



Overview of the Old Testament

Table of Contents

- The Jewish and Christian Bible
- Timeline of Israel

REFERENCES

Any Jewish History book.

Theodore Stylianopoulos, *The New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective* (Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004).

SERVANT BACKGROUND MATERIAL / READING

Old Testament

MEMORY VERSE

The time would fail me, writes the Apostle Paul, to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Sampson, and of Jephthae, of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens ... of whom the world was not worthy: they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth ... (Heb. 11:32-34, 38).

ACTIVITY

Print out timelines for the kids. Teach about the structure of the Old Testament (see the article), and then teach about the main events over the 1000 years. Then go through say a 1000 years, and ask one of the kids to repeat the main events for the 1000 years of history.

THE LESSON

The Jewish and Christian Bibles – Prof. Fr. Theodore Stylianopoulos.

Scripture constitutes an entire library of sacred books written over a period of about one thousand years, from the tenth century B.C. to the first century A.D. The various biblical writings were composed in Hebrew and Greek, and some parts in Aramaic, by mostly unknown authors who lived in particular historical contexts and addressed important issues of their religious communities. The first reference to an authoritative holy book, “the book of the law” (2 Kg 22:8), which modern scholars identify as being essentially the Book of Deuteronomy, connects its origins with the Temple and the priesthood at the time of King Josiah (640-609 B.C.). Another reference places a “book of the law of the Lord” (2 Chr 17:9) about two hundred years earlier at the time of Jehoshaphat, ruler of Judah (873-849 B.C.). Scholars conjecture that the written sources behind the earliest books of the Bible, namely Genesis and Exodus, may go back as far as the tenth century B.C. At the other end of the biblical library, the Book of Revelation was written most likely in the late first century A.D. during the persecution of Christians under the Roman emperor Domitian (81-96 A.D.). In this case the author clearly identifies himself as John, a Christian prophet, who wrote from exile on the island of Patmos and claimed explicit authority for this book of prophecy (Rev 1:1-11; 22:7-19).

Most of the scriptural books, however, neither claimed nor possessed authority as sacred books at the time of their composition. Such authority was accorded to them over many generations, indeed centuries, within the respective religious communities of Jews and Christians. In these communities, primary religious authority was attributed to living persons, patriarchs, priests, prophets, apostles, and above all Jesus of Nazareth, who in their own witness spoke and acted on behalf of God. Readers of the Bible should take special note of the fact that the foundational nature of biblical revelation is personal, while its written expression is by comparison secondary. The great moments and acts in which God made himself known involved powerful, experiential events that changed the lives of concrete persons in the context of their specific communities. Before any accounts of them were written, these revelatory events and experiences were remembered, celebrated, interpreted, told and retold by word of mouth over long periods — in the case of the Old Testament for centuries and in the case of the New Testament for decades.

Thus, behind the written Scriptures lies the dynamic reality of the oral religious traditions of the Jewish and Christian peoples. These oral traditions, maintained and developed through worship, instruction, and custom, were kept alive by God's people, and sustained the identity of God's people, guiding their beliefs and practices. Eventually they were committed to writing through complex processes. The Hebrew Scriptures were written from about 950 B.C. to 150 B.C. and the New Testament books from about 50 A.D. to 100 A.D. In each case, the sacred literature recounted the original events in layers of interpretation — primary, secondary; and tertiary — within each faith community. A startling variety of books were produced, Genesis as well as Ecclesiastes, the Gospel of Mark as well as the Epistle of James. In some instances, notably that of the Apostle Paul, we encounter individual known authors who contributed significantly to the written biblical tradition. Yet all these books organically emerged from the life of Israel and of the Church, serving their concrete needs of worship, instruction, daily guidance, and self-identity; From this perspective we can appreciate the profound fact that the books of the Bible are, by their very nature, *books of faith* both in that they were fruits of the life of faith, as well as in that they fostered and still foster the life of faith.

Not only were the individual books products of the faith community but their gradual gathering into a sacred collection involved, as well, a dynamic process of reception and selection within the ongoing life and tradition of the Jewish and Christian faith communities. As central as the Bible eventually became for Judaism and Christianity, we should remember that “Abraham did not have a Bible, any more than Jesus or Paul had a New Testament.” Only slowly did books gain the status of sacred authority and came to play an important role in both reflecting and determining belief and practice. The biblical writings were selectively preserved and gradually gathered into sacred collections in the religious communities of the Jews and the Christians over many centuries. No other justification can be given for the respective Jewish and Christian Bibles except the choices of these religious communities themselves. When you say Hebrew Bible you say Synagogue. When you say Christian Bible you say Church. These sacred collections are called *canons* (from the Greek *kanon*, meaning “rule” or “standard”). The Jewish canon of the Bible was completed by the first or second century A.D. and the Christian canon of the Bible, which includes the Old and the New Testaments, by the end of the fourth century.

During the first century A.D., and prior to the emergence of the New Testament as part of Holy Scripture, Jews and Christians largely shared the same sacred writings deriving from the Jewish tradition. Although they interpreted them differently, they referred to them by the same titles. The term *Bible* comes from the Greek, *Biblos* (meaning “record,” “document,” or “book”) and was first used by Greek-speaking Jews to refer to the Hebrew Scriptures. The etymological roots lie in an Egyptian word for the papyrus shrub and its bark used for writing in the ancient world since the sixth century B.C. The New Testament authors employ this terminology in a few instances to refer to individual writings such as the Book of Isaiah (Lk 3:4) or the five books of the Law attributed to Moses (Mk 12:26; Gal 3:10). Once, the term occurs in the plural *Biblia* (2 Tim 4:13). The same terminology is also found among the Church fathers, though somewhat rarely, for the entire Christian Bible. The expression “The Bible” (meaning “The Book”) came to prevail in the ‘Western Christian tradition.

The New Testament authors use this terminology numerous times to refer to particular passages or generally to the Scriptures (Mk 12:10; Lk24:27; Acts 8:32, 35; Gal 3:8, 22; Rom 15:4). The apostle Paul calls them “holy scriptures” (Rom 1:2) one time. The terms “Holy Scripture” and “Holy Scriptures” came to prevail in the universal Christian tradition as titles for the entire Bible of the Old and New Testaments.

The Jewish people, as was noted, wrote and collected their own Scriptures. In the Jewish community, the Hebrew Scriptures have been classified from ancient times according to three divisions, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The *Law*, also called the Law of Moses or *Pentateuch* (from the Greek *Pentateuchos*, literally, “five-volume work”), consists of the first five books of the Bible traditionally attributed to Moses. The Hebrew title is *Torah*, usually translated as “Law.” But the term carries far richer meanings in Hebrew, including divine law, instruction, revelation. Although their focal center is God’s Law given on Mt. Sinai, the books of Moses have a larger scope embracing as well the account of creation, the patriarchal epics, and the story of the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt. The *Prophets*, in Hebrew *Nevi'im* (literally, “announcers” or “mouthpieces” of God), comprise numerous books from Joshua to Malachi not arranged chronologically. These include the historical books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. In both the Jewish and Christian tradition Moses, Joshua, and Samuel are all regarded as prophets, inspired leaders and spokesmen on behalf of God. The third broad category of books, the *Writings*, in Hebrew *Kethuvim*, makes up a diverse collection of books from the Psalms to Chronicles which, include prayers and songs, didactic and philosophical meditations, historical and apocalyptic narratives. In the Jewish tradition the Bible is called *Tanakh*, an acronym based on the first letter of the Hebrew words for Law, Prophets, and Writings (TNK). Jesus and St. Paul referred to the two major divisions, “The Law and the Prophets” (Mt 7:12; Rom 3:21). The three divisions are echoed in the words of the risen Christ who, on the way to Emmaus, explained “the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms” (Lk 24:44) to Cleopas and another unknown disciple. The list of books in the Jewish Bible, as selected and arranged by the rabbinic teachers perhaps at Jamnia toward the end of the first century A.D., or more likely during the second century appears above (See FIG. 1).

FIG. 1. Tanakh: The Hebrew Scriptures
THE LAW (TORAH): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy
THE PROPHETS (NEVIM): <i>The Former Prophets:</i> Joshua, Judges, Samuel (1 and 2), and Kings (1 and 2) <i>The Latter Prophets:</i> Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel <i>The Twelve Prophets:</i> Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi
THE WRITINGS (KETHUVIM): Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra—Nehemiah, and Chronicles (1 and 2)

The early Christian community was made up of Jewish and Gentile members. Both saw themselves rooted in the Jewish heritage and claimed to be special heirs to it. The early Christians therefore retained the Hebrew Scriptures, what eventually came to be called “Old Testament” in the Christian tradition, as the only Bible they knew, with two important differences. The first was the adoption of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures called *Septuagint* (Latin *septuaginta* meaning “seventy”). This term goes back to a tradition of Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria about seventy or seventy-two Jewish elders who translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek some two or three centuries before Christ. The story is told in a Jewish work, *The Epistle of Aristeas*, written in Greek by an unknown Alexandrian Jew in pre-Christian times. Its intent is to affirm the authority of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures accomplished over generations by Greek-speaking Jews and serving their needs in the Greek city of Alexandria. This version of the Scripture is most quoted by the New Testament authors and became traditional in the ancient Church. It remains the official version of the Old Testament in the Orthodox Church.

The second difference is that the early Christians adopted a larger number of Jewish writings than the official list compiled by the rabbinic teachers at Jamnia or later. These additional books were

in circulation from pre-Christian times in the Greek language among Greek-speaking Jews who regarded them as valuable. These books express the diverse beliefs, practices, and hopes of many Jews during the time of the Greek and Roman dominance of the ancient world. However, because they carried neither sufficient antiquity nor authority in the Jewish tradition, they were left out of the Hebrew canon by rabbinic leaders who intended to unite and consolidate Judaism after disastrous wars with Rome during the first and second centuries.

But the Christians esteemed these writings and preserved them. In the East, they became known as Readable Books and in the West *Deuterocanonical* (“of secondary authority”). **Although their precise number varies, these writings are still part of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic canons of the Old Testament. With the Reformation, Protestants adopted the Jewish canon and eliminated these books from the Bible. They designated them as *Apocrypha*, a pejorative word meaning “hidden books,” a term which in the ancient Christian tradition was applied to still other books whose authority was rejected by the Church.** These latter books, such as the Book of Jubilees, the Martyrdom of Isaiah, and the Assumption of Moses, were nevertheless preserved by Christians on account of historical and religious interests. They carry no canonical authority but certainly bear historical value because they attest to the beliefs and practices of their authors and their specific religious groups. These books are still designated as *Apocrypha* in the Orthodox Church, but are called *Pseudepigrapha* (literally, “falsely titled”) by Protestants.’ **Thus, by and large, what Protestants call *Pseudepigrapha* the Orthodox call *Apocrypha*, and what Protestants call *Apocrypha* the Orthodox called Readable or Deuterocanonical.** Many current Protestant Bibles, for reasons of ecumenical openness and scholarly interests, regularly feature the Readable Books as “The Apocrypha” or “The Apocryphal Deuterocanonical,” albeit as an appendix (see FIG. 2).

FIG. 2. The Readable/Deuterocanonical Books	
In the Orthodox Bible	In the Roman Catholic Bible
Tobit	Tobit
Judith	Judith
Maccabees 1-3	Maccabees 1-2
Wisdom of Solomon	Wisdom of Solomon
Wisdom of Sirach (also called Ecclesiasticus)	Wisdom of Sirach (also called Ecclesiasticus)
Baruch	Baruch
Epistle of Jeremiah	Epistle of Jeremiah
Esdras	-----

In addition to the Readable/Deuterocanonical books, the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Bibles contain extensive passages in the canonical books of Esther and Daniel not found in the Hebrew version of these texts. Although traditionally these passages are part of the canonical books, the Protestants placed them among the “Apocrypha” according to their nomenclature and call them “Additions” to the Greek versions of Esther and Daniel. In the case of Daniel, these passages include the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Youths, the story of Susanna, and the story of Bel and the Dragon. In the case of Esther, they include shorter passages too numerous to mention here. The inclusive interests of the Eastern tradition extended to additional texts that are taken up in the Orthodox Bibles. Among them are the Prayer of Manasses and Psalm 151. The Slavonic version alone includes Esdras 2. The Greek version alone includes Maccabees 4 as an appendix.

In total, the Hebrew Scriptures contain thirty-eight books, Ezra and Nehemiah forming one book. The Jewish tradition developed and maintains its own numbering and sequential arrangement of these books. The Protestant Old Testament numbers thirty-nine books separating the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah according to ancient Christian tradition. The Roman Catholic Old Testament, including seven Deuterocanonical Books and the Epistle of Jeremiah joined to Baruch, totals forty six books. The Orthodox Old Testament maintains the most inclusive canon of the ancient Church which embraces, together with the ten Readable Books, forty-nine books. In addition, a few other writings mentioned above, such as the Prayer of Manasses and Psalm 151, are accorded some value within the Orthodox tradition.

It should be noted, as well, that the sequence of the scriptural books varies in the Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Bibles, something easily ascertained by any reader comparing current editions of the Bible from these traditions.’ Two significant differences deserve the reader’s attention. One is that the Orthodox and Catholic Bibles integrate the Readable and Deuterocanonical books within their respective Old Testament canons, whereas the Protestant Bibles put them in an appendix. This fact indicates a remaining difference of views regarding the canonical authority of these books. The second is that the **official Orthodox Old Testament continues to be the Greek *Septuagint* version, whereas the current Protestant and Catholic Bibles are translations of the Hebrew original called the *Masoretic* text.** Finally, readers of the Bible should be aware that the “Apocrypha” of the New Testament are entirely different books, outside of the New Testament canon, which were written mostly during the second century A.D. and later.

TIMELINE

Dates (BC)	Timeline of the Old Testament			
4000	Creation of Earth/Man?			
2500	Flood of Noah			
2000	Abraham			
1500	Mosaic Law - Moses			
The United Monarchy				
Dates (BC)	Kingdom of the Israelites			
1020-1000	Saul			
1000-961	David			
961-922	Solomon			
The Divided Kingdoms				International Affairs
Dates (BC)	Israel (Northern)	Judah (Southern)	Dates (BC)	Events
922-901	Jeroboam I	Rehoboam	922-915	Shishaq, pharaoh of <i>Egypt</i> (935-914), came up against Rehoboam.
		Abijah	915-913	
901-900	Nadab	Asa	913-873	Ben-Hadad I, <i>Syrian</i> king (885-870), aids Asa.
900-877	Baasha	Jehoshaphat	873-849	
877-876	Elah			
876	Zimri			
876-869	Omri			
869-850	Ahab			
850-849	Ahaziah	Jehoroam	849-843/2	
849-843/2	Joram	Ahaziah	843/2	
843/2-815	Jehu	Athaliah (non-Davidic Queen)	842-837	
815-802	Jehoahaz	Joash	837-800	
802-786	Jehoahaz	Amaziah	800-783	

786-746	Jeroboam II	Azariah	783-742	
746-745	Zachariah	Jotham	742-735	<i>Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727), conquers Syria, and deports many of the Northern kingdom.</i>
745	Shallum			
745-737	Menahem			
737-736	Pekahiah			
736-732	Pekah	Ahaz	735-715	Shalmaneser, successor of Assyrian Tiglath-Pileser III, conquers Northern kingdom.
732-724	Hoshea			
722/1	Fall of Samaria			
		Hezekiah	715-687	Sennacherib, king of Assyria (704-681), ravages Judah in 701.
		Manasseh	687-642	
		Amon	642-640	
		Josiah	640-609	Assyrian Empire falls in 609.
		Jehoahaz	609	Egyptian king, Necho II (610-594), deports Jehoahaz and replaces him with Jehoiachim.
		Jehoiachim	609-598	Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (605-562), defeats Egypt.
		Jehoiachin	598-597	
		Zedekiah	597-587	
		Fall of Jerusalem	587	<i>Babylon conquers Israel.</i>
Dates (BC)	Return from Exile			
537	Cyrus, the Persian allows the Jews to return			
331	Alexander the Great conquers Persia, and takes Israel.			
312	Ptolemy conquers Israel.			
198	Seleucids of Syria conquer Palestine.			
142	The Jewish family of the Maccabees defeats the Seleucids and wins independence.			
63	The Romans, lead by Pompey, conquer Israel.			
6	Jesus the Christ, is born.			

So to make things simple:

Dates (BC)	History for intellectually-challenged
4000	Creation
2500	Flood
2000	Abraham
1500	Moses
1000	King David
500	Exile of the Jews to Babylon, and 60 years later they return to Israel.
0	Jesus is born

KEYWORDS

All Servants should have knowledge of the meanings of these words. And as for the kids, at least some of the words (concepts) should be made clear to them. All of these words are found in the lesson, identified by italics.

- Canon
- Bible/Scriptures
- Law/Torah/Pentateuch
- Prophets/Nevim
- Writings/Kethuvim
- Tanakh/TNK
- Septuagint
- Deutrocanonical
- Apocrypha
- Pseudepigrapha