouble among themselves. They had disagreements, ambitions, and strife (Jas. 3:13-18; 4:1, 2; 4:11). Some were weak from sickness (Jas. 5:13).

Message

The subject is trials. James begins with that subject (Jas. 1:2) and ends with it (Jas. 5:13). The message is the proper way to respond to trials is to trust God and learn from them by being swift to hear, that is, heed the Word, be slow to speak, and slow to anger.

Structure

James is not a letter. Many have suggested that the literary structure had a “sermonic origin.” Whatever the literary form, the structure seems to be summarized in James 1:19.

I. Salutation	1:1
II. Prologue	1:2-18
III. Theme	1:19-20
IV. Be Swift to Hear	1:21-2:26
A. Hearing is Doing the Word	1:21-25
B. Hearing is Practicing Mercy	1:26-2:13
C. Hearing is Producing Works	2:14-26
V. Be Slow to Speak	3:1-18
A. Teaching and the tongue	3:1-12
B. Wisdom and the tongue	3:13-18
VI. Be Slow to Anger	4:1-5:12
A. Conflicts	4:1-10
B. Judging	4:11-12
C. Planning	4:13-17
D. Being treated unjustly	5:1-12
VII Epilogue	5:13-20

Purpose

The first purpose of James is to exhort Christians to respond properly to trials. These Jewish believers were in the midst of a number of trials, both from without and from within the congregation. If they were to mature, they would have to be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.

The second purpose of James is to warn Christians in trials about the dangers of the trials. Besides not trusting the Lord and thus not enduring, James speaks of temptation (Jas. 1:13-18), a lack of works (Jas. 1:21-2:28), a misuse of the tongue (Jas. 3:1-12), judging one another (Jas. 4:11-12), and bitterness (Jas. 5:6-12).

Summary: James, the half-brother of Jesus Christ, wrote to Jewish Christians outside Palestine who were going through various trials to exhort them to respond properly.

If in the midst of a trial, you trust God and are swift to obey, slow to speak, and slow to get angry, you will obtain maximum maturity.

1 PETER: THE BOOK OF THE SALVATION OF THE SOUL

First Peter has been called “the epistle of the living hope” and could be called the epistle of suffering. Farrar says: “Of all the writings of the New Testament, the First Epistle of Peter is perhaps the most anciently and most unanimously attested’ (Scroggie), “the Job of the New Testament” (Boa).

Author

First Peter 1:1 says that Peter penned this portion of the New Testament. The similarities between 1 Peter and Peter’s sermon in Acts as well as tradition support this.

Recipients

The book repeatedly mentions suffering. Some conclude that 1 Peter was written after the outbreak of the persecution of Nero, which was in the fall of 64 AD. Others, however, point out that there is no evidence in the epistle that the persecutions had resulted in martyrdom. Therefore, the epistle was written on the eve of the outbreak of Nero’s persecution. The date is either late 63 or early 64 AD.

First Peter 1:1 says, “To the pilgrims of the dispersion.” That, plus the injunction to keep their behavior “excellent among the Gentiles” (1 Pet. 2:12), gives the impression that the readers were Jewish Christians. Yet the content of the letter indicates that they were Gentiles (1 Pet. 2:9, 10, as well as 1:14, 18; 4:3-4). Both conclusions are right. The Gentiles were probably in the majority. These Jewish and Gentile believers lived in Asia Minor in regions not mentioned in Acts (Pontus, Cappadocia, and Bithynia, 1 Pet. 1:1).

The occasion of the letter was the news of growing opposition (1 Pet. 1:6; 3:13-17; 4:12-19; 5:9-10). These believers were being slandered and attacked because of their faith (1 Pet. 4:14, 15). They were hated because of their withdrawal from sinful practices. There were also charges of disloyalty to the state (1 Pet. 2:13-17). Peter calls these “fiery trials” (1 Pet. 4:12).

Message

The subject is the “salvation of the soul,” meaning “life” (1 Pet. 1:9). The message is that believers save themselves from spiritual damage by living a holy, loving, submissive, serving life, even in the midst of suffering.

Structure

First Peter is a letter. It begins with a standard salutation, followed by a thanksgiving. After the body of the book, there are personal greetings and a benediction. Only the customary “prayer” is missing.

I. Salutation	1:1-2
II. Thanksgiving	1:3-12
III. The Body of the Letter	1:13-5:9
A. Salvation of the Soul in Relation to God	1:13-21

1. Hope	1:13
2. Holiness	1:14-16
3. Heavenly Fear	1:17-21
B. Salvation of the Soul in Relation to the Church (believers)	1:22-2:10
1. Love the Brethren	1:22-25
2. Desire the Word	2:1-10
C. Salvation of the Soul in Relation to the World	2:11-3:7
1. Through Abstinence from Lust	2:11-12
2. Through Subjection	2:13-3:7
D. Salvation of the Soul in Relation to Life	3:8-4:6
1. Through Blessing	3:8-12
2. Through Suffering	3:13-4:6
E. Salvation of the Soul in Relation to the End	4:7-5:9
1. Through Service	4:7-11
2. Through Suffering	4:12-19
3. Through Shepherding	5:1-4
4. Through Submission	5:5-9
IV. Personal Greetings and Benediction	5:10-14

Purpose

The first purpose of 1 Peter is to exhort the original readers. Peter says he wrote to exhort and to testify (1 Pet. 5:12). There are 34 imperatives in the book. Peter exhorts believers to holiness, love, growth, submission, service, etc., all of which can be summarized as salvation (1 Pet. 1:9), or the grace of God (1 Pet. 5:12).

The second purpose of 1 Peter is to testify. His exhortation to stand fast in the faith constitutes his testimony to the fact that this is the true grace of God (1 Pet. 5:12). They were facing and would face in future persecution (1 Pet. 3:14), suffering, fiery trials (1 Pet. 4:12). Such pressure would (no doubt) tempt them to doubt, faintheartedness and failure. Peter assures them that they are right in spite of the opposition they are experiencing.

Summary: Peter wrote to the Jewish and Gentile Christians to testify concerning the true grace of God and to exhort them to save themselves from a life of fleshly lust by submitting to the will of God, even in the face of suffering.

Believers save themselves from spiritual damage by living a holy, loving, submissive, serving life even in the midst of suffering.

2 PETER: THE BOOK OF THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

Second Peter has been called “the most controversial book in the New Testament” (Hiebert), “the most controverted epistle of the New Testament” (Baxter), and “Peter’s swan song” (McGee).

Author

The epistle itself bears abundant testimony to Peter’s authorship. It claims to have been written by “Simon Peter” (2 Pet. 1:1). It even claims to be his second letter (1 Pet. 3:1). The author refers to the Lord’s prediction about Peter’s death (Jn. 21:18, 19; 2 Pet. 1:14). He also claimed he was an eyewitness of the transfiguration (1 Pet. 1:16-18). If 2 Peter was written prior to Jude, Jude is the earliest attestation of 2 Peter.

Recipients

If 2 Peter 3:1 is referring to 1 Peter, and most say that it is, 2 Peter was written after 1 Peter, which was penned in 64 AD. If Peter were alive in 67 AD, when Paul wrote 2 Timothy, it is likely that Paul would have mentioned him. So Peter must have been martyred before then. Second Peter 1:14 seems to indicate the letter was written just prior to his death, which was probably in 64 AD. So 2 Peter was probably written in 64 AD.

Second Peter 3:1 seems to suggest that Peter had in mind the same readers of Asia Minor as he did in 1 Peter, although the more general salutation of 2 Peter 1:1 would allow for a wider audience. The occasion of this epistle was false teachers who “were coming” in the future (2 Pet. 2:1, 3:3). They will deny the Second Coming of Christ (2 Pet. 3:4), and live a lustful lifestyle (2 Pet. 3:3, 2:10, 14), and lead others, even believers astray (2 Pet. 2:14).

These false teachers denied the Lord who bought them (2 Pet. 2:1), were daring and irreverent (2 Pet. 2:10b, 12), and scoffed at the promise of the Lord’s return (2 Pet. 3:3-4). They lived immoral lives (2 Pet. 2:13), seduced unstable souls (2 Pet. 2:14, 18), and caused the way of truth to be blasphemed (2 Pet. 2:2). They made great promises of liberty, but were the slaves of sin (2 Pet. 2:19). They were insubordinate to established authority (2 Pet. 2:10c, 12). It is apparent that these false teachers were already at work in certain places (2 Pet. 2:11, 12, 17, 18, 20; 3:5, 16), but with prophetic insight, Peter saw that the evil would become much more widespread (2 Pet. 2:1, 2; 3:3).

Message

The subject of 2 Peter is the Second Coming of Christ. He begins by talking about precious promises (2 Pet. 1:4). Chapter 3 seems to describe these promises as Christ’s coming (2 Pet. 3:4, 9, 13). Furthermore, he talks about the coming of the Lord in chapter 1 (2 Pet. 1:16), and at the end of chapter 3 (2 Pet. 3:4, 10, 12). False teachers and scoffers denied these truths and led believers into a life of ungodliness. A reminder of these truths provokes us to escape the corruption that is in the world and live godly lives (2 Pet. 3:11). The message is in light of the return of the Lord, believers should avoid false teachers and live godly lives.

Structure

Second Peter is basically in the form of an ancient letter. It has a salutation, a body and a benediction.

I. Salutation	1:1, 2
II. Prologue: Promises make Godliness Possible and Profitable	1:3-11
III. The Body of the Letter	1:12-3:13
A. The Promises of Prophecies are Sure	1:12-21
B. The Perversions of False Teachers will be Judged	2:1-22
1. Judgment	2:1-9
2. Their Nature	2:10-17
3. Their Allurements	2:18-22
C. The Pronouncements of Scoffers are Wrong	3:1-13
1. Scoffers will Deny the Second Coming	3:1-7
2. The Lord is not slack concerning His Promises	3:8-10
3. Therefore, We should live Godly Lives	3:11-13
IV. Conclusion	3:14-18

Purpose

The first purpose of 2 Peter is to warn against false teachers and scoffers. While the purpose of the letter is nowhere stated as such, the last two verses summarize the two-fold purpose. It is evident from the content that Peter means to warn believers lest they be led astray with the error of the wicked (2 Pet. 3:17). Chapter 2 warns of the false teachers, who walk according to the flesh and despise authority (2 Pet. 2:10). They are self-willed (2 Pet. 2:10), wicked (2 Pet. 2:14), and will be judged (2 Pet. 2:1, 3, 4). The heretics will use deceptive words (2 Pet. 2:3) to lead believers astray (2 Pet. 2:2, 18, 3:17). Chapter 3 warns against scoffers who deny the promise of the Lord's coming (2 Pet. 3:3). This, too, has a bearing on godliness (2 Pet. 3:11).

The second purpose of 2 Peter is to remind them of what they knew and to exhort them to heed it so they would grow. Peter does not claim to be telling them anything new. He repeatedly says he is reminding them of things they already knew (2 Pet. 1:12, 15; 3:1, 15, 17). His purpose is to remind them and thus exhort them to godliness and growth (2 Pet. 1:5; 3:11, 17, 18). These two are connected. Resisting error will help insure godliness and growth.

Summary: Peter wrote his second epistle to a wider audience to warn them against coming false teachers and scoffers and to remind them that since the Lord is returning they should live godly lives.

In light of the return of the Lord, believers should avoid false teachers and live godly lives.

1 JOHN: THE BOOK OF FELLOWSHIP WITH THE TRUE GOD

First John has been called “a wonderful epistle” (Baxter), “the family epistle” (McGee). It is the most difficult book in the Bible to interpret because it is abstract and absolute. Moreover, some abstract absolute statements seem contradictory (1 Jn. 3:9 and 1:8; 5:16 and 5:18).

Author

Nowhere in the book does the author identify himself. He was an eyewitness of the earthly life of Christ (1 Jn. 1:1-2) and he calls himself an apostle (in 1 Jn. 1:1-3; 4:14 “we” equals apostles, “you” are the readers and “they” are the false teachers). The style and vocabulary are so similar to John’s Gospel that most acknowledge that these books are by the same author. An early and universal tradition supports this conclusion.

Recipients

Nothing in the book indicates a date of composition. Most suggest a late date, around 90-95 AD. The assumption is that the Gospel of John was written late and 1 John was written after that. There is, however, evidence that the *Gospel* was written before 70 AD, namely, the present tense in John 5:1.

To determine the date, consider: 1) The tone suggests that an elderly gentleman is addressing a younger generation. He repeatedly calls them “little children.” 2) Tradition says John resided at Ephesus and wrote to the churches of Asia (western Turkey). 3) Since there is no indication that Timothy and John were at Ephesus at the same time, John must have come after Timothy. Paul was at Ephesus several times between 53 to 57 AD. Timothy was there with Paul in 62/63 AD. Timothy was still there when Paul wrote to him in 67 AD. Evidently, Timothy left after that. Hebrews refers to his imprisonment and it was written about 68 or 69 AD. So John did not arrive in Ephesus until after 67 AD. Therefore, 1 John was probably written between 67-90 AD, possibly about 80 AD.

John wrote to believers (1 Jn. 2:12-14, 21; 5:13). There was no doubt in his mind that they were Christians (1 Jn. 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21; also 2:12, 18 and see “brethren” in 2:7; 3:13 and “beloved” in 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11). They had been believers for a long time (there was nothing new to offer them; 1 Jn. 2:7, 18, 20, 21, 24, 27; 3:11). It is even possible that he is addressing leaders. He tells them that they possess an anointing and do not need teachers (1 Jn. 2:20, 27). In the Old Testament, it was the leaders—the prophets, priests and kings—who were anointed (2 Cor. 1:21 may refer to Paul’s apostolic office). It at least implies that they were spiritually mature since the immature need human teachers (Heb. 5:12). Even so, the book was to be read by all.

They were confronted with many false teachers (“antichrists;” 1 Jn. 2:18-26; 4:1) who evidently, originated in Judea (1 Jn. 2:19). They denied that Jesus was the Christ (1 Jn. 2:22). Apparently, this was a denial of the incarnation. They probably claimed to have the Father while denying the truth of the Son (1 Jn. 2:22, 23).

Message

The subject of 1 John is fellowship (1 Jn. 1:3). The message is believers should abide in correct doctrine to maintain fellowship with God and love for the brethren.

Structure

First John is commonly called a letter, yet it does not have the elements of an ancient letter, like a salutation, thanksgiving, prayer, etc. It is more like an essay.

I. Prologue	1:1-4
II. Fellowship with God who is Light	1:5-2:28
A. The Provision for Fellowship	1:5-2:2
B. The Proof for Fellowship	2:3-11
C. The Position of the Readers	2:12-14
D. The Preventatives to Fellowship	2:15-28
1. Love for the World	2:15-17
2. Listening to False Prophets	2:18-28
III. Fellowship with God who is Righteous	2:29-4:6
A. The Manifestation of God's Children	2:29-4:6
B. The Manifestation of Righteousness	3:10b-24
1. What Love is not	3:10b-15
2. What Love is	3:16-18
3. What Love does	3:19-24
C. The Manifestation of the Spirit of Truth	4:1-6
IV. Fellowship with God who is Love	4:7-5:13
A. Reasons for Love	4:7-21
B. Power for Love	5:1-13
C. Practice of Love	5:14-17
V. Epilogue	5:18-21

Purposes

The first purpose of 1 John is to promote fellowship (pastoral). First John was written to promote fellowship (1 Jn. 1:3), to prevent sin (1 Jn. 2:1), to proclaim forgiveness (1 Jn. 2:12), to protect the saints (1 Jn. 2:26), and to provide assurance (1 Jn. 5:13). The first of these is the purpose of the whole book. The others refer to the immediate context. So the purpose of 1 John as a whole is fellowship (1 Jn. 1:3).

The second purpose of 1 John is to protect against the deception of the false teachers (polemical). If they are deceived by false doctrine, they will not continue in fellowship.

Summary: John wrote to believers dealing with false teachers to urge them to abide in what they heard from the beginning so they would maintain their fellowship with God and love for the brethren.

Believers should maintain their fellowship with the Lord and manifest their faith through correct doctrine, righteous living, and wholehearted love for the brethren.

2 JOHN: THE BOOK OF THE TRUTH OF GOD

Second John has been called “a friendly, personal letter’ (Tidwell). It is “notable as being the only one in the New Testament exclusively addressed to a lady” (Lee).

Author

The author identifies himself as the elder (2 Jn. 1). There is nothing else in the book to further pinpoint the identity of the author. The similarities between 2 John and 1 John, as well as tradition, lead to the conclusion that the author was the apostle John.

Recipients

There is nothing (absolutely nothing) in the book to indicate the date of writing. Consequently, guesses range from the early 60s to the late 90s. Most reason that 1 and 2 John deal with the same problem and use similar (in some cases identical) material. Therefore, they were written at about the same time. That makes sense (Eph. and Col.). Like 1 John, 2 John was probably written between 67-90 AD, possibly about 80 AD.

John says he is writing to an elect lady and her children. There are two basic interpretations of this phrase: 1) that it refers to an individual Christian lady; 2) that it is used figuratively of a church. Some, among those who say it was written to an individual lady, go further and say her name is Lady Electa, but that term is not known to have been a personal name. Others claim that she is an unnamed, unknown Christian.

Among those who believe the term is a personification of a church are those who hold that it is a reference to the universal church. “Is not the church the bride of Christ?” they ask. Most, however, see it as a reference to a local church. The content as well as the use of the plural in verses 6-12 are most appropriate to a community. Also, consider that if the lady’s name is Electa, she had a sister by the same name (1 Jn. 13). Furthermore, if an actual Christian woman were addressed, the greeting would have come from her sister and not from her sister’s children (2 Jn. 13).

Like the recipients of 1 John, the readers of 2 John were faced with false teachers (2 Jn. 7). John instructed the church not to be deceived by them (2 Jn. 8), nor to receive them (2 Jn. 10a), nor to greet them (2 Jn. 10b). If they greeted them and received them, they would be deceived by them. If they were deceived by them, they would cease to obey God and love others (2 Jn. 6).

Message

The one subject that fits everything in the epistle is truth (see verse 1 where it appears twice and verses 2, 3, and 4). Other verses talk about truth, but do not use the word (for example, 2 Jn. 5, 6, 7, 9). The message is believers should continue practicing the truth and not support deceivers of the truth.

Structure

Second John follows the format of an ancient letter, at least to a degree. It contains the standard salutation (including author, recipients, and greeting), a body, and ends with

personal greetings. It does not have the familiar thanksgiving and prayer (or benediction). The body is divided into two parts: exhortation and warning.

I. Salutation	1-3
II. The Body of the Letter	4-11
A. The Practice of Truth	4-6
1. The Walk in Truth	4
2. The Walk in Love	5-6
B. The Protection of Truth	7-11
1. The Danger	7
2. The Duty	8-11
III. Personal Greetings	12-13

Purposes

The first purpose of 2 John is to exhort a local church to practice the truth (2 Jn. 5). He begins this exhortation by commending the fact that some of the children walk in the truth (2 Jn. 4) and develops this into its end, which is love (2 Jn. 5).

The second purpose of 2 John is to warn a local church about the perverters of truth. This practice of the truth was in danger from the perverters of truth. So John writes to warn them about the deceivers, which had gone out into the world (2 Jn. 7). They were in danger of not receiving a full reward (2 Jn. 8). If they did not abide in the doctrine of Christ, they would lose out at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Don't be so "progressive" that you fail to "abide." The bottom line, in this case, is, don't receive the deceivers (2 Jn. 10).

Verse ten has been greatly misunderstood. "House" is the church, which in that day met in homes. "Coming" is not the casual visit of a stranger but the coming of a teacher claiming authority. "Receive" means to let him speak and to support him, including giving him hospitality. Don't even greet him (literally, "to rejoice or be glad") means, "Don't say, 'I'm glad to see you. I wish you well.'" It has been suggested that all this means that they should make it plain from their aloofness that in no way do you condone the activities of these men.

In short, John wrote this letter for the practice and purity of the truth.

Summary: John wrote to a local church to urge them to continue practicing the truth and to warn them not to receive deceivers.

Believers should walk in truth and not support deceivers of the truth.

3 JOHN: THE BOOK OF THE PRACTICE OF LOVE

Third John has been called the “shortest book in the Bible” and has been described as being “very personal and vivid” (Boa).

Author

Second and 3 John are alike in many ways, one of which is the way the author identifies himself. Instead of his name, he uses the term or title “the elder.” Like 2 John, 3 John gives no other information to identify the author. Tradition, however, indicates that it was John the apostle. A comparison of this epistle with the other writings of John supports that view.

Recipient

Again, 3 John is like 2 John. There is nothing (zip, zero, zilch) in this book itself that serves as a tip-off to the date of composition. Guesses range from the 60s to the 90s. The similarity of the contents of 3 John to 2 John would suggest a date close to 2 John. If that is the case, 3 John was probably written between 67-90 AD, possibly about 80 AD.

Evidently, the situation was something like this. Early Christian writers are unified in their testimony that the apostle John ended up in Ephesus. The book of Revelation does seem to confirm that. John apparently commissioned a number of traveling teachers. A team of teachers arrived with a letter of commendation from John, but a fellow named Diotrephes refused them and John’s letter (3 Jn. 9). They returned to John and reported the hostility of Diotrephes and the hospitality of Gaius.

John had led Gaius to Christ (3 Jn. 4) and they were close friends (3 Jn. 1). So John wrote to this wealthy layman to encourage him to continue receiving missionaries in spite of the opposition of Diotrephes. He also announced his intention of personally visiting to deal with the situation.

Demetrius no doubt delivered the letter to Gaius. Gaius was a common name in the Roman Empire. Three other men by that name are mentioned in the New Testament, but it is highly unlikely that any of them was the Gaius of 3 John.

Message

The subject of 3 John is love (3 Jn. 5). In John’s thought, truth is the foundation of love (1 John 2:3-11, esp. 2:4, 7ff; 3:19; 2 John 4, 5; 3 John 3, 6). Hospitality is one expression of love. In 3 John, Gaius loves others (3 Jn. 6) and Diotrephes loved himself (3 Jn. 9). The message is believers are to continue the practice of love in the form of hospitality.

Structure

Third John follows the formula of an ancient letter. It contains a salutation, prayer, body and ends with personal greetings and benediction. Only the customary thanksgiving is omitted (though John does express joy for Gaius).

I. Salutation	1
II. Prayer	2-4
III. The Body of the Letter	5-12
A. Confirmation of Gaius	5-8
1. His Example of Hospitality	5-6
2. The Explanation for Hospitality	7-8
B. Condemnation of Diotrephes	9-11
1. His Actions	9-10
2. Your Reactions	11
C. Commendation of Demetrius	12
IV. Personal Greeting and Benediction	13-14

Purpose

The first purpose of 3 John is to encourage Gaius. Apparently, Gaius was wealthy (he entertained a great deal), but not too healthy (3 Jn. 2). There was trouble at church: a strong-willed, headstrong man named Diotrephes repudiated the authority of the apostle John, suppressed a letter written to the church, refused to receive traveling teachers and tried to prevent others from receiving them, even going so far as to excommunicate those who did. With the pain in his body and the problems in his church, it would have been easy for Gaius to have stopped entertaining missionaries. He could have always used his health as an excuse. Furthermore, to continue was to ask for trouble.

John writes to encourage Gaius to continue doing what he was doing (3 Jn. 5-6) and to tell him not to imitate Diotrephes (3 Jn. 11); John would deal with him when he arrived (3 Jn. 10).

The second purpose of 3 John is to endorse Demetrius. Demetrius may have just been the bearer of the letter, the postman, but, on the other hand, he may have been one of the traveling teachers. Either way, he would need hospitality. So John writes to endorse him in the highest possible terms.

Summary: John wrote to Gaius to encourage him to continue the practice of love in the form of hospitality and to endorse Demetrius.

Hospitality is an important form of love.

JUDE: THE BOOK OF FALSE TEACHERS

The epistle of Jude has been called “one of the most solemn in the Bible” (Lee), “a powerful fragment,” “sharply severe” (Baxter), a “vigorous little epistle” (Hiebert), “the acts of the apostates,” “the difficult and neglected letter” (Barclay), “the vestibule to the Revelation” (Coder).

Author

The author says he is Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James (Jude 1). Although some of the Old Testament prophets do, no other New Testament writer identifies himself by his family connection. That relationship limits the possibilities to two different men: 1) Jude (not Iscariot), one of the apostles (also called Lebbaeus, or Thaddeus, Mt. 10:3 and Mk. 3:18 with Lk. 6:16, Acts 1:13 and Jn. 14:22). 2) Jude, the half-brother of the Lord (Mt. 13:55 and Mk. 6:2). In Jude 17, the author distinguishes himself from the apostles. Therefore, the author must be Jude, the half-brother of the Lord. Two of the half-brothers of the Lord wrote Scripture: James and Jude. Both call themselves His slave. Jude adds that he is the brother of James (not of Jesus!).

Recipients

Second Peter and Jude are similar, which is not coincidental (2 Pet. 2:1-3:4 and Jude 4-18). Second Peter was written first. It predicts the coming of false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1; 2:3:3), while Jude records the fulfillment of Peter’s prophecy (Jude 4, 11, 12, 17, 18). Thus, while some say that Peter quotes Jude, it was Jude who used 2 Peter. Jude quotes 2 Peter 3:3 (Jude 18) and acknowledges it as a quote from the apostles (also 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1). Therefore, Jude could not have been written before 64 AD, the year Peter wrote his second epistle. It is likely that some years passed between the prediction in 2 Peter and the fulfillment in Jude. Jude was probably written about 75 AD.

Jude addresses believers in general (Jude 1). Nevertheless, he had a specific group in mind. They were troubled by ungodly men (Jude 4), who were infiltrators into their love feasts (Jude 12). These men were false teachers (Jude 8). These false teachers were libertines (Jude 4). Jude calls them dreamers (Jude 8), which suggests the possibility that they claimed prophetic visions. He leaves no doubt that they were ungodly men (Jude 4, 5-10, 15, 18, etc.) who were headed for judgment (Jude 13, 14-15).

Message

The subject of Jude is false teachers. The message is God will judge the ungodly, including false teachers, and believers should contend for the faith.

Structure

The literary structure is basically that of an ancient letter. It begins with a salutation and ends with a benediction. It does not have the customary thanksgiving, prayer and personal greetings. The body of the book is divided into two parts, each beginning with a reference (in triplet) to the Old Testament (Jude 5-7 and 11). Each of the Old Testament sections is applied to the infiltrators (“these,” Jude 8, 10 and 12, 16, 19).

I. Salutation	1-2
II. Prologue	3-4
III. The Body of the Letter	5-23
A. Sinners will be Judged	5-10
1. Sinners in the Old Testament were Judged	5-7
2. Likewise, these Sinners will be Judged	8-10
B. False Teachers will be Judged	11-23
1. They are Unbelievers	11
2. Their Characteristics	12-15
3. Their Conversation	16-18
4. Their Constitution	19-23
IV. Doxology	24-25

Purposes

One of the purposes of Jude is to remind believers that God will judge the ungodly. Even though the believers knew false teachers would come (Jude 17-18), some false teachers had already slipped into their love feast (Jude 12) unnoticed (Jude 4).

Another purpose of Jude is to exhort believers to contend for the faith (Jude 3). The Greek word translated “contend” means “to contend for a prize, fight, struggle, strive.”

Summary: Jude wrote to believers to remind them that God will judge the ungodly and to exhort them to contend for the faith.

How do believers contend for the faith? Most of Jude deals with ungodly infiltrators into the love feasts of the believers, but toward the end, he begins to speak directly to the readers. Since he begins by saying that he is writing to exhort them to contend for the faith, his exhortations must be exhortations on how to contend for the faith.

The exhortations include: 1) Remember: mockers will come living ungodly lives (Jude 17-18). 2) Remain: keep yourself in the love of God (Jude 20-21). Jude 20-21 consists of one command (“keep yourself in the love of God”) and three participles (building, praying, looking). The way to keep yourself in the love of God is by “building, praying, looking” (Jn. 15:10). 3) Rescue others (keep yourself in the love of God, Jude 22-23). While some take these verses to be referring to unsaved people, they are written to believers. (The majority of Greek manuscripts contain “them” in Jude 24.) Believers are to rescue other believers from ungodly living (Jude 24-25; Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:19-20).

Believers should contend for the faith.

REVELATION: THE BOOK OF JUDGMENT BY JESUS CHRIST

Revelation has been called “the only prophetic book in the New Testament” (there are 17 in the Old Testament), “a book of consummation” (Boa), and “a splendid finish to the divine library” (Lee). The name of the book is taken from the first verse. This is a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Author

The author calls himself John (Rev. 1:1, 1:4, 1:9, and 22:8), “a servant of Christ” (Rev. 1:1), and “your brother and companion in tribulation” (Rev. 1:9). Tradition says the author was John the apostle. The number of similarities between Revelation and the other books of John (distinctive terms like “word,” “lamb,” and “truth,” and conflicting themes like light and darkness, love and hatred, good and evil) support this conclusion.

Recipients

John states that he was banished to Patmos (Rev. 1:9) and he wrote before his release (Rev. 1:11; 22:7, 9, 10, 18, 19). Clement of Rome, Irenaeus (a disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of John), et .al. declared that John was banished to Patmos in the 15th year of Domitian, who ruled from 80-95 AD, and that he was released by Nerva (96 AD). Therefore, John wrote Revelation in 95 or 96 AD. Revelation was addressed to the seven churches of Asia Minor (Rev. 1:4, 10, 11; 22:16). John begins with Ephesus and continues clockwise to Laodicea. At least some of these churches were suffering persecution (Rev. 1:9; 2:10, 13; 6:9; 20:4). Domitian was the first to demand emperor worship while he was alive. That led to persecution.

Message

The subject is a revelation of Jesus Christ as Judge. He is the Judge of the church and the world. The message is that since Jesus Christ is the Judge of the churches, as well as the world, persecuted Christians should be comforted and complacent Christians should be challenged to endure so they will be rewarded.

Structure

The literary form is a blend of epistolary and apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature uses symbols that are often arbitrary (a beast with seven heads and ten horns). The literary structure is given in Revelation 1:9 and 4:1: things seen (Rev. 1:9-20), things which are (Rev. 2-3), things which will take place after this (Rev. 4-22). The “things seen” are the revelation of Jesus Christ as Judge. The “things which are” are seven letters to seven churches. The “things which will take place after this” include three series of judgments (the seals, trumpets, and bowls) on the earth just prior to the coming of Christ, the Second Coming, the millennium, the Great White Throne Judgment, and the New Heavens and the New Earth.

I. Prologue	1:1-8
II. Christ Revealed as Judge	1:9-20
III. Christ Revealed as Judge of the Church	2:1-3:22
A. To Ephesus	2:1-7
B. To Smyrna	2:8-11
C. To Pergamos	2:12-17
D. To Thyatira	2:18-29
E. To Sardis	3:1-6
F. To Philadelphia	3:7-13
G. To Laodicea	3:14-22
IV. Christ Revealed as Judge of the World	4:1-22:5
A. Introduction: The Judge	4:1-5:14
B. The Seven Seal Judgments	6:1-8:1
C. The Seven Trumpet Judgments	8:2-11:19
D. The Explanatory Prophecies	12:1-14:20
E. The Seven Bowl Judgments	15:1-16:21
F. The Judgment of Babylon	17, 18
G. The Second Coming	19:1-21
H. The Millennium	20:1-10
V. The Great White Throne Judgment	20:11-15
VI. The New Heavens and the New Earth	21:1-22:5
VII. Epilogue	22:6-20
VIII. Benediction	22:21

Purposes

One of the purposes of Revelation is to comfort persecuted Christians. When Domitian became emperor, he demanded worship, which led to persecution. Some were suffering, even to death (see Rev. 1:9, where he says, “companions in tribulation;” 2:10, 13; 6:9; 20:4). It must have looked as if wicked men were in control and evil would prevail. John wrote to comfort and to reassure believers that Christ will eventually deal with the nations, judge sin on the earth, establish His kingdom, and bring in everlasting righteousness.

Another purpose of Revelation is to challenge complacent Christians. Some believers were lax and lukewarm. The Ephesians had lost their first love (Rev. 2:4), Pergamos and Thyatira allowed things they ought not (Rev. 2:15-20), and the Laodiceans were lukewarm (Rev. 3:16). John wanted to challenge them to steadfastness and perseverance, so he writes to remind them that the Lord is returning and He has His reward with Him (Rev. 22:12).

Summary: The apostle John wrote to the seven churches of Asia Minor, revealing Jesus Christ as Judge of the churches and the world to comfort persecuted Christians and challenge complacent Christians. The present persecution points to the more severe persecutions that are to come.

Jesus Christ will judge believers as well as the world. How shall we then live?