

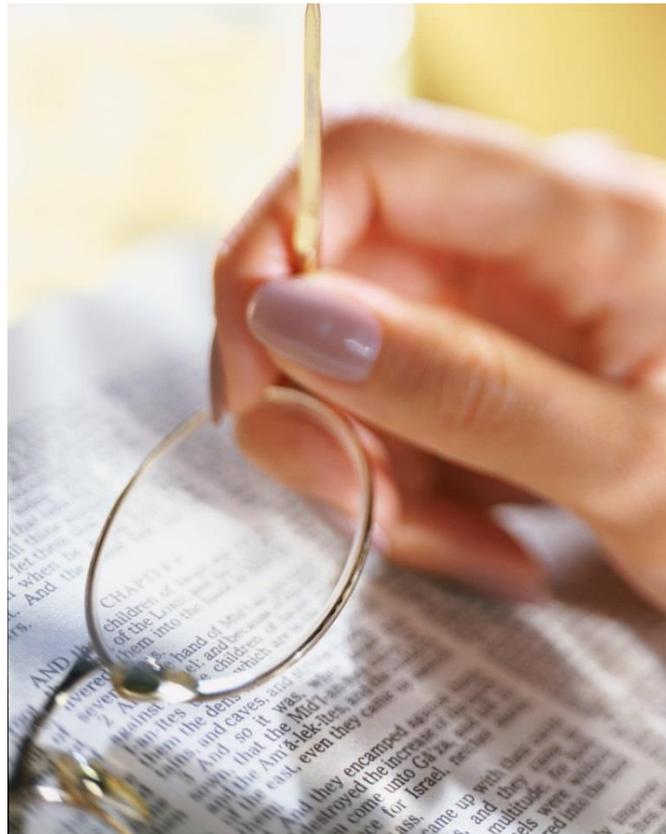
# Bible Basics

# Old Testament

by Debbie Kolacki of

**PRC – Practical Resources for  
Churches**

[www.prcli.org](http://www.prcli.org)



## **Basic Bible Information**

You don't need to be an expert on the Bible to teach Sunday school, but knowing as much as you can about it should make you a better teacher.

This is a quick overview of the Old Testament, so there will be times I'll be generalizing and simplifying information.

As in other areas of religion, what constitutes the Bible, as well as how the Bible is viewed, will vary depending on the denomination you belong to. Generally we'll be taking a middle of the road, mainline Protestant viewpoint in this webinar.

The most theologically conservative denominations view the Bible as inerrant (without mistakes) and take almost all of it literally. Denominations with a very liberal theological viewpoint may believe that many Bible stories belong to the category of myth, as opposed to fact, and see the Bible as inspired by God but definitely written by humans and therefore not error free. Of course, there are viewpoints of varying degrees between these two, and even people who belong to the same denomination have different viewpoints.

The Bible is made up of a collection of books (sort of like chapters in a modern novel) written by around 40 different people. The earliest parts of the Bible were part of an oral tradition and passed down from generation to generation. Eventually these were written down, probably around eight or nine hundred years before Christ was born. The rest of the Bible was written over a period of many more years, ending around 100 years after Christ.

Most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and most of the New Testament was written in Greek. A few parts were written in Aramaic.

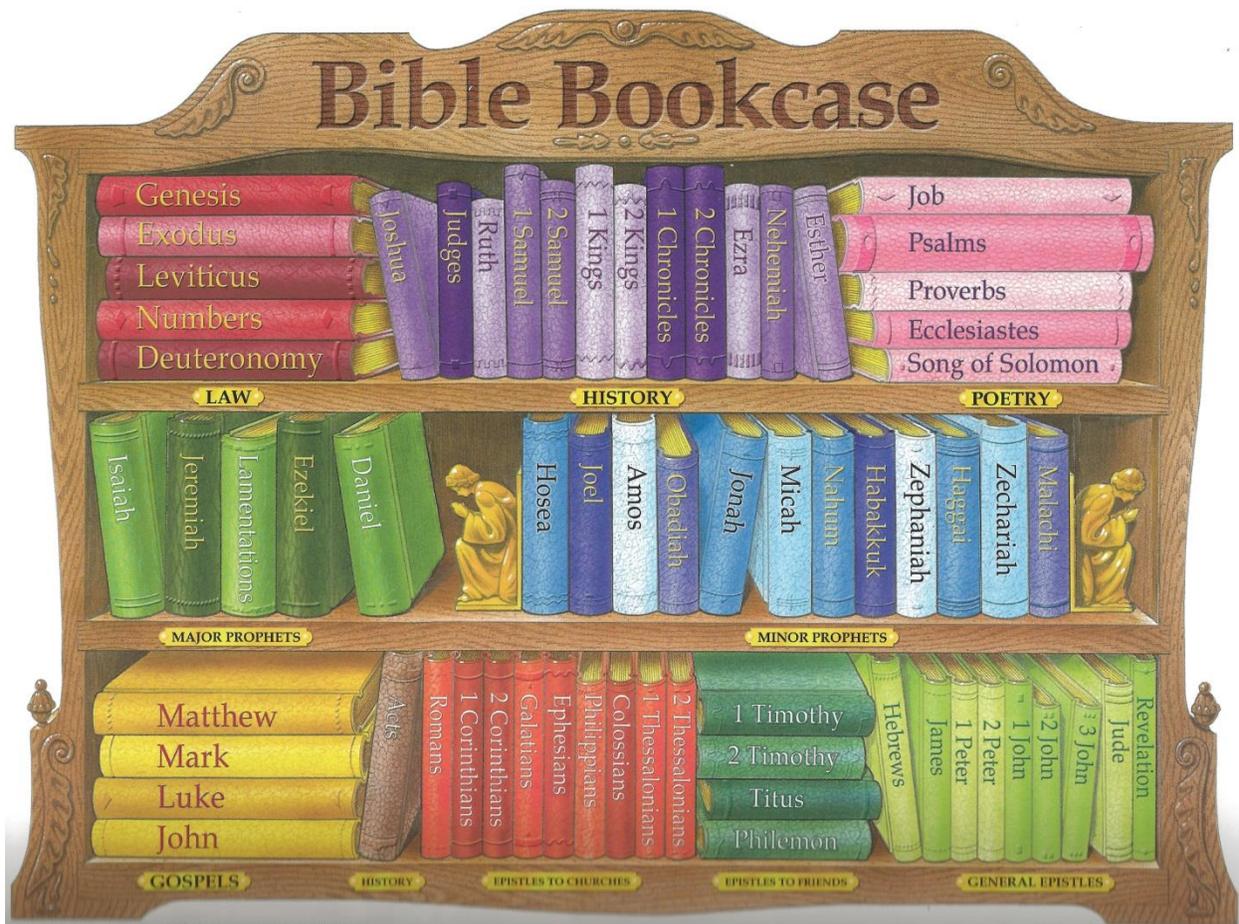


## Books of the Bible

The Protestant Bible has 66 books - 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament.

\*In the picture below, the Old Testament books are on the two top shelves.

\*Sometimes the Old Testament books are called the Hebrew Bible.



## Old Testament Overview

The Old Testament can be divided up different ways, but we'll be looking at four divisions:

- The Books of the Law (also called the Pentateuch or the Torah)
- The Books of History
- The Books of Poetry
- The Prophets

In the Old Testament, the Jewish people are referred to by various terms such as Hebrews, Israelites, Children of Israel, or Jews.

### The Books of the Law

The first five books of the Bible are called the Books of the Law and include:

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy

These five books are sometimes called the Pentateuch, which means "five books," or the Torah, which means "teaching, doctrine, or instruction."



# Genesis

## **Creation/Adam and Eve**

Genesis, which means “the beginning,” appropriately starts with God creating the world and filling it with plants, animals, and the first people, Adam and Eve, who live in the Garden of Eden. God tells Adam and Eve not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam and Eve disobey and must leave the garden. This is the beginning of people’s separation from God, which continues to this day.

Adam and Eve have two sons, Cain and Abel, and Cain murders his brother Abel. It’s not a great beginning to the human story.

## **Noah and the Flood**

The earth becomes populated, but the people are evil, and God regrets making them. God sends a great flood to destroy the earth but saves the one righteous man, Noah, along with his family. God gives Noah instructions to make a large boat, called an ark, and to take two of every kind of animal into the ark. After the flood subsides, God promises to never again send a flood to destroy the earth and puts a rainbow in the sky as a sign of the covenant (or agreement) God has made with humans.

## **The Tower of Babel**

Noah’s descendants repopulate the earth and initially all speak the same language. They get together to build a tall tower and when God sees that he scatters people throughout the earth and gives them different languages. This story is referred to as the Tower of Babel, since the word Babel means “to jumble or confuse.”

## **Abraham and Isaac**

The rest of the Book of Genesis tells the story of Abraham and Sarah and their descendants.

Abraham receives a call from God to leave his home and go to the land of Canaan. God makes a covenant with Abraham to give this Promised Land to his many descendants. However, Abraham’s wife, Sarah, is past the age of bearing children,

so Sarah suggests that Abraham have a child with her servant girl, Hagar; this was not an unusual practice at the time. Hagar gives birth to a son, Ishmael, and eventually Sarah becomes pregnant and has a son named Isaac.

God tells Abraham to take his son Isaac to a mountain and offer him as a burnt offering. Abraham proceeds to do so, but at the last minute an angel stops him and Abraham sacrifices a ram instead. This story is a difficult one for modern readers. Some interpret it as God testing Abraham's faith and willingness to obey God. Unfortunately, child sacrifice was practiced by ancient peoples and it may be that God is giving Abraham the message that this is not an acceptable practice.

### **Jacob and Esau**

Isaac grows up and goes on to marry Rebekah, who gives birth to twin boys, Esau and Jacob. Esau is the firstborn and therefore will become the head of the family and inherit the largest part of his father's estate. However, one day Esau is hungry and sells his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of lentil stew. As the oldest son, Esau is supposed to receive a special blessing from his father, but Jacob pretends to be his brother and steals this as well.

Esau wants to kill Jacob, so Jacob has to leave his home. In Bethel, Jacob dreams of a ladder reaching to heaven with angels on it. This is the famous story called "Jacob's ladder."

Eventually Jacob meets Rachel and wants to marry her. Rachel's father agrees if Jacob will work for him for seven years. However, after the seven years, Jacob is tricked into marrying Rachel's sister, Leah, and must work another seven years in order to marry Rachel. Rachel, Leah, and their two maids give birth to Jacob's 12 sons, who are the ancestors of the 12 tribes of Israel. God gives Jacob a new name, Israel.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are referred to as the patriarchs (fathers) of Israel.

## Joseph the Dreamer

One of Jacob's 12 sons is Joseph, who is his father's favorite. Joseph has dreams where he rules over his brothers. Joseph's brothers are jealous of him and end up selling him into slavery.

Joseph goes to Egypt where he is successful in the house of his master, but then ends up in jail. While imprisoned, Joseph becomes known for his ability to interpret dreams. The pharaoh asks Joseph to interpret a dream he's had and Joseph tells him that it means a time of famine is coming. Pharaoh puts Joseph in the number two position in Egypt, so that he can make sure food is put aside for when the famine comes.

Eventually, Joseph's brothers and father come to Egypt seeking food and they are reunited. Joseph forgives his brothers and his family settles down to live in Egypt.



This illustration by Owen Jones is from *The History of Joseph and His Brethren* published in 1869.

## **Exodus**

We turn now to Exodus, the second book in the Old Testament; an exodus is the departure of a large group of people.

### **Hebrews in slavery in Egypt**

The descendants of Jacob who were in Egypt have now grown into a large group and have become the slaves of the Egyptians. The Pharaoh has issued an order that all male Hebrew babies are to be thrown into the Nile River.

### **Moses**

When Moses, a Hebrew, is born, his mother puts him in a basket on the river, where he is found and adopted by the Pharaoh's daughter.

After Moses grows up, he sees a bush which is burning but not consumed. God speaks to him from the burning bush and tells Moses to go to Pharaoh and tell him to free the Hebrew people.

### **Plagues/Passover**

The Pharaoh refuses to let the Hebrews go, until 10 plagues are sent. The final one is the death of the first born sons of the Egyptians. The Hebrew firstborns are spared and the angel of death passes over their houses. This is the origin of the Jewish Feast of the Passover.

### **Exodus**

Pharaoh agrees to let the Hebrew people go but then changes his mind and sends his chariots after them. Moses parts the Red Sea and his people walk safely through it, but the Egyptians are drowned when the waters return.

### **Forty Years of Wandering**

The Hebrew people end up wandering in the desert for 40 years; God's presence is with them in a pillar of cloud during the day and in a pillar of fire at night.

During this time, the people are also given manna and quails to eat.

### **Ten Commandments and the Tabernacle**

God gives Moses the Ten Commandments and other instructions, as well as specifications for building the Tabernacle, the portable dwelling place of God's presence. The Tabernacle is sometimes called the Tent of Meeting.



Full size replica of the Israelite Tabernacle in Timna, Israel.

## Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

Now we reach the part of the Old Testament where many people who have decided to read the Bible through from the beginning give up.

The name Leviticus refers to the Levites, who were the priests. It contains instructions for them as well as the people on matters of worship, such as how to make offerings, and on matters of daily life, such as cleanliness and which foods are acceptable.

Numbers continues the story of the desert wanderings and is named for the numbering, or census, of the people of Israel.

Deuteronomy is the last of the Books of the Law and means “second law” although it is actually an adaptation and expansion of the original laws given in Exodus. It contains a series of farewell messages from Moses, who dies in the final chapter, within sight of the Promised Land.



## The Books of History

The Books of History cover approximately 700 years in the history of the Israelites. The twelve books are:

- Joshua
- Judges
- Ruth
- 1 Samuel
- 2 Samuel
- 1 Kings
- 2 Kings
- 1 Chronicles
- 2 Chronicles
- Ezra
- Nehemiah
- Esther

### Settlement in the Promised Land

The Book of Joshua begins as Joshua takes over as the leader of the Israelites. It covers the conquest of the Promised Land and its distribution among the 12 tribes.

Here you have the story of Rahab, a resident of Jericho who hides the Israelites sent to spy on the city, as well as the account of the Israelites marching around Jericho and the walls of the city tumbling down.

### Judges to kings

After Joshua dies, the Israelites are ruled by judges, who are military leaders. Famous judges include Deborah, Gideon, and Samson.

1 Samuel begins with the story of Hannah, a woman who prayed to God for a baby. Hannah gives birth to Samuel and brings him as a child to live with the priest Eli. Samuel hears God calling him one night and answers with the famous words "Here I am" and "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Samuel grows up to be the last judge of Israel and when the people demand a king Samuel anoints Saul as the first king of Israel.

## **King David**

Saul is disobedient to God and David, a young shepherd boy, is selected to be the next king. David defeats the giant, Goliath, and wins many other victories against the enemies of the Israelites. David has a close friendship with Saul's son Jonathan.

In 2 Samuel David becomes king. He commits adultery with Bathsheba and has her husband murdered. Despite his mistakes, David is "a man after God's own heart."

Many of the Psalms are attributed to David and his time is seen as one of the greatest in the history of the Jewish people.

David's son, Solomon, becomes the next king in 1 Kings and is known for his wisdom. He is also builds a splendid temple in Jerusalem.

## **Divided kingdom**

After Solomon's death, the kingdom splits into two: the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

## **Destruction of Northern Kingdom**

About 200 years later, as told in 2 Kings, the Northern Kingdom is destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC.

## **Captivity and return of the Southern Kingdom**

The Southern Kingdom last for about 350 years and then is conquered by the Babylonians, who take many of the Israelites into captivity in Babylon in 586 BC.

1 and 2 Chronicles cover the same period as described in 2 Samuel through 2 Kings.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of the Israelites' return to their homeland after 70 years of exile and the rebuilding of the temple.

## **Ruth**

Ruth is one of the Books of History and takes place during the time of the judges. Ruth is a woman from Moab who marries a visiting Israelite. After the death of Ruth's husband, she travels to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law, Naomi, and eventually marries Boaz. Their child is the grandfather of King David.

## **Esther**

Esther is also one of the Books of History and tells the story of a Jewish girl, Esther, who becomes queen of Persia and risks her life to save the Jewish people from death. The Jewish feast of Purim celebrates this event.



Model of Solomon's Temple from the Hamburg Museum.

## The Books of Poetry

- Job
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes
- Song of Solomon

The five Books of Poetry are sometimes called Wisdom Literature.

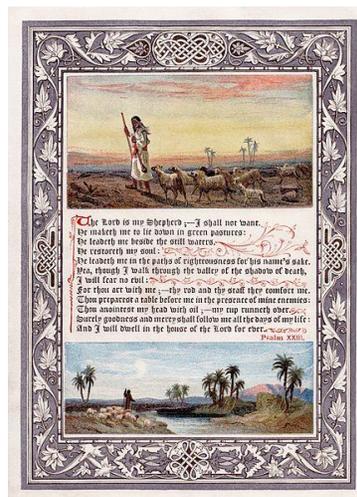
Job is the story of a righteous man who remains faithful to God despite great suffering and loss.

The Psalms are 150 songs or poems to God that express a wide range of human emotions, from joyful praise to deep despair. The most famous Psalm is the 23<sup>rd</sup>, which begins “The Lord Is My Shepherd.”

Proverbs is a collection of short, wise sayings that convey moral truths.

Ecclesiastes is a book about the futility of living a life apart from God. The title is usually translated as “the teacher” or “the preacher.”

The Song of Solomon is sometimes referred to as the Song of Songs; it celebrates the love of a Jewish maiden and her lover and is written as a dialogue.



This picture is from an 1880 family magazine for Sabbath reading called *The Sunday at Home*.

## The Prophets

The Old Testament ends with the 17 Books of the Prophets. The word prophet means to “speak out.” The prophets spoke out against injustice and immorality and warned the people that God would punish them if they continued to be disobedient. The prophets spanned a period of hundreds of years including the times of the kings, as well as when the Jewish people lived in exile and then returned to their homeland.

### Major Prophets

- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Lamentations
- Ezekiel
- Daniel

Five books make up the Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The term “major” simply means that these five books are the longest books of prophecy in the Old Testament and doesn’t refer to their importance.

Daniel tells stories of the Jewish exiles in Babylon. It includes the story of Daniel in the lion’s den and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace.

### Minor Prophets

- Hosea
- Joel
- Amos
- Obadiah
- Jonah
- Micah
- Nahum
- Habakkuk
- Zephaniah
- Haggai
- Zechariah
- Malachi

\*The best known of the 12 Minor Prophets is Jonah, who God tells to go to the city of Ninevah and tell its inhabitants to repent. Jonah runs away and ends up being swallowed by a great fish. Eventually Jonah does preach to the people of Ninevah and they turn back to God.

## Apocryphal Books

There are some books of the Bible which are not accepted by Protestants but are part of Roman Catholic and Orthodox Bibles. These are called the Apocryphal (meaning “hidden” or “questionable.”) books.

- 1 and 2 Esdras
- Tobit
- Judith
- Expanded Esther
- Wisdom
- Ecclesiasticus
- Baruch and the Epistle of Jeremy
- Song of the Three Children
- Story of Susanna
- The Idol Bel and the Dragon
- Prayer of Manasses
- 1 and 2 Maccabees
- 2 Maccabees

## Old Testament stories in Sunday school curriculum

Three year cycle:

- Creation, Noah, Abraham to Joseph
- Moses and the Exodus, Joshua and the conquest
- Judges and Kings: Samuel, Saul, David, Solomon

Summer

Many Sunday school curriculums are set up to go through the major Bible stories over a three year cycle. They will cover parts of the Old Testament in the fall and then turn to the New Testament starting in Advent.

Often the Old Testament stories are divided into three sections as you see here.

Sometimes Old Testament stories not included in these three sections will be covered during the summer.

## **Teaching Old Testament stories to children**

### **Violence**

There is no getting around that much of the Old Testament is violent and even portrays God as approving of this violence. Sometimes Sunday school teachers wish they didn't have to teach the Old Testament and there are curriculums that reflect this, such as ones based on the weekly lectionary readings, which focus mainly on the New Testament. There are arguments to be made on both sides of the issue, but you may not have any choice in this area.

### **Be selective**

Think about the stories you teach and how you teach them. Consider whether a particular Bible story or activity is appropriate for the age group you teach.

### **Be honest**

Be honest. See what the focus of the lesson is and whether you agree with it. Adapt the lesson so that it works for you and your students.

### **Bring in Jesus**

Consider Jesus and his teachings when preparing your lesson. For instance, in teaching the story of David and Goliath you might want to tell the children that people in the past often settled their differences by fighting but Jesus told us to love our enemies.

### **What is the point?**

Ask yourself what the point is for the lesson and the suggested activities you are teaching. For instance, an activity for the David and Goliath story suggests having children throw wads of paper at a picture of Goliath. What will children learn through this sort of an activity?

### **Taking the stories literally?**

Another problem that teachers face has to do with taking some of the Old Testament stories literally, such as the creation of the world in seven days. In most instances I would let the children know that people have different opinions; again, I would be honest and let the children know my opinion while teaching them to respect differing opinions.

## Memorization

There are varying opinions as to whether children should be memorizing things such as the Books of the Bible and scripture verses. I see less need for children to memorize the Books of the Bible, but I think having them memorize scripture such as the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm is a good idea. It's much easier for children, especially those around 10 or 11 years old, to memorize than adults. By having children memorize meaningful scripture verses, you are giving them something they can bring to mind as they experience the ups and downs of life now and in the future.

## Resources for teaching the Old Testament

### Regular curriculum

Your regular curriculum can be a good source for teaching your children about the Old Testament. If you're looking for a Bible overview, there are various possibilities.

### Crossings for Kids

Logos Productions makes [Crossings for Kids](#) which introduces children in grades 1-6 to the entire Bible within the context of eight core stories. They also have a [Crossings confirmation](#) program which could be adapted for use in Sunday school.

### The Story

Zondervan publishes a curriculum called The Story which has several versions for [children](#) as well as [teens](#).

### re:form Ancestors

Another resource for youth is [re:form Ancestors](#) which uses humor and DVD segments to teach about 15 Old Testament characters.

### Other

There's also [Through the Bible in Twelve Weeks](#) which can be used for older children and youth.

Numerous resources teach children about the Bible itself, such as [Learning to Use My Bible](#).

Contact the Parish Resource Center for more suggestions.

## **If you want to know more...**

There are plenty of resources out there to learn about the Bible and the Old Testament.

Books include commentaries, dictionaries, atlases, encyclopedias, books with charts and illustrations, and concordances.

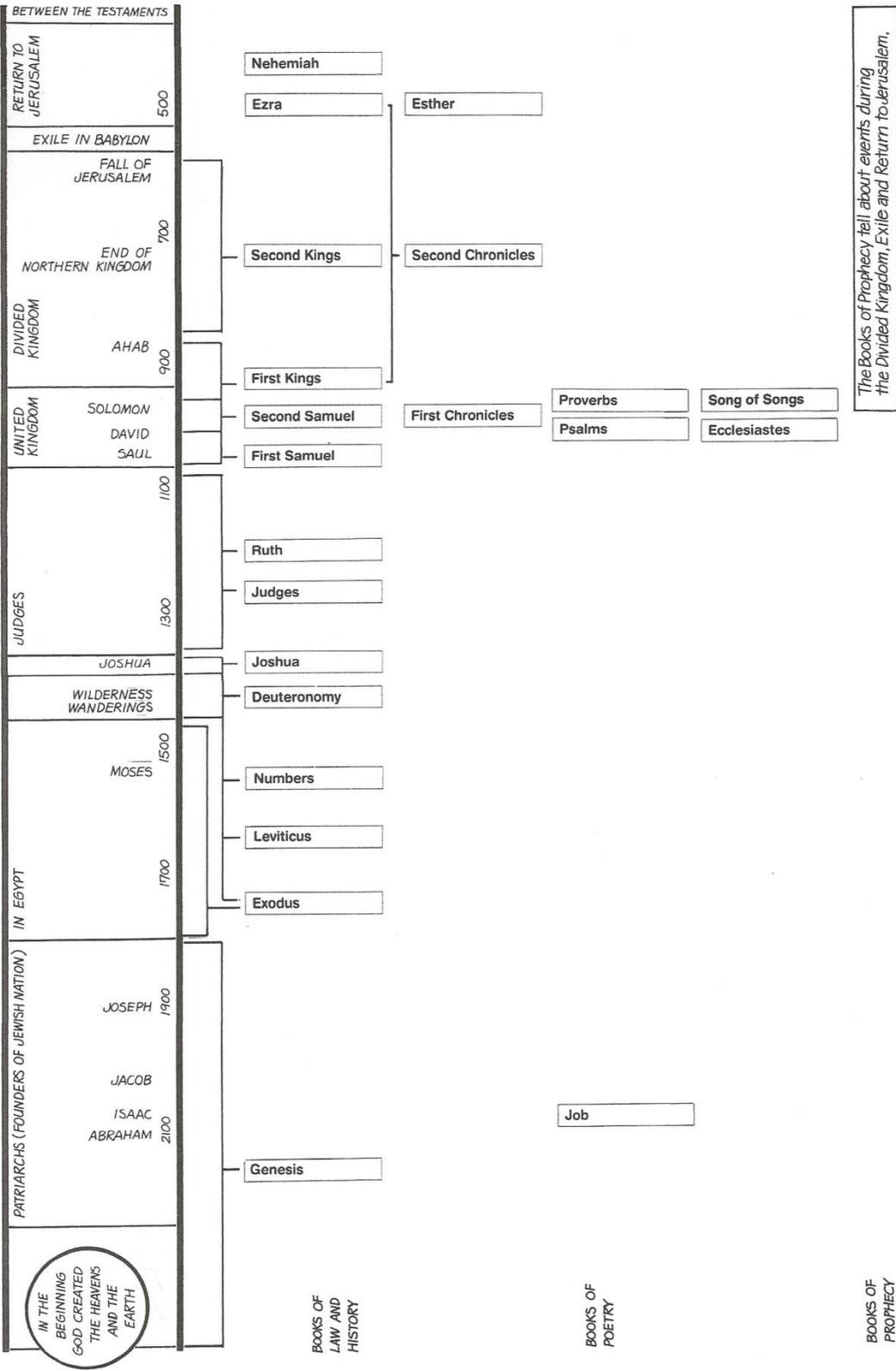
There are also many free websites with Bible information and there are even apps for your smartphone or tablet. I've included a list of some websites in the booklet posted on the Parish Resource Center's website.

Studying with others can be fun and will keep you motivated. There are numerous short and long term studies which give an overview of the Bible. Contact the Parish Resource Center for more information.



# When Old Testament Events Happened

APPROXIMATE TIMES WHEN EVENTS IN EACH BIBLE BOOK HAPPENED



## **Bibles and Bible Study Websites**

### **American Bible Society**

Includes resources, study guides, and more on Books of the Bible and People of the Bible. There are resources and articles about the Bible and about topics in the bible, as well as church resources such as eBulletins, devotionals and more.

resources, study guides and more

<http://bibleresources.americanbible.org/bible-resources/bible-resource-center>

### **Bible Crosswalk**

Includes [John Darby's Synopsis of the New Testament](#), the Fourfold Gospel, the [Geneva Study Bible](#), [John Gill's Exposition of the Bible](#), [Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible](#), [Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible](#), the [People's New Testament](#), [Robertson's Word Pictures of the New Testament](#), [Scofield Reference Notes \(1917 Edition\)](#), the [Treasury of David](#), and [Wesley's Explanatory Notes](#).

<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Commentaries/>

### **Bible Gateway**

Bible Gateway is a free tool for reading and researching scripture online in the language or translation of your choice which provides advanced searching capabilities based on keywords, phrases, or scripture reference. Other features include a Verse of the Day widget, Bible commentaries, audio Bibles, and more. It also includes InterVarsity Press' New Testament Commentaries and Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible.

<http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/>

### **Bible Oremus**

Free New Revised Standard Version (American and Anglicized versions), and several versions of the Psalms.

<http://bible.oremus.org>

### **Biblia**

Includes Bible search engine, reading plans, concordance and dictionary, book outlines and more from the Zondervan NIV Study Bible.

<http://www.biblica.com/niv/study-bible/>

### **Biblos**

Includes Bible atlas, parallel Bible, concordance, dictionary, encyclopedia, commentary, devotions, Christian books, and mobile app.

[www.biblos.com](http://www.biblos.com)

### **Blue Letter Bible**

Includes commentaries by Robert M. Bowman, John Brown, John Calvin, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Mark Eastman, Alfred Edersheim, David Guzik, Matthew Henry, Bob Hoekstra, Fausset & Brown Jamieson, Gary Kusunoki, Joseph Barber Lightfoot, Martin Luther, Andrew Murray, Isaac Newton, Neal Pirolo, Church Smith, Donald R. Smith, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Ray Stedman, David Terasaka M.D., R.A. Torrey, and John Walvoord.

<http://cf.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/>

### **Christians Unite**

Includes Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible, the People's New Testament, John Wesley's Notes on the Bible, JFB: Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, the Geneva Study Bible, and John Nelson Darby - Synopsis of the New Testament.  
<http://bible.christiansunite.com/commentary.shtml>

### **Enter the Bible**

Written by Luther Seminary faculty this site includes summaries, outlines, background and videos for your group study or personal devotions.  
[www.enterthebible.org](http://www.enterthebible.org)

### **E-Sword**

Website to download free Bible study software.  
[www.e-sword.net](http://www.e-sword.net)

### **Net Ministries**

Information about the Bible, pronunciation guide, several Bible dictionaries, articles and links to more resources.  
<http://netministries.org/bbasics/bbasics.html>

### **Study Light**

Includes Adam Clarke's Commentary, John S.C. Abbot and Jacob Abbott Illustrated New Testament, James Burton Coffman's Commentaries: Whole Bible, Barne's Notes on the New Testament, John Darby's Synopsis of the New Testament, John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible, the Geneva Study Bible, David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible, Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, John Lightfoot's Commentary on the Gospels, Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible, Martin Luther's Commentary on Galatians, J.W. McGarvey's Original Commentary on Acts, the People's New Testament, Robertson's Word Pictures of the New Testament, Scofield Reference Notes (1917 Edition), The Fourfold Gospel, the Treasury of David, the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, and Wesley's Explanatory Notes.  
<http://www.studylight.org/com/>

### **You Version**

YouVersion, a LifeChurch.tv offshoot, hosts a free online Bible and community which allows users to take the Bible on the go with multiple mobile applications, languages and translations. YouVersion also offers more than 20 reading plans that differ in translation, Scripture length, frequency of delivery and topic focus. Readers choose a plan that fit their schedules and lifestyles. For example, readers can pick a translation they like, such as "The Message," then choose a reading plan from the Gospels that delivers one chapter, twice a day.  
[www.youversion.com](http://www.youversion.com)

Visit our [website](#) and our [Facebook page](#) for more free resources and to sign up for our monthly free children's ministry webinars.

PRC - Practical Resources for Churches

Phone: 631-486-4350 or 631-821-2255

Email us at [info@prcli.org](mailto:info@prcli.org)

### **Everyone Has a Calling Ours Is Helping You!**

The Parish Resource Center of Long Island is a non-denominational, education-based organization. We currently have three locations on Long Island and a virtual presence.

We provide consultants, educational opportunities and physical resource to churches.

What makes us different? We are here to walk the journey every day with a congregation. We look for practical, cost effective solutions for each request. No question is too large or too small. Call, visit or e-mail us to find out.

