

## The Holy Bible Overview

### **The Old Testament.**

The Bible is customarily divided into two books: The Old Testament and the New Testament. We should note, however, that the word testament is not totally appropriate to designate the character of these two books, but rather the designations New Covenant and Old Covenant. (Some Bibles, such as the Slavonic and Russian, use the designations Old Law and New Law to refer to these two parts.) In any case, the Old Testament may be described as the literary expression of the religious life of ancient Israel.

This literary expression of Israel's religious life extended over a thousand years from the first to the last books of the Old Testament and reflects many facets of the life of Israel, taking many forms: prose and poetry, myth and legend, folk tale and history, sacred hymns and a superb love song, religious and secular laws, proverbs of the wise and oracles of the prophets, epic poems, laments, parables and allegories. Yet, despite these varied forms, a common theme emerges this book is a history of God acting in history, that is, Salvation History, It is a history of a people chosen by God out of whom would come the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Mary and the Son of God, the Word, the Second Person of the Trinity.

In Jewish tradition, the Scriptures were divided into three parts: The Law (the first five books), the Prophets (Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, 1st and 2nd Samuel and 1st and 2nd Kings; Latter Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve Minor Prophets), and the Writings (the remainder of the Old Testament books). Later, just before the New Testament era, the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek at Alexandria, Egypt (the so-called Septuagint LXX). This translation included books and portions of books not found in the Hebrew Scriptures (the so-called Apocrypha or Deutero-canonical books). It is this later Greek (LXX) Scripture that is considered the official text for the Orthodox Churches. In any case, the original language of the Old Testament was Ancient Hebrew, although parts were written in Aramaic (a more recent Semitic language).

### **The New Testament.**

More than 500 years before the birth of Christ, the Prophet Jeremiah predicted that the covenant relation of God with His people, instituted on Mt. Sinai, would give place in the future to a more inward and personal one (Jer. 31:31-34). With this in mind, St. Paul regarded the Christian Dispensation as being based on a new covenant, which he contrasted with the old covenant of the books of Moses (2 Cor. 3:6-15). By His sacrificial death, Christ became the mediator of a new covenant (Heb. 9:15-20).

The books of the New Testament, of which there are twenty-seven, fall into four categories: 1) Gospels from Evangelion or Good News, because they tell the Good News of Jesus Christ Sts. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; 2) Church History The Acts of the Apostles; 3) Epistles (or Letters) of which there are twenty-one, written by Sts. Paul, James, Peter, John and Jude; and 4) an Apocalypse, that is, a Revelation or disclosure of God's will for the future, hence the title: The Revelation to St. John. All of these books were written in the koine or common Greek of the time, which was in common use throughout the Roman Empire at the beginning of the Christian era.

## The Old Testament

### **Genesis.**

Genesis, meaning beginning, covers the time from the Creation (i.e., the beginning of history) to the Israelite sojourn in Egypt, the book falls naturally into two main sections: Chapters 1-11 deal primarily with primeval history; Chapters 12-50 treat the history of the Fathers of Israel (or the Patriarchs). The first section speaks of the creation of the world, including man, man's life in Paradise (a symbol of being in God's presence), and his tragic disobedience of God's commandment (the Original Sin) and Fall. It also speaks of the spread of sin in the world and its first destruction in the Flood. The latter section tells the stories of Abraham (Ch. 12-25), of Isaac and his twin sons Esau and Jacob (Ch. 26-36), and of Jacob's family, the chief member of which, in Genesis, was Joseph (Ch. 37-50).

## **Exodus.**

This book speaks of the deliverance of the People of Israel from bondage in Egypt and the making of a Covenant between God and them at Mt. Sinai. It falls into two major sections: 1) Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage, including the rise of Moses as leader of the people, the Ten Plagues, etc., and the march to Sinai, including the destruction of Pharaoh's armies in the Red Sea (Ch. 1-18) and 2) Israel's sojourn at Sinai, where the Covenant was made and laws governing life and worship were promulgated (Ten Commandments, Ark of the Covenant, Tabernacle, etc. Ch. 19-40). At the center of these events stood Moses, who was called to be the agent of God in delivering Israel from slavery, to be the interpreter of God's redemptive work and to be the mediator of the Covenant.

## **Leviticus.**

The book of Leviticus (the title refers to the Levitical priests set apart to minister at the Sanctuary) is mostly a book of worship and falls into six parts: 1) laws dealing with sacrifices (Ch. 1-7); 2) consecration of priests to their office (Ch. 8-10); 3) laws setting forth the distinction between clean and unclean (Ch. 11-15); 4) the ceremony for the annual Day of Atonement (Ch. 16); 5) laws to govern Israel's life as a holy people (the Holiness Code Ch. 17-26); and 6) an appendix on religious vows (Ch. 27).

Through the various rituals and laws, there breathes the conviction that the holy God tabernacles in the midst of His people during their historical pilgrimage. The nearness of God not only accentuates the people's sense of sin, but prompts them to turn to Him in sacrificial services of worship. For God has provided the means of atonement and forgiveness whereby the community is restored to wholeness and is reconciled to Him.

## **Numbers.**

The title Numbers refers to the census or numbering of the people of Israel at the beginning of this book, but could be better entitled In the Wilderness. The book can be divided into three parts: 1) Preparations for departure from Sinai (Ch. 1-10:10); 2) the journey to Kadesh, from which point an unsuccessful attack upon southern Canaan was made (Ch. 10:11-21:13); and 3) the journey from Kadesh via the Transjordan for the purpose of approaching Canaan from the East (Ch. 21:14-36).

Here we see the Forty-year Sojourn in the Wilderness, in which the people, existing only precariously, are constantly murmuring. They are pictured as faithless, rebellious, and blind to God's signs. Yet, God was marvelously guiding, sustaining, and disciplining His people so that they might know their utter dependence upon Him and thus be prepared for their historical pilgrimage.

## **Deuteronomy.**

The basic theme of Deuteronomy which means Second Law, is the renewal of the Covenant. At the end of the book of Numbers, Israel is encamped in the Plains of Moab, preparing for an attack upon Canaan from the East. Deuteronomy is essentially Moses' farewell address to the people in which he rehearses the mighty acts of the Lord, solemnly warns of the temptations of the new ways of Canaan, and pleads for loyalty to and love of God as the condition for life in the Promised Land. A distinctive teaching of Deuteronomy is that the worship of the Lord is to be centralized in one place, so that the paganism of the local shrines may be eliminated.

This book can be divided into four parts: 1) God's care for Israel from Sinai to Moab (Ch. 1-4); 2) The Covenant Proof of God's love (Ch. 5-11); 3) Moses' explanation of the Law (Ch. 12-26); and 4) Moses' last words and death (Ch. 27-34).

## **Joshua.**

The book of Joshua is the story of the Conquest of the Promised Land. The story opens with the passage of the Jordan River and the sack of Jericho (Ch. 1-6); it then tells how the Hebrew armies moved from the Jordan Valley up into the highlands to conquer Ai (Ch. 7-8) and, through a humorous deception, to become unwilling allies of the Gibeonites (Ch. 9). This led to a great battle with the chieftains of five other Canaanite cities and the conquest of the South (Ch. 10). A final engagement in the North resulted in the complete destruction of Canaanite power in Palestine (Ch. 11). Following a brief summary of Joshua's triumphs (Ch. 12), the book describes the division of the land among the several tribes (Ch. 13-23) and how Israel entered into a Covenant to serve forever the God Whose might had been so awesomely demonstrated (Ch. 24).

## **Judges.**

Despite the initial conquest of Palestine, the process of subjugation continued and, in fact, some parts of the country were never conquered. Heroes (Judges) rose up amongst the people in times of crisis, and this book is primarily an account of their exploits.

The book opens with an account of the conquest of Canaan which is roughly parallel to that in the book of Joshua (Ch. 1-2:5); then follows the main body of the book, which, after a moralizing introduction (Ch. 2:6-3:6), relates the adventures of the individual Judges: Othniel (Ch. 3:7-11), Ehud (Ch. 3:12-30), Shamgar (Ch. 3:31), Deborah (Ch. 4-5), Gideon (Ch. 6-8) and his infamous son, Abimelech (Ch. 9), two minor Judges (Ch. 10:1-5); Jephthah (Ch. 10:6-12:7), three more minor Judges (Ch. 12:8-15) and Samson (Ch. 13-16). The book concludes with an appendix containing tales about the migration of the Tribe of Dan (Ch. 17-18) and the sins of the Benjaminites (Ch. 19-21). In all this, one clear lesson stands out: Loyalty to God is the first requisite for national success and disloyalty a guarantee of disaster.

## **Ruth.**

The book of Ruth speaks of the marriage of Ruth (a Moabitess a foreigner) to a Hebrew man and how, on his death, she chose to return to Judah with her mother-in-law, Naomi, to share the fortunes of her husband's people, rather than remain in the security of her native land (Ch. 1). There, her loyalty and kindness won her the love of Boaz (Ch. 2-4:12), and, through her marriage to him, she became the great-grandmother of David the King (Ch. 4:13-22).

## **First and Second Samuel.**

The two books of the Samuel (1st and 2nd Kings in the Orthodox Bible) are concerned primarily with the history of Israel during the times of the Prophet Samuel, King Saul and King David. Originally one unified work, Samuel was early divided into two parts (1st and 2nd Samuel).

The books can be divided as follows: 1) The last Judges, Eli and Samuel, and the Philistine oppression (1 Sam. 1-7); 2) Samuel and Saul, the institution of the Monarchy, and Saul's rejection (1 Sam. 8-15); 3) Saul and David; David befriended at first by Saul, but later persecuted (1 Sam. 16-31); 4) David, King over Judah after the death of Saul (2 Sam. 1-4); 5) David, King over all Israel and nearby conquered nations (2 Sam. 5-20); and 6) Appendices (2 Sam. 21-24).

The theme of this work is the institution of the Israelite Monarchy and its perpetuity in the dynasty of David, from which one day will be born the Messiah. The last days of Eli are described because they introduce Samuel. Samuel is described because he institutes the Monarchy in Israel. Saul is described because he demonstrates for all time what the Israelite King must not be. David is described because like him and from him will come the desire of the everlasting hills the Messiah.

### **First and Second Kings.**

Like the two books of Samuel, 1st and 2nd Kings (in the Orthodox Bibles, 3rd and 4th Kings) were originally one. First Kings begins with the enthronement of Solomon and the death of David (Ch. 1-2) and recounts the history of Solomon's reign (Ch. 3-11). It then continues with the history of the Kings of the Divided Monarchy (Southern Kingdom of Judah, with its capital at Jerusalem, and the Northern Kingdom of Israel, with its capital at Samaria) through the reigns of Ahab of Israel and Jehoshaphat of Judah (Ch. 12-22). Here also we encounter the dramatic story of Elijah the Prophet (1 Kings 17-2 Kings 2).

Second Kings continues the story of the Hebrew Monarchies. Chapters 1-17 describe the period from the reigns of Ahaziah of Israel and Jehoshaphat of Judea until the Fall of Samaria and the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria in 721 B.C. Included here are the stories of the Prophet Elisha, heir to Elijah. Chapters 18-25 continue the history of the Kingdom of Judah from the Fall of Samaria until the Fall of the Kingdom and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 B.C., with the subsequent Deportation to Babylon.

The purpose of the two books of Kings is to show the causes of the Fall of the Kingdom. The catastrophes of 721 (Fall of Samaria) and 587 (Fall of Jerusalem) are seen as a just punishment for the failure of the majority of the Kings of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms to practice monotheism and observe the unity of the Sanctuary in Jerusalem as demanded by the Law. Israel, not God, had been unfaithful to the Sinai Covenant. If Israel is to resume her God-given mission, she must repent and leave the future to God's unswerving faithfulness and to His steadfast love.

### **First and Second Chronicles.**

First and Second Chronicles (1st and 2nd Paralipomenen in the Orthodox Bibles) were originally one book in the Hebrew Bible and can be seen as part of a larger history including the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. These books are a theological history of the dynasty of David and of the Temple until the Fall of Jerusalem. The purpose of these books were to focus attention on Israel's hope the dynasty of David, and on Israel's glory the Temple of the True God on earth, in Jerusalem.

These books can be divided into four basic parts: 1) (1 Chr. 1-9) a summary of Israel's history from Adam to David, presented by a series of genealogies; 2) (1 Chr. 10-29) David as a great Monarch and the Founder of the Temple and its ritual; 3) (2 Chr. 1-9) King Solomon and the building of the Temple; and 4) (2 Chr. 10-36) the history of the Davidic Kings and their association with the Temple.

### **Ezra and Nehemiah.**

These two books form part of a larger history which includes 1st and 2nd Chronicles (mentioned above). The theme of these books are the religious and political reorganization of Judah after the Return from the Babylonian Exile in the time of the Persian Empire (Kings Cyrus, Darius I, Ataxerxes I and Ataxerxes II). Attention is focused on the importance of the Temple and religious reforms for the preservation of the Jewish State.

The books can be divided into four parts: 1) The return of the first exiles in 537 B.C., followed by the rebuilding of the altar in 536 and the Temple in 516 (Ez. 1-6); 2) the return of a second group of exiles in 458, led by Ezra the Scribe, and the marriage reforms introduced by him (Ez. 7-10); 3) the return of Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in 445 (Neh. 1-7); and 4) the religious reforms and the renewal of the Covenant instituted by Ezra and Nehemiah (Neh. 8-13).

### **Esther.**

The book of Esther is concerned primarily with the story of Esther, the Jewish wife and Queen of the Persian King Ahasuerus. The story portrays the foiling of a plot by Esther and her adoptive guardian, Mordecai, hatched by the evil Haman against the Jews. This account, which shows God's love and care for His people, is greatly venerated by the Jews as the basis for their Feast of Purim.

This book can be divided into four parts: 1) (Ch. 1-2) the setting of the scene in the Court of the King; 2) (Ch. 3-7) the development of the plot and its overthrow by Esther and Mordecai, resulting in the hanging of Haman and his sons; 3) (Ch. 8-10) the destruction of the enemies of the Jews and the institution of the Feast of Purim; and 4) (Ch. 11-16) further additions to the story. [We note here that Chapters 11-16 are not found in the Hebrew Bible, as well as most English Bibles, but form a part of the Orthodox Bible (LXX). In other Bibles, this section constitutes part of the so-called Apocrypha or Deutero-canonical books.]

### **Job.**

The book of Job is concerned with the problem of suffering in the world. It does not attempt to explain the mystery of suffering or to justify the ways of God with men, but rather aims to probe the depths of faith in spite of suffering. It is the story of a righteous man, Job, who loses everything in the material and physical sense, but who maintains his faith in God despite his personal sufferings. The Church sees here a parallel between Job and Christ.

The book can be divided into eight parts: 1) Prologue (Ch. 1-2); 2) 1st Cycle of Speeches (Ch. 3-14); 3) 2nd Cycle of Speeches (Ch. 15-21); 4) 3rd Cycle of Speeches (Ch. 22-28); 5) Job's final summary of his case (Ch. 29-31); 6) Elihu's speeches (Ch. 32-37); 7) God's speeches (Ch. 38-42:6); and 8) an Epilogue (Ch. 42:7-20). [We note that the last three verses are found only in the Orthodox Bibles (LXX).]

### **Psalms.**

The book of Psalms contains the hymns of Israel. This book, called The Psalter, holds a central place in the worship of the Orthodox Church and the Psalms are customarily ascribed to David and Solomon. The book of Psalms is divided into Five Books (in imitation of the Pentateuch the first five books of the Bible): Book I (Ps. 1-41); Book II (Ps. 42-72); Book III (Ps. 73-89); Book IV (Ps. 90-106); and Book V (Ps. 107-150). [Orthodox Bibles also include Psalm 151 a Song of David after he fought with Goliath.]

The Psalms may be classified as follows: Hymns (acts of praise suitable for any occasion); Laments (in which an individual seeks deliverance from an illness or a false accusation, or the nation asks for help in times of distress); Songs of Trust (in which an individual expresses his confidence in God's readiness to help); Thanksgivings (in which an individual expresses his gratitude for deliverance); Sacred History (in which the nation recounts the story of God's dealings with it); Royal Psalms (for use on such occasions as a coronation or royal wedding); Wisdom Psalms (which are meditations on life and the ways of God); and Liturgies (Psalms composed for special cultic or historical occasions).

In the Orthodox Church, the LXX version of the Psalms are generally used and these are numbered differently in Orthodox Bibles; in most cases the LXX numbering of the Psalms is one less than the customary numbering (Cf. Table in Chapter 3 of this Book). In addition, for liturgical use, the Psalter is divided into twenty parts called kathismas (from *kathizo*, meaning to sit, since it is permitted to sit during these readings).

### **Proverbs.**

The book of Proverbs is a collection of moral and religious instruction to the youth of Israel. It can be divided into four main parts and five appendices: 1) (Ch. 1-9:18) Ten discourses of admonition and warning, two poems personifying Wisdom (1:20-33; 8:1-36), Wisdom vs. Folly (9:1-6, 13-18), and various shorter admonitions and poems; 2) (Ch. 10-22:16) 1st Collection of Sayings of Solomon; 3) (Ch. 22:17-24:22) The Sayings of the Wise, with the 1st Appendix added (Ch. 24:23-34), also entitled Sayings of the Wise; 4) (Ch. 25-29) 2nd Collection of Sayings of Solomon; 2nd Appendix (Ch. 30:1-14), entitled The Words of Agur; 3rd Appendix (Ch. 30:15-33) a collection of numerical proverbs; Appendix 4 (Ch. 31:1-9), entitled The Words of Lemuel, King of Massa; and Appendix 5 (Ch. 31:10-31) praise of the ideal wife.

### **Ecclesiastes (or The Preacher).**

This book begins, The Words of the Preacher, the son of David, King in Jerusalem (Eccl. 1:1), and its theme is the vanity of all things, Vanity of vanities....All is vanity! (Eccl. 1:2). The author explores man's happiness and can see no lasting, certain, secure happiness in this earthly existence. This questioning will point men to the everlasting happiness in the world to come.

### **The Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon).**

This book is a collection of poems of human love and courtship, but beneath its secular appearance, lies some great religious truths. In the prophetic books, the Lord God was often seen as the husband of His people (e.g., Hosea 2:16-19) and in later Christian tradition, this book was interpreted as an allegory of the love of Christ for His bride, the Church (e.g., Rev. 21:2, 9).

### **Isaiah.**

The Prophet Isaiah proclaimed his message to Judah and Jerusalem between 742 and 687 B.C., when the Northern Kingdom was conquered by Assyria and Judah lived uneasily in its shadow. Isaiah attacks social injustice which shows Israel's weak adherence to God's laws. He exhorts the people to place their confidence in the Almighty (Omnipotent) God and to lead private and public lives which demonstrate this.

In Chapters 40-66, this theme is extended further and the author demonstrates the significance of historical events in God's plan, which extends from Creation to Redemption and beyond. In this section we find the beautiful Suffering Servant oracles, referring to the Messiah our Lord Jesus Christ.

The book of the Prophet Isaiah has always been held in highest esteem by the Orthodox Church, and is quoted and used above all other prophetic books of the Old Testament in her liturgical life. This is especially evident during the Great Lent when it is read every day at the service of the Sixth Hour.

### **Jeremiah.**

This book contains the words of Jeremiah the Prophet which he dictated to his aide, Baruch. His ministry began in 627 B.C. and ended some time after 580, probably in Egypt. The Prophet is much concerned with rewards and punishments, the recompense for good and evil, faithfulness and disobedience. He criticized Judah for its worship of gods other than the Lord and proclaimed that God's Covenant people must return to Him. The judgment must come, but the ominous future (later, the unhappy present) would be replaced by a new and more enduring relationship with God.

The book can be divided into five parts: 1) (Ch. 1-25) sermons against Judah; 2) (Ch. 26-35) narrative passages, interspersed with sermons; 3) (Ch. 36-45) biographical narratives about Jeremiah, probably by Baruch; 4) (Ch. 46-51) oracles against the foreign nations; and 5) (Ch. 52) a historical appendix. The Orthodox book of Jeremiah differs significantly in many places from that of the Hebrew Bible.

### **The Lamentations of Jeremiah.**

This book, ascribed to the Prophet Jeremiah, is a small book of laments over Jerusalem after its destruction by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. The dominant ideas of the Prophet are sentiments of sorrow, amendment and conversion. The punishment which was from God has not been in vain, but has been a healing medicine. The book is divided into five chapters, the first four of which are acrostic poems (a verse for each of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet each beginning with that letter) and the fifth, although not an acrostic, consists, again, of twenty-two verses.

## **Ezekiel.**

This book is the work of Ezekiel the Priest, whose ministry extended from 593 to 563 B.C., when he was in Babylon with the Exiles. As Prophet to the Exiles, he assured his listeners of the abiding presence of God among them, constantly emphasizing the Lord's role in the events of the day, so that Israel and the nations will know that I am the Lord. The integrity of the individual and his personal responsibility to God is stressed and hope of restoration to homeland and temple by a just and holy God is brought to the helpless and hopeless people.

The book can be divided into three parts: 1) (Ch. 1-24) Oracles of warning; 2) (Ch. 25-32) Oracles against the foreign nations; and 3) (Ch. 33-48) Oracles of hope. The famous reading concerning the dry bones which is read at Holy Saturday Matins comes from this Prophet (Ch. 37).

## **Daniel.**

The Prophet Daniel lived in Babylon in the time of King Nebuchadnezzar. The book itself consists of six stories (Ch. 1-6), which illustrate how faithful Jews, loyally practicing their religion, were enabled, by God's help, to triumph over their enemies (e.g., the Three Youths in the flaming furnace Ch. 3), and four visions (Ch. 7-12) interpreting current history and predicting the ultimate triumph of the saints in the final consummation. In addition, the Orthodox Bible (LXX) contains two more chapters (13-14) concerning the stories of Susanna, a righteous Virgin, and the Prophet Daniel, the false god Bel, and the Dragon. The LXX Daniel also contains an additional 68 verses inserted after 3:23, The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men in the furnace, which is sung at the Liturgy of St. Basil on Holy Saturday.

## **Hosea.**

This book is part of the Book of the Twelve, also known as The Minor Prophets. Hosea preached in the time of the Northern Kingdom (750-722 B.C.). He can be characterized as the Prophet of Divine Love, since he preaches much of God's love for His people and His anger at His beloved's faithlessness. The book can be divided into two parts: 1) (Ch. 1-3) The Allegory of the Marriage; and 2) (Ch. 4-14) Sermons based on the Allegory.

## **Joel.**

This book was written by a Prophet, Joel, the son of Pethuel, who lived in Judah during the Persian period, probably from 400-350 B.C. He views a locust plague which ravished the country as God's punishment on His people and called them to repentance (Ch. 1-2:27) and using this catastrophe as a dire warning, went on to depict the coming of the Day of the Lord and its final judgment and blessings (Ch. 2:28-3:21), which constitutes the second major division of this book.

## **Amos.**

The Prophet Amos preached in the period from about 760-750 B.C. A shepherd from the Judean village of Tekoa, he was called by God to preach at the Northern shrine of Bethel. He denounced Israel, as well as her neighbors, for reliance on military might, for grave social injustices, foul immorality and shallow, meaningless piety. The book is divided into three parts: 1) (Ch. 1-2) oracles against Israel's neighbors; 2) (Ch. 3-6) indictment of Israel herself for sin and injustice; and 3) (Ch. 7-9) visions of Israel's coming doom.

## **Obadiah.**

The prophecy of Obadiah, who prophesied sometime after the Fall of Jerusalem, consists of an oracle against Edom, one of Israel's neighbors. This book is the shortest book of the Old Testament and consists of three parts: 1) an indictment of Edom for hostile actions against Israel in her time of peril (vs. 1-14); an announcement of the Lord's recompense upon the nations for their shameful behavior (vs. 15-18); and 3) a proclamation of the return of the Exiles to the Promised Land, their dominion over Edom and the Lord's universal sovereignty (vs. 19-21).

### **Jonah.**

The prophecy of Jonah and his three days in the belly of a great fish comprise one of the most-remembered of the books of the Prophets indeed, our Lord uses this image concerning his own three days and nights in the tomb (Matt. 12:38-41; Luke 11:29-32). The Prophet calls Israel to repentance and reminds her of her mission to preach to all the nations the wideness of God's mercy and His forgiveness. The book conveniently divides into two parts: 1) (Ch. 1-2) Jonah's first call and disobedience, culminating in his sojourn in the belly of the fish; and 2) (Ch. 3-4) his second call to preach to Nineveh.

### **Micah.**

The Prophet Micah preached in Judah at the same time as the Prophet Isaiah (742-687 B.C.). Like the Prophet Amos, he spoke out against the oppression of the poor by the rich as a crime crying out to Heaven for vengeance. Despite prophesying the Fall of Jerusalem, he looks beyond to the time of divine forgiveness and hope when the expected Messiah would come in person and rule not only Judah but all the nations of the world. The book is divided into three parts: 1) Judgment of Israel and Judah (Ch. 1-3); 2) Israel in the Messianic Age (Ch. 4-5); and 3) Accusations and Judgments (Ch. 6-7). His prophecy concerning Bethlehem (Micah 5:2-4) is read on the Feast of the Nativity of Christ.

### **Nahum.**

The Prophet Nahum prophesied between 626-612 B.C. and concerns himself with an oracle against Nineveh and the destruction of Assyria. It is a triumphant song asserting boldly that the Lord is the avenger of cruelty and immorality.

### **Habakkuk.**

This Prophet, who lived at the time of the height of Babylonian power, wrote probably between 608-598 B.C. He confronts the disturbing problem of why a just God is silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he (Hab. 1:13), for which he receives the answer that is eternally valid: God is still Lord and in His own way and at the proper time He will deal with the wicked; but the righteous shall live by his faith (Hab. 2:4). The book is divided into three parts: 1) (Ch. 1-2:5) a dialogue between the Prophet and God; 2) (Ch. 2:6-20) five woes against a wicked nation; and 3) (Ch. 3) a lengthy poem obviously intended for liturgical use.

### **Zephaniah.**

The Prophet Zephaniah's ministry dates to the reign of King Josiah (640-609 B.C.), and this prophecy can be divided into three sections: 1) (Ch. 1) proclamation of doom on Judah in the form of the destructive Day of the Lord, which is near and hastening fast; 2) (Ch. 2) divine judgment is extended to other nations; and 3) (Ch. 3) comfort and consolation are promised to those who wait patiently for the Lord and serve Him with one accord.

### **Haggai.**

The Prophet Haggai preached in Jerusalem from the 6th to 9th months of 520 B.C. In five addresses, he exhorted Zerubbabel the Governor and Joshua the High Priest to assume official leadership in the rebuilding of the Temple and urged the priests to purify the cultic worship. The Prophet saw these steps also as necessary preparations for the Messianic Age. Upon the completion of these projects, the wonderful era foreseen by the earlier Prophets, would come; for God would bless His people with fruitfulness and prosperity, overthrow the Gentiles, and establish Zerubbabel as the Messianic King on the throne of David.

## **Zechariah.**

The prophecies of Zechariah (found in Chapters 1-8) date from 520-518 B.C. and share with Haggai the zeal for a rebuilt Temple, a purified community, and the coming of the Messianic Age. The second part (Chapters 9-14) were probably written later in the Greek period (4th and 3rd Centuries B.C.) by disciples of Zechariah, for instead of peace and rebuilding, it speaks of universal warfare and the siege of Jerusalem. In this second part we encounter the Messianic Prince of Peace and the Good Shepherd smitten for His flock. Chapter 9:9 forms part of the Old Testament readings for the Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday): Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt, the foal of an ass.

## **Malachi.**

The Prophet Malachi (meaning My Messenger) lived in the period from 500 to 450 B.C. One central theme dominates this Prophet's thought: faithfulness to the Lord's Covenant and its teachings. The book is divided into two parts: 1) (Ch. 1-2:16) the sins of the people and the priests; and 2) (Ch. 2:17-3:24) the coming of God to judge, to punish and to reward. This prophecy is used in the New Testament as part of the prophecies concerning John the Baptist, Behold, I send My messenger to prepare the way before Me... (Mal. 3:1).

The Old Testament Apocrypha

## **Greek Additions to the Old Testament (Apocrypha).**

The Orthodox Bible contains certain other Scriptures besides that normally found in the Hebrew bible and most English language Bibles. The word Apocrypha means things that are hidden, although why so is not positively known. Sometimes these books are given the title Deutero-canonicals contrasted to Proto-canonical to distinguish the first (or *proto*) canonical books from those that came later (*deutero* second). This term is to be preferred over Apocrypha since that word may have negative meanings.

The Deutero-canonical books appeared as part of Holy Scripture with the translation of the Hebrew Scripture into Greek by Alexandrian Jews who had been gathered together for that purpose in Egypt just prior to the New Testament times. Over the centuries, however, these books have been disputed by many; many hold them to have little or no value as Scripture. However, both the Orthodox and Roman Catholics accept them as part of the Biblical Canon, whereas, since the Reformation, most Protestants have rejected them as being spurious. Although the Orthodox Church accepts these books as being canonical, and treasures them and uses them liturgically, she does not use them as primary sources in the definition of her dogmas.

The Greek Additions to the Old Testament that are accepted by the Orthodox Churches are the following:

### **First Esdras**

### **Second Esdras**

[The Greek Orthodox accept 1st Esdras, but not 2nd Esdras, considering 2nd Esdras to be the proto-canonical Ezra-Nehemiah. The Russian Church accepts both, but titles them 2nd and 3rd Esdras, 1st Esdras being the proto-canonical Ezra-Nehemiah.]

### **Tobit**

### **Judith**

## **Additions to Esther**

### **The Wisdom of Solomon**

### **Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach**

### **Baruch**

### **The Letter of Jeremiah**

### **Additions to Daniel:**

#### **Song of the Three Youths**

#### **Susanna**

#### **Daniel, Bel and the Dragon**

### **The Prayer of Manasseh**

### **First Maccabees**

### **Second Maccabees**

### **Third Maccabees**

### **Fourth Maccabees**

[Fourth Maccabees is not accepted by the Russian Church and is placed in an Appendix by the Greek Church.]

### **First Esdras.**

This book (2nd Esdras in Russian Bibles) was written probably in the 2nd Century B.C. by an unknown Greek-speaking Jew, whose purpose was to emphasize the contributions of Josiah, Zerubbabel and Ezra to the reforms of Israelite worship. It basically reproduces 2 Chronicles 35-36, all of Ezra and Nehemiah 7:38-8:12.

### **Second Esdras.**

This book (3rd Esdras in Russian Bibles not used by the Greek Church) was probably written by an unknown Palestinian Jew near the close of the 1st Century A.D. The main part of this book consists of seven revelations, in which the seer is instructed by the angel, Uriel concerning some of the great mysteries of the moral world.

### **Tobit.**

This pious story was written probably in the 2nd Century B.C. by an unknown author. The setting of the story is Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, where the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been taken captive in 721 B.C. with the Fall of Samaria. A pious Jew, named Tobit, lived in the city and was known for his many charitable deeds. Yet, despite these deeds, he became blind and poverty-stricken (Ch. 1-2). At the same time, in faraway Media, there lived Sarah who was haunted by a demon. God heard the prayers of both and sent the angel, Raphael to save them (Ch. 3). Tobit commissioned his son, Tobias, to go to Media to collect a sum of money he had deposited there many years before. The Angel Raphael, his identity hidden from Tobias, accompanied him to Media, revealing to him magic formulas which would heal his father's blindness and also exorcise Sarah's demon-lover, Asmodeus (Ch. 4-6). The mission was successfully completed by Tobias and he married Sarah (Ch. 7-14).

### **Judith.**

This pious, yet nationalistic tale was probably written in the 2nd Century B.C. and is concerned with a Jewish heroine, Judith, who saves her people from the depredations of Holofernes, a general of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. The purpose of the book seems to be to encourage the Jews in a time of persecution. It is divided into two parts: 1) (Ch. 1-7) This sets up the battle between the overpowering forces of paganism and helpless, little Israel. 2) (Ch. 8-16) Here we have a description of the defeat of these forces by the hand of a woman, Judith.

### **The Wisdom of Solomon.**

This book is probably the last book of the Old Testament and was written around 100 B.C. by an Alexandrian Jew, although he probably used earlier materials even those possibly written by King Solomon. Here the concept of wisdom is personified (and this will ultimately lead to the New Testament idea of the Word of God, that is, Christ). The book can be conveniently divided into three parts: 1) Chapters 1-5 deal with the vital importance of Wisdom in determining the eternal destiny of men; Chapters 6-9 speak of the origin, nature and activities of Wisdom, as well as the means to acquire it; and Chapters 10-19 are a description of Divine Wisdom directing the destiny of Israel from Adam to the Exodus from Egypt. This book is used by the Orthodox for Old Testament Readings on the occasion of many Feasts of Saints.

### **Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach.**

This book is the work of Jesus, the son of Sirach, probably a Jewish Scribe who committed his teachings to writing about 180 B.C. Soon after 132 B.C., his grandson (see the Prologue) translated the book into Greek. The book is an important link between the Wisdom Literature of ancient Israel and the rabbinical schools of the Pharisees and Sadducees. It basically consists of one man's lifetime of meditation on the Scriptures, on life in general and on his own broad experience. The book can be divided into two basic parts: 1) (Ch. 1-43) practical moral instructions for all and 2) (Ch. 44-50:24) a eulogy of the great men of Israel's past. This is followed by an Epilogue containing biographical details and several songs (Ch. 50:25-51).

### **Baruch.**

This book, purported to be written by Baruch, the Prophet Jeremiah's secretary, to the Exiles in Babylon, was intended to instruct the Israelites as to how to make the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It can be divided into three parts: 1) (Ch. 1-3:8) Introduction and confession of Israel's guilt in a long penitential prayer; 2) (Ch. 3:9-4:4) The nature of true wisdom which comes from God alone and is found in His holy law; and 3) (Ch. 4:5-5:9) A penitential psalm leading to the preparation for the happy return of the Exiles to Jerusalem and her own future Messianic glory.

### **The Letter of Jeremiah.**

This is usually found as Chapter Six of Baruch (although obviously written by someone else) and purports to be a letter from Jeremiah to the Jews who were about to be taken, as captives, to Babylon. This is an impassioned sermon against participation in the worship of idols, showing that they are simply impotent things.

### **The Prayer of Manasseh.**

This beautiful penitential prayer (read at the Great Compline Service) is purported to be a prayer of wicked King Manasseh of Judah, while in exile, entreating divine forgiveness for his many sins.

### **First Maccabees.**

The author of this book was probably a Palestinian Jew living in Jerusalem, who wrote not long after the death of the High Priest John Hyrcanus I (134-104 B.C.). After an introduction briefly sketching the conquests of Alexander the Great, the division of the Empire and the origin of the Seleucid Empire (Ch. 1:1-10), he recounts the main events of Judea's history from the accession of Antiochus IV (175 B.C.) to the reign of John Hyrcanus I, which marked the period of the successful struggle for Jewish independence. Thus the book can be divided into four parts: 1) (Ch. 1-2) Prelude to the Maccabean wars; 2) (Ch. 3-9:22) Military exploits of Judas Maccabeus; 3) (Ch. 9:23-12:54) Exploits of Jonathan Maccabeus; and 4) (Ch. 13-16) Exploits of Simon Maccabeus.

### **Second Maccabees.**

This book is an abridgment of a five-volume history, now lost, by one Jason of Cyrene, and is a theological interpretation of Jewish history from the time of the High Priest Onias III and the Syrian King Seleucus IV to the defeat of Nicanor's army (180-161 B.C.), paralleling 1 Mac. 1:10-7:50. The author is the first known to us to celebrate the deeds of the martyrs and clearly teaches that the world was created out of nothing. He believes that the saints in Heaven intercede for men on earth (15:11-16), and that the living might pray and offer sacrifices for the dead (12:43-45). The book can be divided into three parts: 1) (Ch. 1-2) Two letters from the Jews of Jerusalem to the Jews of Egypt; 2) (Ch. 3-10:9) Events relating to the Temple, priesthood and the Syrian persecution of the Jews from 176-164 B.C.; and 3) (Ch. 10:10-15:39) The successful military campaign of Judas Maccabeus and the defeat of Nicanor.

### **Third Maccabees.**

This book, written during the 1st Century B.C., deals with the struggles of Egyptian Jews who suffered under the reign of Ptolemy IV Philopater (221-203 B.C.) and the persecution of Palestinian Jews under Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.). It was written obviously to console, exhort and teach Egyptian Jews who, during the 1st Century B.C., were several times threatened with alteration of their civic status by the Roman Administration of Egypt.

### **Fourth Maccabees.**

This book is included in the Greek Orthodox Bible (in an Appendix), but is not found in Russian Bibles, and is a classic example of the interpretation of Judaism in terms of Greek philosophy. It is a lecture on religious reason, as exemplified by the story of the martyrdom of Eleazar, the Seven Maccabean Brothers, and their mother, Solomonia, and was probably written about 20-54 A.D.

### **Additions to Esther.**

[Cf. proto-canonical Esther.]

### **Additions to Daniel.**

[Cf. proto-canonical Daniel.]

The New Testament

## **Matthew.**

This Gospel presents Christ as the Fulfiler and Fulfillment of God's will disclosed in the Old Testament. Jesus is set forth as Israel's Messiah, by whose words and life His followers, the True Israel, may gain divine forgiveness and fellowship. Matthew presents Christ's deeds and words in a generally biographical order: Birth of Jesus (Ch. 1-2); Activity of John the Baptist (Ch. 3:1-12); Baptism and Temptation of Jesus (Ch. 3:13-4:11); Jesus' preaching and teaching in Galilee (Ch. 4:12-18:35); Journey to Jerusalem (Ch. 19-20); the last week, Jesus' Crucifixion and Burial (Ch. 21-27); the Resurrection and Jesus' commission to His disciples (Ch. 28).

Within this framework we can also see the grouping of Jesus' teachings on specific themes the Five Discourses: 1) The Sermon on the Mount (Ch. 5-7); 2) Instructions for Missionary Disciples (Ch. 10); 3) Parables of the Kingdom (Ch. 13); 4) On True Discipleship (Ch. 18); and 5) On the End of This Age (Ch. 24-25).

### **In Times of Anxiety**

[From the Sermon on the Mount Matt. 6:25-34]

I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we wear? For the Gentiles seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day.

## **Mark.**

This Gospel is generally believed to have been the first written of the Gospels. Ancient tradition ascribes it to John Mark (Acts 12:12; 15:37), who composed it at Rome as a summary of Peter's witness. This Gospel is primarily a collection of narratives depicting Jesus as being constantly active (Mark uses the word immediately about forty times in sixteen chapters), characterizing Him as the Son of God (1:1,11; 5:7; 9:7; 14:61-62; 15:39), whose ministry was signified by a succession of mighty works which, to those who had eyes to see, were signs of the presence of God's power and kingdom.

### **The Great Commandment**

(Matt. 22:37-40)

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.

The Gospel can be divided as follows: 1) Beginning of Jesus' public life John the Baptist; baptism and temptation of Jesus (Ch. 1:1-13); 2) Jesus' preaching, teaching and healing in Galilee (Ch. 1:14-9:50); 3) Journey to Jerusalem (Ch. 10); 4) The last week Jesus' crucifixion and burial (Ch. 11-15); 5) The Resurrection (Ch. 16:1-8); and 6) Epilogue on events after the Resurrection (Ch. 16:9-20).

## **Luke.**

The author of this Gospel, St. Luke the Physician, a Gentile convert and friend of St. Paul, presents the words and works of Jesus as the divine-human Savior Whose compassion and tenderness extended to all who were needy. Jesus' universal mission is highlighted by a) tracing his genealogy back to Adam (3:38); b) references commending members of a despised people the Samaritans (10:30-37; 17:11-19); c) indication of the new place of importance of women among the followers of the Lord (7:36-50; 8:3; 10:38-42); and d) promising that the Gentile (of whom Luke was one) would have an opportunity to accept the Gospel (2:32; 3:6; 24:47).

### **When Downcast**

(Matt. 11:28-30)

Come to Me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.

St. Luke presents more episodes of Jesus' last journey to Jerusalem than do the other Evangelists, and this section preserves many of the most beloved of His parables (Good Samaritan, Prodigal Son, the Unjust Judge, etc.). The Gospel can be divided as follows: 1) (Ch. 1-2) Births of John the Baptist and Jesus; 2) (Ch. 3:1-22) Activity of John the Baptist; Baptism of Jesus; 3) (Ch. 3:23-38) Genealogy of Jesus; 4) (Ch. 4:1-13) Temptation of Jesus; 5) (Ch. 4:14-9:50) Jesus in Galilee; 6) (Ch. 9:51-19:27) Journey to Jerusalem; 7) (Ch. 19:28-23:56) Crucifixion and Burial; and 8) (Ch. 24) The Resurrection and the Commissioning of the Disciples.

### **Self-Denial**

(Luke 9:23-26)

If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for My sake, he will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

## **John.**

This Gospel, by the Beloved Disciple, speaks of the Mystery of the Person of Jesus. He is like other men, yet quite unlike them, for He was the Son of God. He was eternally present with God, active in creating the world, and was the source of the moral and spiritual nature of man (life and light). When He became man, He made known the eternal God Whom no one has ever seen (John 1:14,18). St. John records real events, but goes beyond the other Evangelists in interpreting them. He uses symbols from common experience bread, water, light, life, shepherd, door, etc. as well as contrasts light and darkness, truth and lies, love and hatred, etc. to make the meaning of Christ clear. For this reason he is aptly called by the Church the Theologian.

The Gospel is divided in the following manner: Prologue (Ch. 1:1-18 In the beginning was the Word...); Jesus Christ as the object of Faith (Ch. 1:19-4:54); Conflicts with unbelievers (Ch. 5-12); Fellowship with believers (Ch. 13-17 (14-17 are generally known as the Farewell Discourses)); Death and Resurrection (Ch. 18-20); and (Ch. 21) An Epilogue.

### **In Sorrow for the Departed**

(John 11:25-26)

I am the Resurrection and the Life, he who believes in Me; though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever

lives and believes in Me shad never die.

### **Acts of the Apostles.**

The book of Acts the early history of the Church is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke, by the same author, who had accompanied St. Paul on parts of his missionary journeys. The Acts trace the story of the Christian Movement from the Resurrection of Jesus to the unhindered preaching of the Christian message in Rome by Paul. Most of the first part is dominated by events in Jerusalem, while the latter part is dominated by Paul himself. The Word spreads from Jerusalem to Samaria (8:5), to the seacoast (8:40), to Damascus (9:10), to Antioch and Cyprus (11:19), to Asia Minor (13:13), to Europe (16:11), and finally to Rome (28:16).

### **The Golden, Rule**

(Luke 6:31)

As you wish that men would do to you, do so to them.

### **Romans.**

The Epistles of St. Paul are arranged in the New Testament according to length, and this Epistle (or Letter) to the Romans is the longest and most weighty, theologically, thus giving it first place in the canonical order. This letter is probably the last written by St. Paul (that we possess) and, at the time of its writing (between 54 and 58 A.D.), he was at Corinth waiting to take a collection for the needy to Jerusalem (15:25-27), after which he wanted to stop at Rome on his way to Spain (15:28).

After the greeting and thanksgiving, Paul describes first the need for the world of redemption (1:18-3:20). Then he discusses God's saving act in Christ: its nature (3:21-4:25) and the new life which has been made available by this act (5:1-8:39). After detailing the role of Israel the Jewish nation in God's plan (Ch. 9-11), the letter closes with ethical teachings and a few personal remarks (Ch. 12-16).

### **First Corinthians.**

The Gospel was first preached in Corinth by Paul on his second missionary journey (50 A.D.). While living and working there, he preached in the synagogue until opposition arose. He was accused by the Jews before the Roman Governor, Gallio, but the charges were dismissed and Paul remained in the city eighteen months (Acts 18:1-17; 1 Cor. 2:3). Paul's subsequent relations with this Church were disturbed from time to time by doubts and suspicions on both sides, but for no other Church did Paul feel a deeper affection. The whole letter is concerned directly or indirectly with doctrinal and ethical problems that were disturbing the Corinthian Church, including divisions in the Church (1:11), immorality (Ch. 5; 6:9-20), and questions concerning marriage, food, worship and the Resurrection.

### **Second Corinthians.**

Relations between Paul and the Corinthian Church had deteriorated, and having made a painful visit to the Church (2:1), he refrained from making a second trip, knowing that it too would be painful, for which cause he had written to that Church a severe and sorrowful letter out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears (2:4) now lost to us sending it to Corinth by means of Titus, one of his fellow workers. Not able to wait for Titus' return, so anxious was he about the effects of this painful letter, Paul left Ephesus and went to Troas, hoping to meet Titus there. Disappointed there, he went on to Macedonia (2:12-13), where Titus rejoined him, bringing the good news that the Church in Corinth had repented of its rebelliousness against Paul (7:13-16). In relief and gratitude, Paul wrote this letter.

In the letter Paul speaks about the above problems and takes the opportunity to speak at length about the offering for the Church at Jerusalem (8:1-9:15), which was now almost complete. Chapters 10-13 contain a vigorous defense of Paul and his work and throughout the letter we are given many personal and autobiographical glimpses into Paul's life (4:8-18; 11:22-33).

## **The Way of Love**

(1 Cor. 13)

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels; But have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal  
And if I have prophetic powers; and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith; so  
as to remove mountains; But have not love; I am nothing. If I give away all I have; and if I deliver my body  
to be burned; but have not love; I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind, love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on  
its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong; but rejoices in the right. Love bears  
all things; believes all things; hopes all things; endures all things.

Love never ends; as for prophecies; they will pass away, as for tongues, they will cease, as for knowledge;  
it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect, but when the perfect  
comes; the imperfect will pass away.

When I was a child; I spoke like a child; I thought like a child; I reasoned like a child; when I became a  
man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly; but then face to face. Now I know in part;  
then I shall understand fully; even as I have been fully understood.

So faith; hope; love abide; these three, but the greatest of these is love.

## **Galatians.**

This letter was written about 55 A.D. during Paul's third missionary journey and gives many  
autobiographical details of the Apostle's earlier life and missionary activity. The letter dealt with the  
question whether a Gentile must become a Jew before he could become a Christian; for certain Judaizing  
teachers had infiltrated the Churches of Galatia in central Asia Minor which Paul had founded (Acts 16:6),  
declaring that in addition to having faith in Christ Jesus, a Christian was obligated to keep the Mosaic Law.  
On the contrary, Paul insisted, a man becomes right with God only by faith in Christ and not by the  
performance of good works, ritual observances and the like (2:16; 3:24-25; 5:1; 6:12-15). The letter can be  
divided into three parts: 1) defense of Paul's apostolic authority and the validity of his teachings (1:1-2:21);  
2) an exposition of the doctrine of justification by faith alone (3:1-4:31); and 3) justification by faith applied  
practical applications (5:1-6:18).

## **Ephesians.**

This letter was written while Paul was a prisoner (3:1; 4:1; 6:20) at about the same time as the Epistle to  
the Colossians, since it shares many of the same phrases and expressions as that Epistle. Because  
important early manuscripts and Church Fathers make no reference to Ephesus in 1:1 and because the  
letter contains no personal greetings, etc., most scholars see it as a sort of encyclical or circular letter of  
which copies were sent to several Churches in Asia Minor.

The theme of the letter is God's eternal purpose in establishing and completing the universal Church of  
Jesus Christ. Although of various backgrounds and nationalities, the members of this community have  
been called by God the Father, redeemed and forgiven through His Son, and incorporated into a  
fellowship, sealed and directed by the divine, indwelling Spirit (1:5,12,13; 2:18-20; 3:14,16,17; 4:4-6). In  
the letter the figures of the Church as the Body of Christ (1:23; 4:16), the Building or Temple of God (2:20-  
22) and the Bride of Christ (5:23-32) are developed.

## **Philippians.**

This letter, one of the most cordial and affectionate we have from Paul's hand, was addressed to the Christians at Philippi in Macedonia, the first congregation established by him in Europe (Acts 16:11-15). Written about 61 A.D. while he was in prison, the occasion of this letter writing was the return to Philippi of Epaphroditus (2:25-29), who had been sent by the Church there with a gift for Paul (4:18). The Apostle took this opportunity to describe his own situation and state of mind to the Philippian congregation, thanking them for their gift and giving them certain needed instructions. The whole letter is permeated with Paul's joy and serene happiness in Christ, even while in prison and in danger of death (2:2; 3:8-14; 4:11-13).

## **Colossians.**

This letter was written in the early 60's while Paul was in prison (4:3,10,18) at about the same time as the letter to the Ephesians (with which it has many similarities). The purpose was to correct erroneous speculations which had arisen because of the activities of certain false teachers (perhaps Gnostics), who claimed to possess superior knowledge of divine matters (2:18), advocated a mixture of ascetical and ritual practices (2:16,20-23) which had certain Jewish parallels, as well as connections with Greek philosophic speculation and oriental mysticism.

The letter is divided into two parts: 1) a doctrinal section in which the supremacy of Christ in the cosmos, in the Church and in the individual is stressed (1:1-3:4) and 2) practical exhortations (3:5-4:18) in which the ascetical and legalistic tendencies are counteracted by a spiritual morality and social ethic bound together by Christian love.

## **First Thessalonians.**

This epistle is probably the first of St. Paul's letters, written from Corinth about 51 A.D. During his second missionary journey, after being driven out of Philippi, Paul, Silas and Timothy came to Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia (Acts 17:1). Here he preached in the synagogue for three Sabbaths, proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah and attracting many followers, both Jews and Gentiles. The Jews, annoyed at these inroads, aroused such a disturbance, that Paul and his companions had to leave, going first to Berea and thence to Athens and Corinth.

Paul, anxious about the new congregation at Thessalonica, deprived of his leadership and persecuted, sent Timothy to strengthen and encourage the young congregation. When Timothy returned with the good news of their faith and loyalty, Paul wrote the first letter to the Thessalonians to express his joy and gratitude at their perseverance, to urge them to Christian conduct, and to answer two questions: 1) Is a Christian deprived of the blessings of the Kingdom if he dies before Christ's second Advent; and 2) When will Christ come in glory? The first is answered in 4:13-18 and the second in 5:1-11.

## **Second Thessalonians.**

This letter was sent by Paul to the Thessalonians shortly after the first letter, as a result of continued persecutions by the Jews at Thessalonica. In addition, there were some misunderstandings concerning the Second Coming of Christ and the view was held by some that the Day of the Lord had already come (2:2). Some thought that its judgments had already begun; yet they understood Paul to have taught that they would be exempt from these judgments. As a result, some, thinking the end of the world was at hand, had stopped working and were creating an embarrassing situation (3:6,11). Paul corrected the teaching in this letter and reprimanded the idlers, If any one will not work, let him not eat (3:10).

### **First Timothy.**

The first letter to Timothy (the son of a Greek Gentile Father and a Jewish Mother, Eunice, and closely associated with Paul from the time of the second missionary journey) had a dual purpose: to provide guidance in the problems of Church administration, and to oppose false teachings of a speculative and moralistic nature. Thus it offers suggestions for the regulation of worship (2:1-15), sets out the qualifications for bishops (3:1-7) and deacons (3:8-13), and gives instructions as to the attitude of Church leaders towards false asceticism (4:1-16) and toward individual members (5:1-12), especially widows (5:13-16), presbyters (5:17) and slaves (6:1-2).

### **Second Timothy.**

The second letter to Timothy is an earnest pastoral letter from a veteran missionary to a younger colleague, urging endurance as the main quality of a preacher of the Gospel. Here we encounter the theme of a good soldier of Christ (2:3) as well as words concerning the apostasy of the last days (3:1-9), the inspiration of the Scriptures (3:16), and the crown of righteousness (4:8). The letter was written when Paul was probably facing certain martyrdom.

### **Titus.**

This letter, sent to Titus (an oft-mentioned companion of Paul in the Acts) has three main topics, corresponding to the three chapters of this epistle: 1) sets forth what is required of elders or bishops in the face of various false teachers and local problems; 2) the proper approach to different groups in the Church (older men, older women, younger men and slaves), concluding with a summary of what is expected of believers in view of God's grace; and 3) Christians are advised to avoid hatred and quarrels and to manifest the meekness, gentleness, obedience and courtesy made possible by God's mercy in Christ.

### **Philemon.**

While Paul was under house arrest in Rome (ca. 61-63 A.D. (Acts 28:30)), Onesimus, a runaway slave, came under his influence and was converted to Christianity. Paul persuaded him to return to his master, Philemon, a resident of Colossae in Phrygia, who himself had previously become a Christian as a result of Paul's earlier preaching in Asia Minor (vs. 19) and whose home was now a meeting place of a Christian congregation.

Paul, in this letter, while not outwardly condemning the institution of slavery and respectful of Philemon's rights, sets forth a principle which would soften the harshness of slavery (vs. 16) and ultimately banish it altogether.

### **Hebrews.**

This anonymous letter, written prior to the Fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., is an elaborate argument showing the pre-eminence of Christianity over Judaism. The letter is evidently addressed to those who were on the verge of giving up their Christian faith and returning to the Jewish beliefs and practices of their ancestors. The author emphasizes three main points: 1) the superiority of the Person of Christ to the Prophets (1:1-3), Angels (1:5-2:18) and Moses himself (3:1-6); 2) the superiority of the Priesthood of Christ to the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-7:28); and 3) the superiority of Christ's sacrifice offered in the heavenly sanctuary to the many animal sacrifices offered on earth by the Levitical Priests (8:1-10:39). Christians of all ages have also been inspired by Chapter 11, the great Chapter of Faith.

## **James.**

This letter is purported to have been written by James, the brother of the Lord and head of the Church at Jerusalem, to Jewish Christians in the diaspora. He assumes knowledge of the Gospel on the part of his readers and is concerned to remind them how Christians ought to live. In this letter, James makes the famous assertion that faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead (2:15). In addition, he speaks eloquently concerning the use of the tongue for good and evil (3:1-12), as well as prayer for the sick (5:13-16). This text is used by the Orthodox Church concerning the Mystery of Holy Unction or the Anointing of the Sick.

## **First Peter.**

The first letter of Peter was written to give encouragement and hope to Christians in the northern part of Asia Minor, who were undergoing persecution (ca. 64 A.D.). The congregations, mainly of Gentile converts (1:14; 2:10; 4:3), are urged not to be surprised at the fiery ordeal which has come upon them. They are to rejoice in their trials, knowing that they share them with their brotherhood throughout the world (5:9). By participating in the sufferings of Christ (4:13), they will demonstrate the genuineness of their faith (1:6,7). This letter was written from Babylon (Rome 5:13) during the time of the persecutions of Nero.

## **Second Peter.**

This brief letter is a reminder (1:12; 3:1) of the truth of Christianity as opposed to the heresies of false teachers. The author recalls the apostolic witness as the basis of the Church's proclamation (1:16), points to the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament which have been confirmed by the coming of Christ (1:19-21) and explains that the delay of the Second Coming is due to the patience and forbearance of God, Who desires that all should reach repentance (3:9). Because of the text concerning the Transfiguration (1:16-18), the Orthodox Church uses portions of 2nd Peter as one of the readings for that Feast.

## **First John.**

This letter, written toward the end of the 1st Century A.D., has traditionally been attributed by the Church to St. John the Evangelist. The letter has a two-fold purpose: 1) to deepen the spiritual life of its readers (1:3-4), and 2) to correct the heretical views of certain Gnostic teachers who denied that God had really become man in Jesus (4:2). The theme of love runs throughout and the book is full of contrasts: light and darkness (1:6-7; 2:8-11); love of world and love of God (2:15-17); children of God and children of the Devil (3:4-10); the Spirit of God and the spirit of Antichrist (4:1-3); love and hate (4:7-12, 16-21).

## **Second John.**

This letter was written to one specific Church, the elect lady (vs. 1), probably one of the Churches of Asia Minor. Like the first letter of John, it too was written by St. John the Evangelist late in the 1st Century. Here he repeats in briefer form the main teachings of 1st John and adds a warning against showing hospitality to false teachers, lest this further the spread of error (vs. 7-11).

## **Third John.**

This is a personal letter of John to Gaius, focusing on an ecclesiastical problem regarding traveling teachers. Gaius had extended to them hospitality, while Diotrephes, who liked to put himself first (vs. 9), had refused to receive them, challenging the spiritual authority of the Elder (John) (vs. 10). John rebukes Diotrephes, while encouraging Gaius in his practice.

**Jude.**

This letter, written about 80 A.D., by Jude, the brother of James and the Lord, was set forth to warn against false teachers (Gnostics) who had made their way into the Church, characterized here as being immoral (vs. 4, 7,16) and covetous (vs. 11,16), and rejecting authority (vs. 8,11). They are grumblers, malcontents, and loud-mouthed boosters (vs. 16), worldly people, devoid of the Spirit (vs. 19). Because of their lack of brotherly love (vs. 12), it is not surprising that they create division in the congregations (vs. 19). For their actions, they will experience God's judgment (vs. 5-7).

**Revelation (The Apocalypse).**

This revelation was extended to St. John the Evangelist at the end of the 1st Century while he was in exile on the isle of Patmos during the reign of the Emperor Domitian (81-96 A.D.). This is a revelation of Jesus Christ and He is the center of the entire book (1:1). In His risen glory (Ch. 1) He directs His Churches on earth (Ch. 2-3). He is the slain and risen Lamb to Whom all worship is directed (Ch. 4-5). The judgments of the coming seven-year period of tribulation on this earth are the display of the wrath of the Lamb (Ch. 6-19), and the return to Christ to this earth is described in 19:11-21. The thousand-year reign of Christ is described in Chapter 20 and the new heavens and new earth in Chapters 21-22. The Orthodox Church also sees in Chapter 12:1-6 a portrayal of the Most-holy Theotokos. One of the least understood books of the New Testament, The Apocalypse is the one book of the Bible most distorted by various Protestant sects.

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