

A Survey of the Bible – The Old Testament

The Old Testament is essentially about three things; God forming a chosen family of people into a nation called Israel; God giving the nation a land; and the nation's obedience and disobedience and God's response to it. I'm going to divide the Old Testament into nine different chronological periods and give a brief overview of it.

#1 - The Beginnings **(Genesis 1-11)**

In this period, the Bible records two beginnings. The first is the beginning of the world in chapters 1-3. The second is the beginning of the nation of Israel in chapters 4-11.

Chapters 4-11 lead up to the birth of the first Jew, Abraham. It is from Abraham that the nation of Israel comes.

The purpose of chapters 1-11 is twofold.

The first is to answer two of the ultimate questions of human existence. Chapters 1-3 tell us how we got here – God created us. It also tells us why we are the way that we are – God's creation including us is fallen.

The second purpose is to introduce us to Abraham. Chapters 4-11 record the events and genealogies that lead us to him.

This period runs from the date of creation (anywhere between 25,000 and 10,000 BC) to 2100 BC.

#2 – The Patriarchs **(Genesis 12-45, Job)**

Most of you know what a patriarch is. It's a father. In this case, it is the father or the fathers of the nation of Israel. There are three patriarchs – Abraham, his son Isaac, and Isaac's son Jacob. This second period runs from approximately 2091 BC to 1876 BC, which covers the lifespans of the three patriarchs.

This section of Scripture contains the theological foundation of the whole Bible. That foundation is Genesis 12:1-3. The entire Bible, Old Testament and New, rests on these three verses. The Old Testament and New Testament are nothing more than an unfolding of them. See the handout titled *The Theological Foundation of the Bible*.

Although it is not known when Job lived, the book about him is included in this period. The contents of the book suggest that he lived in the patriarchal period, probably before Abraham was born.

#3 – The Sojourn in Egypt **(Genesis 46:1-Exodus 12:36)**

In approximately 1876 BC, Jacob and his family settled in Egypt. God blessed them there and their descendants multiplied like the stars.

One of the Pharaohs feared their growing numbers, however, and enslaved them. God then raised up Moses who eventually took them out of Egypt. This occurred in approximately 1446 BC, 430 years after Jacob and his family settled there.

What we see in this third period is God fulfilling His promise in Genesis 12:2 to multiply Abraham's descendants and make them a nation. By the time they left Egypt, Abraham's offspring had become a nation of 2½ million people.

#4 – The Wilderness Wandering and Conquest **(Exodus 12:37-40:38; Leviticus; Numbers; Deuteronomy; Joshua)**

This fourth period runs from 1446 BC to 1400 BC. It encompasses 40 years of wandering in the wilderness and 6 years after that to conquer the nations in the Promised Land.

Moses led the Jews out of Egypt to Mt. Sinai where they camped for a year. This year is covered in Exodus 12:37 to the end of that book, Leviticus, and Numbers 1:1-10:10.

They then left Mt. Sinai and three weeks later arrived in a place on the outskirts of the Promised Land called Kadesh-barnea.

The land that God promised was already inhabited by 7 powerful nations. The Jews would have to defeat them before they possessed the land.

So, from Kadesh-barnea, Moses sent out 12 spies to reconnoiter the land. 10 came back and gave a bad report that they couldn't defeat these nations. Two spies, Joshua and Caleb, said that they could in God's power.

The vast majority of the people listened to the 10 spies and decided not to go in. God punished them by making them wander as nomads in the wilderness for 40 years – until that adult generation died off.

These events took place from 1445 BC to 1406 BC and are covered in Numbers 10:11-19:22.

After the wandering, God brought the Jews back to Trans-Jordan area, the eastern part of the Promised Land. They conquered that area and divided it between three tribes. That is covered in Numbers 20-32.

They then came to Kadesh-barnea where they had been 40 years before just on the south end of the Promised Land. There, before going into the Land, God gave them the book of Deuteronomy to govern their national and individual lives there.

Moses then died and Joshua led the Jews into the Promised Land where they conquered the nations that dwelled there. This took place during a period of six years from 1406 to 1400 BC.

The Jewish people consisted of 12 tribes, each of which was descended from a particular son of Jacob. Each tribe, except Levi, was given its own assigned portion of the Promised Land.

The conquest and assigning of the land is covered in the book of Joshua.

With the conquest in Joshua, God fulfilled His promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1. He gave the nation that his descendants formed a land to call their own.

#5 – The Judges **(Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel 1-8)**

The fifth period is the period of the judges. This period runs from 1400 to 1100 BC, a period of 300 years.

As I've already noted, each tribe had been given an assigned section of land. There was no central government that bound them together. The tribes were largely independent and only loosely connected by a common language, religion, and history.

The main message of the book of Judges is failure. There were two basic failures.

The first was not driving the Canaanites out of the land. The "Canaanites" is a general term that refers to the pagan nations that inhabited the Promised Land when the Jews entered it. God commanded them to drive these nations out of the land but they didn't. They conquered them and co-existed with them.

The second failure followed the first. The Jewish people began to follow the pagan ways of the Canaanites. They began worshipping their gods and embracing their morality and lifestyle.

Chapters 3-16 record successive periods of oppression by different Canaanite nations. Each period involved a cycle. First, the Jewish people sin. Second, God punishes them by allowing a nation to oppress them. Third, the Jewish people repent. Fourth, God raises up a judge to deliver them.

The judges were military and civil leaders. They led the people to victory militarily and then helped rule during peacetime. There are 13 named judges in the book of Judges.

Chapters 17-21 record different sad episodes. The purpose of these chapters is to reveal the depths of sin to which even God's people could sink and did.

The events in the book of Ruth took place in approximately 1150 BC, during the judgeship of Gideon, about 100 years before the Period of the Judges ends.

The purpose of this book is twofold. First, it introduces us to the family that eventually led to the birth of King David. Second, it shows that while God chose the Jewish people to work through, His plan of salvation extended beyond them to the Gentiles as well. This was of course in accordance with His third promise to Abraham. Ruth was a non-Jew, which means that David and even more importantly Jesus Himself descended from a Gentile ancestor.

#6 – The United Kingdom

(1 Samuel 9-31; 2 Samuel; 1 Kings 1-11; 1 Chronicles; 2 Chronicles 1-9; Psalms; Proverbs; Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs)

The sixth period is the united monarchy. Notice that this period began in 1 Samuel 9 with the appearance of Saul. Samuel was the last judge and the first prophet. His judgeship ended when the tribes of Israel appointed their first king – Saul. Saul's reign begins in 1 Samuel 10.

The United Monarchy refers to the period when the 12 tribes of Israel were united under the leadership of one king. This period lasted from 1050 BC, when King Saul's reign began, and ended with the death of King Solomon 119 years later in 931 BC.

There were three kings who ruled over a united Israel – Saul, David, and David's son Solomon.

David is considered the greatest king that Israel ever had. He made Jerusalem the capitol of Israel and finally conquered and possessed all the land that God promised His people.

Solomon succeeded David and the nation prospered under his rule. It appeared as if Israel would finally become the nation God wanted it to be so that He could fulfill the third of His promises – to bless the nations through it. But alas, it was not to be as we see in the seventh period.

#7 – The Divided Kingdom: Israel
(1 Kings 12:25-22:53; 2 Kings 1-17; Jonah, Hosea, and Amos)

The seventh period began with the twelve tribes splitting into two nations, each with its own king and government. This is why it is called the Divided Kingdom.

Solomon had committed himself to grandiose building projects and burdened the people with two things: heavy taxation and forced labor. The people had to commit not just their money but also their time as well to the central government and its projects.

When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam was to become king. The 10 northern tribes of Israel sent representatives to him asking him to lessen the burden of taxation and forced labor. But listening to his youngest counselors, he replied that he would increase not decrease the burden of those things.

There are always been tension between the 10 northern tribes and the 2 southern tribes, Judah and Benjamin and Rehoboam's obstinacy was the straw that broke the camel's back. The 10 northern tribes revolted and ended up forming a new and separate nation with their own king and capitol, which was eventually the city of Samaria. At that point, God's people were two nations. The ten northern tribes were called Israel and the two southern tribes, Benjamin and Judah, called Judah.

Our own civil war is a parallel that helps us understand this. If the South had won the war, we would then have had two nations where there once had been one – the United States of America and the Confederate States of America.

That was the situation regarding Israel and Judah when the split occurred in 931 BC.

Focusing now on the nation of Israel, the ten northern tribes, it existed as a nation for just over two centuries – from 931 BC to 722 BC.

If this nation had followed God and worshipped and served Him, He would have blessed and prospered it and used it to fulfill the third promise – to bless the nations. But it didn't.

Nineteen kings reigned, representing nine ruling families. Eight of the nineteen were either assassinated or committed suicide. God considered all the kings bad ones because each either worshipped Him at golden calf centers, thus breaking the 2nd commandment, or worshipped the false god, Baal, thus breaking the 1st commandment.

Because the kings and the large proportion of the people did this, God withheld his blessing from Israel. To make a long story short, in 722 BC, a people called the Assyrians conquered and destroyed Israel. It exiled a large portion of the population into other lands and put people from foreign lands in their place. This mixing of populations, as you can guess, eventually led to intermarriage between them. The result was a group of people that were half Gentile and half Jewish.

You've heard of these people because they're mentioned in the gospels and Acts. They were the Samaritans. Jesus ministered to the woman at the well, a Samaritan. Philip went to Samaria to preach to the Samaritans and so on. These were the descendents of the mixed marriages I've just described.

Anyway, the bottom line is that Israel ceased to exist as a nation in 722 BC.

God sent several celebrated prophets to minister to the northern nation of Israel. Elijah and Elisha, for instance, ministered to Israel. So did three of the Old Testament prophets who wrote books – Jonah, Hosea, and Amos.

I would point out that the Scripture references for Israel and Judah in the chronological table are generally but not specifically accurate.

Notice that 2 Kings 1-17 are said to be the history of Israel. But there are passages in that section that are about kings of Judah.

Notice that 2 Kings 11:1-25:30 are about the history of Judah. But there are passages interspersed in that section that are about the Kings of Israel.

The purpose of the table and the passages listed is for general understanding.

#7 – The Divided Kingdom: Judah

(1 Kings 14:21-15:24; 2 Kings 8:16-29; 2 Kings 11:1-25:30; 2 Chronicles 10:1-36:23; Obadiah; Joel; Isaiah; Micah; Nahum; Zephaniah; Jeremiah; and Habakkuk)

Now let's move to the history of the two southern tribes, Judah and Benjamin, which formed the nation of Judah.

This nation existed from 931 BC to 587 BC. You can see then that after 722 BC, when Israel was destroyed, God's chosen nation was now only the two tribes that formed the nation of Judah.

Judah's situation was like Israel's. If the nation had chosen to follow God, He would have blessed and prospered it and used it to fulfill the third promise to Abraham – to bless the nations through it. But it didn't.

Twenty kings reigned in Judah, all of which were from one family, that of David. Unlike Israel in the north, the monarchy passed from one son to another throughout the nation's history. All the kings were descendants of David. Of those twenty kings, seven were basically good kings. The others rejected the true worship of God just like all the kings of Israel did.

Judah had a more promising future than Israel, which is why God sent so many prophets to minister to it before the exile. Those included Obadiah, Joel, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk.

Remember that Assyria was the world power that destroyed Israel. But in 612 BC, the Babylonians, also called the Chaldeans, captured Assyria's capital city, Nineveh, and Babylon became the world power.

Jeremiah and Habakkuk prophesied that God was going to punish Judah for its sins by sending the Babylonians to conquer it, which happened in 605 BC, when the first exile took place.

#8 – Judah in Exile

(2 Kings 24-25; 2 Chronicles 36:5-21; Daniel; Jeremiah; Ezekiel)

That brings us to the eighth period of Old Testament history – the exile of Judah. You know what an exile is. A foreign power conquers a nation and expatriates some of its people. That means it forcibly take them out of their homeland and place them in a foreign land. There were three exiles.

The first was in 605 BC. The Babylonians under king Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and put Judah under tribute. That means that it had to pay a large amount of money each year to the Babylonian government.

Nebuchadnezzar also expatriated a few of the brightest and best Jewish young people to educate, train, and use in the administration of his empire. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were three of those young people. This was the first exile and involved an insignificant number of people.

A few years later, Judah rebelled and quit paying its annual tribute to Nebuchadnezzar. So, he sent his army to Jerusalem again in 597 BC and conquered it. He reimposed the tribute and this time exiled approximately 10,000 people. We know the number from 2 Kings 24:14-16. This included 7,000 men of might and 1,000 craftsmen.

The purpose of this exile was to weaken the strength of Judah and make it more likely to keep paying the tribute.

But Judah quit paying tribute again and rebelled against all authority of the Babylonians. So Nebuchadnezzar again sent his army, which laid siege to Jerusalem to starve it into surrender, which finally happened.

By this time, Nebuchadnezzar was fed up with Judah. Once Jerusalem surrendered, he leveled the entire city including the temple, ended the monarchy, and according to 2 Kings 25:11, 12, and 21, exiled all but the poor of the land. This third deportation was the largest and certainly involved many thousands of people.

The Babylonians didn't do to Judah what the Assyrians did to Israel though. Remember that the Assyrians not only exiled a large portion of Israel's population but also replaced them with Gentile peoples. In contrast, the Babylonians exiled a large portion of Judah's population but didn't replace it with Gentile peoples. The people belonging to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin thus did not intermarry with foreigners and become a mixed people.

This explains a tension we see in the gospels. It's apparent there that the Jewish people in the south, who were still purely Jewish, viewed the Samaritans in the north, who were partly Jewish and partly Gentile, as inferior to them.

But God loves us all equally and took His gospel to the Samaritans. Acts 8:4-8 illustrates this well. Remember that Samaria was the capitol city of Israel, the ten tribes in the north. So Philip ministered to mixed Jewish and Gentile population there.

Going back to the exile of the people of Judah, there were three expatriations – in 605, 597, and 587 BC. The exile was a short one. It lasted from 605 BC until 537 BC, approximately 68 years.

You can see where three of the prophetic books fit in here. The book of Daniel records the career of Daniel beginning in 605 BC when he was exiled to Babylon and ending in approximately 536 when he died.

Lamentations was written by Jeremiah and records the experiences of the people in Jerusalem when the Babylonians laid siege to the city in 587 BC. Again this is a poetical book but is considered part of the prophecy of Jeremiah. We see in it the nightmarish conditions in Jerusalem during the siege. The people were starving for instance. As a result, mothers actually ate their babies when they died of starvation.

Ezekiel was a prophet to the exiles of Judah in Babylon. He was exiled in the second deportation in 597 BC and ministered to Jewish exiles in Babylonia. He prophesied until 570 BC when he died.

You can see then that Jeremiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel were contemporaries. Jeremiah ministered in Jerusalem and Daniel and Ezekiel in Babylonia.

#9 – The Return of Judah

(2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4:5 and 4:24-6:22; Haggai; Zechariah; Ezra 4:6-23; Esther; Ezra 7-10; Nehemiah; Malachi)

The Persians conquered the Babylonians in 537 BC and took over their kingdom. In that same year, the Persian king, Cyrus, issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their homeland. About 50,000 did.

Ezra 1:1-6:22 record this decree and the events immediately after it.

The 50,000 Jews returned to Judah and under the leadership of Zerubbabel, began to rebuild the temple that Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed.

They laid the foundation and then received opposition from the Samaritans in the north. The Samaritans eventually persuaded Cyrus to issue a decree that stopped the rebuilding of it.

Approximately 16 years later, a new Persian king named Darius lifted the decree and the Jews were allowed to begin rebuilding the temple again.

That didn't automatically mean that they would though. After all, they had their own living to make and rebuilding the temple was a costly affair in terms of both time and money.

So God raised up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, who prophesied and persuaded the people to rebuild the temple. That is what their books are about.

So, we have the first Jews returning in 537 BC and eventually rebuilding the temple in 520 BC.

35 years later, in 485 BC, the Jews took preliminary actions to rebuild the city of Jerusalem itself. But enemies persuaded the present Persian King, Xerxes I, also called Ahasuerus, to issue a decree preventing this, which he did.

Notice on your chronological chart that there is a parenthesis in Ezra 1-6. That parenthesis is 4:6-23. This section records the events that I just described.

Obviously these events are unrelated to those of Ezra 1:1-4:5 and 4:24-6:22 the rebuilding of the temple. So why did the author of Ezra put them there?

He did so to show the pattern of opposition to God's plan for Judah. He recorded the opposition to rebuilding the temple in 4:1-5 and immediately records the same kind of opposition to rebuilding the city 35 years later.

The events in the book of Esther took place during the reign of Xerxes I and began several years after the events of Ezra 4:6-23. Many Jews had not returned to their homeland but still lived in the east where they had been exiled. Esther was one of those. She had become a queen in the court of Xerxes and God used her to deliver still exiled Jews from being slaughtered by their enemies. The book covers 479-473 BC.

We now come to the events recorded in Ezra 7-10. 15 years after the events in Esther, another large group of Jews, led by Ezra, returned to Judah. Once Ezra and this new group returned there, Ezra called the people to spiritual revival. The temple had been rebuilt but the Jews weren't as devoted to Yahweh as they should be. Ezra called them to renew their commitment to Him. Ezra's ministry lasted from 458-444 BC.

In 445 BC, another large group of Jews, led by Nehemiah, returned to Judah. This was the third return, the first two being in 537 and 458 BC.

Nehemiah returned there to lead the Jews in rebuilding the city walls of Jerusalem, which was done in 445 BC. After the walls were rebuilt, Nehemiah ruled as governor of Judah for many years. All of these events are recorded in the book of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah did go back to Persia for several years to serve there and then returned again as governor.

It was probably during his absence that Malachi prophesied in 433 BC. The people had become spiritually lethargic and Malachi called them back to being zealous followers of God.

You can see from this survey that after the Jews returned to Judah, foreign powers dominated their nation and governed it by appointing regional rulers over it. That continued through the inter-testamental period between Malachi and the coming of Jesus. As you know, the Roman Empire was the dominating foreign power.

A Survey of the Bible – the Intertestamental Period

The Intertestamental Period is the 400-year period between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament. The Old Testament ended with Malachi in 433 BC and the New Testament began with the birth of Jesus around 4 BC. I'm going to focus on two things – a brief historical background and a brief look at the Jewish groups that sprang up from that.

The historical background begins with the Persian supremacy. Remember that the Babylonians conquered Judah, carried out three different exiles, and destroyed Jerusalem. But then, the Persians conquered the Babylonians in 537 BC and allowed the Jews to return to their homeland.

The Persians controlled most the Middle East for a century after the last return. Remember that Nehemiah returned with a large group of Jews in 445 BC. The Persians dominated the Middle East for a century after that.

During thistime, high priests who were responsible to the Persian government ruled the Jews in Judah. These priests ruled at the pleasure of the Persians and reported to it.

But then a Greek named Alexander the Great conquered the Persians in 333 BC and most of the known world. Alexander was kind to the Jews. He allowed them to peacefully observe their religious laws as their high priests led them.

After Alexander died, his kingdom was divided between his generals. A general named Ptolemy and his successors ruled Egypt and Judah from 323 to 198 BC. The Ptolemies, like Alexander, were good to the Jews.

One of Alexander's other generals was named Seleucus. When Alexander died, he received the Far East and Syria to rule. In 198 BC, his successors forcefully took over Judah from the Ptolemies.

The Seleucids horribly persecuted the Jews. They plundered their temple and killed many of them. They suspended civil and religious liberties, prohibited sacrifices, and set up an altar to Jupiter in the temple where the altar of God was. They burned Old Testament scriptures and made the Jews eat swine's flesh, even offering a pig on the altar in the temple. The Jews who didn't obey or did resist were horribly tortured and killed. It was a nightmarish period of history for the Jews.

But it birthed a bright spot in Judah's history – the period of the Maccabees. A high priest named Judas ben Mattathias led a guerilla revolt against the Seleucids. His son, who came to be called "the Maccabee" finally defeated the Seleucids in 164 BC and took control of Judah. His successors, called the Maccabees, ruled Judah from 164 to 63 BC. This was a period of nationalism and relative peace in Judah.

But in 63 AD, the Romans, under Pompei, conquered Judah. The Romans ruled when Jesus was born and the New Testament begins.

The Romans ruled Judah through regional rulers who were called kings. These kings answered to the Roman emperor and were at his mercy. The regional ruler when Jesus was born, for instance, was King Herod.

The Intertestamental period gave rise to the different Jewish groups that we see in the New Testament.

Several of the groups arose out of the domination of Judah by Alexander and his Greek successors. These Jewish groups were a response to the Greek ideas that began to dominate the world.

When Greek ideas and practices were introduced into Judah, the Jews responded in two ways.

Some fervently resisted these ideas and practices and clung more tenaciously than ever to the faith of their fathers. This way of life came to be called Judaism.

Other Jews were willing to adapt their ideas and practices with those of the Greeks. This mixing of Jewish and Greek ideas and practices came to be called Hellenism.

There was ultimately a clash between Judaism and Hellenism, which resulted in several groups.

One of those groups was the Pharisees. Remember that the Seleucids ruled Judah from 198 to 164 BC. Also remember how they desecrated the temple and the sacrificial system. During this period, a group of Jews arose who stood true to the Old Testament law under fierce persecution. These Jews also fought to preserve Judaism from Greek influence. They were a courageous and admirable people who were called "the Pious."

The Pharisees were descendants of the Pious. You can see that they had admirable beginnings.

But they eventually became hypocritical and proud. They perverted the early ideals from which they came and their practice of religion became legalistic and empty.

The word "Pharisee" means "separatist" and was taken to show that they were separate from Hellenism and the pagans. But by the time of Jesus, people used it in scorn to indicate that the Pharisees also separated themselves from their fellow Jews, whom they looked down upon.

The Pharisees were meticulous keepers of the law but had no love. They controlled what were called the synagogues.

Synagogues arose in earnest during the exile. The temple had been destroyed and there was not access to a central worship site. So local communities of Jews built and ran synagogues.

The synagogues were one of the most crucial parts of Jewish life. Three functions were performed in them. The first was corporate worship of Yahweh. The second was education in the law. And the third was the governance of civil affairs.

Well, the Pharisees controlled the community synagogues, which in turn enabled them to control the people to a great extent. It gave them power over the people.

The clash between Judaism and Hellenism produced a second group that appears in the New Testament. That group is the Sadducees.

The Sadducees were the high priests. 900 years before Jesus, King Solomon, appointed Zadok to be the high priest and run the temple. The Sadducees were descendants of Zadok and the high priests of Judah. They controlled the priesthood and the temple ritual.

The Sadducees were wealthy and worldly-minded. They welcomed Greek ideas and cooperated with the foreign military and political powers of their day. They focused on the Pentateuch and looked with suspicion on the other books of the Old Testament. They also denied the oral traditions that the Pharisees were committed to.

Another group that the New Testament mentions is the scribes. The scribes were not a sect like the Pharisees and Sadducees were but rather the members of a profession. They were copiers of the Pentateuch or Law and authorities on the Old Testament Scriptures. As authorities, they also exercised a teaching function in the synagogues. They thought much like the Pharisees did and so the New Testament often associates them together.

A final group is the Herodians. Remember Herod and his successors were Romans who ruled the region of Judah. One of the things that they tried to do was to Romanize the Jews there. Some of the Jews thought they should be Romanized and so cooperated with Herod and his successors.

These Jews were called Herodians and were a political group not a religious one.

The New Testament mentions all of these groups. They were all formed and active before Jesus came. They represent the frustrations and conflicts that prepared Israel for the coming of the Messiah.

Understanding some of this history and these groups help us understand the New Testament itself better. Let me give you several examples of this.

John 6:14-15: These verses are preceded by Jesus feeding 5000 people with five loaves and two fish. The people are so astonished by this display of power that they intended to make Jesus king.

We can understand the crowd's reaction only if we understand the intertestamental history I gave you. The Jews longed for the independence they had during the Maccabean period just 100 years before. It's clear that they saw Jesus as another Maccabean type figure who would lead them to overthrow the Romans just like the Maccabee's led them to overthrow the Seleucids.

Acts 23:6-10: Paul was brought before the Sanhedrin, which was a judicial body of the Jews. It had jurisdiction to try civil and criminal cases. As we see here, it was composed of both Sadducees and Pharisees.

Remember from our history that the Sadducees embraced the Pentateuch and looked with suspicion on the other books of the Old Testament while the Pharisees revered all the books. Also remember that they rejected the oral tradition to which the Pharisees were utterly committed. This led to disagreements about many things including the resurrection. Since the Sadducees considered only the Pentateuch authoritative, which doesn't say anything about life after death, they believed that there is no resurrection. But the Pharisees believed that there is. These differences of course created real tension between the two groups.

Notice what Paul does here. He knew he couldn't get a fair hearing before the Sanhedrin but could in a Roman court. So he exploits the tension between the Pharisees and Sadducees to disrupt his appearance before the Sanhedrin and get into a Roman court. He does that by bringing up the resurrection, which sets off a debate between the two groups.

Mark 11:1-10: This passage records the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Notice that the people shout about the coming kingdom of Jesus. They obviously were thinking about an earthly kingdom much like the Maccabees had set up before.

In fact, once commentator, W.R. Farmer, associates the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem with Judas and Simon Maccabee. Both Judas and Simon, on two separate occasions, marched into Jerusalem amid great rejoicing after having won independence from oppressors. Farmer believes that the people recalled these triumphal entries and thought Jesus was coming to Jerusalem to deliver it from the Roman oppressors.

A Survey of the Bible – the New Testament

The Old Testament had prophesied that a Messiah would come and bless all the nations of the earth as God had promised in Genesis 12:3. The New Testament records the unfolding of that promise being fulfilled.

The New Testament consists of the following books: four gospels (Matthew – John), a book of history (Acts), a series of personal letters written by Paul, James, Peter, John, Jude, and one anonymous author (Romans – Jude), and one Apocalypse (Revelation).

These books were written within a 65-year period after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Precise chronology is impossible but the following are good "guesstimates": Matthew, Mark, and Luke (60's AD), John (80's), Acts (early 60's), Romans (late 50's), 1 and 2 Corinthians (middle 50's), Galatians (early 50's), Ephesians (early 60's), Philippians (early 60's), Colossians (early 60's), 1 and 2 Thessalonians (early 50's), 1 and 2 Timothy (mid-60's), Titus (mid-60's), Philemon (early 60's), Hebrews (mid-60's), James (late 40's), 1 and 2 Peter (mid 60's), 1, 2, and 3 John (late 80's), Jude (70's), and Revelation (mid 90's). You can see that Jude was probably the first book written and Revelation was certainly the last. While the Old Testament books were written over a span of 1000 years, the New Testament books were written within 50 years of each other.

We looked at the Old Testament books in chronological order in order to understand them. Doing that isn't necessary to an understanding of the New Testament books. So, we are going to briefly look at them in the groupings that I just shared with you.

The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)

We begin with the gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These weren't the first documents written. But they're appropriately placed first because they record what happened at the beginning of the Christian movement, the events that are central to the faith and life of the church and its message to the world.

One of the terms that the church used for that message was gospel, which means good news. So, that term was used to describe these first four books and correctly so. The term does describe their nature. The gospels aren't meant to be biographies or histories. They are meant to be records of good news, that is, about Jesus and the things He taught and did. The purpose of recording this good news was so that people could intelligently decide for Jesus.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called Synoptic Gospels. The word synoptic connotes a viewing together. It communicates that these three gospels share a large mass of common material.

For instance, the substance of 606 out of the 661 verses that are in Mark appear in Matthew and 380 of the 661 verses appear in Luke. Many scholars conjecture that Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source for their gospels.

John is quite different than the Synoptic Gospels in structure, style, and content. It contains no parables for instance and records only seven miracles. Far more attention has been devoted to the study of John than the other three gospels. One of the reasons for that is its devotional nature.

The Book of History **(Acts)**

The next book in the New Testament is a book of history that we call Acts. The Gospels anticipate the church and the Epistles or Letters presuppose it. A work was therefore needed to bridge the two. That work is the book of Acts.

Luke of course wrote not only the gospel that bears his name but Acts as well. Acts simply takes up where his gospel ends, with the resurrection of Jesus. It traces the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Antioch and then to Rome.

One of its purposes is to show that the Christianity and the church were not a menace to the Roman Empire. It does that by recording again and again that the Romans authorities did not view the Christians brought before them in the same negative light as the Jews who brought them.

Its purpose is also to explain how a small Jewish church in Jerusalem became a universal and primarily Gentile movement.

This book is called the Acts of the Apostles but it could well also be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. It presents an early church that the Holy Spirit empowered to do the same works that Jesus did.

The Epistles or Letters

(Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, Jude)

The next grouping of New Testament books is the Epistles, which is a moral formalized letter. These are letters that six leaders wrote to various churches or groups of Christians.

21 of the 27 New Testament books are epistles. Even the book of Revelation has certain epistolary features.

Epistles or letters were a common part of the first century world and the church itself. The gospel spread to widely separated locales. That gave rise to the need of keeping in touch with established congregations. The Apostles and leaders met that need by writing epistles to those congregations.

That is why I enjoy the epistles so much. The authors aren't trying to write theology per se. They're simply writing to real life people and addressing real situations in their life. That lends authenticity to them. It also provides the key to interpreting them, which is to know all that we can about those people and situations.

The Apocalypse **(Revelation)**

The final grouping of the New Testament books is the Apocalypse. That of course is the book of Revelation. Along with the book of Ecclesiastes, Revelation is the hardest book in the Bible to interpret. That's because it abounds with imagery and symbolism that we no longer use. There are four basic interpretations of the book.

The first is the preterist view. This view takes the book to be describing past events only, those of John's own day. The imagery and symbolism represent conditions in the 1st century world of the Roman Empire. Liberal scholars endorse this view because they don't believe in predictive prophecy.

The second view is the historicist view. People with this view believe that the book sets forth a panoramic history from the 1st century to the Second Coming of Jesus. It is an outline of the history that takes place between those two times.

The third view is the futurist view. This view maintains that chapter four to the end of the book deals with predictive prophecy. These chapters have nothing to do with John's own day. They predict what will take place in the end times, in connection with the coming of Jesus. This is the most popular view among evangelical Christians.

The fourth view is the idealist or poetic view. This says that the book's purpose is to inspire persecuted and suffering Christians. The writer uses symbolic language to do that, which represents nothing historical. It's just poetical and symbolic language that shows that those who are faithful will eventually triumph in Jesus.

I have a view of Revelation that combines part of the preterist and futurist view. Simply put, I believe that much of the historical (referring to persons and events in John's day) is also eschatological (referring to the closing years and events of history and beyond).

Summary

Revelation is the appropriate ending for God's written word. After God judges us and we, in our resurrection bodies, enter our eternal home in heaven, His promise in Genesis 12:3 is finally and completely fulfilled. Peoples from all nations will be blessed forever through Abraham's offspring, Jesus.