

A Bible Précis

The whole Bible presented in a form that enables the reader to become familiar with its content in a relatively short time.

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Introduction

This PDF is an alternative format to the hierarchical précis in the Main Menu, allowing it to be read as a book on the screen.

The order presented is simply the author's choice of dealing with the 'history' books first, the Old Testament followed by the New, moving on to the epistles to expand on the N.T. history, then returning to the O.T. prophets and finishing with the poetry books.

The reader can, of course, ignore this preference and simply make a choice from the bookmarks.

As is the norm for EasyBible, words in italics are from the Bible, KJV unless otherwise stated.

The total read time as a book is approaching nine hours.

Old Testament History Books

Genesis to Esther
plus Daniel

The Beginnings

[Gen 1-11]

Creation

[Gen 1:1-2:4]

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

God gives us His brief and precise account of creation, culminating in the sixth day with the creation of a man, Adam, and the forming of a woman, Eve, followed by the institute of marriage, ordained as part of His creative work.

On the seventh day God rested from His work, blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.

The narrative now continues from Gen 2:5 with an account of creation and events that followed from Adam's viewpoint.

The fall

[Gen 2:5-3:24]

It was on the sixth day that God had put Adam in the Garden of Eden to take care of it. Adam is able to eat from any tree in the garden with one exception: He is not permitted to eat from the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. If he does, then his death will surely follow. It is after this that Eve is formed as a wife for Adam. God tells them they are to fill the earth with their descendants.

Soon after, Satan, in the guise of a serpent, puts doubt in Eve's mind concerning the forbidden tree and persuades her she could eat from it after all. Eve succumbs then persuades Adam to do the same. As a consequence of this sin (disobedience of God's word), God pronounces three curses, one each for Satan, Eve and Adam. The curse on Satan initiates the spiritual warfare that continues to exist between him and God, but at the same time foretells its outcome. The woman is to endure pain in childbirth and is reduced to being subordinate to her husband, and man is henceforth to toil for his food.

Cain and Abel

[Gen 4]

Adam and Eve have two sons, Cain and Abel, who grow to be a shepherd and farmer respectively. When they offer their sacrifices to God, Abel's is accepted but Cain's rejected. This rejection has an adverse impact on Cain which eventually leads him to kill his brother. He is consequently banished by God to the land of Nod, East of Eden, where he builds a city named after his son Enoch. His great-great-great grandson is Lamech, the first person recorded to violate God's ordinance of marriage by taking more than one wife

The generations of Adam

[Gen 5]

The generations of Adam are the genealogical link from Adam to Noah and the flood. Of the descendants of Adam, Enoch (not Cain's son) is a righteous man who, from the age of 65, preaches the coming of the Lord's judgement. He is spared death and taken to heaven at the age of 365 years.

The flood

[Gen 6-9]

In time, mankind becomes contaminated by Nephilim, the hybrid offspring of the sons of God (fallen angels) and the daughters of men, and grows to be so wicked that God decides to destroy the earth's inhabitants with a flood. Noah and his family are righteous people and are to be spared this fate, so God instructs Noah to build an ark for his family and many animals. Following the death of Enoch's son Methuselah, the flood comes and drowns the whole earth.

After the flood abates, God makes a covenant with Noah never again to destroy the earth in this way, and gives the rainbow as a reminder of this covenant.

Not long after, Noah plants a vineyard, becomes drunk one evening, is offended by his son Ham's behaviour towards him and so foretells the fate of Ham's offspring, Canaan: *a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.*

The Table of Nations

[Gen 10]

From Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, we get all the nations of the earth. Abraham is descended from Shem.

The Tower of Babel

[Gen 11]

As the population grows, men resist spreading throughout the earth and begin to build the tower of Babel, thinking it will establish them in one place. But God confounds their language, causing them to divide and scatter abroad as He had originally intended.

The Patriarchal Period

Abraham and Isaac

[Gen 12:1 - 25:11]

The call of Abraham

[Gen 12:1-9]

Abram (later, Abraham) is born when his father Terah is 130, and Sarai (later, Sarah), his wife, is born ten years later to his stepmother. Terah takes Abram, Sarai and Lot, a nephew of Abram, and moves north from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran in Padanaram.

A few years after settling in Haran, and following Terah's death, God repeats His call to Abram, first given in Ur of the Chaldees, and directs him to move south to Canaan. God gives Abram a promise that he and his nation will be great and blessed, and that through him all the families of the earth will be blessed. Abram takes *Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran* and journeys to Canaan, a land that God then promises to Abram's descendants..

A famine

[Gen 12:10-20]

A famine forces Abram to travel to Egypt where, for his own safety, he pretends Sarai is his sister (she is in fact his half sister [Gen 20:12]). His fears seem justified when Sarai is taken into the king's house. Because of Sarai, Abram receives many gifts of livestock and slaves, but the deception is realised when God plagues the king and his household. Abram and his family have to leave, but he now has the king's protection and is able to return safely to the area of Bethel rich in possessions.

The parting with Lot

[Gen 13]

Abram and Lot's herds have become so great that there is now insufficient pasture for them both, causing quarrels between Abram's and Lot's herdsmen. They agree to separate, with Lot being given the choice of whether to stay in the land or move away. Lot chooses to leave and moves near Sodom.

God repeats his promise to Abram concerning the land, this time adding that possession of it will be forever. Abram then moves to Mamre (Hebron) where he builds an altar to God.

Melchizedek

[Gen 14]

Fourteen years previously there had been battles between two sets of kings of whom five had formed an alliance under Chedorlaomer. After twelve years servitude they rebelled, then in the thirteenth year war broke out between them. In the fourteenth year, Sodom and Gomorrah are defeated and the people and their goods, including Lot and his family, are taken. When Abram learns of this he takes 318 armed and trained servants from his household and pursues the captors to the city of Dan. Abram defeats Chedorlaomer and returns with all the people and their possessions, including Lot and his family. On his return, Abram is met by Melchizedek, king of Salem and *priest of the God most high*, who brings bread and wine, blesses Abram and receives a tithe from him.

The Abrahamic covenant

[Gen 15]

In a vision, Abram expresses his concern to God that he has no heir through which His promises could be fulfilled. God then reassures Abram and enters a covenant with him by putting him into a deep sleep while the covenant ritual is performed by God alone. This covenant promises Abram's seed will inherit the land of Canaan from the Sichor [*river of Egypt*] to the Euphrates.

The birth of Ishmael

[Gen 16]

Sarai, lacking faith in the promised seed in herself, gives her Egyptian handmaiden Hagar to Abram for a concubine. Once Hagar knows she has conceived, she begins to despise Sarai and enmity grows between them. With Abram's approval, Sarai deals harshly with Hagar and she consequently flees from them. Hagar is intercepted by the Angel of the Lord who tells her to return to her mistress and foretells her descendant's destiny. Hagar bears Abram a son and calls him Ishmael, as instructed by the Angel of the Lord. Abram is now 86 years old.

Circumcision and name changes

[Gen 17]

Four years later God confirms His covenant with Abram, stating it will be an everlasting covenant, introduces circumcision as the sign of the covenant and changes Abram's and Sarai's names to Abraham and Sarah. Abraham expresses his concern that Sarah is too old to have children, but is told by God that she would indeed bear him a son in a year's time. Their son is

to be named Isaac, and he and his seed will be recipient of God's everlasting covenant given to Abraham. This same day all the men of Abraham's household are circumcised.

Three visitors

[Gen 18]

Soon after, the Lord and two angels visit Abraham and Sarah and the promise of a child by Sarah is renewed. Hearing this from within Abraham's tent, Sarah laughs to herself because of her age, but she is rebuked and the promise affirmed.

The two angels leave for Sodom and the Lord mentions the fate due Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham barter with the Lord concerning it, eventually getting agreement that Sodom and Gomorrah will not be destroyed even if only ten righteous men are found there.

Sodom and Gomorrah

[Gen 19]

The two angels arrive at the gate of Sodom and are met by Lot, who insists they accept his hospitality for the night. Before they retire, men and boys from all parts of the city surround Lot's house demanding the visitors be handed over for their sexual gratification. Lot refuses, even going so far as to offer his two virgin daughters in an attempt to dissuade them. They press Lot at the door but all are struck with blindness by the angels. The angels explain to Lot what is about to happen. They ask him to warn his sons-in-law of Sodom's fate, and to take them from the city with him. But they don't take him seriously and Lot's warnings to leave are ignored.

The next morning the angels insist that Lot, his wife and two daughters leave the city as they cannot complete their mission all the time the family remain there. They head for Zoar but, despite being warned not to do so, Lot's wife looks back at Sodom and becomes a pillar of salt.

Lot fears to stay in Zoar so goes to live on a nearby mountain in a cave. Later, he is made drunk by his two daughters who commit incest with him and bear sons, Moab and Benammi. These two sons become the fathers of the Moabites and Ammonites.

Abraham and Abimelech

[Gen 20]

Abraham journeys south to Gerar where, in fear of what he thinks is a godless people, he again says that Sarah is his sister. Abimelech, king of Gerar, takes Sarah into his house, but is warned by God in a dream that he is not to touch her. The next morning, Abimelech tells all his servants about the dream, then rebukes Abraham for the deceit, yet presents him with much

silver, livestock and servants, and returns Sarah to him.

The birth of Isaac and a covenant with Abimelech

[Gen 21]

When Abraham is a hundred years old, Sarah gives birth to Isaac. After Isaac is weaned, Ishmael begins to mock him. Sarah protests to Abraham, wanting Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away, saying that she does not want Ishmael to be heir with Isaac. Abraham is deeply worried about this, but God gives His approval, assuring Abraham that Ishmael would survive to be the father of a great nation. The next morning, Abraham gives provisions to Hagar and Ishmael and sends them into the desert where, through God's intervention, they are later rescued from dying of thirst. Ishmael grows to become an archer and lives in the wilderness of Paran where he marries an Egyptian woman.

About the time Hagar and Ishmael are sent away, there is an incident between King Abimelech and Abraham concerning a well, but the two make a covenant enabling Abraham to sojourn freely in Philistine.

Abraham is tested

[Gen 22]

Some years later, Abraham's faith is tested with a command from God to offer Isaac as a sacrifice at Moriah. Abraham readily obeys, fully trusting in God who had promised him a son. However, Isaac's death is prevented at the last moment, and Abraham is told by the Angel of the Lord that the Lord has sworn, saying that through his seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed because of his obedience.

The death of Sarah

[Gen 23]

Sarah dies soon after, age 127, and is buried in a cave in land purchased by Abraham at Mamre (Hebron).

A wife for Isaac

[Gen 24]

Abraham sends his chief servant to his relations in Haran to find a wife for Isaac. By divine intervention he finds Rebekah, Abraham's brother Nahor's granddaughter. With her family's approval, and Rebekah's agreement, he returns with her. Isaac accepts Rebekah and she becomes his wife.

Abraham's last days

[Gen 25:1-18]

Abraham marries Keturah and has four more sons by her. These sons are sent away with gifts rather than share in Isaac's inheritance.

Abraham dies at the age of 165 and is buried with Sarah in the cave at Mamre.

Jacob

[Gen 25:19 - Gen 35:29]

The birth of Esau and Jacob

[Gen 25:19-26]

When Isaac's wife Rebekah is pregnant, there seems to be a struggle between her unborn sons causing her some concern. When she takes her concern to the Lord, she is told there are two nations in her womb and that the elder will serve the younger.

Rebekah gives birth to her twins and names them Esau and Jacob, the elder being Esau. Esau grows to be a hunter and is favoured by Isaac, whereas Jacob is a 'plain' man and favoured by Rebekah.

Esau sells his birthright

[Gen 25:27-34]

Esau is so indifferent about his birthright that one day, when feeling particularly hungry, he rashly sells it to Jacob for some broth. He later takes a Canaanite wife, which grieves his parents.

Isaac and Abimelech

[Gen 26]

The Abrahamic covenant is now renewed with Isaac, then God instructs him to sojourn in Gerar while there is a famine in the land. Like his father before him, Isaac lies about Rebekah, pretending she is his sister. After some time, the deceit concerning Rebekah is realised when King Abimelech sees Isaac sporting with her. From this time on, Isaac and Rebekah are protected by Abimelech. Isaac is blessed, and to the envy of the Philistines grows in prosperity. Following disputes concerning wells, Isaac eventually moves and settles at Beersheba.

Jacob gets Esau's blessing by deceit

[Gen 27]

As he approaches his final days, Isaac calls Esau to give him the blessing due to the firstborn. Instigated by his mother, and with her help, Jacob fraudulently obtains his father's blessing while Esau is still out hunting for venison to prepare a meal his father had requested. Despite this deception, the blessing has to stand. To avoid Esau's anger and threat to kill Jacob, Rebekah advises Jacob to flee to his uncle Laban until things blow over.

(Esau is to become the father of the Edomites, later to be an adversary of the Israelites)

Jacob flees to Haran

[Gen 28]

Also encouraged by Isaac for the purpose of finding a wife, Jacob leaves for his uncle Laban's. On the way he rests for the night and has a vision of a ladder between earth and heaven with angels ascending and descending on it. The Lord stood above the ladder and promised Jacob he and his seed would inherit the land on which he is resting, and through his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed, the same promises made to Abraham and Isaac.

Leah and Rachel

[Gen 29:1-30]

When Jacob arrived at his uncle Laban's, he meets Rachel and falls in love with her. Not having a dowry, Jacob offers to work seven years for the hand of Rachel. When the seven years are completed a great celebration is held, but after Jacob retires to his tent it is Leah, Laban's eldest daughter, who is sent to him. Then, in the darkness, he spends the night with the wrong sister. Despite the deceit, having spent the night with Leah, Jacob is now considered married to her. He then has to work another seven years for Rachel.

Jacob's first eleven sons and a daughter

[Gen 29:31-30:24]

Because Jacob loves Rachel and not Leah, the Lord prevents Rachel from conceiving and Jacob's first four sons are by Leah. They are Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah. Still unable to conceive, Rachel follows the custom of the time and gives Jacob her handmaiden Bilhah as a concubine. Bilhah has two sons by Jacob, Dan and Naphtali. Leah now stops conceiving and so gives Jacob her handmaiden, Zilpah, who bears him two children, Gad and Asher. Rachel, perhaps in desperation, and presumably because she is in a position to do so, gives Leah a night with Jacob in exchange for Mandrakes collected

by Reuben (Mandrakes were considered an aphrodisiac). Leah conceives and Issachar is born. She is later able to conceive again and has another son, Zebulun, and later a daughter, Dinah.

Rachel is at last able to conceive and gives birth to Joseph.

Jacob's flocks increase

[Gen 30:25-43]

Jacob now wants to leave, but Laban asks him to stay because he has seen how the Lord has blessed him. Jacob is asked to name his wages and an agreement is made based on husbandry methods suggested by Jacob. In time, Jacob becomes rich in cattle as well as other livestock and servants.

Jacob flees Laban

[Gen 31]

After twenty years service to Laban, fourteen for his two daughters and six raising livestock, Jacob leaves secretly while Laban is out sheep shearing. Unbeknown to Jacob, Rachel has stolen some of her father's images.

Three days have passed before Laban is told that Jacob has left. Laban goes after him, his party catching up with Jacob at Mount Gilead. However, Laban is told in a dream by God to *speak not to Jacob either good or bad*. Laban questions Jacob, wanting to know why he had left secretly, and mentions the stolen images. Jacob tells him that he was afraid he would keep his daughters by force, then tells him if he finds his gods then whoever has taken them should not live. The tents are all searched, Rachel's being left until last. When Laban comes to search her tent she makes excuses for not standing, saying it is her time of month, preventing him from finding his gods she had hidden in the camel's bags on which she is sitting.

Jacob is now angry with Laban for apparently making a false accusation, but the two make a pact over a meal and part company peacefully.

God meets Jacob

[Gen 32]

Jacob continues on his way and sends messengers ahead to his brother Esau, but is alarmed when they return to report Esau is on his way with four hundred men. Jacob prays to God for help, then gathers some livestock as a gift for Esau and sends them on ahead in batches with some servants. The idea is that Esau will come across each successive band of servants with a gift of livestock, then by the time Jacob meets Esau he will be appeased.

That evening, Jacob takes all his company and sends them ahead over the ford Jabbock. He remains alone and wrestles all night with God. In the morning, God blesses Jacob and renames him Israel.

Jacob meets Esau

[Gen 33]

Jacob rejoins his family and sees Esau coming to meet him. He divides his company for safety, putting the handmaidens and their children first, then Leah and her children and last of all, Rachel and Joseph. Despite Jacob's concern, all is well between them and there is an emotional reunion. Following some bartering, Esau accepts the gifts sent ahead and returns to Seir, while Jacob travels to Succoth and then on to Shalem where he buys a parcel of land and settles there.

Dinah's rape

[Gen 34]

After some years at Shalem, Schechem, a Hivite, rapes Jacob's daughter Dinah. However, Schechem loves Dinah and his father, Hamor, meets with Jacob in an attempt at appeasement, suggesting each allow their daughters to marry sons of the other. Simeon and Levi deceive Hamor and Schechem by saying they could only agree if all their men were circumcised. They could then live as one nation. This is agreed, and all Haman's men are then circumcised in one day. On the third day, when the men are sore, Simeon and Levi slaughter them all, including Hamor and Schechem, taking all their wives, possessions and livestock. Jacob rebukes his sons, being fearful the surrounding inhabitants will rise against him because of what they have done.

The birth of Benjamin, Jacob's twelfth son

[Gen 35]

Under instruction from God, Jacob moves to Bethel where he is again told by God his name is now Israel. God then repeats His promise of the land being given to Jacob and his seed after him.

Soon after, Jacob journeys toward Ephrath (Bethlehem). On the way Rachel goes into hard labour and dies giving birth to Benjamin.

After burying Rachel, Jacob moves on and settles near Edah, close to Bethlehem. It is while they are there that Reuben sleeps with Bilhah, one of his father's concubines.

Isaac lives to 180 and is buried by his sons Esau and Jacob.

The Edomites

[Gen 36]

Chapter 36 gives us the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother, who are the Edomites.

Joseph

[Gen 37 - 56]

Joseph's dreams

[Gen 37]

Being the son of Jacob's old age at the time (Benjamin came later), Joseph is loved more than his other children. Joseph's brothers are aware of this and hate him for it. When Joseph is about 17 years old he has dreams which he relates to his brothers. The first of these dreams implies all Joseph's brothers will bow down and worship him, and the second included his parents in this act of worship. Joseph is hated the more for his dreams and his brothers plot to kill him. Reuben dissuades them, so they strip him of his 'coat of many colours' and sell him to some passing Ishmaelites who take him to Egypt and sell him to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh. The brothers cover Joseph's coat with goat's blood and show it to their father, who assumes he has been killed by wild animals and mourns him for many days.

Judah and Tamar

[Gen 38]

Joseph's story is interrupted here by a sordid tale concerning his half brother Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar.

Judah marries a Canaanite by the name of Shuah and has three sons by her: Er, Onan and Shelah. When Er comes of age, Judah finds him a wife by the name of Tamar. *Er was wicked in the site of the Lord and the Lord slew him.* Judah then gives his second son to Tamar to raise a child in his brother's name. (This is known as a Levirate marriage). Onan isn't happy with this arrangement and spills his seed on the ground during intercourse. For this reason, the Lord also slays Onan. Judah then asks Tamar to remain a widow at her father's house until his youngest son Shelah comes of age. However, when Shelah is of age, the arrangement is not honoured by Judah.

After some time, Judah's wife dies and he goes to join his sheep shearers at Timnath. Tamar, hearing of this and resenting Judah's treatment of her, discards her widow's garments and covers herself, puts on a veil and sits in an open place on the way to Timnath. Judah sees her, and not recognising her takes her to be a harlot because her face is covered. Having no means of payment at hand, Tamar suggests he gives her his signet, bracelets and staff as a pledge. Tamar conceives, returns home and puts her widow's garments back on. Meanwhile, Judah is unable to honour his pledge because the 'harlot' is

nowhere to be found.

Three months later, Judah is told his daughter-in-law is pregnant through whoredom, so he demands she be brought to him to be burned. When he asks Tamar who the father is she produces his signet, bracelets and staff, and the truth is revealed.

Tamar's name is in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus.

Joseph and Potiphar's wife

[Gen 39]

Joseph is now in Potiphar's service in which God blesses him and all he does is successful. Consequently, Potiphar puts him in charge of his house and all he owns. Potiphar's wife takes a liking to Joseph and attempts to seduce him on several occasions, but each time he refuses her. One day, she catches him by his cloak while trying to entice him to bed. Joseph pulls himself away and leaves the house, but his cloak is pulled off him. Having his cloak in her possession, Potiphar's wife accuses Joseph of trying to seduce her, and Potiphar has him thrown in the prison where the king's prisoners are held.

Even in prison, God blesses Joseph in all he does and the prison keeper puts him in charge of all the prisoners.

The butler and baker's dreams

[Gen 40]

The king of Egypt's butler and baker had offended the king and were both imprisoned, coming under the charge of Joseph. In time, they both have dreams which Joseph interprets. The butler's dream was of a vine with three branches producing grapes which he pressed into Pharaoh's cup. The baker's dream was of three white baskets on his head, the top containing 'bakemeats' for Pharaoh that birds came and ate. Both interpretations are realised in three days, the butler being restored to office but the baker executed. Joseph asks the butler to remember him to Pharaoh, but he forgets.

Pharaoh's dreams

[Gen 41]

Two years later Pharaoh has two dreams. The first is about seven fat and lean cattle and the second seven fat and thin ears of corn. No one is able to interpret these dreams. The butler remembers his own experience with Joseph and mentions this to Pharaoh. Joseph, now 30, is summoned and announces that it is God who will give the interpretation. Not only does Joseph explain that the dreams foretell seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine, but also advises Pharaoh on how to cater for the famine years. Recognising that Joseph has the spirit of God in him, he makes him ruler of all Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. Joseph is given Asenath, the daughter of a priest, as his wife. (They have two sons before the

famine comes, Manasseh and Ephraim).

During the next seven years the harvest is plentiful and storehouses in all the cities are filled with corn. After seven years, a severe famine hits Egypt and the lands around, and all the people now have to go to Joseph to buy corn from the store houses.

Famine and a family reunion

[Gen 42-45]

Jacob, also suffering from the famine, sends ten of his sons to Egypt to buy corn, keeping Benjamin at home with him. It is Joseph from whom they have to buy the corn. Joseph recognises his brothers but they do not recognise him and he deals harshly with them, accusing them of being spies while all the time speaking through an interpreter. In pleading their innocence they mention their youngest brother Benjamin. Joseph eventually sells them corn, but to prove themselves they must return with Benjamin. Meanwhile, Simeon is to be held as security. Unbeknown to the brothers, Joseph has their payment for the corn placed in their sacks. This they don't discover until they stop to feed the animals, but are afraid to return and so continue home.

When all this is related to Jacob, he refuses to allow Benjamin to go back with them, having lost Joseph some twenty years earlier and now Simeon, because he has been held captive.

Eventually, they run out of food again and need to return to Egypt. After some argument, Jacob agrees to let Benjamin go with them and tells them to take gifts and double money to return the money owed from their first trip.

When they get back to Egypt, Joseph instructs the head of his house to bring them to him at noon to dine with him. When they arrive and Joseph sees Benjamin, he is overcome with emotion and has to go to his room to weep. When he has composed himself, he returns and they sit to dine. Joseph's brothers are amazed that the table is set according to Hebrew custom.

The next day they leave, but Joseph has ordered their money to be put in their sacks and his silver cup put in Benjamin's sack. He then sends his steward to follow them with the intent to accuse them and find the silver cup. The brothers deny any accusation and even offer the life of the one in whose sack the silver cup is found. When it is found in Benjamin's they 'rent their clothes' in despair and return to the city.

Joseph tells them that the man in whose sack the cup was found will be his servant and the rest of them are free to return home. Judah begs Joseph to let him take the place of Benjamin and allow Benjamin to return to his father.

Joseph is no longer able to contain himself and weeps. He sends everyone out of the room except his brothers and reveals himself to them. He tells them it was God's plan that he should go ahead of them into Egypt so that the family would be

able to survive the famine. Pharaoh hears of this reunion and tells the brothers they are to bring their father and families to Egypt, and that he will provide wagons and food for the journey.

Israel settles in Egypt

[Gen 46-47]

Having heard the good news concerning Joseph, and encouraged by a vision from God, Jacob and his family head for Egypt with all their livestock. Following an emotional meeting, Joseph tells his brethren to say they are shepherds. Since shepherds are an abomination to the Egyptians, they will be given the land of Goshen in which to live, separate from the rest of Egypt, but having good pasture. Including Joseph's wife and children, Jacob's family number 70 when they settle in Egypt. Joseph is now able to provide food for all his brethren.

In time, the Egyptians have no more money and have to exchange their flocks and property for corn. By this means Joseph renders all the livestock and land their king's property.

Jacob blesses his sons

[Gen 48:1-49:32]

When Jacob is approaching death, Joseph takes his sons to him to be blessed. Jacob tells Joseph that God had said to him *Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people; and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession.* He also tells him he will adopt his sons as his own, equal to Reuben and Simeon.

Jacob's sight has become so poor that Joseph has to position his sons with the eldest in front of Jacob's right hand to receive the firstborn's blessing, but Jacob crosses his hands and it is Ephraim who receives this blessing. Joseph objects but Jacob's action is deliberate.

Jacob then gathers his sons together to bless them before he dies. After blessing each in turn, he gives instructions that he should be buried with Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah and Leah.

The deaths of Jacob and Joseph

[Gen 49:33-50:26]

After blessing his sons and expressing his burial wishes, Jacob passes away. He is embalmed and mourned for forty days before being taken to be buried with great pomp and ceremony.

On returning to Egypt, Joseph gives his brethren instructions for his own burial.

Joseph dies at the age of 110.

The Exodus and Conquest

[Exodus - Joshua]

Moses' birth, calling and return to Egypt

[Ex 1-4]

The Israelites have grown greatly in numbers and prosperity when a new Pharaoh reigns who knows nothing of Joseph. Through fear of their numbers and their might, he puts the Israelites into bondage and their persecution begins. The population continues to grow and attempts are made to limit their increase by preventing birth or survival of male children. When Moses is born, his mother hides him in a basket placed by the river bank where it is discovered by the Pharaoh's daughter. Moses' mother is paid by Pharaoh's daughter to nurse him and then return him to her to be brought up as her own.

At the age of forty, Moses witnesses a Hebrew being attacked by an Egyptian. He intervenes and kills the Egyptian, but the next day it is apparent the killing is becoming common knowledge, and so Moses flees to take refuge in Midian. There he marries Zipporah, a daughter of Jethro the priest of Midian, and has two sons by her. Moses keeps a flock for Jethro, and in time leads them to Horeb where he sees a bush burning, but not being consumed. When he approaches to investigate, *the angel of the LORD* speaks to him from the bush and tells him that he is to return to Egypt, along with his brother Aaron, to deliver God's children out of bondage and to bring them to this mountain.

It's possibly about this time that Job suffers terribly at the hands of the devil. He disputes with his friends, who say his condition is the result of some sin he must have committed. Job holds fast to his innocence, but questions God's actions. He is eventually reproved by God and graciously restored to his former state, with interest.

Pharaoh's opposition and the ten plagues

[Ex 5-12]

When Moses first approaches Pharaoh with God's message it is rejected, Pharaoh's response is to put a greater burden on Israel in their slavery. Moses speaks to God and expresses his concern, to which God responds by reminding Moses of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and, in doing so, promises deliverance of His people. This Moses repeats to the people but, because of their increased burden, they are not of a mind to heed Moses' words.

There then follows a series of ten plagues intended to persuade Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. The first nine plagues are: water turned to blood, frogs, gnats, flies, against livestock, boils, hail, locusts and darkness. Pharaoh's heart is hardened following each plague until the most severe, the tenth plague, death of the firstborn, is announced. Instructions are given by God to make preparations to protect the Israelite households from this last plague, involving sacrifice of a lamb and the

daubing of its blood on door lintels and posts. God calls this The Lord's Passover and declares it will become a memorial. When the plague comes, all the firstborn not protected by the lamb's blood are slain. The loss of his son is too much for Pharaoh and he finally succumbs. Israel's exodus begins.

To Mount Sinai

[Ex 13-18]

The Israelites leave Egypt with great possessions given by the Egyptians [Gen 15:13, 14; Ex 3:21, 22]. These possessions later form the source of materials for constructing the tabernacle. They go by way of the desert towards the Red Sea (Sea of Reeds), led by God with a pillar of smoke by day and a pillar of fire by night.

Pharaoh's heart is again hardened and he gathers his army to pursue the Israelites. God facilitates the Israelites' escape by parting the Red Sea, enabling them to cross between the walls of water while a pillar of smoke and a cloud keep the Egyptians at a distance. When the cloud disperses and the Egyptians attempt to cross the sea, the waters return and they are all drowned. Following this deliverance, Moses composes a song to commemorate the occasion.

Moses leads Israel from the Red Sea out into the Wilderness of Shur. After another three days travelling without water they arrive at Marah, only to find the water there is bitter. Through Moses, God sweetens the water and they travel on and camp at Elim, where there are twelve wells and seventy palm trees. They then travel through the Desert of Sin on their way to Sinai. The Israelites begin to complain about lack of food, suggesting they would rather have died in Egypt with full bellies. God then provides sustenance of quail and a daily supply of manna, the Sabbath's ration being given along with the previous day's. This manna is to be their food throughout the forty years they will be wandering in the desert.

Travelling on, they arrive at Rephidim where they are again without water and complain bitterly to Moses. God instructs Moses to go ahead of the people with some of the elders and strike a rock at Horeb, from which water will be provided.

The Amalekites move to attack the Israelites at Rephidim and Moses sends Joshua with some men to fight them. Victory is gained while Moses, standing on a hill overlooking the battle scene, holds his staff up high.

Jethro later visits his son-in-law and witnesses the burden on Moses of ministering to all the people. He advises him to share this burden with trustworthy men, only overseeing more serious issues himself.

The Israelites are now approaching the wilderness of Sinai.

Arrival at Mount Sinai and sanctification of the people

[Ex 19]

During the third month of leaving Egypt, the Israelites arrive at Sinai and camp close to the mountain. God calls Moses to

the mountain and directs him to remind the Israelites that it was He who brought them out of Egypt, and if they obey His voice and keep His commandments and covenant (to be given a little later) then *they shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people.... and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*. When Moses repeats God's words to the people, they agree with one voice that *All that the LORD hath spoken we will do*. Moses reports their response to God and is then told to sanctify [to set apart for special use or purpose, that is, to make holy or sacred] the people for two days to be ready on the third day to approach the mountain. Following their sanctification, Moses is again called to the mountain, and to only bring Aaron with him.

The Ten Commandments, and some laws

[Ex 20:1-23:19]

God then speaks to Moses, giving him the Ten Commandments,

Thou shalt have no other gods before Me
Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image
Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain
Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy
Honour thy father and thy mother
Thou shalt not murder
Thou shalt not commit adultery
Thou shalt not steal.
Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour
Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house

..... followed by laws Moses is to tell the people. These are laws concerning the treatment of slaves, restitution for wrong doing and social justice, (that is, treatment of others), and laws concerning the Sabbath and three festivals: the feast of unleavened bread (connected to Passover), the feast of harvest (first-fruits) and the feast of ingathering (Pentecost).

The Mosaic Covenant

[Ex 23:20-24:18]

Their follows a promise from God that Canaan will be conquered and conditions are given to ensure that conquest.

A covenant is then confirmed by Moses telling the people God's words to which all the people agree they will obey. Moses writes down God's words, then in the morning builds an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel.

Moses is again called to the mountain to receive tablets of stone with the law and commandments written by God so that Moses can teach his people. This time, Moses is on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

Instructions for constructing the Tabernacle

[Ex 25-31]

Whilst he is on the mountain, Moses is told he is to collect contributions for the Sanctuary from every man who will give with a willing heart. The tabernacle will then be built according to the pattern given by God.

Instructions are given for making:

the Ark of the Covenant

the Table for the shewbread

the Golden Lampstand

the Tabernacle perimeters

the Priests' garments, along with instructions for consecration of the priests

the altar of incense

bronze basin for priests to wash their hands and feet.

Also given are:

the recipe for anointing oil and incense

rules for payment of taxes to support the service of the tabernacle.

People are identified as having been filled with the spirit of God, enabling them to have the skills to carry out work in construction of the tabernacle.

Moses is then instructed to remind the people to keep the Sabbath.

And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.

The Golden Calf

[Ex 32-33]

Because he has been on the mountain for so long, the people lose hope in Moses and persuade Aaron to make a golden calf and an altar, which they then use for worship followed by partying. God tells Moses what is happening and suggests that He would consume the people and make a great nation from him, but Moses successfully intercedes for the people. When Moses comes down from the mountain and sees their behaviour, he breaks the stone tablets in anger and administers

punishment to them. Moses then returns to the mountain to make atonement for their sin.

God tells Moses that He will send an angel before them on their journey, for He would not be in the midst of these stiff necked people lest His anger prevails, and they must now cease from wearing their ornaments.

Moses then pitches a tent outside the camp and calls it the Tabernacle of the congregation, for the Tabernacle within the camp had not yet been built. It is from here that Moses will commune with God when the pillar of cloud descends.

Moses again intercedes for the people and experiences God's glory. He is then instructed to go and hew two new tablets and return alone in the morning when God will rewrite what was written on the tablets Moses broke.

The Covenant Renewed

[Ex 34]

God now declares a covenant He will make with His people for when they reach the Promised Land, a covenant in which they are required to obey all His commandments concerning their occupation of the land and dealing with the people there. All the while they obey God's commandments, they will prosper in the Promised Land. (This is the Mosaic Covenant, the only conditional covenant God made with His people; the other covenants being unconditional). God also reminds them concerning the feasts of unleavened bread and first fruits.

Moses is then instructed to write the words of this covenant whilst God writes the Ten Commandments on the tables of stone. During this time, Moses is with God forty days and nights without bread or water.

When Moses returns from the mountain, his face shines from having been in the presence of God. He relates the words of the covenant just given and reminds them of the Sabbath regulations.

Construction of the Tabernacle

[Ex 35-39]

The people are now to make offerings, with a willing heart, of all the things required to construct the Tabernacle.

The names of those who are filled with knowledge, given by God, to construct the tabernacle is related to the people and, with more than sufficient materials having been provided, the work to construct the tabernacle begins.

First the outer walls, then the ark followed by the table for shewbread, the golden lampstand, altar of incense, altar of burnt offering and the bronze basin.

An inventory of all the materials for the tabernacle is listed before the priestly garments are made, according to the detailed pattern given by God.

The Tabernacle erected

[Ex 40]

Everything having been made ready, the tabernacle is now erected at the time given by God and according to God's instructions, with anointing and sanctification at the appropriate times.

Aaron and his sons are dressed and anointed in preparation for service.

With all the work now complete, a cloud covers the tent of the congregation and God's glory fills the tabernacle.

From this point, when the cloud is taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel would move on their journeys, but if the cloud remains over the tabernacle, then they will remain camped. The cloud is over the tabernacle by day, and the pillar of fire by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.

Israel's Laws

[Leviticus]

Introduction

It's now a year since the Israelites left Egypt, the last nine months of which were in Sinai. With the erection of the Tabernacle now having been completed, it is ready as a centre for the system of laws and sacrifices for the Israelites.

This book is effectively an account of the Levitical Priesthood in that it contains detailed instructions for sacrifices, laws and festivals by which the Israelites are to live, all given to Moses by God to relay to the people.

Leviticus 1 opens with: *And the LORD called to Moses Laws for Burnt Offerings and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying,*

Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the LORD and introduces the first of the five main offerings.

The five main offerings

[Lev 1-5]

Burnt Offering

[Lev 1]

A burnt offering will be voluntary and could be offered at any time. It is both a general acknowledgement of the sin nature and a request for a renewed relationship with a total commitment to God, as represented by the whole animal being offered.

The animal has to be a male with no defect and is killed at the entrance to the tabernacle with hands laid on its head to represent the transfer of sin. The animal is prepared and the whole burnt over night, except the skin which will be a fee for the priest.

Grain Offering

[Lev 2]
A grain offering is voluntary and offered from the giver's own provisions as a recognition of God's goodness and His provision. The grain has to be finely ground and have oil and salt in it, but must not have any yeast or honey. A small portion is offered to God on the altar, along with some frankincense. The rest of the grain offering goes to the priests.

Fellowship offering

{Lev 3}
A peace, or fellowship, offering is a voluntary sacrifice given to God as a way to say thank you for God's unsought generosity, simply as a means to praise God for His goodness.

Sin Offering

[Lev 4]
A sin offering is a mandatory sacrifice made for sins committed in ignorance, or unintentional, by breaking one of the Lord's commandments. The manner in which the sin offering is made, and the animal offered, will vary depending on the status of the sinner. When the live animal is brought to the altar, the sinner will lay his hand on the head of the animal, representing the transfer of sin from the sinner to the animal.

Guilt Offering

[Lev 5]
The guilt offering, also mandatory, is very similar to the sin offering. The difference is that the guilt offering is for a sin that had done definitive damage to the tabernacle service, or another person, thereby requiring restitution.

Concerning Priests

[Le v 6-10]

Instructions for the Priests

[Lev 6-7]

More detailed instructions are now given for priests concerning all the offerings.

In the circumstance of stealing from one's neighbour, the guilt offering is necessary, but restitution has to be made before the offering, then there will be certainty of forgiveness.

This is followed by specific instructions for the Burnt Offering, the Grain Offering and the Sin Offering.

Moses then gives instructions concerning the use of portions of animal sacrifices.

The priesthood

[Lev 8-10]

As instructed by God, Moses ordains Aaron and his sons as priests. The ordination process involves a sin offering, a burnt offering and a ram offering for ordination, followed by a period of seven days in which they are to stay at the entrance of the tabernacle. After seven days their ministry begins with a sin offering and a burnt offering to make atonement for themselves and for all the people.

The rules concerning priesthood are very strict, and when two of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, break the rules they are executed by God. They are taken outside the camp to be mourned by their relatives, but Aaron and his remaining two sons are not permitted to leave the tabernacle. A stark lesson for the priests.

Ceremonial laws

[Lev 11-17]

Clean and unclean animals

[Lev 11]

To keep Israel pure as the representation of God's kingdom, laws for cleanliness are given, beginning with clean and unclean animals, those that can and cannot be eaten, and the disposal of carcasses.

Impurity following birth

[Lev 12]

Moses next instructs the people on the ceremonial process relating to impurity after giving birth, different for male and female births, then the purification rite requiring a burnt offering.

Leprosy

[Lev 13-14]

Moses now addresses the subject of leprosy, instructing the priests in examination and diagnosis of the disease, and consideration of garments that might have the plague of leprosy on them.

There are of course rituals surrounding the cleansing of lepers and the whole process is given by Moses in detail.

Laws Concerning Bodily Discharges

[Lev 15]

Bodily discharges are now addressed for both men and women, but separately, for abnormal discharges, their uncleanness and the required offerings. In addition to the abnormal discharges, and under the same status of unclean, instruction is given separately concerning men's semen and women's menstruation.

The Day of Atonement

[Lev 16]

The Day of Atonement will become the Jews holiest day - Yom Kippur - the acts of atonement and repentance at its centre. The ritual is described here in chapter 16, but the phrase 'Day of Atonement' isn't used until chapter 23.

God instructs Moses to tell Aaron of the procedures for the Day of Atonement.

This is the only day a priest can enter the Holy of Holies, and even then, only the high priest.

Aaron is instructed in the manner in which he is to enter the Holy Place, the animals required for offerings, his clothing and the need to wash his body before putting them on.

This involves a bull offering for himself, the priest and his household, and two goats, one as a sin offering for all the people and the other as a scapegoat, with sprinkling of blood being an essential element of atonement. Aaron is to lay his hands on the head of the scapegoat, representing the transfer of all the sins of Israel to the goat, then the goat is led out of the camp and released into the wilderness, taking the sins of Israel with it.

Aaron is then given detail on how to properly complete the process of the 'Day of Atonement'

The sanctity of blood

[Lev 17]

Moses is instructed to give the law concerning blood to Aaron, his sons and all the people.

No one other than a priest is permitted to make a blood sacrifice in the tabernacle, sprinkled blood being the means of atonement, and no one is permitted to consume blood. Blood of any animal is to be drained before the animal is eaten,

For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I [God speaking to Moses] have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.

Moral laws

[Lev 18-20]

Laws are given against a number of sexual relations and activity

[Lev 18]

Against incest, with specific instances stated; sex during menstruation; adultery; contributing to Molech worship - the sacrifice of infants; homosexuality; bestiality.

A number of various laws

[Lev 19]

Following a general call to holiness, some laws already covered are revisited:

- To respect parents

- Against adultery

- Laws concerning offerings.

In addition, a number of various laws are given:

- Providing for the poor by leaving fields incompletely harvested

- Honest dealing

- Basic human compassion commanded

- Laws regarding justice and truthfulness

- The command to love one's neighbour

- Laws of purity in response to pagan practices

- The penalty for unlawful intercourse with a concubine

Regarding the commencement of eating fruit in the land of Canaan
Laws to insure separation from pagan practices
Further laws of kindness and justice.

Penalties for Laws Already Given

[Lev 20]

For sins of idolatry
Molech worship
For involvement with the occult
For sins of immorality
For the cursing of a parent
For sins of incest
For homosexual sin
For marrying both a woman and her mother
For bestiality
For other sexual sins
For being a medium or practitioner of the occult.

Regulations for priests, offerings and feasts

[Lev 21-22]

Moses is now required to give a number of specific instructions for priests.

Concerning the prohibition of touching dead bodies and imitating the mourning practices of pagans; regulations for their marriage practices; matters concerning their specific responsibilities, maintaining purity, matters relating to unacceptable sacrifices.

The feasts of the Lord

Lev 23]

Instructions are now given concerning observance of appointed feasts

Observation of the Sabbath is stated, then the required seven feasts:

The first four to be celebrated in the Spring:

Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Feast of Weeks

The last three to be celebrated in the Autumn:

Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles.

Some Laws put into action

[Lev 24]

The rules are then given for the continual burning of the lampstand and the continual provision of shewbread. (The shewbread is twelve cakes of unleavened bread, which are a perpetual representation of the twelve tribes of Israel before Jehovah.)

The punishment for blasphemy is stated using the example of an Egyptian blasphemer. Also mentioned is murder and killing of a neighbour's animal, with the level of punishment in general to be appropriate for the offence: "an eye for an eye".

Sabbath and Jubilee years

[Lev 25]

The laws concerning the Sabbath and Jubilee years are given.

The Sabbath year is every seventh year when the land is to be rested from farming, but the Israelites can feed from crops that naturally grow on the land.

The Jubilee year is every fiftieth year when all land is returned to its owner and all Israelite slaves freed. Consequently, land is bought and sold on the basis of how many years are left before the Jubilee year. God says "*The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me.*"

Provision is also to be made for redemption of the land when an owner has had to sell but later has the means to redeem it, either by himself or by a kinsman redeemer.

Blessings and curses

[Lev 26]

The conditions of the Mosaic Covenant given at Mount Sinai are restated in the form of blessings and curses. The people are told that if they observe God's Sabbaths, respect His sanctuary and obey His commandments, then their crops will be abundant and they will live without fear and in peace. But if they do not do these things, then the consequences will be terrible and increase all the time they do not repent, until they are eventually taken captive by their enemies. Yet He will not forget them in the land of their enemies, and will wait for their repentance to honour His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Offerings vowed to the Lord

[Lev 27]

Finally, rules are given for things vowed to the Lord in kind. A value is put on them, whether they be people, animals or houses, and provision is made for their redemption should circumstances deem it necessary

The Desert Wanderings

[Numbers]

The first census

[Num 1:1-10:10]

It has now been thirteen months since the Israelites left Egypt.

A Census is taken of all the men of twenty years or older who are able to serve in an army, and the numbers recorded by tribe. The Levites are excluded from the census as they are to be responsible for the tabernacle and its furnishings, for the erection and disassembly of it, and for carrying it from camp to camp. The order of which the tribes are to camp around the tabernacle, and the order for marching is given, with the twelve tribes assembled in four groups of three headed by Judah, Reuben, Ephraim and Dan.

Before leaving Sinai, offerings from each tribe are given for the dedication of the tabernacle.

The journey from Sinai to Kadesh

[Num 10:11-12:16]

After nearly fourteen months since leaving Egypt, the cloud lifts from above the tabernacle and the Israelites prepare to leave Sinai, breaking camp and forming their marching order according to God's instructions.

After just three days of travelling, some of the Israelites start to complain about the manna, perhaps now becoming somewhat monotonous, and crave after the fine foods they remember from Egypt. In response, God provides them with quail, but so much of it they will eventually become sick of meat and again be satisfied with manna. But before they have finished their first meal of quail, the people are struck with a severe plague, their complaining having kindled God's wrath. After this episode they then travel on to Hazeroth and camp there.

Miriam and Aaron speak to Moses, apparently envious of Moses' relationship with God. God summons all three to the Tabernacle and speaks directly to Aaron and Miriam, confirming the special relationship in which it is only Moses with

whom God speaks face to face. As punishment for the complaint, Miriam was made leprous and had to remain outside the camp for seven days.

They then travelled on to the Desert of Paran, in the region of Kadesh.

In the Kadesh region

[Num 13:1-20:21]

The Israelites are now approaching the land God is to give them. God instructs Moses to send twelve men, one from each tribe, to explore the land and return with a full report. They pass through the Wilderness of Zin and explore as far north as Hebron. After forty days they return with some pomegranates, figs, and a cluster of grapes so large that it has to be carried on a pole between two people. However, ten of them report that the people are very powerful and their cities large and fortified. They also mention the Nephilim, to whom they seemed like grasshoppers. The report is soon known to all the people and they become fearful they will be killed. It's even suggested that they should choose another leader and return to Egypt. Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Caleb try to persuade them that God will deliver the land and its people into their hands, and they should not rebel against the Lord. Yet the crowd now begins to talk of stoning them. God, tiring of the people's rebellious attitude, suggests he will disinherit them and raise a new nation through Moses. However, Moses intercedes on their behalf and God pardons them, but declares that none of the people aged twenty or more will see the promised land. They will continue to sojourn in the desert for a total of forty years, one year for each day of the exploration. Of the twelve spies, only Joshua and Caleb would see the promised land. The other ten were smitten with a plague.

The next morning, some men attempt to enter the promised land to somehow make up for their mistrust, but do so without God's approval and are defeated at Hormah by the Amalekites and Canaanites.

Various laws are now given to Moses for when they eventually enter the promised land.

A man is found gathering sticks on the Sabbath, and under instruction from God is stoned, effectively demonstrating the seriousness of Sabbath-breaking. The people are then required to make fringes in the border of their garments as a constant reminder to keep the Lord's commandments.

Korah, a Levite, along with Dathan and Abiram, rebel against Moses and Aaron, leading two hundred and fifty 'princes'. Korah's grievance is Aaron's position over them in the priesthood, and Dathan and Abiram's concerning Moses' leadership over them all and his failure to take them into the promised land. Their rebellion is punished by God who causes the leaders and all their tents to be swallowed up by the ground, and the two hundred and fifty to be consumed by fire.

To confirm Aaron's leadership, God instructs that Aaron's staff and twelve from the tribes of Israel are all to be placed in the tabernacle. The one that blossoms will identify the leader. In the morning it is Aaron's staff that has bud and

blossomed, demonstrating with certainty that Aaron is the head of the priesthood.

The priesthood now confirmed, instructions for their duties are given, and for the support they are to receive from the Levites. As the Levites will not have any inheritance from the land, they will have what's left over from sacrificial offerings and receive the nation's tithes. They will then, in turn, give tithes to the priests.

Instructions are now given for the elaborate ceremonial preparation of cleansing water, using the ashes of a red heifer. The cleansing water is used for purification rituals following contact with a dead body.

The people again complain to Moses about lack of water. God instructs Moses and Aaron to speak in front of all the people to the rock, which will then bring forth water. But Moses strikes the rock rather than speaking to it. For this disobedience, which God says was a failure to sanctify Him in the eyes of the people, Moses and Aaron would not be the ones to take Israel into the promised land.

Moses now sends messengers to Edom (Esau's descendants) to request passage through their land, but this request is denied.

From Kadesh to the plains of Moab

[Num 20:22-22:1]

The Israelites now journey from Kadesh to Mount Hor where Aaron dies and his position passes to his son Eleazar.

Following an incident with, and subsequent victory over, some Canaanites, the camp heads south to avoid Edom, in the opposite direction to the promised land and passing near the Red Sea. This discourages the people and they again complain about the lack of water and food, expressing their loathing of manna. God punishes them by sending serpents with fatal bites, then instructs Moses to make a fiery serpent on a pole. Anyone who is bitten and then looks at the serpent on the pole is saved from death.

They continue on their way, stopping at various places, and come to the top of Pisgah where messengers are sent to Sihon, the king of the Amorites, requesting passage through his land. This is denied and the king goes to war with the Israelites, but is defeated and they are able to stay in the land of the Amorites for a time.

On the Plains of Moab

[Num 22:2-36:13]

Balak, son of a Moabite king, having seen Israel's defeat of the Amorites, is terrified of them and assumes they have plans against Moab. Since Balak believes there is no military way to defeat Israel, he colludes with the Midianites to pay for the services of a diviner, Balaam, to put a curse on them. Balaam is told by God not to curse the Israelites, and uses the voice

of his donkey and an angel of the Lord as a means of encouraging Balaam to do as He wishes. This is presumably intended to be more persuasive than any financial incentives from his hirers. Three times Balak asks Balaam to curse Israel, but three times he blesses them, as instructed by God, before returning home.

Many of the Israelites have now been seduced by Moabite women and enticed into worshipping their gods. God's wrath is kindled and a plague is brought on the people until Phinehas, a priest and grandson of Aaron, deals with two of the offenders.

A second census is now taken in preparation for invading the promised land.

Following a petition from the daughters of Zelophehad, God provides the law concerning inheritance when a man dies without sons.

From Mount Abarim God shows Moses the land the Israelites are to inherit, but Moses will not be permitted to enter it. This is because of his disobedience in the Desert of Zin when he struck the rock to provide water for the people. Joshua is then formally proclaimed as Moses' successor.

Required offerings and feasts are restated and the law concerning vows is given. A man's vow is binding, but a woman's is only binding if a father or husband does not nullify it at the time the vow is made.

The Lord instructs Moses to take vengeance on the Midianites as his last act before his death. After this battle, Moses is angry with the commanders for sparing the women and children. They were instructed to kill all the women who were not virgins, as they were those who were guilty of corrupting the Israelites, and all the boys, presumably because they would endanger the inheritance rights of Israelite men. The spoils of this war are divided according to God's instructions to Moses.

The tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh request to have the land east of the Jordan as their inheritance. This is reluctantly granted by Moses on the condition the men take part in the conquest of Canaan before returning to their new land and homes.

Moses had been instructed by God to record the stages in their journey. These are given here (chapter 33).

The boundaries of their inheritance west of Jordan, the towns and pastures for the Levites, and the six cities of refuge for those who cause death by accident, are all allotted.

Safeguards for the inheritance for Zelophehad's daughters are put in place, completing all the commands and regulations given by God through Moses on the east side of the Jordan.

Preparing to Enter The Promised Land

[Deuteronomy]

Moses reviews the wilderness wanderings

[Deu 1-3]

Moses recounts the wilderness wanderings, how, when approaching the promised land, twelve men were sent to spy out the land and the people rebelled after hearing the report from ten of the men. As a consequence of this they were to wander in the desert for another thirty eight years. After all this time they approached the plains of Moab and defeated Sihon, king of Heshbon, and Og, king of Bashan. Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh requested possession of this land on the east side of the Jordan river. It was granted to them providing the men took part in the battles to possess Canaan.

Moses recalls how, from the top of Pisgah, he was shown the land to be possessed, but would not be permitted to enter it.

A call to obedience

[Deu 4:1-43]

Moses reminds the people of the incidents with Moabite women and followers of Baalpeor, then calls them to obedience as they take possession of the promised land. They are to teach their children the laws given at Horeb, and they are not to make any form of idols for worship. Moses gives them a prophetic warning that if they become corrupt in future generations, they will be scattered amongst other peoples and only a remnant will survive and return in later days.

Then Moses sets aside three cities of refuge on the east side of Jordan, one for each tribe, to which a person could flee if he had unintentionally killed another.

Commandments, statutes and judgements

[Deu 4:44-26:19]

Moses summons all Israel to hear the laws given by God at Horeb. He first repeats the Ten Commandments then gives further instruction before repeating the rest of the laws, which Moses calls commandments, statutes and judgements. They are to continually recall them to their children, and have them written in places where they will always be seen. Obedience is to be a condition of their prosperity and righteousness. They are God's chosen people and must always remember He is the Lord their God. Moses tells them that they are to possess the land, not because of their righteousness, but because of God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, for they are a stiff-necked people who have continually provoked God. He recalls the golden calf incident, how he broke the tables, and fearing God's anger against them interceded on their behalf. New tables of stone were provided on which God wrote the Ten Commandments. They are now to circumcise their hearts

and no longer be stiff-necked. They have witnessed all the great things God has done for them, but He will do even more when they possess the Promised Land, providing they love the Lord their God, and serve him with all their heart and with all their soul. Their need for obedience will be stated again when they possess the land, at which time they will be required to proclaim the blessings of obedience from Mount Gerizim, and the curses of disobedience from Mount Ebal.

They are to rid the land of all idolatrous places and their offerings are only to be made in a place God will choose and declare once they have settled in the land. They are warned against any further acts of idolatry as their love for God will be tested by some people who will tell of a sign or wonder that then comes true, suggesting that they should worship other gods. Even if this person is one they love, they are to be exposed and put to death. If they hear rumours of idolatry in another town, it is to be investigated and, if found to be true, all its inhabitants are to be executed and the town completely destroyed and burned, never to be rebuilt.

Moses then recalls the laws concerning clean and unclean food, tithing and the feasts they are to keep.

They are to appoint judges and set up courts, but anything too difficult for their courts is to be taken to the priests, whose decisions are to be binding.

Kings and prophets will be raised and guidance is given concerning them.

Instructions are given for: Cities of Refuge; the need for two or more witnesses; going to war; atonement for an unsolved murder; marrying a captive woman; the right of the firstborn; dealing with a rebellious son, cross-dressing, marriage violations and more.

Blessings and curses

[Deu 27-28]

Moses instructs the people to build an altar on Mount Ebal when they have crossed the Jordan. This altar is to be finished in plaster and all the laws Moses has given them are to be clearly written on it. The tribes of Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin are to stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people; the tribes of Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali are to stand on Mount Ebal to pronounce curses. The Levites are then to recite twelve curses, all with the response of “Amen!” from the people.

Moses then tells them all the ways in which they will be blessed by God if they obey His commandments. He then gives them a lengthy list of terrible curses that will come upon them if they are disobedient.

The Land Covenant

[Deu 29-30]

The people are about to receive another unconditional covenant, referred to as the Land Covenant. Moses prepares them by

reminding them of the things they have seen God do, and that their obedience is required to avoid His wrath. The covenant entered is a promise from God that they will be restored from any dispersion and will again prosper, but with their hearts circumcised. Yet Moses emphasises the choice is theirs to avoid God's wrath or not, and they will remain in the promised land and prosper all the time they are obedient.

The succession and Moses' last days

[Deu 31-34]

At the age of 120 years, Moses announces Joshua as his successor to lead the people across the Jordan and take possession of the land.

He tells them the law is to be read to all Israel every seven years during the Feast of Tabernacles, emphasising that their children, who do not know the law, must hear it and learn to fear God.

God summons Moses and Joshua and speaks to them in the tabernacle. Moses is told that the people will rebel and is given a song to teach the Israelites, a song that will testify against them and be remembered by their descendants. God tells Joshua to be strong and courageous, as it is he that will lead the Israelites into the promised land.

Having finished writing the book of the law, Moses gives it to the Levites (who carry the Ark of the Covenant) to place it in the ark where it is to be kept. Moses then recites the song to the people.

Moses blesses all Israel by tribe, then climbs Mount Nebo where God shows him the whole of the promised land for the last time before burying him in Moab, in a place not known by any man.

And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.

The Conquest

[Joshua]

Israel enters the promised land

[Jos 1:1-5:12]

God reaffirms Joshua's authority, reviewing the task ahead and encouraging him to be strong and very courageous. Joshua is reminded that observance of the law is a condition of prosperity and success.

Joshua tells the people to prepare to cross the Jordan to possess the land given to them by God. The people responded saying that they will do all that Joshua commands them.

Joshua sends two spies to check out the land and, in particular, Jericho. At Jericho, they stay at the house of a harlot named Rahab who hides them from the king's men. They make an agreement with her that she, and all staying in her house, will be spared when the Israelites invade if a scarlet cord is tied in her window. She tells them that all Jericho has heard of everything that God had done for them, of their recent conquests, and how they are all afraid of them. Rahab's window is in the city wall, so they are able to escape down a rope from the window then go to hide in the hills for three days while the king's men are looking for them. They then return to Joshua to report that all the people fear the Israelites.

The next morning the Israelites move from Shittim and camp at the Jordan, which is in flood. After three days, the ark of the covenant is carried ahead, and while the priests stand in the middle of the Jordan holding the ark, the waters are cut off, allowing them all to cross on dry land.

Joshua orders twelve stones to be collected from the middle of the Jordan. Once they have all crossed, the priests carry the ark to the west bank and the waters immediately return, in flood as they were before. They then move on to Gilgal where Joshua sets up the twelve stones as a memorial for future generations.

None of the young men had been circumcised during their wilderness wanderings. This is now corrected and all the men of Israel remain in the camp until their circumcision is healed.

On the fourteenth day of the month they celebrate Passover, then on the next day the manna ceases and they begin to eat produce from the promised land.

The fall of Jericho

[Jos 5:13-8:35]

Joshua receives instructions from God for the campaign against Jericho. For the next six days they march once around the city with the Ark of the Covenant ahead of them, with trumpets being sounded. On the seventh day, when the trumpets have

sounded, all the people shout and the walls of Jericho collapse, allowing all the men to go into the city and conquer it. Only Rahab and her family are spared, being taken to a place outside Israel's camp, later to be permitted to live amongst the Israelites. All the gold, silver, bronze and iron from Jericho is set aside for God's treasury, and the city is burned. Joshua then warns the people against any attempt to rebuild Jericho in the future.

Following a favourable report from men sent by Joshua to check out Ai, about three thousand men are sent against the city, but they are defeated. Joshua is distraught, then God tells him it is because someone has lied and stolen some of the things from Jericho meant for the Lord's treasury. To correct this sin, the culprit has to be identified, punished and the things stolen burned. By a process of elimination, tribe by tribe, clan by clan then family by family, Achan is identified as the culprit. He confesses and the stolen items are gathered and taken with his family outside the camp. Achan and all his family are then executed and everything burned and covered with rocks.

God then told Joshua to take Ai by an ambush. Men are to be sent to the other side of city to lie in wait and the rest of the army is to confront Ai. When the men of Ai come out to attack them they are to turn and run. As the men of Ai pursue them and leave Ai undefended, those lying in wait are to attack the city and burn it. The men of Ai will then be caught between the two groups and defeated. The ambush and subsequent defeat will occur while Joshua holds out his javelin towards Ai. As God had instructed, Ai is totally destroyed and all its inhabitants killed. On this occasion God allows the people to keep all the bounty.

Joshua builds an altar on Mount Ebal where burnt offerings are made and the law of Moses is copied onto the stones. With the people facing the Ark of the Covenant, half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half in front of Mount Ebal, Joshua reads all the law, the blessings and the curses, as instructed by Moses.

The central and southern cities are conquered

[Jos 9-10]

When the kings west of the Jordan hear about Israel's successes in the hill country, they all prepare for war, except the Gibeonites. The Gibeonites send a delegation to Israel with the aim to make a treaty, dressed and equipped as if they had been on a long journey from a distant country. Believing they are not from Canaan, and without enquiring of God, the treaty is made and ratified by an oath. Three days later they hear that these people are Gibeonites and had deceived them. When challenged about the deceit, the Gibeonites say it was because of all that they had heard and were in fear of Israel. Because of the oath made, Joshua has to let the Gibeonites live, but made them wood-cutters and water-carriers for the community.

Having heard the Gibeonites had made a treaty with Israel, five Amorite kings joined forces to attack Gibeon. The Gibeonites appeal to Joshua for help and so he marches to Gibeon with all his fighting men, having been told by God not

to fear the five kings. The armies are taken by surprise, thrown into confusion by God and defeated. The armies are pursued, and as they flee Gibeon, God causes large hailstones to come down on them. More are killed by hailstones than by the swords of the Israelites. There is not enough time in the day to complete the defeat of the Amorites, so Joshua calls out to God for the sun to stand still to allow them more time: And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. *So the sun stood still in the midst of the heaven, and hastened not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man: For the Lord fought for Israel* [Jos 10:13b, 14].

Joshua returns to Gilgal with his army and hears that the five kings are hiding in a cave at Makkedah. He gives orders for the cave to be blocked with stones and guarded while the remnant of the armies are pursued. However, a few managed to reach their fortified cities without being caught. The five kings are then hanged and left until evening, when their bodies are placed back in the cave which is again blocked with stones. Joshua then attacks and defeats Makkedah, totally destroying it and everyone in it.

From Makkedah, Joshua and his army move on to take and destroy the cities of the south as God had commanded, leaving no survivors. They then return to Gilgal.

The northern kings are defeated

[Jos 11-12]

Led by Jabin, king of Hazor, the northern kings gather together at the Waters of Merom to war with Israel. Having been told by God that He will deliver these enemies into their hands, as He had done in the south, Joshua leads his whole army against the alliance and defeats the royal cities of the north, leaving no survivors in Israel's land. However, some Anakites survived in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod.

Joshua and his army return to Gilgal and the land now has rest from war.

The division of the land

[Jos 13-21]

Joshua is now very old and not all the cities of Canaan have been taken. God tells Joshua that He himself will drive out all the remaining cities, and that Joshua is to include their land when dividing the whole land amongst the Israelites.

[This doesn't relieve the Israelites of their responsibility to conquer the territories, rather, confirms their need to trust in God].

Reuben, Gad and the half tribe Manasseh, at their request, had been allotted territories east of Jordan. However, not all

the territories allotted to Reuben had been expelled and continued to dwell amongst the Israelites.

Caleb, of the tribe of Judah, was one of those supporting Moses after the spies returned from surveying the Promised Land. Moses consequently promised him a specific territory. Joshua honours that promise, blesses Caleb and gives him Hebron as his inheritance. But he first has to drive out the inhabitants, which he does.

Judah is now allotted the remainder of their territory as their inheritance.

Part of the tribe of Manasseh had been allotted land east of the. The other part are to settle on the west bank of the Jordan, and here we have the areas allotted to this half of Manasseh and to Ephraim. However, the Canaanites that dwell in Gezer are not driven out and dwell among the Ephraimites, albeit they served under tribute.

Now there is a problem with Manasseh driving out all the inhabitants: *Yet the children of Manasseh could not drive out the inhabitants of those cities; but the Canaanites would dwell in that land. Yet it came to pass, when the children of Israel were waxen strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute; but did not utterly drive them out* [Jos 17:12-13].

Now Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph, were two of the larger tribes, so they question Joshua asking why they had been given just one lot and suggesting that, because of their size, they really should have two lots. Joshua agrees to their suggestion and another lot is drawn. Manasseh are now able to dwell next to Ephraim on the West Bank. (Remembering, of course, that the other part of Manasseh are over on the east bank of the Jordan River).

The tabernacle is now set up at Shiloh making Shiloh the spiritual centre for the Israelites from where the priesthood would perform their duties.

There are still seven tribes who have yet to receive their inheritance. Three men from each of these tribes are chosen to go and survey the territory and draw out the boundaries. On their return, the casting of lots for the remaining tribes could begin.

The first lot is for Benjamin who are to dwell around the area of Jerusalem and northward, a narrow strip that went from Jordan up through Bethel.

The second lot is for the tribe of Simeon who become the southern most tribe in Israel. Their land is to be down around Kadesh-Barnea and desert area, a vast desert area Beersheba, and almost up to Hebron.

The third lot is for the tribe of Zebulun who receive the area of the valley of Megiddo, and the vast valley from Haifa on back towards Mount Gilboa.

The fourth lot is for the tribe of Issachar who receive the area south of the Sea of Galilee.

The fifth lot is for the tribe of Asher who receive the coastal area from Haifa on up to Sidon.

The sixth lot is for the tribe of Naphtali who received the area around the Sea of Galilee.

The seventh lot is for the tribe of Dan who are given the area known as the Hula Valley, which is the upper Jordan before it gets to the Sea of Galilee.

Then, finally, a city is given to their leader Joshua in the general area known as Mount Ephraim.

The Levites do not have territories of their own but are given cities with surrounding land for their farming. Forty eight cities are given from amongst the tribes, all of which are listed here in chapter 21.

The eastern tribes return home

[Jos 22]

Having completed their obligation to take part in the battles to possess the land, the Reubenites, Gadites and a part of the half-tribe of Manasseh, return home to the east of Jordan. There they build an imposing altar by the Jordan, which the remaining tribes take to be some form of rebellion against God because the tabernacle had been erected at Shiloh. A delegation is sent to investigate and is told that the altar is not for offerings or sacrifice, but simply built as a witness to their continuing allegiance to God. They felt the need to do this because they are separated from the rest of Israel by the Jordan.

Joshua's last days

[Jos 23-24]

Joshua is now approaching 110 years and the end of his life. He convenes the tribes of Israel and reminds them of what God has done for them, and will do if they follow his commandments. They are not to associate with the nations that remain among them, not to invoke the names of their gods, swear by them, serve or bow down to them. To do so will invoke the Lord's anger and they will quickly be driven from the land He has given them.

Like Moses before him, Joshua's final act is to summon the people before the Lord. Speaking for God, he briefly recalls their history from Terah, Abraham's father, to the present day.

Here, at Shechem, Joshua makes a covenant for the people, commemorated by a stone placed close to the ark, and recorded in the Book of the Law.

They are called on to make the choice whether to fear and serve God or to serve other gods, to which all respond with an agreement to serve God.

Joshua dies at the age of 110 and is buried at Mount Ephraim, on the north side of the hill of Gaash.

The Times of the Judges

[Judges and Ruth]

A limited conquest

[Jdg 1]

The children of Israel now turn to the Lord to enquire which tribe should go first against the remaining Canaanites. Judah is selected and, along with Simeon, subdue all except some in the valley. However, the tribes of Benjamin, Joseph, Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali and Dan did not drive out all the Canaanites from places allotted to them, though Israel is sufficiently strong to make many of them their tributaries.

God's judgement on disobedience

[Jdg 2:1-3:6]

Whilst the elders who outlived Joshua were still alive, the children of Israel continued to serve God. But with the coming of a new generation who had not witnessed Joshua's leadership and God's good works, they begin to disobey His commandments and break their covenant with Him by mixing with the Canaanites and turning to their gods. As God had warned them, this would lead to a period in which they would be overwhelmed by the Canaanites and oppressed by them.

God's plan is that each time the Israelites distance themselves further from Him, He will raise a judge to deliver them. The Israelites seem incapable of learning from this, and following each deliverance they just seem to get into deeper trouble, invoking God's wrath more each time.

Othniel

[Jdg 3:7-11]

Now the Israelites begin to intermarry with the Canaanites and serve their gods. Consequently, God allows Chushanrishathaim, king of Mesopotamia, to subdue them and they serve him for eight years. The Israelites cry out to God and He raises Othniel, a nephew of Caleb, to deliver them from Chushanrishathaim. A period of forty years peace then follows.

Ehud

[Jdg 3:12-30]

The Israelites again lapse into idolatry and are delivered into the hands of the Moabites for eighteen years. Ehud, a left-handed man of the tribe of Benjamin, kills Eglon, the king of Moab, while pretending to offer him a present in the

privacy of his parlour. Ehud locks the doors when leaving, allowing time for his escape before the murder is discovered. He then leads the Israelites into battle and the Moabites are defeated, bringing peace that is to last for eighty years.

Shamgar

[Jdg 3:31]

The next leader was Shamgar son of Anath. He too rescued Israel, and did so by killing six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad. [Good News Bible]

Deborah and Barak

[Jdg 4-5]

Following Ehud's death, the Israelites once again lapse and this time are oppressed for twenty years by Sisera, commander of Jabin's army in Hazor. Deborah is leading Israel at this time, settling disputes brought to her by the people. She summons Barak to lead ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun to Mount Tabor, while she lures Sisera and his army to the Kishon river where Barak will be able to defeat him. Barak refuses to go unless Deborah goes with him. She agrees but declares the honour of victory would consequently be given to a woman. Sisera's army is defeated and all slain in battle, but Sisera flees to Zaananim near Kedesh. Here there are some Kenites living that have had friendly relations with Jabin. (The Kenites are descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law). Jael, the wife of Heber, a Kenite, lures Sisera into her tent. Sisera is expecting to be hidden, but is killed by Jael while he sleeps by driving a tent peg through his temple. Deborah and Barak sing a victory song and peace follows for forty years.

Gideon

[Jdg 6-8]

Having again fallen into idolatry, the Israelites are now oppressed by the Midianites who invade their lands each season, destroying crops and livestock. After seven years, the Israelites call to God for help. Gideon is chosen by God, and an angel of the Lord is sent to give him his mission. Gideon has no confidence that he is able to do the task and asks for confirmation that this messenger is truly from God. When Gideon prepares a meal for the angel he is instructed to place it on a stone, and when the angel touches it with his staff it is consumed by fire. Gideon is then instructed by the Lord to pull down his father's altar to Baal, build an altar to the Lord and sacrifice a bullock on it.

The Midianites and Amalekites come, as was their habit now, and camp in the Jezreel valley. Gideon sends messengers throughout Manasseh, and to Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali to come to meet with him, but he again has doubts and asks for two signs from God using a fleece laid on the ground overnight. After the first night, the fleece is soaked in dew but the

ground dry; after the second night, the fleece is dry and the ground covered in dew.

Gideon has mustered an army of thirty two thousand men, but God did not want this great number as the Israelites would claim victory for themselves. God instructs Gideon to send home all those who are fearful, which reduces the army to ten thousand. He then has them all drink from nearby water and selects all those that drink by lapping (putting their hand to their mouths) as those who are to fight. This reduces the army to just three hundred men. Gideon and his small army panic the Midianites into fleeing by surrounding them then, on Gideon's signal, they blow trumpets and expose lamps by breaking the pitchers in which they are hidden. When the Midianites are fleeing, the men of Manasseh, Naphtali and Asher gather and pursue them. Gideon sends messengers throughout Ephraim who then join in the pursuit, capturing and killing two princes of Midian and bringing their heads to Gideon.

The men of Ephraim then jibe Gideon for not including them in the original assault, but he appeases them by stating the importance of their capture of the princes.

Despite the weariness of his army, Gideon then crosses the Jordan to pursue two Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna. He asks the men of Succoth and then, a little farther on, the men of Peneul for some bread for his army, but is refused on both occasions. Gideon catches up with the Midianites, defeats the remaining army of fifteen thousand, then pursues and captures the two kings, Zebah and Zalmunna. Returning via Peneul and Succoth, he teaches both communities a lesson for not helping him when he had asked for bread for his men.

The defeat of the Midianites is completed when Gideon slays Zebah and Zalmunna. The Israelites ask him to be their king but Gideon refuses, saying the Lord will rule over them. He then makes a request of them that each should give him an earring from their bounty. They agree and Gideon makes an ephod from the earrings and keeps it in his city. Unfortunately, the Israelites came to treat the ephod as an item to be worshipped, and it becomes a snare to Gideon and his house.

Gideon has many wives and seventy sons, as well as one by his concubine in Shechem, called Abimelech.

Israel now enjoys forty years of peace but, as is the pattern, when Gideon dies they slide into idolatry making Baalberith their god.

The usurper Abimelech

[Jdg 9]

Abimelech, the son of Gideon's concubine in Shechem, seeking to fulfil the request made to Gideon to rule over the people, suggests to the people of Shechem that it would be better for him to rule over them rather than the other seventy sons of Gideon, especially as he was also of Shechem. This reasoning is accepted and Abimelech is given money to hire some men, then slays Gideon's sons at Ophrah, except for the youngest, Jotham, who hides from them. Shechem then unilaterally

makes Abimelech king over Israel. Hearing of this, Jotham goes to the top of mount Gerizim from where he is able to recite a parable which all Schechem can hear. This parable belittles their choice of Abimelech as king and foretells their destruction with a curse.

After Abimelech has been king for three years, tensions arise between him and Schechem, with Ebed's son Gaal taking up arms and opposing Abimelech. Gaal is defeated in battle, but the tensions between Schechem and Abimelech continue. Abimelech goes into battle against Schechem and all the city is defeated and killed. He then goes to Thebez and attacks that city, but the inhabitants take refuge in a tower within the city. While he is attacking the tower, a woman throws down a piece of a millstone, striking Abimelech on the head and killing him. This act ends the tensions and fulfils Jotham's curse on the wickedness of Shecham and Abimelech.

Tola and Jair

[Jdg 10:1-5]

After Abimelech there follows twenty three years of peace under Tola, and twenty two years of peace under Jair.

Jephthah

[Jdg 10:6-12:7]

Yet again the children of Israel fall into idolatry, serving the gods of a number of the nations around them. Consequently, God permits the Philistines and Ammonites to overrun them, and after eighteen years they cry out to God for help. God reminds them of all He has done for them in the past and how he has come to their help in more recent decades. This time He refuses to help and tells them to go to the gods they've been worshipping to solicit their help. But the Israelites put away their foreign gods and serve the Lord only, and God grieves for them.

The Ammonites gather in Gilead for battle, but the Israelites are gathered in Mizpeh, so the Gileads are now wondering who will fight for them. Of Gilead's sons, Jephthah was born of a harlot and was disowned by his brethren, not wanting him to share in their inheritance. But Jephthah became a *mighty man of valour* and the Elders of Gilead now seek his help, offering to make him head over them, to which he agrees.

Because he is now head of Gilead, Jephthah sends messengers to the Ammonites questioning what argument they have against him that causes them to fight in his land. Their reply is that they are reclaiming the land the Israelites took from them when they came from Egypt. Jephthah's response is that it was God who gave the Israelites the land, and therefore their argument was not with him, but they took no notice.

Jephthah made a vow to the Lord that "whatsoever" came to meet him from his home when he returned in peace would

be offered to Him as a burnt offering. He defeats the Ammonites, but when he returns to his home it is his only child, his daughter, who is first to greet him. His daughter accepted her fate because it was a vow to the Lord, but requested a period of two months grace before the vow is honoured, which is agreed.

The Ephraimites now claim that Jephthah did not include them in the defeat of the Ammonites and a dispute arises between the Gileadites and Ephraimites, resulting in the death of some forty-two thousand Ephraimites.

Jephthah leads Israel in peace for another six years.

Ibzan, Elon and Abdon

[Jdg 12:8-15]

After Jephthah, Ibzan leads Israel for seven years before his death and is buried in Bethlehem. After him, Elon leads Israel for ten years, then Abdon for a further eight years.

Samson

[Jdg 13-16]

Israel again falls into idolatry and is oppressed by the Philistines for forty years.

Manoah, a Danite, has a wife whose name we are not given, who is barren. An angel of the Lord appears to her, and later to her and her husband together, announcing she is to give birth to a son who will be a Nazarite to God, and begin the work of freeing the Israelites from the Philistines. She names her son Samson.

When Samson grows to a young man, God's Spirit leads him to take a Philistine wife to open an opportunity to take vengeance on the Philistines (The Philistines have control in Israel at this time). When Samson goes with his parents to Timnath to meet with his future wife, he is attacked by a young lion and kills it with his bare hands, but he tells no one of the incident. Some time later, Samson again goes to Timnath to complete his marriage and goes out of his way to find the lion he had previously slain. He finds there is a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase and feeds on the honey, then takes some to his parents, but does not tell them where the honey came from.

At his wedding feast, Samson poses a riddle to thirty of the guests, based on the episodes with the lion. If they solve the riddle in seven days, when the celebrations finish, then he will give them thirty sheets and thirty changes of garment. If they do not, then they are to give him the same. Being unable to solve the riddle, they persuade Samson's wife to extract the answer from him, which she succeeds in doing after some effort, and they win the wager. Because they had cheated, Samson, driven by the Spirit, slays thirty men at Ashkelon, and from the spoil pays those that solved the riddle. He then returns to his father's house.

Because Samson is away at his father's house for some time, his father-in-law assumes he has left his daughter and she is given to another. Samson's reaction to this is to send foxes with firebrands tied to their tails through the Philistines corn fields and vineyards to set fire to them. The Philistines take revenge by burning his wife and father-in-law. Samson then retaliates and smites many of them before going to dwell at Etam in Judah.

An army of Philistines goes to Judah to capture Samson, helped by three thousand men of Judah. Samson willingly submits and goes with them bound with cords. When he is delivered to the Philistines, he has the Spirit of God in him and kills a thousand of them using a fresh jawbone from an ass. After this he is thirsty and, calling to the Lord, is provided with water found in the hollow part of the jawbone.

Samson then judges over Israel for twenty years, although the Philistines still occupy Israel territory.

At some time, Samson goes to Gaza and stays for the night with a harlot. The men of Gaza surround the place overnight, intending to kill Samson, but he escapes at midnight.

In time, Samson meets and falls in love with Delilah. With the prospect of a great financial reward, she is persuaded by the Philistines to discover the secret of Samson's strength so they can defeat him. Three times she is told different things by Samson that are untrue, but on the fourth occasion he tells her that if his head is shaven then his strength will be lost. While he sleeps, she has his head shaven and the Philistines are then able to capture him. They take out his eyes and throw him in a prison in Gaza, but while in prison his hair begins to grow again.

The Philistines now have a celebration, giving credit to their god Dagon for Samson's deliverance. Samson is brought to where they are celebrating and is put between two pillars so they can make sport of him. Samson cries out to God for strength and he is able to displace the pillars bringing the building down, killing all those in the building and on the roof. It is said that the number he slew at his death was more than he slew in his life.

Micah and the Danite migration

[Jdg 17-18]

The last five chapters of Judges form an epilogue that tells of the rise of idolatry in Israel before God begins to deal with His people.

Micah, a man of mount Ephraim, had taken some silver from his mother. When he confesses, she is thankful and gives a portion for the manufacture of images through which they will worship God (presumably because they are some distance from Shiloh) and which are then kept in Micah's possession. Micah then consecrates one of his sons to become his priest.

A young Levite is travelling through the country to find a place to settle and comes across Micah's house. When Micah realises he is a Levite, he invites him to stay to be his priest for payment and his keep. Micah feels that having a Levite as

his priest would put him in good stead with God.

Later, the Danites send some men to spy out the land to complete their inheritance. They come across Micah's home, and the Levite living there, and enquire of his circumstances before seeking divine guidance concerning the direction in which they should travel. Moving on they come across Laish, which is a plentiful land where the inhabitants are relaxed about their security. This is reported back to their people and six hundred men are dispatched to take the land. On the way they call at Micah's house, take the images and persuade the Levite that it would be better for him to be a priest to many rather than one man. When Micah discovers this he pursues the Danites, but withdraws when it is clear the group is too strong for him.

Laish is taken and the people settle there and rename it Dan. The Levite and his sons after him are priests in Dan until the captivity, and the idols are used for worship all the time God's house is in Shiloh.

The Levite's concubine

[Jdg 19-21]

A certain Levite is passing through Ephraim when he takes a concubine who is later unfaithful to him. She leaves him and goes to her father's house to which he follows her. Her father plays host to him for a few days before he leaves to return home with his concubine. On the way they arrive at Gibeah where they need to stop for the night. They are unable to find a place to stay until an old man, an Ephraimite, offers them lodging. Some wicked men of Gibeah surround the house with the same intent as those at Sodom who surrounded Lot's house. The Levite's concubine is given to them instead and they abuse her all night to the extent that she dies from the abuse. The Levite takes her body home then cuts it into twelve pieces and sends them to all Israel.

An assembly of the children of Israel is gathered at Mizpeh to hear from the Levite the whole story of what had happened to his concubine. They unanimously agree that the people of Gibeah should be punished for what they had done, and ask the tribe of Benjamin to deliver the men of Gibeah to them. But instead, the Benjamites prepare for battle to defend Gibeah. With God's approval, the Israelites go into battle against the Benjamites, but are twice defeated. Being encouraged by God, they go into battle a third time and this time the Benjamites are thoroughly defeated, all of them being killed except for six hundred men.

The children of Israel had sworn an oath at Mizpeh that none of them should provide wives for the Benjamites, but they now repent of this and grieve that a tribe of Israel should be effectively wiped out. Now Jabeshgilead had not supported Israel in dealing with Benjamin, and the decision is made to destroy these people except for the virgins, who would be given to the Benjamites. But this was insufficient, only providing four hundred virgins. However, there is an annual feast of the

Lord held in Shiloh, so they take advantage of this and connive to obtain another two hundred virgins. The Benjamites are to lie in wait for the virgins to come out to the vineyards to dance, then take them for their wives. When their fathers come to complain, they will be told of the Benjamites' plight. This is how the tribe of Benjamin is to be saved from extinction.

In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Ruth

Naomi and Ruth

[Ruth 1]

Naomi, together with her husband and two sons, leaves Bethlehem because of a famine in the land and goes to live in Moab. Her husband dies before her two sons marry Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. Her sons then die leaving Naomi and her daughters-in-law alone. Naomi hears that the famine is over in Canaan and decides to return to her home. On the way she tells her two daughters-in-law that they should return to their own people and find new husbands there. They initially refuse, but Orpah agrees and returns home. Ruth, however, insists on staying with her mother-in-law, giving her a wonderful declaration of love. They arrive in Bethlehem when the barley harvest is about to begin.

Ruth meets Boaz

[Ruth 2]

Now Naomi and Ruth are destitute, so Ruth is sent to glean in the fields after the reapers. She is gleaning in Boaz's field when he notices her and enquires after her. Boaz, hearing of her story, speaks to Ruth and tells her only to glean in his field and to take refreshments with his servants. He then tells his servants not to hinder her gleaning and to even let a little extra fall for her to collect. She collected so much that she had to beat it before returning to Naomi in the evening. When Naomi was told all that had happened, she realised that Ruth had chanced upon the field of a near kinsman, Boaz. Ruth is told to continue gleaning in Boaz's field and not to go to any other. This she does until the end of the harvest.

Ruth and Boaz at the threshing floor

[Ruth 3]

At winnowing time, Naomi gives Ruth instructions on how to get Boaz as her husband (by means of the custom of levirate marriage, as he is a near kinsman). Naomi follows her instructions and Boaz responds favourably, but has to tell her there is a nearer kinsman than he. The night's events are kept secret and Ruth is sent home to Naomi with six measures of barley,

which Naomi recognises as a sign that Boaz intends to fulfil his role as kinsman redeemer, seven being the number of completeness.

Boaz marries Ruth

[Ruth 4]

The next morning, Boaz tells the nearer kinsman of the situation and, in front of witnesses, offers him the opportunity to be her kinsman redeemer. The offer is declined and Boaz is free to marry Ruth.

They have a son who is named Obed by Naomi's neighbours. Obed is to be the father of Jesse, who is to be the father of David.

The Monarchy

[1Sam 1-1Kings 11]

Samuel

[1Sam 1-7]

Samuel's birth, dedication and calling

[1Sam 1-3]

Hannah, one of two wives of Elkanah, is loved by Elkanah but is barren. Because of this, she is jibed by Elkanah's other wife. During their annual visit to worship and sacrifice at Shiloh, Hannah prays to God in her distress, and vows that if she has a son he will be given to the Lord for service all the days of his life. Eli, the priest, sees her praying with her lips moving, but no sound coming from them, and assumes she has been drinking. When Hannah tells him that she is praying because of her considerable grief, Eli says to her *Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou has asked of him*. She no longer feels sad, and soon after returning home conceives and has a son she names Samuel. After he is weaned, she takes him to Shiloh and presents him to Eli for service to God.

Each year, when they go to Shiloh to offer their sacrifice, Hannah takes a new coat she has made for the growing lad. Eli blesses Elkanah and Hannah and intercedes for them, asking that they should have more children. Hannah conceives and has three more sons and two daughters.

During this time Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, abuse their position when taking the priests' share of offerings. Despite serving at the temple, they do not know the Lord as Eli does and their actions cause men to resent making their offerings. They also have sex with women who come to the tabernacle. In his later years, Eli rebukes his sons for their behaviour, but they take no notice of him, neither does Eli take any action against them. Consequently, he is confronted by a man of God who gives him a message from God, telling him that his family's duty as priests will come to an end, no offspring will survive beyond the age at which they might become a priest, and that He would raise a faithful priest. A sign of this coming about will be the death of his two sons in the same day.

Eli is now old and his sight failing. One evening, when Samuel has finished his duties and has laid down to sleep, God calls him. Thinking it was Eli calling, Samuel went to him, only for Eli to deny having called and to be sent back to bed. This happens three times before Eli realises God is calling Samuel, and now instructs him on how to respond if he is called again. God does call Samuel again and tells him that Eli's house will be judged. Next morning, Samuel does not want to

tell Eli the message given by God, but does so when pressed. From this time on, God is with Samuel, and as Samuel grows, all Israel comes to know he is established as a prophet to the Lord.

The Philistines capture the ark

[1Sam 4]

The Israelites go to battle against the Philistines but are defeated with the loss of about four thousand men. In an effort to gain God's support, they ask that the ark be brought from Shiloh. The request is granted and the ark arrives at camp with Hophni and Phinehas. This strikes great fear into the Philistines, but they encourage one another and go to battle. Victory is again theirs, but with the loss of thirty thousand Israelites. The ark is captured by the Philistines and Hophni and Phinehas are killed in the process. When Eli hears of the death of his sons and that the ark is captured, he remembers the angel's message and falls from his seat breaking his neck, for he is now ninety eight years old and a heavy man. When the news reaches his daughter-in-law she goes into labour, but dies giving birth.

The ark is returned to Israel

[1Sam 5-6]

The Philistines take the ark to Ashdod and place it beside their idol Dagon. Two mornings in succession Dagon is found fallen on his face before the ark. Consequently, the priests and people will no longer enter the place. The people of Ashdod are then smitten with haemorrhoids and they decide to move the ark to Gath, but the same happens at Gath and at other places the ark is taken.

The ark has now been with the Philistines seven months and the priests are summoned for advice. The decision is made to return the ark with a trespass offering of five golden mice and five golden haemorrhoids, one each for Ashdod, Gaza, Askelon, Gath and Ekron. All are to be placed on a new cart pulled by two heifers that had not previously been yoked, and delivered to the borders of Bethshemesh.

At Bethshemesh, the Israelites celebrate the return of the ark and make offerings and sacrifices to God. However, during the celebrations some of them look into the ark and many are smitten by God because of it. The ark is then taken by men from Kirjathjearim to Abinidab's house where his son Eleazor is sanctified to look after it. The ark remains there for twenty years.

Samuel subdues the Philistines at Mizpah

[1Sam 7]

Samuel now exhorts the people of Israel to reform from idolatry, which they agree to do. He gathers them at Mizpeh, prays

for them and makes offerings on their behalf. Meanwhile, the Philistines, having heard the Israelites are at Mizpeh, set out to do battle with them, but God hampers them with a great storm and the Israelites are able to defeat them.

Now subdued, the Philistines do not move against Israel during the rest of Samuel's life, and the cities taken by the Philistines are restored to them.

There is now also peace between Israel and the Amorites, the Amorites having seen the Philistines have been dealt with. Each year, Samuel judges Israel whilst doing a circuit of Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpeth, returning to his home at Ramah.

Saul

[1Sam 8-31]

Saul is made king of Israel

[1Sam 8-12]

In his old age, Samuel makes his sons Joel and Abiah judges over Israel, but they are corrupt, take bribes and pervert justice. Consequently, the people ask for a king to judge over them. Samuel is displeased and prays to God about it. God tells Samuel that it is He they have rejected, not him, and to heed their request, but warn them of the disadvantages and ill consequences that would follow. Nevertheless, they insist on having a king to judge them and fight their battles.

Kish, a Benjamite, has a son Saul who is very tall and handsome. Kish loses his asses and asks Saul to take a servant and go to look for them. They pass through mount Ephraim, Shalisha, Shalim, the land of the Benjamites and Zuph without finding the asses. Prompted by his servant, they go to look for the prophet known to be in the land to seek his guidance. The prophet, Samuel, had been told the previous day by God to expect Saul and goes out to meet him. Samuel invites them to eat with him and stay the night. Next day, before Saul and his servant leave, Samuel privately tells Saul God's plan for him. He anoints Saul and declares he will be king, then tells him what will happen over the next few days. He will meet two men by Rachel's sepulchre who will tell him his father's asses have been found. He will then meet three men on their way to worship God who will acknowledge him, and give him two loaves of bread from their offerings. Finally, he would meet a group of prophets when the Spirit of the Lord would come upon him, he would prophesy with them and become a new man. He is then to go to Gilgal and wait seven days for Samuel who will come and make offerings. After being told all these things, Saul leaves Samuel. As he does, God gives him another heart and all that Samuel said takes place.

Samuel gathers the people together at Mizpeth where he reminds them of what God has done for them, of their rejection of God and their request for a king. A process is followed whereby the tribe of Benjamin is selected from all those present, then the family of Matri, then Saul who Samuel introduces as their king. Saul then goes home to Gibeah with a band of men

whose hearts God had touched. However, there were some there that despised Saul.

Later, the Ammonites camp near Jabeshgilead, threatening the population who then attempt to enter a covenant with them. The condition set by the Ammonites is severe, requiring the right eye of every man. They negotiate for a delay, during which time messengers are sent throughout Israel seeking help. Saul is angered by their situation, cuts up some oxen and sends the pieces around Israel threatening the same will be done to their oxen if they do not support him and Samuel. The consequence is a large army is formed, the Ammonites are defeated and survivors scattered. This victory seals Saul's position as king of all Israel.

Samuel, in passing authority to their king, calls on the people to confirm the integrity with which he has conducted his office. He reminds them of all the things the Lord has done for them and, although they asked for a king to rule them and have been given one, it will be in their interest to continue to obey God's commandments. If they don't, He will be against them as He was with their forefathers. To make the point, Samuel calls upon the Lord to send thunder and rain (it would not be expected at this time of year) as an indication of God's displeasure with them. The people are afraid, and so Samuel comforts and encourages them to serve the Lord with all their heart, for both the sake of themselves and their king.

God soon rejects Saul as king

[1Sam 13-15]

Saul has now reigned for two years over Israel. Of the army that had earlier fought battles under him, he had selected 3000 to stay with him in Michmash and 1000 to be with his son Jonathan in Gibeah.

Now Jonathan attacks a Philistine garrison, which provokes them to retaliation, and they prepare with large numbers to battle with the Israelites. Saul, now in Gilgal, gets impatient waiting for Samuel because people are beginning to desert him, so he took it upon himself to make offerings to God. On hearing of this sin, Samuel tells Saul that, as a result of his disobedience, God has chosen another to be king over Israel.

The Philistines had in the past prevented the Israelites from learning the trade of smiths. Consequently, except for Saul and Jonathan, they have no sharpened weapons when the Philistines come against them. When the Philistines make their way to Micmash to battle with the Israelites, Jonathan and his armour bearer attack a garrison and the two of them kill twenty men. This strikes terror in the whole army which, having been observed by Saul's spies, encourages Saul and his men, later joined by other Israelites, to take on and defeat the Philistines.

Saul had made an oath forbidding his people to eat until evening for the sake of the battle, but Jonathan is unaware of this, and in his ignorance breaks the oath. Seeing Jonathan eat, and now being very hungry, the people are encouraged to slay some of the spoil from the battle and eat it with the blood, contrary to the law.

Saul enquires of God whether he should pursue the Philistines until morning, but does not get an answer, which leads him to conclude a sin has been committed. An enquiry identifies Jonathan as the guilty party, for which Saul should have him killed, but the people speak up for Jonathan and he is spared.

Saul goes on to have battles with neighbouring nations and subdues them, but the Philistines continue to be a problem to him all his days.

God instructs Saul to utterly destroy Amalek, the nation that attacked Israel when they came out of Egypt. Saul gathers his army and goes to do battle with them, first allowing the Kenites to leave Amalek as they had shown kindness to Israel during their exodus. Saul destroys the Amalekites, but takes their king Agag as prisoner and saves the best of their livestock. God relates this disobedience to Samuel who grieves over it, then goes to meet Saul to reprove him. Samuel tells Saul that, because of his rejection of God's word, he is now rejected by God as king. Samuel then kills Agag and returns to his home where he mourns for Saul. He does not meet with Saul again, and God repents of having made Saul king over Israel.

Samuel anoints David

[1Sam 16]

God instructs Samuel to go to Jesse of Bethlehem to anoint Saul's successor from amongst his sons. Jesse's sons are brought before Samuel one by one, but none is accepted by God. However, Jesse's youngest son, David, is still in the fields tending the sheep, so Samuel asks for him to be fetched. When David stands before Samuel, God tells Samuel to anoint him. From this point forward the Spirit of God is with David, but the Spirit departs from Saul and from time to time he becomes troubled. To help Saul cope with this, his servants advise him to have a harp player to play for him. David, being known to one of the servants, is sent for and becomes Saul's harp player and armour bearer.

David and Goliath

[1Sam 17]

The armies of Philistine and Israel are again at war and face one another across a valley prepared for battle. Each morning and evening for forty days Goliath, a giant of a man, had challenged the Israel army to send a man to fight him alone to settle the battle, but all were afraid of him. David is back with his father tending the sheep at this time, and is sent by his father to take provisions to his three eldest sons who are in Saul's army. While he is with his brothers, Goliath makes his challenge and David puts himself forward to fight him. This is reported to Saul who initially discourages David, but David relates his successes in defending his father's sheep against bears and lions, and tells Saul that God will deliver the Philistine to him, just as He did the bears and lions. David faces Goliath with just his sling and kills him with one stone, striking him

on his forehead. He then uses Goliath's sword to cut off his head and the Philistines flee from the scene. Saul's army pursues them and they are defeated.

Saul turns against David

[1Sam 18]

Initially there is respect shown toward David by Saul and his son Jonathan. Jonathan's to the extent that he has a love for David and he and David make a covenant of friendship.

Saul puts David in charge of an army and sends him into battle. David's success gains the admiration of everyone, provoking Saul's anger and putting him in fear of his position. When an evil spirit from God is sent to Saul, David is called to play his harp to settle him. Saul attempts to kill David by throwing a javelin at him, but fails. He then puts David in charge of a greater number of fighting men and the people love him all the more.

Saul makes a decision to try to deal with David by sending him to fight all the battles with the Philistines, in the hope that he will be killed by them. As an incentive to encourage David to go to battle, Saul offers his daughter Merib to be his wife. But when the time comes for Merib to be given to him, she is given to another. Saul is told that his daughter Michal loves David, so he offers her to be his wife instead. David has no dowry, so Saul makes it known that he will accept 100 Philistine foreskins, expecting David to be killed in the battle. But David returns with 200 foreskins and so Michal becomes his wife.

Saul is now afraid of David because he knows God is with him, and so he becomes David's enemy.

Saul seeks to kill David

[1Sam 19-24]

Saul tells his son Jonathan and his servants that David is to be killed, but Jonathan stands up for David and reminds his father of his achievements and innocence. Saul is persuaded and swears "*as the Lord liveth, he shall not be slain.*" David is then able to return and be with Saul as before.

David again goes to war with the Philistines and has a great victory, as a consequence of which Saul's fears and bitterness return. He again tries to kill David with a javelin while he is playing the harp for him, but David avoids the javelin and runs off. Saul sends his servants after David to kill him, but he escapes with Michal's help when she lets him down from her window, then pretends he is sick in bed while he flees to Samuel in Ramah.

David tells Samuel of all that Saul had done and they both go to stay in Naioth. Saul hears of this and sends messengers to take David, but when they see the prophets prophesying in Samuel's presence, the Spirit of God comes upon them and they also begin to prophesy. News of this reaches Saul and he twice more sends messengers with the same result before

going himself. On his way, Saul too starts prophesying and continues to do so in Samuel's presence through to the next morning.

David then flees from Naioth and goes to see Jonathan to ask him why Saul should wish him dead. Jonathan tells David he will keep him informed of anything his father intends to do. A scheme is agreed whereby David will be informed whether Saul is yet reconciled to him, but he isn't, and David and Jonathan have to part. They do so with much emotion and with confirmation of the covenant between them.

David goes to Nob where he pretends he is on a secret mission for Saul. He and his men are hungry and are given shewbread by Abimelech the priest. Abimelech also gives David Goliath's sword that he had kept wrapped in an ephod. Doeg, one of Saul's herdsmen, is in Nob, so David moves on to Gath in fear of the possibility that Saul may learn of his whereabouts. Unfortunately, he is known at Gath, so feigns madness to escape from Achish the king.

From Gath, David goes on to the cave of Adullam where his relations join him. About four hundred men also join David; those that are in distress or in debt or discontent in some way, and David becomes their captain. He then goes on to Mizpeth of Moab where he gets permission from the king for his parents to stay there. On the advice of Gad the prophet, David leaves for Judah with his men and goes to the forest of Hareth.

Saul complains to his servants of their unfaithfulness to him, and their lack of concern of Jonathan's faithfulness to David. Then Doeg reports what had happened at Nob, with the consequence that Saul summons Abimelech and the priests to be charged with conspiracy. Despite their defence, Saul has them executed by Doeg, the only one who would slay God's priests. Doeg then slays all in the city of Nob, including the livestock. Only Abimelech's son Abiathar survives to escape and tells David of the slaughter. David feels responsible because Doeg had seen him at Nob, and so takes Abiathar under his protection.

David is told the Philistines are attacking Keilah. After enquiring of God, he takes his men and defeats the Philistines, saving Keilah. Saul hears of David's success and plans to go to Keilah to surprise him. But David, again enquiring of God, leaves with his men, now six hundred in number, and takes refuge in the wilderness of Ziph where Saul pursues him. Jonathan visits David and assures him that his father will not find him, but the Ziphites offer to deliver David to Saul. Having been told David is in the wilderness of Maon, Saul pursues and surrounds David, but hears the Philistines are invading and has to leave to deal with them first.

David is then able to go to stay in strongholds at Engedi.

Having dealt with the Philistines, Saul takes three thousand men and resumes his pursuit of David. Saul sleeps in a cave and David has the opportunity of killing him. He is encouraged to do so by his men, but he chooses to simply cut off the skirt of his robe. When Saul arises, David goes after him and shows him how he had the opportunity to kill him but didn't,

reasoning that he is not his enemy and that Saul has no cause to pursue him. Saul confesses David is more righteous than he and that he will become king of Israel. He then asks David to swear his offspring will not be cut off, which he does, and Saul returns home.

The death of Samuel

[1Sam 25:1]

And Samuel died; and all the Israelites were gathered together, and lamented him, and buried him in his house at Ramah. And David arose, and went down to the wilderness of Paran.

David, Nabal and Abigail

[1Sam 25:2-44]

Whilst in the wilderness of Paran, David hears of Nabal, a man rich in sheep, and sends ten of his young men to request provisions, pointing out that he had done no harm to Nabal or taken anything from his shepherds. Nabal's ill-natured refusal is reported to David, which provokes him to take arms against Nabal. Abigail, Nabal's wife, a beautiful and intelligent woman, receives a good report from one of Nabal's young men concerning David and his dealing with the shepherds, and the danger they are now in because of her husband's attitude. To counter this, and without telling her husband, she takes a good selection of provisions to David as a gift. The gifts are presented to David with wise and prudent words which are well received. Abigail returns to tell her husband, but because of his drunken state, she puts off telling him until the next morning. When she does tell Nabal, he becomes ill and dies ten days later.

David then takes Abigail for his wife. Meanwhile, Saul has given David's wife Michal to another.

David flees to Philistine to escape Saul

[1Sam 26-27]

The Ziphites report to Saul that David is hiding in their land. Saul then takes an army of three thousand men to seek him. David becomes aware that Saul is close by, so takes Abishai with him to reconnoitre his camp. Finding Saul and his men asleep, Abishai encourages David to kill Saul, but he refuses to harm the Lord's anointed and takes Saul's spear and cruse of water lying at his head. These he presents to Saul the next day as a testimony that he has no design against him. Saul returns home being again convinced of David's innocence.

David fears he will eventually perish by the hand of Saul so takes his two wives and six hundred men to the land of the Philistines, where he expects, correctly, that Saul will not pursue him. He soon finds favour in the eyes of Achish, king of Gath, and expressing a desire for a place in the country to live David is given Ziklag. After about fourteen months David

invades the Geshurites, Gezrites and Amalekites, not sparing any least Achish should hear of it. When Achish enquires, David's response leads him to believe he had invaded some parts of Israel, effectively making David Achish's servant.

Saul and the witch of Endor

[1Sam 28]

Now the Philistines again gather to do battle with Israel. Saul, fearing the Philistines, seeks answers from God, but none is forthcoming. He then resorts to seeking out a woman with a familiar spirit (the witch of Endor) to call upon Samuel. This she does and Saul learns from Samuel that he and his sons will die the next day at the hand of the Philistines, and Israel will be defeated. Saul is so taken aback by this that he refuses to eat until eventually compelled to by the women and his servants.

Achish Sends David Back to Ziklag

[1Sam 29-30]

When the Philistines are gathered to do battle with the Israelites, Achish puts David and his men to the rear of the Philistine army, but the princes, recognising David and knowing he is a Hebrew, are fearful he may turn against them. They object to his being part of the army and insist he returns to Ziklag. Following an exchange between Achish and David, during which David's good character is not questioned, Achish sends David and his men back to Ziklag to avoid displeasing the Philistine lords.

When David returns to Ziklag he finds the city burnt and all their wives, sons and daughters carried off by the Amalekites. His men are so grieved they even talk of stoning David. They come across a young man left behind by the Amalekites because he was sick, who agrees to lead them to the Amalekites. They find the Amalekites celebrating their victories and attack and kill them all, except for four hundred young men who escape on camels. Everyone of their brethren are recovered, including David's two wives. David divides the spoil amongst those that fought as well as those that had not taken part in the battle, and even sends presents from the spoil to several places in the tribe of Judah who had been kind to him while he was in hiding from Saul.

Saul Takes His Life

[1Sam 31]

Now the Philistines are strong against Israel and many are slain, including Saul's sons Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchishua. Saul is wounded by an archer and asks his armour bearer to put a sword to him, but he refuses and Saul takes his own life rather than die at the hand of a Philistine. With their king dead, his army flees and several cities are taken and inhabited by the Philistines. The next day, when the Philistines find Saul's body, they cut off his head, strip him of his armour and fasten

his body to the wall of Bethshan. When the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead hear of this, some valiant men go to retrieve Saul and his sons' bodies and burn them at Jabesh. They then take their bones and bury them under a tree at Jabesh, then fast for seven days.

David

[2Sam 1 - 1Kings 2:11]

David is anointed king over Judea; Conflict with the house of Saul

[2Sam 1-4]

An Amalekite comes to David at Ziklag giving an account of Saul and Jonathan's death which, in the case of Saul, he said he was party to at his request. David and his men are filled with grief and the messenger is slain for his claimed involvement in Saul's death. David composes a lament for this occasion.

After seeking God's guidance, David goes to live in Hebron, taking all his men, and is there anointed king of Judah. Hearing of the kindness of the men of Jaeshgilead in burying Saul, he thanks them and promises to remember it, while taking the opportunity to inform them he was now the anointed king over Judah. Meanwhile, Saul's son Ishbosheth is made king over the rest of Israel by Abner, once commander-in-chief of Saul's army, and reigns for two years.

After David had been king over Judah for seven and a half years, an incident between twelve of Abner's men and twelve of David's men, instigated by Abner, leads to a battle in which Abner is defeated. Asahel, one of David's men and also a nephew, is killed in pursuit of Abner. Joab, another a nephew of David, and some men continue the pursuit until Abner is joined by some Benjamites and argues for an end to the fighting. Joab sounds a retreat and Abner's party returns to Mahanaim, having lost three hundred and sixty men. After burying Asahel, Joab's party returns to Hebron having lost just twenty men.

Wars continue between the house of Saul and the house of David, with David growing ever stronger and the house of Saul growing ever weaker. During this time, David has six sons by six wives, the third son being Absalom.

Following a quarrel between Ishbosheth and Abner, Abner proposes to make a treaty with David in which he would be actively involved in bringing all Israel under David's reign. David agrees to the treaty, but only if his first wife Michal, Saul's daughter, is returned to him. This is done and Abner begins to make representations to Israel to align with David, reporting this to David and promising to continue his endeavours.

When Joab returns from a battle with great spoil, and hears that Abner has been to see David and left in peace, he rebukes

David for it, then secretly sends for Abner and murders him in vengeance for his brother Asahel's death. David declares himself and his kingdom guiltless of Abner's death, then pronounces terrible consequences for Joab and his family.

David buries Abner in Hebron with great lamentation and expression of his high regard for him.

When Ishbosheth and all Israel hears of Abner's death, they become troubled at the loss of their leader, not quite knowing what will happen next. Two of Ishbosheth's captains assassinate Ishbosheth, cut off his head and take it to David, claiming that all the wrongs done to David by the house of Saul are now avenged. They declare this act to be of God, but David, understanding their motive, knows God was not in need of their help and has them executed for their wicked deed. Ishbosheth's head is then taken and buried in Abner's sepulchre in Hebron.

David becomes king over Israel

[2Sam 5:1-5]

All the tribes of Israel now come to Hebron, accepting David as their leader and anoint him king over all Israel. David was thirty years old when he first became king, and reigned over Judah seven years and six months. He is to reign over all Israel and Judah for a further thirty three years.

David conquers Jerusalem and defeats the Philistines

[2Sam 5:6-25]

David goes to Jerusalem, but is yet unable to take the city from the Jebusites, so first takes the stronghold of Zion. Jerusalem is later taken by Joab, who becomes chief commander of David's army as his reward. Here David builds his house, takes more wives and concubines and increases his offspring.

The Philistines, hearing David is now king over all Israel and all the more of a threat to them, come to fight him on two occasions. Enquiring of God, David is directed to fight the Philistines and does so in the knowledge that God will deliver them into his hand.

The ark is brought to Jerusalem

[2Sam 6; 1Chr 15-16]

David takes thirty thousand men and fetches the ark from Baal of Judah, intending to bring it to his own city. On the way, Uzzah touches the ark, thinking it's about to fall from the cart, and is struck down by God, as direct physical contact with the ark is forbidden. At this point, David becomes afraid and the ark is left at Obededom's house. Here it remains for three months, during which time God blesses Obededom and all his house. On hearing of this, David then brings the ark from Obededom into his own city with great joy, dancing with all his might wearing a linen ephod rather than his royal clothes.

His wife, Michal, expresses displeasure in some of David's behaviour whilst he was bringing the ark into the city, but her criticism brings reproach upon herself, and she has no children from this time on.

The Davidic Covenant

[2Sam 7; 1Chr 17]

David expresses a desire to Nathan to build a house for the ark of God, which meets with Nathan's approval. But that night Nathan receives a word from God; he is to tell David that God had dwelt in a tent for many years, and never gave instruction to build Him a house. Neither should David build Him one, but his son who will succeed him will.

A promise is given from God, through the prophet Nathan, that Israel will live forever and in peace in the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and that the establishment of David's throne and kingdom will last forever. This is the Davidic Covenant.

David then prays to God expressing his own unworthiness, his recognition of God's greatness, and faith in the promises made.

David's victories

[2Sam 8; 1Chr 18]

After having had some rest from his enemies, David again has to deal with them. He is victorious over the Philistines, Moabites, Syrians, Edomites and others. During these victories much spoil is taken, including brass and gold that will later be used in the construction of the temple. Also, many gifts are brought to David.

With all his enemies subdued, and having established his principal officers under him, David now reigns peacefully over all Israel and administers judgement and justice to all his people.

David's faithfulness to his covenant with Jonathan

[2Sam 9]

For the sake of his covenant with Jonathan, David enquires whether there is anyone living from Saul's house. He is told of Jonathan's son Mephibosheth, who is lame. David sends for him and restores all his grandfather's land due to him that was lost during Ishbosheth's rebellion. He appoints Ziba, Saul's servant, as well as his sons and his servants, to look after Mephibosheth's land, though he was to always eat at David's table as one of his own sons.

David commits adultery and murder

[2Sam 10-12; 1Chr 19]

Hearing that the king of Ammon had died, and because he had shown him kindness when he was persecuted by Saul, David sends messengers to console Hanun, the king's son, but the messengers were ill-treated and humiliated by Hanun. The Ammonites, perceiving David's displeasure, prepare for war and hire the Syrians as allies. David sends Joab and Abishai to fight them, one against the Ammonites and the other against the Syrians. Both enemies are defeated and they return to Jerusalem. The Syrians regroup to fight with David but are again defeated, and David makes servants of them.

At the end of the year, David sends Joab with all his army to fight the Ammonites (who are defeated), but David remains in Jerusalem.

From his rooftop one evening, David sees Bathsheba washing, has her brought to his house, commits adultery with her. He later arranges for her husband, Uriah, to be put at the forefront of battle so that he would be killed. The plan is successful and when Bathsheba finishes mourning for her husband, David sends for her. She becomes his wife and bears him a son.

This displeases God and Nathan the prophet is sent to David to charge him of his sins by way of a parable. Accepting these charges and recognising the gravity of his sins, David repents. Nathan tells David he is forgiven by God, but will suffer penalties. Although David is told he will lose his child conceived through adultery, when the child falls sick he still fasts and prays lest God should show him grace. The child nevertheless dies and David ceases fasting, returning to a normal life of worship and eating. Bathsheba conceives again, bears David a son whom David names Solomon, and also calls him Jedidiah, which means 'beloved of the Lord'.

Joab now goes against the city of Rabbah, then David takes all his men and conquers the city. He takes a large amount of spoil and puts all the people into servitude, as he does with all the cities of Ammon before returning to Jerusalem..

David loses his sons Amnon and Absalom

[2Sam 13-20]

David's son Amnon falls in love with his brother Absalom's sister Tamar. Encouraged by Jonadab, a nephew and friend to Amnon, a plot is schemed whereby Amnon feigns sickness and requests that Tamar should nurse him, which will then give him the opportunity to force himself on her. When the opportunity arises, her unwillingness to yield voluntarily to Amnon gives rise to a hatred for her that exceeds his love, and causes her more grief than would the indecent act itself. Absalom, observing her distress, discovers the truth but tells her to keep the matter secret. David also gets to know of what has happened, but does not punish Amnon.

After two years, Absalom persuades his father to allow all his brothers to go with him to his sheep shearing. Absalom had

commanded his servants to take advantage when Amnon was merry through drink and kill him. David hears that Amnon has had all his brothers slain and is grieving when Jonadab tells him that only Amnon has been killed, this news being verified when his sons return and they all weep over Amnon's murder. Having contrived Amnon's death, Absalom now has to flee and goes to Geshur. There he remains for three years, during which time David begins to long for his son, having been comforted over the death of Amnon.

Joab, recognising that David longs to have Absalom back with him, employs a wise woman of Tekoah to put a concocted case before David which contrives to allow David to have his son return home. This David does, but decrees that Absalom is to stay at his own house and the two are not to see each other.

Two years pass without Absalom seeing his father, during which time his handsome appearance, particularly his head of hair, is noticed by many. Absalom has three sons and a daughter he names Tamar, who is also recognised for her beauty. After these two years, Absalom sends for Joab intending him to petition his father, but Joab twice refuses to see him until Absalom forces a meeting by having his servants burn his field. A meeting and agreement follows and Absalom is reunited with his father, who kisses his son while he is on his knees before him.

In time, Absalom intercepts those coming to David for judgement of any controversy, and judges their situations himself. Through this means, over an extended period of forty years, Absalom steals the hearts of the people of Israel. He then speaks to his father, pretends he had made a vow to God and seeks leave to go to Hebron to honour it. At Hebron, Absalom forms a conspiracy to become king.

David, hearing of this, and knowing of Absalom's favour with the people, leaves Jerusalem with his household and servants for his own safety, and for that of his city, leaving ten concubines to keep house in his absence. As David and the people go up to the mount of Olives, weeping along the way, David is told that Ahithophel is involved in the conspiracy, and so he prays that Ahithophel's counselling will amount to foolishness. Hushai, the Archite, comes to David on the mount, but David sends him back to Jerusalem to oppose the counsel of Ahithophel, and to send him word from time to time by the priests.

When David has passed a little way beyond the top of the mount, Mephibosheth's servant Ziba comes and presents David with many gifts. He enquires after Mephibosheth, but is told he has returned to Jerusalem.

Later, as David and his company are passing Bahurim, Shimei, from the house of Saul, comes cursing David, but David chooses not to take offence and told his party to do likewise.

Absalom is now in Jerusalem with all his men and Ahithophel is there with him. Hushai offers his service to Absalom and is admitted to his privy council. Absalom seeks Ahithophel's counsel and is told by him to have intercourse with David's concubines, for which he will be abhorred by his father, but will demonstrate to all Israel that the two will not be

reconciled, and that the people are safe to continue supporting him.

Absalom again seeks Ahithophel's counsel and is advised to march with twelve thousand men to kill David. But Absalom also asks for Hushai's counsel, which is to gather a larger army from all Israel (which will naturally take longer to achieve). Absalom favours Hushai's counsel, as a result of which Ahithophel later hangs himself. Hushai sends a message to David through the priests advising him to pass over Jordan immediately. This David does and pitches in Gilead, where he is supplied with many provisions from prominent local people. Some time later, Absalom follows David to Gilead.

David divides his army into three, captained by Joab, Joab's brother Abishai, and Ittai, and commands the three to deal gently with Absalom for his sake. There follows a great battle where many of the followers of Absalom are slain. Absalom's mule runs under the thick boughs of an oak which catches Absalom's head and he is left hanging. He is then killed by Joab and ten of his men. News of Absalom's death is delivered to David, causing him considerable grief. David indulges in too much grief for his son Absalom and is rebuked by Joab, warning him there would be a revolt by those who delivered his enemies if he did not change his conduct, which he then does. Consequently, Israel, followed by Judah, encourage David's return to Jerusalem.

At Jordan, Shimei, who had previously cursed David, asks for his pardon and is forgiven by David. When David returns to Jerusalem, Mephibosheth, providing sufficient excuse for not going with David, has the half of his land that had been given to his servant restored to him. Then Barzillai, who had generously supplied David, is allowed to return to his own city and his son, Chimham, is taken into the king's court.

Contention arises between the people of Israel and Judah concerning Judah's involvement in David's return to Jerusalem, Israel claiming a greater right to the king because of their numbers.

Sheba, a Benjamite, starts a rebellion against David with all the men of Israel following him, while Judah remains faithful. Amasa is ordered by David to assemble the men of Judah to crush the rebellion, but he is slow in carrying out the order, so Abishai is sent instead, followed by Joab who later executes Amasa. Sheba is pursued to Abel where he takes refuge, but is beheaded because of the influence of a wise woman on the people of Abel, and his head delivered to Joab, putting an end to the rebellion.

Final conflicts in David's reign

[2Sam 21-23; 1Chr 20]

Now there had been a famine for three years when David enquires of God and is told the famine is because of Saul's slaughter of the Gibeonites, for Joshua had made an oath with the Gibeonites not to harm them. David summons the Gibeonites to ask what atonement might be made, to which they reply they only desire seven of Saul's sons to be delivered

to them for hanging. This is granted, after which David buries their bones, along with Saul's and Jonathan's, in their father's sepulchre.

The Philistines again go to war against the Israelites. When one of the sons of a giant (of the nephilim) seeks to kill David, David's age is against him and he lacks the strength to fight, so another goes to David's aid and kills the giant. There are three more occasions when the Philistines war with Israel, and on each one a descendant of the giants is killed.

David recites a psalm, then gives account of his great men and their exploits, of which he provides detail concerning five, and another thirty are mentioned by name.

Adonijah's plot

[1Kings 1]

As David is being comforted in his old age, Adonijah, his eldest son, takes it on himself to usurp the throne with the support of Joab and the priest Abiathar. Nathan counsels Bathsheba to bring the matter to David's attention, with his support, reminding David of his oath that Solomon would be king. David confirms the succession of Solomon and orders Nathan the prophet and Zadok the priest to anoint him, which they do to the great joy of all the people. When the news of Solomon's anointing reaches Adonijah and his friends, all his friends disperse in fear, but Adonijah catches hold of the horns on the altar as a means of refuge. He is pardoned by Solomon on the promise of good behaviour.

David counts the fighting men

[2Sam 24; 1Chr 21]

Provoked by ungodly thoughts, David orders a census of all Israel, which takes some nine months to complete. He now acknowledges to God that his motives were sinful and asks for his iniquity to be taken from him. God sends the prophet Gad to David, proposing three things of which David is to choose one as a punishment. All three were grievous, but David chooses three days of pestilence, the one that seems not to involve man but God alone. Nevertheless, it does result in the death of seventy thousand men. Gad instructs David to build an altar to God on the threshing floor of Araunah (also translated as Ornan) the Jebusite, on which he makes offerings that brings his punishment to an end.

Solomon is charged with the building of the temple

[1Chr 22:2-19]

David is refused the opportunity to build a temple for God said to him thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight. Nevertheless, David makes abundant preparations for craftsmen and

materials and tells Solomon he is to build the temple and that God will be with him in his task. David also commands the princes of Israel to assist Solomon in its building.

The Levites' temple duties

[1Chr 23-26]

David numbers the Levites from thirty years upwards and assigns them their work: 24000 for the work in the temple, 6000 offices and judges throughout Israel, 4000 porters and 4000 musicians. In future they are to be numbered from twenty years upwards because of the extra burden of work through increased numbers of Israelites. The priests are divided into twenty four courses (or groups), each with its own head man, to exercise the duties of priests on the Sabbath in rotation. Others are then divided into twenty four courses to assist the priests in their duties. The sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun are assigned to be singers and musicians, being divided into twenty four courses with twelve in each course. There are further divisions for porters to serve at the temple gates, others to be in charge of the temple treasures and others to be judges to administer justice throughout Israel.

Civil government

[1Chr 27]

David then identifies twelve military courses and their captains that are to serve him for a month in turn throughout each year. He also names the princes over the tribes of Israel. He then names his economic rulers, counsellors and the general of his army.

The government passes to Solomon; plans and instructions for the temple

[1Kings 2:1-11; 1Chr 28-29]

David convenes the leading men of Israel to declare Solomon his successor, whom God had chosen to be both king and builder of the temple. He then exhorts them to serve God and for Solomon to be strong in building the temple. Solomon is given the design for the temple, exactly as David had received it in the spirit, and a list of materials prepared for it. He then gives him encouragement as God will be with him and an abundance of servants, skills and labour will be available to him.

David now addresses all the people telling of the preparations for the temple to be built by Solomon, of his material contribution towards it, and of the contributions willingly offered by all the leaders in Israel, to which news they all greatly rejoice. He then gives prayers of praise and thanksgiving, and sacrifices are offered to God. Solomon is then anointed by David and made king for the second time, and all Israel submit themselves to Solomon.

David now speaks to Solomon, charging him to walk in the ways of God, and gives him instructions concerning particular

persons he should show favour to, or execute justice on.

David passes away after reigning over Israel for forty years, seven years in Hebron and thirty three years in Jerusalem.

Solomon

[1Kings 2 - 11]

Solomon's kingdom is established

[1Kings 2:12-46]

Adonijah petitions Bathsheba to speak to Solomon on his behalf, which she does, but according to David's last instructions to Solomon, he judges him and he is put to death. Solomon then removes Abiathar from the priesthood.

Joab, in fear for his life, takes refuge in the tabernacle, grasping the horns on the altar as Adonijah had done before him. When summoned to go before Solomon, Adonijah says he will die there. And so he does, for Solomon has him executed at the altar for his treason and killing of innocent people, then replaces him with Benaiah, and Abiathar with Zadok.

According to the final commandment from his father concerning persons to be judged, Shimei is confined to Jerusalem. After some time, Shimei breaks the rules of his confinement and is consequently executed.

With Adonijah the usurper, Joab the general of David's army who took Adonijah's side, as did Abiathar the high priest at the time, and Shimei who was considered to be a dangerous man, all dealt with, there remains no threat to the throne and the safety of Solomon's kingdom is established.

Solomon asks for wisdom

[1Kings 3; 2Chr 1:1-13]

Solomon marries the Pharaoh's daughter and continues his reign with much devotion to God. Following many sacrifices at Gibeon, God appears to Solomon in a dream and offers him anything he desires. Because of his young age, Solomon asks for an understanding heart to judge his people. This is granted along with the addition of riches and honour. Wisdom is quickly demonstrated when judging a case between two harlots arguing over who is the mother of a baby. All Israel hears of this judgement and respect Solomon, for they can see the wisdom of God is in him.

Riches and honour follow

[1Kings 4; 2Chr 1:14-18]

God's promise of riches and honour is soon realised and the extent of Solomon's dominion is recorded along with the

provisions and presents given him. His wisdom and knowledge exceeds those to the east and west of him, and that of people known for their own wisdom and philosophies. Hence, Solomon's fame becomes recognised by all nations around him.

Solomon speaks three thousand proverbs and composes one thousand and five songs. People are sent by kings from all nations to hear his wisdom and knowledge first hand.

The trade-pact with King Hiram; work on the temple begins

[1Kings 5:1-12; 2Chr 2]

King Hiram, a supporter and admirer of David, sends messengers to Solomon who are then sent back with a request for cedars from Lebanon, and workers with the skills Israel doesn't possess for hewing timber. In return, Solomon would provide provisions for Hiram's household. The pact is agreed, cedars and firs are sent from Lebanon, and abundant provisions supplied to Hiram. This exchange continues amicably year after year.

Solomon Builds the Temple

[1Kings 5:13-7:51; 2Chr 3-4]

Work starts on the temple construction, with many workers, conscripted from all the tribes of Israel [1Ki 5:13-18], used in laying the stone foundations and preparing stone and timber for the building. Solomon spends seven years building the temple, for which we are given detail concerning its dimensions, the porch, windows and chambers, walls and flooring, the oracle and cherubim and the doors and carved work.

(An account is given of Solomon's other building projects, including his own house which takes thirteen years to build.)

A renowned worker in brass is sent for from King Hiram to complete all the brass-work in the temple. That is two pillars of brass, the molten sea (a very large brass vessel of water) and other furniture, utensils and ornaments.

Dedication of the temple

[1Kings 8:1-9:9; 2Chr 5-7]

The ark is now brought into the temple and placed in the oracle of the house, the most holy place. When the priests leave the holy place the glory of the Lord fills it. Solomon makes a speech to the people concerning the building of the temple and how he came to be engaged in it. He then offers a prayer requesting that whatever supplication is made at anytime, on any account, by Israelites or strangers, it might be accepted. He then blesses the people, offers a great number of sacrifices and makes a feast for the people who, when dismissed, return to their homes full of joy. Then God appears to Solomon in a dream for a second time (the first being at Gibeon when Solomon first became king) in answer to his prayer at the dedication of the temple.

Solomon's building and trading operations

[1Kings 9:10-28; 2Chr 8]

Solomon gives King Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee and in return, despite being displeased with the cities, he gives Solomon sixty talents of gold.

Solomon had imposed taxes on the people to help fund the temple and his other building works, but this levy also pays for places that Solomon now builds or repairs.

There are still many Canaanites living in Israel, all of whom Solomon makes bondsmen. He also maintains a standing army, many servants and military and civil leaders. Solomon builds a navy and is helped by Hiram who sends him men experienced in shipping. With this navy he is able to trade and bring great riches to his kingdom.

The queen of Sheba and Solomon's wealth

[1Kings 10; 2Chr 9:1-12]

The queen of Sheba had heard of Solomon's greatness and wisdom. Not believing it all, she comes to see for herself, bringing much riches with her. What she finds exceeds her expectations. She presents him with a great sum in gold, as well as spices and precious stones. In return, Solomon gives the queen things she desires and gifts of his own choosing with which she returns to her own country.

Solomon has a considerable income and makes extravagant use of it to increase the magnificence of his court. His riches exceed that of all other kings of the earth. Year after year, people come to hear Solomon's wisdom, known to be from God, and bring him presents. His riches continue to grow and he amasses an army of chariots and horsemen.

Solomon's downfall

[1Kings 11; 2Chr 9:13-31]

Solomon's extravagance includes his many women, who are now taken from other nations, contrary to the law given by Moses [Ex 34:16] and instruction before entering Canaan [Deu 7:3-4]. He has seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, as well as princesses. In his old age, some of these women begin to turn his heart away from God, and he worships other gods and builds places for his wives to worship them. For this evil, God appears to Solomon for the third time (the first when Solomon asked for wisdom to judge his people [1Ki 3:6], and the second in answer to Solomon's prayer and supplication after the temple had been built [1Ki 8:29-50]) and tells him his kingdom will be taken from him, not in his time for the sake of his father David, but in his son's time. So God raises adversaries against Solomon in Hadad, Rezon (descendants from the time when David and Joab defeated David's enemies [1Chr 18, 19]), and in the person of Jeroboam,

a servant of Joash who, seeing he was *industrious*, *he made him ruler over all the charge over the house of Joseph*. These would be the conscripts from Manasseh and Ephraim [1Ki 5:13-18]. Jeroboam later receives a prophecy that he will rule ten tribes of Israel. Solomon gets to know of this and seeks to kill Jeroboam, but Jeroboam flees to Egypt until Solomon's death.

Solomon had reigned for forty years in Israel when he dies, and is buried in Zion, to be succeeded by his son Rehoboam.

A Divided Kingdom

The division of the tribes

When Rehoboam, Solomon's son, goes to Schechem to be made king, Jeroboam and all the people ask him to reduce their taxes as a condition of them accepting him as king. Rehoboam asks the people to return in three days, during which time he first consults the old men, then the young men. He rejects the advice of the old men and accepts that of the younger, which is to increase the burden on Israel with harsher penalties. When the people return and hear Rehoboam's reply, all Israel rebel against him, return to their homes and make Jeroboam their king. Following the murder of one of his men, Rehoboam flees to Jerusalem where Judah remains faithful to him.

The northern tribes are referred to collectively as Israel, and the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin as Judah.

In the northern kingdom, most kings are sinful and succession by murder is not uncommon.

Kings of Israel

[1Kings 12-2Kings 17; 2Chr 10-12]

King Jeroboam

[1Kings 12:25-14:20]

Following the division of the Kingdom, Jeroboam creates a system of idolatrous worship, forbidding Levites and priests from carrying out their duties. Consequently, Levites and priests, followed by others from all tribes seeking to worship God, go to Jerusalem. It is by this migration of people that the twelve tribes of Israel are preserved.

A man of God is sent to speak against Jeroboam's altar and prophecies, providing a sign to confirm his authority, which included the drying up of Jeroboam's hand. When his hand is restored by the prophet through prayer, Jeroboam offers him hospitality, but it is refused because God had charged him not to eat or drink there, and he leaves. An older prophet hears of this, goes after him, and through deceit brings him back to his own home for refreshment. Because of this disobedience, the younger prophet is later slain by a lion and buried in the older prophet's sepulchre.

Despite these events and the prophecy given, Jeroboam continues in his idolatrous ways, to which judgement will eventually come upon him.

Jeroboam's son becomes ill, so he sends his wife in disguise to the prophet Ahijah to determine his future, but Ahijah prophesies the ruin of Jeroboam's house.

Jeroboam reigns for a total of twenty two years in Israel.

Kings Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Tibni, Omri and Ahab

[1Kings 15:25-22:40]

Now Nadab had reigned for nearly two years before Baasha and was sinful, like his father before him. Baasha conspired against Nadab and killed him, then reigned in his place and destroyed the house of Jeroboam, fulfilling Ahijah's prophesy.

Following Baasha's death, his son Elah reigns for two years then is killed by Zimri, one of his captains, who then reigns for a mere seven days. The people are then divided between Tibni and Omri, Omri's supporters prevailing making him king, but Omri is worse than all the kings that preceded him. His son Ahab then reigns for twenty two years and is more evil in God's sight than all the kings before him. He marries Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal the Zidonianite king, and then serves Baal, building a house and altar to Baal in Samaria. Ahab also permits the rebuilding of Jericho which had been forbidden by Joshua.

Elijah in the reign of Ahab and Joram (Jehoram)

[1Kings 17:1-22:40]

Now Elijah the Tishbite, of whom nothing has been said up to this point, comes to Ahab and prophesies that it will not rain for three years. Elijah is then sent by God to the brook Cherith where he is fed by ravens, then to a widow at Zarephat where he, the widow and her son are sustained for a long time on a handful of meal and a little oil in a cruse. After some time, the widow's son falls sick and dies, but through Elijah's prayer is restored to life.

Elijah is directed by God to go to Ahab. On the way he meets Obadiah, the governor of Ahab's house, whom he charges to tell Ahab where he is so that he might come to meet him. When they meet, Elijah tells Ahab to bring together all Israel and the prophets of Baal at mount Carmel. There he challenges them to prepare a sacrifice to Baal without fire, as he would to God, to see whose god would accept it. Following their failure to have their sacrifice accepted, and much mocking, Elijah prepares his sacrifice without fire, even soaking it all with water. It is then consumed by fire from God, proving to the people that Jehovah is the true God. He then has all Baal's prophets slain. Rain then follows a few days later in response to Elijah's prayer.

Ahab then rides to Jezreel, but Elijah, strengthened by God, runs the sixteen miles from mount Carmel to Jezreel, arriving ahead of Ahab.

At Jezreel, Ahab tells Jezebel of all that Elijah had done, with the consequence that Elijah has to flee following Jezebel's threats to his life. After a day's journey into the desert, God provides Elijah with food to sustain him for the forty day

journey to mount Horeb, where God has directed him to go. At mount Horeb, God instructs Elijah to anoint Hazael king over Syria, Jehu king over Israel, and Elisha to be prophet in his place. [The anointing of Jehu was executed later by a prophet assigned by Elisha].

Elijah finds Elisha and throws his mantle over him, after which Elisha follows Elijah and becomes his servant.

The king of Syria wages war against Samaria and lays siege to it, demanding Ahab's wives, children and riches be delivered to him, to which the elders tell Ahab not to consent. A prophet comes to Ahab and directs him to go against the Syrian army, which he does and defeats them. However, the Syrian army returns a year later, but is still defeated by the Israelites, despite them being heavily outnumbered. The king of Syria then pleads to Ahab and a covenant of peace is made between them. A prophet, first disguised as a wounded soldier, uses an analogy to show Ahab he has disobeyed God by covenanting with the king of Syria. Revealing himself, he prophesies Ahab's death and the demise of his people. Ahab then returns to Samaria somewhat discouraged.

In time, Ahab takes a liking to a vineyard belonging to Naboth, a Jesreelite, because of its proximity to his palace, and offers him another in its place or payment to its value. Naboth refuses and Ahab is saddened to the extent that he takes to his bed and doesn't eat. Jezebel then concocts a plan by which Naboth is falsely convicted of blasphemy and put to death, allowing Ahab to take possession of the vineyard. Elijah is then sent to Ahab by God to pronounce judgements on him, Jezebel, and all his family. However, Ahab humbles himself and God consequently defers the punishments to his son's days.

Following three years of peace with the king of Syria, Ahab chooses to go to war against him to regain Ramothgilead, and persuades Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, to join forces with him. Ahab first takes advice from his four hundred prophets, but is not satisfied with this and a true prophet, Micaiah, is sent for. Micaiah implies by his words that Ahab will be killed and explains how he has been deceived by his prophets. Micaiah is struck on the cheek by Zedekiah, one of the false prophets, and is ordered by Ahab to be imprisoned. When they went into battle, Jehoshaphat is put in danger by wearing Ahab's robes, but it is Ahab that is wounded and dies.

King Ahaziah

[1Kings 22:51-2 Kings 1:18]

After Jehoshaphat had reigned in Judah for seventeen years, and Moab rebelled against Israel following the death of Ahab, Ahaziah begins to reign in Israel.

Ahaziah has a fall in his home which causes him to become sick. He sends messengers to enquire of the god of Ekron to determine whether he will recover from the sickness. They are prevented from completing their task by Elijah, who tells them their king will die of the sickness for attempting to enquire of a heathen god. When Ahaziah perceives the man that

stopped the messengers was Elijah, he twice sends a captain with fifty men to fetch him, but they are consumed by fire from heaven. Ahaziah then sends a third company of men, but this time God instructs Elijah to return with them, and so his message is given directly to Ahaziah who subsequently dies after reigning for just two years.

Elisha in the reign of Joram

[2Kings 2:19-8:15]

Despite being asked not to, Elisha follows Elijah to several places until they cross the Jordan, Elijah having parted the waters with his mantle. Here Elijah asks Elisha what he can do for him, to which Elisha asks for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. Elijah is then taken to heaven by God and his authority passes to Elisha. He divides the Jordan and passes over on dry land, witnessed by the prophets from Jericho. Concerned that Elijah had come to some harm, the prophets persuade Elisha to allow fifty men to go and search for him, which they do in vain. The prophets then ask Elisha to heal the waters at Jericho, which he does before leaving and returning to Samaria via Bethel and Carmel. On the way to Bethel, Elisha is mocked by some youths who he then curses in God's name, and forty two of them are killed by bears.

Concerning Moab's rebellion, this takes place when Ahab's son Joram reigns in Israel following Ahaziah's death. Joram is an evil man in God's sight, though not as bad as his father was. He gathers an army and enlists the help of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and the king of Edom. After seven days journey toward the battle, the armies become distressed through lack of water, both for them and their cattle they have with them. Fearing defeat they approach Elisha who, for the sake of Jehoshaphat only, is able to promise water will be available in the valley and that God would be with them in defeating the Moabites. Both these come to pass, and in defeat, the Moabite king shows his depravity by offering his son as a burnt offering.

Elisha performs a number of miracles recorded over the following years: the multiplying of a poor widow's pot of oil for payment of her husband's debts; of providing a son for a Shunammite woman who had been very hospitable to him, and later raising her son to life when he had died; the cleansing of a deadly pottage made of wild gourds; and his feeding of one hundred men with just twenty barley loaves.

Elisha comes to hear of a Syrian Naaman who has leprosy, and had been sent to the king of Israel by the king of Syria to be cured. He sends for Naaman and instructs him to dip himself in the Jordan seven times, but Naaman was expecting an instant cure and leaves in anger. However, his servants persuade him to do as Elisha had instructed, which he does and is cured. Naaman returns to Elisha to offer him a present, but it is refused. Then Elisha's servant Gehazi goes after Naaman and lies to obtain the gifts for himself, for which he is punished with leprosy.

Elisha is requested to go with some prophets' disciples to Jordan where they will build a small community. Whilst cutting

some wood, one loses his axe in the water and Elisha causes it to float, enabling it to be found.

The king of Syria wars against Israel, but each time he counsels with his servants concerning where they might encamp, Elisha is able to forewarn the king of Israel. The king of Syria thinks he has a spy within his household, but he is told by his servants that Elisha is able to hear what he discusses in secret, so he sends an army to capture Elisha. When the Syrian army is encamped nearby, angels are among them but they are not seen by Elisha's servant until Elisha prays to God to reveal them to him. When the Syrian army come to attack, they are smitten with blindness in answer to Elisha's prayer, and are led to Samaria before their sight is restored. Here they are given plenty to eat and drink before being sent back to Syria in peace. Syria ceases to war against Israel for some time. However, with the passing of time Syria goes to besiege Samaria resulting in a great famine, so great as to bring about a case of cannibalism. The king hearing of this blames Elisha, and intent on having his head sends a messenger to him, but regrets the decision and prevents the execution. Elisha then prophesies there will be plenty of food available in Samaria from the next day. One of the king's lords doesn't believe this will happen and so is told by Elisha he would not benefit from it.

That night four lepers enter the Syrian camp but find it deserted. This is because the Syrians had thought they heard the sounds of an invading force, and had fled leaving their possessions and food. The lepers report this to the king's household and the story is investigated and confirmed. The Syrian camp is consequently spoiled, providing plenty of food as Elisha had prophesied. The unbelieving lord is put in charge at the city gate but is trampled by the crowds, and consequently doesn't partake of the food as told him by Elisha.

Elisha speaks to the Shunammite woman (whose son he had restored to life) and tells her to go to sojourn in Philistine for seven years to avoid a great famine. After seven years she returns from Philistine asking the king for the return of her house and land. When the king hears from her of the great things Elisha had done, he restores her home and land to her, including all the fruit her land would have provided while she was away.

Now Elisha is at Damascus when Benhadad, king of Syria, becomes sick and sends Hazeal, the captain of his guard, with presents to enquire whether he would have been able to recover from his sickness. Elisha tells Hazeal that Benhadad would be able to recover but will die anyway. Elisha weeps and tells Hazeal that he will be king over Syria and exercise great cruelty in Israel.

Hazeal returns to Benhadad and tells him Elisha said he would recover, but the next day he takes a thick cloth dipped in water and smothers the king. Hazeal then reigns over Syria.

Elisha had become known as the prophet of Israel, an office he held for around sixty years.

It is thought that Obadiah might also have prophesied during Joram's reign, but simply focusing on Edom.

King Jehu

[2Kings 9-10]

One of the prophets' sons is sent by Elisha to anoint Jehu as king of Israel, and to order him to kill and destroy the whole house of Ahab. Jehu acquaints his captains with the instruction and sets out for Jezreel where he slays Joram, king of Israel, Ahaziah, king of Judah, then Jezebel, whose fate is that dogs should eat her flesh as foretold by the Lord.

Jehu writes letters to the rulers of Jezreel, the elders, and those who brought up Ahab's sons, telling them to select a king from amongst his sons. But knowing the dangers of doing such a thing, they refuse, but with full submission to Jehu. He then sends a second letter ordering them to slay Ahab's seventy sons, which they do and deliver their heads to Jezreel as instructed.

Jehu then goes to Samaria where he comes across the brethren of Ahaziah, king of Judah, at the shearing house where he has his guards take them captive and slay them. When leaving the shearing house, Jehu meets Jehonadab and invites him to join him and be a witness to his zeal for God. He then enters Samaria where he slays all those remaining connected with Ahab's household and then, after contriving to bring them together, all the worshippers of Baal. The images of Baal are also destroyed, but Jehu does nothing about the golden calves in Bethel through which the people of Dan worship God. Because of his work in rooting out the evil of Baal, God tells Jehu, through a prophet, that his sons would rule over Israel for four generations. But Jehu's heart is not completely with God and Hazeal, king of Syria, afflicts all those in the coasts of Israel, as foretold by Elisha.

Jehu reigns over Israel from Samaria for twenty eight years and is buried in Samaria.

Kings Jehoahaz and Jehoash (also called Joash)

[2Kings 13]

In the twenty third year of Joash king of Judah's reign, Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu king of Israel, begins to reign. Jehoahaz is a wicked king, bringing the wrath of God upon Israel through the oppression of the Syrians. Jehoahaz dies after reigning seventeen years and is buried in Samaria, where Omri and the kings he descended from him were buried.

Jehoahaz's son Joash now reigns in Israel. He is another wicked king, as was his father before him. During his reign he challenged by Amaziah, king of Judah, and a battle follows in which Amaziah is defeated. Treasure is taken from the temple and the king's house before Joash returns to Samaria with some hostages [2Kings 14:8-14].

Now Elisha has fallen sick and King Jehoash of Israel comes and weeps over him, at which time Elisha foretells Jehoash's limited victories over the Syrians. Elisha then dies of his sickness.

Jehoash later defeats the Syrians three times to recover cities previously taken by them during his father's reign.

Jehoash reigns for sixteen years and is buried in Samaria.

It is during Jehoash's reign (thought to be the latter part of his reign) that Jonah was called to prophesy to Ninevah and bring about their repentance.

King Jeroboam II

[2Kings 14:23-29]

Jeroboam, the son of Jehoash king of Israel and the second king to have that name, begins his reign when Amaziah had been reigning for fifteen years. He is yet another evil king in God's eyes, like those before him and like the first Jeroboam. Nevertheless, God uses Jeroboam to restore lands bordering Syria that had previously been taken by Israel's enemies. This was prophesied by Jonah, though not recorded in his book.

It's possibly around this time, during Jeroboam's reign, that the prophet Jonah reluctantly warns the Ninevites to repent.

Amos, who was neither a priest nor a trained prophet, also prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II, citing judgements on surrounding nations and Israel, and prophesying Israel's final restoration.

After Amos, Hosea began to prophesy during the reign of Jeroboam II and through to King Hoshea. His theme was based on the relationship between God and His people, as Groom and bride.

Kings Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah and Pekah

[2Kings 15:8-31]

Zechariah succeeds his father Jeroboam as king of Israel. He too is an ungodly king and only reigns for six months before Shallum, son of Jabesh, conspires against him, kills him and reigns in his place. Shallum only lasts a single month as king in Samaria as Menahem, the son of Gadi, comes to Samaria and kills him, then reigns in his place. There are people from his own city and those nearby that do not accept Menahem as king, so he deals harshly with them, including the barbaric slaughter of all pregnant women.

The Assyrians rise against Israel, but their king is bribed by Menahem with some of his own money and money from the wealthy men of Israel. The bribe is accepted by the king of Assyria and they leave Israel. Menahem reigns for ten years in Samaria before his death.

His son Pekahiah succeeds him but he is another godless king and reigns just two years before one of his captains, Pekah, conspires against him, assassinates him and takes over the kingship. Pekah reigns over Israel for twenty years as another godless king. During his reign, the Assyrians invade much of Israel and take captive around half of the Israelites. Hoshea then conspires against Pekah, kills him, and reigns in his place.

Hoshea, last king of Israel when Israel is exiled

[2Kings 17]

Hoshea is the last king of Israel, not a God fearing man, but said to be not as bad as his predecessors. The king of Assyria rises against Hoshea, prevails and makes Hoshea his tributary. In time, Hoshea turns to the king of Egypt for help, but the king of Assyria becomes aware of the conspiracy when Hoshea stops paying him taxes. He invades Israel and lays siege to Samaria for three years, imprisoning Hoshea. After three years, all the Israelites are taken captive and are resettled in various cities in Assyria and Medes, ending Hoshea's nine year reign.

And so it is, after many years of gross sins and idolatry from the first Jeroboam's reign, God allows Israel to be taken away captive by Assyria who then resettle people from other countries in the land.

Kings of Judah

[1Kings 12-2Kings 25; 2Chr 10-36]

Rehoboam

[1Kings 12:1-24; 14:21-31; 2Chr 10-12]

It is a sad reflection of Rehoboam's kingship that, despite it being just the northern kingdom that initially had an idolatrous system of worship, after only five years into his reign Rehoboam and all Judah begin to disregard God's laws.

In the fifth year of his reign, God permits Shishak, king of Egypt, to invade Judah, taking the fenced cities. God sends a prophet to tell Rehoboam and his princes the cause of the invasion, and they consequently humble themselves before God, but they are reduced to servitude and their riches taken by Shishak.

Rehoboam reigns for seventeen years in Jerusalem but has continuous conflicts with Jeroboam. He dies at the age of fifty eight and is buried with David and Solomon.

Kings Abijam (Abijah) and Asa

[1Kings 15:1-24; 2 Chr 13-16]

[The name Abijam is primarily used in Kings and Abijah in Chronicles]

Abijam succeeds Rehoboam and reigns for just three years. His character is more like that of his father than David.

During his reign there is a war between Abijah and Jeroboam at the beginning of which Abijah warns the Israel army of their separation from God, reminding them of Judah's faithfulness which would ensure their victory. In the meantime, Jeroboam sends troops around to Abijah's rear as an ambush but to no avail, as Abijah is successful and Jeroboam is defeated.

Asa succeeds Abijam and is of much better character with a heart towards God throughout his reign. He begins a process of reformation in Judah. An army of Ethiopians comes against him, but his trust in God gives him victory over them, after which he is encouraged by a prophet to continue with the work of reformation. He removes all the idols and restores dedicated things to the temple, although he fails to get rid of some of the other places where idols are worshipped.

Peace follows until the thirty sixth year of Judah when Baasha, now king of Israel, takes Ramah and begins to build it as a fortification. Asa makes a league with the king of Syria to create a diversion in Israel, causing Baasha to leave off building. Asa's reliance on Syria rather than God provokes God's wrath, and he is reproved through the prophet Hanani. This angers Asa, and so he imprisons Hanani and oppresses some of the people.

Three years on, Asa has heavily diseased feet and dies two years later. He is buried in a sepulchre he had made for himself in the city of David.

King Jehoshaphat

[1Kings 22:41-50; 2 Chr 17:1-20:37]

Jehoshaphat has been a good king in Judah, walking in the ways of the Lord, bringing about a reformation of their religion and arranging for instruction for his people in God's law. Neighbouring nations show him respect, his kingdom is fortified and his army strengthened. But when Jehoshaphat returns from a battle at Ramothgilead, he is reproved by a prophet for aligning himself with the ungodly Ahab. After this reproach, he increases his acts of reformation, appoints judges throughout Judah, and appoints priests and Levites in Jerusalem for the same purpose, charging them to perform their duties faithfully.

Having been told of an army coming against Judah, consisting of Moabites, Ammonites and others, Jehoshaphat proclaims a fast throughout Judah and prays before his people for God's deliverance. They are immediately assured of victory by a prophet, bringing about much worship and praise. God causes their enemies to destroy one another, and the people of Judah are able to recover much spoil. Jehoshaphat and his people return to Jerusalem to rejoice and praise God for delivering them.

Jehoshaphat later joins with Ahaziah, a wicked king of Israel, to build ships, but is reproved by a prophet. The ships are damaged and not able to be used.

Apart from the two episodes with Ahab and Ahaziah, Jehoshaphat has been a godly king who reigned for twenty five years in Jerusalem. He is buried with his fathers in the city of David, and is succeeded by his son Jehoram.

King Jehoram

[2Kings 8:16-24; 2Chr 21]

At the age of thirty two, Jehoram, Jehoshaphat's son, begins an eight year reign over Judah. His wife is the daughter of Ahab, king of Israel, influencing him such that his reign is more like that of Ahab's, being evil in God's sight. He murders his brethren and some princes he thought might oppose him. But God does not bring punishment on Judah because of his promise to David.

During his reign, the Edomites, who had been a tributary to Judah since the times of David, revolt and make a king for themselves. They are subdued by Jehoram, but he is distracted when the city of Libnah, a Levitical city, revolts against him because of his idolatrous practices.

Jehoram receives a prophecy written by Elijah before his ascension, in which punishment for his idolatrous and ungodly ways in the form of a great plague is pronounced on him and his household, and the nature of his death is given.

The Philistines and Arabians invade Judah taking all that is in the king's house, including his wives and sons, except for Ahaziah, his youngest son.

Jehoram's bowels are then inflicted with an incurable disease for two years, from which he dies.

Joel possibly prophesied during Joash's reign, with the message for the people is to turn the nation back to God in preparation of the great day of the Lord.

King Ahaziah

[2Kings 8:25-29; 2Chr 22:1-9]

As Ahaziah is now the only remaining son of Jehoram, he is made king of Judah, but only reigns for one year, during which he is an idolatrous king, encouraged by his mother. He aligns himself with King Ahab and goes to war with Ahab's son Joram against Hazael, king of Syria. During this war he is wounded. He seeks refuge but is later found and executed by Jehu.

Athaliah and Joash (Jehoash)

[2Kings 11-12; 2Chr 22:10-24:27]

To save him from being slain, Ahaziah's sister takes one of Ahaziah's sons, Joash, and hides him for six years. Meanwhile, Ahaziah's mother Athaliah reigns over Israel as a usurper (women were not permitted to rule). In the seventh year, Jehoiada the priest arranges for a guard to be put around Joash, now just seven years old, and anoints him king. When Athaliah becomes aware that Joash is made king, she claims it is treason, but the priest orders her execution.

Now Joash is a good king, worshipping the only true God, ruling and walking according to the law of God with Jehoiada the priest instructing him. However, it is noted he did not remove the high places of worship that still exist outside the temple.

Joash arranges for the temple to be repaired, funded by the people's offerings.

After the death of Jehoiada at the age of 130, princes of Judah, who had been secretly inclined to idolatry, make obeisance to Joash, who takes notice of them and also slips into idolatry. Jehoiada's son Zechariah testifies against them but is killed by Joash. Following Zechariah's death, a small company of Syrians come against Judah and Jerusalem and the princes of Judah, and all the princes are killed and the spoil taken to the king of Syria at Damascus. This was God's means of Judgement over Joash who is left by the Syrians wounded and diseased. Joash's own servants conspire against him and he is killed in his bed.

Joash is buried in David's city, but not in the king's sepulchre. He had reigned in Jerusalem for forty years, the first twenty one or two years being contemporary with Jehu, king of Israel.

Joel possibly prophesied during Joash's reign, with the message for the people is to turn the nation back to God in preparation of the great day of the Lord.

King Amaziah

[2Kings 14:1-22; 2Chr 25]

Amaziah, son of Joash king of Judah, is made king at the age of twenty five and reigns in Judah for twenty nine years. He is a good king who follows God's laws, but his heart is not perfect.

Amaziah slays his servants who had killed his father but, in accordance with Moses' law, left their children unharmed. In preparation for war with the Edomites, he raises a large army from his own kingdom, to which he adds 100,000 hired out of Israel, but then sends them home on the advice of a prophet. Whilst Amaziah is at war with the Edomites, the Israelite army he sent home attacks some cities of Judah, killing three thousand and taking much spoil. From his war with the Edomites, Amaziah brings back some of their gods amongst the spoil and begins to worship them, for which he is reproved by a prophet. He then sends a challenge to Joash, king of Israel, which is accepted and a battle follows in which Amaziah is defeated. Treasure is taken from the temple and the king's house before Joash returns to Samaria with some hostages.

Amaziah lives another fifteen years after the death of Joash of Israel, but he turns away from following God and is killed by his own people. Nevertheless, he is still buried with his fathers in the City of David.

King Uzziah (Azariah)

[2Kings 15:1-7; 2Chr 26]

[The name Uzziah is used in Chronicles and Azariah is used in Kings]

Azariah is made king of Judah at the age of sixteen. He grows to be a good king, seeking God and following his laws. He prospers and is successful in wars and in building projects, his name becoming known by surrounding nations. But his successes eventually leads to pride and he takes it upon himself to burn incense on the altar of incense in the temple, an act only permitted by priests. When he is challenged by a company of priests he defies them and is struck with leprosy, which stays with him until his death. Azariah reigns in Jerusalem for a total of fifty two years.

It is during the last year of Uzziah's (Azariah's) reign that Isaiah begins to prophesy and continues through to Hezekiah's reign; Micah is contemporary with Isaiah; and Jeremiah prophesies from Josiah to Zedekiah.

King Jotham

[2Kings 15:32-38; 2Chr 27]

It is in the second year of Pekah's reign that Jotham begins his reign in Judah, at the age of twenty five. He is a God fearing king, yet still does not have the high places of worship outside the temple removed. He is responsible for much building work and defeats the Ammonites from whom he receives tribute for three years.

Jotham reigns for sixteen years in Jerusalem and is buried with the other kings of Judah in the city of David.

King Ahaz

[2Kings 16; 2Chr 28]

Jotham's son Ahaz now begins to reign in Judah at the age of twenty. Unlike his father, he is not a God fearing man and follows Israel's ways, even sacrificing his own son as the Canaanites did. Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah king of Israel rise against Ahaz at Jerusalem. They are not able to take the city, but Israel takes many captives from Judah, and Rezin recaptures Elath, driving the Jews out. Ahaz pays the king of Assyria to assist him against the kings of Syria and Israel, using his own funds and treasures from the temple. The king of Assyria goes against Damascus and Rezin is killed in the process.

Ahaz goes to Damascus to meet with the king of Assyria where he sees an altar of an idol which he then has replicated in the temple. He also defaces and removes items from the temple.

His idolatrous acts and calamities faced by Judah continue to his death, sixteen years after his reign began.

King Hezekiah

[2Kings 18-20; 2Chr 29-32; Isa 36-39]

Hezekiah is the twelfth king of Judah, succeeding his apostate father Ahaz at the age of twenty five. He is to be a great and good king following the example of his great-grandfather Uzziah. His first act upon accession to the throne is to open the doors of the temple, to summon the priests and Levites to purge it, cleanse it and re-establish the sacrifices and ceremonies, of which the first are to be a splendid example. He abolishes idolatry and destroys the ‘brazen serpent’, said to have been the one used by Moses in the miraculous healing of the Israelites, because it had become an object of idolatrous worship. In all, a great reformation is brought about in Judah during his reign.

On the death of Sargon and the accession to the Assyrian throne of his son Sennacherib, Hezekiah refuses to continue to pay tribute to the king of Assyria, as his predecessors had, and enters into a league with Egypt. This leads to an invasion of Judah by Sennacherib who takes fortified cities and besieges Jerusalem. Hezekiah yields to Sennacherib’s demands and agrees to pay him three hundred talents of silver and thirty of gold, some of which has to be made up from silver and gold from the temple. Nevertheless, Sennacherib invades Judah for a second time in two years when Rabshakeh, one of Sennacherib’s generals, using blasphemous and insulting language, urges the Jews to revolt against their king. Hezekiah sends messages to Isaiah and prays to God for deliverance, a prayer that is answered when most of the Assyrian army (185,000 men) are destroyed by an angel in one night. Sennacherib flees to Nineveh with the remnant of his forces, where seventeen years later he is assassinated by his sons.

Hezekiah falls sick and prays to God, who speaks to him through Isaiah, providing a means and miraculous sign of his recovering, and a promise of another fifteen years of life. The king of Babylon sends messengers to Hezekiah with a present and congratulations for his recovery. Hezekiah receives the message with joy, and in his vanity shows the messengers all his treasures. He is reproved by Isaiah and the fate of his people, their capture and exile in Babylon, is foretold and humbly accepted.

Hezekiah reigns a total of twenty nine years before he dies and is buried with his fathers.

Kings Manasseh and Amon

[2Kings 21; 2Chr 33]

Hezekiah’s son Manasseh succeeds him at the tender age of twelve years. He is heavily influenced by the nations around him and leads Judah into idolatry, to do more evil than the nations that were before them in Canaan. Nevertheless, God reaches out to Judah, but the people do not listen.

Manasseh is captured by the Assyrians and imprisoned. His imprisonment causes him to reflect and he repents of his ways

and is restored to Jerusalem. He begins to undo the evil he had brought upon Judah and encourages his people to return to worshipping God, but the reformation is incomplete.

After a lengthy reign of fifty five years, Manasseh dies and is buried in his own garden.

Manasseh's son Amon succeeds him at the age of twenty two. He reigns for just two years, during which short time his idolatrous acts are like those of his father. He is assassinated by his servants, who in turn are killed by the people. Amon is buried in the garden where his father was buried.

King Josiah, Judah's last and greatest reformer

[2Kings 22:1-23:30; 2Chr 34-35]

Amon is succeeded by his son Josiah at the age of eight, but he does not seek God until eight years later when he devotes himself to Him and begins a campaign of exterminating the prevailing idolatry from Judah. At the age of twenty six, he begins to repair and restore the temple, which is by now in very poor condition. During this restoration, the book of the law is discovered and given to Josiah, who is alarmed by the things it contains and sends for the prophetess Huldah for her counsel. She tells of the destruction of Jerusalem to come, but assures him it will not be during his lifetime.

Josiah then gathers his people and reads the book of the law to them, after which a renewal of the ancient covenant is made. Idolatry in all its forms is then systematically removed from Judah, including the final destruction of the 'high places'. A great Passover is celebrated, after which Josiah continues with his work of cleansing Judah of idolatry.

Back in 612 B.C. when the Assyrian capital, Nineveh, was overrun by the Medes, Scythians, Babylonians and their allies, the Assyrians moved their capital to Harran. When Harran was captured by the alliance in 609 BC, remnants of the Assyrian army joined Carchemish, a city under Egyptian rule, on the Euphrates. Egypt, a former vassal of Assyria, was allied with Assyrian King Ashur-uballit II and marched in 609 BC to join him at Carchemish. From there they would attempt to retake Harran from the Babylonians.

Pharaoh Necho is passing through Judea with his army to go and assist Assyria in their attempt to retake Harran, when Josiah rashly decides to go into battle against him, despite a warning from Necho that God had told him to make haste. Josiah is fatally wounded and carried back to Jerusalem. Here he is mourned by all Judea and lamented for by Jeremiah.

Josiah had reigned for a total of thirty one years, but his death from battle means that Judah will now become a vassal state.

It was during Josiah's reign that Jeremiah began to prophesy, and continued until Jerusalem's fall in the reign of Zedekiah and some time after during the captivity.

Zephaniah also prophesied at this time, but only during the early part of Josiah's reign.

Contemporary with Zephaniah was Nahum, whose sole subject was the coming destruction of Ninevah.

Josiah's successors: Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah

[2Kings 23:31-24:20; 2Chr 36:2-16]

Jehoahaz, Josiah's son, is not the eldest but is anointed by the people as king. However, after just three months, Pharaoh Necho returns from battle and deposes Jehoahaz, makes his brother Eliakim king renaming him Jehoiakim, and imposes a tribute on Judah. Jehoahaz is taken prisoner to Egypt where he later dies.

Jehoiakim does not pay the tribute from his own money but taxes the people. After serving Nebuchadnezzar for three years, the Assyrians are totally destroyed at the battle of Cardichemish by an alliance led by the Babylonians. With the Babylonians now the dominant power, Jehoiakim changes his allegiance to them. Some time later, Jehoiakim changes his mind, provoking Nebuchadnezzar to besiege Jerusalem. Jehoiakim is taken to Babylon along with other captives and articles from the temple of the Lord. (It is at this time that Daniel and his companions are taken captive [Daniel 1:1-4].)

He reigns for eleven years doing that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.

It was during Josiah's reign that Jeremiah began to prophesy, and continued until Jerusalem's fall in the reign of Zedekiah and some time after during the captivity.

Jehoiachin, Jehoiakim's son, now reigns in his place at the age of eighteen, but his reign only lasts for three months and ten days before Nebuchadnezzar besieges Jerusalem and he is carried off to Babylon, along with all his household and its treasures, as well as treasures from the temple. He also takes ten thousand men into exile, leaving only the poorest people in the land. The prophet Ezekiel is included amongst those taken.

Despite his short reign Jehoiachin was also said to have done all that was evil in the sight of the Lord.

The king of Babylon now makes Mattaniah (Josiah's third son and Jehoiachin's uncle) king and renames him Zedekiah. Zedekiah is twenty one when he becomes king and reigns for eleven years in Jerusalem. He too does all that was evil in the sight of the Lord, despite having the prophet Jeremiah as his counsellor.

The fall of Jerusalem

[2Kings 25; 2Chr 36:17-23; Jer 52]

Zedekiah rebels against Babylon resulting in a siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, lasting for eighteen months and causing a great famine in the city. The city is overcome and Zedekiah and his household try to escape, but are captured and taken prisoner. He is made to witness the killing of his sons then his eyes are gouged out. He is then put in chains and thrown in prison where he stays for the rest of his life. The city is later burned, including the temple.

All the temple furniture had been taken, and the people taken captive in a total of three waves over a period of several years.

And so Jerusalem falls and the exile of the Jews begins.

When Nebuchadnezzar is succeeded by Evilmerodach, Jehoiachin is released from prison and made king above the lesser kings in Babylon, a position he holds until his death.

The Exile

[Daniel 1-6]

Daniel and his friends taken captive

[Dan 1]

During the first captivity of Jews from Jerusalem, when Jehoiakim had rebelled and Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city, among those taken captive with the sole purpose of being trained for service to the king are Daniel and three of his companions, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The four are given the names Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego by the prince of eunuchs in whose charge they have been placed. The trainees are provided with a daily portion of the king's meat and wine. In fear of defiling himself, Daniel abstains from the king's provision but, to gain approval and prove himself and his companions, agrees they should live on water and pulse for ten days. When the ten days are up, the four young men appear in better health than those eating the king's meat. Their abstinence then accepted, they continue their training and grow in wisdom and understanding, to the extent that the king judges them to be ten times more knowledgeable than all the magicians and astrologers in his realm.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream

[Dan 2]

After the young men's three years of training, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream that troubles him, yet he appears to forget its content. He calls on his wise men to tell him what the dream was and then to interpret it, threatening death if they do not, but great rewards if they do. They naturally say the demand is unreasonable, which angers the king and he orders their execution. As they are numbered amongst the wise, this puts Daniel and his companions in danger, so Daniel approaches the king to ask to be given time to divulge and interpret the dream. Following prayer, Daniel is shown the dream in the night and is able to relate it to the king the next day, and its interpretation concerning the four kingdoms, or empires, and God's everlasting kingdom. Daniel rightly gives credit to God for the interpretation. Nebuchadnezzar rewards him with gifts and promotes him to rule over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon. At Daniel's request, his three companions are made his deputies.

The fiery furnace

[Dan 3]

Nebuchadnezzar has an image made of gold having a height of 60 cubits (approximately 90 ft or 27 m) and a breadth of

six cubits (approximately 18 ft or 5.4 m). He convenes a large assembly for the dedication of the image, led by all his princes, governors and officers, and gives a proclamation that every person must fall down and worship the image when they hear the sound of music, under pain of death by fire. Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego are seen disobeying this command and are reported to the king who summons them for questioning. They admit their disobedience and refuse to comply, putting their trust in God. In anger, the king orders the furnace to be heated to seven times hotter than usual, and for the three to be cast into it. The heat is such that it kills the men casting them into the furnace, but the king is then astonished to see the three men with a fourth walking around in the fire. Nebuchadnezzar says “*the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.*” He calls the men from the furnace and they emerge completely unscathed, leading Nebuchadnezzar to give praise to God and decree that no person is to speak against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. If they do, then they will be executed and their property destroyed. The three are then restored to the positions held before they were accused and given more responsibilities.

Nebuchadnezzar’s testimony

[Dan 4]
Nebuchadnezzar is the author of this chapter, which in his words is a testimony of *the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me.*

Nebuchadnezzar has another dream, this one troubles him and even makes him afraid. His wise men are unable to interpret it, so he calls on Daniel and relates the dream to him. Daniel is astonished by the dream, as the interpretation is that Nebuchadnezzar will lose his mind for seven years in order that he will come to know that God is all powerful. He will then be restored to his position as king of Babylon.

After a year during which nothing happens, and while the king is reflecting on his achievements, he is struck down just as the dream foretold, and is reduced to behaving like an animal. After seven years in this mental state, Nebuchadnezzar’s mind is healed and he gives praise to God. His position is restored with more honour than before, and in his praise of God, he recognises that God will deal with the proud.

The writing on the wall

[Dan 5]
Many years later Belshazzar holds a great feast for a thousand of his lords, during which he calls for and uses the gold and silver vessels that had been taken from the temple by his father. While they are praising the gods of gold, silver, brass, iron and wood, a hand is seen writing a message on the wall. This terrifies the king and he sends for his wise men, but they are

unable to interpret the message. His distress grows and is visible to all, so much so that his mother recommends he consults Daniel, who is then sent for. Daniel is promised a great reward if he can interpret the writing, but he declines the offer, praises the king's father but charges the king with pride, idolatry and profaning the vessels from the temple. Daniel then interprets the writing which is a short condemnation of Belshazzar and an announcement that he is to lose his kingdom. Daniel is given the rewards promised and is made third ruler in the kingdom. That night the city is invaded and Darius the Mede takes the kingdom.

Daniel and the lions' den

[Dan 6]

Because of the *excellent spirit* that was in Daniel, Darius promotes him to be over all the presidents and princes in his kingdom. Daniel's high position causes envy amongst Darius' officials and they seek to be rid of him, but can find no fault. Their only means would be through his faithfulness to God, so a plot is hatched to bring about his death. They approached Darius with a decree *that whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions*. Darius agrees to sign this decree and having done so, under the Mede and Perisan law, it cannot be revoked, even by the king. Daniel, despite knowing of this decree, continues with his daily prayers at his window which faces east towards Jerusalem. His praying is seen and reported with the intended consequence that Daniel has to be thrown in the lions' den. Precautions are put in place to prevent Daniel being helped or rescued, and the king spends a sleepless night worrying about Daniel's fate. In the morning he goes straight to the den and finds Daniel safe. He then orders Daniel's accusers and their families to be cast into the den, and makes a decree that all are to fear the God of Daniel.

Daniel continues to prosper throughout the reigns of Darius and Cyrus, and sees some of his people being returned to Jerusalem by the decree of Cyrus.

Daniel is not known to have returned to Jerusalem and the timing and nature of his death is not recorded.

Israel's return

Ezra

The Decree of Cyrus and the first body of people to return to Jerusalem

[Ezra 1-2]

In Cyrus' first year of reign in Babylon, God stirs up his spirit in order that Jeremiah's prophecy might be fulfilled [Jer 25:12 & 29:10]. (Although not explicitly stated, it seems probable that Cyrus was shown an excerpt from Isaiah (44:27-45:6) that mentions him by name and prophesies the manner of his taking of Babylon.) Consequently, he makes a proclamation to permit the Israelites to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Those choosing to return on this occasion with Zerubbabel, the head of Judah, are supplied with silver, gold, goods and beasts by those around them. Also, Cyrus gives them the treasures from the temple that Nebuchadnezzar had originally taken from them. Forty two thousand three hundred and sixty people return to Jerusalem, along with seven thousand three hundred and thirty seven servants and maids. Amongst those who return is Ezra, a priest and descendant of Aaron [Neh 12:1].

The temple is rebuilt

[Ezra 3-6]

Having now returned from their captivity, the first thing the Israelites do is to reinstate their sacrifices, offerings and festivals appropriate to the time of year. They then pay the workers for their labour and some of the materials required to build the temple. The foundations are laid to the joy of all the people, although the older men who remembered the beauty of the original temple wept. The Samaritans offer to help in building the temple, but their offer is refused so they continually make trouble for the Israelites, hampering their building work. In time, the Samaritans send a letter to Artaxerxes, king of Persia, with all kinds of accusations against them. Consequently, Artaxerxes commands the Israelites to stop building the temple.

In the second year of Darius' reign (this is a later Darius than that of Daniel's time) the prophets Haggai and Zechariah encourage the Israelites to resume building the temple, despite some questioning of their authority to do so. Their response to the questioning prompted a letter to Darius to confirm Cyrus' decree. Darius searches for the decree, finds it and issues a fresh one confirming the authorisation to build the temple, ensuring expenses for the building. Offerings are provided, and a warning of punishment to those who oppose the decree. The building of the temple is consequently completed over the next four years, is solemnly dedicated to God and the Passover celebrated by all the people.

The Decree of Artaxerxes and the second body of people to return to Jerusalem

[Ezra 7-8]

Having returned to Babylon at some point, Ezra now prepares to go to Jerusalem a second time with an intent to teach and re-establish the priestly system of judges, and God's laws to the people of Israel. A decree is received from the king to this effect and to provide Ezra with the financial support he needs. Ezra travels around the land to encourage those who had not previously taken advantage of Cyrus' decree, to now consider returning to Jerusalem with him under the decree of Artaxerxes.

When the people are gathered together, Ezra sends for the Levites, then fasting and prayer is proclaimed to seek God's blessing for a safe journey. The journey (circa 458 B.C.) takes four months, during which confrontation with any enemy is avoided. They all arrive safely and offerings are made to God to give thanks for the journey. Then the king's commissions are delivered to his lieutenants and governors, allowing Israel to return to their full way of spiritual life.

The problem of mixed marriages is resolved

[Ezra 9-10]

Ezra is told by some of the princes of Israel that many of the Israelites have married foreign wives, expressly forbidden by their law [Deuteronomy 7:1]. Ezra is so grieved and distressed at hearing this that he sits astonished for most of the day. He then confesses their sins to God with shame and embarrassment. Such is the depth of Ezra's remorse that many people hear of it and gather at the temple to weep with Ezra.

Shechaniah, the son of Jeheil, proposes that those who have married foreign wives should divorce them and separate themselves from them and their children. This is agreed and people are appointed to oversee the separations, which take a full three months to complete. Those who separate from their foreign wives and children are recorded in the book of Ezra.

Israel's return - Nehemiah

Nehemiah obtains permission to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the city

[Neh 1:1-2:8]

About eleven years after Ezra had gone to Jerusalem, Nehemiah, a cup bearer to the king at the palace, hears of the harassment and distress suffered by the Jews in Jerusalem, because their walls and gates are still in the same condition as when Nebuchadnezzar had left them, broken and ineffective. Nehemiah is distressed at this and takes to fasting and prayer. When he next serves the king in his role as cup bearer, his unusual state of melancholy is recognised by Artaxerxes who asks him what his problem is, and how he can help. Nehemiah tells of the plight of the Jews and requests permission to

return to Jerusalem to rebuild it, and to be given letters of confirmation. He also requests that wood be provided for building the gates. All this is granted and Nehemiah sets off for Jerusalem with some of the king's men to protect him.

The walls and doors are rebuilt

[Neh 2:9-7:73a]

After being in Jerusalem for three days, Nehemiah secretly sets out to survey the city walls and gates. When his survey is complete, he tells the Jews of his mission and the support he has from Artaxerxes, and the building work begins, notwithstanding scoffs and threats from their enemies. The names of all those contributing to the work are recorded by Nehemiah.

Their enemies continue to mock them, but no response is given to their mocking other than Nehemiah's prayers. When the work is seen to continue, their enemies conspire to hinder their progress by force. Nehemiah provides for a defence, both spiritual in prayer and physical in arming one half of the builders to protect the other half if the need should arise, with a strategy to ensure their protection.

Now the poorer Jews complain of the burden they are carrying in purchasing and supplying food for their families while the building work is continuing. Some are even having to mortgage their properties to richer Jews. Nehemiah is angry at this revelation and rebukes the rich for lending money and charging the borrowers. They are convicted before an assembly and agree to return all properties to their owners. Nehemiah sets an example by supporting himself and his family at his own expense.

When the Jew's enemies see the wall has been rebuilt (the gates are still to be completed at this time), they request a meeting with Nehemiah at a named place. He refuses, being suspicious of their motives. They write to Nehemiah four times, but each time he refuses. A fifth letter is sent suggesting Nehemiah and the Jews with him would be treated as rebels by his neighbours, since the building of walls and rumours going around that he would be made king, implies such. This letter is also rejected. False prophets are then employed to advise Nehemiah to flee to the temple for safety, advice that is rejected.

The work is completed after just fifty two days, all the while there being secret correspondence between Nehemiah's enemies and some dissenters from amongst the Jews.

The wall and gates now being completed, Nehemiah appoints two people to take charge of the city, with instructions to take special care about opening and shutting the gates.

The city is much larger than that needed for the current inhabitants, so Nehemiah prepares for population growth by providing the genealogy of all those now resettled there. Details are also given of freewill offerings made for the restoration of Jerusalem.

Ezra brings about a revival

[Neh 7:73b-11:36]

All the people gather together asking Ezra to read the book of the law, which he does from a pulpit. He has thirteen Levites in the pulpit with him, and together they spend the morning reading and expounding the law. Learning of the degree of God's standards required of them, they are overwhelmed with grief, but are encouraged to observe the Feast of Tabernacles which is now due. This they do and observe it strictly, including the making of booths which had not been done since Joshua's time.

The people's repentance is then demonstrated in their fasting in *sackclothes and earth upon them*, their confession of sins, worship and prayer. The Levites then offer a long prayer in which they recall God's acts in creation, and the time from the call of Abraham until the present day. They recognise the good things that God did, the transgressions of the people and the Lord's correction of them.

Because of all this they make a covenant which is written down, signed and sealed by many. They covenanted to observe the law of God with specific mention of not to marry with the people of the land, to keep the Sabbaths weekly and to make tithes and offerings for the service of the temple.

The dedication of the wall

[Neh 12]

The people encompass Jerusalem with two processions on the wall, Nehemiah with one procession and Ezra with the other, making their way in opposite directions, each led by a choir. When they meet half way round the wall, in the temple area, there is thanksgiving followed by sacrifices offered in the temple. The whole occasion is one of great joy.

Further abuses and reforms

[Neh 13]

Nehemiah had been governing Jerusalem for about twelve years when he returned to the court of Artaxerxes in Babylon. Some time later he comes back to Jerusalem to find certain abuses have arisen in his absence. (It is around this time that the prophet Malachi is prophesying to the Jews, convicting them of their sins.)

Some temple quarters had been profaned and polluted by allocating them to Tobiah, an old enemy of Nehemiah's and a non-Jew. Nehemiah has Tobiah and all the furnishings removed, and rooms returned to their former use. He restores the income due to the Levites, which had not been given to them. He puts a stop to the breaking of Sabbath laws by closing the city gates and preventing traders from entering on the Sabbath, threatening them should they attempt to trade on the Sabbath

again. He also puts a stop to the taking of foreign wives, a practice that has again arisen to the extent that children have learned a foreign language rather than their own.

In all these abuses, Nehemiah adopts strong measures against the offenders.

Israel's return - Esther

Esther becomes queen

[Est 1-2]

Looking back to the time when the first wave of people returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel, and before the second wave with Ezra, Ahasuerus, king of Persia, holds a great feast for all the dignitaries of his kingdom. This feast lasts for 180 days, after which a feast is then held for his people for seven days, and at the same time a feast is held by Vashti, the queen, for the women. On the last day of the feast, Ahasuerus sends for Vashti to be brought before him unveiled so that he could show off her beauty, but she refuses. To appear before the men unveiled was not the done thing, but for Vashti to refuse her king was a problem in that she might be an example to other women. At the advice of his councillors, the king deposes his queen and publishes an order throughout his provinces that every man is ruler in his own house.

Later, the king's wrath is appeased and his thoughts return to Vashti, but his decree against her is irreversible. Consequently, the decision is made to bring many fair virgins from throughout his kingdom in order that he can select a new queen.

Serving at court at this time is a Benjamite by the name of Mordecai. He had brought up a young woman by the name of Esther, also a Benjamite, because her parents had died. Mordecai ensures Esther is included in the virgins given into the custody of Hegai, the keeper of the women. Esther is told by Mordecai not to reveal she is a Jew. It is twelve months before Esther is taken to the king when she is then chosen by him to be his queen.

Some time later, while sitting at the king's gate, Mordecai overhears a plot by two men against the king, which he relates to Esther that she might inform the king. The matter is investigated and the two are hanged for their treason.

Haman and the decree to destroy the Jews

[Est 3]

Ahasuerus later promotes the Agagite Haman above all other officials, and all other servants at court are now required to bow down before him. But Mordecai does not bow, and when pressed says it is because he is a Jew. Haman is so angered by Mordecai's attitude that he seeks to destroy all the Jews throughout the whole of Ahasuerus' kingdom. Haman persuades

the king that the Jews are a problem because they obey their own laws and not his, adding that he would offer a large reward which would eventually compensate for any loss of revenue to the king. Ahasuerus gives him the necessary authority and lots, called Par, are cast daily to establish when this should take place, with the date eventually determined to be twelve months later. It is about five years after the king's marriage to Esther that the decree is sent out, not without causing some bewilderment and concern in the city.

Mordecai persuades Esther to help

[Est 4-5]

On hearing of the decree, Mordecai is naturally greatly distressed, as are all the Jews throughout the provinces, audibly expressing his grief in sackcloth and ashes outside the king's gate. Esther hears of Mordecai's distress, and through her chamberlain Hatach, whom she sends to enquire of Mordecai, the edict is discovered. Mordecai insists Esther should go to the king to plea for the Jews, but it is a law that none can enter the king's chamber without being invited. If they do, and the king does not accept the uninvited intrusion, then the penalty is death. Esther had not been called before the king for thirty days, but Mordecai insists that she must approach him, for neither of them would escape the edict, so she would die anyway. He also suggests that she may well be in the position she is for such a time as this, to protect the Jews. Esther agrees and tells Mordecai to have all the Jews fast for three days, then she will go to the king and if she should perish, then she will perish.

So Esther approaches the king who does indeed hold out his sceptre towards her, signalling his acceptance of her approach. He asks the nature of her petition, offering anything she wishes up to half of his kingdom. At this time, Esther simply invites the king and Haman to a banquet of wine she has prepared for them that day. This they did and the king asks again what it is that Esther wants of him. She requests that he and Haman attend another banquet the next day, then she will tell him her petition.

Haman leaves the banquet full of joy because he is the only one next to the king whom the queen has invited to another banquet. As he leaves court, he again sees Mordecai who refuses to bow before him. Haman, full of his own importance, is in too much of a hurry to concern himself with Mordecai. He is too keen to get back to his family and relate the degree to which he is now considered above all others except the king, and what glory, riches and honour this has brought him. He then reflects on how this is all belittled by the behaviour of Mordecai. His wife and family encourage him to construct a high gallows on which to hang Mordecai, ready for the permission to do so which will surely be granted to him at the banquet the next day. And so the gallows is built in preparation.

The plan to counter the decree

[Est 6-8]

During that night Ahasuerus is unable to sleep, so he calls for the book of records to be brought and read to him. During the reading, the act of Mordecai in bringing to light the plot against the king is read, and Ahasuerus asks what reward Mordecai has received, to which the answer is none. The king asks who is in court. Haman is there, waiting to speak to the king concerning the hanging of Mordecai, so he is asked to approach the king. Ahasuerus asks Haman what he considers he should do for a man he delights to honour. Thinking the king would not want to be honouring any other man above himself, Haman advises an elaborate display of honour, to which the king agrees and immediately orders Haman to do all that he said for Mordecai. This he does exactly as ordered, but then goes to his household to tell of all that had happened. His family come to realise that his downfall could be imminent. While they are talking, the king's chamberlains arrive to hasten Haman to the banquet prepared by the queen.

At the banquet Esther is again asked by the king what it is she desires of him. She replies that she simply wants her life and the life of her people, for they have been sold for destruction. The king, amazed at her request, asks who would dare to initiate such a vile thing, to which Haman is named. Ahasuerus is so shocked he has to leave the room for a moment. While he is out, Haman, fearing for his life, falls before the couch on which the queen is reclining. At that moment, the king returns, misconstrues the situation and orders Haman to be hanged on the very gallows that had been prepared for Mordecai.

Ahasuerus gives all Haman's estate to Esther, and Mordecai is made steward over the estate. But the decree set in place to destroy the Jews, once made by the king, cannot be reversed in Persian law. To overcome this, a new decree is made giving the Jews authority to defend themselves and even to slay those that rise against them.

The Jews survive the decree

[Est 9-10]

On the day set for the decree to destroy the Jews, they gather together to defend themselves as authorised by the king. In that day they kill Haman's ten sons and five hundred of his men, and in the provinces they kill 75,000. The next two days are kept as a festival and established as such by Esther and Mordecai, known today as Purim.

Mordecai has now become second in the kingdom after the king and highly respected by the Jews, seeking their good welfare from his newly acquired position.

The 'Silent' Years

Daniel 11:5-35

Following the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C., the Greek Empire was divided between four of his generals: Cassander, who took Macedonia and Greece; Lysimachus, who took Asia Minor and Thrace; Seleucus, who took the largest portion of Syria and Babylon; and Ptolemy, who took Egypt, Arabia and Israel. In Daniel 11, the king of the south is Ptolemy I and the king of the north is Seleucus I. Israel, being the northern extremity of Ptolemy's region, effectively becomes a buffer state between the south and the north and is caught up in the 150 years of warfare between the two regions, chronicled in Daniel 11:5-35.

What follows is:

Daniel's prophecy by verse followed by
the relevant history

Verse 5

And the king of the south shall be strong, and one of his princes; and he shall be strong above him, and have dominion; his dominion shall be a great dominion.

The king of the south here is Ptolemy, who reigned over the land south of Judea which included Egypt, Lybia, Cyrene, Ethopia, Arabia and Phoenicia, as well as others. The king of the north, Seleucus, was greater, for he reigned over countries from Syria eastward as far as India.

Verse 6

And in the end of years they shall join themselves together; for the king's daughter of the south shall come to the king of the north to make an agreement: but she shall not retain the power of the arm; neither shall he stand, nor his arm: but she shall be given up, and they that brought her, and he that begat her, and he that strengthened her in these times.

After a lapse of some years, a political marriage is arranged between Antiochus II of the north and Bernice, the daughter of Ptolemy II, from the south. Antiochus is required to divorce his own wife, Laodiceia, to facilitate this arrangement. Bernice was unable to prevail against her rival Laodiceia who poisoned Antiochus, murdered Bernice, and set her elder son, Seleucus II Callinicus, on the throne.

Verse 7

But out of a branch of her roots shall one stand up in his estate, which shall come with an army, and shall enter into the

fortress of the king of the north, and shall deal against them, and shall prevail:

Ptolemy III Euergetes, the brother of murdered Bernice, invades Syria, seizes the port of Antioch, and overruns Seleucus' empire as far as Babylon.

Verse 8

And shall also carry captives into Egypt their gods, with their princes, and with their precious vessels of silver and of gold; and he shall continue more years than the king of the north.

His spoils for Egypt included 4,000 talents of gold, 40,000 talents of silver, and 2,500 idols. These included treasures carried from Egypt some 280 years earlier. He ruled more years than his rival: 24 years as opposed to 20.

Verse 9

So the king of the south shall come into his kingdom, and shall return into his own land.

(The Septuagint reads “*and he shall enter the kingdom of the king of the south, and he shall return to his own land.*”)

After two years Seleucus reorganises and marches south against Egypt, is defeated and returns to Antioch with only a small remnant of his army.

Verse 10

But his sons shall be stirred up, and shall assemble a multitude of great forces: and one shall certainly come, and overflow, and pass through: then shall he return, and be stirred up, even to his fortress.

The sons of Seleucus II are Seleucus III, who is murdered during a campaign in Asia Minor, and Antiochus III (known as Antiochus the Great) who recovers the fortress of Seleucia, the province of Coele-Syria and Tyre, then resumes the war with Egypt. After this campaign, in the following spring (219 B.C.), Antiochus returns with a large army of 60,000 men to Raphia.

Verse 11

And the king of the south shall be moved with choler, and shall come forth and fight with him, even with the king of the north: and he shall set forth a great multitude; but the multitude shall be given into his hand.

Ptolemy IV assembles an army of 70,000 men, meets Antiochus III at Raphia where they fight and Antiochus is defeated. His losses are said to be 10,000 infantry and 300 cavalry.

Verse 12

And when he hath taken away the multitude, his heart shall be lifted up; and he shall cast down many ten thousands: but he shall not be strengthened by it.

Ptolemy IV's pride in victory leads to a celebratory tour of his provinces, including Jerusalem where he attempts to enter the Holy of Holies, but is miraculously prevented by paralysis. He returns to Egypt and persecutes the Egyptian Jews,

killing many of them. Ptolemy IV is said to have not taken advantage of his victory but, being content then returned to Egypt, there to continue to indulge himself in the sensual pleasures and vices of the life he had been used to.

Verse 13

For the king of the north shall return, and shall set forth a multitude greater than the former, and shall certainly come after certain years with a great army and with much riches.

Following the death of Ptolemy IV in 203 B.C., he is succeeded by his son Ptolemy V Epiphanes who is an infant just four years old. Twelve years after the battle at Raphia, Antiochus III sets out with a much greater army than before with the intent to conquer Egypt.

Verse 14

And in those times there shall many stand up against the king of the south: also the robbers of thy people shall exalt themselves to establish the vision; but they shall fall.

Antiochus makes allegiance with Philip of Macedon and they separately attack Ptolemy's provinces. There is also an uprising among the vassals of Egypt and also some of the Jews.

Verse 15

So the king of the north shall come, and cast up a mount, and take the most fenced cities: and the arms of the south shall not withstand, neither his chosen people, neither shall there be any strength to withstand.

Antiochus takes Coelesyria (a Hellenistic term for a region of Syria) and Phoenicia. In 200 B.C., Scopas, an Egyptian general, takes Judea but is then defeated at Sidon in 198.

None are able to stand against Antiochus the Great.

Verse 16

But he that cometh against him shall do according to his own will, and none shall stand before him: and he shall stand in the glorious land, which by his hand shall be consumed.

Still referring to Antiochus the Great, of whom Gill says in his commentary is able to “take cities, and dispose of them at his pleasure; the army of the king of Egypt not being able to oppose him, and stop his conquests in Coelesyria and Phoenicia; nor should they hinder his entrance into Judea.”

“The glorious land” is Judea, where Antiochus stands as a victorious conqueror with the Jews readily submitting to him, receiving him into their city, and assisting him in taking the castle where Scopas had placed a garrison of soldiers.

It is the practice of his soldiers to ‘consume’ the land, but secular history tells us that following the favourable reception and subsequent assistance by the priests and elders of Jerusalem, Antiochus frees them from tribute, permits them to live according to their own laws, allows them cattle and other things for sacrifice and provides wood for repairing the Temple.

Verse 17

He shall also set his face to enter with the strength of his whole kingdom, and upright ones with him; thus shall he do: and he shall give him the daughter of women, corrupting her: but she shall not stand on his side, neither be for him.

It is now 197 B.C. and Antiochus III embarks on a campaign to take Cilicia, Lycia and Caria which are still under Egyptian control. His army includes Jewish supporters, even some that had switched their allegiance from Ptolemy. However, he is defeated and, realising he could not take Egypt by force, offers the hand of his daughter Cleopatra to Ptolemy as a political solution. The marriage is arranged in 197 B.C. (but not consummated until some years later as the groom was just 10 years old) with a dowry which includes Coele-Syria, Phoenicia and Judea. This political solution fails as Cleopatra becomes a devoted wife and forsakes her own people in favour of her husband and his people.

Verse 18

After this shall he turn his face unto the isles, and shall take many: but a prince for his own behalf shall cause the reproach offered by him to cease; without his own reproach he shall cause it to turn upon him.

Being disappointed in the failure of his scheme to obtain Egypt, Antiochus now looks toward Greece. He makes a strategic mistake in aligning himself with Hannibal, the Carthaginian general, to fight the Romans. In 191 B.C. he is defeated at Thermopylae and in 190 B.C. suffers a decisive defeat at Smyrna by the Roman commander Lucius Scipio, and is forced to surrender all his territory west of the Taurus Mountains.

Verse 19

Then he shall turn his face toward the fort of his own land: but he shall stumble and fall, and not be found.

Antiochus is now burdened with a heavy tribute of 15,000 talents and flees eastward, plundering temples on the way to fund the expense. An intent to rob the temple of Jupiter Elymaeus is discovered and the incensed inhabitants band together and slay Antiochus and his remnant army. He is killed at the age of fifty two after reigning for thirty seven years, but his body is never found.

Verse 20

Then shall stand up in his estate a raiser of taxes in the glory of the kingdom: but within few a days he shall be destroyed, neither in anger, nor in battle.

Antiochus the Great is succeeded by his eldest son Seleucus Philopater, who is to reign for twelve years from 187 to 175 B.C. Throughout his reign he places a heavy burden of taxation on his people to pay tribute still due to the Romans, Judea being included. After twelve years he is poisoned by his treasurer Heliodorus intending to take over. But Antiochus Epiphanes, who had been held hostage by the Romans since his father's defeat, is freed as all monies have now been paid.

Verse 21

And in his estate shall stand up a vile person, to whom they shall not give the honour of the kingdom: but he shall come in peaceably, and obtain the kingdom by flatteries.

There should have been other candidates to succeed Antiochus the Great: Seleucus IV's son Demetrius who is being held as a hostage in Rome, or the youngest son, also named Antiochus, but he is still only a baby living in Syria. But Antiochus Epiphanes arrives back in Antioch just after his brother dies, poses as the guardian of the infant Antiochus, and pretends to be taking the throne for his nephew Demetrius until his release. With the promise of allegiance, Antiochus Epiphanes enlists the support of the Eumenes, king of Pergamum, and his brother Attalus against the usurper Heliodorus, and gains the kingship as Antiochus IV. His kingship has been thus obtained through intrigue and flattery, despite his reputation as a vile man, which gained him the nickname 'Epimanes' the madman, a kind of opposite to the name he gave himself, 'Epiphanes', meaning illustrious.

Antiochus IV (175-164 B.C.) is the 'little horn' of Daniel 8:9.

Verse 22

And with the arms of a flood shall they be overflown from before him, and shall be broken; yea, also the prince of the covenant.

The supporters of the usurper Heliodorus were crushed by Eumenes and Attalus, leaving Antiochus with a peaceful kingdom to reign over.

Onias III, High Priest in 171 (here referred to as 'the prince of the covenant') is murdered and the priesthood is sold to Onias's younger brother Jason (2 Maccabees 4).

Verse 23

And after the league made with him he shall work deceitfully: for he shall come up, and shall become strong with a small people.

Antiochus is now able to move about with a small number of men, apparently peaceably, but with the intent to overcome and rob.

Verse 24

He shall enter peaceably even upon the fattest places of the province; and he shall do that which his fathers have not done, nor his fathers' fathers; he shall scatter among them the prey, and spoil, and riches: yea, and he shall forecast his devices against the strongholds, even for a time.

Unlike his forefathers, Antiochus IV does not keep all the spoils for himself but distributes them amongst his men. This tactic allows him to 'become strong with a small people' [verse 23].

Verse 25

And he shall stir up his power and his courage against the king of the south with a great army; and the king of the south shall be stirred up to battle with a very great and mighty army; but he shall not stand: for they shall forecast devices against him.

Antiochus now gathers a large army and heads for Egypt to fight with Ptolemy VI Philometer, who has himself assembled a large army in preparation for Antiochus' attack. But Ptolemy Philometer is unable to stand against Antiochus and is defeated. Ptolemy's defeat is not entirely due to the military strength of Antiochus, as there has been a power struggle between Ptolemy VI and Ptolemy Euergetes (II), who is later to succeed him. His defeat is said to have been aided by bad advice and treachery.

Verse 26

Yea, they that feed of the portion of his meat shall destroy him, and his army shall overflow: and many shall fall down slain.

It was after the death of his mother, Cleopatra, that Ptolemy VI Philometer had received bad advice regarding Antiochus IV. Although Antiochus was able to take Egypt, he was unable to subdue Alexandria. The Alexandrians now brought Ptolemy Philometer's brother Ptolemy Euergetes (II) to the throne.

Verse 27

And both these kings' hearts shall be to do mischief, and they shall speak lies at one table; but it shall not prosper: for yet the end shall be at the time appointed.

Now, having control over all of Egypt with the exception of Alexandria, Antiochus entertains Ptolemy Philometer on which occasions they both show regard for one another. However, both are acting deceitfully. Antiochus appears to side with Ptolemy concerning his brother at Alexandria, but all the while having an interest in completing his acquisition of all the territories of Egypt; Ptolemy appearing grateful with Antiochus' protection, but intending to conspire with his brother against Antiochus. Nothing is to come of these deceits since any planned outcome would not suit God's plan at this time.

Verse 28

Then shall he return into his land with great riches; and his heart shall be against the holy covenant; and he shall do exploits, and return to his own land.

In Jerusalem there has been a rumour that Antiochus was dead and an uprising ensues led by Jason seeking to recover his position as High Priest. In the process he mercilessly slays some of his own people, thinking them to be his enemies. Antiochus hears of this, and presuming the whole of Judea is in revolt, heads for Jerusalem. The city is taken by force and many killed regardless of sex or age. The Temple is raided and treasures taken, after which he returns to Antioch boasting of the massacre.

Verse 29

At the time appointed he shall return, and come toward the south; but it shall not be as the former, or as the latter.

At a time appointed by God, Antiochus embarks on a third expedition to Egypt with a large army but, unlike the first two occasions, there is to be no military success.

Verse 30

For the ships of Chittim shall come against him: therefore he shall be grieved, and return, and have indignation against the holy covenant: so shall he do; he shall even return, and have intelligence with them that forsake the holy covenant.

Ptolemy, king of Egypt, and his brother, having come to an agreement, send representatives to the senate of Rome pleading for assistance against Antiochus. In response, Rome sends ambassadors in ships from Chittim (Macedonia) demanding Antiochus should not make war against Ptolemy, and that he should quit Egypt. The intimidation of the Romans is sufficient and Antiochus returns to Syria humiliated. His humiliation drives him to take his revenge on the Jews, and he sends Apollonius with an army of twenty thousand men with orders to slay the men and sell the women and children.

Now there were many apostate Jews who had forsaken the law of God and turned to become heathens. Antiochus had kept correspondence with these apostates to keep in touch with the affairs of the Jews, and to encourage propagation of Heathenism, forbidding offerings and sacrifice, and encouraging them to profane the Sabbaths and festival days.

Verse 31

And arms shall stand on his part, and they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate.

Antiochus' army invades the Temple, defiling it by entering it and preventing sacrifices and offerings. The "abomination of desolation" is committed by Antiochus Epiphanes himself by placing an image of Jupiter Olympus on the altar of God and sacrificing a pig on it.

Verses 32

And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.

Over time Antiochus had persuaded many Jews toward a more Hellenistic life, encouraged by apostate high priests. But there are those who hold strong to the laws of God and resist all the threats, tortures and death inflicted by Antiochus. Such a person is Mattathias Hasmoneas, whose deeds are to lead to an uprising known as the Maccabean revolt.

Verse 33

And they that understand among the people shall instruct many: yet they shall fall by the sword, and by flame, by captivity, and by spoil, many days.

Among these are men who are able to teach many concerning God's laws, though some of these, and many of those they teach, suffer at the hand of Antiochus for not obeying his heathen laws. They are killed, some burned alive, some captured and sold as slaves, and many houses plundered and spoiled.

Verse 34

Now when they shall fall, they shall be holpen with a little help: but many shall cleave to them with flatteries.

The revolt of Mattathius and his sons gains much support, though there will be those whose support will have less than honourable motives.

Verse 35

And some of them of understanding shall fall, to try them, and to purge, and to make them white, even to the time of the end: because it is yet for a time appointed.

The revolt has its setbacks, but eventually brings about a period of peace and independence for the Jews. Nevertheless, there are to be deep divisions within the Hasmonean dynasty which will lead to its downfall, with the Jewish nation left to await a time appointed by God for their restoration.

Only a small slice of history has been prophesied here, focusing on the pivotal event of the *abomination that maketh desolate* in verse 31. Also prophesied in Daniel 9:27 (Daniel's Seventy Weeks) and 12:11 (The end times), and referred to by Jesus in his 'signs of the end of the age' [Matt 24:15; Mark 13;14] (Passion Week).

New Testament History Books

Matthew to Acts
plus Revelation

Jesus Christ

We have four gospels from which Jesus' time on earth can be derived. However, the gospel writers' intent was to record Jesus' ministry, not provide a biography. Also, each writer penned his gospel for different audiences and different purposes. Consequently, we do not have perfect harmony between them, but by drawing from the three Synoptic Gospels we do have a good understanding of the timeline and geographical areas in which Jesus carried His message.

What follows is the gospel story primarily through the eyes of Matthew, but for completeness includes events not recorded by him, identified by the text references.

Jesus before his ministry

[Mat 1:1-4:11]

Jesus' birth and early years

[Mat 1-2:40]

Mary's cousin Elizabeth is advanced in years and childless. While her husband Zacharias is performing his priestly duties, the angel Gabriel appears to him and tells him Elizabeth will bear a son whom he is to name John (This John will be John the Baptist). Six months later, the angel Gabriel visits Mary, who is betrothed to Joseph and still a virgin, and tells her she is to be the mother of Jesus, conceived of the Holy Spirit. (This was prophesied by Isaiah [Isa 7:14]. He tells her that Elizabeth is also pregnant, and so she visits her cousin and praises the Lord with the words we know as the Magnificat [Lk 1:46-55].

Mary's pregnancy is a problem to Joseph, as his natural assumption is that she has been unfaithful. In the Jewish culture, betrothal is a commitment to marry that can only be broken by a 'divorce' on the grounds of fornication. Joseph is considering solving the matter privately when he is visited by the angel of the Lord who explains Mary's circumstance, and that her son is to be named Jesus. And so Joseph marries Mary, but their marriage will not be consummated until after Jesus is born.

In preparation for a tax to be levied a census is imposed on the population, requiring Joseph and Mary to travel to Bethlehem, Joseph's home town. When they arrive, they can find no lodgings available at any inns and are eventually offered a stable, where Mary later gives birth to Jesus. The birth is announced by angels to some local shepherds who visit the child, then tell everyone they see what has happened.

Some time later a group of Magi arrived in Jerusalem enquiring where the babe had been born who is to be king of the Jews. They had been travelling from the east following a star they knew to be a sign of his birth. Their arrival worries king Herod and all Jerusalem. Herod summons the chief priests and scribes demanding to know where Christ should be born. When he is told his birth place was prophesied as being Bethlehem [Micah 5:2], he arranges a private meeting with the Magi, tells them the village where they should find him, and asks them to let him know precisely where he is so he too can go and worship him. When they leave Herod, the star reappears and guides them to the house where Joseph, Mary and Jesus are now staying. They worship the child and present him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Having been warned in a dream by God not to return to Herod, the Magi head back east by a different route.

The angel of the Lord then appears to Joseph in a dream, telling him to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt to escape Herod as he is intending to have the child killed. (This will bring about the fulfilment of Hosea's prophecy *and called my son out of Egypt* [Hos 11:1]. They set off that very night.

Once Herod realises the Magi have ignored his request to return to him, he has all the boys in Bethlehem of two years or younger killed. Their age being according to the time when the Magi first saw the star appear. (This had been prophesied by Jeremiah [Jer 31:15]).

Soon after, Herod dies and Joseph is told by the angel of the Lord that it is safe to return to Bethlehem. But when Joseph hears that Herod's son Archelaus is now on the throne, he is afraid, and being warned by God in a dream, heads for the area of Galilee and settles in Nazareth. *And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom. And the grace of God was on Him* [Luke 2:40].

Jesus at the Passover

[Lk 2:41-52]

Jesus, now being twelve years old, is taken by his parents to Jerusalem for Passover. When the feast days are over they head back for Nazareth, assuming Jesus is with them amongst their kinsfolk and acquaintances. After a day's journey they realise he is missing, and return to Jerusalem in search of the lad. It is three days before they find him in the temple with the teachers, both listening to and questioning them, astonishing everyone with his understanding. Joseph and Mary reprimand Jesus, but he questions why they should not have known he would be about his Father's business. They don't understand what Jesus means by this. The family returns to Nazareth where Jesus grows to manhood, remaining all the while subject to his parents whilst increasing *in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man*.

Jesus' baptism and temptations

[Mat 3:1-4:11]

Some eighteen years later, John the Baptist, Elizabeth's son, is baptising people in the Jordan river, *preparing the way for the Lord*. Jesus approaches John to be baptised by him. John at first declines, but then baptises Jesus and the Spirit of God descends upon Him and God declares *This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*.

Jesus then goes into the desert and fasts for forty days and nights, after which he is tempted by the Devil. Three times the Devil tempts Jesus. First he suggests that as the Son of God he should be able to turn stones to bread to relieve his hunger, then if he leaps from the highest point of the temple angels will save him, and finally, if he should bow down to the Devil and worship him, then he will give him all the world. Jesus responds to each temptation with a refusal and a quote from Deuteronomy.

Having failed in his attempts, the Devil leaves and angels come to minister to Jesus.

Jesus' ministry in Galilee

[Mat 4:13-13:58; Jn 1:35-4:54]

The beginnings of Jesus' ministry

[Jn 1:35-4:54]

When Jesus returns from being tempted in the desert, John points him out to two of his disciples, Andrew and John, who are later to become Jesus' first disciples. Andrew tells his brother Simon Peter, who will also later become a disciple of Jesus. The next day, Jesus decides to leave for Galilee and two more disciples are selected, Philip and Nathanael (Bartholomew).

Jesus' mother is at a wedding in Cana to which Jesus and his disciples have been invited. When there is no more wine for the guests, Jesus' mother mentions this to him and he reluctantly performs his first miracle by turning water into wine.

After this, Jesus goes to Capernaum with his mother, brothers and disciples and stays there for a few days. When it's almost time for Passover, Jesus goes to Jerusalem and finds men in the temple courts selling cattle, sheep and doves for sacrifices, and others serving as money changers. He makes a whip out of chords, drives out the animals from the temple area and overturns the money changers' tables. Jesus is asked with what authority he did this and to give a sign of that authority, to which he replies *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up*. But they do not understand he is referring to his body.

While Jesus is in Jerusalem, he performs miracles and many people begin to believe in him. A Pharisee named Nicodemus

approaches Jesus, acknowledging that he must be sent from God because of the miracles he performs. Jesus teaches him that people must be born again to enter the kingdom of God, and speaks those familiar words *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

Jesus now begins his journey back to Galilee and passes through Samaria, where he meets a woman at Jacob's well and asks her for a drink. This surprises the woman because of the known animosity between Jews and Samaritans, but Jesus uses the opportunity to teach that people will never thirst from the water he gives, declaring himself as the 'living water'. He also teaches that God is spirit and his worshippers must *worship Him in spirit and in truth.* It is during this encounter that he declares for the first time that he is the Messiah. [Jn 4:26]. The woman tells of her meeting with Jesus and the Samaritans urge him to stay with them. Jesus remains there for two days, during which time many become believers.

Having already gained respect by his miracles and teachings, Jesus goes to his home town of Nazareth. As is his custom, he goes to the synagogue where he is invited to read from Isaiah. The congregation is impressed by his reading, recalling that he is Joseph's son. However, when his teaching reflects on scripture that favours the Gentiles, implying they are being compared with the Jews of their time, they are offended. They become so angry that they take him out of the city to the brow of a hill with intent to kill him, but he is able to slip away from them.

Jesus leaves Nazareth and again goes to Cana where he previously turned water into wine. Here he is approached by a nobleman whose son is dying. Jesus tells him to return home as his son will live. He believes Jesus, and on the way home is met by his servants and told his son is well. Enquiring when his son became well, he realises it was the exact time that Jesus had said to him *Thy son liveth,* and he and his whole household become believers.

To Capernaum

[Mat 4:12-25]

Jesus now goes to Capernaum which is to become his base whilst ministering in Galilee. On the shore he meets Simon Peter and Andrew, who now become his full-time disciples. A little farther on he calls two more fishermen to join him, John, also to now become a full-time disciple, and his brother James, sons of Zebedee.

At the first opportunity, they all go to the synagogue where Jesus is able to read from the scriptures and teach. In the synagogue there is a demon -possessed man from whom the demon cries out to Jesus, calling him by name and recognising him as being the *Holy one of God.* Jesus rebukes the demon, telling him to keep quiet and to leave the man. The incident becomes known and Jesus' fame spreads throughout Galilee.

The next morning, Jesus rises early to pray before taking his disciples with him to preach in the synagogues throughout Galilee. It is around this time that Jesus selects other disciples who are to be amongst his twelve.

Jesus' fame spreads throughout Syria with multitudes coming to seek and follow him. They come from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and beyond the Jordan.

The Sermon on the Mount

[Mat 5-7]

Jesus goes up a mountain with the crowds following him. His disciples gather around and Jesus, specifically addressing his disciples, teaches them what it means to be a true follower of Christ.

He begins by telling them the attitude they should have in their hearts, their inner selves (these verses are known as the Beatitudes) and how they are to be an example to all men. Jesus then tells how the law should be understood, not as the Pharisees teach it, but how God intended it to be, not simply as a law concerning outward behaviour, but concerning the inner thoughts of the heart. Examples are given concerning murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, the true meaning of 'an eye for an eye' and of love.

Jesus then tells how important it is that their motivation should be such that they are seeking respect from God, and not from men. In this he gives examples of the Pharisees who seek the admiration of men by their public display in their giving, praying and fasting. These things are best done privately, otherwise the only reward might be that received at the time, the admiration of others. They are to seek rewards in heaven, to trust in God rather than worry about the cares of this world, and to first seek the kingdom of heaven and righteousness, then all else will follow.

Jesus then warns them not to judge others hypocritically, as they will also be judged by the same measure. Also, to be cautious about whom they judge and minister to, as there are those who are unapproachable and would simply turn on them.

They are to look to God in prayer for their needs as disciples, to treat others as they would want to be treated themselves, and ensure they keep to the teachings He has given them, being aware there will be false teachers and prophets attempting to influence them.

Jesus finishes this teaching with a short story that emphasise the importance of knowing him, and hence the importance of acting on his words, not simply remembering them.

A collection of miracles

[Mat 8-9]

As they are coming down from the mountainside, a man with leprosy kneels before Jesus and asks to be healed. Jesus obliges, but instructs him not to tell anyone.

When Jesus enters Capernaum, a Roman centurion comes to him and asks for his servant to be healed. When Jesus offers

to go to his house, the centurion declines, knowing Jesus only has to speak and his servant will be healed. Jesus points out to those following him that this centurion's faith is greater than any he has found in Israel. The centurion's servant is healed that very hour.

Jesus and his disciples then go to Peter and Andrew's house where Jesus cures their mother-in-law of a fever. That evening, crowds gather outside and Jesus heals many, casting out demons. He asks that those healed tell no one in case they should reveal who he is.

At some point, Jesus gets into a boat with his disciples and begins to cross the lake. As they are crossing, a storm comes that is so furious that it frightens the disciples. To their amazement, Jesus is able to calm the storm by rebuking the winds and waves. When they arrive at the other side, they are met by two demon-possessed men who are known to be very violent. Following an exchange with Jesus, the demons are permitted to enter some pigs that then rush into the water and drown. The whole town becomes aware of this and come out to meet Jesus, pleading with him to leave their region, for the pigs were their livelihood.

They then return across the sea and go to Capernaum where a paralytic man is brought to Jesus. He is first told by Jesus his sins are forgiven. Some scribes nearby consider Jesus to be blaspheming by forgiving sins, but Jesus knows their thoughts and asks them which is easier to do, to say 'Your sins are forgiven' or 'Get up and walk'. He then demonstrates his authority by healing the paralytic, and the crowd gives praise to God.

It is after this that Matthew leaves his job as a tax collector to become one of Jesus' disciples. They are all eating at Matthew's house where other tax collectors and sinners join them. This is seen by the Pharisees who question Jesus' disciples, asking why their teacher mixes with these people who are not normally acceptable to Jews. On hearing this, Jesus admonishes them saying that he desires *mercy, not sacrifice*, and tells them to go and learn from scripture what he means by this. He also tells them that he has come to call sinners, not the righteous.

Later, John the Baptist's disciples come to ask Jesus why his disciples do not fast like them and the Pharisees. Jesus responds using a parable concerning old and new garments and wineskins, a covert criticism of the self-righteousness of the Pharisees. (His ways do not fit their ways).

At that time, a ruler comes and kneels before Jesus, asking him to come and lay hands on his daughter who had just died. Jesus agrees, and as he and his disciples are on their way to the ruler's house, a woman, who has been suffering from bleeding for twelve years, touches Jesus' cloak and is immediately healed. They then go on to the ruler's house where Jesus raises his daughter back to life. After this, two blind men's sight is restored by Jesus, and later, a demon-possessed mute is healed and is able to speak again.

It is at this point the Pharisees claim that Jesus is driving out demons with the authority of the Devil.

The commissioning of the twelve disciples

[Mat 10]

Jesus next goes through all the towns and villages of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing people of all kinds of diseases and sickness. There are now a great number of people in need of his ministering, so Jesus gathers his chosen twelve disciples to prepare them for the task. They are Simon (who is called Peter), his brother Andrew, James and John, sons of Zebedee, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James (son of Alphaeus, not Jesus' brother), Lebbeaus, Simon the Canaanite and Judas Iscariot. Jesus commissions them to go and preach *the kingdom of heaven is at hand*, but commands them not to go to the Gentiles or Samaritans, but to go only to the *lost sheep of Israel*. They are given instructions on how they are to go about their task, and given authority to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead and to cast out demons.

Ministering throughout Galilee

[Mat 11-12]

Now John the Baptist, who has been imprisoned, sends two of his disciples to Jesus to get confirmation that he is the Messiah. Jesus tells them to go back to John and report the things they have witnessed and heard concerning his healing works, knowing that John would recognise these as having been prophesied by Isaiah. Turning to the crowd, Jesus talks to them about John the Baptist, commending him. He then speaks against the cities, where most of his good works had been done, for not repenting, mentioning Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum by name.

Some time later, on the Sabbath, Jesus is walking through the cornfields with his disciples who are feeling hungry and so pluck and eat ears of corn. The Pharisees see this and question Jesus because they view this act as work, which is not lawful on the Sabbath. Jesus rebukes them citing David eating the shewbread when he was hungry, and how priests by the law work in the temple on the Sabbath. Jesus then questions their understanding of the scripture that says *For I desire mercy and not sacrifice* [Hos 6:6], having stated he is greater than the temple and that *the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath day*.

Jesus leaves them and goes to the synagogue. There he finds a man with a withered hand and seizes the opportunity to confront the Pharisees by healing him. The Pharisees then begin to plot against Jesus and discuss how they might destroy him, but Jesus, knowing their thoughts, slips away.

Later, a blind and dumb man, possessed with a demon, is brought to Jesus and is completely healed by him. The people, amazed at what they have witnessed, begin to recognise that this man might be the son of David. When the Pharisees hear this they, for the second time, accuse Jesus of casting out demons in the name of the Devil. Jesus is offended by this

accusation and tells them that he casts out demons by the Spirit of God. He explains the fault in their kind of logic and warns them that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. The Pharisees, despite what they have witnessed, ask Jesus for a sign. He again rebukes them and, referring to Jonah, covertly prophesies his death and resurrection.

Later, his mother and brethren come to speak with Jesus. When Jesus is told they are waiting to see him, he gestures towards his disciples saying *Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.*

The Kingdom Parables

[Mat 13]

The same day Jesus goes and sits by the sea and a large crowd gathers around him. The crowd grows so great that Jesus gets into a boat and sits a little way off from the shore. He then speaks to them in parables, the first being the parable of the sower who sows seeds on various types of ground. When his disciples ask why he speaks in parables, Jesus explains that it is so that only the spiritually discerning can understand and receive the benefits. Jesus then explains the parable of the sower, providing a key to understanding further parables. He then goes on to tell the parable of the tares which the enemy sows amongst the wheat. The next two parables are given, the first telling of the mustard seed which grows unnaturally large so that birds (representing the devil, from the parable of the sower) are able to lodge in its branches. The next tells of leaven (idiomatic of sin) hidden in three measures of meal, contaminating the whole.

Jesus then sends the crowd away and returns to the house where his disciples ask for an explanation of the parable of the tares. This Jesus does and tells them three more parables likening the kingdom of heaven to treasure hidden in a field, a pearl of great price and a net cast into the sea gathering good and bad, the bad being eventually cast away. Jesus asks his disciples if they understood these parables, to which they replied they did.

Jesus then leaves the house and returns to Nazareth to teach in the synagogue. The people are so astonished at his teaching, his words of wisdom and the mighty works they know he has done, that they question how the son of a carpenter, whose brethren they knew and still live amongst them, could possibly attain such abilities. Jesus tells them *A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.* Because of their unbelief, Jesus no longer ministers in Nazareth.

Jesus withdraws from Galilee

[Mat 14:1-17:21]

Herod's reaction to Jesus' ministry

[Mat 14:1-12]

A while back, Herod the tetrarch had beheaded John the Baptist on the occasion of Herod's birthday. John had been imprisoned for speaking against the marriage of Herod to Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because it was unlawful. Herodias had her daughter dance for Herod and he was so aroused that he rashly promised her up to half his kingdom. Having been coached by her mother, she asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. The request dismayed Herod, but his promise was made in front of all his guests, so John was executed. Now, when the fame of Jesus reaches Herod's ears, he fears that Jesus might be John the Baptist risen from the dead.

Feeding the 5000 on the eastern shore of Galilee

[Mat 14:13-15:20]

After burying John, his disciples come to Jesus and tell him of all that had happened. Jesus, wanting to spend some time alone, crosses the sea by ship to a quiet place. But the people, hearing of this, gather and go around the coast to meet him. When Jesus reaches the shore and sees all these people, he is filled with compassion and heals their sick. When evening comes, the disciples become concerned the crowd will not have time to get to a town to buy food. The disciples have just five loaves and two fishes between them. Jesus asks the people to sit, he looks to heaven, blesses and breaks the food, then gives it to his disciples to distribute amongst the people. When they have finished eating, there are still twelve baskets of fragments remaining, having amply fed five thousand men plus women and children.

The crowd is dispersed and Jesus sends his disciples back across the sea while he goes up the mountain to be alone and pray. During the night, when the disciples' boat is in the middle of the sea, the weather changes and a strong wind begins to toss the boat around. Jesus is now coming to join them and is walking across the sea, but they do not recognise him, and thinking they are seeing a spirit they become fearful. When Jesus calls out to them, Peter asks if he can walk on the water to meet him. When he does he is distracted by the waves, begins to sink and calls out to Jesus to save him. Jesus reaches out to Peter, telling him that he started to sink through lack of faith. When the two get into the ship, the wind ceases and the disciples worship Jesus, acknowledging he is the Son of God.

Later, the Pharisees again challenge Jesus, this time asking why his disciples ignore the tradition of the elders by not going through the elaborate ritual required when washing their hands before they eat. Jesus rebukes them, telling them that they

disobey God's law of *Honour thy father and mother* by their tradition through which, in declaring their actions toward their parents as a gift by which their parents will profit (called 'Corban'), they avoid any commitment. Jesus tells them, and later explains to his disciples, that it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth, which is from the heart.

To Phoenicia

[Mat 15:21-28]

Jesus then goes to the region of Tyre and Sidon from where a woman comes to him begging for mercy, and help with her daughter who is suffering badly from possession by the Devil. He initially ignores her but draws out a confession of faith whereby she, as a Gentile, likens herself to a puppy being given food from its master's table. Jesus acknowledges her great faith and her daughter is healed.

Jesus feeds the 4000 at Decapolis

[Mat 15:29-16:12]

Jesus then moves on and comes to a mountainside by the Sea of Galilee, where great multitudes come with many sick people requiring healing. After three days, Jesus has compassion for them and seeks to feed them. As with the five thousand before, the people are all fed by the multiplication of food. This time it is from seven loaves and a few little fishes, feeding four thousand men besides women and children, and having seven baskets left over when all are fed.

The people are then all sent away and Jesus goes by boat to the coast of Magdala. Here the Pharisees and Sadducees approach Jesus asking for a sign from heaven, but they are rebuked for not recognising the signs of the times from scripture. He then turns to his disciples warning them to *Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees*. At first they don't understand, confusing the warning with their lack of bread. Jesus reminds them of the feeding of the five thousand then four thousand, emphasising that lack of food isn't a problem and that his warning is specifically against the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The penny drops and they realise Jesus is warning them against their doctrine.

To Caesarea Philippi

[Mat 16:13-17:21]

They then travel on to the region of Caesarea Philippi where Jesus asks them who they think he is, to which Peter acknowledges him as *the Christ, the Son of the living God*. Jesus tells Peter (whose name means a rock or stone, that is, a little rock) that this was revealed to him by the Spirit and that his church would be built on this rock (that is a 'mass of rock', meaning Jesus himself). They are told not to reveal to anyone that he is the Messiah. From this point on, Jesus begins to

explain that he must go to Jerusalem where he will suffer at the hands of the elders, chief priests and scribes, be killed and will rise again on the third day. Peter rebukes Jesus for thinking this way, but is told that his thoughts are from Satan, contrasting with his earlier revelation from God.

Six days later, Jesus takes Peter, James and John up a mountain where they witness his transfiguration and meeting with Moses and Elijah. The three are told not to mention what they have seen to anyone until after his resurrection.

Soon after, they join a multitude of people amongst whom is a man whose son is possessed, and whom the disciples were not previously able to heal. Jesus rebukes the devil, and the child is cured. When asked by his disciples why they were unable to cure him, he tells them that their faith was not strong enough but, in any event, this kind of exorcism would have required prayer and fasting.

Jesus' last ministry in Galilee

[Mat 17:22-18:35]

Jesus discusses his death

[Mat 17:22-23]

Whilst still in Galilee, Jesus again tells his disciples how he will be betrayed and killed, but will rise again on the third day.

Temple tax

[Mat 17:24-27]

When they then arrive at Capernaum, Peter is approached by the tax collectors asking if Jesus pays his tribute. He replies yes, but Jesus later explains to Peter how he, Jesus, shouldn't be obliged to pay tribute, being the 'heir to the kingdom'. But to avoid offence, the tribute money is miraculously provided from the mouth of a fish caught by Peter.

Offences

[Mat 18]

His disciples had been disputing which of them should be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and put the question to Jesus. He doesn't answer their question as asked, but draws a child to him and tells them that anyone with the faith of a little child will enter the kingdom, and anyone that humbles himself as a little child will be among the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Then, using children as a metaphor for those who are truly humble in their faith, Jesus warns of the consequences of anyone who offends such a person, for he came to save the lost, and it is the will of the Father that none of those saved should perish.

Whilst speaking of offences, Jesus provides a three stage approach for dealing with unrepentant sinners within the church community: to approach the offender on a one-to-one basis, to then take one or more witnesses to convict the sinner, and finally to bring the matter before the church. If none of these actions bear fruit, then the offender is to be treated as an outcast.

Peter asks Jesus how often he should forgive the same sin committed against him, *till seven times?* to which Jesus replies *seventy times seven*. Jesus then relates the parable of the unforgiving servant, representing the extent of God's forgiveness and the forgiveness we are consequently expected to extend to others.

In Judea

[Mat 19:1-12; Lk 10:1-13:21]

Teaching concerning divorce

[Mat 19:1-12]

Jesus and his followers travel to the area of Judea where many more people follow Jesus and are healed. The Pharisees come intending to entrap Jesus with a question concerning divorce and the law as given by Moses. Jesus responds by referring to Genesis and confirming God's true intent for marriage, one man and one woman, which should be for life. Should a person then divorce, remarriage to another is not permitted all the time the spouse is still living. The exception given relating only to the Jewish period of betrothal.

The mission of the seventy

[Lk 10:1-24]

Jesus sends seventy of his disciples out to preach the gospel with the ability to support their preaching with miracles, and with full instructions on how to practise their mission. They are to go without any physical means of support, relying on the hospitality of those cities that accept them, but not lingering in those that don't.

They later return with joy reporting the success they had experienced, including being able to exorcise spirits. Jesus tells them they are blessed, as many prophets and kings had desired to have seen and heard the things they have seen and heard.

The parable of The Good Samaritan

[Lk 10:25-37]

A lawyer asks Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life. Jesus draws from him the need to love God and your neighbour, then relates the parable of The Good Samaritan as an example of what is meant by loving your neighbour.

At Bethany with Mary and Martha

[Lk 10:38-42]

On an occasion when Jesus is at Martha's house, Martha complains that her sister is spending time sitting at his feet leaving her to do the work. He tells Martha that Mary is right to take the opportunity to care for her soul rather than the things of this world.

Teachings in Judea

[Lk 11:11-13:21]

Later, when Jesus has finished praying, he is asked by one of his disciples to teach them to pray. He teaches them what we refer to as The Lord's Prayer, encouraging them to always 'ask, seek and knock' through prayer, to which God will respond.

When Jesus later casts out a demon, some people say that it is done in the name of Satan (perhaps having heard of the Pharisees' accusation some time before) to which Jesus explains the absurdity of that idea, and then warns it is possible for a person to be repossessed to a greater degree if precautions are not taken once cleansed.

A woman speaks up and says how blessed Jesus' mother is to have borne him, to which Jesus replies that it is more blessed to hear the word of God and keep it.

Then, when many people are gathered around him, Jesus refutes those looking for a sign, citing Jonas (Jonah) and Solomon as being signs of their times, saying that one who is greater than Jonas and Solomon is before them, and their eyes should be able to perceive this.

Jesus is then invited to dine with a Pharisee, but when he sits to eat, the Pharisee expresses surprise that Jesus did not wash his hands first. As before, Jesus condemns the Pharisees for their hypocrisy in appearing to be righteous by their ceremonies and behaviour, but not following the spirit of the law in many things they do, pronouncing woes against the Pharisees and the lawyers in his condemnation.

Meantime, a very large crowd has been gathering along with Jesus' disciples who are waiting on him. When Jesus joins the crowd, he first turns to his disciples and again warns them against the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy, against reticence in professing the gospel and in blaspheming against the Holy Spirit, the latter of which is an unforgivable sin.

In response to a request by a man concerning inheritance due him, Jesus tells a parable about covetousness, teaching his disciples to first seek the kingdom of God, encouraging them to focus their lives on God and live in dependence on Him. He then tells another parable to warn them they will not know the hour when he will return, but they are to remain faithful to his teaching, for the faithful will be rewarded, but the unfaithful will be punished. However, they are to expect trouble

and persecution because of their faith.

Jesus then speaks to all the people warning them to discern what is right, so they too might be prepared in time for the judgement to come. On being told of Galileans who were slaughtered by Pilate when making sacrifices, Jesus teaches that fate is not caused by sin, and emphasises the necessity of repentance. Then, using the parable of the fig tree, teaches the importance of bearing fruit in one's life.

Later, when Jesus is teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath, he heals a woman who has been afflicted for eighteen years, and puts to shame the ruler of the Synagogue for his indignation that this healing work was done on the Sabbath. Jesus then repeats the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast, first told when he was ministering in Galilee, as these parables warn against false teaching in the church.

In and around Perea

Luke's account

[Lk 13:22-18:14]

Jesus continues his journey towards Jerusalem, now passing through the cities and villages of Perea, east of the Jordan.

On the way, Jesus is asked if there will just be a few who will be saved, to which he replies in the same way he did at the end of the Sermon on the Mount [Mat 7:21-23], emphasising the importance of knowing him. That same day, certain Pharisees warn Jesus that Herod seeks to kill him, but Jesus is defiant, and in his response foretells his death at Jerusalem and denounces judgements on that city.

On a Sabbath, Jesus is in one of the chief Pharisee's house, but the Pharisees continue to try to find fault with him. When Jesus then heals a man there with dropsy, he is again challenged concerning 'working' on the Sabbath, but rebukes his challengers. A parable is then told by Jesus to certain of the guests, giving a lesson on humility, then to the same people he speaks of the need for charity. One of those present, inspired by Jesus' words, says to him *Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God*. To this Jesus responds with a parable telling of the rejection of the Jews, and others, who are concerned more for the things of the world, and of the acceptance of those that might be considered less worthy.

Later, when a great number of people are with him, Jesus tells them that discipleship cannot be undertaken without serious consideration of the personal consequences, otherwise it is likely to wane.

When publicans and sinners are drawn to Jesus to hear his words, the Pharisees and scribes murmur against his keeping company with such people. Jesus responds to their attitude with four parables: the lost sheep, the lost silver, the prodigal son and the shrewd manager. The Pharisees are offended by Jesus' words and show contempt for them. Jesus rebukes them

and relates a parable about the fate of the rich man and Lazarus, warning against covetousness and lack of compassion for the needy, and its consequences.

Jesus turns to his disciples and teaches them the need to take care not to give offence, and to readily forgive offences against them. He also encourages them to keep increasing their faith, and teaches them humility in their service to God.

As Jesus travels on towards Jerusalem, passing through Samaria and Galilee, he cleanses ten lepers, but only one gives thanks and glorifies God, and he is notably a Samaritan.

Later, following an enquiry from the Pharisees, Jesus turns to his disciples with words concerning the coming of the kingdom of God, and how it will be at an unexpected time.

Jesus then relates the parable of the persistent widow and the judge, teaching fervency in prayer, followed by the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, teaching an attitude of humility.

Matthew's account

[Mat 19:13-20:34]

Some little children are brought to Jesus for a blessing, but his disciples seem to think he shouldn't be troubled by their presence. Jesus corrects their attitude and blesses the children before continuing on his way.

A rich young man later asks Jesus what he should do to gain eternal life, since he had obeyed the commandments from his youth, but still felt there to be something lacking. When Jesus suggests he should give up his wealth to follow him he leaves disappointed, for his possessions are considerable. Jesus tells his disciples how much more difficult it might be for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven if his riches mean so much to him.

Peter then enquires what their fate might be as they had given up everything to follow him. He is told they will be sitting on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus concludes this exchange by saying that anyone who surrenders family or possessions for his sake will receive much more, and inherit eternal life.

Jesus then relates the parable of the workers in the vineyard, telling us that the kingdom of heaven and eternal life are available even to those who come to him very late in life.

Continuing their journey towards Jerusalem, Jesus again tells his disciples he will be betrayed, is to suffer and be killed, but will be resurrected on the third day.

James and John's mother comes to Jesus and asks that her sons should have positions of honour in his kingdom. Jesus tells her this honour is not for him to give, then reminds his disciples that they, like him, should not expect to be served but should serve others.

Later, when they are leaving Jericho, two blind men call to Jesus addressing him as the Son of David and asking for

mercy. Jesus has compassion for them, touches their eyes and their sight is immediately restored. They then join the others and follow Jesus.

Passion Week

[Mat 21-28]

The triumphal entry and events that follow

[Mat 21:1-26:58]

When they approach Jerusalem and are at Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sends two disciples to a nearby village to fetch a colt for him. He uses this colt to ride into Jerusalem where many recognise him for who he is, crying out *Hosanna to the Son of David*. As many more gather to hear what the commotion is about, they enquire who he is and are told he is the prophet spoken of by Moses. Jesus then goes to the temple Court of the Gentiles where he creates havoc with those selling animals for sacrifice, and overturns the moneychangers' tables telling them *It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves*. The blind and lame are then brought to the temple and are all healed by Jesus. All the while, children repeat the cry of their parents, *Hosanna to the Son of David*. This is all to the considerable displeasure of the chief priests and scribes. Jesus then leaves and goes to Bethany where he stays the night.

The next morning, as they return to the city, Jesus is feeling hungry. He sees a fig tree that has leaves but no fruit, and says to it *Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward forever*. The tree withers and the disciples, seeing it the next morning, marvel at how it had withered so quickly. Jesus tells them that they will be able to do much more than this if they ask in prayer and believe.

Jesus goes to the temple to teach, and while he is teaching he is approached by the chief priests and elders questioning his authority. He replies with a question concerning the authority of John the Baptist, which they are unable to answer without entrapping themselves. Jesus then relates the parables of the two sons and of the tenants. They realise he is speaking about them, and at that point want to deal with him, but are afraid of the reaction of the crowds who would all be for Jesus. Jesus relates another parable, the parable of the wedding feast. Their reaction to hearing yet another parable that offends them is to leave and plan how they might entrap him with his own words. They send their own disciples, along with the Herodians, to question Jesus whether it is lawful to give tribute to Caesar. This attempt fails and is later followed by the Sadducees attempting to ridicule any idea of a resurrection, since they don't believe in it. They asked whose wife a woman would be in the resurrection if seven brothers had married her, one after the other following each one's death. Jesus tells them that they don't understand the scriptures, pointing out that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the God of the living. The

Sadducees and Pharisees then jointly send a lawyer to ask Jesus which is the greatest commandment of the law, since between them they see conflicts within the law as to which part might be considered to be of greater priority. Jesus responds with the laws of love for God and their neighbours, telling them that the whole of the law and the prophets hangs on these two commandments. He then turns to the Pharisees and asks them who they thought Christ might be the son of, to which they naturally replied *the Son of David*. Jesus then asks them how it was that David, in the Spirit, referred to Christ as his Lord (as no man would refer to a son as his lord). This confounds them and they dare not challenge Jesus again after this exchange.

Jesus then addresses his disciples and the crowds and berates the scribes and Pharisees, giving numerous examples of their hypocrisy as religious leaders. He concludes this attack on them by prophesying the destruction of the temple and that they, the Jews, would not see him again until the time they acknowledge him as the Messiah.

Leaving the temple, his disciples remark on its magnificence and Jesus again prophesies its destruction. When Jesus and his disciples are alone on the Mount of Olives, his disciples ask him what the signs of his second coming will be. Recorded in what we know as the Olivet Discourse [chapters 24-25], Jesus warns of persecution, predicts the fall of Jerusalem, and teaches about his second coming, referring to the *abomination of desolation* spoken of by Daniel the prophet. At this time, Jesus says, all in Judea must flee to the mountains. He then uses the parable of the fig tree to show that signs will be recognised, but tells that the hour will not be known. We must be prepared, as demonstrated by the parable of the ten virgins. Meanwhile, we are required to bear fruit as told by the parable of the talents, for when he returns, there will be a judgement and a separation of those worthy of eternal life and those who are not.

Jesus then tells his disciples he will be betrayed in two days time, at Passover, and will be crucified.

Meanwhile, the chief priests, scribes and elders have assembled before the high priest, Caiaphas, to discuss how they might kill Jesus, but avoiding doing so on the feast day.

Now Jesus is in Bethany at Simon the leper's house with his disciples when Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (who Jesus had earlier raised from death), anoints his feet with nard, a very expensive perfume, and wipes his feet with her hair. Judas Iscariot objects saying that the perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor, but Jesus tells them she did it for his burial. Judas then leaves the house and makes an arrangement with the chief priests to deliver Jesus to them for thirty pieces of silver.

Jesus sends his disciples to prepare a room where they will meet to share the Passover meal. In the evening, while they are eating, he tells them one of them will betray him. He takes some bread, blesses it and breaks it, offering it to his disciples telling them it represents his body. He then passes around a cup of wine, saying it represents his *blood of the new covenant, shed for many for the remission of sins*, and tells them that they are to do all this in remembrance of him. They then sing a

hymn and leave for the Mount of Olives. It is while they are on the mount that Peter is told he will deny Jesus three times before the cock crows.

When they get to Gethsemane, Jesus takes Peter, James and John aside and asks them to keep watch while he prays. Jesus returns to them three times after praying, each time finding them asleep. In these prayer sessions he asks his Father if there is another way remission of sins can be accomplished, but there is not. Then Judas arrives with armed men from the chief priests and identifies Jesus with a kiss. The disciples scatter and Jesus is taken to Caiaphas where the scribes and elders are assembled waiting for him. Peter follows and goes to sit amongst the servants to see what is happening.

Jesus' trial, death and resurrection

[Mat 26:59-28:20]

Witnesses are called to testify against Jesus, but no testimony is given sufficient to condemn him. Jesus doesn't answer any accusations, so the high priest asks him under oath, which he is bound by law to respond to, *whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God*. His admission in front of all those assembled enables them to claim he has blasphemed before witnesses and can be condemned to death. They then spit on him, buffet him and strike him. It is at this time that Peter is challenged three times as being one of Jesus' disciples, each time denying he is, then the cock crows. Peter, remembering that Jesus had predicted his denials, leaves and weeps bitterly.

Now the Jews' authority to execute anyone had been taken away by the Romans some years earlier, so they now need to take Jesus to Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judea, to be tried. Seeing that Jesus had been condemned, Judas goes and tells the chief priests and elders he betrayed innocent blood, but they are not interested. He throws the thirty pieces of silver before them and leaves and hangs himself. Unable to put blood money in the temple treasury, the priests use it to buy a potter's field for the burial of strangers.

Jesus is taken before Pilate, who is unable to find any reason to condemn him under Roman law, but learning he is a Galilean, sends him to Herod who happens to be in Jerusalem at the time. Herod questions Jesus while the chief priests and scribes vehemently accuse him, but Jesus remains silent. Because he says nothing, Herod's soldiers take him to be a fool, mock him, put a robe on him and he is returned to Pilate. Although Pilate is unable to find anything against Jesus according to Roman law, he fears the mood of the people and, as is the custom, offers them a choice of whom he should release, Jesus or a notable prisoner called Barabbas. Prompted by the chief priests and elders, the crowd called for Barabbas to be released and Jesus to be crucified. Pilate publicly washes his hands, declaring his innocence concerning the blood of Jesus, before handing him over to his soldiers who take him away to be scourged. They then mock Jesus, put a scarlet robe around him and place a plaited crown of thorns on his head. When they have finished mocking him, they replace the scarlet robe with

his own, then lead him away to be crucified. On the way, a man of Cyrene, called Simon, is made to carry Jesus' cross. They reach Golgotha where Jesus is crucified between two thieves. When Jesus gives up his spirit, the temple veil is torn from top to bottom and the earth quakes.

In the evening, Joseph of Arimathaea, a rich man who is also one of Jesus' disciples, begs Pilate for Jesus' body, to which he agrees. Joseph wraps Jesus in a clean linen cloth, lays him in his own sepulchre and rolls a great stone in front of it.

On the Sunday morning at dawn, Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James) and Salome go to the sepulchre taking spices to anoint Jesus' body. An angel had rolled away the stone so they are able to go in, but Jesus is not there. The angel tells them that Jesus has risen and they are to tell his disciples and Peter that he will see them in Galilee. They run and tell the disciples what they have seen, then Peter and John run to the sepulchre to see for themselves.

Now those who had been guarding the tomb went and told the chief priests what had happened. The chief priests gave them money to say that the disciples had come and stolen the body while they slept, and gave them assurances they would persuade their superiors not to punish them for falling asleep whilst on guard.

That same day, two disciples are making their way to Emmaus when Jesus comes alongside them and asks them why they are troubled. Not recognising him, they relate all that had happened. Then Jesus explains how the scriptures had foretold all these events. It wasn't until they arrive at the village and are all eating together, that they realise it is Jesus who has been talking to them, but he then vanishes from their sight.

They quickly return to Jerusalem and report their experience to the eleven disciples, confirming Jesus has indeed risen. As they are speaking, Jesus appears to them, eats with them, and then imparts on them an understanding of the scriptures.

In the evening, while the disciples are behind locked doors in fear of the Jews, Jesus again appears to them, but Thomas is not there and consequently refuses to believe he has risen.

Eight days later, Jesus appears to his disciples while they are again behind locked doors. This time, Thomas is with them and is invited by Jesus to touch his wounds. Thomas then acknowledges Jesus as his Lord and God.

Later, the eleven disciples go to Galilee where Jesus meets them for the last time. Here he commissions them to go and *teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit* before ascending to heaven.

The Early Church

[The Acts of the Apostles]

The beginnings of the church

[Acts 1-5]

Luke is writing his second treatise to Theophilus (the first being his gospel) recounting Jesus' final words to his apostles and his ascension before recording the events that follow.

When all the disciples are gathered together, about one hundred and twenty in all, Peter recalls the fate of Judas and the need to replace him to restore the number of apostles to twelve. Through prayerful casting of lots, Matthias is chosen and becomes the twelfth apostle.

On the day of Pentecost all the disciples are gathered together, are filled with the Holy Spirit and begin to speak. All the crowd were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. Peter addresses the crowd, telling them how Joel prophesied the event they are witnessing, then preaches Jesus as the true Messiah, after which about three thousand souls become believers and start to speak in tongues. There are people from many nations in Jerusalem, all of whom are able to hear what the disciples are saying in their own language. Peter and the other eleven apostles are grouped together when Peter addresses the crowd, responding to some mocking suggesting the apostles might be drunk. He tells them how Joel prophesied the event they are witnessing, then takes the opportunity to preach Jesus as the true Messiah, reminding them in the process that it was they who had crucified him. Following Peter's address, about three thousand souls become believers, are baptised and added to the church.

The apostles go on to preach daily, healing the sick, casting out demons and converting many. The fellowship of believers begins to grow and many of them sell their possessions, sharing what they have with the needy amongst them.

One day, when Peter and John go to the temple to pray, they are confronted by a man who has been lame from birth and heal him. He immediately stands up and follows them into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God. All the people had been used to seeing this man daily at the Beautiful gate, and are filled with wonder and amazement at what has happened to him. Peter tells them it was not by their own power that he and John had healed this man, but through the power of Jesus of Nazareth whom the people had crucified, although in ignorance. He calls them to repentance, telling them how the prophecy of Moses was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and how all the prophets from Samuel's time testified of Jesus. He reminds them that they are the children of the Abrahamic covenant through which all will be blessed, and tells them that Christ came to bless them by turning them away from their sins.

The priests and Sadducees are incensed at their teaching (the Sadducees do not believe in the resurrection) and arrest them, intending to deal with them in the morning. However, many are converted and the number of believers is now around five thousand.

The next day they are brought before the Sanhedrin and questioned concerning the authority by which they had done these things. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaims Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom they had crucified, as the authority. Perceiving that Peter and John were not learned men, they are confounded by their boldness of speech. Knowing the miracle of the previous evening was witnessed by so many, they are unable to do much about it other than to command them not to preach again in Jesus' name. Peter and John are defiant and are further threatened by the Sanhedrin before being released.

They return to their own company reporting all that had happened, and are joined in worship and prayer. God answers their prayers with a further filling of the Holy Spirit, enabling them all to witness with boldness.

Now none of the disciples are found lacking, as those who are more wealthy sell their land and possessions and their money is distributed as needed. One of those able to contribute in this way is Joses, a Levite of Cyprus who is surnamed Barnabas by the apostles.

Among those who sell their possessions are Ananias and his wife Sapphira, but they are deceitful in their giving. Their deceit being considered an offence against God, they are both separately rebuked by Peter and struck dead by the Spirit, bringing fear to all the church.

The apostles continue to work many miracles and the church grows. Such is the faith of some that they even position the sick so that Peter's shadow might pass over them and heal them. The high priest and the Sadducees are so angry by the Apostles' preaching and works that they seize them and throw them into prison. But the angel of the Lord releases them, instructing them to go and preach the Gospel in the temple. When the high priest gathers the council in the morning and sends for the apostles, the officers return reporting their escape, despite the prison being secure. Meanwhile, they hear the apostles are back in the temple preaching, and send the captain and the officers to bring them before the council. The council reminds them of the previous day's hearing and the demands they had placed on them, but the apostles defend themselves charging them with Christ's death and reasserting his resurrection. The council considers slaying the apostles but are dissuaded from doing so by the prudent advice of Gamaliel, a celebrated doctor of the law. They are then beaten and again charged not to teach in the name of Jesus before being released. They leave rejoicing in their persecution and defy the council by continuing to preach Jesus Christ.

Stephen and his martyrdom

[Acts 6:1-8:4]

The church has now greatly multiplied, causing logistical problems for the apostles' ministry, which naturally begins with the early Hebrew converts. Because of this, the Hellenistic Jews begin to complain that their widows are being neglected. The remedy is to appoint seven deacons to assist the apostles, allowing them to focus on preaching God's word. Among those chosen is Stephen, who stands out as a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit. Stephen goes on to do great wonders and miracles among the people.

Stephen now preaches in the synagogue, but is opposed by certain groups who dispute with him, but are not able to overcome his wisdom and teaching. They induce people to falsely accuse him of blaspheming against Moses and God, and he is brought before the Sanhedrin to answer to these charges.

Standing before the council, Stephen responds to his charges with an account of the history of the Jews beginning with Abraham, emphasising their fathers' rebellion against God and their persecution of the prophets. Their indignation at Stephen's testimony, and his account of his vision as he looks to heaven and sees the Glory of God with Christ at the right hand of the Father, seals his fate and he is dragged out of the city and stoned. Among those witnessing the stoning, and supporting it, is a young man by the name of Saul.

Stephen's death is followed by a great persecution against the church in which Saul plays a major role. The church is scattered abroad, but this enables the word to be preached all the more.

Philip's ministry

[Acts 8:5-40]

Another of the seven chosen along with Stephen is Philip, who later goes to Samaria and preaches Christ there, healing the sick and casting out demons. Among those baptised is Simon, a sorcerer.

When word reaches Jerusalem that Samaria had received the word of God, Peter and John are sent to investigate. They confirm the converted with prayer and the laying on of hands, and the Holy Spirit comes upon them. On seeing this, Simon the sorcerer offers money, thinking he can purchase the ability to confer the Holy Spirit. He is rebuked by Peter and urged to repent, which he does, requesting support in prayer from the apostles.

Peter and John continue to preach in the villages of Samaria a while before returning to Jerusalem.

Philip is then commanded by an angel of the Lord to go towards Gaza to meet an Ethiopian eunuch. The eunuch is reading Isaiah when Philip joins him. Philip preaches Jesus from the Scripture, then baptises the eunuch.

The Spirit of God then carries Philip to Azotus where he preaches, not just there, but in all the cities until he reaches Caesarea.

Saul's conversion

[Acts 9:1-30]

Saul, the noted witness at Stephen's stoning, is zealous in his persecution of the church. He successfully gains authorisation from the high priest to go to Damascus to detain and bring back any disciples found there. On the way, he is surrounded by a light from heaven and challenged by Jesus concerning his persecution. Struck blind, he is led to Damascus where he spends three days without food or drink. A disciple named Ananias is commanded in a dream to go to Saul and lay hands on him to restore his sight. This he does and Saul is filled with the Holy Spirit.

Saul then spends a few days with the disciples before going to synagogues where he preaches Christ. Knowing his reputation, this confounds the Jews who then seek to kill him. Assisted by the disciples, Saul escapes by being let down over the walls of the city at night in a basket, from where he is then able to go to Jerusalem. There he attempts to associate himself with the disciples. At first they fear him, but their minds are put to rest when Barnabas confirms Saul's conversion. Saul then preaches Christ to the Hellenistic Jews, but they are unconvinced and plan to kill him. The disciples become aware of this plot and take Saul to Caesarea, from where he travels to his home at Tarsus.

Peter's ministry

[Acts 9:31-11:18]

The churches, now being freed from persecution, were edified, walked in fear of the Lord and multiplied. Peter, it seems, was in Jerusalem during the persecution, but is now able to travel freely to visit the churches.

In time, he arrives at Lydda and finds a man named Aeneas, who had been afflicted with palsy for eight years. Peter heals him, telling him Christ has made him whole. Aeneas must have been well known, as his healing brought about the conversion of all at Lydda and the district of Saron.

Farther on at Joppa, there had lived a woman by the name of Tabitha who had been known for her good works and charity, but had recently died. Knowing Peter was nearby, the disciples sent two men to request he comes to them. Peter responds readily and raises Tabitha from death, bringing about the conversion of many at Joppa.

Peter stays at Joppa for many days, lodging with a man called Simon, who is a tanner. Meanwhile, there is a centurion at Caesarea called Cornelius who is a God-fearing man. Cornelius has a dream in which an angel of the Lord tells him to send

men to Joppa to fetch Peter. The next morning Cornelius sends three of his men to do as the angel had commanded. While they are travelling, Peter is at prayer and begins to feel very hungry. He falls into a trance and has a dream of a sheet being lowered with all kinds of animals in it, both clean and unclean. Peter is instructed to kill and eat the animals, but objects saying he has never eaten anything unclean. He is told by a voice that God has declared them all clean. This happens three times and Peter is left puzzled by the dream. The three men sent by Cornelius then arrive and deliver their message. They lodge there for the night before returning to Caesarea next morning, accompanied by Peter who takes six men with him as witnesses.

When Peter and his company meet with Cornelius, Peter is quick to point out that Jews do not keep company with Gentiles, but reveals that God had shown him not to call any man common or unclean. When he asks Cornelius why he has sent for him, Cornelius relates his dream and Peter then realises the full meaning of his own dream. That is, God is no respecter of persons and Christ is to be preached to the Gentiles as well as Jews. He then preaches Christ to Cornelius and his friends and the Holy Spirit descends on them all, after which they speak in tongues and praise God, to the astonishment of the witnessing Jews. Peter has them baptised and agrees to stay with them for a few days.

When Peter returns to Jerusalem he is accused of having associated with Gentiles. He defends himself by relating in detail the whole story concerning Cornelius and his dreams. His defence is accepted and they glorify God for having granted repentance and eternal life to the Gentiles.

The Gentile church in Antioch

[Acts 11:19-30]

When the church had been scattered following Stephen's persecution, the Jews preached the word as far abroad as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, but only to other Jews. However, some men from Cyprus and Cyrene then preached to the Gentiles at Antioch, producing many converts. When the church at Jerusalem hear of this they send Barnabas who, confirming their faith, goes to Tarsus to look for Saul.

Finding Saul, he brings him back to Antioch where they spend a year together teaching people about Christ. It is here at Antioch that converts are first called Christians.

Some prophets come from Jerusalem, one of whom foretells a great famine that will arise in Judea. In response to this, the church decides to make a collection for the brethren in Judea and send it to them by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Herod's persecution of the church

[Acts 12:1-24]

Now about this time, Herod begins to persecute the church and kills John's brother, James. Seeing this pleases the Jews, he has Peter put in prison, intending to deal with him at Passover. When all the church are praying for Peter, he is freed from prison by an angel of the Lord. He makes his way to Mary's house where he tells the astonished group about his escape (Mary is the mother of John Mark). Peter then leaves Mary's house and *went somewhere else*.

Herod examines those responsible for Peter's safe keeping in prison and has them put to death.

It seems that Herod was displeased with Tyre and Sidon, but the people appease him through the king's chamberlain. Later, when Herod makes a speech to the people in his royal apparel, he receives praise as if he is a god, is consequently smitten by the angel of the Lord and dies a miserable death.

Paul's first missionary journey

Acts 12:25-14:28]

Having delivered the offerings raised by the church at Antioch, Barnabas and Saul return from Jerusalem, bringing with them John Mark, Barnabas' nephew.

Through prayer and fasting, Saul and Barnabas are appointed from among the teachers at Antioch for a specific work. They leave Antioch, taking John Mark with them, and travel to Seleucia from where they sail to Cyprus. From Salamis to Paphos they preach the word of God to the Jews in the synagogues. At Paphos, the deputy, Sergius Paulus, calls for Saul and Barnabas to hear the word of God, but a Jewish sorcerer by the name of Bar-Jesus, or Elymas, attempts to prevent the deputy from receiving the word. Saul, now called Paul for the first time, pronounces God's judgement on him and he is struck blind. The deputy is astonished at this act and is confirmed in the faith.

Paul and his company leave Paphos and sail north to Perga in Pamphylia, on the southern coast of Asia Minor, where John Mark decides to leave them and return to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas continue north and arrive at Antioch in Pisidia. Here Paul preaches the word in the synagogue, showing through scripture that Jesus is the Christ. Many Jews and proselytes receive the Christian faith. The next Sabbath, the whole city is at the synagogue to hear Paul preach, filling the Jews with envy and causing them to contradict Paul's teaching. Paul and Barnabas boldly tell them they were first required to preach the word to the Jews, but as they are rejecting it, the Gospel is now to be preached to the Gentiles. The Gentiles rejoice at this and receive the word, but the Jews organise a persecution against Paul and Barnabas and they are expelled from the area. They arrive at Iconium, full of joy and the Holy Spirit.

Paul and Barnabas preach with great success at Iconium, but a persecution is again organised and they are obliged to flee to the region of Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia.

While preaching at Lystra, Paul heals a man who had been a cripple from birth. The people of Lystra, being a remote region, consequently assume Paul and Barnabas are gods and make preparations to offer sacrifices before being dissuaded by them, albeit with some difficulty.

Now some Jews from Antioch and Iconium come to persuade the people to stone Paul, who is then dragged out of the city and assumed to be dead. However, when the disciples gather around him he gets up and returns to the city.

The next day Paul and Barnabas leave for Derbe. Having preached there, they retrace their steps through Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, confirming the disciples and ordaining elders in every church. They then pass through Pisidia and Pamphylia and preach the word in Perga, before going on to Attalia and sailing back to Antioch.

Having arrived back at Antioch they gather the church together and tell them of all that God has done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

They now remain at Antioch for a long time.

The Jerusalem meeting

[Acts 15:1-35]

Now some teachers from Judea come to Antioch and teach that Gentiles must be circumcised before they can be saved, causing some dispute between them and Paul and Barnabas. It is decided that Paul and Barnabas should go to Jerusalem to discuss this matter with the church there.

After much disputing with the apostles and elders at Jerusalem, Peter offers his opinion. Barnabas and Paul then relate their success amongst the Gentiles, after which James delivers his judgement, that the only condition to be imposed on Gentile converts is to *abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication*. A letter is written to the churches at Antioch, Syria and Cilicia informing them of their decision, supported by Judas and Silas who will later return to Antioch with Barnabas and Paul.

When Paul and his company return to Antioch and read the letter from Jerusalem, it is received with great Joy. Judas and Silas stay for a while, preaching and teaching the people. But when the time comes for them to return to Jerusalem, Silas decides he would prefer to stay with Paul and Barnabas to continue to be involved with the work there.

Paul's second missionary journey

[Acts 15:36-18:22]

Some days later, Paul suggests to Barnabas that they visit the churches planted on their first journey. Barnabas is determined that Mark should go with them, but Paul refuses because Mark had left them at Pamphylia. Not being able to agree on this, Barnabas leaves for Cyprus taking Mark with him. Paul chooses Silas to go with him and they first head for the churches at Derbe and Lystra.

It is in this area of Iconium that Paul meets Timothy who is respected amongst the churches. Paul chooses Timothy to join him and Silas, but as Timothy is the son of a Jewess and a Greek father, decides it would be prudent to circumcise him first.

The decision of the apostles and leaders in Jerusalem is delivered to the churches as they pass through the different cities, and they are urged to follow their instructions. They find that the faith of the churches is stronger and their numbers are continuing to increase.

During their travels, Paul wants to divert to preach the word in new places, but is twice deterred by the Spirit and directed to Troas. Here Paul has a dream in which a man begs him *come over to Macedonia to help us*.

Luke has now joined Paul and Silas and they sail to Samothracia, then Neapolis, and from there they go to Philippi, a major city in that region of Macedonia. There is no synagogue in this city but a group of worshippers are found by the riverside where Paul and his group then sit and speak with them. Here, a woman named Lydia accepts Paul's teaching, and she and her household are baptised. She offers her hospitality to the group enabling Paul and his companions to lodge with her.

For a few days, a young woman with a spirit of divination, used by her masters for financial gain, follows the group until Paul finally gets upset with her and exorcises the spirit in the name of Jesus Christ. Her masters, finding their income is now lost, make accusations against Paul and Silas and they are both beaten and imprisoned. At midnight, while Paul and Silas are praying and singing praises to God, an earthquake suddenly shakes the prison, the doors open and all the prisoners' chains fall free. The prison keeper awakes to find the prison doors open, assumes the prisoners have escaped and is about to kill himself (for death would have been his punishment if they had escaped) but is prevented by Paul. The event results in the conversion and baptism of the prison keeper and his household.

The next morning the magistrates order Paul and Silas to be released. Paul asserts his rights as a Roman citizen, causing alarm amongst the magistrates for, as a Roman, he had been treated unlawfully. Consequently, the magistrates personally come to release Paul and Silas, but suggest they should leave the city. From the prison they go to Lydia's house, comfort the brethren and then go on their way taking Timothy with them, but Luke stays in Philippi.

They pass through Amphipolis and Apollonia and arrive at Thessalonica. Here they preach the gospel on three successive

Sabbath days producing many converts, some Jews, many devout Greeks and a few women. Amongst the converts there is a man named Jason whose house they stay at. Some unbelieving Jews were moved by envy to incite a mob, who then go to Jason's house to seize the disciples. Not finding them there, they take Jason and some of the brethren to the city rulers, accusing them of crimes against the state. Being satisfied with the defence offered by Jason, they are released. The brethren then decide they should send Paul and Silas away at night, and they head for Berea, taking Timothy with them.

At Berea, Paul and Silas preach in the synagogue where the word is received and the scriptures searched daily by the Bereans to verify the good news. There are many converts made here, both Jews and Greeks. The Jews at Thessalonica get to hear the word is now being preached at Berea and go there to incite a persecution against Paul and Silas. Consequently, Paul is sent away by sea accompanied by some brethren, but Silas and Timothy remain at Berea.

Paul arrives at Athens and the brethren return with a message for Silas and Timothy to join Paul as soon as possible. While he is waiting for them, Paul recognises the whole city is given over to idolatry and disputes with Jews at the synagogue, also with devout people and some others in the market place. He is encountered by some philosophers who debate with him and invite him to explain his doctrine. When they hear of the resurrection of the dead, some mock him, some are hesitant and some believe. Among the converted are Dionysius, a member of the council, and a woman named Damaris.

Paul leaves Athens and goes to Corinth where he meets with Aquila and Priscilla. They are tentmakers, which is also Paul's trade, and he is invited to stay with them. As is Paul's custom, he goes to the synagogue each Sabbath, reasoning with and converting some Jews and Greeks.

When Silas and Timothy join him from Macedonia, Paul is encouraged in the Spirit to testify all the more to the Jews that Jesus is Christ. They oppose him, and so he ceases to preach in the synagogue and uses a neighbouring house owned by a believer named Justus. From here he continues to preach, converting and baptising many Corinthians including Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue.

Paul has a dream one night in which he is greatly encouraged by God, and consequently remains in Corinth for eighteen months.

The Jews rise against Paul and take him before Gallio, the deputy of Achaia, in an attempt to have him convicted, but their cause is dismissed as it is solely a Jewish concern.

Some time after this, Paul takes his leave of the brethren and sails to Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila as far as Ephesus from where they return to Corinth. Here, at Ephesus, Paul reasons with the Jews in the synagogue and is asked to stay with them, but he chooses to go to Jerusalem for Passover and promises to return at a later date, if it be God's will.

Paul sails from Ephesus to Caesarea where he visits the church, then continues to Antioch.

Paul's third missionary journey

[Acts 18:23-21:16]

After spending some time back at Antioch, Paul again leaves and travels through Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

Meantime, a Jew named Apollos comes to Ephesus. He is an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures and had been initiated in teachings concerning Christ, but only as far as John's baptism and not the events that followed. After hearing him preach, Aquila and Priscilla take him aside and instruct him more fully in the gospel. Apollos then goes to the church at Corinth where they receive letters of commendation concerning him from Ephesus. Here at Corinth, Apollos teaches in the synagogue, converting many Jews to Christ.

While Apollos is at Corinth, Paul arrives at Ephesus and perceives there is something still lacking with twelve of the disciples there. It appears they only know the baptism of John, so Paul completes their teaching and baptises them in the name of the Lord Jesus. He then lays hands on them and they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues and prophesying.

Paul then preaches in the synagogues for three months, but many speak against him. He then leaves the synagogues, taking some disciples with him, and spends the next two years preaching *daily in the school of Tyrannus*. From here, the news of the gospel spreads throughout Asia to both Jews and Gentiles. During this time, Paul works many miracles.

Some vagabond Jews attempt exorcisms in the name of Jesus, but an evil spirit turns on them saying *I know Jesus! And I have heard about Paul. But who are you?* They fear Jesus and Paul, but not these Jews. This becomes known, resulting in many being converted who then burn their books on magic.

After these events, Paul decides he should now go through Macedonia and Achaia then on to Jerusalem. However, having sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia, he is able to continue a little longer in Asia.

Growth of the Christian church in Asia has greatly impacted the living made by people whose trade is dependent on worship of the goddess Diana. Demetrius, a silversmith of Ephesus and maker of silver shrines for Diana, incites a less than peaceful demonstration against Paul. Things begin to look dangerous for Paul and his companions, but the town clerk intervenes and the crowd is appeased.

Paul calls his disciples together to take his leave of them before journeying to Macedonia. Passing through Macedonia, preaching along the way, he travels on to Greece and spends three months there.

Paul then intends to sail to Syria, but hearing that Jews are laying in wait for him, he travels back through Macedonia accompanied by several companions. They travel ahead of Paul to Asia while Paul waits for Luke. Paul and Luke then sail from Philippi, and in five days reach Troas where they meet with the brethren from Asia. They stay there for seven days.

The day before Paul was going to leave, the disciples gathered together to break bread, after which Paul preaches to them at some length. At around midnight, a young man goes into a deep sleep, falls from the third floor and is killed. Paul restores him to life before continuing to talk to the disciples until daybreak,

.... when he leaves for Athos by land. Luke and his companions go by sea, meeting with Paul at Athos from where they all travel together to Mitylene, eventually arriving at Miletus.

Intending to go to Jerusalem as soon as possible to be there for Pentecost, and not wanting to be delayed at Ephesus, Paul sends for the Ephesian church elders. He spends some time talking about his ministry and, knowing he will not see some of them again, warns them of dangers that might come their way before commending them to God and kneeling with them in prayer. Because they are not likely to see him again, Paul's leaving is very sorrowful. They accompany him to a ship in which he sets sail with his companions for Caesarea. They travel via Patara and stop at Tyre where they stay for seven days with some disciples.

While they are at Tyre, the disciples warn Paul *through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem*. Nevertheless, they continue on their journey and sail to Ptolemais where they stay for a day with some brethren before going on to Caesarea.

At Caesarea, they lodge with Philip, one of the seven deacons, where they stay for many days. During their stay with Philip, a prophet by the name of Agabus comes from Judaea to see Paul. He warns him that he will be bound by the Jews at Jerusalem and handed over to the Gentiles. All those with Paul try to persuade him not to go on to Jerusalem, but he insists he must go, saying he is prepared to die there for the name of the Lord Jesus.

And so they go to Jerusalem, along with some of the disciples from Caesarea. Amongst them is an older disciple by the name of Mnason, whom they will be lodging with at Jerusalem.

Paul's imprisonment in Jerusalem

[Acts 21:17-23:35]

The day after arriving at Jerusalem, Paul and some of his company go to see James and the elders. When Paul tells them of the things accomplished by God in his ministry to the Gentiles, they glorify God. Yet there is still disquiet amongst the Jewish believers who consider that Paul preaches against Moses, and it is suggested he joins four men in a purification process they need to undergo concerning a Nazarite vow. This would show that Paul is fully compliant with Moses' law, and the things they heard concerning him are of no real concern. Paul agrees and goes with the four to the temple. Seven days later, at the end of the purification process, some Asian Jews raise an insurrection against him because of his teaching, and their assumption he had taken one of his Gentile friends into the temple. Paul is dragged from the temple and the people

are of a mind to kill him when the chief captain, responding to the uproar, brings soldiers and has Paul bound and taken to the castle.

Paul requests he be able to speak to the people. Permission is given and he addresses them in Hebrew, which encourages them to listen. He gives them an account of his birth and education, his early prejudices against Christianity, and of his miraculous conversion and call to discipleship. When they hear Paul say that God sent him to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, they become outraged and want to take his life. The chief captain orders Paul to be taken and examined by scourging, but Paul pleads his rights as a Roman citizen and escapes the torture. The next day, the chief captain orders the Sanhedrin to assemble and hear Paul's case.

While offering his defence before the Sanhedrin, the high priest orders Paul to be smitten on the mouth. Paul sharply reproves him and is in turn reproved by one of the high priest's attendants, and so he has to account for his words. He notices the council is comprised of both Pharisees and Sadducees and splits their opinion by asserting that it was because of his belief in the resurrection that he was called in question (the Sadducees do not believe in the resurrection). In fear of Paul's safety in the tumult that follows, the chief captain has him brought into the castle.

That night, Paul is comforted by a dream in which the Lord says he will also be a witness in Rome.

The next morning, more than forty Jews conspire with the Sanhedrin to have Paul brought before them again, intending to lay in wait and kill him. Paul's nephew hears of this and ensures the plot becomes known to the chief captain. Consequently, arrangements are made for Paul to be sent to Caesarea with a large escort, and a letter sent to Felix the governor explaining the circumstances of his case. When Felix hears that Paul is from the province of Cilicia, he agrees to give him a hearing, but only when his accusers are come. Meanwhile, he is to be held in Herod's judgement hall.

Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea

[Acts 24-26]

After five days, Ananias the high priest, the elders and Tertullus, an orator, come to Caesarea to accuse Paul. After Tertullus' oration, Paul is beckoned by Felix and gives his defence. Having heard both the case against Paul and his defence, Felix decides to wait to hear the testimony from the chief captain. Meantime, orders are given for a centurion to take charge of Paul, but to allow him his liberty and access to his acquaintances.

After some days, Felix, with his wife Drusilla, sends for Paul to hear from him concerning the faith. Felix is greatly affected, and suggests he would hear Paul again at a later date. He hopes that by keeping Paul in Caesarea he might receive some money in exchange for his liberty, but in the meantime, sends for Paul more often to converse with him. After two

years, Felix is superseded by Porcius Festus. In order to please the Jews, Felix leaves Paul imprisoned, but now in Festus' charge.

As Festus is now governor of Judea, the Jews again try to get Paul brought to Jerusalem for trial, intending to lay in wait to kill him. Festus refuses, saying that his accusers must come to Caesarea. This they do, but again fail to prove anything against Paul. Festus, wanting to please the Jews, asks Paul if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem to be tried there. Paul refuses and appeals to Caesar, as is his right as a Roman citizen, which Festus acknowledges.

Some time later, Herod Agrippa and his wife Bernice come to Caesarea to pay respects to Festus and are told about Paul, the accusations against him, his trial and appeal to Caesar. Agrippa wants to hear Paul for himself, so an appointment is made for the next day, which is turned into an occasion of pomp and ceremony with the chief captains and principal men of the city present.

Festus opens proceedings with an account of Paul's situation, as given to Herod the previous day, and his hope that, following Agrippa's examination, he may then have something favourable to write when he sends Paul to Rome.

Agrippa invites Paul to speak for himself, which he begins to do, but first pays a compliment to Agrippa, perhaps to secure a favourable response. Paul gives an account from his youth to his miraculous conversion, and his consequent preaching of the resurrected Christ. King Agrippa interrupts Paul, declaring him to be mad from all his learning, to which Paul defends himself with an appeal to Agrippa's own belief in the prophets. Agrippa confesses himself almost converted by Paul's words, before rising and discussing Paul's situation privately and declaring his innocence. Agrippa then tells Festus that Paul could have been set free had he not appealed to Caesar.

Paul's perilous voyage to Rome

[Acts 27:1-28:15]

It having been determined that Paul must be sent to Rome, he is handed over to Julius, a centurion. Accompanied by Luke, they embark on a ship of Adramyttium and the next day arrive at Sidon. Here, Paul is permitted to go ashore to see some friends. From there they sail past Cyprus, Cilicia and Pamphylia and come to Myra where they transfer to an Alexandrian ship bound for Italy. They then sail past Cnidus, Crete and Salmone, and come to the Fair Havens where unfavourable conditions for sailing force them to take shelter. Paul warns against sailing any farther at this time, but the centurion prefers the captain's advice and wants to head for Crete to winter there. Having had favourable winds they sail past Crete, but are then caught in a tempest and struggle to keep the ship afloat. They are also now unable to navigate by either sun or stars because of the storm. One night, Paul has a vision and is able to tell them all they will survive and be cast on an island. After

being tossed around on the sea for many days, they are finally shipwrecked on the island of Melita with the whole crew surviving, able to make it to shore on broken fragments of the ship.

The local inhabitants take care of them, making a fire to keep them warm. A viper comes out of the bundle of sticks used for the fire and fastens onto Paul's hand, which the locals perceive to be a sign that Paul is a murderer pursued by some kind of divine vengeance. But when Paul shakes off the snake and is unharmed, they then change their minds and say he is a god.

The crew is courteously received by Publius, the island's governor, and all are able to lodge with him for three days, during which time Paul miraculously heals Publius' sick father. News of this brings others on the island to come to be healed, and Paul's company is consequently honoured and presented with many gifts.

After three months on Melita they embark on a ship for Alexandria, then land at Syracuse where they stay for three days before setting off again. They sail past the straits of Rhegium, landing at Puteoli where they find some Christians with whom they tarry for seven days before setting off for Rome. On the way to Rome. they are met by Christians at Appii, and then at the Three Taverns. Paul thanks God for these meetings and is encouraged by them.

Paul's house arrest in Rome

[Acts 28:16-31]

At Rome, Paul is delivered to the captain of the guard who permits him to live by himself, but attended by a single soldier. After three days, Paul calls for the chief Jews and states his case to them. They tell him that no letters had been received and no ill spoken of him, but Jews had spoken against the Christian faith and they want to hear from Paul about it.

An appointment is made for the next day when Paul speaks to them at length from the law and the prophets concerning Christ. Some believe and some do not, to which Paul informs them that it is because of their unbelief that the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles.

Paul remains under house arrest for two years, during which time he is able to preach the Gospel unhindered to all who come to him. From Rome, he also writes his letters to Philemon, the Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians.

Nothing further is written in Acts concerning Paul's mission and his death.

From his pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus, we learn that Paul was released from prison. He was later imprisoned again and wrote his second letter to Timothy. This was Paul's last known letter.

Postscript

Was there a fourth missionary journey?

The book of Acts clearly outlines the first three of Paul's missionary journeys and his first set of trials, then ends with his first imprisonment in Rome. Everything after that time must be gleaned from Paul's last three epistles: 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus. However, there is no indication of a missionary journey, more a case of simply visiting, or mentioning, existing churches.

Revelation

Introduction and John's vision of Christ

[Rev 1]

This last book in the Bible opens with a statement that it is a revelation of Jesus Christ, given to Him by God, to show things that are to come to pass, and that this revelation is given to John by an angel while on the isle of Patmos. We are also told that anyone who reads this book will be blessed.

John tells us how he *came to be in the spirit in the Lord's day* and has a vision of Christ, the Alpha and Omega (the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet), and the wonder of it, standing amidst seven golden lampstands with seven stars in his right hand and a two edged sword coming from his mouth. He is told to write down the things he has seen, the things which are of the present, and the things which are to come. John is then told that the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, the churches represented by the seven lampstands.

Letters to the seven churches

[Rev 2-3]

John is instructed to write to seven churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Each letter is introduced as being from Christ.

The church at Ephesus is commended for her works, how she cannot bear those that are evil, and how she has dealt with false apostles. However, she is reproved for leaving her first love and called to repent or face the consequences. Nevertheless, she is commended for her hatred of the practice of those referred to as Nicolaitans and a promise is given to overcomers - those that live a Christ-like life, have completely died to self and now live a life that's holy and blameless.

For the church at Smyrna, notice is taken of her works, tribulation and poverty, her richness in spirit but also the blasphemy of some. There is no criticism given against this church. She is given encouragement to be faithful during afflictions that will come, with the promise of the crown of life to overcomers.

The church at Pergamos is commended for her works and her faithfulness, despite being in a place so bad it is described as Satan's seat. Yet there are those within, identified as Balaamites and Nicolaitans, that have bad practices and doctrines for which the church is reproved. She is warned to repent or face the consequences. A promise of 'hidden manna', a 'white stone' and a 'new name' is given to overcomers.

The church at Thyatira is commended for her works, love, service, faith and patience, all which continue to grow.

However, the church had been infiltrated by spiritual fornication and idolatry. Time was given for repentance, but it was not forthcoming. Punishment will be inflicted on those who do not repent and all associated with them. To the overcomers is given the promise of power over their enemies, and the gift of ‘the morning star’.

The church at Sardis seems to have little to commend it, her works being known but are imperfect. Although alive in name, she is a dead church. She is exhorted to be watchful and remember how the Gospel was first heard and received, to hold fast and repent, or else He will come as a thief in the night. It is recognised there are a few people who are undefiled, and they will walk with Jesus. A promise is made that overcomers will not be erased from the book of life, and their names will be confessed before the Father and his angels.

Unlike Sardis, the church at Philadelphia has nothing said against her. She is commended for her works having had the door open to her for evangelising that could not be shut. She has little power in the secular world, but has kept true to the word and not denied Christ. Those that profess to be Jews outwardly, but inwardly are not, will be made to come to the church and recognise the love Jesus has for her. Because she has kept His word, she will not suffer the hour of temptation and trial the rest of the world will experience. She is not called to repentance but simply told to persevere, and overcomers will receive their reward.

In direct contrast to Philadelphia, the church in Laodicea is condemned for being lukewarm, a condition repugnant to Jesus. She has a vain opinion of herself, is unaware of her true spiritual state, and is given counsel to seek and recognise the truth. It is because of Jesus’ love for her that He rebukes and chastens her and calls her to be zealous and repent, and is waiting at the door to be invited in. To the overcomers is promised the kind of honour and glory He had received from the Father when He overcame.

John’s vision of heaven

[Rev 4]

John is called to be shown the things that will happen hereafter, that is, in the future, following the period represented by the seven churches. He sees the throne of God, but is not able to see God, only His glory emanating from it. There are twenty four thrones around God’s throne on which sit elders, probably representative of the church, and seven lamps of fire burning which are the seven Spirits of God. In the midst, and around the throne, are four living creatures. These creatures can be likened to the emblems of the four groups of tribes in their marching order around the tabernacle. The living creatures and the elders are all worshipping and praising God, who created all things for His pleasure.

The seven seals

[Rev 5:1-8:5]

The sealed scroll

[Rev 5]

John sees a scroll in God's right hand, written on both sides and having seven seals (denoting a title deed) which is the title deed to the earth. No man is able to open it, causing John to weep convulsively. John is told Jesus, the Lamb of God and the Lion of Judah, has prevailed and is qualified to open the book, then sees Him in the midst of all, appearing as He was when slain. Jesus takes the book and is worshipped with a new song declaring his qualifications for opening the book, and how He has made the redeemed ones kings and priests to reign with Him on earth. Then John hears the voice of millions of angels and all creatures praising and glorifying Jesus, with an amen from the four living creatures, followed by the twenty four elders prostrating themselves in worship.

The breaking of the first six seals

[Rev 6]

The seals are then opened by Jesus. For the first four seals, John is beckoned by each of the four living creatures in turn to step forward and see what is to be revealed. From these four seals come four horses with riders, generally known as the 'four horsemen of the apocalypse'.

The first is a white horse with a rider who has a bow and crown of victory, representing the coming world leader (antichrist).

The second is a red horse with a rider given power to take peace from the earth and cause men to kill one another.

The third is a black horse whose rider has a pair of balances in his hand. A voice from the midst of the living creatures telling of a famine in which a man's wages would only be sufficient to buy bread, though luxuries would be spared.

The fourth horse is a pale horse whose rider is named as Death, and Hell is following him. The two have the power to destroy a quarter of the earth with the sword and with hunger, pestilence and wild beasts.

With the opening of the fifth seal, John sees the souls of martyrs crying out for vengeance, but they are given white robes and told they should have patience until the suffering of their brethren is over.

With the sixth seal there follows earthly and cosmic devastation, causing islands and mountains to be moved and men to flee and hide themselves in the mountains, *For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?*

The people of God

[Rev 7]

After the first six seals have been opened, four angels are seen preventing hurt on the earth. Another angel, having the specific authority of God, instructs them not to allow the pending hurt (from the seven trumpets shortly to be announced) until God's servants have been sealed. Those to be sealed number 144,000 consisting of 12,000 from each tribe of Israel. John then sees (yet future) a great multitude from all nations, so great they can't be numbered, standing before God and Jesus, having overcome the great tribulation to be with Christ, to hunger and thirst no more, and to have their tears wiped away by God.

The seventh seal

[Rev 8:1-5]

The seventh seal is now opened followed by a period of silence. The seventh seal releases seven angels with their trumpets that will announce judgements on man. (This will be the great tribulation). But before the trumpets are sounded, another angel offers the prayers of all the saints with incense, then fills his censer with the fire of the altar and *casts it to earth, the effects of which were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.*

The seven trumpets; the great tribulation

[Rev 8:6-11:19]

The first six trumpets

[Rev 8:6-9:21]

The seven angels with seven trumpets now prepare themselves to sound. The first four trumpet blasts are revealed as ecological disasters.

The first causes hail and fire, mingled with blood, burning up a third of the trees and all the grass.

The second trumpet sounds, then something like a great mountain with fire is cast into the sea, a third of the sea becoming blood, killing a third of life in it and destroying a third of all ships.

The third heralds the fall of a great star from heaven burning as a lamp, falling on a third part of the rivers and on the fountain of waters. It is given the name of wormwood, since a third of the waters become wormwood and many die from its bitterness.

Following the fourth trumpet, a third part of the sun, moon and stars are hidden.

Then an angel proclaims three woes, warning that, although the first four trumpets heralded severe events, worse is to come from the remaining three.

Following the fifth trumpet, a star falls that has the key to the bottomless pit, releasing smoke which darkens the sky, and locusts which are not permitted to consume any vegetation but are to torment those who do not have the seal of God on their forehead. This torment is to last for five months, during which time there is no death, though the tormented will seek it. The king of these locusts, whose description is of hybrid beings, is identified as the ‘destroyer’, one of the names for Satan. This is the first woe with two more to come.

When the sixth angel blows his trumpet, John hears a voice ordering this angel to loose four of Satan’s angels. These angels command a vast army that will slay a third part of all men during a specified period of time. Despite this judgement, the survivors do not repent of their idolatry, murders, sorceries, fornication or thefts.

The angel and the little scroll

[Rev 10]

Before the seventh trumpet, John is given a vision of future events. He sees a mighty angel with an open little book in His hand and hears seven thunderous voices. John is about to record what the voices say when he is forbidden to by the angel. A solemn oath is made by the angel that the mystery of God, as declared by His prophets, would be finished at the beginning of the seventh trumpet. John is told to take the book and eat it, and that it would be sweet in his mouth but bitter in his belly. He is then told he must prophesy again before many people of all nations.

The two witnesses

[Rev 11:1-14]

John is given a rod and told to measure the temple, altar and worshippers, but not the outer court where the Gentiles are. The Gentiles will tread the holy city under foot for three and a half years, during which time two witnesses will prophesy in sackcloth and no rain will fall on the earth. The witnesses will be protected from any who try to kill them, all the while having the power to smite the earth with plagues as they see fit.

When the three and a half years is over, they will be killed by the beast who ascends from the bottomless pit. Their bodies will be left in the street where all will see them, and rejoice over the death of these two who tormented them. Then, after a short period of time, they will be resurrected and ascend to heaven. At the same time there will be a great earthquake destroying a tenth of the city and killing seven thousand men, bringing fear on the remnant who will then give glory to God.

This is the second woe, the third is to quickly follow.

The seventh trumpet

[Rev 11:15-19]

The seventh trumpet is sounded heralding the coming of the third woe and God's wrath. Immediately following this trumpet, voices are heard in heaven announcing the kingdoms of the world are now Christ's, and He is to reign for ever. The twenty four elders, who sat on their seats before God, praise and worship Him giving thanks that victory has come, that judgement will follow and rewards given to His prophets and saints that feared Him, and for the pending destruction of the antichrist and his followers.

The other effects of this trumpet are the temple of God in heaven is opened, the ark of the covenant is seen, and there are lightnings, voices, thunderings, an earthquake and great hail.

The woman and the dragon

[Rev 12]

An inset in the story flow now occurs in Revelation 12 and 13. These chapters pick up the story at an earlier period and bring it up to date, presenting the stories of the Church (Revelation 12), and of the Beast (Revelation 13).

Next is seen a vision of a woman and a beast. The woman is pregnant and soon to give birth. The dragon, identified later as Satan, stands before the woman ready to devour her child. She bares a son, who is taken up to God and to His throne, then flees to the wilderness where God has prepared a place for her, and where she is to remain and be fed for three and a half years. Then a war is fought in heaven between Michael and his angels and Satan and his angels, with Michael prevailing and Satan and his angels being cast out of heaven. There is rejoicing because they overcame Satan by the blood of the Lamb, but a warning is given to the inhabitants of the earth that the wrath of Satan is to come, because he only has a short time left. Satan persecutes the woman and makes war with the remnant of her seed, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

The two beasts

[Rev 13]

The beast out of the sea

[Rev 13:1-10]

A beast is then seen rising out of the sea having the name of blasphemy, and is given power and authority by Satan. This beast has a wound that was deadly, yet he survived it. The world wonders over this miracle and consequently worships Satan

and the beast. For three and a half years this beast will blaspheme against God and everything that is of God, making war with the saints and being victorious over them. Yet a word of comfort is given to the saints encouraging faith and patience.

The beast out of the earth

[Rev 13:11-18]

Then a beast is seen rising out of the earth, being like a lamb, but speaking as a dragon and exercising all the power of the first beast. This beast deceives the world with miracles, and instructs an image of the first beast to be made that everyone must worship, or be killed. Everyone is to receive a mark of the beast on their right hand or forehead, without which they will not be able to buy or sell anything. The number of the beast is that of a man and is given as 666.

The joy of the redeemed and the harvest

[Rev 14]

John now sees Jesus with the 144,000 having His Father's name written on their foreheads. They sing a song that only they are able to sing, having been redeemed from the earth and having no blemish, the first-fruits through Jesus.

Next John sees an angel having the everlasting gospel to preach before everyone on earth, calling them to fear God and worship Him for the hour of judgement has come. This angel is followed by another announcing Babylon has fallen because of her fornication. Then a third angel is seen, warning that anyone who receives the mark of the beast on their forehead, or hand, would receive the full wrath of God.

The patience of the saints will be tried and the overcomers rewarded.

John now sees a vision of the reaping of the harvest of the earth. The reaper is Jesus, who has a sharp sickle and is called on to reap by another angel, saying the time has come for the earth is ripe. Upon this, the earth is then reaped and the redeemed gathered. Another angel appears from the temple with a sharp sickle, and the power over fire, to whom another angel calls to gather the wicked who are then trodden in the winepress of divine wrath, resulting in much blood being spilt.

The seven bowls; the fullness of God's wrath

[Rev 15-16]

Preparation is made to pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath. A song of God's victory is sung and the temple of the 'tabernacle of the testimony' in heaven is open. The seven angels come out of the temple, and the four living creatures (beasts) give them seven golden bowls full of God's wrath. No man is now able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels are complete.

John hears a great voice calling to the angels to go their way and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God upon the earth.

The first angel pours his bowl specifically upon the earth, causing a grievous sore, offensive to the senses, on those who have the mark of the beast and have worshipped his image.

The second pours his bowl upon the sea causing the sea to become blood, killing every living creature in it.

The third pours his upon the rivers and fountains of water, which also become blood so that those who killed the prophets and saints should have to drink it.

The fourth pours his upon the sun causing men to be scorched with fire, for which they blaspheme God and do not repent.

The fifth pours his upon the seat of the beast, and his kingdom becomes full of darkness, causing great anguish, but no repentance.

The sixth pours his on the river Euphrates, causing it to dry up to prepare the way for the kings of the east.

Between the pouring of the sixth and seventh vial is the battle of Armageddon.

The seventh vial is poured into the air and a great voice from the throne in the temple of heaven announces “It is done.” There are voices, thunders and lightnings, the greatest earthquake ever seen, the fall of Babylon and a great hail with stones as heavy as a talent (about 26 kg !). Men blaspheme God because of the great hail, and do not repent.

God’s final triumph

[Rev 17-22]

The Woman and the Beast

[Rev 17]

Revelation 17 and 18 provide another inset into the story flow, giving an overview of the end-time system called Babylon the Great.

One of the seven angels, who had the bowls, comes to John to invite him to see the judgement of the great whore, with whom the kings of the earth had committed fornication, and who had made the people of the earth drunk with the wine of her fornication. John is carried into the wilderness and sees a woman on a scarlet beast. She is dressed in purple and scarlet, arrayed with precious jewellery, and having a cup in her hand full of abominations and filth. She is described by the names on her forehead, and is drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs. The angel then explains to an astonished John the mystery of the woman and the beast that carries her.

First the mystery of the beast is explained, how, having been consigned to the bottomless pit, now ascends from it. The beast’s seven heads represent the succession of seven kings, or empires, of which one is yet to come. Its ten horns represent ten kings who give their power and strength to the beast, and who shall make war with the Lamb, but will be defeated.

The angel then tells John the waters on which she sat are the peoples of the earth, and that the ten horns will come to hate the whore and turn against her, according to God's will to fulfil prophecy.

The woman is then declared as being the great city (Babylon) which reigns over the kings of the earth.

The Fall of Babylon

[Rev 18]

Then another angel comes and announces that Babylon the great has fallen, having become the habitation of everything evil, where nations and kings had committed fornication with her, and merchants become enriched with her luxury.

Another voice is heard calling His people to come out of Babylon, and not be partaker of her sins that are causing her to receive her plagues, but to take full vengeance on her because she has glorified herself and felt secure. Plagues will come on her in one day and she will suffer death, mourning and famine, and will be utterly burned by fire.

The kings of the earth will lament over her from afar off, as will the merchants, for all have benefited from her greatness and riches, which have all now come to nought within the space of one hour.

God's people are called to rejoice, for God has now taken vengeance on her. A mighty angel appears and casts a great stone into the sea, signifying Babylon's permanent destruction.

The hallelujah and the wedding feast

[Rev 19:1-10]

There follows a great rejoicing in heaven for the triumph over Babylon. The multitude in the church give glory and honour to God for His righteous judgements, and the twenty four elders and the four living creatures fall down and worship God. All God's servants are called upon to join in the praise.

After this, the voice of a great multitude is heard calling one another to be glad and rejoice, for the time of the Lamb's marriage with his bride has come. His wife, having made herself ready, is dressed in white linen, the linen depicting the righteousness of the saints.

John is told to write concerning those called to the marriage supper. He is told these are the true sayings of God, at which he falls on his feet to worship the angel but is prevented from doing so, being reminded by the angel that he is just a fellow servant; God is the only one to be worshipped.

Christ victorious

[Rev 19:11-21]

John sees heaven open and Jesus riding on a white horse to judge and make war. He is followed by His armies in heaven, also on white horses, clothed in the white linen of the righteous. An angel calls with a loud voice to gather the birds of heaven for the supper of the great God, to eat the flesh of those judged as evil.

The beast, kings of the earth and their armies then gather to make war against Jesus and His army. They are defeated and the beast and his prophet are both cast into the lake of fire, and the kings and their armies are slain to the rejoicing of the righteous.

The Thousand Years and the last judgement

[Rev 20]

John sees an angel with the key to the bottomless pit and with a chain in his hand. He binds Satan for a thousand years so that he is unable to deceive the nations. During this time the church sits on thrones to judge with Jesus, as do the saints who had been martyred and had not received the mark of the beast or worshipped him. This is described as the first resurrection. The rest of the dead will not be raised until the thousand years are complete.

When the thousand years are up, Satan is released to deceive the nations. The number deceived is great and are gathered to do battle, but are defeated. Satan is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and false prophet are, and will be tormented day and night for ever.

All the dead, small and great, now stand before God to be judged according to their works.

Death and hell are cast into the lake of fire, as are those whose name is not found written in the book of life. This is the second death.

God's new world

[Rev 21-22]

John now sees the new heaven and the new earth in which there is no more sea, and in which there is no tabernacle, as God will now dwell amongst His people.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

Jesus then declares the work is done.

One of the angels, who had the seven bowls, shows John the bride, the Lamb's wife which is the new Jerusalem. John

sees the detail of its size and structure, which is then measured by the angel. John observes there is no temple within as God and the Lamb are its temple, there is no sun or moon as the glory of God and the lamb are its light, and the gates are not shut as there is no night. Everything within it is pure and nothing can enter that might defile it.

John sees *a pure river of water of life* coming from the throne of God and the Lamb, with the tree of life that bears twelve fruits, yielding a fruit every month, and whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

The angel tells John that all the visions he has seen are faithful and true, and that the Lord God had sent His angel to reveal these things to him. John is overwhelmed and again falls down to worship the angel, and again has to be reminded to worship God only.

John is told to reveal all that he has seen. Jesus tells John He will come quickly with His reward to give every man according to his works, and confirms John has been given these visions to testify to the churches.

A warning is given that no man is to add to or take away from the words of this book.

Come Lord Jesus.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

New Testament Epistles

Paul's Epistle to the Romans

Paul's letter to the Romans was written from Corinth in the spring of 57 or 58 A.D. while on his third missionary journey, and making preparations to return to Jerusalem with an offering from the mission churches for the believers there. His letter was dictated to Tertius [16:22] and delivered by Phebe [16:27].

Paul longed to visit the church now established in Rome, but first wanted to personally deliver the collections from the Gentile churches to Jerusalem. The Roman church had not received the gospel from an apostle, so Paul prepared the way for his coming by laying out God's plan of redemption and salvation for all mankind in this letter. The systematic way in which he does this makes Paul's letter to the Romans perhaps the most important of his letters for Christian study.

The outline can be considered in terms of 'righteousness', similar to that given in the New International Version Bible:

- Opening remarks

 - Unrighteousness of mankind

 - Righteousness imputed: Justification

 - Righteousness imparted: Sanctification

 - Righteousness vindicated: Israel's rejection and ultimate purpose

 - Righteousness practised

- Final words, commendations and greetings

Opening remarks

[1:1-17]

Paul's longing to visit Rome

Paul introduces himself and relates his divine call and mission. He salutes the church in Rome, commending their faith, and expresses his eagerness to see them and share the gospel of Christ. At this point, Paul tells them the gospel reveals God's righteousness and declares *The just shall live by faith.*

The unrighteousness of mankind

[1:18-3:20]

The Gentiles

[1:18-32]

Evidence of the Creator is all around for everyone to see, but the Gentiles choose to worship creation rather than the Creator. For this, God didn't prevent their corruption through freedom of choice, which included homosexual depravity of both sexes. Paul lists all the sins symptomatic of unrighteous Gentiles; not only do they commit these sins, but take pleasure in doing so.

The Jews

[2:1-3:9]

Those that judge others, but are guilty themselves, will not escape God's wrath, whether they be Jew or Gentile, for God is no respecter of persons. The Gentiles will be judged according to the law written on their hearts; the Jews according to the written law they have failed to obey.

The Jews have the written law and are confident they know better because of it, but their failure to practise what they preach has been a cause for Gentiles to blaspheme God. Their circumcision is an outward sign of the law, but is of no consequence if the law does not produce a change of heart. It is the change of heart that receives God's recognition.

Despite the advantage and privilege enjoyed by the Jews in receiving the oracles of God, some concocted the ridiculous notion that unbelief would somehow be acceptable, as it would enable further proof of God's faithfulness to them.

Do the Jews then excel because of the advantage they have had? No, they have simply shown they are no better than the Gentiles, since all have sinned and are accountable to God.

All people

[3:10-20]

None are righteous before God, since all mankind is corrupt in many ways, and none can be justified by the law itself.

Righteousness imputed: Justification

[3:21-5:21]

Through Christ

[3:21-26]

Now the righteousness of God has been revealed, apart from the law, through Jesus Christ whose sacrifice is the redemption for all mankind, and the pathway to forgiveness of sins for all who believe in Him.

Received by faith

[3:27-4:25]

Salvation then is established for both Jew and Gentile through faith, not through works of the law, but this does not mean the law is set aside.

Abraham is our example of justification by faith, since God declared him righteous before the law was established. Salvation, then, is available to both Jews and Gentiles, for it is not dependent on the law. The promise made to Abraham, that all the nations of the earth should be blessed in him, was made before he was circumcised. If salvation was for the Jews alone, then the law would have nullified the promise, but it didn't, for David testified to Abraham's righteousness and to the law.

The account of Abraham's justification through faith is given as a lesson, that we might believe in Christ as our means of salvation, apart from the law, having been crucified for our sins and raised from the dead for our justification.

The fruits of righteousness

[5:1-11]

Being justified by faith, we have peace through Christ and access to grace, allowing afflictions, through patience and experience, to bring about hope. There is no shame in this hope, for the love of God is poured out in abundance, as Christ was crucified whilst we were still sinners, being our atonement by which we can now be reconciled to God.

Sin and death entered the world by one man, Adam, and through his transgression all became guilty before God, the law exposing that guilt. Now, through the obedience of one man, Jesus Christ, the grace of God abounds much more than sin ever could, with the gift of righteousness and eternal life.

Righteousness imparted: Sanctification

[6-8]

Freedom from the power of sin

[6]

We must not abuse grace by thinking that sin can somehow be excused because it allows grace to abound even more. Through our baptism into Christ, we have declared our old sinful selves to have been crucified with Him, and for sin to no longer reign in our lives. We are ‘resurrected’ to live to the glory of God, freed from the bondage of sin and now slaves to righteousness, *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Freedom from the law’s condemnation

[7]

The Mosaic law has power over a man as long as he lives. Illustrated by marriage, whereby a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives, Christian believers are delivered from the Mosaic law by Christ Jesus (who died for us) and united to God. The law provided knowledge of sin, but no means of overcoming it, yet was in itself holy, just and good.

Despite being free from the bondage of sin, there is still an inner struggle between the flesh and the spirit, between sin and righteousness. We thank God that deliverance from the curse of sin is available through Christ our Lord.

Life in the power of the Holy Spirit

[8]

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ and walk according to the Spirit, for the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us through Him. One who is carnally minded cannot please God, but those who walk in the Spirit have the Spirit of God dwelling in them, the same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead makes their mortal bodies alive through righteousness. Those that are led by the Spirit are adopted sons of God, and joint heirs with Christ, so that if we suffer with Him we may also be glorified together.

The sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory, which is our hope through Christ Jesus. Along with the whole of creation, we groan and travail in pain while we wait with patience in the hope of things we cannot see.

The Spirit helps us in all things, interceding for us in prayer. All things work together for good for those who love God, and are predestined through foreknowledge to be glorified, nothing being able to separate us from His love.

Righteousness vindicated: Israel's rejection and ultimate purpose

[9-11]

The justice of the rejection: God's sovereign choice

[9:1-29]

Paul expresses his great sorrow of heart for his kinsmen who were God's chosen people, but had stumbled.

God called Abraham as the father of the Israelites, but not all descendants of Abraham are called Israelites. The promise given to Abraham passed down through Isaac, not Ishmael, and through Jacob, not Esau. Then, in time, He chose Pharaoh to be an instrument to show His power throughout the earth.

God has mercy on whom He will have mercy, and none can question His authority, having power over mankind just as the potter has over his clay.

The prophet Hosea foretold the calling of the Gentiles, and Isaiah the rejection of the Jews with only a remnant surviving.

The cause of Israel's rejection: their unbelief

[9:30-10:21]

The Gentiles learned that justification comes through faith, but the Jews, despite receiving the law of righteousness, stumbled because they considered righteousness to be gained through works of the law.

Paul's heart's desire and prayer is for the Jews to be saved, for they have a great zeal for God, but do not recognise that faith in Christ is now the path to righteousness.

All who confess the Lord Jesus and believe in their heart that God raised Him from the dead will be saved and not be put to shame.

Faith comes through hearing the Word of God preached. The spread of the gospel throughout the earth, predicted by the prophets, is being accepted by the Gentiles, but not by most of the Jews.

Israel's destiny

[11]

Has God then completely rejected Israel? No, for as in the time of Elijah, when a remnant of seven thousand were saved, so by God's grace there is a remnant in the present time. Being saved by grace, they are not saved by works of the law. Still, the body of Israelites are blinded as prophesied by David.

The rejection is not final. Through their stumbling, salvation has come to the Gentiles, yet there is hope, for the Jews will become a holy people again. The Gentiles are not to boast over the plight of the Jews, for the Jews were the natural branches and the Gentiles have merely been grafted on in their place. If they do not continue to walk in faith, they too will be cut off.

If the Jews do not continue in their unbelief, they will be grafted back in. Then, when a multitude of Gentiles have been converted, all Israel will be saved, for this is God's covenant with them. God will again call them and the Gospel will be given to them as it has been to the Gentiles. All this is according to the immense wisdom, knowledge and unsearchable judgements of God, through whom all things exist to His glory.

Righteousness practised: The Christian life

[12:1-15:13]

In the church

[12]

Paul calls for all to give themselves to God, not to conform to this world, to be meek in their outlook, and for each to use their gift received from God according to the grace given him.

Love is the dominant factor affecting all aspects of relationships and attitude to one another and to the world. We are to live peaceably with all, leaving vengeance to God and to overcome evil with good.

In the world

[13]

We are to submit to the civil government over us, for there is no fear in living lawfully and paying all dues owed.

We should not be in debt to anyone except in love, which is the fulfilment of the law and all its commandments.

Our lives are to be lived in the expectation that Christ's coming again is drawing near.

Among the weak and the strong Christians

[14:1-15:13]

We should not dispute or judge one another on positions held on lesser issues. Neither should we do anything that might cause a weaker brother to stumble over lesser things. Rather, cultivate peace and brotherly affection.

The strong are to bear the infirmities of the weak and strive to please their neighbours, rather than themselves, after the example of Christ. We should be of one mind in glorifying God, accepting one another as Christ accepted Jews and Gentiles

according to scripture. In this, the God of Hope will fill us with peace and joy in our believing, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Epilogue

[15:14-16:27]

Personal summary

[15:14-33]

Paul speaks of his mission and aim to preach the gospel where it has not previously been preached, and how his desire has been to visit the saints in Rome on his way to Spain. However, he must first go to Jerusalem and explains his reason, concerning the contributions for the poor there, and solicits their prayers that his desire to come to Rome will be fulfilled.

Commendations and greetings

[16]

Paul concludes his letter with personal messages and greetings, a warning against those who cause divisions and offences contrary to the gospel, and finally, greetings are given from Paul's colleagues.

Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians

It is obvious from the text that Paul wrote more than two letters to the church at Corinth [5:9], this probably being his second. It was written circa 55 A.D., towards the end of Paul's three year stay at Ephesus. However, it is evident that, at the time of writing, he had only intended to remain there for less than a year [16:8].

This letter was prompted by news from Chloe's household that there was less than unity in the church [1:10, 11], also by a visit from Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, who probably gave him further information [16:17], and in response to a letter from the church with specific concerns [7:1].

In this letter Paul addresses the following subjects:

Divisions in the church [1-4]

Immorality in the church [5-6]

Marriage [7]

Concerns over questionable practices [8-10]

Propriety in worship [11]

Spiritual gifts [12]

Love [13]

Prophesying and speaking in tongues [14]

Resurrection of the body [15]

A collection for the mother church and final greetings [16]

Divisions in the church

[1-4]

After Paul's opening introduction to his letter, he addresses one of the major problems that has been brought to his attention: divisions in the church. People had been aligning themselves to individuals, Paul, Apollos and Cephas (Peter), instead of being one church in Christ. He reminds them of the principal purpose of his ministry, to preach the gospel, and this he does, not by use of fancy speech as if he were a wise man to be admired, but plainly declaring the risen Christ and thus bringing glory to God. In preaching the gospel, he brought to them a wisdom exceeding the wisdom of the world, a wisdom that could only be delivered through the power of the Spirit of God.

Paul tells them that, although they have received the gospel, they are still carnal-minded and he has to speak to them in a likewise manner, not spiritually. He reminds them that in bringing the gospel to them, he planted the seed, which Apollos then watered, but God provided the growth. He and Apollos are just labourers for God together, building on the true

foundation which is Christ Jesus. How they build on that foundation will be judged by God.

Paul reminds them that their bodies are the temple of God in whom God's spirit dwells. They are, then, to keep themselves pure, not thinking themselves wise, for the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, and to glory in no man, whether it be Paul, Apollos or Cephas, for they are all equal in Christ.

As ministers of God, Paul and his companions are faithful stewards of God, the judgement of which will be God's, not theirs. Paul cautions them against their acquired pride, and calls on them to regard him as their spiritual father in Christ, in the way he regards them as his children. To this end he had sent Timothy to them as his beloved son who will remind them of his teaching, which is the same in every church. He will come to visit them in person, if it be the Lord's will, in the hope he will be able to come not to reproach, but in love and in the spirit of meekness.

Immorality in the church

[5-6]

A serious case of fornication had been brought to Paul's attention, that of a man who is having sexual relations with his stepmother, and of their carefree attitude toward this. They are instructed to excommunicate him, and not to keep company with any brother who is an unrepentant sinner.

Paul also reproves them for going to law with one another over small matters, and hence to be judged by heathens. They should be able to settle these matters amongst themselves as brothers in Christ.

At this point Paul warns them against a number of gross sins, inhibitors to the inheritance of the kingdom of God, which some of them have been guilty of in the past. He now returns to the sin of fornication, which is specifically a sin against a man's own body, the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in him. Having been bought for a price, they are to glorify God in their bodies and in their spirit, which are God's.

Marriage

[7]

The church had previously written to Paul with some concerns about marriage which he now addresses.

He suggests that marriage can be seen as a remedy against fornication. In marriage, the husband and wife should be consenting toward one another. It is better to be married than to burn with lust.

To the married he says they should remain together, but if they divorce, then they are to remain unmarried or be reconciled, for this is God's law.

If anyone has an unbelieving spouse, they should stay married if the unbeliever is content to remain with them. But if not,

then they are to let the spouse go, as they are not under bondage in such cases, for *God hath called us to peace*. Paul offers this as his advice, and not the law. He describes by examples how becoming Christians does not change their external state, and advises everyone to continue in the state in which they were called.

Paul considers *the time is short* and advises accordingly, that it is better to be unmarried because those that are married have to give time for their spouses, but those that are unmarried are able to devote their time to the Lord. Nevertheless, those who are married should remain married. His advice concerning virgins is given in the same vein.

Concerns over questionable practices

[8-10]

Paul responds to a question concerning eating meat offered in sacrifice to idols, suggesting it is of no consequence to the spiritually mature since idols are nothing. But to the spiritually weak it can be a problem. To cause a weaker brother to stumble in such a situation is an offence against the brother and against Christ. For this reason, despite his superior knowledge, his spiritual maturity, Paul would not eat meat sacrificed for idols and offend a brother. *Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.*

There has been some charge against Paul concerning compensation for his services as an apostle. He defends the right of a minister of God to receive some recompense, even by Mosaic law, but states that he has waived this right so as not to hinder the gospel of Christ. In doing so he becomes a servant to all he preaches to: to the Jew he becomes as a Jew, to the Gentile a Gentile, and to the weak he becomes as a weak man. All this for the sake of the gospel and the prize of an incorruptible crown.

Paul now reflects on the Israelites who, when wandering in the desert, were all recipients of God's grace, but nevertheless were backsliders and punished by God for their many sins. These things are an example to us who may think we are strong, but should take heed lest we fall to temptation as they did, recognising that our faithful God will never permit temptation beyond that which we should be able to withstand.

Returning to the matter of eating meat prepared for idols, Paul reminds the Corinthians they are all partakers of the communion of Christ's blood and body, and are all of the one body of Christ. As such, considering idols to be of some significance, and the eating of things offered to them as also having significance, is wholly inconsistent with Christianity and is gross idolatry. Paul states *All things are lawful to me, but not all things profit. All things are lawful to me, but not all things build up.* They may buy such meat in the markets or eat at a heathen's table without the need to ask questions, *for the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness of it.* Everything is done to the glory of God, but in this freedom, care must be taken not to give offence to weaker brethren.

Propriety in worship

[11]

Perhaps inspired by a new found freedom in Christ, some women had laid aside the custom of wearing their veils, particularly while praying or prophesying. Paul reminds them of the divine order of God, Christ, man then woman, and the significance of head covering, yet also reminds them that man and woman were made for their mutual benefit.

Paul reprimands them for their behaviour and attitude at the Lord's supper where some are hungry and some even drunk. He tells them that eating and drinking to satisfaction is done at home, and reminds them of the Lord's words in ordaining the communion of bread and wine, and the sanctity of it.

Spiritual gifts

[12]

Here Paul speaks of the abundance of spiritual gifts in the church, and how the different gifts given to individuals are for the edification of the whole church. He uses the body as an analogy for the body of the church, illustrating the importance of each member working as an essential part of the whole, resulting in a close relationship within the body, reflected in both common suffering and glorification.

Not everyone is called for the same purpose in church, consequently, not all will have the same gifts. Some seem to want to strive for what might be considered the better gifts, but Paul is about to show them the true motivation behind the use of all gifts.

Love

[13]

Paul tells how love is the only true motivation behind all that he does. He describes the attributes of love and concludes that of faith, hope and love, the greatest is love.

Prophecy and speaking in tongues

[14]

In advising them concerning spiritual gifts, Paul places an importance on prophecy in preference to speaking in tongues, because prophecy edifies the church, whereas speaking in tongues is like a musical instrument without a tune, which benefits no one unless there is another to interpret it. Their praise and worship should be to the benefit of the whole church, and to this end Paul would rather speak five words with understanding than ten thousand in an unknown tongue. If a non-believer were to hear the whole church speaking in tongues, he would probably consider them mad, whereas a

non-believer hearing prophecy may well be converted.

Paul accuses them of bringing disorder and confusion into the church with their desire to show off spiritual gifts, and directs them in the correct use of tongues and prophecy.

To maintain order, they are told their wives are to be silent in church. If something arises they do not understand, then they should not question it at the time, but resolve the matter at home.

All things are to be done in public worship with decency and order.

Resurrection of the body

[15]

Paul summarises the gospel to them: *how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.* He reminds them of how Christ's resurrection was witnessed by the apostles, lastly by himself through grace, as he was the least of the apostles having persecuted the church. As an apostle, they are able to believe what he preaches, yet some amongst them are saying there is no resurrection of the dead. If there is no resurrection, then Christ was not resurrected, and their faith, and his teachings, are all in vain. But Christ is risen, and those who are His will be resurrected and reign with Him. It is to their shame that some amongst them do not know God, and they are to be careful not to be deceived by these people. Paul then explains how in the resurrection their bodies would no longer be flesh and blood but spiritual, as neither flesh and blood, nor anything corruptible, can enter the kingdom of heaven. This is a mystery that Paul is revealing to them, that all will be changed in a twinkling of an eye at the sound of the last trumpet, from corruptible to incorruptible, from mortal to immortal, and death will be swallowed up in victory. They are, then, to remain steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, because they know their labour will not be in vain.

A collection for the mother church and final greetings

[16]

Paul concludes by giving them some directions concerning a collection he is making for the saints in Jerusalem. He speaks of paying them a visit, recommends Timothy to them, and tells them Apollos also wants to visit them in due course. He exhorts them to be strong in their faith, to do everything in love, and to respect those that have helped him and his fellow labourers in their work.

Finally, following salutations from the churches in Asia, from Aquila and Priscilla and from himself, he blesses them and gives them his love in Christ Jesus.

Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians

There is some debate over how many letters Paul wrote to the Corinthians, with some considering that this second letter as we have it is in fact a composite of three, a fraction of the first plus the third and fourth. As one would expect, many scholars will insist that Second Corinthians is complete in its own right. This summary will treat this letter as one since it "forms a coherent whole..... Tradition has been unanimous in affirming its unity (the early church fathers, for example, knew the letter only in its present form)..... none of the Greek manuscripts break up the book." [Quoted from the New International Version introduction to 2 Corinthians]

First Corinthians dealt with problems in the church in Corinth. After this letter was written, misunderstandings arose between Paul and the Corinthian church which caused great distress to Paul, leading him to make what he described as a painful visit to Corinth. After this painful visit, he wrote a letter 'with many tears', then sent Titus to them to try to appease the situation there. When Titus returned with good news from Corinth, the relieved Paul wrote this second Epistle.

Paul excuses his not coming to them

[1]

Following his initial greeting, Paul offers thanksgiving to God for bringing him and his companions through all their tribulations, particularly mentioning their troubles in Asia and the prayerful support of the Corinthian church. He appeals to their recognition of his integrity and that of his fellow labourers, mentions his intent to visit them and excuses his not doing so.

Preparing the way for his next visit

[2]

Paul's earlier letter was written with much anguish and in tears. He now exhorts them to forgive the repentant sinner and confirm their love for him. Paul then gives thanks to God, reflecting on his recent ministry centred on Macedonia.

The ministry of the New Testament

[3]

Paul explains how he doesn't need letters of confirmation of his ministry as an apostle, since the converts at Corinth were more than sufficient commendation. He then draws a comparison between the ministry of the law (the Old Testament), the truth of which remains veiled to the Jews, and that of the Spirit (the New Testament) and its superiority in that it is able to lead Christians to salvation.

Afflictions in ministry

[4]

Paul states the integrity of their ministry and that any failure is because unbelievers were being blinded by the god of this world (Satan). His preaching is of Christ and he, being merely an earthen vessel, gives glory to God. Troubles and afflictions are suffered but do not deter, since their faith in Him who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise them. Consequently, their afflictions are considered light when compared to the prospect of eternal blessings.

Paul's ministry of reconciliation

[5]

Paul expresses his desire to be with the Lord, but there is also the need to be about his ministry, a need driven by the Spirit and the knowledge he will be judged, for all will appear before the judgement seat of God. It is for the love of Christ that he labours to persuade all to be prepared for that day, by becoming new creatures in Christ, who died that we might be reconciled to God. This, Paul says, is his ministry, that of reconciliation.

Paul appeals to the Corinthians

[6]

Expressing the many trials he has suffered to bring his message to them, Paul appeals to them not to have received the gospel in vain. They are not to fellowship with unbelievers, for their ways have nothing in common with Christ's ways. His appeal is that of a spiritual father to his children.

Paul's joy with the Corinthians

[7]

Paul reflects on the concern he had for them whilst in Macedonia, and how the news that Titus brought of their reformation turned that concern to great joy. Their reformation had been brought about because of his earlier letter, and he is able to rejoice that his boasting to Titus concerning them, and his confidence in them, is now validated.

The collection for the Christians at Jerusalem

[8-9]

Paul praises the Macedonian churches for their generosity in giving, and encourages the church at Corinth to emulate them. Nevertheless, he advises them that their giving should be with a willing heart and not such that it would prove a burden to them. Paul commends the integrity of Titus and others who are being sent to them for the purpose of collecting the church's offerings.

However, Paul recognises his writing to them concerning giving is hardly necessary, but he desires that their collection should be made before he arrives so as not to appear to be by coercion, should some Macedonians come with him. They are reminded that being generous in their giving results in generosity from God, particularly when giving is from the heart and not grudgingly, for *God loves a cheerful giver* and His grace will abound toward them.

Paul's defence of his apostolic authority and the area of his mission

[10]

There are those that oppose Paul [vs 2, 10, 12] so here he seeks to vindicate himself. He asserts his spiritual authority in preaching and in his punishment of offenders, emphasising his relationship with Christ and authority through Him. He refuses to behave like the false teachers amongst them who judge themselves by comparison with one another, but measures himself according to his own rules that focus on glorifying God.

Paul forced into foolish boasting

[11-12]

Paul apologises for what he is about to write, for he has a great love for them and is fearful they may be drawn away from the simplicity of the gospel by false teachers. He then boasts of his own ministry, comparing himself to other apostles, and emphasises how he was supported by the church in Macedonia whilst bringing the gospel to them at Corinth. Paul mentions the deceitful nature of false teachers, then boasts of all his troubles and afflictions in support of himself as a true apostle.

Paul relates his own glorious conversion and how he suffers an infliction, his 'thorn in the flesh', which in answer to pleas in prayer was told by Christ "*My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*" In this he even takes pleasure in his sufferings, as they bring glory to God and vindicate his position as an apostle. He now tells of his intention to visit them again, expresses his love for them, and tells them of his apprehension that he might still find unrepentant sinners in their midst.

Final warnings

[13]

Reminding them that his next visit will be his third, Paul warns them he will not be weak in dealing with sinners, and pleads with them to examine themselves so that they might be true to their faith.

He concludes with a final exhortation of Christian love and his prayer of Grace.

Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

There is, not surprisingly, some disagreement over the dating and circumstance of Paul's letter to the Galatian churches. One very plausible suggestion is circa 50 A.D., when Paul had returned from his first missionary journey to find a growing problem concerning the preaching of the gospel by people from Judea. They taught that Gentile converts had to accept Jewish law and submit to the covenant sign of circumcision if they were to be saved. This opposed the true gospel that justification is by faith and not works; the problem had to be resolved. Consequently, Paul went to Jerusalem, taking Barnabas and Titus with him, to confront the Christian leaders there [Acts 15]. This was a successful meeting in that there was an acceptance of Paul's mission to the Gentiles, and they should not be required to follow Jewish law. Paul then wrote this letter to the churches in Antioch Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe.

The gospel received by special revelation

[1]

Following a brief introduction, Paul expresses surprise that the Galatians were already paying heed to the teaching of another gospel. As confirmation that he preaches the only true gospel, Paul reminds them of how he was converted by Christ himself from persecutor to missionary, and how he subsequently received no teaching from man concerning the gospel.

Paul's teaching sanctioned by the apostles at Jerusalem

[2]

Paul adds weight to his statement of only receiving the gospel by divine revelation by telling of his recent visit to Jerusalem. It had been fourteen years since his first visit following his conversion, this time taking Barnabas and Titus with him. He received no opposition to his teaching and Titus, a Greek, was not pressed to be circumcised. The elders at Jerusalem accepted that Paul's mission is to the Gentiles, and offered him and his companions the right hand of friendship, requesting they always remember the poor saints in Jerusalem. (We know from Acts 15:20 they also asked that Gentiles should *abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.*)

Paul further substantiates his gospel of freedom and faith by recalling his public rebuke of Peter at Antioch. Peter had stopped communing with Gentiles in fear of criticism from visiting Jews.

He then concludes this portion of his letter by stating that justification is by faith, for if it was by the law, then Christ's death by crucifixion would have been in vain.

Slavery under the law

[3-4]

Paul now expands on his doctrine of justification by faith by first speaking against justification by the law. He begins by questioning the foolishness of having first received the Spirit of God through faith, they should then think their continuing salvation should be by obedience to the law. He refers to Abraham as their example, as he had been declared righteous through faith before the law was given some four hundred and thirty years later. There can be no hope of salvation through the law since none can keep it, hence all are condemned by it. Hope then is in Christ Jesus who bore our sin. The purpose of the law was to prepare the way for Christ, as through His sacrifice we are no longer slaves to the law and all become adopted children of God, both Jews and Gentiles, through faith alone.

Paul implores the Galatians not to forsake the freedom of the gospel by reverting to obedience to the law. He uses the situation of Ishmael and Isaac as an illustration, in that it was Isaac who was born of the promise to Abraham and Sarah, and it was he who inherited God's promises to Abraham.

Freedom in Christ

[5-6]

Stand fast in the liberty in Christ is Paul's plea to the Galatians. There is a choice to be made between the law and grace. Choosing the way of the law is to deny the gospel in that Christ becomes of no effect to them. The gospel brings liberty, but not liberty to do as one wishes. True liberty manifests itself in love by walking in the Spirit. However, the flesh and the Spirit are contrary to one another, demonstrated by the listed works of the flesh and fruits of the Spirit. Those 'crucified' in Christ have crucified the flesh and live and walk in the Spirit. In this we must watch over one another, not considering ourselves to be better than another, and to do good to all men as the opportunity presents itself, especially to fellow Christians.

Paul makes a final appeal to the Galatians to choose the cross over circumcision, that is, faith over the law, which is the heart of the gospel. Peace and mercy will come to all who walk according to the true gospel.

Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians

Ephesians did not address any particular problem in the church, but was written to give Paul's readers a deeper understanding of God's eternal purpose and grace by means of a revealed mystery, and of the high standards God has for the church. Considered to be intended as a circular letter, it was written from his house arrest in Rome around 60 A.D.

God's purpose in Christ

[1-3]

Spiritual blessings in Christ; A prayer

[1]

Following a brief greeting, Paul speaks of God's blessings in Christ: that he chose us, adopted us as children, brought us redemption and the forgiveness of sins, and has made known the mystery of his will, that in the fullness of time we will receive our inheritance, having the gift of his Spirit in our lives. All this is given *unto the praise of his glory*.

Paul tells of how he always gives thanks for them, mentioning them in his prayers that they may know the hope of God's calling, understand the riches of their inheritance, know the power of God in their lives, and the power that resurrected Christ and made him Lord over all things.

Salvation of individuals by grace; One in Christ

[2]

God's purpose is fulfilled by first reconciling individuals to himself. We were dead in sin and lived according to the ways of the evil one, but God's love and grace gives us a new life in Christ. We are saved through faith to do the good works God called us to do.

Secondly, individuals are reconciled to one another, the barriers between Jews and Gentiles having been broken down through Christ's death. We have peace in Christ and with one another now we are all one in Christ, having access to God through one Spirit.

The 'mystery' revealed; A second prayer

[3]

The mystery Paul spoke briefly of earlier, given to him by Christ and not previously known by man, is that the Gentiles will be fellow heirs, along with the Jews, all of the same body and partakers of God's promise in Christ.

Paul's second prayer is that his readers be strengthened by the Holy Spirit in them, and being rooted and grounded in love, be able to comprehend the depth of Christ's love and be filled with all the fullness of God.

God's purpose manifest in the Christian's daily life

[4-6]

Towards maturity in the Spirit

[4]

Paul calls the church to maintain the unity that the Spirit brings to the church. The differing gifts of the Spirit are to develop maturity in the saints, preparing them for ministry and for building up the whole body of the church in love. The old way of life, when they were alienated from God, is put aside for a new life in Christ. The evil things of the devil, such as all manner of lasciviousness, greed, dishonesty and anger, are replaced by a new nature that is the renewal of the mind by the Spirit, manifest in holiness, love and forgiveness.

Renewal of personal life; Relationships; The armour of God

[5-6]

Do not be deceived by false teaching, for those who live in any of the ways of the old self will not have inheritance in the kingdom of God. Walk as children of light in all goodness, righteousness and truth, having no fellowship with the disobedient, but rather reprove them by the example of your own lives. Constantly give praise to God, thanking him for all things, and submitting yourselves to one another in fear of him.

The relationship between husbands and wives is to reflect that of Christ and his church. Children must honour their parents and parents must nurture their children in the ways of the Lord. Servants should serve knowing that Christ came to serve, and masters should remember they have a Master in heaven that is no respecter of persons.

Finally, we are to be strong in the Lord as our real enemy is not flesh and blood but the influence of the evil one. It is a spiritual conflict in which we must use all the armour that God provides, which includes truth, righteousness, faith and the word of God, all of which is underpinned with prayer.

Paul concludes his letter with words of peace, love and grace.

Paul's Epistle to the Philippians

Paul's letter to the Philippians was written while he was under house arrest in Rome, probably around 61 A.D. The Philippians were a constant support to Paul since his planting of the church in Philippi during his second missionary journey. Since learning of his imprisonment, they had sent Epaphroditus to him with aid and to provide any help he could. However, Epaphroditus had become very ill and so Paul felt it best he should return to Philippi. This gave him the opportunity to write to his beloved saints there.

Thanksgiving and prayer for the Philippians; Paul's personal circumstances

[1]

Paul expresses his joy in their steadfast fellowship in the gospel, how they are constantly in his thoughts, and how he prays that their love, faith and the fruits of their work will continue to grow.

He explains how his circumstance - his house arrest - has led to furtherance of the gospel amongst the Romans, with the consequence that there is a greater boldness in Christians preaching the word. Nevertheless, there are some who preach with less than honourable motives, but Paul's joy is that, for whatever reason, the gospel is being preached by many. At this time he doesn't know whether he will be released or martyred, but he is able to say *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain!*. Paul longs to be with Christ, but knows in life he can further the gospel and would love to be able to visit them again. In any event, he calls for them to be of one spirit in faith and not to fear their adversaries.

Imitating Christ's humility; Timothy and Epaphroditus

[2]

In his call for unity, Paul encourages them to be humble, expressing Christ's humility as their ultimate example. In this they are to be a light amongst the crooked and perverse nation around them.

Paul tells them he will be sending Timothy when there is further news, and highly commends him. He also tells of the need to send Epaphroditus back to them following a serious illness he had while he was with him.

Warning against Judaisers

[3]

Paul reminds them to beware of Judaisers who preach the need for circumcision, telling how he was once zealous as a Jew and in the consideration of righteousness by the law, thought blameless. He tells of his transformation in which righteousness is not of his own achievements but by faith in Christ, and of his ambitions as a Christian. He calls them to be

like minded, looking forward to the glorious resurrection at Christ's second coming.

Final exhortations, thanks and salutations

[4]

Paul appeals to his readers to rejoice in the Lord, be prayerful in all things, and for their thoughts to be always on all things virtuous and praiseworthy.

The Philippians generosity and support of Paul has followed him since they first knew him, and surpassed that of any other church. Paul rejoices in their support, yet reminds them of his attitude to material things, having dependency on God who will also supply all their needs *according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus*.

Paul ends his letter with the usual salutations, and here is able to include the new converts of Caesar's household.

Paul's Epistle to the Colossians

During Paul's three year ministry in Ephesus, Epaphras had been converted and took the gospel to Colosse. However, this new church came under attack from heretical teaching which seemed to emanate mainly from Judaism and gnosticism. Paul's purpose of writing this letter was to refute these heresies by emphasising the complete adequacy of Christ in contrast to the inadequacy of human philosophy. It was written while under house arrest in Rome in 60 A.D., perhaps a little after his letter to the Ephesians.

Greetings, thanksgiving and prayer; The supremacy of Christ

[1]

Paul greets the church and gives thanks to God for their faith, love and hope that is the result of Epaphras having taken the gospel to them. He prays constantly that they might continue to grow in their faith, bearing fruit and increasing in knowledge, exhorting them to give thanks to the Father for His redemptive work in them through the blood of Christ.

Paul expresses the supremacy of Christ as the first-born before all creation, the head of the body, the church, through whom all things are reconciled to the Father, now including the saints at Colosse. Having been reconciled, they need to continue in the faith, grounded and settled, not moving away from the hope of the gospel of which Paul became a minister, empowered to reveal the 'mystery' hidden until the present times, that all nations can share in the riches and glory of redemption through Christ Jesus.

Warnings against heresies

[2]

Knowing the adverse influences around them, Paul expresses his concern for their spiritual welfare, telling them he is with them in spirit and urging them to be steadfast in their faith. They are told to beware of the philosophies and deceit that are of this world and not of Christ, in whom is the fullness of God. Paul reminds them that their old selves have been buried with Christ through baptism and raised again, all their sins having been forgiven, to be as one with Christ whose death and resurrection defeated the hold of sin over them. Paul now warns them against some specific heresies to which they are exposed that relate to Judaism and gnosticism, questioning how, if they have become as one with Christ, they could now be subject to the doctrines of men.

The way of life in Christ

[3-4:1]

Paul teaches them the way they ought to live, setting their minds on things above and not on things of this world. They must no longer have anything to do with corrupt passions, covetousness, anger, shameful speech and dishonesty. Rather, they are to have hearts of compassion, kindness, humility and, above all, love. All that they do should be done in peace, being steeped in God's word and always giving thanks and praise to Him. Paul specifically mentions here the relationships between husbands and wives, children and parents, and servants and masters.

Encouragement and final greetings

[4:2-18]

In these closing words, Paul encourages them to continue in prayer and witnessing, and sends greetings from numerous brothers, including Onesimus, who is the subject of his letter to Philemon, and Luke. He also requests this letter be exchanged with one sent to Laodicea, then ends with a personal greeting.

Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians

This is one of Paul's earliest letters to the churches. If Galatians was the first (which is much debated) then this would have been his second. Paul was only at Thessalonica for a short time before having to leave because of persecution orchestrated by some Jews. Even so, there had been many converts. From Thessalonica Paul went on to Berea, then Athens and then to Corinth. Timothy had been sent to Thessalonica from Athens then later rejoined Paul in Corinth, bringing news of the Thessalonian church which prompted this first letter to them, written around 51 or 52 A.D. Although the content is various, the subject of eschatology (doctrine of last things, or, end times) seems to be uppermost in Paul's mind, with each of the first three chapters ending with a reference to Christ's second coming, and chapter four giving it specific consideration. Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians also deals with this subject, with the consequence that these letters to the Thessalonians are often referred to as the eschatological letters.

Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians

[1]

Paul's greeting comes from himself, Silas and Timothy, his companions at the time. He gives thanks and commends them for their faith, love and hope which, despite the persecution around them, continues to grow and has become known throughout Macedonia and Greece. They are an example to all believers in the region in how they turned away from idols to God and now wait for His Son from heaven.

The manner of Paul's ministry to the Thessalonians

[2]

Seemingly in defence of his ministry to them, Paul tells of how they came to Thessalonica despite experiencing previous persecutions in Macedonia, bringing the gospel boldly, but with plain speaking and without seeking glory from anyone. They delivered the gospel with love and without being a burden to them, being blameless in their behaviour, and teaching them as a father to his children that they might come to know the ways of God. All the believers at Thessalonica can testify to this. Paul and his companions are now able to give thanks for their acceptance of the gospel as the true word of God, having become like the churches in Judea, suffering persecution for their faith. But their time at Thessalonica had been cut short and Paul now longs to come to see them again, having already been hindered twice. His hope and joy would be for them to be in the presence of Christ in His coming.

Further thanksgiving and prayer

[3]

Timothy had been sent to Thessalonica because Paul was concerned their faith might have suffered as a result of the persecution there. However, he returned with good news and the message that they longed to see Paul and his companions again. Paul gives thanks to God and prays they will increase and abound in love, establishing hearts prepared for the Lord's second coming.

Living for God; Concerning the departed and Christ's second coming

[4-5:11]

Paul now exhorts them to continue to walk in faith and to aim to please God. He particularly mentions abstinence from fornication (which dishonours the body), both personally and in relation to another man's wife, for *the Lord is the avenger concerning all these*. Their brotherly love should increase more and more, they should work to support themselves and they should conduct themselves in a manner that witnesses to their faith.

Probably in response to concerns for loved ones who died before Christ's second coming (for which the expectation at the time was that it would be soon), Paul makes it clear that believers, living or departed, will all be gathered to be with the Lord forever. In this they can take comfort, but they will not know when that day will come, for it will be *as a thief in the night*. In the meantime, they are to continue in their Christian walk, in faith, love and hope of salvation, comforting and edifying one another.

Closing exhortations, prayer and greetings

[5:12-28]

Paul's closing remarks provide a summary list of Christian attributes they should display, including respect for masters, concern for one another, to do good to all men, rejoice and pray continuously, and to always give thanks to God. They are to be receptive to inspired teaching, but with discernment.

Paul closes with a request for prayer and a charge to ensure this epistle is read to all the brethren.

Paul's Second Epistle to the Thessalonians

Judging by the content of this letter, there doesn't seem to have been much change to the situation at Thessalonica. However, it does appear there was a fraudulent letter circulating [2:2] that caused a misunderstanding concerning Christ's second coming. Consequently, about one third of this letter is devoted to this subject. It is generally considered to have followed Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians some months later, around 51 or 52 A.D.

Greetings and thanksgiving

[1]

Paul sends greetings from himself, Silas and Timothy, and gives thanks to God for their growing faith and love in the face of continuing persecutions and tribulations they are having to endure. Those around them who have not accepted the gospel will not share in the glory of the Lord's second coming. Paul's prayer for the church is that God will count them worthy, and that the name of Jesus Christ might be glorified in them and they in Him.

The man of lawlessness

[2]

Paul tells them not to be troubled by things they are told or by a counterfeit letter they had received, and reminds them of his teaching whilst he was with them. There would be an apostasy before the man of lawlessness (the son of perdition, the antichrist) is revealed who will exalt himself as God, occupying the temple and deceiving many with all power, signs and wonders. Then, when the Lord comes again, He will cause him to be destroyed and all those who believed him will be punished. Paul calls on them to stand firm in their faith and hold to the truth that they will be partakers in the glory which is their hope through grace.

Not to keep company with sinners

[3]

After requesting the Thessalonians' support in prayer, Paul instructs them not to keep company with any among them that are disorderly or do not keep God's word, with the intent they will then be ashamed. Yet they are not to be treated as enemies, but admonished as brothers.

Paul concludes his letter in his usual manner, but makes a point of saying it is in his own hand, presumably to counter the fraudulent letter referred to earlier.

Paul's First Epistle to Timothy

It is apparent from Paul's pastoral letters, this, his first letter to Timothy, and his letter to Titus, that Paul was released from his imprisonment in Rome, apparently acquitted of the charges against him. During this time of freedom he commissioned Titus to remain at Crete (see Paul's letter to Titus) and Timothy to remain at Ephesus. Paul then moved on to Philippi and was later arrested, imprisoned and tried again, this time to be convicted and executed. This first letter to Timothy was written while Paul still had his freedom.

The problem at Ephesus

[1]

Paul greets Timothy as his 'child in faith' who was left in charge of the church at Ephesus while Paul went to Macedonia. Timothy's purpose for remaining there was to correct the false teaching of some, particularly with regard to the law of which they had insufficient understanding. The law was not made for righteous man but for sinners, according to the teaching of the gospel. This gospel Paul received by grace from Christ, despite his earlier persecution of Christians. Timothy is charged with this role for which he will need to be strong and true to the faith.

Public worship: Prayer and advice to women

[2]

Paul now gives some general advice concerning administration of the church. Emphasis is placed on the need for prayer at all times and for all people, for God wants everyone to be saved. His guidance concerning women is that they should dress modestly and should not interrupt during teaching, nor usurp authority over man, referring to creation and the fall for scriptural support.

Church leaders

[3]

There are two categories given for church leaders: Overseers (bishops) and deacons. Paul gives the qualities required for those aspiring to be leaders in the church: Bishops must be blameless in all aspects of Christian teaching, including at home, be mature in faith and have the respect of others. Deacons must similarly be blameless, showing they are ready for service in the church by holding in all conscience to the truth in the gospel.

Dealing with asceticism

[4]

There is a heresy growing that is gnosticism, of which asceticism is an essential part, claiming all things physical to be evil. Paul mentions two aspects of this heresy, forbidding to marry and abstaining from meats, both of which are sanctified by the word of God and by prayer. Timothy is to counter these heresies, which are ungodly and foolish, by reminding the brethren of the truth in God's word and by being an example to all believers in conversation, in love, in spirit, in faith and in purity. Until Paul returns, Timothy is to focus his life on reading and teaching, which is central to his own salvation as well as to those he pastors.

Dealing with different groups in the church

[5]

A brief mention is made of the approach Timothy should take when having to rebuke older and younger men and women: Older men as a father, younger men as a brother, older women as a mother, and younger women as a sister and with all purity.

Paul then gives detailed instructions on the proper treatment of widows in the church. Widows are to be treated with honour and respect, due to them if they had shown all the good characteristics of Christian motherhood. But they have to be over sixty, as younger widows might stray from a goodly character. In any event, it is the duty of family to care for widows before they become the responsibility of the church.

Next Paul turns to elders, beginning with the need to support those who have served well in the church. However, if an accusation is received against an elder, it must be supported by two or three witnesses, and if guilty he must be rebuked as an example before the whole church.

Timothy is charged to follow these instructions given him, to deal impartially with people and not to ordain anyone rashly.

It is also suggested he should take a little wine for his own health's sake.

Slaves, the rich, and a final appeal

[6]

Paul now speaks of the correct attitude a slave should have towards his master, witnessing to the gospel. This Timothy should teach and exhort, as any opposing teaching is not of Christ and will only create problems.

A warning is given against the desire to be rich, for that desire will become a snare leading men away from a righteous path. Paul charges Timothy to rise above these things and live a godly life to which he has been called. Those who are rich

should not trust in their riches, but in God, doing the good their riches allow them to do.

Paul ends with a final plea from the heart to his adopted son he loves: *O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called Grace be with thee.*

Paul's Second Epistle to Timothy

Paul is now back in prison, not under house arrest as during his first detention in Rome, but in a cold dungeon where even his friends took a time to find him. This is the last letter Paul wrote. His mixed emotions of confidence in his salvation, his desperation to see Timothy again, and his concern for the welfare of the church can all be found in his words.

Greetings and encouragement

[1]

Paul demonstrates his great affection for Timothy in his greeting by referring to him as his 'dearly beloved child.' He gives thanks to God for Timothy's continued faith and expresses his great desire to see him again. He encourages him to be strong in the Spirit of power and love, and not to be ashamed of the gospel, given by grace, which is the way to eternal life. Paul reminds Timothy that many of his own followers in Asia had turned away from him, then offers a prayer for the house of Onesiphorus who had supported him and shown kindness to him.

Advice for the pastor

[2]

Timothy is encouraged to continue to be strong in his faith and to teach others so they too will be able to teach. As Christ suffered and died, all his servants must suffer and (their old selves) die for him, for if we suffer, we will also reign with him. Paul exhorts Timothy to study to show himself approved of God, and to shun false teachings that will lead to more ungodliness, citing the examples of Hymenaeus and Philetus. He is urged to purge himself of anything less than pure, in order that he might be a vessel worthy for the use of his Master. To accomplish this he must flee youthful lusts, follow the path of faith, love and peace, and avoid being sidetracked by foolish and unlearned questions designed to produce strife. An atmosphere of gentility and meekness, not strife, is the way to bring people to God.

Troubles ahead

[3]

Paul warns Timothy there will be troubles to come from a growing number of people who will appear to be godly, but will love the pleasures of this life more than God. Numerous sinful faults are listed, but the deceit is that they will influence people who will learn from them, and who will never come to the knowledge of the truth in God's word. These deceivers, as well as afflictions and persecutions, will continue and grow. Hence the importance of scripture is emphasised as the rock on which the Christian life is built, for *All Scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for*

correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfected, thoroughly furnished to every good work.

Preach and evangelise; final requests and greetings

[4]

Timothy is exhorted to continue to preach and evangelise, for false teachers will grow in numbers with people hearing what they want to hear, rather than what they should hear.

Paul knows the end is not far away for him. Many have deserted him, but Luke is still with him at the prison. A plea is made for Timothy to come to see him, to bring Paul's cloak, some books and parchments and to bring Mark with him. People Timothy should be aware of are mentioned. Those who send their greetings and those whom Paul asks Timothy to greet are named. Paul's letter then ends with the words *May the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.*

Paul's Epistle to Titus

Following Paul's release from his first imprisonment in Rome, he took Titus to Crete to establish churches there. He later left Titus to continue with the work they had both started. It seems that Paul became aware that Zenas and Apollos were going on a journey that took them through Crete and took the opportunity to write this letter to Titus.

Elders and false teachers

[1]

Following his greeting, Paul reminds Titus of why he left him in Crete: to set in order things that are lacking and to ordain elders in every city. An elder must be blameless in his Christian walk and knowledgeable in scripture, in order to teach and to oppose those that argue doctrine. For there are many that argue and teach false things, particularly Jews, who must be prevented from corrupting the truth to be found in scripture.

Christian witnessing: seniors and servants

[2]

In his preaching, Titus is to exhort the senior generation to be an example to the younger, so that the young married women are encouraged to run their homes with love, and both husbands and wives to live their lives according to the faith. Titus too must be exemplary so that none can criticise him. He is to exhort servants to be obedient to their masters, for they are in a unique position to be an example of good Christian living, and a witness that salvation through Christ is available to all in preparation for His second coming.

Christian witnessing for all: Closing requests and salutations

[3]

Christians should be law-abiding citizens, speaking evil of no one, being meek and gentle towards all people, remembering that we were all once sinners and have now been saved, not by our own deeds but by grace, and are the beneficiaries of the gift of the Holy Spirit who indwells all believers. Titus is urged to avoid foolish and unprofitable debate from those who believe but do not recognise the truth in Scripture, and who choose to be contentious. If such people do not accept the truth after two attempts to correct them, then they are to be rejected.

In his closing words, Paul asks Titus to come to him at Nicopolis when either Artemas or Tychicus arrive at Crete, and to bring two brothers, Zenas and Apollos, with him.

Paul's letter ends with his usual salutations and blessing of grace.

Paul's Epistle to Philemon

This short letter to Philemon was written at the same time as Paul's letter to the church at Colosse and delivered by the same hands, Onesimus and Tychicus. Onesimus was a slave to Philemon, but had stolen from him and run away, a crime punishable by death under Roman law. He had met Paul while Paul was under house arrest and became a Christian. Now willing to return to his master, Paul writes this personal appeal for Philemon to accept Onesimus as a Christian brother.

Following his opening greeting in verses 1 to 3, Paul makes a tactful appeal for Onesimus, constructed in a way prescribed by ancient Greek and Roman teachers: To build a rapport, persuade the mind, then move the emotions.

Verses 4 to 10

Paul builds a rapport by offering thanksgiving and prayer, specifically for Philemon, before introducing his appeal as one Christian to another, based on Christian love.

Verses 11 to 19

Written to persuade the mind. Paul suggests that Onesimus' conversion to a Christian now makes him more profitable to both of them, saying that he would even like to keep Onesimus to help him in his ministry. He then suggests that the whole episode may have been through divine providence so that he might have Onesimus back, not as a slave, but as a dear brother in the Lord. Paul makes it very personal by saying that if Philemon considers Paul a partner in faith, he should also consider Onesimus in the same way. An offer is made to pay any money owed by Onesimus, reminding Philemon he owes Paul his (spiritual) life.

Verses 20 and 21

Written to move the emotions, Paul is effectively saying that what is being requested is the least Philemon should do if God's grace toward him is not to be in vain.

Paul finishes his letter requesting preparation be made in the hope that he might come to visit, and then with greetings from the same persons mentioned in his letter to the Colossians.

The Epistle to the Hebrews

The writer of Hebrews is unknown, but he would certainly have been known to his readers, and would have had the respect and authority necessary for his letter to be influential. Its content tells us that his readers were Jewish converts who were either being tempted back to Judaism, or were perhaps attempting to Judaize the gospel. The date of writing is only known to precede 70 A.D. as there is no mention of the temple destruction, and references to the temple are in the present tense. The theme of his letter is the absolute supremacy of Christ, and is beautifully structured to present that message to a Hebrew audience. The letter can be subdivided as follows:

Christ is greater than the angels [1-2]

Christ is superior to Moses [3]

Rest for God's people [4]

Christ is superior to the Aaronic priesthood [5-7]

The superior sacrificial work of Christ, our High Priest [8-10]

Perseverance in faith [11-12]

Concluding exhortations [13]

Christ is greater than the Angels

[1-2]

Christ is the firstborn of the Father who calls him his son, who laid the foundations of the earth and now sits on the right hand of God. All the angels worship him, but angels are servants, *ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.*

If words spoken by angels were steadfast, how can we neglect the message of salvation spoken of by the Son of God. Jesus came to us, having been made a little lower than the angels, to suffer death and then be crowned with glory and honour, in order that death and sin be conquered, and that man might be sanctified and brought back to God.

Christ is superior to Moses

[3]

Consider Jesus, our High Priest, who was faithful to the Father who appointed him. Moses was also faithful, but Moses was a servant in God's house, whereas Christ is the son in God's house.

Beware of being provoked into turning away from God, remembering the people in Moses' time who failed to inherit the Promised Land because of their unbelief; we must not fail through such unbelief.

Rest for God's people

[4]

Christians too have a 'rest' to enter. We must be careful we do not fail through unbelief as the Hebrews did in Moses' time. The 'rest' the Hebrews entered in the Promised Land was a physical rest. Using Psalm 95, the writer concludes that God made a promise of rest to those who believed, and that David, in this Psalm, still spoke of the possibility of entering a rest if people would hear God's voice, which must therefore be a spiritual rest which still remains to this day. The way to this rest is provided by coming to God through Jesus Christ, our great High Priest.

Christ is superior to the Aaronic priesthood

[5-7]

Aaron was high priest in the time of Moses, and all priests were of the house of Aaron. Jesus is more than our High Priest, he is a Priest-King in the order of Melchizedek [Ps 110:4] whom Abraham met [Gen 14:18-20]. The writer now warns his readers against falling away, saying they should by now be mature in their faith, but are still as babes.

The writer urges them to move on from basic principles of faith towards perfection, warning them that they would not be able to recover from apostasy. They should therefore not be spiritually lethargic, but have faith and patience as Abraham did, for Christians have the certainty of God's oath and promise given to Abraham, of which they are now heirs.

Melchizedek, who had no ancestors or descendants, was a king and *priest of the most high God*, superior to Abraham who gave him tithes, and therefore superior to the Levitical priesthood who were descendants of Abraham. Righteousness could not be obtained under the law administered by the priesthood, hence a priesthood that offered a means of righteousness must be superior.

The priesthood of Christ is superior in that it was not given through the law but by a solemn oath, saying that Christ is of the order of Melchizedek, a perpetual priest with no succession, whereas there were many priests in the Levitical priesthood. Furthermore, Christ does not have to first offer sacrifices for his own sins before the people's, since he is holy and without blemish. Consequently, he is able to offer righteousness through his own one-time sacrifice.

The superior sacrificial work of Christ, our High Priest

[8-10]

Our High Priest has much more to offer because the earthly priesthood was only a shadow of things to come. Had the original covenant been flawless, there would have been no need for the second, foretold through Jeremiah and quoted here in verses 9 to 12.

We are reminded of the nature of the earthly tabernacle, and that it could not make the high priest, who enters the holiest place to perform a service, perfect. The pattern of that service, which first required a sacrifice, was imposed until the coming of Christ whose tabernacle is more perfect, not made by hands, but is in heaven. Christ has entered this heavenly tabernacle by a more superior sacrifice. In previous days, there could be no covenant or forgiveness of sins without sacrifice, but now, the new covenant has been made with the sacrifice of Christ, who is our path to forgiveness of sins.

In those days, there had to be many sacrifices for a person's sins. Now, Christ has offered himself as a one-time perfect sacrifice and the old sacrifices are no longer needed. Readers are warned to hold fast to the profession of their faith in Christ without wavering, and not to reject God's grace given through him.

Perseverance in faith

[11-12]

Examples of faith are shown in Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Rahab. Others mentioned in passing are Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and, collectively, the prophets. These men and women of faith could not receive the fulfilment of promises before the coming of Christ.

With so many examples of faith, we should be encouraged to persevere, for we now have Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. The sufferings we experience are to be considered as fatherly chastisements from God, which will benefit and encourage us. But we should take heed that we do not fall from grace as Esau did. The writer warns his readers not to reject Jesus, for we have not been brought to the physical mountain as the Israelites had, but to the spiritual mountain that is Sion, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the church of Christ, who will be our judge. Since we are called to partake in an eternal kingdom, we should have the grace to serve God in an acceptable manner.

Concluding exhortations

[13]

Practical guidance is given for Christian living, with a reminder that Christ suffered for us and we should continuously offer our sacrifice of praise and witness.

The letter closes with prayer, request for prayer, messages and greetings.

The Epistle of James

It is generally accepted that the author of this epistle was James, the brother of Jesus. James didn't become a convert until after Jesus' resurrection, but then went on to become a leader of the Jerusalem church. The recipients are specifically identified in verse 1 as *the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad*, quite likely those who left Jerusalem during the persecution following Stephen's martyrdom. The date of writing isn't known for sure, theories ranging from pre-50 to early 60's A.D., just before James' martyrdom.

This is a very practical letter, focusing entirely on disciplines of Christian life.

Temptation

[1]

Following a brief introduction identifying his intended recipients, James opens his letter speaking of temptations being a joy in that they are a test to believers. Testing is beneficial to spiritual growth, bringing Christians to spiritual maturity. The wisdom of this can, if necessary, be sought in faithful prayer. Testing exalts people of low degree, yet will bring the rich into recognition of their true standing before God. Those that endure temptation *shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him*. However, temptations are not from God but from one's own thoughts, which can lead to sin and spiritual death if not dealt with. God's word is our source of understanding in this, but reading in itself is insufficient. We must practise what the word teaches us, otherwise we deceive ourselves, and our own words will expose us.

Favouritism forbidden; Faith and deeds

[2]

Showing favouritism to the rich, and hence demeaning the poor, is condemned as an act contrary to God who has chosen the poor, and whose name is often blasphemed by the rich. Being a respecter of persons is transgressing the law that says *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. The law is to be obeyed in its entirety, for if one point of the law is transgressed, then the (whole) law is transgressed.

Paul says it is faith that saves us, not deeds. James qualifies this by emphasising that deeds are the consequence of faith. Believing in God is in itself not enough, demons also believe and tremble, so evidence of faith in the form of deeds is an essential element of Christian life. We know that the body without the Spirit is dead, so is faith without deeds also dead.

Beware, the tongue

[3]

A warning is given of how easy it is to offend with the tongue. In the same way that a bit in a horse's mouth can turn its whole body, and the relatively small rudder will turn a ship as directed, so can the tongue, a small member of our body, change the direction of our destiny. Ill-chosen words can defile the body and set it on a course of spiritual destruction. Out of the same mouth that praises God can come curses on people who are made in the likeness of God; *these things ought not to be*. Those who profess to be Christians ought especially to control their tongues, for if there are unchristian thoughts or attitudes, then the tongue will expose them. Good conversation can reflect wisdom and knowledge from above, has attributes such as gentility and mercy, and is without hypocrisy. Good seeds are sown by a good tongue.

Against worldliness

[4]

In this chapter James speaks of things of our spirit that are of this world and are at enmity with God. We should remember the scripture tells us *The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy*, and draw close to God, then He will draw close to us. We are not to speak evil of one another, not judge one another, not boast of what we might do, but seek the Lord's will.

The corrupt rich; Patience and brotherly care

[5]

James condemns the worldly attitude of the rich and their oppression of the poor, warning them of the miseries that will come upon them.

Christians are encouraged to be patient in waiting on the Lord, citing the prophets as examples of those who suffered affliction yet had patience. We are warned concerning oaths, and encouraged to pray for one another, particularly for the sick and for sinners. Finally, James exhorts us to bring a brother who is a sinner back to truth, for this act will save a soul from spiritual death, and hide a multitude of sins.

The First Epistle of Peter

The disciple Peter's first letter was written for him by the more educated Sivanus (Silas) early in the 60's A.D. It was written to brethren in areas of Asia Minor who would soon be suffering persecution in the same way the Christians were in Rome, to give them encouragement to stand firm and to live out their lives as Christians in a hostile world. These two themes are interwoven throughout Peter's letter.

Faith and a living hope

[1]

Peter praises God for His grace in selecting, through foreknowledge, those to be born again and saved through faith, having *a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*, who are able to rejoice at sufferings, for sufferings refine His people in readiness for the salvation of their souls. These things were foretold by the prophets and fulfilled in Christ. Christians are exhorted to live a holy life, having been redeemed from their former ways by the sacrifice of Christ, and to live according to the gospel, which is the everlasting truth.

A spiritual house; Submission to authority

[2]

God's word is the food for spiritual growth, enabling Christians to be the living stones that form the spiritual house, which is the church. In this house, God's people are a holy priesthood offering up spiritual sacrifices in praise and worship to the one who called them out of darkness into His marvellous light.

Christians should bear witness by submission to authority, not being seen to be unlawful and thereby inviting criticism from unbelievers. Servants, or slaves, likewise should submit to their masters, even if they are treated unjustly, as this was the example of Christ who suffered for all without just cause.

Wives and husbands; The duty of all Christians

[3]

Wives should submit to their husbands. In doing so, husbands who sin will be won over by their pure conversation and their meek and quiet spirit. Husbands are to honour their wives as equal heirs to God's grace, lest their prayers be hindered.

All Christians are called to love one another, displaying the fruits that love brings, and to seek peace. This will favour the eyes of the Lord and open His ears to prayer. Expect to suffer for your faith and be prepared to answer those who are puzzled concerning the hope that is in you. Take care your sufferings are for doing good rather than evil, for Christ once suffered

for the sins of all that He might bring them closer to God, having been put to death in the flesh, then brought to life by the Spirit and is now at the right hand of God.

Living and suffering for Christ

[4]

Christians should arm themselves with the mind of Christ, considering a life according to the flesh to be in the past, regardless of peer pressure, for all must give account to God as judge. Conduct yourselves with a view that we are in the end times, being prayerful, loving, hospitable and serving with the proper use of God's gifts. You should not be surprised that you have to suffer, but rejoice that you are worthy to be *partakers of Christ's sufferings*. Nevertheless, beware that your suffering is for Christ's sake and not for your own wrong doings.

Conduct of elders and young men; Final greetings

[5]

Elders are to teach and oversee willingly and with humility. Younger brethren are to submit themselves to their elders, treat one another as equals and with humility, and guard against the influence of the devil. Remain steadfast in the faith, knowing your brethren throughout the world also suffer the same afflictions.

Final greetings and a blessing are then given.

The Second Epistle of Peter

Peter's second and last letter was written towards the end of his life, probably between 65 and 68 A.D., and presumably to the same audience as his first letter. On this occasion he did not have Silas to help him, and the written Greek (the commentators say) is more basic. The purpose was to encourage spiritual growth, warn against false teachers, and to urge his readers to remain strong in their faith in readiness for the Lord's return.

Spiritual growth through the knowledge of God

[1]

Peter's opening greeting reminds us all that our Christian walk is possible only through our knowledge of God. Faith leads to virtue, and through knowledge is added temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly affection and love. Christians that lack these attributes are not able to grow spiritually. Peter considers it to be his duty to remind his brethren of these things, particularly now as he sees his time on earth coming to an end. He recalls his presence at Christ's transfiguration as a witness to the divine source of the gospel he has preached to them.

False teachers

[2]

Peter warns that there will be false teachers whose intent is financial gain from their religious teaching. In the days of Noah, when fallen angels and an ungodly world were destroyed by the flood, only Noah and his family were saved. Likewise, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed with only Lot and his daughters saved. These events demonstrate that God will deliver the godly out of temptation, and reserve the unjust for the day of judgement when they will be punished. Balaam is an example of one who chose the wages of unrighteousness when using his gifts, and was rebuked by means of a dumb ass. If false teachers, who once knew Christ and were delivered from sin, return to their old ways, then it would have been better for them never to have known righteousness, for appropriate judgement will befall them.

The certainty of Christ's return

[3]

Peter reminds us of the words of the prophets and the teaching of the apostles. They had spoken of false teachers and those who would scoff concerning the second coming of Christ. The day is not known, but the Lord's time is not as our time: *one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*, and He is long-suffering, *not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*. Peter finishes his letter urging all Christians to remain steadfast and to grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The First Epistle of John

Although the author is not named, it has been generally accepted it was John, the disciple Jesus loved, also the author of the letters 2 and 3 John. The overall purpose of this letter is given in 5:13 *that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God*. It is constructed around three tests of ‘the reality of the knowledge of God’: The test of obedience, the test of love and the test of belief. These three tests are grouped and repeated three times throughout the letter.

It is thought this letter was probably written sometime between 85 and 95 A.D.

Introduction

[1:1-4]

The apostle gives his testimony by relating his fellowship with Jesus, and hence with God, explaining the close physical relationship the apostles had with him.

The first application of the tests

[1:5-2:28]

Obedience

John declares God to be the light; none can have fellowship with Him who do not walk in the light and have not been cleansed from all unrighteousness by the blood of Christ. No man can say he has not sinned, but God is faithful and just to cleanse from all unrighteousness those who confess their sins, with Jesus Christ as the atoning sacrifice for all sins. We can be sure that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.

Love

This is a commandment of old, to love one another. Anyone who hates his brother is still walking in darkness. Warnings are given against love for the things of this world, that is, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Those that have love for this world do not have the love of the Father in them.

Belief

John warns against ‘antichrists’; In this context, those who deny that Jesus is the Christ and also deny the Father (These

were the Gnostics of the time who were leading some believers astray). His readers are urged to remain steadfast in the truth and in their confession of the One that promised everlasting life.

The second application of the tests

[2:29-4:6]

Obedience

It is one of God's expressions of love for us that those who believe in Jesus and are born again are called children of God. All children of God know of the certainty of Christ's second coming and turn away from sin. This is how believers know that Christ is in them and they are children of God, that they turn away from all sin.

Love

We know we have spiritual life when we love one another and have compassion for those in need. Love is most evident when it is displayed in actions rather than words, but it is our hearts that condemn us if true love is not in us.

Belief

Caution is to be exercised when listening to those who profess to have the Spirit in them. The Spirit of God is recognised by this simple truth: *every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God.* Hence, belief is in the incarnate Christ, not just in words but in public confession.

The third application

[4:7-5:12]

Obedience and Love

Love comes from God; God is love. God showed his love for us by sending His son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. So we also ought to love one another. The God who no one sees is seen in those who love, for God's spirit is in us, and his love is made complete in us. Perfect love drives out fear; the one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because God first loved us. *And this command have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.*

Belief

John speaks of faith in Christ (belief), introduced by combining the three elements of love, obedience and belief. The core of Christian belief, witnessed by the Spirit, is that God has given us eternal life through His son.

Concluding remarks

[5:13-21]

John ends his letter with an explanation of his primary purpose in writing: *that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God*. He encourages confidence in prayer, tells them that those born again cannot be touched by the Devil if they avoid sinning, then reminds them that Jesus is the Son of God who was sent by the Father, and through him we come to know God.

John concludes with the simple warning to *guard yourselves from idols*.

The Second Epistle of John

This very short letter, penned by John late in his life, was written to a specific woman believer (some say the woman represents the church in general) urging her to be discerning when providing hospitality to travelling evangelists. The problem was that there were Gnostic teachers who relied on the same practice as true evangelists, that is, they would be taken into a believer's home then given provisions when they left. Apart from the usual exhortations, briefly given, the key verses are 10 and 11: *If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.*

The Third Epistle of John

John's third letter is another personal one, this time to one Gaius of whom nothing else is known. It would seem that a church leader by the name of Diotrephes rejected John's letters and authority. He would not receive brethren sent by John, and even excommunicated those that did receive them. John wrote this letter to commend Gaius for supporting the brethren sent by him and, presumably indirectly, to send a warning to Diotrephes.

The Epistle of Jude

It is generally accepted that Jude, in calling himself the ‘brother of James’, was a half brother to Jesus. The recipients of the letter is not known, nor is the date of writing, although there are suggestions it was either around 65 or 80 A.D.

Verses 3 and 4 tell us that Jude had originally intended to write about *the salvation we share*, but then felt compelled to warn his readers about some godless men who had infiltrated the church. These were false teachers who taught that God’s grace gave them licence to sin, since their sins would no longer be held against them. They even considered their sins would lead to further evidence of God’s grace.

Jude cites historical examples of God’s judgement against such apostates: The unbelieving Israelites during the exodus, the angels who fell prior to the flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah judged for their sexual immorality and perversion. He then describes the deplorable words and character of these godless men and the fate that awaits them.

Jude reminds his readers that these things were foretold by Jesus. He urges them to continue to grow in faith, showing mercy to others and to save souls whenever they are able.

The letter ends at verses 24 and 25 with an expression of praise to God:

Now to Him being able to keep you without stumbling, and to set you before His glory without blemish, with unspeakable joy;

to the only wise God, our Savior, be glory and majesty and might and authority, even now and forever. Amen.

The Major Prophets

Isaiah

Isaiah's name means "Yahweh is Salvation"

Isaiah, the son of Amoz (not Amos), was one of the most prominent citizens of Jerusalem, having access to both the royal and priestly leadership of the nation of Judah. Called to be a prophet in the year of Uzziah's death, he continued to minister through the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah of Judah, around 740 to 700 B.C. For about 20 years, he spoke to both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. After Israel's fall to the Assyrians in 722 B.C., Isaiah continued to prophesy to Judah and became a prime figure during Hezekiah's reformation.

Isaiah's overall message is that salvation is of the Lord, in both the physical and spiritual sense.

The book of judgement

[1-39]

Messages of rebuke and promise

[1-5]

Judah is God's people, but they are riddled with physical and spiritual sin; corruption and sin have become a way of life to them. Sacrifices and prayers are now meaningless to the extent that God has come to hate them, but continues to encourage repentance. There will come a time of restoration when all will again look to God. When the Day of the Lord comes there will be a judgement of Jerusalem and Judah. Disaster will come upon the wicked, but it will be well with the righteous and that day will be beautiful and glorious for the remnant in Zion. Isaiah sings a song of a vineyard that was nurtured with love, but only yielded sour grapes. The owner of the vineyard is God, and the vineyard is Israel. This song is followed by woes against all the wrongs committed by the 'sour grapes' who will eventually go into exile.

Isaiah's calling

[6]

Isaiah is having a vision of the throne of God when he is called to be His prophet to the people, to encourage them to return to God and to warn them of the consequences of not doing so.

Prophecies occasioned by the Syrian and Israelite threat against Judah

[7-12]

King Ahaz of Judah defies God and is attacked by Syria and Israel. Isaiah is sent to Ahaz with a message from God not to fear the threat against Judah by the alliance. Ahaz is invited to ask for anything he would consider to be a sign to show the message really is from God, but he refuses. Nevertheless, he is given a sign which is the prophecy: *Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel*. However, instead of relying on God, Ahaz turns to Assyria. Isaiah's baby sons' names form part of the prophecy that tells of Assyria dealing with the north, then advancing into Judah until Jerusalem herself is surrounded. The prophecy now sweeps us into the future and the birth of the Messiah, then switches back to the present with Israel condemned for her arrogance and rebellion. Assyria is used as God's instrument of judgement and the invasion begins in the north. Many Israelites are taken captive, but Assyria herself will in time be judged. Yet the prophecy tells of a remnant who will return to their land. We read of the future again and the coming King from David's family who will establish the perfect kingdom on a God-centred earth, with a remnant of Israel restored a second time. In that day there will be songs of joy for the people's deliverance.

Judgement on the nations

[13-23]

God warns the surrounding nations that judgement is also in store for them. Included in this prophecy of judgement is Babylon (here we read an account of Satan's fall), Assyria, Philistia, Maob, Aram, Cush (Ethiopia), Egypt, Edom and Tyre. Jerusalem's destruction is also prophesied.

Final judgement and victory

[24-27]

The time will come when the whole world and everyone in it will be judged, but there will be deliverance and blessing for the faithful. Praise will be given for the Lord's sovereign care; Israel's enemies will have been punished and her remnant restored.

Six woes

[28-33]

Six woes are now pronounced, five on the unfaithful in Israel and one on Assyria: To Samaria (Ephraim) and to Judah's leaders who mislead the people; To Jerusalem who will be besieged, then reprieved; To those who foolishly rely on a foreign

alliance; To an obstinate nation; To those who turn to Egypt instead of God; and to Assyria. Yet all the while there is hope for those trusting in God.

More prophecies of judgement and promise

[34-35]

Destruction will come to all the nations, avenging God's people to whom blessings will be restored.

An historical transition from the Assyrian threat to the Babylonian exile

[36-39]

We now return to contemporary events. Sennacherib, the king of Assyria besieges Jerusalem, but Isaiah encourages Hezekiah not to surrender. The angel of the Lord intervenes and saves Jerusalem, killing 185,000 soldiers in one night. Sennacherib withdraws the next day and returns to Nineva. Hezekiah becomes ill and is near to death when he calls out to God in prayer, to which God responds by extending his life by fifteen years. When Merodachbaladan, son of Baladan, king of Babylon, hears that Hezekiah had been sick and recovered, he sends gifts celebrating his recovery. In an act of pride, Hezekiah foolishly shows the messengers all the treasures in his palace and storehouses. Isaiah is told of this, then in response predicts the Jews' exile to Babylon.

The book of comfort

[40-66]

The second part of Isaiah's book, chapters 40 to 66, begins *Comfort, comfort my people* and is sometimes referred to as 'The book of comfort'.

The deliverance and restoration of Israel

[40-48]

Isaiah has a message of comfort for the people now in captivity in Babylon: God will come as promised; He is the sovereign Lord who never stops caring for His people; He is forthright in dealing with the nations, but always loving and caring to His own, and they should not be afraid; He will bring salvation to all mankind through Israel.

A song of praise is now offered. However, Israel has not been the servant God intended her to be and she is blind and deaf to the signs and messages given her. Despite this, and the punishment the people must suffer, He will always be with them, is eager to forgive all their sins and will restore them. Cyrus will be God's instrument to begin this process. He will defeat

Babylon and will give Israel their first opportunity to return to Jerusalem, then the restoration of the remnant will follow in two phases.

God's servant and the redemption of God's people

[49-55]

We are now given a prophecy of Jesus Christ, called as the servant of the Lord, rejected by the Jews and to be a light to the Gentiles. Despite this rejection, God's people will be preserved and gathered again, though God declares Israel's problems were solely due to her own iniquities. (At this point we are given some details of Jesus' suffering under interrogation by the Romans [50:6]) The remnant of Israel are to take comfort from their distant history, for they have the glorious prospect of being restored, and the cup of the Lord's wrath they had tasted will be tasted by their enemies. A prophecy is given of Jesus' suffering, his rejection, crucifixion and resurrection to glory as intercessor for us all. Then God's people (who, here, we are told are His bride) will be able to forget the shame of their past when, with compassion, He brings about the future glory of Zion. All people of all nations will be invited to call on the Lord, while He is still near and can still be found, to share in His everlasting covenant. None will be excluded from the love of God and salvation if they follow and obey Him.

The remaining chapters speak of Israel's shame and her glory, but the first few verses of chapter 56, vs 1 to 8, seem best attached to the end of chapter 55:

God's salvation will be available to all who hold fast to the covenant, even those considered by others to be least worthy.

The wicked of Israel are condemned

[56:9 to 57:21]

God's condemnation is specific and disturbing, yet interlaced with love and compassion. The nation has embraced pagan gods and their rituals, including child sacrifice; their observance of fasting is a mockery to God; they are riddled with sin and their very lifestyle is sinful.

Irreverent fasting

[58]

Israel's fasting has become superficial and has lost sight of its true purpose. If they return to fasting as it should be, and take a delight in the Sabbath, then once again they will find joy in the Lord.

Israel's shame; Israel's glory

[59-62]

Israel's iniquities are great and separate her from God. Only confession can pave the way for redemption. Redemption will be available to all through the Redeemer in time to come, when there will be a new and everlasting covenant.

We now have a vision of Israel's glory and rich splendour when God delivers her from her lowly state. The *year of the Lord's favour*, (quoted by Jesus when handed a scroll of Isaiah to read in the synagogue) and the day of vengeance will come, then Israel will be called 'priests of the Lord.'

A vision of the avenger and Isaiah's prayer

[63-64]

A vision of Christ as the Avenger is described, followed by a prayer offered by Isaiah, recalling God's love for Israel through the ages and crying out for their divine deliverance.

God's response

[65-66]

Finally, we have God's response: Judgement and salvation and a new heaven and a new earth, not just for Israel, but for all nations.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah's name means "Jehovah throws", in the sense of laying down a foundation, or "Jehovah establishes, appoints, or sends."

Jeremiah served as both a priest and a prophet. He prophesied primarily to Jews in Judah during the reigns of Judah's last kings, beginning around 627 B.C., during the reign of the last good king Josiah (640-609 B.C.) until Jerusalem's fall in the reign of Zedekiah (598-586 B.C.) and some time after, to around 570 B.C.

His ministry was immediately preceded by that of Zephaniah. He was a contemporary of Habakkuk with Ezekiel being a late contemporary.

Jeremiah is often called the 'weeping prophet' because of his situation and two references to weeping, one his own and the other in the Septuagint introduction to Lamentations.

Jeremiah's overall theme is judgement upon Judah, yet there will be future restoration in a messianic kingdom.

The book of Jeremiah mixes prophecy and historical narrative, but not all in chronological order. The following is in the order presented in the Bible.

Jeremiah's calling

[1]

God speaks to Jeremiah, calling him to service and telling him the nature and difficulty of His message to the people, but at the same time giving him encouragement.

Israel's sin and its consequences

[2-6]

Jeremiah's first message to Israel is to remind them of their original state, and how they have turned to sin and forsaken God. He tells Israel of their greatest sin, unfaithfulness to God, who is a Husband to them, through their consistent worship of pagan gods, referred to as adultery, and appeals to them to return to their God. Jeremiah focuses his message on Judah, warning them that the consequence of ignoring his plea will be an invasion from the north, first of the land of Judah, then the city of Jerusalem.

An attempt is made to find an example of truth and justice among the people, but none is found and punishment is inevitable. All warnings have been ignored. Consequently, His people will be left to suffer the invading army with Jerusalem coming under siege.

Messages given at the temple gate

[7-10]

Jeremiah stands at the temple gate and warns the people concerning their hypocritical worship, telling them it amounts to a false religion and is worthless. He points to the destruction of Shiloh (where the tabernacle was first established) as an example of how the temple is not necessarily safe just because it's the temple. Furthermore, God declares their places of pagan worship will become known as the 'Valley of Slaughter', because their dead will be buried there until the place becomes filled with their bones.

The religious leaders are no better, having deceived the people by their own sin and driven by self interest.

Jeremiah laments over the sin of his people and the coming judgement, then admonishes them for their love of idols. He warns of the coming destruction, but also prays for God's wrath to come.

A broken covenant

[11-13]

Jeremiah is told to remind Judah of their covenant with God, given at Sinai and still existing, a covenant they have persistently broken with their sin and idol worship. God tells Jeremiah not to pray for Judah now as He will not listen to such prayers.

God lets Jeremiah know that the men of Anathoth, Jeremiah's home town, plot to kill him because of his prophecies, but tells him that He will punish them and not even a remnant will survive. Jeremiah questions God, asking why the wicked always seem to prosper. God tells him that this is the way of the world, and there is worse to come, but He will punish the wicked and restore the repentant.

Jeremiah is given instructions concerning a linen belt, but doesn't realise he is enacting a parable. God explains to Jeremiah that the belt put around his waist is like Israel bound to Himself, but like the belt that rots, Israel will become completely useless because she has not listened to Him.

God tells Jeremiah to give the people another prophecy concerning the fate of Judah and Jerusalem. Jeremiah pleads with the people to pay attention, not to be arrogant, and to give glory to God before He brings judgement. If they do not listen, he will weep bitterly because they will be taken captive.

A drought

[14-15]

There is a severe drought and the people plead to God, having been duped by false prophets into believing God will listen

to them and save them from it. Jeremiah's prayers for the people are to no avail and he is filled with self pity, but God encourages him and renews his confidence as His spokesman.

Disaster and comfort

[16-17:18]

God forbids Jeremiah to marry because of the disaster that will come upon the land. He is also forbidden to take part in any mourning for the dead or to associate with the people, for His blessing, love and pity has been withdrawn from them. Even so, God still speaks of a time of restoration.

The Sabbath

[17:19-27]

Judah's sin is great, but God still offers an alternative to judgement if they will only return to Him. Jeremiah is to remind them of their failure to keep the Sabbath, symptomatic of their disobedience, and tells them how they might be restored as God's people if they would only again hallow the Sabbath.

Lessons from the potter's house

[18-19]

Jeremiah is sent by God to a potter's house where the potter is seen discarding an unsatisfactory pot, then proceeding to make a new one to his satisfaction. This, God explains, is how Israel is to Him; He will discard and re-mould as He sees fit, according to their faithlessness.

The people again plot against Jeremiah, but this time Jeremiah prays for their punishment.

God now instructs the prophet to purchase a clay jug from the potter and take some elders to the Valley of Ben Hinnom. There he is to prophesy concerning the disaster to come upon Judah, then smash the clay jug as a symbol of Judah's destruction.

Jeremiah and Pashur

[20:1-6]

When Jeremiah returns to the temple and continues to prophesy, the priest Pashur has him put in the stocks. The next day, when Pashur releases Jeremiah, he foretells Pashur and his family's exile and death in Babylon.

Jeremiah complains to God

[20:7-18]

Jeremiah's situation is causing him considerable distress, so much so that he complains to God. He was chosen to give God's message to Judah, but everyone is against him to the extent that he doesn't want to give the message, yet the need burns within him. His distress is so great that he wishes he had never been born. No reaction from God is given.

Condemnation of kings, prophets and people

[21-24]

It is now close to the time of Judah's exile. Zedekiah turns to Jeremiah hoping for some word that God will save them, but there are no words of comfort forthcoming, only a prophecy of Zedekiah's defeat.

Jeremiah also prophesies judgement against three evil kings of Judah: Jehoahaz (Shallum), Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin. (These three preceded Zedekiah).

The leaders are rebuked for their misrule, but the return of a remnant is spoken of, not just for this present time, but also for the distant future when Jesus will sit on David's throne.

False prophets are now singled out and their judgement foretold. These are prophets who speak prophecies and oracles as if they were sent by God, but were not.

God shows Jeremiah two baskets of figs. One contains very good figs, representing the good exiled from Judah whom God will restore after the exile. The other contains poor figs, too poor to be eaten, representing those who will not return from the exile.

The Babylonian Exile

[25-29]

Jeremiah reminds the people he has been prophesying to them for twenty three years, but they have not listened. Consequently, God is going to use Nebuchadnezzar, who He refers to as His servant, to conquer Judah and take the people into captivity in Babylon for seventy years.

God now tells Jeremiah to take His cup of wrath to the nations, to be a symbol of God's judgement on them. Jeremiah is to announce that divine Judgement. Judah is to be judged first, then a list of other nations to be judged is given, beginning with Egypt and ending with Babylon (Sheshack is the place referred to, but is a Hebrew cryptogram for Babylon).

Now, early in Jehoiakim's reign, when God had instructed Jeremiah to preach in the temple courtyard, not omitting a single word He had given him, the people turn against Jeremiah. They seize him with the intent to kill him, saying his

prophecy is against the city and warrants his execution. Some speak in support of Jeremiah, pointing out that Micah had prophesied against Jerusalem in the time of king Hezekiah, but he had not been put to death. Ahikam, a court official, also supports Jeremiah and so he is spared.

The Babylonians have now taken some of Judah captive and placed Zedekiah on the throne as a vassal king. Jeremiah is instructed by God to walk the streets wearing a wooden yoke as a symbol of submission, and to tell the people not to resist the Babylonians. He is also to warn them against listening to prophets that tell them otherwise, as these prophets are not from God.

One of the false prophets is Hananiah whose prophecy directly contradicts Jeremiah's. Hananiah even takes the wooden yoke from Jeremiah and breaks it in front of the people in symbolic support of his own prophecy. Jeremiah later tells Hananiah that he will die that very year for his false prophecies, which he did.

Jeremiah sends a letter to the first exiles in Babylon, encouraging them to settle and live normal lives. They are to build houses, eat of the produce of the land, have sons and daughters, give their sons and daughters in marriage and to multiply, not decrease. They are not to listen to false prophets, as God is going to restore them to Judah in seventy years.

Shemaiah then sends a letter from Babylon to Zephaniah opposing Jeremiah, but Zephaniah shows Jeremiah the letter. Jeremiah sends another message to the exiles telling them that because Zephaniah is a false prophet God will punish him, and he will not have any descendants surviving to see the restoration.

Promises of restoration

[30-33]

At this point, God tells Jeremiah to write all the words He has given him.

Then we have the statement: *For, lo, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.*

God's message of restoration follows with His declaration of a new covenant [31:31-34] (quoted in its entirety in Hebrews 8:8-12), in which God states *I was an husband unto them.*

When Jerusalem is under siege and Jeremiah is confined to the courtyard in the royal palace, he receives a word from God that he must buy a field from his cousin when asked to. He is to draw up the title deeds, properly witnessed and sealed, and place it in an earthen vessel for safe keeping. This Jeremiah does, but is puzzled by it and so asks God in prayer why this had to be done. God tells Jeremiah that the deed represents the assurance that He will restore His people to the land, when they will again prosper and buy and sell property.

God then speaks further to Jeremiah, reasserting His promise of restoration, both for these times and for the time when

Jesus will sit on David's throne.

A warning to Zedekiah

[34]

Jeremiah warns Zedekiah that Jerusalem is soon to be taken and that it is his destiny to be taken captive. Perhaps hoping for a reprieve, Zedekiah orders that all slaves should be freed according to God's law. The order is obeyed, but only for a time, as those freed are soon brought back into slavery, evoking God's condemnation of their masters as law-breakers.

The Rechabites

[35]

Looking back in time to the earlier siege of Jerusalem, Jeremiah is told to summon the Rechabites to a temple side room to be given wine to drink. When offered the wine, the Rechabites refuse it, referring to a command of their forefather Jonadab to live as nomads, not to plant fields and not to drink wine. It was fear of invading armies, Chaldean and Syrian, that had brought them to Jerusalem. Here, their obedience to the command of their forefathers puts Judah to shame for their lack of obedience to God, and the Rechabites are rewarded with a promise of survival.

Jeremiah's sufferings and persecutions

[36-38]

Still looking back to Jehoiakim's reign, Jeremiah is told to write down everything God had spoken to him concerning Judah. Jeremiah dictates all the words to his scribe Baruch, who writes them on a scroll. The scroll is later first read to all the people, then the officials and finally to king Jehoiakim. However, after each section of the scroll is read to the king, he cuts it off and burns it. The king orders the arrest of Jeremiah and Baruch, but they are in hiding and cannot be found.

Jeremiah is told to produce another scroll, exactly as the first, then to give the king a word from God declaring his fate.

We now return to the reign of Zedekiah. Zedekiah had not taken any notice of Jeremiah's words, but now sends for him, asking him to intercede for him in prayer to God. At this time Jeremiah was free to come and go among the people, and the Babylonians had withdrawn from the city because the Egyptian army were marching to support Zedekiah. Jeremiah is instructed by God to tell Zedekiah that the Egyptian army will return home, after which the Babylonians will return and capture Jerusalem.

After the Babylonians had withdrawn, Jeremiah attempts to leave the city on business, but is accused of leaving to join the Babylonians and is thrown in prison. Zedekiah sends for Jeremiah and asks privately if there is any word from God, to which Jeremiah tells the king he will be handed over to the king of Babylon. Jeremiah is not sent back to the dungeon, but

is confined to the prison courtyard where he will have more freedom.

Hearing that Jeremiah was continuing to prophesy, some officials petition the king to have Jeremiah put to death because his words are discouraging the soldiers. Zedekiah does not oppose them and Jeremiah is thrown into a cistern where he is left to die. Later, Ebed-Melech, one of the king's officials, persuades the king it would be wrong to allow Jeremiah to die. He is rescued and returned to the prison courtyard.

Zedekiah again asks Jeremiah for a word from God. Jeremiah repeats the prophecy concerning the fall of Jerusalem and the need for Zedekiah not to resist capture. They agree their conversation is to be kept private, and Jeremiah is permitted to remain in the prison courtyard where he stays until the day Jerusalem is captured.

The fall of Jerusalem and its aftermath

[39-45]

The Babylonians return to lay siege to Jerusalem, and in the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign the city is taken. Zedekiah flees the city, but is captured and taken to Nebuchadnezzar, who slaughters his sons before his eyes and kills all the nobles of Judah. Zedekiah's eyes are then taken out, he is shackled and taken to Babylon.

Nebuzaradan is the commander of the imperial guard and knows of Jeremiah's prophecies and the reason for Judah's fate. He finds Jeremiah in chains and releases him, giving him freedom to go wherever he pleases, including the choice of going to Babylon under his care. Jeremiah chooses to go to stay with Gedaliah, whom Nebuchadnezzar had appointed governor over Judah, to be amongst the people left behind.

Gedaliah gives assurances to the Jews that they will be safe settling under Babylonian rule, and that they are to live and harvest as normal. Their harvesting is successful, producing an abundance of wine and summer fruit.

Gedaliah is told Baalis, the king of the Ammonites, is sending Ishmael to kill him, but he doesn't believe it and even entertains Ishmael and the ten men with him. While they are eating, Ishmael and the ten men get up and kill Gedaliah. They then kill all the Jews with him at Mizpah and all the Babylonian soldiers there. Fearing reprisals, the people prepare to flee to Egypt. In fear of their fate, Jeremiah is petitioned to speak to God so they might know what to do. They declare their willingness to obey God's command. However, when Jeremiah later tells them they are to stay in Judah and not to go to Egypt, they say it is a lie. They go to Egypt as far as Tahpanhes, taking Jeremiah and Baruch with them.

The Jews in Egypt turn to idolatry and ignore pleas from Jeremiah to repent and return to God, sealing their fate, which is that Nebuchadnezzar will overrun Egypt and the Jews will perish by the sword or famine. Only a tiny remnant of refugees will survive.

Jeremiah gives a message from God to his scribe, Baruch. If Baruch does not seek anything great for himself, then God

will ensure his safety for the rest of his life.

Jeremiah prophesies against the nations

[46-51]

Returning to an earlier time, Jeremiah prophesies against Egypt, followed by some words of comfort for Israel. He then prophesies against Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar and Hazor, Elam then Babylon.

The fall of Jerusalem repeated; Jehoiachin's later release.

[52]

Zedekiah rebels against Babylon and enters into an alliance with the king of Egypt, resulting in a siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. This lasts for eighteen months which causes a great famine in the city. The city is overcome and Zedekiah and his household try to escape, but are captured and taken prisoner. He is made to witness the killing of his sons then his eyes are gouged out. He is then put in chains and thrown in prison where he stays for the rest of his life. The city is later burned, including the temple. All the temple furniture is taken and the people taken captive in three waves over a period of several years.

When Nebuchadnezzar is succeeded by Evilmerodach, Jehoiachin, now about fifty five years old, is released from prison and made king above the lesser kings in Babylon, a position he holds until his death.

Lamentations

It is not certain who wrote Lamentations, but ancient Jewish and Christian tradition ascribe it to Jeremiah. He is named in the opening sentence of the Septuagint, which reads:

“And it happened, after Israel was taken captive and Jerusalem was laid waste, Jeremiah sat weeping and gave this lament over Jerusalem .

Thought to be written soon after Jerusalem's Fall (586 B.C.)

There are five laments recorded as poetry in five chapters. Each lament has 22 verses reflecting the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, except the third which has 66 verses, 3 x 22. The first four laments are acrostics with each of the twenty two verses, or triplets of twenty two in the third chapter, beginning with the successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

The first lament is over Jerusalem's misery and desolation. She was once a prosperous and vibrant city but is now laid waste and desolate.

The second lament reflects God's anger against His people, the destruction of Jerusalem and the scoffing by Israel's enemies.

The third speaks of Judah's affliction reflected in the words of an individual, his recognition of God's love and faithfulness, but a desire for God to avenge his enemies.

The fourth lament expresses a contrast between the city's former glory and the suffering of her people through God's judgement.

The final lament is an appeal to God not to forget Judah despite her sin and the consequences of it, and to restore her to her former glory, unless He has utterly rejected her and is angry beyond measure.

Ezekiel

Ezekiel's name means "God Strengthens".

Like Jeremiah and Zechariah, Ezekiel was also a priest.

Ezekiel was training to be a priest and was in his mid-twenties when, in 597 B.C., Jehoiachin surrendered Jerusalem to the Babylonian army. Ten thousand men were taken into exile, joining those who had previously been exiled during his father Jehoiakim's reign. Amongst the ten thousand was Ezekiel. Nearly five years later, at the age of thirty, God called him into service as a prophet.

Ezekiel prophesied to the Jews in captivity in Babylon from around 593 to 570 B.C., now referring to them as Israel. He was contemporary with Jeremiah and Daniel and, like Daniel, some of his prophecies had significant eschatological content.

Ezekiel's calling

[1-3]

Whilst among the exiles by the Chebar River, Ezekiel has a vision of the throne of God and is called to be a prophet to God's rebellious people. God refers to Ezekiel as 'son of man', a title He repeatedly uses. Ezekiel is taken in the Spirit to be among the exiles at Tel Abib where he stays for seven days, after which he is told by God he is to be a watchman for all Israel. He is to give them a warning of accountability for their brothers' sins, and is then confined to a house and made dumb until required to prophesy.

Israel's sin and the departure of God's glory from the temple

[4-12]

In Chapters 4 and 5, Ezekiel is required to enact the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. He is to make a representation of Jerusalem under siege, spend 390 days on his left side for Israel's sins and 40 days on his right side for Judah's sins, survive on a meagre ration of defiled grain and water, shave his head signifying his sharing of Jerusalem's disgrace, and burn his hair, tossing it away until only a remnant remains. These symbolic acts, witnessed by the people, are to be a vivid lesson to them.

This enacted prophecy is followed in chapters 6 and 7 by the prophecy in words, foretelling the doom and destruction of Jerusalem.

About a year later, related in chapters 8 to 11, Ezekiel is carried in a vision to Jerusalem and set beside the temple at the north gate of the inner court. What he is then shown is a fourfold view of sins: An image set up at the north gate of the

temple; the elders secretly practising animal worship, each having a shrine of his own idol; the women mourning a god Tammuz; and twenty five men turning their backs on God to worship the sun. The people think that God does not see all they are doing. They are of course wrong and judgement is administered before Ezekiel's eyes. He cries out to God, fearing all Israel will be slain, but he is told all those who grieve and lament over the detestable things done in Israel will be spared. Then Ezekiel again sees a vision of the throne of God, but now the glory of God departs from the temple. A judgement is then pronounced on the leaders of the people, and a promise is given concerning the return of the remnant of Israel.

The people are still not listening, so in chapter 12 we hear how Ezekiel is told to enact the final stage of the exile from Jerusalem. The enacting is not just of the exile in general, but focuses on the flight of Zedekiah. He gathers together the bare necessities for escape, and breaks through the mud brick wall at night. When the people ask Ezekiel what he was doing, he gives an explanation to them just as God had instructed him. They seem to think this will be a long way off in the future, but are told this exile is imminent.

A series of oracles explaining divine judgement

[13-24]

In chapter 13, false prophets who prophesy peace when there will be none are condemned, as are the prophetesses who make magic charms and ensnare the people.

In chapter 14, the idolaters are condemned. It would seem that they think the few righteous among them will be their saving, but God declares that even if Noah, Daniel or Job were here, they would only be able to save themselves.

A parable of the vine, an oft used symbol of Israel, is given in chapter 15. By now the vine has lost its ability to produce fruit and is useless for anything else.

In chapter 16 we have a lengthy allegory of Jerusalem as the unfaithful wife. First seen as a wayward foundling, when she is old enough she is married and love lavished on her. She becomes great and glorious but breaks her marriage covenant and prostitutes herself in the most despicable way with the foreign nations around her. Her husband has been forgotten and she will be punished. God will deal with Israel as she deserves, but in time He will remember the covenant of her youth. A new and everlasting covenant will be established and atonement made for all she has done, but she will remember and be ashamed.

In chapter 17, God gives Ezekiel a parable of two eagles to relate to the people, and then to give an explanation of it. The first eagle is Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who took king Jehoiachin captive. The seed he plants is the vassal king Zedekiah, but Zedekiah soon turns to the second eagle, Egypt, for help. That help doesn't materialise and the Babylonians return to destroy Jerusalem. (This prophecy comes true within three to four years.) But God will take a shoot from the top

of a cedar, the line of Judah's kings, which will take root and flourish.

It was a commonly held belief that a son bore the sins of his father. In chapter 18, God makes it plain that each is accountable for his own sins. If a man lives a righteous life, then he will live. If he has a son who leads a sinful life, then that son will die for his sins. But if a sinful man has a son who leads a righteous life, then this son will live, he is not held to account for the sins of his father. Furthermore, God wants everyone to live. If a sinful man repents and turns away from his sins, then he too will live.

In chapter 19, a lament is given concerning three kings of Judah. The first is Jehoahaz, who was captured and taken to Egypt by Pharaoh Necho; the second is Jehoiachin, who was king when Ezekiel was taken into captivity; and the third is a prediction of Zedekiah's rebellion and the fall of Jerusalem.

We come to chapter 20 and it is now August of 591 B.C. Some elders of Israel come to Ezekiel to enquire of the Lord, but God doesn't allow their enquiry and Ezekiel is told to judge them. He recalls Israel's rebellious history and God's judgement on them, then speaks of restoration. As we move into chapter 21, a prophecy is given of the coming judgement, with Nebuchadnezzar being God's instrument of that judgement, when Babylon will destroy both Jerusalem and Ammon.

Jerusalem is the specific object of scorn in chapter 22. The people are guilty in every imaginable and detestable way, involving every section of society. There is no one innocent to be found, so they will be consumed by God's fiery anger.

In chapter 23 we have a parable of two sisters: Oholah represents Samaria, capital of the northern kingdom, and Oholibah represents Jerusalem. Both sisters become common whores whose whoredom really started in Egypt. Their lust for their lovers (pagan gods) turns from Egypt to Assyria with unquenchable thirst, and their acts of whoredom seem to have no bounds. Oholibah is now outdoing her sister and lusting after Babylon. She will share in her sister's fate when she is put to shame and destroyed by her latest lover.

It is now January of 588 B.C., the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem. In chapter 24, Jerusalem is likened to a rusty cooking pot put on the fire. Its contents will be consumed, then the empty pot itself put to the fire.

Then, Ezekiel's wife, the delight of his eyes, dies. God gives Ezekiel instruction on how he is to mourn, which is how the people will mourn when the news of the loss of Jerusalem reaches them.

Oracles of judgement against foreign nations

[25-32]

These oracles form a division between Ezekiel's prophecies prior to and following the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.

The first four nations prophesied against are Israel's oldest enemies. Ammon, Moab and Edom who will be overrun by the people from the east, and Philistia whose hostility continues towards the Israelites until Nebuchadnezzar deports them.

Tyre and Sidon are next to be the subjects of Ezekiel's prophecies. Both are sea ports, the greater of the two being Tyre, and both are to fall to Nebuchadnezzar's army.

Chapters 29 to 32 are devoted to prophecies against Egypt. Some of these prophecies can be accurately dated and do not all occur chronologically. Together they depict the fall of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar. Words are spoken against a proud and arrogant Pharaoh. Egypt will be destroyed and laid waste for a long period of time, after which she will become a nation again, but will be weak and no longer have her former confidence. Her destruction is brought about by Nebuchadnezzar following a hard campaign against Tyre for which he seemed to get no reward. However, in his defeat of Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar gets his reward by taking Egypt's wealth.

Words of consolation for Israel

[33-39]

In chapter 33, Ezekiel's mission as watchman over Israel is reiterated.

The news that Jerusalem has fallen reaches the exiles in Babylon and the cause of it is explained by Ezekiel.

In chapter 34, the shepherds of Israel, the leaders, are condemned for their failure to shepherd the flock. God declares that He will be their shepherd and judge between the good and bad sheep. Here we look forward to the time when one from the line of David will rule over God's people, bringing peace and prosperity.

In chapter 35, there is another prophecy given against Edom, not just for her past, but for her intent to take advantage of Israel's defeat and take possession of the lands, both of Israel and Judah.

Then, in chapter 36, Ezekiel prophesies the restoration of Israel, cleansed of her sins and with a new heart.

Chapter 37 is where we read of the valley of dry bones, a vision shown to Ezekiel to represent the restoration of dead Israel. Then Ezekiel is given a practical representation of the two nations using two sticks, one for Israel and the other for Judah. They become one again by the joining of these two sticks. Again, the prophecy looks forward to the new everlasting covenant with one shepherd from the line of David.

The 'final battle' is depicted in chapters 38 and 39 as a prophecy against Gog. The symbolism is significant and relevant to near future events of our time, but requires study and interpretation which isn't within the remit of this summary. It is a prophecy of war waged against Israel by other nations led by Gog, in which God will intervene and save His people. The war will nevertheless be devastating. The weapons used will become a fuel, and the cleanup process will take many months to complete because of the manner in which the land has become contaminated. Then God's glory will be displayed among the nations in the restoration of Israel.

Israel's coming restoration

[40-48]

The remaining chapters of Ezekiel are concerned with the Millennium Kingdom. The date of Ezekiel's vision is given as the 25th year of their exile.

Chapters 40 to 42 give the interior and exterior details of the rebuilt temple. The detail is precise, but this is not the temple built when the Jews returned from exile. It is perhaps, then, the Millennium temple.

In chapter 43, Ezekiel describes the returning of God's glory to the temple. His vision is like the previous visions of God's glory experienced when He came to destroy the city and those by the Chebar River.

In chapter 44, the role of the priesthood is to be reinstated, and rules given concerning it.

Chapter 45 concerns the division of the land for the sanctuary, the city, and the prince, both for his government of the people and his worship of God. Further instructions for the prince and the people are given in Chapter 46.

In the first part of chapter 47, Ezekiel is given a vision of a new river of life flowing from the temple. Then the division of the land is given; first the boundaries then, in chapter 48, the division by tribe. Then the names of the new city gates are given. There will be three gates in each of the four city walls, each named after the tribes of Israel.

Finally, the new city is to be named: "The Lord is there."

Daniel

[Chapters 1, 2, 7-12]

Daniel's name means "God is my judge".

Like Ezekiel before him, Daniel was a captive in Babylon. Little is known of Daniel's background other than he was of royal birth and above average physically and mentally, which is the reason he and his friends were brought before the King Nebuchadnezzar and trained in the Chaldean language and sciences. Like Joseph, he was promoted to the highest position in the realm, all the time maintaining his spiritual life despite the heathen, and often hostile, environment.

Daniel's prophecies were written during the Exile, beginning in 605 B.C. when Babylon conquered Jerusalem, probably being completed around 530 B.C., shortly after the capture of Babylon by Cyrus in 539.

Although classed as a major prophet in the Bible, a good proportion of this book contains historic narrative, giving us the only account in the Bible covering the time in exile as well as, albeit by prophecy, some of the inter-testament period. These were covered in the Old Testament history section. Here we will just focus on Daniel's prophecies..

Daniel's training in Babylon

[1]

Daniel was amongst those taken captive when Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem. Along with three of his companions, Daniel was trained for service to the king. They grew in wisdom and understanding to such an extent that the king judged them to be ten times better in all matters of wisdom and understanding than all the magicians and astrologers in his realm.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream

[2]

Some three years after Daniel and his companions had been taken into captivity, and their training has been completed, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream that troubles him, yet he appears to forget its content. He calls on his wise men to tell him what the dream was and then to interpret it, threatening death if they did not, but great rewards if they did. They naturally said the demand was unreasonable, which angers the king and he orders their execution. As they are numbered amongst the wise, this puts Daniel and his companions in danger, so Daniel approaches the king to ask to be given time to divulge and interpret the dream. Following prayer, Daniel is shown the dream in the night and is able to relate it to the king the next day. It was a dream of an image with a head of fine gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron and feet of part iron and part clay. Then a great stone smashed the image and filled the whole earth. Daniel gives its

interpretation which concerns successive kingdoms, or empires, represented in order from the head to the feet. The first, the head of fine gold, is Nebuchadnezzar's. This is followed by four others, the fourth of which, represented by the feet, will be a divided kingdom, although strong in part (the iron). The stone that destroys the image is God's everlasting kingdom. Daniel rightly gives credit to God for the interpretation. Nebuchadnezzar rewards him with gifts and promotes him to rule over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon. At Daniel's request, his three companions are made his deputies.

'Four beasts' and 'the ram and he-goat.'

[7-8]

Belshazzar has succeeded Nebuchadnezzar as king of Babylon. It is during the first year of Belshazzar's reign that Daniel has a vision of four beasts. The first is like a lion with eagle's wings, the second like a bear, the third like a leopard with four wings and four heads, and the fourth, so terrible that Daniel is unable to give a name to it, has iron teeth and ten horns. An account is given of the visions which represent four empires succeeding one another, followed by the annihilation of the dominion of the fourth beast, which is then replaced by the kingdom of God. Daniel is greatly troubled by his visions and their interpretation, which he keeps to himself until his book is written.

Two years later Daniel has another vision, this time concerning a ram and a goat. First the ram appears with two horns having much power, but is struck down by the goat which initially has one horn, but the one horn is then replaced by four. These four are then replaced by a single horn which has great power and prevails against many countries and stands up against the prince of host (a reference to God), with the sanctuary eventually being defiled and remaining in this condition for 2300 days. The angel Gabriel is sent to Daniel to give him an understanding of this vision and awakes him from a sleep to interpret it.

The ram with its two horns signifies the kings of Media and Persia, the goat the king of Greece, and the great horn, Alexander the Great. The four horns are four kingdoms which rise up out of the Grecian empire on the death of Alexander, and the little horn is Antiochus Epiphanes, a fierce king who is described by his craft, cunning, power and might, and by the destruction he will inflict. He is a type of the antichrist who will eventually be crushed by God.

Daniel is assured the 2300 days is true and he is instructed not to repeat the vision to any person other than his own people because of the length of time before its manifestation. The vision and its interpretation so affects Daniel that he is ill for a few days. When he recovers and relates the vision to some of his own people, none can understand it.

Daniel's vision of the seventy weeks

[9]

Many years later Babylon is invaded by Darius the Mede. During the first year of Darius' reign, Daniel reads Jeremiah [25:12 and 29:10] and realises the seventy years of Israel's exile are nearly complete and prays concerning it. During his lengthy prayer, the angel Gabriel comes and gives Daniel a prophecy involving seventy weeks, which are seventy weeks of 360-day-years representing Israel's destiny. Verse 24 gives the scope of the prophecy, 70 weeks.

Verse 25 gives the first 69 weeks and is the period between Artaxerxes' decree to rebuild Jerusalem in 445 B.C. [Neh 2:5-8], and Jesus' triumphal entry in Jerusalem in 32 A.D. [Mat 21:1-9].

Verse 26 speaks of a period of unknown length between the 69th and 70th weeks during which the Messiah is executed, Jerusalem is destroyed and the Diaspora follows. (Today's times are in this gap between the 69th and 70th week).

Verse 27 speaks of the 70th week during which there will be a covenant enforced, but it will be interrupted half way through when sacrifices and oblations will cease and an abomination will desolate the Holy Place [Mat 24:15]. Then the great tribulation will begin [Mat 24:21], which precedes the Messiah's second coming at the end of the 70th week.

The 'silent' years

[10-11:35]

Daniel has a vision of a man told to us in chapter 10. It is the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia, and Daniel has been fasting for three weeks. The man has come to give Daniel a revelation recorded in the next chapter, but first tells of the spiritual battle between those protecting God's people and those determined to destroy them.

The revelation foretells history during the inter-testament period and tells of the struggle for power between the kings north and south of Judea, with Judea stuck in the middle. (A full account is given in the section "The 'Silent' Years"), The purpose of this prophecy is the climax in 11:31 when armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. They will then set up the abomination that causes desolation.

The 'abomination that causes desolation' is a pivotal event in eschatology, the end times, and is referred to by Jesus [Matt 24:15].

The end times

[11:36-12:13]

The previous verses in chapter 11 deal with prophecy that is already history. From verse 36, although still referring to Antiochus Epiphanes, the prophecy leaps forward to the 'end times' and the coming Antichrist. He will exalt himself above

all, including God, and will prosper until the indignation (the great tribulation). He will have no regard for anything, whether it be of God or not. A new god will be honoured with those supporting him receiving their reward, including land.

At the time of the end, the Antichrist will come under attack from the 'king of the south' and then the 'king of the north'. The king of the north continues south through Israel defeating all in his path with only Edom, Moab and Ammon (modern day Jordan) not being taken. However, when he heads back northward into Israel, *he shall come to his end, and none shall help him.*

There is now a time of great trouble, such as has never been seen before, from which only the people whose name is found written in the 'book of life' will be saved.

There will be a resurrection of many, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those that are wise will turn many to righteousness.

Daniel is instructed to close and seal his book until knowledge has been increased. He questions how long it will be to the end of these things. He is told it will be three and a half years, but Daniel doesn't understand all that is being said to him. He now asks *what shall be the end of these things.* Daniel is told *from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away and the abomination that maketh desolation is set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days.* He is then told *Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days.*

The book finishes with the words *But go thy way until the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.*

Note: The reader is unlikely to get a full understanding of the 'end times' from this précis, or from the full text of Daniel alone. It will require a study to achieve this, either from a Bible Study group or personal study using commentaries.

The Minor Prophets

Hosea

Hosea's name means "Salvation"

Hosea prophesied in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam II, the son of Joash, king of Israel [1:1]. He began to prophesy at the end of Jeroboam II's reign, around 755 B.C., and continued until 710 B.C., just a few years after the Assyrian captivity in 722 B.C.

The first part of this book, chapters 1 to 3, speak of Hosea's marriage to an adulterous wife, which is an illustration of Israel's relationship with God and His unfailing love for them as depicted in the remaining chapters

Hosea's wife and children

[1-3]

God instructs Hosea to marry a woman who will be unfaithful. He marries Gomer who is to bear three children whose names will speak of God's message to his people: A son Jezreel, meaning 'God scatters', because God will avenge the slaughter of a royal family by Jehu; a daughter Lo-ruhamah, meaning 'not pitied', because God will no longer show love to Israel, though He will to Judah when He prevents Jerusalem from being invaded; and another son Lo-ammi, meaning 'not my people', for God will disown Israel. Yet there is a promise of restoration for Israel when they will be called '*sons of the living God*'.

As Hosea's wife plays the whore, so does Israel in her worship of Baal. But God's unfailing love will bring Israel back, just as Hosea will forgive and accept Gomer back as his wife.

In time, God tells Hosea to show love for his wife once more despite her adulteries, just as He loves the Israelites. Gomer has become a slave and Hosea has to buy her back. He puts her on probation, just as Israel will be before the last days when she will seek God's blessings.

The charge against Israel and judgement to come

[4-5]

Nothing more is said of Hosea's marriage, which has served its purpose as an illustration of God's relationship with Israel.

Hosea charges Israel with her sins. The priests have a large share of the guilt and will receive their share of the judgement. Spiritual adultery leads to physical adultery by all Israel, but it is the men who are held accountable for the sins of the women. Judah is warned not to follow Israel's example, a warning in which Ephraim is spoken of as representative of all Israel.

God announces that judgement will come to Israel. Even their attempt to buy the protection of Assyria will not save them. Judah too is warned, since she is indulging in the sins that are to bring down Israel.

Repentance is short-lived; Punishment will follow

[6-10]

Israel shows a change of heart as a result of God's charges, but there is no depth to her repentance and the catalogue of charges continues. Israel is destined to reap the whirlwind of judgement now she has forgotten her Maker.

Hosea may have been considered a fool for his prophecies, but he has been a watchmen over Israel. God is now going to reject Israel because she hasn't obeyed Him, and she will become subservient to Assyria just as she was to Egypt. She will become wanderers among the nations. It was a time when they should have turned to God, sowing righteousness in order to reap the fruit of His unfailing love, but they planted wickedness, reaped evil, and ate the fruit of deception. The image of a calf at Bethel, which had become their only king, is now to be destroyed.

God's faithful love

[11-14]

God expresses his faithful love for Israel, a love that cannot cease despite Israel's history. They seemed to have forgotten the times of Jacob and Moses, and think that affluence somehow covers up their sin. So God cannot help but express His anger again before encouraging a prayer for repentance, and a promise of restoration.

Joel

Joel's name means "Yahweh is God"

Little is known about Joel or the time at which he prophesied, suggestions for which vary enormously, but the message is not affected by the time of writing. He is considered to be one of the earliest prophets of Judah.

The purpose of Joel's prophecy is to turn the nation back to God in preparation of the great day of the Lord.

Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32 at Pentecost in Acts 2:16, 17-21.

The plague of locusts

[1]

There is a disastrous plague of locusts in the land which Joel treats as a sign that the Day of the Lord is near, and that it will come like destruction from the Almighty. He calls for a holy fast and for the elders to lead in a day of prayer.

The Day of the Lord announced

[2]

The locusts are likened to an advancing army causing fear and anguish in every nation. God is at the head of this army and the question is asked, 'Who can endure it?'

There is a call to repentance to their gracious and compassionate God. He will come to their aid and drive the 'northern army' far from them, restoring things to their former glory.

In that day, God's Spirit will be poured out on all people, and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

The coming Day of the Lord

[3]

In that day, God will judge the nations for scattering and abusing His people Israel. Blessings will return to Israel and His kingdom will endure for ever.

Amos

/Amos' name means "Burden" or "Burden bearer"

Amos was from Takoa in the southern kingdom, about six miles south of Bethlehem, where he worked as a shepherd then later as a fruit-picker. He was unique amongst the writing prophets in that he was neither a trained prophet nor a priest. Although living in Judah, he was sent north where he prophesied to Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II, from around 763 to 755 B.C., after Jonah and before Hosea.

Amos prophesies to Israel and its surrounding nations with the message that there is national accountability for national sins.

Judgement on Israel's neighbours

[1:1-2:5]

Judgement is pronounced on Damascus in Aram for acts of cruelty; on Gaza in Philistine and Tyre in Phoenicia for selling their fellow men; on Edom for persistent hostility; on Ammon for atrocities committed to extend their borders; on Moab for desecrating a corpse; and on Judah for rejecting God's laws.

Judgement on Israel

[2:6-16]

Amos now focuses on Israel's crimes, which are a consequence of turning away from God. They oppressed the poor, profaned religion with acts of fornication and opposed prophets and Nazarites sent by God. For these things the day of God's judgement will come upon them.

Oracles spoken against Israel

[3-6]

Nothing is done without reason, and God does nothing without first revealing it through His prophets. Amos is sent to testify against Israel and declare God's intent to punish her for her sins and destroy the altars of Bethel.

Some of the women of Samaria (the kine of Bashan) receive particular mention because of their lifestyle at the expense of the poor. Their religion is a facade, practised whilst all the while living a sinful life. Despite all God's attempts to get His people to return to Him, He is ignored.

A lament is quickly followed by a plea to seek God and be saved. God does not want their sacrifices and rituals, but a change of heart in the way they conduct themselves, seeking good and not evil, then He will be gracious to the remnant of

Israel. Without their repentance, the Day of the Lord will not be the expected blessing to them, but a day of judgement. Meanwhile, God will cause them to go into captivity.

The people are reprov'd for their complacency, having no fear of the 'evil day', their prophesied ruin. Their self-sufficiency and pride will be their downfall, and they will be the first to be taken into captivity.

God's plumb-line

[7]

Amos has five visions. In the first two he beseeches God to hold back on his judgement. In a third vision, God, standing on a wall made using a plumb line, shows Amos a plumb-line, signifying the destruction of Israel having been judged by God's righteous standard (represented by the straight plumb line).

Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, makes a charge against Amos and advises him not to prophesy any more against Israel but to return to his own country to prophesy there. To this, Amos vindicates his calling and prophesies the fate of Amaziah and his family, as well as that of Israel.

The basket of ripe fruit

[8]

Amos has a fourth vision in which he is shown a basket of summer fruit, signifying the northern kingdom being ripe for destruction. Their oppression of the poor and their sharp practices are noted. They are not only threatened with ruin, but will suffer the famine of not hearing the word of God, affecting the young and assuring the irrecoverable ruin of idolaters.

Evil destroyed; the faithful remnant restored

[9]

Amos' fifth vision signifies the judgement of the people, a judgement from which none will escape, despite them being God's chosen people. Yet there is a promise of the restoration of David's temple and the return of the people of Israel to their own land, never more to depart from it.

Obadiah

Obadiah's name means "Servant of Yahweh"

The date of his prophesying, or writing, is difficult to determine, with at least four reasonable options.

Placing him around 850 to 840 B.C. in the chart is not through my own analysis, but simply a preference to another's.

Obadiah's prophecy in this little one-chapter book is focused on Edom, descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother, hostile to Israel since before the times of the Exodus.

Edom's pride is attacked [1-4] and her destruction foretold [5-7]. Her destruction will be because of her crimes against Israel, her rejoicing when Jerusalem was under attack from the Babylonians being particularly noted [8-14].

As with other nations, judgement will come on the Day of the Lord, when Israel will be triumphant and occupy Edom's territory, and the kingdom will be the Lord's [15-21].

Jonah

Jonah's name means "Dove".

Jonah was sent to warn Nineveh of her impending destruction. It is thought he prophesied to Nineveh around the early years of Jereboam II's reign, around 784 to 760 B.C., Prior to Amos.

Jonah's writings show that salvation extends to anyone who will repent and turn to the Lord, even the Gentiles.

Jonah flees from God

[1]

God calls on Jonah to go and preach to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, because of their wickedness. Instead, Jonah tries to hide from God by taking a ship to Tarshish, in Spain. The ship runs into a storm and the superstitious sailors, fearing for their lives, cast lots and decide Jonah's God is the cause. Jonah admits his behaviour is to blame so is thrown overboard and swallowed up by a great fish. Jonah is in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights.

Jonah's prayer

[2]

Jonah calls out to God in prayer from the fish's belly, to which God responds and Jonah is thrown up onto a beach.

Nineveh responds to Jonah's message

[3]

For a second time, God calls Jonah to go and preach to Nineveh. This time Jonah obeys and sets off for the great city, so large that it takes three days to travel around it. When Jonah enters the city his message is simple: *Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.*

Nineveh appears to respond without question, and the king orders everyone to fast and repent in sackcloth and ashes. God acknowledges their repentance and the city is saved.

Jonah's lesson

[4]

Jonah is angry that Nineveh was spared a deserved judgement and leaves the city to watch from a distance, in case their repeal is short-lived. Here, God reproves Jonah. He uses the withering of a plant (originally provided to give Jonah shade) and Jonah's attitude towards it, to show him just how important are the souls of Nineveh.

Micah

Micah's name means "Who is like Jehovah"

Micah was from Moresheth in southern Judah. He prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah [1:1], from around 735 to 710 B.C.

His message was for both kingdoms, warning God's people of coming judgement for their sins, but also offering hope through God's mercy.

Judgement to come for Samaria and Jerusalem

[1]

Judgement against Samaria and Jerusalem will come. Samaria's will be decisive, with the Assyrian army sweeping through Israel, stopping at the gates of Jerusalem. There will be weeping and wailing and parents will mourn for their exiled children.

Corruption and false prophets

[2]

Charged with covetousness, oppression and injustice against the poor, God is devising disaster against the guilty, a disaster from which there will be no escape. He will bring down their pride and cause them to lament over the loss of their land.

False prophets speak against Micah and prophesy better things, things people want to hear.

Deliverance is promised for the remnant of Israel.

Leaders and prophets rebuked

[3]

Leaders are rebuked for their oppression of the people; when they cry out to the Lord they will not be heard. Prophets are rebuked for false prophesying and will no longer have visions, suffering shame as a consequence. Leaders, priests and prophets all mistakenly believe God's presence will protect them, no matter what.

The coming kingdom

[4]

In the last days, all nations will look to Jerusalem, will know God's ways and there will be universal peace. But first there will be an exile before a remnant can finally return.

The King out of Bethlehem

[5]

Here we have the prophecy quoted in Matthew 2:6 when Herod hears of the coming Magi: *But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*

Current and future events merge in a prophecy of deliverance for God's people, and vengeance on their enemies.

What God requires of His people

[6]

Israel are again reproved for their sinful acts and attitudes, and are told that *to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God* is all that God requires of them. But they continue to fail Him and their guilt will inevitably lead to punishment.

Misery turns to triumph

[7]

Micah laments over the terrible sinful state of the times in which he lives, while all the time trusting in God who will cause Israel to rise again. Sins will be pardoned and transgressions forgiven when, in His mercy, God will prove faithful to His oath to Abraham and Jacob.

Nahum

Nahum's name means "Compassionate" or "Full of comfort" or "Consolation"

Nahum prophesied after the fall of Hebes (663 B.C.) and before the fall of Nineveh (612 B.C.), the subject of his prophecy. The likely period is considered to be around 650 to 630 B.C.

Nahum is considered a sequel to Jonah as Nineveh's repentance was short-lived and judgement is now forthcoming.

God is slow to anger

[1]

God will avenge His adversaries, but show kindness to those who trust in Him. The destruction of Nineveh is prophesied and Judah is urged to keep her solemn feasts and vows.

The besiege of Nineveh

[2]

An account of the besiege of Nineveh is given.

Nineveh's destruction

[3]

Nineveh's great sin is identified. Her destruction will be similar to that inflicted on No-Amon (Thebes) in Egypt. Nineveh's ruin will be final, and the nations she oppressed will be joyful.

Habakkuk

Habakkuk's name means "Embracer" or "Wrestler"

Little is known about Habakkuk. The date of his recorded exchanges with God isn't certain, but the beginning of Jehoikim's reign seems a reasonable deduction. He was certainly contemporary with Jeremiah,

Possibly 635 to 625 B.C.

Habakkuk is asking one of the difficult questions, similar to what we might ask today.

Habakkuk's complaint

[1]

Habakkuk is deeply troubled that violence and injustice appear to be tolerated by God. It seems that justice never prevails and so complains to God concerning it. However, God's response creates another dilemma in Habakkuk's eyes: why allow a nation more wicked than themselves to punish Judah?

God's response

[2]

God instructs Habakkuk to write down His revelation as it will be some years before it is fulfilled. *Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith* is God's simple response, but then spelt out in detail with four woes uttered against Babylon: To the greedy, to the violent, to the drunk, and to the idol worshipper.

Habakkuk's prayer

[3]

Habakkuk responds with a prayer in the form of a psalm in which he expresses his awe of God's mighty power. Despite the loss of essential resources, Habakkuk takes delight in God who is his strength, and is content to trust in Him. He will be patient and wait for the day when God will deal with Babylon.

Zephaniah

Zephaniah, his name means “Yahweh Hides”.

Zephaniah was of royal blood, his ancestry given as tracing back to King Hezekiah. He prophesied during the reign of King Josiah of Judah, contemporary with the early years of Jeremiah’s ministry.

Jeremiah prophesied from around 635 to 625 B.C

His purpose seems to be to motivate God’s people to repent and return to God, as there will be a future restoration.

Judgement is near

[1]

Through Zephaniah, God declares the utter consumption of sinful Judah. Sins particularly mentioned are idolatry, violence and fraud. There will be a great noise of crying and howling, especially in Jerusalem, where there are men content with their lifestyle and indifferent to God’s providence and judgement. This coming judgement is not far off, is inevitable and inescapable.

Judgement on the nations

[2]

The Jews are exhorted to repentance before judgement is pronounced on the surrounding nations: To the west, Philistia; to the east, Moab and Ammon; to the south, Cush (Ethiopia); to the north, Assyria.

Jerusalem’s future

[3]

Jerusalem is reproved for her persistence in sinning, despite all the warnings and corrections from God. Judgement will follow, but then so will redemption. All nations will be purified, the scattered remnant of Israel restored and God’s people will be held in high esteem.

Haggai

Haggai's name means "festal one".

Following a decree issued by Cyrus, king of Persia, 50,000 Jews returned to Jerusalem and began to rebuild the temple. After the foundations had been laid, fierce opposition from the Samaritans halted the work. For four months, during 520 B.C., Haggai encouraged the Jews to continue the rebuilding work with four messages to them. Each of the four messages can be precisely dated.

Haggai was one of the three post exile prophets, contemporary with Zechariah. Malachi was later.

A call to resume the building of the temple

[1]

Haggai's first message from God is given to Zerubbabel, their leader, and Joshua the high priest on 29th August 520 B.C.

The people are reprov'd for their failure to continue rebuilding the temple. Their neglect had provoked God to judge them with famine and scarcity of essentials. The people respond with obedience and a promise is given that God will be with them.

The glory of the second temple shall be greater than that of the first

[2:1-9]

Haggai's second message is given on 17th October 520 B.C.

The stories handed down of the first temple's splendour make this one look plain in comparison. The people are encouraged with the assurance that the glory of this temple will be greater than that of the first, alluding to the coming of Christ.

Blessings for a sinful people

[2:10-19]

The third message is given on 18th December 520 B.C.

Two questions are asked of the priests as a lesson that sin is contagious, and a reminder that as long as the temple remains unbuilt, they will be lacking. Now that they have set about rebuilding in earnest, God will bless them.

Zerubbabel, God's signet ring

[2:20-23]

Haggai's fourth message is a short one given to Zerubbabel, also on 18th December 520 B.C.

This message is prophetic, announcing the judgement to come on the nations at the second coming of the Messiah, and that the Davidic line is preserved through Zerubbabel, revoking the curse placed on his grandfather Jehoiachin in Jer 22:24.

Zechariah

Zechariah's name means "Jehovah remembers".

Like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Zechariah was also a priest.

Zechariah was contemporary with Haggai and began preaching just prior to Haggai's third message, with his final prophecy being some forty years later. He was also a visionary, as were Daniel and Ezekiel, with his prophecies reaching far into the future concerning the first and second coming of Jesus Christ.

The first six chapters record Zechariah's eight visions given in a single night, which are both an encouragement to the people to continue the work of rebuilding the temple, and prophetic in nature. (Some break these eight visions down further into ten.)

Zechariah prophesied in 520 and 519 B.C. but his writings were considered to have been completed around 470 B.C. Zechariah was contemporary with Haggai and began preaching just prior to Haggai's third message, with his final prophecy being some forty years later. He was also a visionary, as were Daniel and Ezekiel, with his prophecies reaching far into the future concerning the first and second coming of Jesus Christ.

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Zechariah prophesied in 520 and 519 B.C.

Eight visions

[1-8]

The four riders; The four horns

[1]

In October/November of 520 B.C., Zechariah calls his people to repentance. A few months later, in February of 519 B.C., he has a series of eight visions in one night.

The first is of four horsemen who go about the world and find it at ease and content while His people are scattered. This displeases God and a message of comfort and encouragement is given to His people, assuring them the temple will be rebuilt.

The second vision is of four horns signifying the four enemies that scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem, and of four carpenters who will take away these enemies' power.

Jerusalem is measured; it will be a city without walls

[2]

In this next vision, a man is seen with a measuring line in his hand to measure the city of Jerusalem (A measuring line is a symbol of restoration). Zechariah is told that Jerusalem will grow far beyond its current limits and will greatly prosper, with God its protector. Those still in Babylon are encouraged to return.

A prophecy follows addressed to all mankind, which is the gathering of the Gentiles in the day of the Lord to become His people.

Clean garments for the high priest

[3]

In this vision, Joshua the high priest is seen standing being resisted by Satan, who is then rebuked by the Lord. Joshua is wearing filthy garments which are replaced with change of raiment, signifying his acquittal of any accusation from Satan. Joshua is symbolic of the Messiah, our great high priest, who is now foretold removing all sin and bringing peace to all mankind.

The gold lampstand and the two olive trees

[4]

Zechariah is now given a vision of a gold lampstand fed by seven pipes from two olive trees, providing a constant supply of oil to keep the lamps burning. This is a vision of encouragement to show that the building of the temple, started by Zerubbabel, will also be finished by him, not by his own might, but through the power of God's Spirit which is constantly available to him.

The flying scroll - sin removed

[5]

The next vision is of a great flying scroll, representing God's judgement of the sinful, followed by a vision of a great measure of sin carried away to Babylon, that is, removed from the land.

The four chariots

[6]

The eighth and final vision corresponds to the first. Here, God is keeping watch over the whole world with the horses now drawing four chariots, signifying divine judgement. Then there is a symbolic crowning of Joshua (symbolic because priests

could not be kings), prefiguring the dual role of Jesus the Messiah as our high priest and king.

This concludes the eight visions Zechariah received in one night.

The problem of fasting

[7]

Nearly two years later, in December of 518 B.C., when rebuilding of the temple was well under way, a delegation from the people asks whether two fasts should now continue. (The fast in the fifth month commemorated the fall of Jerusalem in 587, and that of the seventh month was in memory of the murdered governor, Gedaliah.) God questions the spirit in which these fasts were conducted, reminding them of their failings in the past which caused them to go into exile.

A joyous future for Jerusalem

[8]

God promises a glorious future for the remnant of Israel in Jerusalem, where God will return to make his home in the city. It will be a time of peace, joy and gladness. He reminds them of the early times of Haggai, and how they will now be blessed again, then tells them what He requires of them and what He hates. In that future time, many people will come from all nations to seek the Lord in Jerusalem.

In chapters 9 to 14 we have two prophetic oracles: the great messianic future and the full realisation of God's kingdom.

The first advent of Jesus Christ

[9-11]

Judgement on Israel's enemies and the coming of the Messiah

[9]

The first eight verses speak of the coming invasion of Tyre and the coastal areas to the south by Alexander the Great who, although he passes by more than once, does not invade Jerusalem.

The remaining verses tell first of Jesus' triumphant entry [vs 9], quoted in part in Matthew 21:5 and Luke 19:30-38, and then Christ's second coming when he will reign in the great kingdom age.

Israel gathered

[10]

Further encouragement is given, with the condemnation of false leaders followed by promises of the faithful being strengthened and returned to their land in glory, and their enemies humbled.

The Messiah is rejected

[11]

Israel will be invaded by the Romans from the north through Lebanon, moving south to Jerusalem. The leaders, who care more for their own circumstances than that of the people, will be cut off. God will use the Romans as his instrument of judgement, when the people will be left to their mercy as they relieve them of their power and cause them to disperse. Yet God will take care of His flock, but the prophets, priests and rulers will be cut off in one month because of their mutual loathing. With the crucifixion of Jesus, the covenant God made with all the people will be broken. Having rejected the true Messiah with the betrayal of Christ for thirty pieces of silver (later to be cast on the floor of the temple and then to fall into the potter's hands) the time will come when they will accept a false messiah, the antichrist, who will receive an injury leaving him with a withered right arm and blind right eye.

Israel's deliverance and cleansing

[12-13]

The second oracle concerning the second coming and the acceptance of the Messiah.

The time will come when Israel will be a 'burdensome stone' to all the world as they gather against her, but she will overcome her enemies and again inhabit Jerusalem, when her glory will be magnified. God will destroy any nation that comes against Israel. Through God's Spirit, who testifies of Christ, Israel will come to recognise the one they had rejected and there will be a great mourning.

In that day, Israel will be cleansed of all idols, false prophets and demons. But there is more tribulation to come from which only a third will remain faithful to proclaim their God.

The final siege of Jerusalem; The return and reign of the Messiah

[14]

When the nations are gathered against Jerusalem and take the city along with half of its inhabitants, then God will intervene against them. There will be a great earthquake which will cause His people to flee to safety, then Christ will come with His

saints to rule the earth from Jerusalem which will be, for the first time, completely safe. The nations that fought against Jerusalem will suffer plagues and confusion. Those who survive will be required to go to Jerusalem each year to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, the only remaining compulsory feast day. The disobedient, those not responding to this call, will be punished.

In that day everything will be holy.

Malachi

Malachi's name means "My messenger", or, "Jehovah's messenger".

Nothing is known of Malachi's background. From his writings it can be determined he prophesied around 430 B.C.

Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament and the last prophet chronologically. The historical context is Nehemiah as reflected in the final chapter of the book of Nehemiah.

The last of the post exile prophets, he prophesied from around 437-417 B.C.

Malachi confronted God's people and their leaders with their sins and pleaded with them to return to holiness.

God's love for Israel

[1]

God expresses His love for Israel, offering a comparison with their brother-nation, the Edomites, as a demonstration of that love. His love is not being returned with the love and respect due to their Father, with sacrifices and offerings being more like leftovers than first-fruits. It would be better if the temple doors were closed.

Charges against the priests; Marriage and divorce

[2]

The priests are admonished for failing to teach the law, and even deceiving the people concerning it. The people's attitude to marriage is condemned with God expressing His hatred for divorce, which is seen as dealing treacherously with a man's first wife, and an obstacle to maintaining the Godly seed of Israel when a foreign wife is taken.

The Day of Judgement

[3]

This chapter opens with the prophecy of John the Baptist and the Messiah, who will first come to purify, then to judge.

There follows an exhortation to return to tithing as required by the law. The people have robbed God by withholding tithes and offerings, and have suffered as a result. They are invited to test God by paying their tithes in full, then they will receive abundant blessings.

A growing concern that the arrogant are blessed and evil-doers prosper, has led to the attitude that there is no advantage in serving God. The people are exhorted to return to faithful worship with a promise of recognition on the day of judgement for those that do.

The Day of the Lord

[4]

The day is coming when unrepentant sinners will be convicted and the righteous receive their due reward. Elijah will be sent before that great and dreadful Day, to be a sign and encouragement for all to repent of their sins and turn to the Lord.

Poetry and Wisdom Books

Job, Psalms, Proverbs,
Song of Solomon
and Ecclesiastes

Job

The Book of Job is unique and stands alone with no connection to any other in the Bible. In Job's time it was considered that God's judgement was administered during life; prosperity for the good and punishment for the wicked. This is the story of an innocent man's suffering and his refusal to blame God in the midst of that suffering.

Job loses everything

[1]

Job is a righteous man who fears God and hates evil. He is very wealthy and considered to be the greatest of all the men of the east. His sons do not have the same reverence for God and he continually prays for them.

On a day that court is held in heaven, Satan is present and God questions him concerning Job. Satan claims that Job only serves God because he is wealthy, and if his wealth is taken away then he would curse Him. God gives Satan permission to test Job, but he is not permitted to touch Job himself.

In the space of a single day Job loses everything, all his possessions, servants and family. Despite all this, Job worships God and makes no complaint against Him.

Job is inflicted with running sores

[2]

Having failed in this attempt to discredit Job, Satan claims that Job is now only concerned about himself. God permits Satan to test him further, but his life is to be spared.

Job's body becomes covered from head to toe in running sores. His suffering is so great that even his wife suggests he should curse God and die. But Job holds fast and still refuses to speak against God.

Three of Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, hear of his plight and come to see him. His sores are so bad they can hardly recognise him and spend seven days just sitting with him to be a comfort to him.

Job speaks of his anguish

[3]

Job speaks to his friends, relating how he now finds life so bitter that he wishes he had never been born. He longs for relief to his suffering in death.

Eliphaz speaks to Job

[4-5]

Eliphaz responds to Job's complaint, reminding him that he has often counselled people in the past and he should now consider his own advice: God afflicts the guilty, not the innocent, and no one is blameless before Him.

What is it that Job has done? Troubles are just a part of life. He should turn to God, be grateful for the chastising due him and wait for God's favour to be restored and his life to be abundant again.

Job's response to Eliphaz

[6-7]

Job describes the degree of his suffering as immeasurable. He longs for his cries to God to end his life to be heard. His friend's words bring no comfort; they are meaningless because he has done no wrong.

Job fears he has to live out his appointed time on earth continuing in suffering. The nights bring no relief and his days are spent without hope. He now turns to God and complains about his condition, desperately trying to reason with Him, crying out about his present condition and questioning why any past transgressions have not been pardoned.

Bildad now speaks to Job

[8]

Bildad believes in God's justice and that He will not condemn an innocent man. Job must therefore have sinned at some time and his passionate words can only be seen to be hypocritical. Only God's provision of relief would prove him and other accusers wrong.

Job's response to Bildad

[9-10]

Job too believes in the justice of God and reflects on His wisdom, power and dominion. How then can he communicate with God, to call him to account? Good or bad people, disaster can come to both and the wicked are seen to prosper. Job is confused by his predicament.

His confusion continues to be expressed in his words. His creator has become his destroyer, yet he takes comfort in the good things God had given him. But confusion remains because of the harsh way God has now dealt with him. Nevertheless, he still wishes he had not been born, questioning whether there will be any respite before his days are over.

Zophar now speaks to Job

[11]

Zophar is more harsh toward Job than his other two friends, claiming he lies about his innocence and that God is letting him off lightly. Job must repent of his sins and put them behind him, only then will God restore him.

Job's response to Zophar

[12-14]

Job refutes his friends' arguments, telling them they are no wiser than he. It is Job who is upright, yet is suffering, whilst there are those that are not upright and prosper. Still Job acknowledges God's wisdom and sovereignty, particularly over men's affairs.

He again defends himself against the accusation of his friends, which he says are nothing but lies for which they will surely be judged by God. He tells them to leave him alone and reaffirms his confidence in God. Job now pleads with God to discuss his afflictions.

Job reflects on man's sinful life, the inevitability of death and the hope of a resurrection. He then complains of the severity with which God has dealt with him, even suggesting this is the way He deals with men generally, destroying their hope until death, having lived in pain and sorrow.

Eliphaz speaks for the second time

[15]

Eliphaz charges Job with showing no respect for God in his attempts to justify himself, claiming his own words condemn him. To emphasise how wrong he considers Job's words to be in saying the wicked are not punished, Eliphaz now delivers a detailed account of the woes and fate due to them.

Job's response to Eliphaz

[16-17]

Job's reply to Eliphaz applies to all his friends; instead of bringing him comfort they added to his misery. Had they been in his circumstance then he would have treated them differently. Job again speaks of his sufferings, maintains his innocence and wishes he could take his case directly to God. Still he continues to wait for relief in death.

His friends have dealt with him unjustly for upright men will be astonished at what has happened to him, and true men of God will want to strengthen themselves. He sees no wisdom in his friends' words and has no hope other than death.

Bildad now speaks for the second time

[18]

Bildad appears to have lost patience with Job as he now embarks on a full attack, reproving his attitude and words. Like Eliphad before him, he goes into some detail concerning the misery and fate of wicked people, presumably applying his words to Job.

Job's response to Bildad

[19]

Job again complains about his friends' cruel words and his afflictions of which he says God is the instigator. Yet still he expresses his faith in his Redeemer and that he will eventually see Him. Job warns his friends that if they continue they may well suffer God's judgement.

Zophar speaks for the second and last time

[20]

It seems that Zophar has taken no notice of Job's confession of faith, but reacts to his reproach with more words concerning the fate of the wicked and the hypocrites. He asserts that the prosperity of a wicked man is short and his ruin a surety; that not just he, but his family will also suffer; he will be stripped of his ill-gotten wealth and live in misery; his death will be violent and his family and property finally destroyed.

Job's response to Zophar

[21]

Job now seems to give up complaining about his own predicament (it didn't seem to move his friends) and focuses on the primary point of dispute between them: Is prosperity the mark of a righteous man and the loss of it sufficient to prove him guilty of sin? He addresses this by suggesting they should be astonished by the fact that often the wicked seem to live a long life and prosper in all respects, yet live in defiance of God, although their ruin does come eventually. Job charges his friends to observe these facts, and in doing so accuses them with falsehood in their attempts to comfort him.

Eliphaz now speaks for the third and last time

[22]

Eliphaz accuses Job of self-righteousness and even lists sins he says Job has committed which are the cause of his troubles. He reminds Job of God's works of majesty and judgement in days of old and urges him to acknowledge his sins and repent, then all will be well with him again.

Job's response to Eliphaz

[23-24]

Job longs to find God to plead his case to Him, but He is not to be found. He is still confident in his innocence, but nevertheless is fearful of being in His presence.

He now lists some terrible things he sees that go on in the world in the transgressions of the wicked. Although they are not punished in this life, God will reserve them for future punishment. It cannot be said then that all who are suffering are wicked, neither all that are prosperous are righteous. Job asserts that his words cannot be contradicted.

Bildad speaks for the third and last time

[25]

It would seem all has been said that can be said, for Bildad now does no more than state the obvious, that no man is perfect in God's sight.

Job's response to Bildad

[26]

Bildad's speech seems to have brought Job to the realisation that his friends' arguments have run out of steam and he sharply reproves them for their lack of wisdom. He shows that God's might is evident in creation, but even so, who can understand the full extent of His power.

Job's concluding response to his friends' arguments

[27]

His friends have finished speaking, Zophar having elected not to speak for a third time. Job strongly asserts his innocence and speaks against the hypocrites and wicked people.

Job reflects on wisdom

[28]

Now his friends are silent, Job ponders on the mysterious ways of God and the question of wisdom. He speaks of man's endeavour to obtain precious metals and the difficulties involved in the process. But precious metals and stones do not compare to wisdom and no amount of them can purchase it, neither can it be searched out from amongst earthly things. True wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord and abstaining from evil.

Job reflects on his past prosperity

[29]

Job recalls the glorious days when God blessed him, even from his youth. He was blessed with a good home and family, respected by all manner of people and held in great respect as a magistrate.

His present suffering

[30]

Now Job's previous glory has all been turned on its head. He was held in esteem by the greatest of men, but is now held in contempt by the lowest; he enjoyed good health, but now is in a constant state of suffering; he had enjoyed the presence of God in his life, but now God has deserted him. In times past Job had a sympathising heart toward those in need or in trouble, he now has to lament over his own sorrowful condition.

Job defends his character before God

[31]

Job gives a detailed account of himself and his life. He defends his integrity, chastity, his dealings with his servants, the poor, widows and the fatherless. He has not been guilty of covetousness or idolatry, has always been hospitable towards strangers and has never attempted to cover sin. Now Job appeals to God's judgement, confident of his innocence.

Elihu comes on the scene: His first speech

[32-33]

A young man by the name of Elihu had been listening to the exchanges between Job and his friends. He has become angry at Job's self-righteousness and angry because his friends condemned him but had no answer. He hadn't spoken until now out of respect for their age, but they are now silent and so he speaks up. Elihu explains to Job that he has the Spirit in him and God has given him understanding. Great men are not always wise and age does not always bring understanding. He resolves to speak impartially.

Elihu proposes to speak in God's stead, but not harshly. He accuses Job with an irreverent attitude in claiming his innocence and speaking of the harsh way he considers God has dealt with him. He should not strive against God, for God cares for men's souls by various means. Sometimes instructing by dreams and visions through which he humbles their pride to preserve them from ruin, sometimes through afflictions and sometimes through a messenger. These are wise and gracious methods that God uses to enlighten men. Elihu encourages Job to listen attentively to his teaching.

Elihu's second speech

[34]

Elihu pauses, but no one responds, and so he continues with a 'second speech'. He gets the attention of Job's friends then charges Job with accusing God of acting unrighteously, which is of course impossible. Elihu refutes Job's accusing words by pointing out the power and judgements of God. He tells how men should address God then solicits men of understanding to join him in trying Job.

Elihu's third speech

[35]

Job remains silent and Elihu accuses him of implying that his righteousness is greater than God's, saying that no man can affect God, either by his iniquities or his righteousness. Many men are oppressed, but few cry out to Him in their time of need. Job has lost hope in ever seeing God's favour return, but is this justified, and are Job's complaints in reality lacking knowledge?

Elihu's fourth speech

[36-37]

Elihu, despite all his words so far, says there is more to be said on God's behalf and entreats Job to listen. He tells of God's dealings with men, how the righteous are rewarded, but the wicked are disciplined and commanded to return from iniquity or suffer the consequences. He suggests that if Job had submitted to God's judgement then things would have been different. He shouldn't be wishing for death but learning the lesson. He then speaks of God's sovereignty as reflected in nature.

Elihu continues to extol on God's design of nature, questioning Job's understanding of it. He finishes by reflecting on God's power and judgement, all of which is why man should be in awe of Him who is no respecter of persons.

God intervenes

[38-40:2]

God now intervenes and challenges Job to answer numerous questions concerning creation: Where was he when God created the world, night and day, the weather systems and the constellations? And what about the wild animals, can he provide their food, did he create them and provide for all their needs? Will Job instruct the Almighty? Let him answer.

Job's response

[40:3-5]

Job's response is not unexpected having been confronted by God. He humbles himself: *Behold, I am vile*. He cannot answer.

God continues to challenge Job

[40:6-41:34]

God challenges Job with the impossible, questioning if he is at all like Him in majesty and excellency, having dominion over the proud. An instance of God's power is given in a specific land animal called a behemoth, describing its size and power.

The leviathan, a sea animal, is also named, and the two described as animals that no man can control. A lengthy description of the leviathan is given. In describing these animals, God is emphasising to Job the infinite distance between Job's impotency and His omnipotence.

(Note. Nobody knows what the behemoth and leviathan were. Favourite guesses were elephants and crocodiles; more recent and controversial suggestions are dinosaurs.)

Job's repentance; God's verdict; Job's restoration

[42]

Job now acknowledges the folly in his thoughts and words, confesses them to God, finds he now abhors himself and repents.

God accepts Job's repentance but censures his three friends, demanding sacrifices to be offered so that Job might pray for them. Nothing is said against Elihu.

Having forgiven his friends, Job is restored to his former prosperity and receives double what he had before. His family continues to grow and he enjoys a full life, living a further one hundred and forty years.

Psalms

The Book of Psalms is really five books combined, with the final psalm of each book closing with a doxology, a word of praise to God. They were Israel's hymnal with a strong theological content.

Hebrew poetry differs from ours in that we know poetry as primarily having rhyme and rhythm, whereas Hebrew poetry has a parallelism of ideas, sometimes comparative, sometimes contrasting and sometimes completing the idea of the previous line.

Nearly half the psalms were written by David, with another twelve written by Asaph, the Head of David's choir, twelve for the sons of Korah, just two by Solomon, one each by Heman and Ethan the Ezrahites, and one by Moses. Forty eight psalms are anonymous.

Book 1

[1-41]

Psalm 1

The happiness of a righteous man is contrasted with the state of the ungodly who are like the chaff separated by the wind and will perish.

Psalm 2

This psalm is not ascribed to David in its title, but by Peter in Acts 4:25-26 where he quotes verses 1 and 2

This is the first of the Messianic psalms and speaks of the opposition by both Gentiles (the heathen) and Jews (the people) to Christ, of His victory and a call for all to accept Him with a warning to those who will not.

Psalm 3

A Psalm of David

When he fled from Absalom his son [2 Sam 15]

David complains of the increase in number of his enemies who say that God has forsaken him. Nevertheless, David is confident God will be his protector as He has been in the past.

Psalm 4

A Psalm of David

A prayer for the night

David pleads to be heard by the ungodly and reasons with them to turn to God and put their trust in Him, as true happiness can only come through God's grace. David attests to God's protection as he lays down his head for the night.

Psalm 5

A Psalm of David

A prayer for guidance in the morning

David asks God to hear his prayers, referring particularly on this occasion to morning prayers. He expresses the displeasure God has toward the bloody and deceitful man. He then tells of his determination to continue to worship God and asks for guidance in the face of his enemies who he calls on God to destroy. His prayer continues focusing on the people of God, that He will give them joy and keep them safe.

Psalm 6

A Psalm of David

Faith in a time of distress

This psalm is a plea for mercy for a man worn down physically and mentally, crying out for the return of the Lord's favour, which he is confident will happen.

Psalm 7

A Psalm of David

Concerning the words of Cush the Benjamite. Some consider Cush to be in reality a reference to Saul.

Prayer and praise for deliverance from his enemies

David puts his trust in God to deliver him from his enemies, deliverance which will vindicate him and edify the people. He expresses confidence in God's dealing with the wicked who will have brought judgement upon themselves. David will give God the glory for his deliverance.

Psalm 8

A Psalm of David

Man's place in God's glorious creation

God's glory and excellence is manifest in his creation with the heavens getting particular mention. Man was created only a little lower than the angels and is given dominion over all His creation, leading to God's name being held in esteem over all the earth.

Psalm 9

A Psalm of David

A prayer of thanksgiving for the Lord's righteous judgements

David praises God for his righteous judgement on his and Israel's enemies. He knows God will always be a refuge for those in distress, and all are encouraged to join him in his songs of praise. He prays for continuing mercy and support, foretells the fate of the wicked and prays on behalf of the needy and the poor, and against their oppressors.

Psalm 10

(Psalms 9 and 10 are considered to have been originally written as one psalm)

David complains about the pride of the wicked

There are wicked men who defy God, disregard His laws and seem to get away with it. It is the poor who suffer. David calls upon the Lord to exercise His judgement.

Psalm 11

A Psalm of David

Faith in God's righteousness

David expresses his trust in God's judgement of the wicked and His love for the righteous.

Psalm 12

A Psalm of David

A cry for God's help

Thought at the time to be destitute of human comfort, David cries out for help from God, telling of the nature of people around him. He speaks of God's judgement against them, and His protection of the poor and needy.

Psalm 13

A Psalm of David

Trust in the Lord's salvation

It would seem to David that time is passing and the Lord has forgotten him. Yet he trusts in God's salvation and that it will come in time to witness to his enemies.

Psalm 14

A Psalm of David

The folly of the godless

Society is generally godless and none can be found that do any good. They will fear God because He is the refuge for the poor.

David prays for the restoration of Israel.

Psalm 15

A Psalm of David

Qualities of the righteous

David lists some qualities of the righteous. If they maintain these qualities they will dwell with the Lord.

Psalm 16

A Psalm of David

The hope of the saints and the Messiah's victory

It is thought that David is likely to be hiding from Saul when he cries out for his preservation. He declares his trust in God, expresses his abhorrence of idolatry and his confidence in the saints' hope of inheritance. Then follows a remarkable prophecy of the resurrection of Christ.

Psalm 17

A Psalm of David

Confidence in final salvation

Expressing confidence in his own righteousness, David calls on God to deliver him from his unrighteous enemies who have now surrounded him. David is confident in his final salvation.

Psalm 18

A Psalm of David

Thanksgiving for David's deliverance from all his enemies and from Saul [2 Sam 22:1-51]

David declares it is God who has delivered him. He briefly relates his sufferings and prayers for assistance, then gives a dramatic description of his deliverance, which only came about because of his strong faith and adherence to God's statutes. For all his victories, and with an expectation of more to come, he gives the glory to God.

Psalm 19

A Psalm of David

God's creation and law

The majesty of God is revealed in His creation. His perfection is revealed in His law given for man's benefit. David prays for help in living an upright life.

Psalm 20

A Psalm of David

A prayer for the king before battle

This psalm is thought to be a prayer for the king, used before he went into battle. That his prayers may be heard, offerings accepted and his wishes fulfilled. Confidence of victory is expressed and the psalm concludes with an earnest request that their prayers be heard.

Psalm 21

A Psalm of David

Thanksgiving for victory in battle

Thanks are given to God for answering David's prayers in giving him victory over his enemies with consequential blessings. Confidence is expressed in further victories if his enemies rise against him again. This psalm is concluded with a word of praise for God's power.

Psalm 22

A Psalm of David

Suffering and salvation; Christ on the cross

This is the most quoted psalm in the New Testament. It is a prayer to God at a time when David is under great distress. As a summary, it is not so much David's prayer and circumstance that is of primary interest, but the fact that it is clearly a prophetic (Messianic) psalm as can be seen in the following verses:

- 1 *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* are the words cried out by Jesus on the cross
- 7-8 describe the abuse Jesus received whilst hanging on the cross
- 14-16 describe the agony on the cross
- 18 describes the dividing of and casting of lots for Jesus' garments
- 20-21 speak of Jesus' deliverance

Psalm 23

A Psalm of David

The Lord the Shepherd

Arguably the most well known psalm: "The Lord is my Shepherd."

As the Good Shepherd, the pastor of His people, the Lord takes care of them in their earthly lives, providing physical and spiritual needs and protecting them in the face of the enemy. They can have confidence in His continual mercy and an eternal life.

Psalm 24

A Psalm of David

A psalm of worship of the King of Glory and His Kingdom

Some considered this psalm to have been written for the occasion when the ark was returned to Jerusalem from the house of Obededom.

The Lord is Sovereign Ruler of the universe. Who is fit to minister to the Lord in his temple? Worship and praise is given to the King of Glory as He returns to His temple.

Psalm 25

A Psalm of David

A plea for forgiveness and deliverance

This is the first of seven acrostic psalms where the first letter of each line follows the order of the twenty two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. [The others are 34; 37; 111:1-10; 112:1-10; 119; 145.]

In a time of distress David prays to God expressing his trust in Him. He prays for pardon with confidence, as should all who fear the Lord. He pleads for mercy and deliverance for himself and for the restoration of Israel.

Psalm 26

A Psalm of David

Confidence in an upright life

In this psalm David is putting himself on trial before God for his integrity to be judged. He states he has walked in truth, avoided any fellowship with ungodly people, and has been a witness to others in his love for the Lord. He throws himself on the mercy of God, resolving to hold fast to his integrity.

Psalm 27

A Psalm of David

A prayer of faith and trust in God

Here is a prayer of a righteous man's confidence in God, his desire to worship God in His temple and benefit from the resultant blessings. David prays for continuing fellowship with God and to be taught how to deal with his enemies so that His goodness will be seen in this life. He exhorts others to be of good courage and to have faith in the Lord.

Psalm 28

A Psalm of David

A prayer answered

In his distress, David makes supplication to God not to be drawn into the ways of the wicked. He blesses God for hearing his prayers, is consoled, then prays for God's people.

Psalm 29

A Psalm of David

The power of the voice of the Lord

David calls upon the mighty to give the glory to God and to worship Him in the beauty of His holiness. He expresses the power of God's voice in His creation, in the wonders produced by a thunderstorm, His sovereign dominion over the earth and His particular concern for His people.

Psalm 30

A Psalm of David

Thanksgiving for deliverance from sickness

David gives thanks to God for delivering him from sickness and calls upon others to trust in Him. He recalls his previous state of mind, his cries to God for mercy, and how his deliverance brought great joy and a resolve to forever sing God's praises.

Psalm 31

A Psalm of David

Complete trust in God in times of trouble

Throughout this psalm there is a sense of complete trust in God. David begins by professing his confidence in Him and prays for deliverance from his present troubles. He speaks of his current pitiful state and relates how his prayers were previously heard despite feeling cut off from God. He calls on all saints to love God and to have trust in Him.

Psalm 32

A Psalm of David

The joy of forgiveness

Sins must be acknowledged and no thought given to being able to hide them. They must be confessed to God, then forgiveness will follow.

Psalm 33

In praise of God, His creation, sovereignty and mercy

The righteous are called upon to praise God for His works of creation, His governance over it, and for the favour He has

shown in choosing His own people. Those that fear God are blessed because they trust in Him and His mercy.

Psalm 34

A Psalm of David

In praise of God who cares for His people

This is the second acrostic psalm. Our Bibles tell us this is a psalm of David when he feigned madness before Abimelech [Achish] who drove him away [1 Sam 21:13-15], but there is little in its content that can be said to be peculiar to that occasion.

David praises God for what He has done for himself and others. He encourages all people to fear and seek Him. He then gives counsel to all to depart from evil and pursue peace, encouraging them with the understanding that God gives favour to the righteous, but will punish the wicked.

Psalm 35

A Psalm of David

A plea for God's judgement against his enemies

David, as is frequent, is in fear of his enemies and prays for his safety and for their confusion. He speaks of the kindness he showed to those who had rewarded him evil for good, and consequently appeals to God's judgement that he might deal with his enemies. He prays for his supporters and praises God for His righteousness.

Psalm 36

A Psalm of David

Hatred of sin; Satisfaction in God's loving kindness

The wicked have no fear of God, are deceitful and mischievous. Those that put their trust in God receive His mercy, faithfulness and loving kindness, and are abundantly satisfied. David prays for the faithful, that he might be protected from pride and from the wicked whose fate is certain.

Psalm 37

A Psalm of David

This is the third acrostic psalm.

There is no worship or praise in this psalm, hence it is considered a teaching psalm giving instruction for those in adversity. They are not to envy the prosperity of the wicked, for the little a righteous man has far exceeds the riches of the

wicked whose prosperity will only be for a while, but the saints are preserved forever. They can have confidence in God if they put aside all malice and live according to His laws and statutes. This is the way to contentment in this life and in that which is to come.

Psalm 38

A Psalm of David

A prayer for forgiveness in a time of great distress

David's general predicament is causing him to reflect on his sins and to humble himself before God. He speaks of being in a miserable state, has been forsaken by his friends and is being persecuted by his enemies. He confesses his sins and earnestly implores God's help.

Psalm 39

A Psalm of David

The brevity of life

This psalm would appear to be a reflection on life, and the vanity of it, as it approaches its final period. David relates the care he took over his thoughts, tongue and actions, considers the brevity of life, prays for deliverance from sin and that his remaining time might be without afflictions.

Psalm 40

A Psalm of David

Perseverance and faith

David speaks of God delivering him from distress following a period of patience and trust. He writes in the Spirit in verses 6 to 8, speaking of the redemptive work of Christ. David prays for God's mercy and deliverance from evils, for himself and all who seek Him.

(Verses 13 to 17 are repeated in Psalm 70)

Psalm 41

A Psalm of David

Comfort in sickness

David is on his sick-bed and is experiencing malice from his enemies. He comforts himself in communing with God,

complains concerning his enemies and prays for support. He blesses God who hears his prayers and preserves him, expressed in a closing doxology.

Book 2

[Ps 42-72]

Psalm 42

For the sons of Korah

Longing for God in a time of distress

The psalmist longs to worship again in God's house and expresses the distress he is feeling. Faced with jibes from his enemies, he tries to take comfort believing that God will be with him.

Psalm 43

This psalm has no title, but some consider it to have originally been part of the previous psalm.

The psalmist pleads with God to take his side against his enemies, to send His light and truth to guide him to the tabernacle, where he promises to praise Him with exceeding joy on the harp. He ends this short psalm with self-examination of his spiritual state (a repeat of Psalm 42:5).

Psalm 44

For the sons of Korah

A prayer for the nation

The psalmist recounts God's protection of his people in days of old, but He now seems to have deserted them, as can be seen from their present predicament. He claims they have not turned away from God and that God will surely know this, so calls upon Him for deliverance.

Psalm 45

For the sons of Korah

The Messiah and His bride

This psalm speaks of Christ the bridegroom:

vs 1-9 His glory and majesty
vs 10-11 the royal bride which is the church
vs 12-15 presented to the groom
vs 16-17 and her numerous descendants

Psalm 46

For the sons of Korah

God our refuge and strength

We can take comfort in God when things around us seem threatening, for He is amongst us and is our protector. God will be exalted among the heathen and throughout the earth.

Psalm 47

For the sons of Korah

Shout praises to the Lord

Gentiles are called to praise God, and the Jews to exalt His favour toward them. All are then called to sing praises together, with a hint in verse 9 of Jews and Gentiles becoming one church.

Psalm 48

For the sons of Korah

Zion, the glorious city of God

Jerusalem is praised for its relationship with God, it is His dwelling place and other nations' kings are in awe of it. Zion will be established forever and the name of God known throughout the earth. All are called to rejoice, to walk around and see the beauty of this city favoured by God.

Psalm 49

For the sons of Korah

This psalm is more a sermon than a song of praise, intended to comfort godly people. It speaks against those that trust in their wealth, that boast about it and have vain expectations. Death is inevitable, but riches cannot be taken with you and cannot secure happiness after death. Do not be concerned about the prosperity and power of the wicked, for they are brutish and die like beasts.

Psalm 50

A Psalm of Asaph

God the righteous judge

God will come and judge his people. They are reproached for their vain confidence in sacrifices when prayer is the kind of worship God responds to. Those that pretend to worship God but live in disobedience are rebuked and will receive due judgement; salvation will only come to those that truly praise and glorify God.

Psalm 51

A Psalm of David

A prayer of repentance

It is considered that the title to this psalm tells us that David wrote this after *Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone into Bathsheba*. Some dispute this based on verses 4 and 18. Nevertheless, it is a wonderful prayer of repentance.

David prays for the remission of his sins. He is deeply penitent and pleads for God to purge his sins and renew his heart, fearful that God's Holy Spirit will be taken from him. David is convinced a broken and contrite heart is the true sacrifice, but promises that ordained sacrifices will continue.

Psalm 52

A Psalm of David

The fate of the wicked

Written when Doeg the Edomite told Saul that David had gone to the house of Abimelech [1 Sam 22:9].

The potential mischievousness of a powerful enemy who prefers evil and lying is noted, as is his inevitable destruction which is expected of a man who trusts in his riches and wickedness rather than God. Contrariwise, David trusts in God and will praise Him for ever.

Psalm 53

A Psalm of David

The folly of the godless

This psalm appears to be an updated version of Psalm 14, but with verses 5b and 6 being omitted.

Society is generally godless and none can be found that do any good. Where there was no fear of God there now is, as He judged the godless and put them to shame.

David prays for the restoration of Israel.

Psalm 54

A Psalm of David

A prayer for deliverance

When the Ziphites had gone to Saul and said *Is not David hiding among us?* [1 Sam 23:19-29].

David complains that godless strangers have risen up against him with intent to kill him. He declares his confidence that God will protect him and punish his enemies. He promises to continue in his sacrifices to God and speaks of his deliverance.

Psalm 55

A Psalm of David

A time of distress; The treachery of a friend

David, in great danger and distress from his enemies, cries out to God. He wishes he had the wings of a dove so that he could fly away and be at rest. He prays against his enemies and makes mention of a man he had considered his friend, but is now a cause of much distress to him. Through all this, David still has confidence in God and expects his enemies to be dealt with.

Psalm 56

A Psalm of David

Trust in God in the face of adversity

When the Philistines captured him in Gath [1 Sam 21:10-15]

David, in the hands of his enemies, again puts his trust in God, praying for support against them. He has every expectation of deliverance and promises continued praise and obedience.

Psalm 57

A Psalm of David

A prayer for safety whilst amongst his enemies, when he fled from Saul into the cave [1 Sam 22:1; 24]

David cries out to God for mercy from amongst his enemies, whom he describes as lions, having every confidence his prayer will be heard. He promises to give praise to God in the presence of his people and among the nations.

Psalm 58

A Psalm of David

Judgement of the wicked

David reproves the wicked, both the people and judges whose wickedness is like a poison. Their destruction is foretold. The righteous will rejoice in the knowledge that God will judge the earth and they will be rewarded.

Psalm 59

A Psalm of David

Assured judgement of the wicked

On the occasion that “Saul sent men, and they watched the house in order to kill him.”

David prays to God for deliverance from his enemies and expresses his complete confidence in Him. He requests the manner of their defeat then sings praises for past benefits, which he knows only came through God’s mercy and deliverance.

Psalm 60

A Psalm of David

An urgent prayer for God’s favour to be restored to Israel.

On the occasion when he fought against Mesopotamia and Syria of Zobah, and Joab returned and killed twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt. (Tradition assigns this psalm to events recorded in 2 Sam 8.)

David speaks of the nation’s demise and attributes it to God’s displeasure. He prays for deliverance and is confident in his expectation of victory over Shechem, Succoth, Gilead, Ephraim, Moab, Idumea, and the Philistines, and pleads with God to help him.

Psalm 61

A Psalm of David

Prayer of a burdened king

Possibly penned on an occasion when he had been banished from the land, David calls upon God because he had protected and provided for him in the past and trusts He will continue to do so.

Psalm 62

A Psalm of David

Waiting on and trusting in God

David professes his confidence in God and encourages his soul to wait on Him. He declares God to be his rock, salvation and defender, and encourages others also to trust in Him and no other. God will give to every man according to his works.

Psalm 63

A Psalm of David

When he was in the wilderness of Judah

A thirsty heart

David's soul thirsts after God, for he finds great satisfaction in communion with Him. He rejoices in his assured safety in God and is joyful over his dependence on Him in the face of his adversaries.

Psalm 64

A Psalm of David

Oppressed by the wicked; rejoicing in the Lord

David prays to be preserved from the wicked. He foretells their downfall and the resultant fear of God, which will bring gladness to the hearts of those that trust in Him.

Psalm 65

A Psalm of David

Of praise and thanksgiving

God is praised for hearing prayer, forgiving sins, the satisfaction He brings to the hearts of men, and for their salvation. Words of thanksgiving are offered for God's creation and its abundant provision for mankind.

Psalm 66

A psalm of thanksgiving

The psalmist calls upon all to praise God. He reminds the Jews of God's mighty acts for their forefathers and what He is doing for them now. He resolves to pay his vows made to God when he was in trouble, to offer the appropriate sacrifices and to bear witness to all concerning what God has done for him.

Psalm 67

A prayer for the increase of God's kingdom

The psalmist prays for God's mercy on Israel as an example to all nations and calls upon all to praise Him. He then calls upon all nations to serve God because He judges and governs righteously. Those that fear God will be blessed.

Psalm 68

A Psalm of David

The triumphant rule of Israel's God

David opens this psalm with a prayer against his enemies and for his people. He urges them to praise God for His greatness and compassion. His words remind them of God's presence during the exodus when He gave them the law, refreshed them when they were weary and gave them victory over their enemies. David lapses into prophecy and speaks of Christ's ascension, of salvation, the victory He would have over His enemies and of the enlargement of the church by the inclusion of the Gentiles. The psalm concludes with an invitation to all to sing God's praises and acknowledge His greatness.

Psalm 69

A Psalm of David

When overwhelmed by afflictions

After Psalm 22, this is the most quoted psalm in the New Testament.

In the first 20 verses David speaks of the dire straights he finds himself in; his circumstances seem overwhelming and he is having to wait on God's mercy. His problems include his enemies, the shame of his own sins that might cause others to stumble, his estrangement from his brethren and his recognition that hatred for him can be a reflection of people's hatred for God. He cries out to God for mercy and deliverance; his heart is broken.

In verses 20 to 28 David's words become prophetic of: Jesus' loneliness in those last days, His crucifixion, the resultant suffering of the Jews, the destruction of the temple and the blotting out of the 'book of the living' of those that deny Him.

David promises to continue to praise God with songs and thanksgiving, then speaks of the future restoration of the Jews and inclusion of the Gentiles.

Psalm 70

A Psalm of David

God, make haste

David pleads for God to make haste to deliver him from his enemies. He prays for those who seek God then again asks God to make haste with his deliverance, for he is poor and needy.

Psalm 71

A Psalm of David

Our Bible does not attribute this psalm to David, but the commentator Gill says “This psalm is without title, but it is thought to be David’s: the Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions, and all the Oriental ones, ascribe it to him; and both the subject and style show it to be his.”

In God I trust

David, declaring his trust in God, prays for deliverance with confidence, for God is his rock and fortress and has been from his youth. In these latter days, now his strength is failing, he doesn’t want his enemies to think God has forsaken him and prays for them to be confounded. David’s hope and determination is that he will continue to be a witness to God in his old age, and trusts that God will still be with him and against his adversaries.

Psalm 72

A Psalm of Solomon or A Psalm for Solomon.

There is mixed opinion concerning the authorship. Some commentators, past and present, say this is David’s last psalm written for his son Solomon, the first and last verses supporting this, as does the inclusion of prophecy.

David prays for Solomon in verses 1 and 2, then from verse 3 his words prophesy the kingdom reign of Jesus Christ. His reign will be righteous and all will revere Him throughout the generations; it will be refreshing for the righteous, they will flourish and there will be an abundance of peace; his dominion will be over the whole earth; the poor and needy will be taken care of; there will be an abundance of provisions; His name will endure forever, all will be blessed in Him and all will call Him blessed. The whole earth will be filled with His glory.

This psalm ends with the statement that the prayers of David are now ended, indicating this was the last psalm he wrote, although there are some of his previous writings recorded later in the Book of Psalms.

Book 3

[Ps 73-89]

Psalm 73

A Psalm of Asaph

Do not be tempted by the apparent prosperity of the ungodly

The psalmist first acknowledges God is good to those with a clean heart. He then speaks of his envy of the wicked, their apparent prosperity despite their ungodly ways and attitudes, and how he fell into temptation. But he was delivered from temptation when he drew near to God and was able to see beyond the worldly, recognising that the ungodly will eventually perish whereas those that trust in God have a far greater prospect in the glory of eternal life.

Psalm 74

A Psalm of Asaph

A plea for relief from oppressors that have desolated the sanctuary

The psalmist speaks of the acts committed against the sanctuary. He calls on God to take action for his people as he had done in the times of the exodus. He pleads with God not to allow the oppressors to continue to dishonour His name and shame the oppressed, but to rise against His enemies and the enemies of His people.

Psalm 75

A Psalm of Asaph

God is judge

The psalmist gives thanks to God who is the sovereign judge of all the earth. Only the righteous will be exalted.

Psalm 76

A Psalm of Asaph

God's majesty in judgement

The true God known in Judah, Israel, Salem and Zion, majestic in defeat of Israel's enemies and merciful to the meek of all the earth. His people must not forget their vows and obligations; all nations ought to fear God and pay the homage due to Him.

Psalm 77

A Psalm of Asaph

Consolation in times of distress

The psalmist cries out to God in a time of distress when he feels God has deserted him. He meditates on all the marvellous works God has done for His people and in this is able to console himself.

Psalm 78

A Psalm of Asaph

A reminder of God's relationship with Israel as a lesson for all generations

This psalm is introduced as being a reminder for the present and all future generations of God's compassion for His people to encourage them to keep His commandments.

The psalmist recalls Israel's history of rebellion, their punishments, their insincere repentance and God's continued compassion for them. They repeatedly backslid and were forgetful of His mercy shown towards them from the time He delivered them out of Egypt. Even after they had entered the Promised Land and their enemies had been defeated, God's anger was continually provoked. God eventually removed any judgements they had brought upon themselves by rejecting the tribes of Israel, choosing Judah and David to be king over His people, and bringing them to their present happy state.

Psalm 79

A Psalm of Asaph

A prayer for God to take action against those that brought desolation to Jerusalem

The psalmist speaks of the desolations wrought upon Jerusalem by their enemies and prays for God to deal with them. He asks God to exercise mercy towards His people, and to pardon and restore them for His name's sake. In return he promises gratitude and praise expressed through the generations.

Psalm 80

A Psalm of Asaph

A cry to God for the restoration of His people

This psalm is a prayer for the Israelite captives who are suffering before their neighbours and enemies. Israel is compared to a vineyard, planted in Canaan. It spread and flourished, but then in time became wasted and ruined. The psalmist cries out to God to return to His people and restore His vineyard.

Psalm 81

A Psalm of Asaph

A festival song

This psalm is considered to be one of those chosen to be sung at a festival, although there is no absolute certainty as to which one.

The people are exhorted to praise God for His deliverance, to heed His ordinances, and to lament past transgressions and consequential sufferings.

Psalm 82

A Psalm of Asaph

A warning to corrupt judges

Judges are questioned as to how long they will continue in their corrupt ways. They are called to judge fairly and to be no respecter of persons. If they do not mend their ways, then they in turn will be judged by God.

Psalm 83

A Psalm of Asaph

Against a confederation of enemies

The psalmist calls upon God for help against a number of named enemies who are conspiring to cut Israel off as a nation. Included in the names are Moab and Ammon, descendants of Lot, and Edom, descendants of Esau. He asks God to punish them as he had punished particular nations and individuals in the past. He further asks they should be confounded, troubled, put to shame and perish, all to be done for the glory of God.

Psalm 84

A Psalm for the Sons of Korah

A longing to be closer to God

The psalmist here pours out his heart, longing for a close communion with God which he sees will be found in the sanctuary at Zion. He refers to all who are there with God as being blessed, and prays in confidence to be able to spend even a little time in His house.

Psalm 85

A Psalm for the Sons of Korah

Thanksgiving and a call for further mercy

The psalmist gives thanks to God for the the restoration of His people, but still sees the need for mercy to be shown towards them. He prays in confidence, knowing God will answer and show mercy to those who fear Him, and has an expectation that glorious blessings will follow.

Psalm 86

A Psalm of David

A prayer for mercy

David prays for daily support, knowing that God is always ready to show mercy and forgive. There is no other like God and all nations will come to recognise His glory and worship Him. David prays for further instruction from God and promises to praise Him with all his heart and to glorify His name for evermore. He makes a plea to God to show mercy towards him in the face of his enemies, and to show a token for good that will shame them.

Psalm 87

A Psalm for the Sons of Korah

Zion, city of God

The psalmist speaks of the glorious future of Zion whose inhabitants will even include former enemies. The conversion of Jews and Gentiles will be cause for much praise and celebration.

Psalm 88

A Psalm for the Sons of Korah; A contemplation by Heman the Ezrahite

The cry of a man in deep distress nearing death

This is perhaps the darkest of psalms, being one of complete woe and does not end with any hint of relief, comfort or joy.

The psalmist's soul is full of troubles as he approaches the end of his life. He feels as if he were already in the grave with those who have no more access to God. All his friends have left him to suffer alone with his troubles and the affliction he has in his eye. Daily he cries out to God for mercy and deliverance, knowing that once dead he would not be able to praise God, see the wonders of His works, or benefit from His loving kindness. In these dark times, he has no lover, friend or acquaintances.

Psalm 89

A contemplation of Ethan the Ezrahite

A prayer for the restoration of Judah

The psalmist speaks of God's promise to David, His support and mercy shown to him and against his enemies. However, it seems that His covenant with David has been made void as Judah is now captive and David's enemies are rejoicing. The psalmist entreats God to remember His covenant with David and bring about restoration.

Book 4

[Ps 90-106]

Psalm 90

A Prayer of Moses the Man of God

Moses speaks of the eternity of God and the frailty of man toward whom God is showing His displeasure. He states the necessity of considering the shortness of life, and earnestly prays for God's mercy and for His favour to return to Israel.

Psalm 91

God, my refuge and fortress

The psalmist speaks of how the godly man can feel safe in the shadow of the God in whom he trusts, who will defend and preserve him, trample on his adversaries and respond to his prayers with mercy and deliverance.

Psalm 92

A song for the Sabbath day

It is good to give praise on the Sabbath and to give thanks for God's works. A fool has no understanding of this. The wicked will perish, but the righteous will be fruitful and flourish.

Psalm 93

The majesty and power of God

God's reign, clothed with majesty and power, is eternal. God is mightier than any who oppose Him as testified by His works. Holiness is His house, forever.

Psalm 94

A call for justice

The psalmist appeals to God against those who are His people's oppressors. He warns them that God sees and hears everything and even knows their thoughts. God is merciful to the righteous and will bring them comfort, but the wicked He will cut off.

Psalms 95-100

Some like to group these six psalms together. For example, when commenting on Psalm 97, Barnes says "Perhaps the most that can be said now on the origin and design of the psalm, is that these "six" psalms, Ps. 95-100, seem to have been composed with reference to the same occasion, and may be designed to be used together. They are similar in their contents and structure; and they refer to the same thing - the sovereignty or the supremacy of God."

Psalm 95

The writer of Hebrews implies this psalm is by David - Heb 4:3-7

A call to worship and obedience

The people are invited to praise God for His majesty and dominion, and to pray to God, for He is their shepherd and they are His sheep. They are exhorted not to be disobedient as their fathers had been in the desert and consequently not permitted to enter His rest.

Psalm 96

All the earth to sing unto the Lord who will be their judge

In this psalm, all the peoples of the earth are invited to sing in praise of the one true God, to bring offerings and to worship Him. This is to be a witness to all nations and a reminder to all that He is coming to judge the earth.

Psalm 97

God's majesty and glory

God's majesty and glory are acclaimed, putting idol worshippers to shame. Those who love God and hate evil can rejoice in the knowledge that He is their deliverer.

Psalm 98

In praise of God

Simply a psalm of loud and joyful praise for God's salvation, righteousness, faithfulness and mercy.

Psalm 99

God's mercy and justice

The Lord reigns over all; people should tremble at His great and awesome name. He loves justice as demonstrated in Jacob's life. Reference is made to Moses, Aaron and Samuel as examples of men of old who called upon Him and were graciously answered with forgiveness and mercy.

Psalm 100

A call for praise and thanksgiving

This final psalm of the series (Ps 95-100) is a call for everyone to come before the Lord with a joyful shout and singing. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture, and with acts of thanksgiving and praise we thank Him and bless His name for His everlasting goodness, mercy and truth.

Psalm 101

A Psalm of David

Leading an upright life

David declares he will conduct his affairs with the attitude of a perfect heart. He will set himself against the ungodly and only employ the faithful. This applies not only to his own household, but as king over Israel.

Psalm 102

This psalm has a prefix generally translated as:

A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed and pours out his complaint before the Lord.

The writer expresses the miserable state he finds himself in, representative of those in exile. He has every expectation that deliverance will come soon when God remembers His favoured people and hears their prayers. His confidence is in an unchanging God whose promises will be accomplished in the fullness of time.

Psalm 103

God's abundant love and mercy

This 'Psalm of David' is full of emotions of gratitude and praise for what God has done for the psalmist in particular, and for what He does for all who keep his commandments. God's mercy is everlasting to those who fear Him. All God's angels, His hosts and all His works are called upon to join in the praise.

Psalm 104

The formation and governance of the world

Some sources attribute this psalm to David.

It appears to allude to the first five days of creation:

Day 1	vs 2-5	Gen 1:1-5
Day 2	vs 6-9	Gen 1:6-8
Day 3	vs 10-18	Gen 1:9-13
Day 4	vs 19-23	Gen 1:14-19
Day 5	vs 24-30	Gen 1:20-23

The psalmist concludes by expressing his intent to praise God all his life and his hope that sinners will cease to exist.

Psalm 105

God is praised for His wondrous works with Israel

The psalmist exhorts the people to sing praises to God and make known His deeds in dealing with Israel. This psalm is historic in nature and recalls God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Joseph, Jacob's being sold into slavery and his later rise to power, Israel's settling in Egypt and eventual bondage, Moses and Aaron's part in Israel's deliverance from Egypt, God's provision for the Israelites in the desert, and His bringing them to the Promised Land.

Psalm 106

Israel's disobedience

The psalmist praises God for His abundant mercy before offering a prayer for himself. He then confesses the sins of his

people and their fathers, recalling their transgressions from history during their time in Egypt, the desert and the land of Canaan.

Although they often backslid and rebelled, God heard their cries, remembered His covenant with them and took pity on them. This prompts the psalmist to pray for Israel's restoration in order that they might once more give thanks and praise to their everlasting God.

Book 5

[Ps 107-150]

Psalm 107

Verse three implies this psalm may have been written after the Jews had been redeemed from captivity.

The psalmist exhorts the people to give thanks to God for His goodness and mercy and gives four word-pictures of problems that man encounters. The first two they can directly relate to from their history: The traveller lost in the desert and prisoners in bondage. The third is of sick men and the fourth of sailors tossed around in the tempest. In each case they cry out to God who delivers them from their distress. This is in contrast to the way in which God deals with those who do not obey His word. The righteous have cause to rejoice and the wise will gain understanding of God's loving kindness.

Psalm 108

A psalm of David

This psalm is a compound of psalms 57:7-11 and 60:5-12 with little variation, perhaps because they simply suited the occasion.

David expresses his desire to give praises to God for mercies he has received. He then prays for the fulfilment of God's promises concerning restoration of Israel's lands and privileges taken by their enemies.

Psalm 109

A psalm of David

David complains that his enemies, who have been recipients of his love, have returned evil for good. He prays against them seeking their destruction, then prays for himself, asking God to lift him from his low state. In doing so, his enemies would see what God has done for him and be ashamed. David then declares his intent to greatly praise God publicly.

Psalm 110

A psalm of David

This psalm is Messianic in that it speaks solely of Christ and nothing else, particularly prophesying His kingly and priestly office, and His triumph over His enemies.

Psalm 111

In praise of God's works and faithfulness

The psalmist praises God for His works as being great, honourable and glorious, and for the provision, kindness and redemption granted to His people. Fear of God is the starting point of wisdom for man.

Psalm 112

The happiness of the righteous

The man who fears God and obeys his commandments is sure to be blessed with regards to himself and his family. He will conduct his affairs with righteousness and will have no cause to be afraid. The wicked will envy his prosperity.

Psalms 113 to 118

These are commonly referred to as the great Hallel. Hallel is a Jewish prayer, a verbatim recital of Psalms 113 to 118 on the feasts of Tabernacles and Passover. Psalms 113 and 114 are sung before the Passover meal and Psalms 115 to 118 after it.

Psalm 113

An exhortation to praise God

Our God is above all nations and His glory above the heavens, yet He humbles Himself and is concerned with the poorest of His creation.

Psalm 114

God's presence during Israel's exodus

Recalling God's presence and power during Israel's exodus and time in the desert.

Psalm 115

God alone is to be glorified and praised

All glory goes to God; idols are lifeless and reflect the personality of their makers. Trust and fear God who is mindful of His people and cares for them. The heavens are God's, but He has given the earth to His people. Praise Him now, because you cannot praise Him from the grave.

Psalm 116

Gratitude to God expressed in love

The psalmist professes his love for God who delivered him from a dark period in his life. His gratitude is expressed with a resolution to serve God with thanksgiving and praise.

Psalm 117

This shortest of the psalms is a simple exhortation for all nations, which would include Gentiles, to praise God.

Psalm 118

An exhortation to praise God for His everlasting mercy

The psalmist exhorts all about him to praise God for his mercy that *endureth for ever*, then relates his own experience, expressing the advantage of trusting in the Lord rather than man. He was consequently able to overcome his enemies in the name of the Lord. He desires, and is given, admission to the temple - a figure of the exaltation of Christ. All the people offer praise and acknowledge that this deliverance is the Lord's work. The psalmist prays for prosperity and ends with a short doxology.

Psalm 119

This is the longest psalm of all. It is an acrostic - alphabet - psalm made up of 22 eight-verse sections, each section beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and each verse within each section beginning with the same letter.

This psalm might be best described as a meditation on God's Word, or law, but is not as formal structurally as its acrostic style and cannot be easily summarised. It is perhaps sufficient to say that the whole generally speaks of the privileges and happiness of those who observe and delight in God's Word.

Commentators generally agree that the psalmist uses ten expressions when speaking of the law:

Testimonies	Ways
Commandments	Truth
Precepts	Judgement
Word	Righteousness
Law	Statutes

With few exceptions, one or other of these words appears in every verse of this psalm.

Psalms 120 to 134

The next fifteen psalms are prefixed with the title “A song of degrees”, four of which are ascribed to David and one to Solomon. The remaining ten have unknown authors.

There is a variety of conjecture as to why these psalms have this title, but conjecture is all it is and therefore the real reason cannot be determined. There seems, then, little point in retaining the title, but it’s there and has to be acknowledged. Perhaps one day someone will solve it.

With the exception of Psalm 132, which is eighteen verses, they are all very short, nine verses or less.

Psalm 120

A cry for deliverance from deceitful tongues

An example of how a man of God can suffer as much from what people say as what they do.

Psalm 121

God’s protection

Anyone who puts their trust in God knows where to turn when in trouble. God will protect them from evil and preserve their souls at all times.

Psalm 122

A psalm of David

David professes his joy in the House of the Lord and prays for the peace of Jerusalem.

Psalm 123

A prayer for mercy and relief from contempt.

Psalm 124

A psalm of David

David gives credit to God alone for deliverance from his enemies and the great danger he had been in. Confidence is expressed in God.

Psalm 125

There is strength to be found in trusting in God. Let the ungodly be warned.

Psalm 126

The Israelites are exuberant now God has brought them out of captivity.

Psalm 127

A psalm of Solomon

Everything is in vain unless it is with God's blessing; Children are His heritage and blessed is he who has a fruitful wife.

Psalm 128

The man who fears God is blessed in his labours, his family and with seeing God's ordinances in Jerusalem. He shall have a long life and see peace in Israel.

Psalm 129

An expression of God's saving Israel out of her afflictions and a prayer against her enemies.

Psalm 130

The psalmist, in distress, confesses his sins, declares confidence in God's mercy and waits upon Him. Israel, too, is encouraged to hope in God who is their redeemer.

Psalm 131

A psalm of David

David professes his humility and exhorts Israel to hope in God henceforth.

Psalm 132

This psalm is in two parts. The first, verses 1-9, speaks of David's zeal in bringing the ark to a permanent resting place; the second reflects on God's promises to David and his line, His choice of Zion for a permanent resting place and His promises to the people.

Psalm 133

A psalm of David

A short three verse psalm: Simply, the blessed unity of the people of God.

Psalm 134

Another short three verse psalm. This one for those on night watch in the temple.

Psalm 134 was the last of the fifteen psalms called the "Songs of Degrees."

Psalm 135

An exhortation to praise God

Reasons given to praise God are reflected in nature, and in wonders done in Egypt and during the exodus. The pointlessness of idols is stated. With all this in mind, the people, priests and Levites are all called upon to praise God.

Psalm 136

Thanksgiving to God for His enduring mercy

Each verse notably ends in the phrase *for his mercy endureth for ever*.

This psalm has some similarity with 135 in its content, but focuses on nature in the first nine verses and Israel's history from Egypt to her restoration from exile in the remaining verses. Throughout, the people are called upon to give thanks to God for His mercies.

Psalm 137

The exiles lament over Zion whilst in captivity

The melancholy captives cannot humour their captives who want to hear songs about Zion. They cannot forget their city Jerusalem and look for judgement on Edom and Babylon.

Psalm 138

A psalm of David

A song of thanks for God's goodness

David reflects with thankfulness on his experience of God's goodness toward him. He knows that God also cares for the lowly, and looks forward to a future with God being there in the midst of his troubles.

Psalm 139

A psalm of David

God knows us through and through

A declaration of God's omniscience, omnipresence, and the wonder of man's form. The psalmist is in awe of God's thoughts for him. He has a hatred for the wicked and asks God to search out and deal with all that is wrong in him.

Psalm 140

A psalm of David

Confidence in God's protection

David calls on God to preserve him from his enemies, and prays for their judgement. He expresses his confidence in God's protection of the afflicted and in their desire to give thanks and enter His presence.

Psalm 141

A psalm of David

Prayers for safekeeping from wickedness

David cries out to God to hear his prayer, that he should not offend with his tongue and that he may be preserved from any wrong doing, expressing a willingness to be reproved. Disasters still affect his people, but he trusts in God and prays for deliverance at the expense of his enemies.

Psalm 142

A psalm of David

The title of this psalm says “A prayer when he was in a cave.” This circumstance occurred twice, recorded in 1 Sam 22 and 1 Sam 24.

The prayer of a man in trouble and alone

With this psalm, David shows that when he is in great distress and alone, his comfort comes through prayer.

Psalm 143

A psalm of David

David prays for God’s guidance and support

David appears to be at the end of his tether, at an all time low, and in this desperate situation he knows God is his only refuge. He cries out ‘ hear me deliver me..... teach me..... lead me..... quicken me...’ to ‘bring my soul out of trouble’. The psalm ends with a prayer against his enemies.

Psalm 144

A psalm of David

God, who protects and prospers His people

David praises God, in whom he trusts, for his goodness, yet wonders why He pays attention to insignificant man. He prays against his enemies, his deliverance from them and for the prosperity of his people.

Psalms 145-150

These are a group of psalms in praise of God, probably intended for public worship. They are used today by Jews in daily prayer. Psalms 146-150 each begin and end with an Alleluia - ‘O praise the Lord!’

Psalm 145

A psalm of David

Unadulterated praise of God

David pours out praise to God for His unsearchable greatness, for His wondrous works and mighty acts, His goodness and tender mercies to all, His everlasting kingdom and power, His kindness to the lowly and His providence. He hears and answers the prayers of the faithful and all shall praise His holy name.

Psalm 146

Trust in God alone

Praise God alone, not man, for it is God who is the Creator and He who has dominion over His creation, a dominion of providence and grace which is everlasting.

Psalm 147

Praise to our omnipotent God

The psalmist exhorts believers to praise God for the care of His people

Throughout this psalm, and in various places, the people are called upon to praise God as the God of nature, the God of grace and the God of Israel who gave them His Word.

Psalm 148

All creation is to praise God

Everything that exists owes praise to the Creator: the angels, the heavens, nature, all creatures and all mankind, particularly Israel.

Psalm 149

A song for God praising Him for His salvation and judgement

The congregation are called upon to Praise God with joy, with dance and musical instruments, for He takes pleasure in His people and delivers them from their enemies.

Psalm 150

A final exhortation to praise God

This is the grand climax to the Psalter, a final call to praise God with the volume of all the instruments.

Proverbs

The book of Proverbs opens with *The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, the king of Israel*. However, the structure of this book tells us that this is a compilation from sources other than just Solomon and, in the form we have it, was compiled some three centuries after Solomon's time.

First Kings 4:32 reads *He spoke three thousand proverbs*. With such a number quoted, there must at some time have been a known collection of Solomon's proverbs. Clearly, there is only a small proportion here in this book, the remainder of which are lost to us.

Theologians don't all agree on how far this book goes in providing us with teachings of Solomon himself, what portions may be attributed to him and what may be attributed to later writers. Nevertheless, the book can be readily divided into sections which probably goes some way to answering this.

However, we shouldn't be too concerned about differing opinions of theologians and commentators. It is sufficient to know that *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness* [2 Tim 3:16]. The only problem, perhaps, is that the way the proverbs read is as if someone threw them all into a hat and then picked them out randomly to record them. For this reason, some have categorised the proverbs by subject matter. This is somewhat subjective as witnessed by the varying number of categories used: Matthew Henry offers 77; Hugh Buchanan 44; Thompson Chain Reference Study Bible 22; and The Lion Handbook to the Bible just 16. If the reader likes the idea of reading through the proverbs in this way, and has access to the Internet, then a search will probably find a categorisation that suits.

As there are 31 chapters, a popular way of reading this book is a chapter a day. This is as good a process as any to familiarise oneself with Proverbs.

The random manner of the proverbs makes it almost impossible to provide a summary without commenting on each individual proverb, which isn't a summary. Consequently, there is a limitation on what can be achieved here.

Including the introductory verses in ch1 vs1-7, the book can be divided into eight sections:

Prologue [1:1-7]

Lessons on wisdom [1:8-9:18]

Proverbs of Solomon [10:1-22:16]

A collection of thirty sayings of wise men [22:17-24:22]

A further collection of sayings of wise men [24:23-34]

More of Solomon's proverbs (Hezekiah's collection) [chs 25-29]

Sayings of Agur [ch 30]

Sayings of King Lemuel [ch 31]

Prologue

[1:1-7]

Here we have the purpose of these proverbs: to know wisdom and gain understanding. Primarily intended as instruction for the uneducated and young, but the wise will also benefit. All will grow in understanding and knowledge.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge:

Lessons on Wisdom

[1:8-9:18]

The superiority of the way of wisdom

[1:8-33]

Before presenting the reader with a selection of proverbs, the writer offers some lessons on wisdom, speaking as a father to his son. He speaks of the superior way of wisdom, beginning with the necessary caution to avoid the company of sinners, and to listen instead to the voice of wisdom, personified, complaining that she is ignored, even being treated with contempt. She warns those who ignore her counsels that there will be serious consequences.

Commendation of Wisdom

[2-4]

Chapter 2 - Benefits of accepting Wisdom's instructions

If wisdom is sought, then she will be found in the fear of the Lord, who is the giver of all wisdom and its consequential knowledge. She will protect you from falling into wrong company, both male and female, and lead you to the path of righteousness.

Chapter 3 - Wisdom's instructions and benefits

Wisdom teaches obedience, trust, humility, giving and submission to God's chastening, the benefits of which riches cannot buy: peace, happiness and security. We are not to hold back from doing good, practising love and forbearance continually. The wicked and their ways are not to be envied, for the humble and wise will be the beneficiaries of God's grace.

Chapter 4 - Challenge to hold on to wisdom

Wisdom should be passed from father to son; should be embraced and not forgotten. Wisdom is life and her path is as a shining light, whereas the way of the wicked is as darkness. Keep wisdom in your heart and do not deviate in any way from the path she leads you down.

Warnings against folly

[5-7]

Chapter 5 - Warning against adultery

The character of a loose woman is described, as are the dire consequences of submitting to her enticing words. Rather than submit, rejoice in the wife of your youth and the pleasures of conjugal love, for to do otherwise is folly and has its cost.

Chapter 6:1-19 - Warning against perverse ways

There are things the author describes as perverse, which include becoming surety for others, slothfulness and a mischievous person. We are then given seven things that God hates: a proud look; a lying tongue; hands that shed innocent blood; a heart that plans wicked things; feet that are swift to run to mischief; a false witness; one who stirs up trouble among friends.

Chapter 6:20-35 - Cost of committing adultery

The author provides an exhortation to keep the Word of God in our hearts, before returning to the subject of adultery and repeated warnings of whoredom and adultery that can destroy a man's soul. A warning is given concerning the jealousy of an adulteress's husband.

Chapter 7 - Warning against the incitements of an adulteress

Another exhortation to acquire wisdom as armour against the adulteress. This time, an observation of a harlot at work is recorded, enticing a young man who is seemingly unaware of his spiritual fate. It is followed by a solemn warning that *Her house is the way to hell*.

Appeals addressed to youth

[8,9]

Chapter 8 - Wisdom's appeal

Wisdom's appeal is addressed to all men. The excellence of her instruction and the value of it exceeds any earthly riches, and benefits those who submit to her counsel. Wisdom has existed from the beginning, the very first of all creation. Only those who heed her counsels are blessed.

Chapter 9 - Invitations of wisdom and folly

We are now invited by Christ, under the name of Wisdom, to enter into fellowship and communion with Him. Fear of God is what is required from us, but the choice is ours. For we are also invited by folly, in the name of a foolish woman, to commune with her, but her reward is spiritual death.

Proverbs of Solomon

[10:1-22:16]

Other than the introductory words of 10:1 - *These are Solomon's proverbs*: - this section is devoted entirely to proverbs, many of which are within a single verse, and most of which have no relationship to adjacent proverbs. Consequently, as alluded to earlier, there is no opportunity here to summarise them.

Sayings of the wise

[22:17-24:22]

This is reckoned as the beginning of a new section, introduced by the words of verse 17 *Listen, and I will teach you what the wise have said*. Who wrote these words and who 'the wise' are appears to be a matter of theological debate. What is notable is that following verses 17 to 21, which are an encouragement in the pursuit of wisdom, the proverbs are generally expressed in more than one verse. A change in style to Solomon's proverbs earlier.

More sayings of the wise

[24:23-34]

Verse 23 begins *The wise have also said these things*: and announces a new group of just a few proverbs.

Proverbs of Solomon - Hezekiah's collection

[25-29]

Hezekiah was one of the great kings of Israel who brought about a reformation. It is perhaps not surprising then that he collected some of Solomon's proverbs, recorded here.

As in Solomon's proverbs in earlier chapters, they are now predominantly one-liners and summarising them is impractical.

Sayings of Agur

[30]

Regardless of some speculation or theories, we don't know who Agur was.

The structure of this small collection of proverbs allows the following summary.

Agur first professes his faith and offers a short prayer. He then gives a caution against wronging servants before he delivers his proverbs grouped in fours. The first two are reflections on four wicked generations and four things that are never satisfied. A caution then follows against one who despises his parents before following with four things he finds too wonderful for him, four things that disquiet the land, four small but wise animals, then four things that go well. Finally, there is a warning against doing foolish things that will lead to strife.

Sayings of King Lemuel

[31]

This final section is *The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him* [verse 1]. This is the only mention of King Lemuel in the Bible, so we don't know who he is. Some say he is Solomon, but careful consideration of verse two speaks against this view.

Lemuel's mother advises him against debauchery, wine and strong drink, as these things have the potential of adversely affecting both kings and their subjects when administering justice.

She then describes at length a virtuous woman whose many qualities will cause her children to call her blessed and her husband to praise her. Such a woman is one who fears God.

Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes is the Greek translation of Koheleth, which is generally translated as preacher. Koheleth is the name the writer gives himself in several places in this book. The word Koheleth is only found in Ecclesiastes.

Although the writer isn't named, verses 1:1, 1:12, 1:16 and 2:4-9 strongly suggest it was Solomon. As we read Ecclesiastes, it is easy to view it as Solomon's reflections on his life and all its extravagances, and the futility of them without God.

'Vanity' is used 38 times in Ecclesiastes. In the context of this book, it takes on the Oxford Dictionary's second meaning: 'the quality of being worthless or futile', or as Strong describes it: H1892 *emptiness* or *vanity*; figuratively something *transitory* and *unsatisfactory*.

Summary

Chapter 1

Men come and go and nature goes through continuous cycles. There is nothing new under the sun. The writer gave his heart to seeking out wisdom, and in his observation of all things declares wisdom is meaningless, as the abundance of wisdom and knowledge merely exposes lack of knowledge and consequent sorrow.

Chapter 2

The teacher relates his acquisition of pleasures and possessions and considers them all as *vanity and waywardness of spirit; of no advantage under the sun*. Even wisdom, that excels folly, becomes meaningless at the point of death. The toils of life are resented, they are all meaningless, for there is no satisfaction in life without God.

Chapter 3

There is a time and season for everything in life and in this world. Everything that God has made is beautiful in its time and is a gift from God, for which people should be thankful.

What God has done is everlasting and nothing can be added to or taken away from it. Man should be in awe of Him, for He will judge both the good and bad. All will return to dust, until which time man should enjoy the fruits of his own labour.

Chapter 4

The oppressions of life have no comforter, either for the oppressed or the oppressors. There is envy and idleness. It is better to share life with another than to be alone.

It is also better to be young, poor and wise than to be an old foolish king. Advancement in itself is meaningless. However, make sure your offerings are more meaningful than that of a fool.

Chapter 5

Reverence is to be observed in all aspects of worship.

The produce of the earth is for all, but not so riches which are meaningless. They lead to covetousness and evil, and cannot be taken to the grave. We should be thankful and enjoy the blessings of God.

Chapter 6

What is the value of long life to a man with all his riches if his soul cannot be satisfied, and what advantage has the wise man over a fool if he doesn't know what will satisfy his soul?

Chapter 7

Here the writer quotes a series of proverbs in a style remarkably similar to Solomon's Proverbs. They conclude with the observation that man was good as God created him; his problems are of his own making.

Chapter 8

Wisdom encourages a spirit of obedience. Despite the fact that the ungodly sometimes seem to have advantage in life, it will be well for those who fear God. Man should enjoy the time God has given him. The writer set his heart to know wisdom, but God has concealed the answer to life's mysteries.

Chapter 9

The righteous are in God's hands, but for everyone, good and bad, death is inevitable. The righteous should enjoy the time God has given them, all the while living to His glory, for there is no knowing how long a person has on this earth.

Wisdom is greater than power, yet is not always recognised as one sinner can destroy much good.

Chapter 10:1-11:6

A collection of proverbs on wisdom and folly.

Chapter 11:7-12:7

Old age, with its problems, and death will eventually come. So rejoice in your youth, all the while remembering God and walking blamelessly, for God will be your judge.

Chapter 12:8-14

This is the conclusion: Let wisdom be your guard. Wisdom is to fear God and keep his commandments, for God will judge everything, good and evil.

Song of Solomon

We are told in the first verse of this book that Solomon wrote this song. It is called 'song of songs', a title which is, presumably, a superlative telling us that this song is the greatest of the 1005 songs composed by Solomon [1 Kings 1:1]. It is an explicit story telling of the love between a husband and his wife during courtship, the wedding and life after the wedding, and represents marriage as God intended it. The husband here is Solomon [3:7] and the wife a Shulamite girl [6:13]. There is, however, another view that suggests the two lovers are the Shulamite girl and a shepherd. In this version, she is captured by Solomon and placed in his harem in an attempt to win her affections. This fails and she is finally reunited with her shepherd.

Both these versions have been allegorised.

In the first, the Jews see Solomon as God and the Shulamite girl as Israel, with the song depicting the love God has for his people Israel who are often referred to as His wife. Christians view this story as representing the love between Christ (Solomon), and His church (the Shulamite girl).

In the second, Solomon represents the world coming between Christ, the shepherd, and His church, the Shulamite girl.

The fact that all three interpretations can be gleaned from the text does not make for an easy summary. So here the allegories are put to one side and the book is summarised as written, that is, a lengthy and highly symbolic dialogue between a maiden and her lover.

The dialogue covers three periods of their relationship: Courtship, marriage and post marriage.

The Courtship

[1:1-3:5]

The maiden, a Schulamite woman, longs for her lover and his kisses, but is concerned about her dark complexion acquired from working in vineyards. She looks for her lover and is directed to the shepherds' tents.

Her lover brushes aside her concerns with expressions of praise of her beauty and suggests how he might provide for her.

The maiden describes herself as a rose and lily, and her beloved as a tree under which she sits, providing her with fruit sweet to her taste.

She warns women not to fall in love too readily.

The maiden likens her beloved to an energetic roe or young hart, come to take her away in the spring. She and her lover now belong to one another.

At night, in her bed, the maiden dreams she cannot find her lover. With help, she finds him and takes him home. Again, she charges other women not to give in to love too early.

The Wedding

[3:6-5:1]

The wedding day has arrived and an elaborate wedding procession is described. Her bridegroom appears, now identified as Solomon.

Having compared parts of her body to animals and precious objects, Solomon tells how his heart has been ravished by her.

She is then spoken of in terms of an enclosed garden. She asks the winds to blow on her garden, invites her beloved to come to her and they make love.

Post Marriage

[5:2-8:14]

The maiden has another dream in which her husband comes to her to make love. She prepares to receive him but he disappears. As in a previous dream, she seeks help to find him but this time is abused. She then asks some women to help her and gives a description of him, comparing parts of his body to precious things, jewels and animals.

They find each other in the garden where her beloved again praises each part of the maiden's body. She invites him to the fields and villages from where they will go to the vineyard and she will give him her love.

She seems to wish he would be looked upon as her brother, so that her open displays of affection for him would not lead some to despise her.

The maiden looks for their love to be sealed in her heart so that their strong love will overcome the cruel effects of jealousy.

She reflects on her young life and is content that her chastity was lost to Solomon.

Finally, although Solomon has many women (vineyards), there is contentment in this particular relationship.

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