

OLD TESTAMENT Summary Book By Book

by Dr. Henderson Ward



Believers of all denominations, and interested persons and Bible students, will find these book by book summaries useful whenever they read and inquire into the Word of God.

GENESIS

Author: Moses

Date Written: 1450 1410 BC

To Whom Written: The people of Israel

Purpose: Genesis is often referred to as the book of origins and is the first book of Moses. Genesis records the beginning of our world, the beginning of plants, fish species and animals and it introduces us to Jehovah God. It records the beginning of humankind in that God created Adam and Eve and set them in the paradise called Eden. God gave them freedom of choice and they chose to disobey God by sinning and as a consequence were thrown out of Eden. Humankind became extremely wicked and God terminated their existence with The Flood. Only eight people were saved in Noah's ark during the flood and God used these people to start all over again. The vast majority of Genesis deals with Abraham and the chosen people called Israel.

EXODUS

Author: Moses

Date Written: 1447 1410 BC

To Whom Written: Israel and her succeeding generations

Purpose: Exodus is all about God bringing his chosen people Israel out of Egypt and leading

them towards the Promised Land. We see God persuading Pharaoh, through a series of powerful miracles, to free the Israelites. Under Moses' leadership Israel travels through the desert and eventually crosses the Red Sea and we see the utter destruction of the Egyptian pursuers as the Red Sea swallows them up. At Mount Sinai God gives Israel his commandments and laws to live by and in the final chapters of this book we see Moses carefully following God's instructions and building the Tabernacle which was symbolic of God's presence and care as Israel's journey continued.

LEVITICUS

Author: Moses

Date Written: 1448 1410 BC

To Whom Written: The children of Israel

Purpose: Leviticus is essentially about God giving instructions through Moses to Israel on how she is to be holy in her worship, her social conduct and her culinary endeavours. "You shall be holy for I am holy" occurs several times and God is specific in letting Israel know his requirements and how they can be satisfied. Some refer to Leviticus as the priests' "Charter" because it contains precise instructions and laws relating to the consecration of priests, conduct in the tabernacle, offerings and sacrifices required, the different festivals to be kept and strict procedures for dealing with medical and health issues.

NUMBERS

Author: Moses

Date Written: 1446 1410 BC

To Whom Written: The children of Israel

Purpose: This book is about Israel's wanderings in wilderness country and its name "Numbers" comes from the mustering of the army as Israel prepared to enter the Promise Land. It portrays a panorama of events which all took place in the wilderness of Sinai, Zin and Paran (Kadesh-barnea) and details important milestones in the history of Israel. It details the choosing of Moses' successor, the law of inheritance, the law of jealousy, the law of the Nazarite, rebellion in the camp, the confrontation with Balaam, various worship protocols and the division of the Promised Land. It relates how God dealt with his freed people, their constant bickering, grumbling and defiance of God and their eventual preparation for habitation in the Promised Land.

DEUTERONOMY

Author: Moses

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Date Written: 1407 1406 BC

To Whom Written: The children of Israel

Purpose: The name of this book, Deuteronomy, by its meaning "second law" gives the overarching purpose of its relevance. The children of Israel had traveled vast distances over a period of forty years and were now encamped in the plains on the east side of the river Jordan and were about to enter the Promised Land. The older generation, because of their incessant grumbling and defiance had been allowed to die off during the wilderness journey and the new generation, in preparation for habitation in the Promised Land, needed to be updated on God's requirement, hence this restatement of the Sinaitic Laws. It also details the blessings and curses dichotomy facing Israel, the leadership transition from Moses to Joshua and the death of the first and greatest of all the prophets, i.e. Moses.

JOSHUA

Author: Unknown but could have included Joshua

Date Written: Probably 1405 1383 BC

To Whom Written: The children of Israel

Purpose: This book seems to have been written with the aim of recording, for future generations, the details of Israel's military campaign under Joshua's leadership as they entered the Promised Land. It provides details on how the land, after being conquered, was portioned out by lot to the various tribes and families and shows God's faithfulness in keeping his promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It also details the final call for Israel to remain in covenant relationship with God and reminded them of the blessings due to obedience and faithfulness and the dire consequences should they turn their backs on God. As a history book, it also records Joshua's death and some events after Joshua's death like Caleb's conquering of Hebron.

JUDGES

Author: Unknown but tradition says it was Samuel

Date Written: Probably 1086 1035 BC

To Whom Written: The nation of Israel

Purpose: Judges records the tumultuous history of Israel from the time of Joshua's death until the time of Samuel and faithfully details this time when Israel was ruled by a series of men (and one woman), called judges, fifteen in number, who took leadership positions to rescue and defend her. The essential purpose teaches lessons about Israel and God as Israel is shown again and again immersing herself in sin and rampant idolatry and reaping Divine retribution but upon showing true repentance and genuine sorrow, God shows her mercy. Judges also

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speaks to the utter failure and futility of Godless, idolatrous governments to give the people the peace and prosperity they so badly need.

RUTH

Author: Disputed but probably Samuel

Date Written: Probably 1046 1011 BC

To Whom Written: The children of Israel

Purpose: To show how a gentile woman, Ruth a Moabite, forsook her people and their Godless way of life and chose Jehovah and his covenant people. It shows how Ruth a widow and her mother in law, Naomi an Israelite, traveled back from Moab to Bethlehem and God provided redemption through Boaz who married Ruth. It details how Ruth, a gentile, became an ancestor of Jesus Christ when the marriage to Boaz produced a son, Obed who was the father of Jesse, the father of King David. It also shows clearly that God cares for all people and will accept those, from whatever nationality, who turns to him.

1 SAMUEL

Author: Unknown but could have included Samuel, Nathan and Gad

Date Written: After 1011 BC

To Whom Written: The nation of Israel

Purpose: Israel was transitioning from the period of the "Judges" with Samuel the last such "Judge" to the period of the Monarchy with Saul the first king. The main purpose of this book was to document this transition and record the initial travails of the monarchy which was not God's choice but the people's. It also records Saul's waywardness and disobedience and his eventual rejection by God and gives details of David's highly eventful, but none the less certain pathway to the throne.

2 SAMUEL

Author: Unknown

Date Written: After 973 BC

To Whom Written: The nation of Israel

Purpose: With the monarchy in its infancy and enormous forces combining to crush it, David is anointed King. This book then, is a compendium of the illustrious, bloody, and bellicose and yet successful reign of Israel most loved and revered monarch, King David. It speaks to David's divine selection (in contrast to Saul's); his many escapes from imminent death at the hands of

Saul; his many wars both within Israel and with Israel's enemies; and his establishment of Jerusalem as his capital and the City of David. It also shows David, the ancestor of Jesus Christ, as a man fully committed to and loving God but with all the foibles and fallibilities of fallen humanity.

1 KINGS

Author: Unknown

Date Written: Just prior to 587 BC

To Whom Written: The nation of Israel

Purpose: To carefully document the reigns of a number of kings both from the Northern Kingdom of Israel and from the Southern Kingdom of Judah, beginning with Solomon and ending with Ahaziah. It seeks to give account for the inexorable decline of the nation of Israel from the high point under Solomon's monarchy until it went into Babylonian captivity and it stresses and contrasts those kings who were faithful to God by keeping his covenants and walking in his ways and those who did not. Even though they were social and political developments which benefited the people the emphasis here is on Israel's reluctance to love and serve God wholeheartedly, hence their moral and social decline.

2 KINGS

Author: Unknown

Date Written: Just prior to 587 BC; Chapters 24 & 25 about 550 BC

To Whom Written: The nation of Israel

Purpose: To record for posterity the reigns of the remaining kings, of the Northern Kingdom beginning with King Ahaziah and of the Southern Kingdom beginning with King Jehoram, until each of these kingdoms came to an end. Like 1 Kings, of which this book forms a part, it seeks to account for the decline of the nation of Israel concentrating on the powerful influence of her leaders, mostly evil with a few good ones in between, who led them during this period. It also speaks to God's continuing care for his people and his unbreakable commitment to his covenants in that during Israel's apostate state God still pursued them time and again with messages from his prophets to love and serve him wholeheartedly.

1 CHRONICLES

Author: Unknown. Perhaps edited by Ezra.

Date Written: Probably between 450 and 420 BC

To Whom Written: The nation of Israel

Purpose: To document the history of Israel and in particular the history of the southern kingdom of Judah and its kings, highlighting the righteous ones and exposing the wickedness of the others, and their influence on the people. Unlike the other historical books, 1 Chronicles concentrates on the spiritual rather than the purely historical aspects of the period and details the contribution of David with respect to worship. It addresses David's organization with respect to specific roles and functions of the Levites in terms of singers, musicians, porters, priestly duties and even includes details for the building of the temple.

2 CHRONICLES

Author: Unknown. Perhaps edited by Ezra.

Date Written: Probably between 450 and 420 BC

To Whom Written: The nation of Israel

Purpose: To provide the people who were returning from exile the history of Israel and in particular the history of Judah and its kings, concentrating on the righteous ones and exposing the wickedness of the others, and their influence on the people. 2 Chronicles is meant to be encouraging and motivating, reminding Israel of their Godly heritage and concentrates on the spiritual rather than the purely historical aspects of the period and commences with the contribution of Solomon whose reign was rather peaceful, and continues until the kingdom was ended and the people deported to Babylon followed by the restoration decree proclaimed by Cyrus, king of Persia.

EZRA

Author: Unknown. Part written by Ezra

Date Written: Approximately 450 BC

To Whom Written: The returned remnant in Jerusalem and future generations

Purpose: To document the return of a remnant to the Promised Land (Jerusalem) and thereby demonstrating the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy and God's promises. It gives details of the people involved in, and the process of, the return; addresses the laying of the Temple's foundation, the commencement of its structure and subsequent completion as well as the reintroduction of Mosaic social and religious practices. It speaks to Jehovah's continuing faithfulness and protection to Israel through her decline, captivity and eventual return of a remnant to Jerusalem.

NEHEMIAH

Author: Unknown. Part probably written by Nehemiah.

Date Written: Probably between 445 and 420 BC

To Whom Written: The returned remnant in Jerusalem and future generations.

Purpose: To document the outstanding contribution of Nehemiah in providing political and spiritual leadership to the returned remnant at a critical stage in their redevelopment. It addresses the process beginning with the sad news about Jerusalem and continued to Nehemiah's request for leave to go to Jerusalem, followed by rebuilding the wall against fierce opposition, reorganization of the guards and population, tabulation of the priests and Levites and ending with the reestablishment of the covenant practice of giving to the temple Tithes and Offerings for the Levites.

ESTHER

Author: Unknown.

Date Written: Probably between 464 and 435 BC

To Whom Written: Jewish people everywhere.

Purpose: To document and demonstrate God's support for his covenant people taken into captivity by Babylon and choosing to remain in this capital city of Shushan in SW Persia under Persian rule. It speaks to God's sovereign care of his children and his power to preserve them in adversity wherever they may be located in foreign lands. It addresses Mordecai's successful scheme to make Esther queen, Haman's failure to wipe out the Jews and the consequences for him, his children and supporters, Mordecai's elevation in the Persian Kingdom and the creation of a perpetual festival called Purim.

JOB

Author: Unknown.

Date Written: Unknown.

To Whom Written: To people everywhere, especially those who are suffering.

Purpose: To document God's total sovereignty in the affairs of mankind and to illustrate God's wisdom in assisting those in committed service to him undergoing personal affliction and unmerited suffering without capitulation. It speaks to the frailty and travails of suffering mankind and his inability to reconcile just and upright living with victimization, abasement, pain and misery. It addresses Job's friends blaming him for wrongs he did not commit and Job maintaining his integrity to the very end by trusting God who rewarded him with material blessings greater than he had before.

PSALMS

Author: Primarily David, Asap, Solomon and Moses and others, some unknown.

Date Written: Probably between 1440 BC and 450 BC

To Whom Written: A variety of persons including God, for the author himself and to the chief musician.

Purpose: This collection of 150 Hebrew songs, hymns and poems was used by worshippers to express gratitude, praise, joy and thanksgiving in their routine devotions as well as on their festive occasions. It is believed by many that these psalms formed the hymn book for the worshippers in the second temple, built by Zerubbabel and it is certainly the case that several of them have prophetic and or Messianic components pointing to the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ.

PROVERBS

Author: King Solomon, Agur and King Lemuel

Date Written: Approximately 950 BC in the case of Solomon and prior to 700 BC in the case of Agur and King Lemuel

To Whom Written: To all people but to young people in particular.

Purpose: These brief, pithy and incisive sayings expressing a fable, condensed parable or wisdom and collected by King Hezekiah during his reign were for the express purpose of giving moral instruction to young people and in particular young men. Many of these parables were addressed by Solomon to "my son" giving the suggestion that King Solomon had certain concerns about his family's moral upbringing, his sons in particular, and he was being proactive in providing them with sound moral guidance whilst he himself was morally sound, hence the date of 950 BC before his moral decline.

ECCLESIASTES

Author: Unknown but tradition says it was King Solomon.

Date Written: Uncertain but probably 930 BC if we accept Solomon's authorship.

To Whom Written: To those enquiring about life's meaning and importance.

Purpose: These twelve chapters containing as they do a compendium of complaints, half true statements, philosophical assertions, theological fallacies, pithy sayings, vexatious outpourings, spiritual insights and much else besides seeming to be the report of the author's inquiry in which, using his human knowledge and wisdom and without reference to Jehovah's involvement and guidance, he submits the totality of his findings. He purposefully asserts that although, in his opinion, it's all "vanity of vanities" nonetheless his conclusion is that one should fear God and keep his commandments.

SONG OF SOLOMON

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Author: Unknown but tradition says it was Solomon

Date Written: Probably 935 BC if we accept Solomon's authorship

To Whom Written: A bridal couple to each partner

Purpose: To demonstrate the character of true love by way of a love story having all the ingredients of passion and fidelity, testing and loyalty and by the application is analogous to the love of Christ for the church and the church's commitment to him in love and faithful service.

ISAIAH

Author: Isaiah.

Date Written: Probably 681 BC towards the end of Isaiah's ministry.

To Whom Written: The nation of Judah.

Purpose: To disclose to Judah and through her to mankind in perpetuity, that salvation is of the Lord and the need to depend on God alone. It speaks to God's judgment on all those who turn away from God but emphasizes God's willingness to forgive and his promise of the Messiah and full restoration. It reveals prophetic messages which were to take place hundreds of years in the future during Babylonian dominance and beyond and provided references to Jesus and the Apostles.

JEREMIAH

Author: Jeremiah

Date Written: During his ministry 627 BC to 581 BC

To Whom Written: To the people of Judah

Purpose: This compendium of prophecies recorded in many forms like poetry, allegory, prose and acted parables speaks to the backsliding, waywardness, captivity and eventual restoration of Israel and was primarily to declare Jehovah's judgment upon his people for their many sins and to call them to turn from their wickedness and repent and seek spiritual renewal and reconciliation. It addresses issues and circumstances pertaining to the last five kings of Judah and foresees the return of the remnant to Judah after a sojourn of 70 years in Babylon.

LAMENTATIONS

Author: Jeremiah

Date Written: Probably just after the fall of Judah in 586/7 BC

To Whom Written: To those who survived the fall of Judah.

Purpose: To document that disobeying God and doing as we please will always incur God's wrath and judgment. However God's wrath does not last forever and in judgment he is merciful to those who repent and seek his forgiveness and mercy. It contains a series of laments or dirges wrung from the heart of a sensitive Jeremiah as he witnessed the deserved punishment of Judah as she is destroyed by the rampaging Babylonians, the temple burned, people slaughtered in the streets and its people taken captive but ends with the reminder that God will not abandon his covenant people.

EZEKIEL

Author: Ezekiel

Date Written: Probably between 587 BC and 565 BC

To Whom Written: Jews exiled in Babylon and God's people generally

Purpose: This list of prophecies, not in chronological order, recorded in many forms like allegory, prose and acted parables (very similar to Jeremiah's) was to relate to the exiled Jews God's condemnation and punishment of his people for their many sins. It was also to document God's continuing compassion for Israel and his efforts to restore his people once they had repented and sought reconciliation and also God's desire to let Israel know that in and through it all he wants them and the world to know that he is God.

DANIEL

Author: Daniel

Date Written: Probably around 536 BC

To Whom Written: Jews exiled in Babylon and God's people everywhere

Purpose: This book, divided into two halves, the former dealing with Daniel's history and the latter his prophecies, seeks to encourage and give comfort and hope to God's people undergoing severe hardship by revealing God's future plan for them. It demonstrates the transitory nature of bad times and declares God's omnipotence in assuring ultimate victory and thereby realizing the oaths and covenants made to his people in accordance with his word.

HOSEA

Author: Hosea

Date Written: Approximately 722 BC just prior to the fall of Samaria in 721 BC

To Whom Written: The Northern Kingdom of Israel

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Purpose: This book, somewhat like Daniel is divided into two sections, the former dealing with Hosea's domestic life and the latter his prophecies, seeks to show that God's love for his people is unconditional and in spite of Israel's abominable behavior through her harlotry nevertheless God, in expressing his love for them and his sadness at their rejection, urges wayward Israel to repent and be restored to the loving relationship she once had with Jehovah.

JOEL

Author: Joel

Date Written: Unknown

To Whom Written: To the people of Judah

Purpose: Observing horrendous devastation caused to the land by marauding swarms of locust, Joel warns the people of Judah of God's imminent judgment upon their many sins and calls the whole nation to repent not only for the impending disaster but for their waywardness and wrongdoing. It also reveals with true prophetic accuracy the events surrounding the day of Pentecost.

AMOS

Author: Amos

Date Written: Between 755 BC and 750 BC

To Whom Written: The Northern Kingdom of Israel

Purpose: To document God's concern that Israel, at a time of relative prosperity and success, chose to engage in moral and religious infidelity, denied the poor and fatherless social justice and deemed that the wealth and prosperity of the nation was for the favored few thereby bringing God's judgment on his people and to reveal that the wrath of God was imminent on the covenant people of Israel and the surrounding nations but that God would ultimately rescue and restore Israel.

OBADIAH

Author: Uncertain but probably Obadiah

Date Written: Uncertain

To Whom Written: To the Nation of Edom (Idumea) and God's people

Purpose: To reveal God's displeasure with Edom over their treatment of Israel and their rejoicing and heartlessness at the calamity of Jerusalem and God's impending judgment on their people and to declare God's care and faithfulness to his covenant people Israel reassuring

them of complete restoration.

JONAH

Author: Uncertain but could be Jonah

Date Written: Uncertain but probably between 783 BC and 753 BC ([2 Kings 14: 25](#))

To Whom Written: The Nation of Israel and God's people everywhere

Purpose: In sending his servant Jonah to preach a message of doom to Nineveh who on hearing the bad news repented and turned to God who had mercy on them, the aim was to reveal to all humanity that salvation is of the Lord and that this same salvation is available to all who will repent and turn to him and affirms that gentiles are included in God's overall plan of salvation for the human race.

MICAH

Author: Micah

Date Written: Probably between 739 BC and 686 BC

To Whom Written: The whole Nation of Israel (North and South)

Purpose: To warn God's people through Micah, a prophet who was highly perturbed that the Nation was giving offerings and making sacrifices to God whilst at the same time behaving wretchedly, of the coming judgment for their many sins and to offer them hope of God's mercy if they will turn to him and confess their sins and walk in accordance with his commandments. It addresses God's requirement for social justice and ends with God's compassionate restoration of a chastened but redeemed people.

NAHUM

Author: Uncertain but could be Nahum

Date Written: Uncertain but probably before the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC

To Whom Written: The inhabitants in Nineveh and Judah

Purpose: To show that power and military might even of a mighty nation will not save a wicked person from God's judgment and it would be overthrown without mercy. It declares God's impending judgment on the Assyrian capital of Nineveh which was spared when they heeded the warning of Jonah and assures the people of Judah that God's promises to them would be honored and their future deliverance assured.

HABAKKUK

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Author: Uncertain but could be Habakkuk

Date Written: Uncertain but probably between 612 BC and 597 BC

To Whom Written: The nation of Judah and God's people everywhere

Purpose: To declare to Habakkuk and people everywhere that although God might tolerate violence, injustice, destruction and indifference to his will and decrying the teaching of the law he nevertheless is Sovereign and in control of everything and Jehovah can be trusted when events and circumstances seem to contradict his sovereign control. It affirms that the righteous will overcome by faith in God alone whatever the circumstances.

ZEPHANIAH

Author: Zephaniah

Date Written: Uncertain but probably between 640 BC and 628 BC

To Whom Written: The nation of Judah and surrounding countries

Purpose: To document God's wrath and soon coming judgment on Judah and the surrounding countries for their wickedness and gives encouragement for the people to repent and turn to God. It affirms God's promise to his covenant people by declaring that in the latter days Israel will be, once again, living in the Promised Land enjoying the blessings of God during the Messianic reign.

HAGGAI

Author: Haggai

Date Written: 520 BC

To Whom Written: The remnant living in Babylon and the returnees

Purpose: To motivate the remnant living in Babylon and the returnees, in particular Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest, to complete the rebuilding of the temple which they started and did not complete for by so doing they then would be in a position to receive blessings from God. It excoriates them for their selfish priorities in building their own houses and encourages them to reorder their priorities which they did.

ZECHARIAH

Author: Zechariah

Date Written: 520-518 BC

To Whom Written: The remnant especially the returnees from Babylon

Purpose: This book, opening with a need for repentance and a return to the Lord contains visions, questions about fasting and prophetic events surrounding the Messiah at the end of time, seeks to encourage and give hope and comfort to God's people who were experiencing difficult circumstances. It sought to rekindle spiritual fervor so that people would once again turn to Jehovah and also to encourage the returnees in their task, in like fashion to Haggai, of completing the rebuilding of the temple and to look ahead to the time when the messiah will come and reign over all the earth.

MALACHI

Author: Malachi

Date Written: Probably between 457 BC and 432 BC

To Whom Written: To the inhabitants of Jerusalem and their sinful leaders

Purpose: To declare God's love for his covenant people and to warn them, especially her leaders who have led the people astray by giving faulty instructions and perverting justice as well as polluting God's altar and offering unworthy sacrifices, of his approaching judgment and implores them to return to the path of righteousness before the terrible day of the Lord comes in which wickedness will be consumed as stubble and the righteous shall receive his reward.

Books by this author (non-fiction except indicated otherwise)

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<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B002X78D16>

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ONE MINUTE TO MIDNIGHT ON GOD'S CLOCK (e-book)

<http://tatepublishing.com/bookstore/book.php?w=978-1-60799-630-9>

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