

Reading Through the Bible - Week 1

Bibliology Overview: Genesis to Revelation

Overview

This lesson provides a general introduction and overview of the entire Bible, exploring its structure, organization, major themes, writers, and historical background. The goal is to move beyond simply knowing the names of the books to understanding how each book fits into the cohesive narrative of God's revelation and plan for humanity.

We will explore the divisions of the Bible into the Old and New Testaments, its various genres (history, law, poetry, prophecy, gospel, epistle), and the significance of its individual books as a unified narrative. to understand the historical and cultural contexts in which the books were written.

It will also set the stage and provides the "big picture" (meta-narrative) that is essential for accurate interpretation of individual passages and emphasis on the Bible's unity despite its diversity of writers, genres (poetry, narrative, epistle, prophecy, etc.), and historical contexts.

Theme

"The Divine Library: Navigating God's Narrative of Revealing Himself": This theme emphasizes that the Bible is not a single book but a collection of individual books/letters, written by numerous writers over centuries, yet bound together by a cohesive narrative and overarching divine message.

Objectives

- **Cognitive (Knowledge):**
 - Identify the major divisions of the Bible (Old and New Testaments, Pentateuch, Historical Books, Wisdom Literature, Prophets, Gospels, Epistles, etc.).
 - Summarize the primary purpose and central message of key individual books.
 - Describe the historical and cultural context in which each book was written.
- **Affective (Attitude/Heart):**
 - Develop an increased appreciation and passion for studying Scripture as God's authoritative Word.
 - Recognize the interconnectedness of all Scripture and how the Old Testament points to the New Testament and the coming of Christ.
- **Behavioral (Application/Skills):**
 - Apply basic inductive study methods (observation, interpretation, application) to a selected passage.
 - Utilize study tools (e.g., study Bibles, commentaries, online resources) to gain deeper insights into specific books.
 - Integrate biblical principles into their daily lives and personal decision-making.

Study Points

Point I. Introduction: What is Bibliology?

- **Study Point:** "Bibliology" comes from the Greek *biblia* (books) and *logos* (word/study), referring to the theological study of the Bible. Understanding bibliology provides confidence that the book we base our lives on is legitimate and authentic, a crucial foundation for any further biblical study.
- **Bibliology Facts:**
 - It was written by approximately 40 different human writers.
 - The Bible was written over a period spanning roughly 1,500 years encompassing a cohesive redemptive narrative.
 - **Metanarrative of Scripture:**
 - A four-part biblical account consisting of **Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation**.
 - This theme traces how God's promises, power, and presence are revealed through various human writers to fulfill His ultimate plan through Jesus Christ.

Point II. The Doctrine of Inspiration & Revelation: God's Role in Human Writing

- **Study Point:** A core tenet is that the Bible is both fully human in its writing and fully divine in its origin ("God-breathed"). Inadequate views of inspiration (e.g., natural genius, partial inspiration) diminish the Bible's authority.
 - **Revelation:** God's providential act of making Himself and His truth known to humanity.
 - **Inspiration:** The Holy Spirit's supernatural influence on the human writers, ensuring that the words they recorded were the very words God intended, without overriding their individual personalities or writing styles (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21).
 - **Mechanical Dictation Theory:** Rejected by most evangelicals, it suggests God dictated every word verbatim, minimizing human involvement in the written Word of God.
 - **Verbal, Plenary Inspiration:** The orthodox evangelical view that every word of Scripture is inspired by God, while the writers' unique personalities and styles were genuinely used by the Holy Spirit.
 - **Illumination Theory:** The Holy Spirit merely "helped" the writers, but without direct divine authority over the words themselves.
- **Scripture:**
 - "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16 NKJV).
 - "For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21 NKJV).

Point III. Canonization and Transmission

- **Study Point:** The rigorous process of canonization, guided by God in the early church and historical consensus, provides assurance that the right books were included. The abundance and consistency of ancient manuscripts affirm the reliability of the biblical text we possess today.
 - **Canon:** The recognized collection of books that met certain criteria to be considered inspired Scripture and authoritative for the church. The canon was not created by the Church but *recognized* by the Church as already having divine authority. The process demonstrates God's preservation of His written Word.
 - **Transmission:** The careful copying and preserving of biblical manuscripts throughout history.

- **Bibliology Facts:**

- The 66 books were accepted because they were recognized as having divine authority from their inception, not because a council *made* them authoritative.
- Thousands of ancient manuscripts exist today, allowing scholars to compare texts and confirm their accuracy.

Point IV. Inerrancy and Authority: Trustworthiness and Reliability

- **Study Point:** The Bible's trustworthiness directly impacts a Christian's life and thinking today, providing a reliable foundation for faith.
- **Inerrancy:** The theological position that the Bible is without error in its original manuscripts (autographs).
- **Authority:** Because the Bible is God's Word, it is the supreme and final authority for all matters of doctrine, morality, and Christian living (John 10:35).
- **Sufficiency:** The Bible contains everything humanity needs to know God and live a life pleasing to Him.

Point V. Interpretation (Hermeneutics) and Application: Understanding the Text

- **Study Point:** Because the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit through human writers, the Holy Spirit also illuminates the text to help believers understand and apply Scripture to their lives today.
- **Interpretation Principles:**
 - **Context is Key:** Understand the historical, cultural, and literary context of a passage.
 - **Genre Awareness:** Interpret different literary genres (e.g., narrative, poetry, law, prophecy) appropriately.
 - **Compare Scripture with Scripture:** Interpret obscure passages in light of clearer ones and the overall message of the Bible.
 - **Application:** Moving from "what it meant then" (meaning) to "how it applies now" (significance).

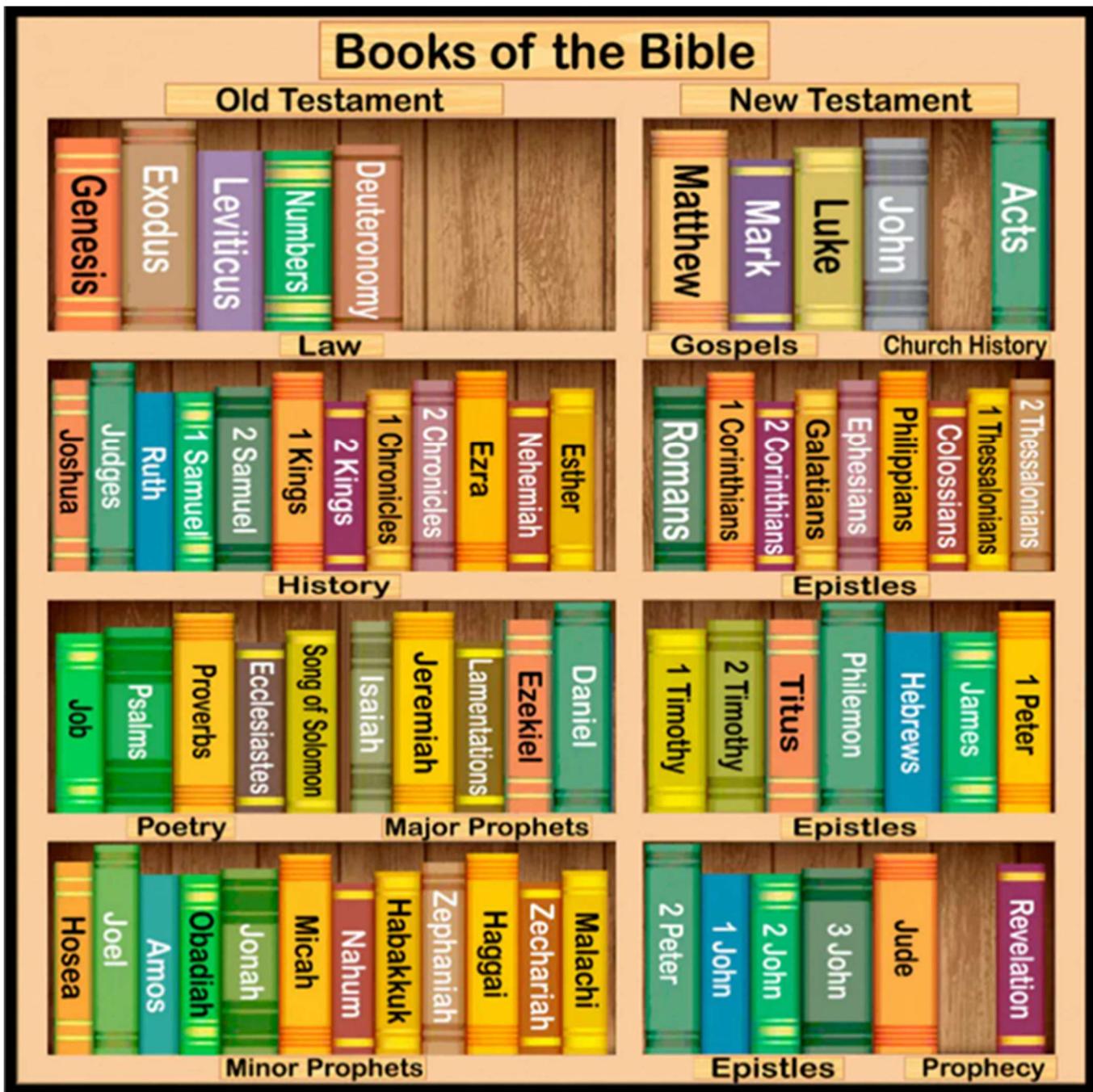
Point VI. The "Library" Analogy

- **Study Point:** The Bible as a library rather than a single book. A library has sections (fiction, non-fiction, history) and a numbering system (Dewey Decimal). The Bible is similar, with different types of writing. The term "Bible" comes from the Greek word *Biblia*, meaning "books".
- **Key Aspects of the Library Analogy:** The Bible isn't a single book but a collection (a library) of diverse writings by many authors over centuries, featuring different genres (history, poetry, law, prophecy, letters) and perspectives, much like a library has sections for fiction, science, or poetry, requiring varied reading approaches for proper understanding.

It emphasizes that different sections have unique styles, writers' intents, and purposes, so one wouldn't read a cookbook like a novel, nor should one read Psalms literally like Kings:

- **Collection of books:** The Bible is a collection of 66 separate books/letters.
- **Diverse genres:** Contains history (Kings, Chronicles), law (Leviticus), poetry (Psalms, Song of Songs), prophecy (Isaiah, Jeremiah), gospels (Matthew, John), and letters (Pauline Epistles).
- **Multiple writers:** Written by various people (prophets, apostles, kings, scribes) with distinct voices and agendas over roughly 1,500 years.
- **Different perspectives:** Even within similar genres (like the Gospels or historical books), writers present unique viewpoints, like witnesses in a courtroom, notes this Core Christianity article.

- **Organization: Categories and Genres**



- **The Two Testaments: The Major Divisions**

➤ **Old Testament (OT): The Foundation (39 books):** Covers creation, the history of Israel, the Law (Covenant with God), prophecy, and wisdom literature.

Focus: God's relationship with Israel and the anticipation of a Savior.

- **Law/Pentateuch:** The Pentateuch (Greek for "five scrolls" - Penta = five, Teuchos = scroll), the first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), forms the foundational narrative and legal framework for Judaism and Christianity, detailing creation, Israel's formation under God's covenant, laws for holy living (Torah), and wilderness wandering, with Jesus affirming its divine origin through Moses as central to understanding Him
 - **Genesis** - Answers two big questions: "How did God's relationship with the world begin?" and "Where did the nation of Israel come from?"
Writer: Traditionally Moses, but the reference accounts are much older.
 - **Exodus** - God saves Israel from slavery in Egypt and then enters into a special relationship with them.
Writer: Traditionally Moses
 - **Leviticus** - God gives Israel instructions for how to worship Him.
Writer: Traditionally Moses
 - **Numbers** - Israel fails to trust and obey God and wanders in the wilderness for 40 years.
Writer: Traditionally Moses
 - **Deuteronomy** - Moses gives Israel instructions (in some ways, a recap of the laws in Exodus–Numbers) for how to love and obey God in the Promised Land.
Writer: Traditionally Moses

- **History:**

- **Joshua** - Joshua (Israel's new leader) leads Israel to conquer the Promised land, then parcels out territories to the twelve tribes of Israel.
Writer: Unknown
- **Judges** - Israel enters a cycle of turning from God, falling captive to oppressive nations, calling out to God, and being rescued by leaders God sends their way (called "judges").
Writer: Unknown
- **Ruth** - Two widows lose everything, and find hope in Israel, which leads to the birth of the future King David.
Writer: Unknown
- **1 Samuel** - Israel demands a king, who turns out to be quite a disappointment.
Writer: Unknown
- **2 Samuel** - David, a man after God's own heart, becomes king of Israel.
Writer: Unknown
- **1 Kings** - The kingdom of Israel has a time of peace and prosperity under King Solomon, but afterward splits, and the two lines of kings turn away from God.
Writer: Unknown
- **2 Kings** - Both kingdoms ignore God and his prophets, until they both fall captive to other world empires.

Writer: Unknown

- **1 Chronicles** - This is a brief history of Israel from Adam to David, culminating with David commissioning the temple of God in Jerusalem.
- **2 Chronicles** - David's son Solomon builds the temple, but after centuries of rejecting God, the Babylonians take the southern Israelites captive and destroy the temple.
- **Writer:** Traditionally Ezra
- **Ezra** - The Israelites rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, and a scribe named Ezra teaches the people to once again obey God's laws.
- **Writer:** Ezra
- **Nehemiah** - The city of Jerusalem is in bad shape, so Nehemiah rebuilds the wall around the city.
- **Writer:** Nehemiah
- **Esther** - Someone hatches a genocidal plot to bring about Israel's extinction, and Esther must face the emperor to ask for help.
- **Writer:** Unknown

- **Poetry:**
 - **Job** - Satan attacks a righteous man named Job, and Job and his friends argue about why terrible things are happening to him.
 - **Writer:** Unknown
 - **Psalms** - A collection of 150 songs that Israel sang to God (and to each other): a hymnal for the ancient Israelites. The Book of Psalms is traditionally subdivided into five books, a structure that dates back to at least the first century AD. These divisions were likely intended to parallel the five books of the Torah (Pentateuch):
 - Book 1** – Psalms 1-41: Primarily the songs written by David
Theme: Personal trials, distress, and confidence in God's deliverance.
 - Book 2** – Psalms 42-72: Primarily the songs written by David and the Sons of Korah.
Theme: Like Book 1 but introduces a communal voice and focuses on the messianic kingdom.
 - Book 3** – Psalms 73-89: Primarily songs written by Asaph and the Sons of Korah.
Theme: A darker tone, questioning God's justice during times of national crisis and exile.
 - Book 4** – Psalms 90-106: Song writers include Moses (Ps 90) and many unknown writers.
Theme: Focuses on God's eternal nature and sovereignty over creation, responding to the crisis of Book 3.
 - Book 5** – Psalms 107-150: Song writers include David and many unknown writers.
Theme: Praise, thanksgiving for restoration from captivity, and celebration of God's Word (including Psalm 119).
 - **Proverbs** - A collection of sayings written to help people make wise decisions that bring about justice.
 - **Writer:** Solomon and other wise men
 - **Ecclesiastes** - A philosophical exploration of the meaning of life with a surprisingly nihilistic tone for the Bible.
 - **Writer:** Traditionally Solomon

- **Song of Solomon** (Song of Songs) - A love song (or collection of love songs) celebrating love, desire, and marriage. The Song of Solomon (or Song of Songs) is a collection of love poems that lacks a single rigid narrative structure, and various schemas for its subdivision exist among biblical scholars. Most analyses divide the book based on the progression of the relationship between the two main lovers (the man and the woman) and the recurring dialogues with a chorus (the "daughters of Jerusalem"). A common and practical three-part subdivision is:

The Courtship (Song 1:1–3:5): This section describes the initial longing of the couple to be together and their anticipation of marriage. It includes the woman expressing her desire for her lover and a dream sequence where she searches for him in the city.

The Wedding (Song 3:6–5:1): This section focuses on the royal wedding procession and the couple's profession of love for one another. The man praises the woman's beauty, and they unite in love, with the union receiving a divine blessing.

The Maturing Marriage (Song 5:2–8:14): This final section portrays the couple navigating the realities of married life, including a period of conflict and separation (symbolized by another dream where the woman rebuffs her husband). They eventually reconcile, reaffirm their commitment, and celebrate the enduring, powerful nature of their love.

A more detailed breakdown can be based on the poetic exchanges within the book:

The **introduction** (1:1–6),

followed by **dialogues between the lovers** (1:7–2:7).

the **woman recalling a visit from her lover** (2:8–17).

The **woman addresses the daughters of Zion** (3:1–5),

which is followed by **the sighting of a royal wedding procession** (3:6–11)

and **the man describing his lover's beauty** (4:1–5:1).

The **woman again addresses the daughters of Jerusalem** (5:2–6:4),

and **the man describes his lover visiting him** (6:5–12).

Observers then describe the woman's beauty (6:13–8:4),

concluding with **an appendix** (8:5–14).

Writer: Traditionally Solomon

- **Prophecy**

- **Major Prophets:** The Major Prophets refer to five specific books. These books are further categorized based on their historical context and literary structure. The Major Prophets can be subdivided by the period in which they ministered, primarily centered around the Babylonian Exile (approx. 605–538 BC):

- **Pre-Exilic** (before the fall):

- **Isaiah** (Ch 1-39) - Known as "Proto-Isaiah, God sends the prophet Isaiah to warn Israel of future judgment—but also to tell them about a coming king and servant who will "bear the sins of many."

Writer: Isaiah (and maybe some of his followers)

- **Jeremiah** – Known as "the weeping prophet," God sends a prophet to warn Israel about the coming Babylonian captivity urging repentance to avoid exile, but the people don't take the news very well.

Writer: Jeremiah

- **Exilic** (during the captivity):
 - **Ezekiel** - God chooses a man to speak for Him to Israel, to tell them the error of their ways and teach them justice: Ezekiel.
Writer: Ezekiel
 - **Daniel** - Daniel becomes a high-ranking wise man in the Babylonian and Persian empires and has prophetic visions concerning Israel's future.
Writer: Daniel (with other contributors)
 - **Isaiah** (Ch 40-55) - Referred to as "Deutero-Isaiah," this section is widely viewed by scholars as being addressed to the exilic community in Babylon, focusing on comfort and the promise of return.
- **Post-Exilic** (after the return):
 - **Isaiah** (Chapters 56–66) - Known as "Trito-Isaiah," these chapters are generally dated to the post-exilic period, addressing the community that had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple.
 - **Lamentations** - A collection of dirges lamenting the fall of Jerusalem after the Babylonian attacks. While often grouped with the Major Prophets because of Jeremiah as the writer, this book is a poetic response to the immediate aftermath of the exile (the destruction of Jerusalem).
Writer: Traditionally Jeremiah
- **Minor Prophets:** The Minor Prophets are subdivided primarily by historical age broken down by Israel & Judah and Exilic period. They are called "minor" due to their shorter book length, not lesser importance, and collectively form a significant prophetic section of the Old Testament.
 - **Pre-Exilic Period** (before Babylonian Exile):
 - ❖ **Prophets to Israel** (Northern Kingdom):
 - **Hosea** - Hosea is told to marry a prostitute who leaves him, and he must bring her back: a picture of God's relationship with Israel.
Writer: Hosea
 - **Amos** - A shepherd named Amos preaches against the injustice of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.
Writer: Amos
 - **Jonah** - A disobedient prophet runs from God, is swallowed by a great fish, and then preaches God's message to the city of Nineveh.
Writer: Traditionally Jonah
 - **Prophets to Judah** (Southern Kingdom):
 - **Joel** - God sends a plague of locusts to Judge Israel, but his judgment on the surrounding nations is coming, too.
Writer: Joel
 - **Obadiah** - Obadiah warns the neighboring nation of Edom that they will be judged for plundering Jerusalem.
Writer: Obadiah
 - **Micah** - Micah confronts the leaders of Israel and Judah regarding their injustice, and prophesies that one day the Lord himself will rule in perfect justice.
Writer: Micah

- **Nahum** - Nahum foretells of God's judgment on Nineveh, the capital of Assyria.
Writer: Nahum
- **Habakkuk** - Habakkuk pleads with God to stop the injustice and violence in Judah but is surprised to find that God will use the even more violent Babylonians to do so.
Writer: Habakkuk
- **Zephaniah** - God warns that he will judge Israel and the surrounding nations, but also that he will restore them in peace and justice.
Writer: Zephaniah
- **Post-Exilic Period** (after Babylonian Exile):
 - **Haggai** - The people have abandoned the work of restoring God's temple in Jerusalem, and so Haggai takes them to task.
Writer: Haggai
 - **Zechariah** - The prophet Zechariah calls Israel to return to God, and records prophetic visions that show what's happening behind the scenes.
Writer: Traditionally Zechariah
 - **Malachi** - God has been faithful to Israel, but they continue to live disconnected from him, so God sends Malachi to call them out.
Writer: Malachi

- **New Testament (NT) - The Fulfillment ((27 books))**: Covers the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the birth of the Church, and letters to early Christian communities.
Focus: The fulfillment of OT promises through Jesus and instructions for Christian living.
- **Gospels:** The four Gospels in the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) are primarily subdivided into the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke), which share similar content and structure, and the Gospel of John, which presents a different perspective and material, focusing on Jesus as the divine Son of God.
 - **The Gospel of Matthew** - This is an account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, focusing on Jesus' role as the true king of the Jews.
Writer: Matthew
 - **The Gospel of Mark** - This brief account of Jesus' earthly ministry highlights Jesus' authority and servanthood.
Writer: John Mark
 - **The Gospel of Luke** - Luke writes the most thorough account of Jesus' life, pulling together eyewitness testimonies to tell the full story of Jesus.
Writer: Luke
 - **The Gospel of John** - John lists stories of signs and miracles with the hope that readers will believe in Jesus.
Writer: John
- **Ecclesiastical (Church) History:**
 - **Acts** - Jesus returns to the Father, the Holy Spirit comes to the church, and the gospel of Jesus spreads throughout the world.
Writer: Luke

- **Epistles/Letters:**
 - ❖ **Pauline Epistles**
 - **Ecclesiastical Epistles**
 - **Theological (major) Epistles**
 - **Romans** - Paul summarizes how the gospel of Jesus works in a letter to the churches at Rome, where he plans to visit.
Writer: Paul
 - **1 Corinthians** - Paul writes a disciplinary letter to a fractured church in Corinth and answers some questions that they've had about how Christians should behave.
Writer: Paul
 - **2 Corinthians** - Paul writes a letter of reconciliation to the church at Corinth and clears up some concerns that they have.
Writer: Paul
 - **Galatians** - Paul hears that the Galatian churches have been led to think that salvation comes from the law of Moses and writes a (rather heated) letter telling them where the false teachers have it wrong.
Writer: Paul
 - **Eschatological (final events) Epistles**
 - **1 Thessalonians** - Paul has heard a good report on the church at Thessalonica and encourages them to “excel still more” in faith, hope, and love.
Writer: Paul
 - **2 Thessalonians** - Paul instructs the Thessalonians on how to stand firm until the coming of Jesus.
Writer: Paul
 - **Prison Epistles**
 - **Ephesians** - Paul writes to the church at Ephesus about how to walk in grace, peace, and love.
Writer: Paul
 - **Philippians** - An encouraging letter to the church of Philippi from Paul, telling them how to have joy in Christ.
Writer: Paul
 - **Colossians** - Paul writes the church at Colossae a letter about who they are in Christ, and how to walk in Christ.
Writer: Paul
 - **Philemon** - Paul strongly recommends that Philemon accept his runaway slave as a brother, not a slave.
Writer: Paul
 - **Pastoral Epistles**
 - **1 Timothy** - Paul gives his protégé Timothy instruction on how to lead a church with sound teaching and a godly example.
Writer: Paul
 - **2 Timothy** - Paul is nearing the end of his life, and encourages Timothy to continue preaching the word. **Writer:** Paul

- **Titus** - Paul advises Titus on how to lead orderly, counter-cultural churches on the island of Crete.
Writer: Paul
- ❖ **General Epistles:** a collection of eight letters addressed to broad Christian audiences rather than specific individuals or churches, focusing on enduring trials, false teachings, faith, and practical Christian living, distinct from the Pauline epistles.
 - **Hebrews** - A letter encouraging Christians to cling to Christ despite persecution, because he is greater.
Writer: Unknown
NOTE: While the Epistle to the Hebrews is traditionally placed after the Pauline epistles in many versions of the New Testament, it is under this category as there is no clear evidence of Paul as the writer.
 - **James** - A letter telling Christians to live in ways that demonstrate their faith in action.
Writer: James (likely the brother of Jesus)
 - **1 Peter** - Peter writes to Christians who are being persecuted, encouraging them to testify to the truth and live accordingly.
Writer: Peter
 - **2 Peter** - Peter writes a letter reminding Christians about the truth of Jesus and warning them that false teachers will come.
Writer: Peter
 - **1 John** - John writes a letter to Christians about keeping Jesus' commands, loving one another, and important things they should know.
Writer: John
 - **2 John** - A very brief letter about walking in truth, love, and obedience.
Writer: John
 - **3 John** - An even shorter letter about Christian fellowship.
Writer: John
 - **Jude** - A letter encouraging Christians to contend for the faith, even though ungodly persons have crept in unnoticed.
Writer: Jude
- ❖ **Prophecy:** The Book of Revelation is typically structured around key numerical and thematic elements.
 - **Revelation** - John sees visions of things that have been, things that are, and things that are yet to come.
Writer: John
 - Primary divisions are indicated in verse 1:19:
 - o **"What you have seen" (Chapter 1):** The vision of the glorified Christ.
 - o **"What is now" (Chapters 2-3):** Messages (letters) to the seven historical churches in Asia Minor, addressing their contemporary situations.
 - o **"What will take place later" (Chapters 4-22):** A series of prophetic visions concerning future events, culminating in the final judgment and the new heaven and new earth.

Cycles within Ch 4-22 using the number seven:

- **The Seven Seals** (Chapters 4–8:1): Introduces the heavenly throne room and the Lamb who opens a scroll with seven seals, bringing about a series of judgments.
- **The Seven Trumpets** (Chapters 8:2–11:19): The seventh seal leads to seven angels blowing trumpets, unleashing further devastation.
- **The Seven Bowls of Wrath** (Chapters 15–16): The final series of plagues poured out on the earth, completing God's judgment.

Closing Reflection

Take a moment to reflect on the immense gift the Bible represents. It is not merely a collection of human ideas about God, but God's intentional communication of Himself to us. Our confidence in the Bible's trustworthiness is rooted in the character of the God who authored and preserved it.

Takeaway Challenge

As we go through this year-long series of reading through the books of the Bible, make it a point to engage with the Bible not just as a historical text, but as the living and authoritative Word of God, asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate your understanding.

❖ **The 5-P Method:**

- Pour over the text,
- Pull out principles,
- Pose questions,
- Plan obedience, and
- Pin down an action.