**Overview of the Bible**

The Bible totals 66 books by various human writers and ultimately one divine Author. The Biblical doctrine of inspiration is presented in 2 Timothy 3:16, which says that “all Scripture is inspired by God.” This means that God used human authors to write but, in essence, gave them all of the thoughts and words that He fully intended. The books chosen to be part of the “canon,” the fully revealed Word of God, were put together by counsels of godly men only decades after the documents were first written. They determined through much prayer, discussion, and analysis which writings had evidence of divine inspiration and which were writings of mere men.

The Old Testament chronicles the time period before Christ under the old covenant which required the Jews to keep many moral, civil, and religious laws. If they did, they would be blessed. If they did not, they would be cursed. We learn later that salvation under the old covenant was based upon faith in God to forgive their sins, not upon their system of offering sacrifices which was more of a foreshadowing of Christ’s ultimate and final sacrifice on the cross. The new covenant was prophesied about in the Old Testament, and it came with Christ who made it possible for us to have direct access to God. Through faith in His sacrifice alone is salvation. The church of Jesus Christ, which is comprised of believers, was born. The temple of the Old Testament where the presence of God dwelt is now in the heart of every Christian man and woman. God makes His home in our hearts, and we are able to go to Him directly in prayer, without the need to go through an earthly priest.

**The Old Testament**

The Old Testament has 39 books and chronicles the history of man and of the Jewish people until the coming of Christ. We see that God keeps His covenant with His people even though they do not keep their covenant with Him. The coming of Jesus as Messiah is also foreshadowed and foretold over and over. It begins with Genesis and the creation of a paradise-like world and of man. Man falls into sin because of Satan’s temptation. Man and the earth are cursed to physical death and other evils. The world grows more evil and God floods the earth to wipe out all the evil, saving only righteous Noah and his family. God makes a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their descendants, the Jewish people. God leads the Jews out of captivity in Egypt, where they had become slaves. God leads them eventually to the land of Canaan which is to be their homeland. Their kingdom reaches its height under David and Solomon. Then the kingdom is divided and both northern and southern kingdoms are carried off into captivity because of their rebellious ways. God continues to warn them through His messengers, the prophets, but they refuse to listen. God spares a remnant who return to Him in the closing books. Then there are four hundred years where God is silent until Christ comes to the earth. The books of the Old Testament and their divisions are as follows:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Law** | **History** | **Poetry** | **Major Prophets** | **Minor Prophets** |
| **Genesis** | **Joshua** | **Job** | **Isaiah** | **Hosea** |
| **Exodus** | **Judges** | **Psalms** | **Jeremiah** | **Joel** |
| **Leviticus** | **Ruth** | **Proverbs** | **Ezekiel** | **Amos** |
| **Numbers** | **1 Samuel** | **Ecclesiastes** | **Daniel** | **Obadiah** |
| **Deuteronomy** | **2 Samuel** | **Song of Solomon** |  | **Jonah** |
|  | **1 Kings** | **Lamentations** |  | **Micah** |
|  | **2 Kings** |  |  | **Nahum** |
|  | **1 Chronicles** |  |  | **Habakkuk** |
|  | **2 Chronicles** |  |  | **Zephaniah** |
|  | **Ezra** |  |  | **Haggai** |
|  | **Nehemiah** |  |  | **Zechariah** |
|  | **Esther** |  |  | **Malachi** |

The first five books are called the Law because God gives His law and makes a covenant with His people. Moses is believed to be the main author and chief composer. Job was written at a very early point in history and narrates the story of a righteous man who endured a trial, chronicling the lessons that he learned about God. Joshua chronicles the conquering of the promised land of Canaan. Judges chronicles the cycle of faithfulness, rebellion, repentance, and deliverance of the people, after arriving in Canaan. Ruth is the story of a faithful woman who lived at about the same time, and through whose faithfulness became part of the line of Judah which connected to King David and Jesus Himself. The next six historical books chronicle the period of the kings of Israel, most of which were evil. Most of the Psalms are written by King David and most of the Proverbs are written by his son, Solomon. Solomon also authored Ecclesiastes, his reflections on his wasted life, and Song of Solomon, discussing the joy of a godly relationship between a man and a woman. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel prophesy during the time of the divided kingdom and into the exile. They are called the major prophets because they are longer books. The prophets are concerned mainly with rebuking the present evil of the nation, but they also foretell the coming of Christ as well as His second coming. The minor prophets prophesy at the same time except for the final three, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, which prophesy during the time of Ezra, Esther, and Nehemiah. These final historical books tell of the remnant of Israel that God preserves in the last days of the old covenant before Jesus is born to Mary.

**The New Testament**

The New Testament consists of 27 books. The first four are the gospels, which chronicle the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, written by four eyewitnesses of Jesus: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Acts is an historical account by the disciple Luke about how the church was born and of its early days. Revelation is an account of a vision given by God to the disciple John discussing Christ’s return, how the age will end, and what is yet to come. The remaining books are letters written by Paul, John, James, Jude, and Peter to individuals and churches about doctrinal issues and how church and family should function, among other things. Paul wrote the majority of the New Testament books, as God had chosen him to be the missionary to the Gentiles. All people of all nations have the opportunity to become God’s people through Christ, whether Jew or Gentile. Hebrews is the only book where authorship is uncertain, and it is written specifically to the Jews to explain the new covenant to them. Here is a table to help break down the New Testament into categories:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Gospel**  **Accounts** | **Historical**  **Account** | **Paul’s Letters** | **Other Letters** | **Future Prophecy** |
| **Matthew** | **Acts** | **Romans** | **Hebrews** | **Revelation** |
| **Mark** |  | **1 Corinthians** | **James** |  |
| **Luke** |  | **2 Corinthians** | **1 Peter** |  |
| **John** |  | **Galatians** | **2 Peter** |  |
|  |  | **Ephesians** | **1 John** |  |
|  |  | **Philippians** | **2 John** |  |
|  |  | **Colossians** | **3 John** |  |
|  |  | **1 Thessalonians** | **Jude** |  |
|  |  | **2 Thessalonians** |  |  |
|  |  | **1 Timothy** |  |  |
|  |  | **2 Timothy** |  |  |
|  |  | **Titus** |  |  |
|  |  | **Philemon** |  |  |

**How and when was the Bible put together?**  
  
The term “canon” is used to describe the books that are divinely inspired and therefore belong in the Bible. The difficulty in determining the biblical canon is that the God did not give us a list of the books that belong in the Bible. Determining the canon was a process conducted first by Jewish rabbis and scholars and later by early Christians. Ultimately, it was men led by God who decided what books belonged in the biblical canon.

Compared to the New Testament, there was much less controversy over the canon of the Old Testament. Hebrew believers recognized God’s messengers and accepted their writings as inspired of God. While there was undeniably some debate in regards to the Old Testament canon, by A.D. 250 there was nearly universal agreement on the canon of Hebrew Scripture. The only issue that remained was the Apocrypha, with some debate and discussion continuing today. The vast majority of Hebrew scholars considered the Apocrypha to be good historical and religious documents, but not on the same level as the Hebrew Scriptures.  
  
For the New Testament, the process of the recognition and collection began in the first centuries of the Christian church. Very early on, some of the New Testament books were being recognized. Paul considered Luke’s writings to be as authoritative as the Old Testament ([1 Timothy 5:18](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Timothy%205.18); see also [Deuteronomy 25:4](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Deuteronomy%2025.4) and [Luke 10:7](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%2010.7)). Peter recognized Paul’s writings as Scripture ([2 Peter 3:15-16](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Peter%203.15-16)). Some of the books of the New Testament were being circulated among the churches ([Colossians 4:16](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Colossians%204.16); [1 Thessalonians 5:27](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Thessalonians%205.27)). Clement of Rome mentioned at least eight New Testament books (A.D. 95). Ignatius of Antioch acknowledged about seven books (A.D. 115). Polycarp, a disciple of John the apostle, acknowledged 15 books (A.D. 108). Later, Irenaeus mentioned 21 books (A.D. 185). Hippolytus recognized 22 books (A.D. 170-235). The New Testament books receiving the most controversy were Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 John, and 3 John.  
  
The first “canon” was the [Muratorian Canon](http://www.gotquestions.org/Muratorian-Canon.html), which was compiled in A.D. 170. The Muratorian Canon included all of the New Testament books except Hebrews, James, and 3 John. In A.D. 363, the Council of Laodicea stated that only the Old Testament (along with the Apocrypha) and the 27 books of the New Testament were to be read in the churches. The Council of Hippo (A.D. 393) and the Council of Carthage (A.D. 397) also affirmed the same 27 books as authoritative.  
  
The councils followed something similar to the following principles to determine whether a New Testament book was truly inspired by the Holy Spirit: 1) Was the author an apostle or have a close connection with an apostle? 2) Is the book being accepted by the body of Christ at large? 3) Did the book contain consistency of doctrine and orthodox teaching? 4) Did the book bear evidence of high moral and spiritual values that would reflect a work of the Holy Spirit? Again, it is crucial to remember that the church did not determine the canon. It was God who determined which books belonged in the Bible. It was simply a matter of God imparting to His followers what He had already decided. The human process of collecting the books of the Bible was flawed, but God, in His sovereignty, and despite our ignorance and stubbornness, brought the early church to the recognition of the books He had inspired.

**Other Key Writers/Historians:**

**Josephus**-Jewish Historian was born in Jerusalem in A.D. 37/38 and became a historian writing principally about the Jewish people up until his death ca. 100. Four of his works are extant: 1) The Jewish War; 2) The Jewish Antiquities; 3) Vita (life) and 4) Against Apion. These works provide us with knowledge of the New Testament era which we otherwise would not possess. In short, Josephus has contributed to our understanding of the social, political, historical (incl. chronological data) and religious backgrounds of the New Testament.

**Tacitus** – Roman Historian Little is known for certain about the origins of Tacitus, although he is believed to have been born, around A.D. 56, into a provincial aristocratic family in Gaul (modern France) or nearby, in the Roman province of Transalpine Gaul. We don't even know if his name was "Publius" or "Gaius Cornelius" Tacitus. He had a successful political course, becoming [senator](http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/government/a/LivySenate.htm), [consul](http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/romeconsuls/g/071407consul.htm), and eventually [governor](http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/cursushonorum/g/proconsul.htm) of the Roman province of [Asia](http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/romeancientrome/ig/Maps-of-Rome-and-the-Empire/Rome-in-Asia-Minor.htm). He probably lived and wrote into [Hadrian](http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/hadrian/p/Hadrian.htm)'s reign (117-38) and may have died in A.D. 120.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Overview of The Bible - Old Testament** | | | |
| **Book** | **Date** | **Author** | **Comments** |
| Genesis | 1445-1405 B.C. | Moses |  |
| Exodus | 1445-1405 B.C. | Moses |  |
| Leviticus | 1445-1405 B.C. | Moses |  |
| Numbers | 1445-1405 B.C. | Moses |  |
| Deuteronomy | 1445-1405 B.C. | Moses |  |
| Psalms | 1410-450 B.C. | Multiple |  |
| Job | Unknown “1400 B.C.” ? | “Moses” ? |  |
| Joshua | 1405-1385 B.C. | Joshua |  |
| Judges | 1043 B.C. | Samuel |  |
| Ruth | 1030-1010 BC | Samuel |  |
| Song of Solomon | 971-965 BC | Solomon |  |
| Proverbs | 971-686 BC | Solomon primarily |  |
| Ecclesiastes | 940-931 BC | Solomon |  |
| 1 Samuel | 931-722 BC | Anonymous |  |
| 2 Samuel | 931-722 BC | Anonymous |  |
| Obadiah | 850-840 BC | Obadiah |  |
| Joel | 835-796 B.C. | Joel |  |
| Jonah | 775 B.C. | Jonah |  |
| Amos | 750 B.C. | Amos |  |
| Micah | 735-710 B.C. | Micah |  |
| Hosea | 750-710 B.C. | Hosea |  |
| Isaiah | 700-681-B.C. | Isaiah |  |
| Nahum | 650 B.C. | Nahum |  |
| Zephaniah | 635-625 B.C. | Zephaniah |  |
| Habakkuk | 615-605 B.C. | Habakkuk |  |
| Ezekiel | 590-570 B.C. | Ezekiel |  |
| Lamentations | 586 B.C. | Jeremiah |  |
| Jeremiah | 586-570 B.C. | Jeremiah |  |
| 1 Kings | 561-538 B.C | Anonymous |  |
| 2 Kings | 561-538 B.C. | Anonymous |  |
| Daniel | 536-530 B.C. | Daniel |  |
| Haggai | 520 B.C. | Haggai |  |
| Zechariah | 480-470 B.C. | Zechariah |  |
| Ezra | 457-444 B.C. | Ezra |  |
| 1 Chronicles | 450-430 B.C. | Ezra |  |
| 2 Chronicles | 450-430 B.C. | Ezra |  |
| Malachi | 433-424 B.C. | Malachi |  |
| Esther | 450-331 B.C. | Anonymous |  |
| Nehemiah | 424-400 B.C. | Ezra |  |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Overview of The Bible - New Testament** | | | |
| **Book** | **Date** | **Author** | **Comments** |
| James | 44-49 A.D. | James |  |
| Galatians | 49-50 A.D. | Paul |  |
| Matthew | 50-60 A.D. | Matthew |  |
| Mark | 50-60 A.D. | Mark |  |
| 1 Thessalonians | 51 A.D. | Paul |  |
| 2 Thessalonians | 51-52 A.D. | Paul |  |
| 1 Corinthians | 55 A.D. | Paul |  |
| 2 Corinthians | 55-56 A.D. | Paul |  |
| Romans | 56 A.D. | Paul |  |
| Luke | 60-62 A.D. | Luke |  |
| Ephesians | 60-61 A.D. | Paul |  |
| Philippians | 60-62 A.D. | Paul |  |
| Colossians | 60-62 A.D. | Paul |  |
| Philemon | 60-62 A.D. | Paul |  |
| Acts | 62 A.D. | Luke |  |
| 1 Timothy | 62-64 A.D. | Paul |  |
| Titus | 62-64 A.D. | Paul |  |
| 1 Peter | 64-65 A.D. | Peter |  |
| 2 Timothy | 66-67 A.D. | Paul |  |
| 2 Peter | 67-68 A.D. | Peter |  |
| Hebrews | 67-69 A.D. | Anonymous |  |
| Jude | 68-70 A.D. | Jude |  |
| John | 80-90 A.D. | John |  |
| 1 John | 90-95 A.D. | John |  |
| 2 John | 90-95 A.D. | John |  |
| 3 John | 90-95 A.D. | John |  |
| Revelation | 94-96 A.D. | John |  |