

AN OUTLINE  
OF THE BIBLE



#### **IV. Revelation**

Rome demanded that everyone, including Christians, worship the Emperor, causing some Christians to compromise the faith. Those who did not comply were persecuted (for example, by the Emperor Domitian). Revelation is different from other NT books, due to its symbolic language. However, it actually contains three types of literature. First, it belongs to a genre that has many non-biblical parallels: it is an “apocalypse” or “revelation.” Second, Revelation is also a circular letter that was written by John on the island of Patmos, and was written (perhaps) after all of the rest of the NT. Third, it is a prophecy. Prophecy is not “history written in advance;” it is a message from God – a prophet is God’s “mouthpiece.”

It is often asked why the book is part of the NT. What does it contribute? It may be helpful to realize that it contains Christ’s cosmic victory over evil and death, and it teaches the doctrine of the Trinity more clearly than the rest of the NT. Christ’s victory is not only a future expectation; it also has already been achieved in heaven.

A Theme: Hope.  
A Text: 21:1-4

*For further reading:*

For more information on the content of each book or how to read the Bible, please see *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* and *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart. Tom Wrights’ *For Everyone* series is also very helpful for the NT.

A Final Note: *Which Bible?*

There are many Bible translations today. I recommend the New International Version (NIV) Study Bible. It is easy to read and accurate. Another option is the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), which is more literal. A suggested starting place is Mark’s Gospel because it is short, straightforward and provocative.

B. Pastoral Epistles (By Paul Re: Church Offices; addressed to individuals)

1. I & II Timothy – From Paul to a young pastor named Timothy. Paul wanted to encourage him and give advice. All three of these “pastoral” letters describe church officers, such as elders and deacons.
2. Titus – Titus was a missionary at Crete. Paul wrote to encourage him (see 3:8).

C. General Epistles (8 letters; not by Paul; Written to general audiences; not specific individuals or churches)

1. Hebrews – Unknown author who wrote to help explain how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament. The theme of Hebrews is the absolute supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ as the revealer and mediator of God’s grace.  
Text: 1:1-4.
2. James – James, perhaps a brother of Jesus, wrote this letter. It contains much moral and ethical advice, thus giving it practical application to everyday life. Cf. 1:5.
3. I & II Peter – Peter wrote these letters to Christians who were suffering under persecution in Asia Minor. Christ is lifted up as our exemplar of how to act while being persecuted for one’s faith. I Peter may have originally been a baptismal sermon.
4. I, II, III John – These short letters are very similar in style and language to the Gospel of John. I John is the longest, and helps sort truth from error. Some think II John was delivered with I John and acted as a type of cover letter (due to its brevity). III John was a personal letter that may have been attached.
5. Jude – Written by Jude, a brother of James. This letter was written to defend orthodoxy, and has severe warnings for judgment for false teachers. There is a strong literary relationship between Jude and II Peter.

## An Outline of the Bible

### OBJECTIVES:

1. To be a helpful guide and reminder in understanding the Bible by learning the “big ideas;” hence, it strives to state things simply and clearly;
2. To encourage a love for reading Scripture; and,
3. To encourage Bible study individually and corporately.

### BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

It helps to know the books of the Bible in order. They are listed at the beginning of the Bible. Biblical references are made by citing the book of the Bible, and then the chapter, followed by a colon and the verse(s). A number before the name of the book indicates that there is more than one book with the same name.

Examples:                      John 2:4-7  
   I Peter 2:1  
   III John 1 (or 3 John 1)

The Protestant Bible is comprised of 66 books (39 Old Testament, 27 New Testament). Some Christians, such as Roman Catholics, add a few more books, but their canon is very similar.

### **Old Testament**

#### 3 Parts:

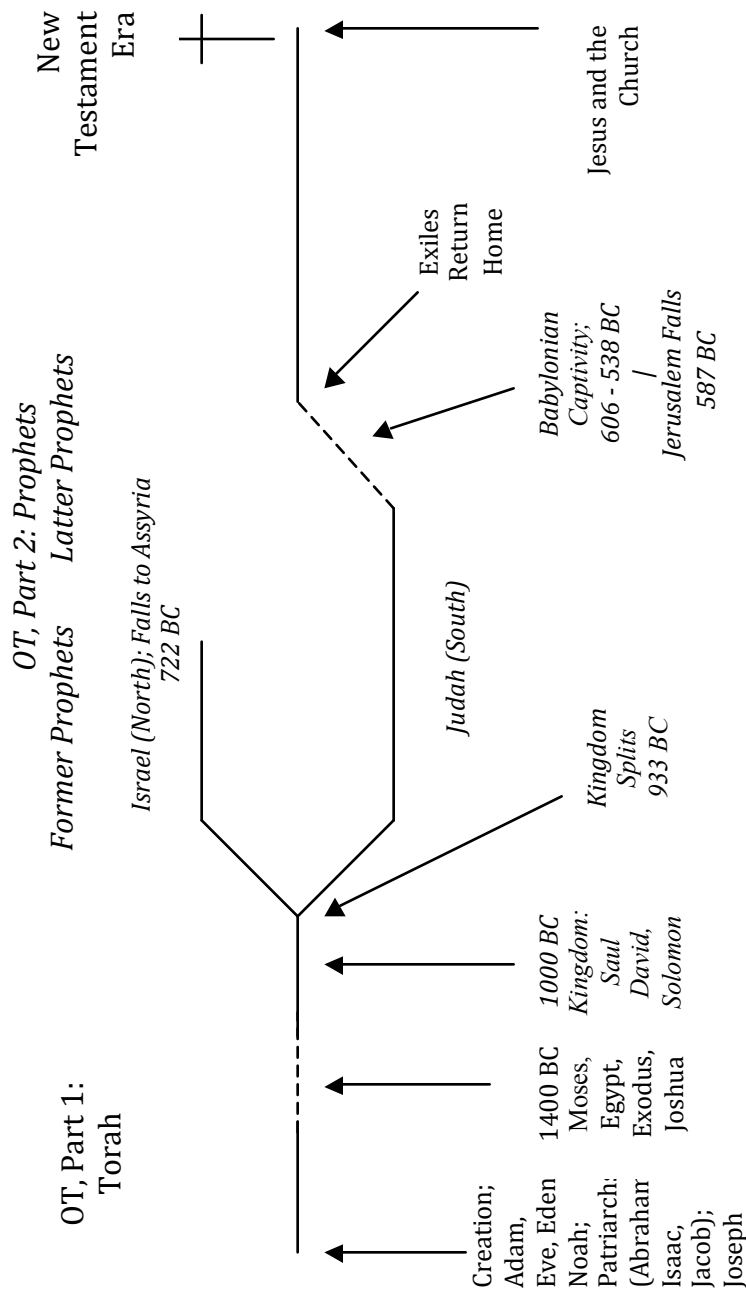
1. Torah
2. Prophets
3. Writings

### **New Testament**

#### 4 Parts:

1. Gospels
2. Acts
3. Letters (Epistles)
4. Revelation

THE BIBLE AT A GLANCE:



- Galatians – Paul states that faith alone (not circumcision or works of the law) enables one to enter the community of faith.

Key verse: Gal. 5:6

Theme: Salvation by Faith Alone.
- Ephesians – Paul’s letter to the churches in Asia Minor (now Turkey), was circular, or passed around among the different churches. A theme is the church as the Body of Christ.

Key verse: Eph. 1:7-10

Theme: Our Identity in Christ.
- Philippians – Paul wrote this while under house arrest (or maybe prison). It is noted for the themes of “joy” and imitating Christ in humble obedience, which is the basis for Christian community.

Key verse: Phil. 2:5

Theme: Imitate Jesus’ Humility.
- Colossians – Was written to combat some form of unknown heresy. It is clear though, that Jesus – and nothing else – is the center for our faith.

Key verse: Col. 1:15-20

Theme: Christ is Supreme over All.
- I & II Thessalonians – Early letters of Paul (c.50 AD). He wrote them because many Christians thought Jesus would return so soon that they stopped working & were lazy! Others wanted to know what would happen at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Christ.

Key verse: I Th. 4:11; II Th. 3:10

Theme: Christ’s Second Coming.
- Philemon – A short, powerful letter that Paul wrote to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus, a runaway slave.

Key verse: Verse 6

Theme: Reconciliation.

3. Luke – Themes often center around: the role of women, worship, the Holy Spirit, and the oppressed. First in a two part series (Luke-Acts). Emphasizes community as well.

B. John – John is the most unique of the four Gospels. It emphasizes the Holy Spirit, Jesus’ love, and the sharp difference between truth and falsehood. Much time is devoted to the last days of Jesus’ life.

## II. Acts of the Apostles (History of the Early Church)

Structure: Beginnings 1-12; Paul 13-28

A Key Text: Acts 1:8

A Theme: Spread the Gospel

Acts has the same author as Luke’s Gospel. It tells the history of the early church (which makes it unique in the NT) beginning with the ascension of Christ. It includes: Pentecost, the stoning of Saint Stephen (the 1<sup>st</sup> martyr) and Paul’s conversion. Much of Acts chronicles Paul and his 3 missionary journeys, & ends around the time of Paul’s death.

## III. NT Epistles (21 Letters)

A. Letters of Paul (13 altogether. The first 10 letters are arranged in the Bible from longest to shortest, and address churches.)

1. Romans – Paul wrote to Christians in Rome, and the great theme is the “Gospel of God,” which is carried out by “righteousness through trust.” Salvation is open to all peoples through faith in Christ, not works.

A Key Text: 1:1-4, 16-17.

2. I & II Corinthians – Paul wrote these to Christians in Corinth. These letters are good examples of Paul in that they illustrate Paul primarily wrote to correct problems in the church and answer their questions. However, these letters are known for their teaching on love (I Cor. 13) and spiritual gifts (I Cor. 12, 14). II Cor. is the most autobiographical of Paul’s letters.

## THE OLD TESTAMENT

(3 Parts -- Torah, Prophets, Writings)

**Part I – Torah:** [5 books] Means “law” or “instruction;” a.k.a. “Pentateuch,” or “5 Books of Moses.”

### 1. Genesis

The Creation

Adam, Eve & the Fall

Noah & the Flood

Tower of Babel

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (= the Patriarchs)

Joseph & the Descent into Egypt

Structure: Genealogy

A Key Text: Genesis 12:1-3

Theme: Creation & Covenant.

Genesis covers a huge amount of time, starting “In the beginning...” We see the creation of the world and humankind, the covenant God made with Abraham, and the formation of the Hebrews, who leave Israel for Egypt during a famine where they become enslaved for 400 years under Pharaoh.

A key theme that starts in Genesis and goes throughout the whole Bible is covenant, meaning the relationship that God began between Himself and us. In Genesis, circumcision is the key sign of entering the covenant community. In the New Testament, baptism becomes the sign.

### 2. Exodus

Moses

Deliverance from Egypt

10 Plagues, Passover

Parting of the Red Sea

10 Commandments

Covenant at Sinai

The Golden Calf

Building of the Tabernacle

Structure: Exit 1-15, Desert 15-18, Sinai 19-40

A Key Text: Exodus 8:1

Theme: Grace and law.

Exodus refers to the “exit” of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt into the wilderness (or desert). Moses is born, and is the key figure throughout the rest of the Torah.

### 3. Leviticus

Sacrifices & Burnt Offerings    Structure: Worship 1-16, Holiness 17-27  
The Priesthood                    A Key Text: Leviticus 19:1-2  
Holiness and Laws                Theme: Holiness at rest.

Leviticus lists many laws and how one lives holy or “clean.” After the Hebrews left Egypt, they were in the wilderness for 40 years, in part at Mt. Sinai, where most of the laws were given.

### 4. Numbers

40 Years in the Wilderness    Structure: Itinerant  
Israel’s Journey to                A Key Text: Numbers 11:1-3  
    the Promised Land            Theme: Holiness on the move.  
Censuses  
Balaam

Numbers gets its name from all the censuses that were taken in the wilderness. It tells how many Hebrews there were, and how they organized their camp. At one point, spies are sent into Israel to scout out the land.

### 5. Deuteronomy

Recounting of History            Structure: Moses’ Farewell Discourses  
Rehearsal of Laws                Text: Deuteronomy 30:15-16  
Covenant with Yahweh          Theme: Law is grace.  
Moses’ Final Speech & Death

Deuteronomy literally means “repetition of the law.” Moses recalled much of what happened in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers before the people. Throughout the whole Torah, the Hebrews have been waiting for the Promised Land. The end of Deuteronomy is a “cliffhanger.” The people are on the border of entering the Promised Land at the Jordan River. They are finally about to leave the wilderness!

E. Work of the Chronicler -- These books are thought to have been written after the return from the Babylonian Exile by an author referred to as “the chronicler.”

**Ezra:** 5-4<sup>th</sup> C BC  
Theme: Rebuilding the Temple.

**Nehemiah:** 5-4<sup>th</sup> C BC  
Theme: Rebuilding the Wall.  
Text: 8:1-3.

Ezra/Nehemiah took place when the Israelites returned home from Babylon; thus, they had to rebuild what had been destroyed.

**I, II Chronicles:** 5-4<sup>th</sup> C BC  
Theme: The Good King (David)  
Text: I Chronicles 29:26-30

I, II Chronicles are similar to I, II Kings. However, Chronicles is addressed to the Israelites after the Babylonian Exile, not before (as Kings is). Consequently, this considers God’s covenant in a new light.

## THE NEW TESTAMENT

(4 Parts--Gospels, Acts, Letters, Revelation)

### I. The Gospels (Life of Jesus)

A. “Synoptic” Gospels (“synoptic” = “with the same eye” because they are similar). The Gospels are records of the life, death, deeds and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. Each Gospel embodies different themes and makes its own contribution to the canon. For further reading, see Mark Powell’s *Fortress Introduction to the Gospels*.

1. Matthew – Written by the apostle Matthew. Its strong connections between the Old Testament and Jesus accounts for its placement as the first book in the NT. Emphasis on Jesus’ teaching.
2. Mark – Shortest Gospel, probably the first written. Themes include the urgency of the Gospel message, discipleship and the mystery that surrounds Jesus. Emphasis on Jesus’ deeds.

C. *Festival Scrolls*: There are 5 festival scrolls, one for each major festival of the Jewish liturgical year. Together they cover a wide range of life and human nature. (Ecclesiastes is sometimes listed here.)

**Ruth** (Festival of Pentecost, the harvest festival)

Theme: God's and Ruth's faithfulness.

Text: 1:16; 2:10

Ruth is a Moabite (i.e. a foreigner) who becomes part of the Israelite nation (this is unusual). She is King David's great-grandmother.

**Song of Songs** (Read on Passover)

Structure: Love song between a husband and wife.

Theme: Love.

Text: 8:6

While this is clearly a beautiful, loving, sexual couple, some have interpreted it allegorically as God's love for the Church. Others have viewed it to show how to be faithful amidst a tempting world.

**Lamentations** (Fast of the Ninth of Ab -- destruction of the Temple)

Theme: Mourning with hope.

Text: 1:1 – the lonely city; 3:22 – God's steadfast love.

Laments the sense of loss that accompanied the destruction of the City, Temple, and Exile.

**Esther** (Institution of the Feast of Purim)

Theme: God saves his people.

Text: 9:29-32.

In Esther, we see the beginnings of a Jewish festival called the Feast of Purim. Interestingly, this is the only book in the Bible that does not mention God.

#### D. *Apocalyptic Literature*

**Daniel**

Theme: Serve God Under Pressure

Text: 3:17-18; Even if we die, we will not serve others.

A Jew named Daniel becomes a high-ranking government official in Babylon, where he is careful only to worship Yahweh. Known for Daniel's dreams, and the story of Daniel in the lion's den.

**Part II – Prophets**: [21 books.] The Prophets are a comment on Torah, i.e. how life continues for the people of the covenant. There are 2 types of prophets: “former” and “latter.” The “former” prophets can be viewed as a theological commentary and contain the ongoing story of a nation after Moses' death. The “latter” prophets are more what we often think of: an individual speaking God's word to the people, and focus on the theological conviction of God's judgment and God's promise.

NOTE: These books of the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament, were grouped by Jews. Christians later kept the same books, but rearranged their order. Thus, your Bible will have some books in a different order.

#### A. *The Former Prophets*

##### 1. Joshua

Crossing the Jordan  
into Promised Land

Conquest of Canaan

Fall of Jericho & Rahab

Division of the Land

Structure: Conquer Land 1-12,  
Divide Land 13-24

Text: Joshua 1:8-9

Theme: Leadership Under the Lord.

Moses died and did not enter the Promised Land, so Joshua faithfully led the people and began to conquer the Canaanites, taking the land God had promised to them. Many battles are recorded here.

##### 2. Judges

300 Years in Promised Land

Rulers after Joshua (=Judges)

Deborah, Gideon, Samson

Philistine Oppression

& Israelite Unfaithfulness

Structure: Episodic

Text: Judges 2:18-19

Theme: Leadership Apart from  
the Lord.

The Judges ruled after Joshua died, but before the monarchy was formed. Israel keeps falling away from God and sinning, and each time a “judge” (or temporary ruler) is raised up by God to restore them.

### 3, 4. I, II Samuel

Samuel: Priest, Prophet, Judge  
Saul & Birth of the Monarchy  
David; Goliath; Bathsheba  
Solomon & David's other sons

I Samuel Structure: Samuel 1-8,  
Saul 9-15, David 16-31

II Samuel Structure: Stories of  
David

Text: I Sam. 8:4-7

Theme: Yahweh is King.

Samuel replaces the prophet Eli, who was bad. Samuel anoints Saul, and later David, as King at God's command. I Samuel is primarily about Saul and the founding of the monarchy. II Samuel is about King David's long reign.

### 5, 6. I, II Kings

Solomon & the Temple  
Rehoboam and Jeroboam  
Divided Kingdom  
Elijah & Elisha  
Hezekiah

Structure: Reign of Individual  
Kings/Prophets

Text: I Kings 22:51-53

Theme: Problems Under Kings.

I Kings opens with David's death and the succession of Solomon. Israel experienced its "Golden Age" under David and Solomon, but *split* into 2 kingdoms after Solomon. This is a *major event* in the Bible. The northern nation is Israel (10 tribes); the southern one is Judah (2 tribes). 933 B.C. (These 12 tribes come from Jacob's 12 sons, who are in Genesis.)

II Kings talks of the destruction that will happen: Israel will be forever conquered [Assyria; 722 B.C.], and Judah will fall [Babylon; 587 B.C.]. After this "Babylonian Captivity," Judah will be restored. These are some of the *biggest events* in the Old Testament.

**Part III – Writings:** [13 books.] This 3<sup>rd</sup> and final part of the Old Testament is the most diverse, and contains varying material such as poetry, narrative, liturgy, etc. The unifying theme of the Writings is this differing perspective. They show how God has sustained Israel, even when they are politically marginal. The Writings mostly belong to the time right after Judah was restored from the Babylonian Captivity (or "Exile"). Therefore, some stories are very similar to previous books (i.e. I, II Kings and I, II Chronicles), except that they sometimes reflect upon earlier events through a post-exilic, rather than a pre-exilic lens.

A. Wisdom Literature: Reflections on ordinary life.

#### Proverbs

Structure: Collections

Theme: The Fear of the Lord is Wisdom

Text: 1:7

"Maxims" traditionally attributed to Solomon reflect (in part) on the value of wisdom and the "perfect wife."

#### Job

Structure: Story and Dialogue

Theme: Suffering

Text: 1:9

Job is a book famously dedicated to the idea of suffering. Despite our lack of understanding concerning suffering, God is still in control, and suffering is not necessarily the result of wrongdoing.

**Ecclesiastes** (Associated with Tabernacles, or Feast of Booths)

Theme: "Skeptical" wisdom.

Texts: 3:1-8; 12: 13-14.

Life not centered on God is meaningless.

B. Hebrew Poetry

#### Psalms

Structure: 5 books, corresponds to the Torah

Theme: Answer God

Texts: Psalm 1 (Meditate on Torah), Psalm 150 (Praise God)

Psalms is largely a book of prayers, praises and laments, many of which were used in worship. ½ of the psalms are crisis-related.



**10. Haggai:** 6<sup>th</sup> C BC

Theme: Build God's House

Text: 1:9; 2:7-9

This short post-exilic book talks about the consequences for obedience and disobedience. Haggai calls upon Judah to re-build God's Temple, and speaks of the glory of the "new house," i.e. the Coming Messiah in Chapter 2.

**11. Zechariah:** 6<sup>th</sup> C BC

Theme: Day of Lord

Text: 14:1; Day is Coming; 9:9; coming on a donkey

Similar to Haggai in that it rebukes Judah. The central theme is encouragement primarily to exhort the people to rebuild the Temple. Zechariah's name means "Yahweh remembers," i.e. God remembers his covenant. This book has a strong Messianic emphasis, and consequently a hopeful future.

**12. Malachi:** 5<sup>th</sup> C BC

Theme: Day and Covenant

Text: 2: 10; 3:1-2; 4:2, 5 Elijah coming

Malachi means "my messenger." Although Judah has returned from Exile, they are not keeping God's covenant; they are breaking the faith by failing to keep the Law. Malachi rebukes them for doubting God's love and exhorts them to live faithfully.

Malachi also encouraged Judah to please God and speaks of the coming Messiah. For this reason, and because the tone ends rather upbeat, it is the last book in the Old Testament and thus leads right in to the New Testament.

**B. *The Latter Prophets:*** Are divided into the Big 3 ("Major" prophets) and Book of the 12 ("Minor" prophets). The 3 nations involved: Assyria (8-7<sup>th</sup> C BC), Babylon (6<sup>th</sup> C BC), Persia (6-5<sup>th</sup> C BC).

❖ **Major Prophets** ("Major" = a long book; does not imply theological importance)

**1. Isaiah:** 8-6<sup>th</sup> C BC

Structure: 1-35, 36-39 (deliverance of Jerusalem), 40-66

Theme: Holy One of Israel

Text: 6:3

Isaiah is sometimes called the "Messianic Prophet." Chapter 53 is famously later interpreted to be a prophecy about Jesus, and likens Christ to a lamb. Perhaps Isaiah's biggest theme is that of the impending doom: Assyria is coming. The Northern Kingdom, Israel, falls, but Jerusalem (the capital of the Southern Kingdom, Judah) does not fall at this time.

**2. Jeremiah:** 6<sup>th</sup> C BC in Jerusalem

Many Themes.

Text: 7:1-7 Temple Speech; 18 Potter image

As Assyria and Israel was to Isaiah, so Babylon and Judah are to Jeremiah. Jeremiah tried to keep Judah focused on God, but failed. Babylon attacked and carried off the people to Babylon, where they were captive for 40 years.

**3. Ezekiel:** 6<sup>th</sup> C BC in Babylon

Theme: New Life; God is in control.

Text: 37:14 (Dry Bones)

Ezekiel warned Jerusalem would fall if it was not faithful; just because they are God's people and Jerusalem has the holy Temple does not mean they are exempt from judgment. Jerusalem did not listen and did fall. Ezekiel comforted them in Babylon.

❖ **Minor Prophets** (Or, “Book of the Twelve,” because all 12 fit on one scroll. “Minor” = short.)

**1. Hosea:** 8<sup>th</sup> C BC

Theme: God is Covenant Love.

Text: 11:11; Holy One in Your Midst.

Hosea is famous for marrying a prostitute named Gomer. Some people debate if this is literal or an simply an allegory of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God.

**2. Joel:** 6<sup>th</sup> C BC

Theme: Locusts Coming: Day of Lord.

Text: 2:28; Dream Dreams.

Although locusts are compared to Yahweh’s imminent judgment on Judah, there will be a future, glorious day.

**3. Amos:** 8<sup>th</sup> C BC

Theme: Justice and Righteousness.

Text: 5:24; Let justice roll down.

After all of Israel’s neighbor’s are condemned in oracles from the Lord, the Northern Kingdom is then threatened, with a promise of future deliverance.

**4. Obadiah:** 6<sup>th</sup> C BC

Theme: Edom and Day of Lord.

Text: 15; The Day of the Lord is near.

This one-page book prophesies the destruction of Edom, the descendants of Esau. This is the shortest book in the Old Testament.

**5. Jonah:** 8<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> C BC

Theme: Outsiders & Insiders.

Text: 4:11; Don’t I care for the cattle?

Jonah was a reluctant prophet who ran away from God, only to be swallowed by a fish, which took him and spit him out where God wanted him to be: Nineveh. Jonah is interesting because this time the people actually listen and repent and are not destroyed. Jonah is mad at God for his mercy.

**6. Micah:** 8<sup>th</sup> C BC

Theme: Justice and Righteousness.

Text: 6:8; He has told you what is good.

Micah prophesies doom for Israel and Judah. He equates Judah’s guilt with its corrupt kings.

**7. Nahum:** 7<sup>th</sup> C BC

Theme: God doesn’t like brutality.

Text: 3:19; Who has escaped your endless brutality?

Prophecies against the city of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, for its wickedness.

**8. Habakkuk:** 7<sup>th</sup> C BC

Theme: Trust in Tough Times.

Text: 2:4; The righteous live by trust.

This book is a dialogue between the prophet Habakkuk and God. Habakkuk complains that the evil people around him are never punished by God. Verse 2:4 is famously used in the NT by Paul.

**9. Zephaniah:** 7<sup>th</sup> C BC

Theme: Day of Lord.

Text: 1:14; Day of Lord is Near.

The theme, the coming Day of the Lord, is when God will punish Judah for its wickedness.