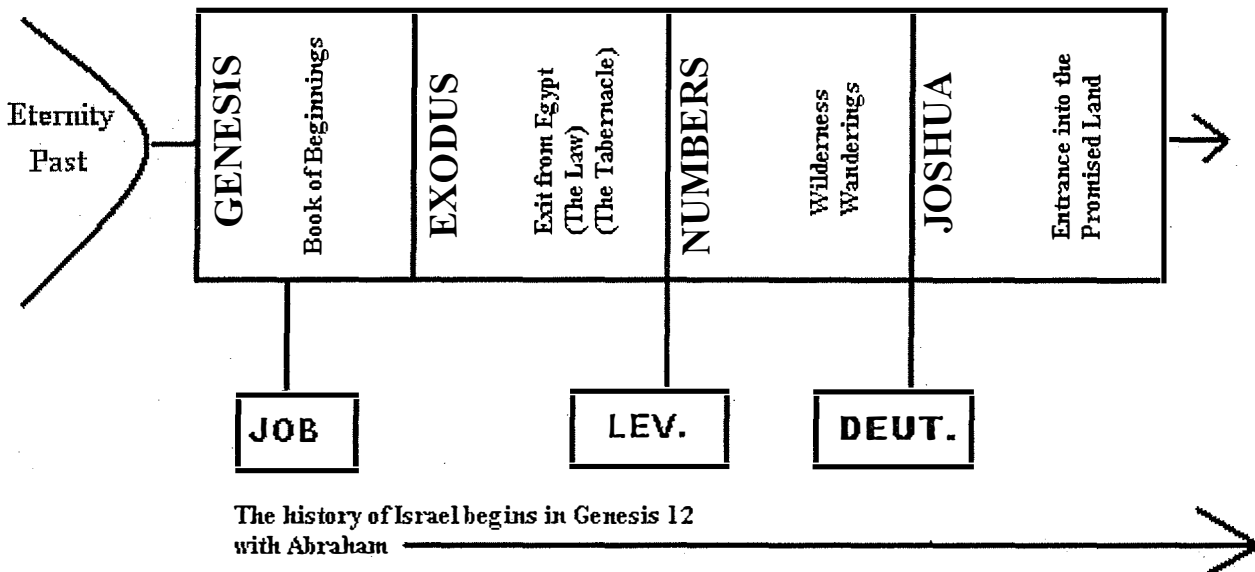


General Introduction

How the Old Testament Books Fit Together

Note: For a detailed study of all the books of the Old Testament see our Sunday school lessons entitled The Old Testament Books.

The following study shows how the Old Testament books fit together. Let us begin with the books which cover the early history of the world and the early history of the nation Israel:



The four books listed on top all serve to advance the historic flow, from the creation of the world (Genesis) to the entrance into the promised land (Joshua). These are the historical books. The three books on the bottom do not advance the historic flow and they must be seen in relationship to the historical books. Job was one of the earliest books written, and the events of that book took place sometime during the early history of our world covered by Genesis. Some believe that Job lived around the time of Abraham. Leviticus was Israel's book of worship. Deuteronomy contained final instructions before entering the promised land.

Here is a brief description of these books:

Genesis is the book of beginnings. It traces the beginning of the Universe (the heavens and the earth), the beginning of man, the beginning of woman, the beginning of marriage (our society today desperately needs to understand how God originally instituted and defined marriage), the beginning of children, the beginning of sin, the beginning of death, the beginning of animal sacrifices, the beginning of murder, the beginning of cities, the beginning of nations, the beginning of languages and the beginning of the great nation Israel. The book of Genesis begins with the six days of creation and it ends with the children of Israel in Egypt at the time of Joseph's death. The key divisions of the book are indicated by the phrase, "These are the generations of..."

Exodus (compare the word "Exit") relates God's great deliverance out of Egypt. The law is given to Israel at Mt. Sinai (see chapter 20 where the Ten Commandments are found). The last part of the book is God's detailed blueprint for the tabernacle, God's glorious tent.

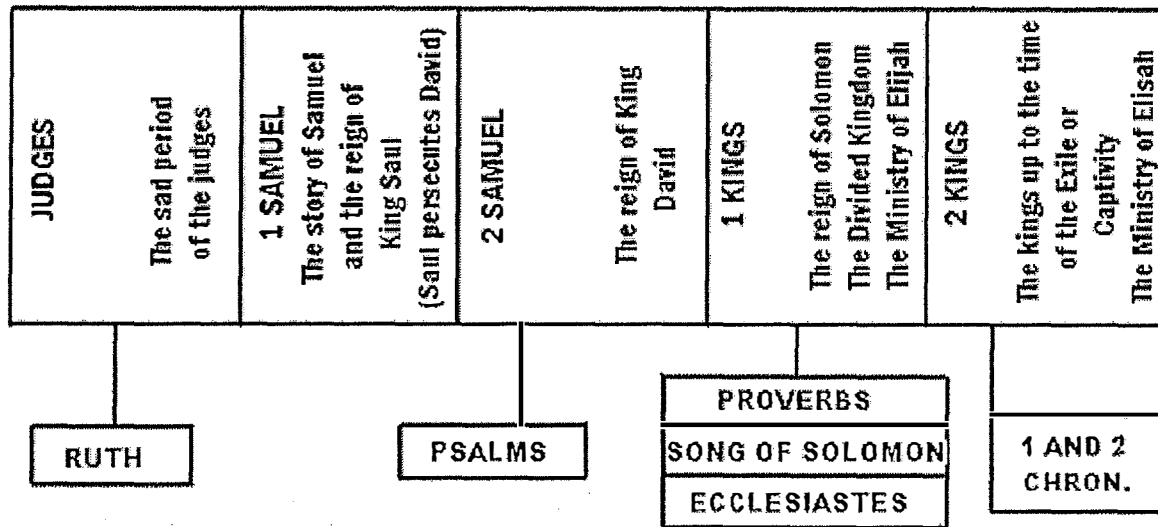
Numbers contains the account of Israel's wanderings in the desert for 40 years. In chapter one all the males able to go forth to war, those twenty years old and upward, were numbered (counted), and this is the reason the book is called Numbers.

Joshua tells of Israel's entrance into the promised land and the amazing conquest that followed. It was the LORD who gave the children of Israel victory over their enemies.

Job is perhaps the earliest book that was written (around 2000 BC??). Behemoth (Job 40) and Leviathan (Job 41) can reasonably be understood as referring to certain species of massive dinosaurs living on earth at that time--Behemoth lived on or near land and the Leviathan lived in the sea. This contradicts evolutionary theory which says that the dinosaurs became extinct millions of years before man came upon the scene. The book of Job is about a godly man who was severely tested by the Lord in order to demonstrate something to Satan. It has much to teach us as to why God sometimes allows the righteous to suffer.

Leviticus instructs the Israelites concerning true worship. There is much that Christians can learn about worship from this book also. The key word in the book of Leviticus is the word "HOLY," which is found over eighty times in this book. The God we worship is HOLY, and thus there must be an atmosphere that is appropriate. The HOLY ONE demands our reverence, our respect. May we stand in awe of Him. Forty-five times in Leviticus we find the expression "I AM THE LORD." Our worship is to be God-centered. How inappropriate it would be to come to God in a flippant or casual way, or in any way to make light of WHO HE IS! We must never detract from the DIGNITY of the occasion, as God's people worship the HOLY ONE.

Deuteronomy means "second law." Moses, not long before his death, delivered the law a second time to the younger generation that was about to enter the land (the older generation died in the wilderness, except for Joshua and Caleb). These discourses are rich in devotional content. They stress love for God as demonstrated by obedience to His Word. The greatest commandment is found in 6:5. Christ quoted from this book three times during his temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4).



The six books listed on top (Judges through 2 Kings) all serve to advance the historic flow. They cover the period of history from the time of the judges all the way to the Babylonian Captivity. The books on the bottom (Ruth through Chronicles) do not advance the historic flow, but they are positioned in their correct historical sequence (Psalms belongs with David; Proverbs belongs with Solomon, etc.).

Judges relates the sad history of the period of the judges when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). The period of the judges lasted over 300 years.

1 Samuel presents the godly Samuel and the ungodly Saul. Saul became Israel's first king. The people wanted a king like all the other nations, and God allowed them to have what they wanted, even though Saul proved to be a very poor king. David is also prominent in this book, mostly as the hero who defeated Goliath and then as the fugitive being pursued by King Saul.

2 Samuel covers the reign of King David, and includes not only his commendable acts as Israel's greatest king, but also his failings and sins which included his adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1-5), his murderous scheme to get rid of her husband (2 Samuel 11:6-27), and his numbering of the people (2 Samuel 24:1-9).

Both books of Kings cover the period of history from Solomon to the Babylonian Captivity. These two books cover approximately 400 years of history.

1 Kings begins with the reign of King Solomon (first 11 chapters). Solomon was the last king of the united monarchy. His unrivaled wisdom and the glories of His kingdom are described (chapters 3-10), as well as his spiritual decline (1 Kings 11). It was Solomon who built the glorious temple in Jerusalem (chapters 5-8). After Solomon's death the kingdom is divided into two parts (1 Kings 12), the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. The prominent prophet in 1 Kings is Elijah.

2 Kings continues the history of the divided monarchy up to the time of the Babylonian captivity. In 2 Kings we learn about the decline and fall of the northern kingdom of Israel under Assyria (chapter 17) and the decline and fall of the southern kingdom of Judah under Babylon

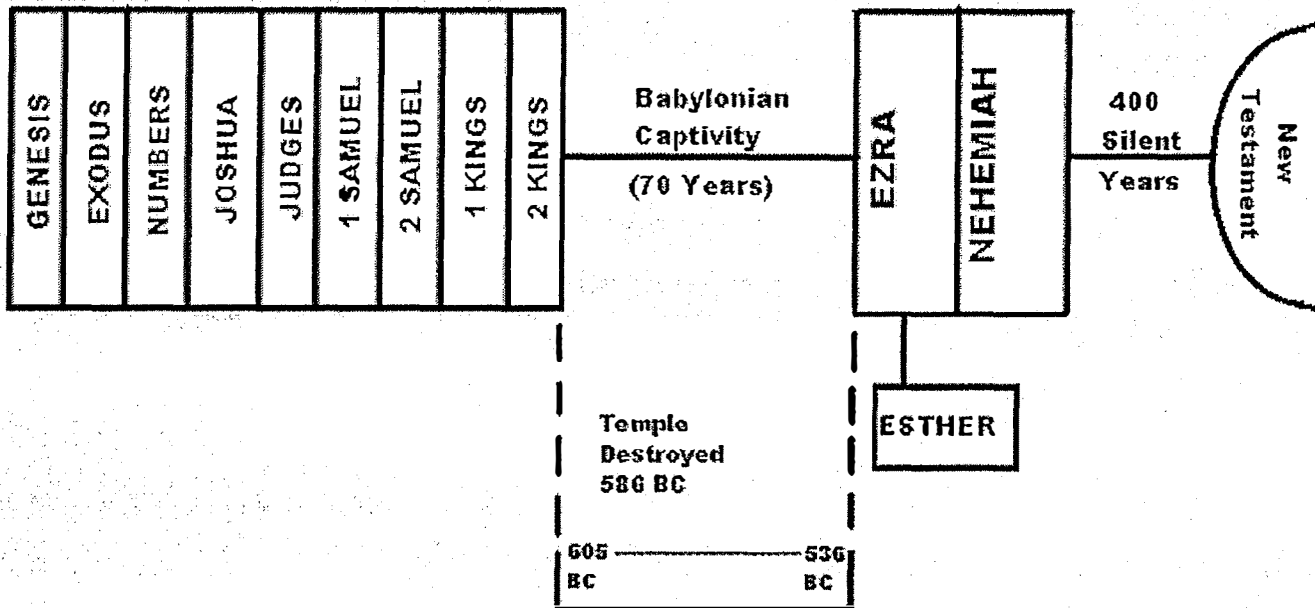
(chapters 24-25). The prominent prophet in 2 Kings is Elisha.

Ruth records fascinating events which took place toward the latter part of the period of the judges. Ruth and her husband are mentioned in the genealogy of Christ (Matthew 1:5).

The Psalms, which together form the Hebrew song book, are connected with King David since he wrote so many of them. These songs are very personal and precious and do wonders for the heart as the believer contemplates the greatness of God and His mercy.

Proverbs (practical wisdom presented in terse statements), **Ecclesiastes** (man vainly trying to find satisfaction "under the sun," apart from God), and **Song of Solomon** (a love song) were all penned by Solomon, David's Son.

1 Chronicles deals mainly with David; **2 Chronicles** covers the same time span as the two books of Kings--from Solomon to the Exile (the Babylonian Captivity).



Ezra and Nehemiah, along with the nine books already discussed (Genesis through 2 Kings) all serve to advance the historic flow. The events of the book of Esther take place during the time covered by the book of Ezra, in the kingdom of Persia.

Ezra takes place after the 70 year captivity. Ezra is actually two books in one. The first book (chapters 1-6) is about Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest as a small remnant of Jews returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. The second book (chapters 7-10) is about Ezra the scribe. In between these two books is a time gap of about 58 years. The events of Esther took place in this time gap.

Nehemiah concerns the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. This is the last historic book of the Old Testament. The prophetic book which corresponds to this period of history is Malachi.

Esther takes place in Persia. In this book God's Name is not mentioned at all, but God's providential hand is everywhere seen.

The following explains in more detail how these three books fit together:

THREE BOOKS AND FOUR TRUE BIBLICAL ACCOUNTS!

The book of Ezra is a very interesting book. It is actually two books in one. We find the first book in the first six chapters and we find the second book in the last four chapters. In between chapters 6 and 7 there is a time gap of about 58 years.

<p style="text-align: center;">BOOK NUMBER 1</p> <p style="text-align: center;">THE ACCOUNT OF ZERUBBABEL</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Ezra Chapters 1-6</p>
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IN BETWEEN CHAPTERS 6 AND 7 WE FIND:

A Gap of about 58 years! During this time all of the events in the book of Esther took place!

<p style="text-align: center;">BOOK NUMBER 2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">THE ACCOUNT OF EZRA</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Ezra Chapters 7-10</p>

AFTER EZRA CHAPTER 10 all of the events in the book of Nehemiah took place! So although we have three books (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther) we actually have four true accounts:

- 1) **THE ACCOUNT OF ZERUBBABEL (Ezra chapters 1-6)**
- 2) **THE ACCOUNT OF ESTHER (the book of Esther)**
- 3) **THE ACCOUNT OF EZRA (Ezra chapters 7-10)**
- 4) **THE ACCOUNT OF NEHEMIAH (the book of Nehemiah)**

Up to this point we have discussed all of the books of the Old Testament except for the prophetic books (the minor and major prophets). In order to understand how these books fit into the history of Israel, we need to review the earlier history of Israel. The key dates to remember are these:

Abraham: Approximately 2000 B.C.

Moses: Approximately 1500 B.C.

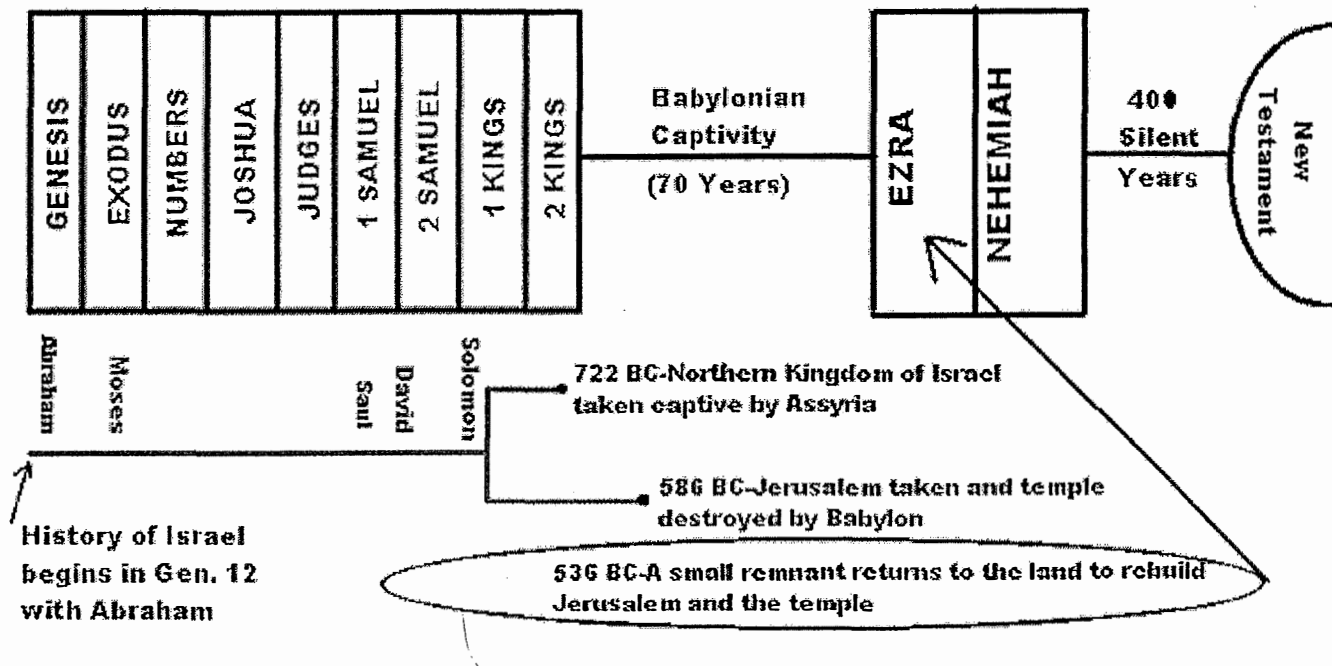
David: Approximately 1000 B.C.

The first three kings of Israel (Saul, David and Solomon) ruled over the entire nation. The kingdom was united at this time, although Absalom, David's son, revolted against his father and tried unsuccessfully to steal the kingdom from him. After Solomon's death, the kingdom was divided in two. Solomon's son, Rehoboam, was the king of the southern kingdom which consisted of two tribes, Judah and Benjamin. The southern kingdom became known as the kingdom of Judah (the tribe of Judah was much larger than the tribe of Benjamin). Jeroboam became the king of the northern kingdom which consisted of ten tribes, with Ephraim being the largest. This became known as the kingdom of Israel. Since Ephraim was the largest tribe, the kingdom of Israel was sometimes simply referred to as "Ephraim" (we find this in the book of Hosea and elsewhere--see Isaiah 11:13).

The kings of the northern kingdom of Israel were without exception bad kings. Of each one it is said, "he did evil in the sight of the LORD." Jeroboam, the first king, began a pattern of wicked idolatry that was followed by every subsequent king. Thus the northern kingdom was on a collision course with the judgment of God. This collision took place in 722 BC when the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom and its capital Samaria, and carried away many of the people as captives.

In the southern kingdom of Judah there were some good kings (such as Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah) and some wicked kings (such as Ahaz and Manasseh). The kingdom of Judah lasted longer than its northern neighbor, but in the end, it followed the same course of sin and idolatry resulting in God's judgment at the hands of the Babylonians. Although the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem in three different stages, the key date is 586 B.C. when the city and temple were destroyed. The following chart summarizes these key events in the history of Israel:

THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL



The prophets books are often described as MINOR or MAJOR. This does not mean that the major prophets are more important than the minor prophets. Each prophet spoke and wrote the Word of the LORD and their message was vitally important to their original audience and is also vitally important to us today. MINOR and MAJOR merely refer to the size of the books. The major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel) are lengthy books containing many chapters each; the minor prophets are very short books with few chapters (Obadiah contains only one chapter). The minor prophets are the twelve books beginning with Hosea and ending with Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament. The Lord Jesus referred to all of the prophetic books simply as "the prophets" (Luke 24:44 and compare verse 27).

A more helpful way to categorize the prophetic books is to list them according to their relationship to the Babylonian captivity. Those books which were written before the Babylonian captivity are called the pre-exilic books; the ones written during the captivity are called the exilic books; the ones written after the captivity are referred to as the post-exilic books. Consider the following:

THE PROPHETS IN RELATIONSHIP TO THE EXILE

605BC ————— 536BC		
Before the Exile	During the Exile	After the Exile
Obadiah Joel Jonah Amos Hosea Isaiah Micah Nahum Zephaniah Habakkak	Jeremiah-Lamentations Daniel Ezekiel	Haggai Zechariah Malachi

Notice that **Jeremiah** (who also wrote **Lamentations**) warned the people of the coming Babylonian judgment, but he also gave God's message to the people during the exile (during the captivity).

The pre-exilic prophets were **Obadiah** (deals with the Edomites [descendants of Esau] and their doom), **Joel** (emphasizes "the day of the Lord"), **Jonah** (God's messenger to the wicked Assyrians), **Amos** (message for the northern kingdom of Israel), **Hosea** (points out the unfaithfulness of Israel), **Isaiah** (message to the southern kingdom of Judah), **Micah** (contemporary of Isaiah whose message was also for Judah), **Nahum** (judgment upon Assyria), **Zephaniah** (message to Judah), **Habakkuk** (explains the Babylonian invasion which was soon to take place).

Daniel and **Ezekiel** were the two prophets who ministered DURING the captivity.

Haggai and **Zechariah** encouraged the small remnant who returned to rebuild the temple (this corresponds to Ezra chapters 1-6). **Malachi** was the last word from God prior to the 400 silent years. The nation at this time was in a serious backslidden condition.

This concludes our study of the Old Testament books and how they fit together in the light of the history of Israel. The next chapter shows how the New Testament books fit together.