

An Introduction To The Bible

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God is the author of Sacred Scripture (The Bible). *“The divinely revealed realities, which are contained and presented in the text of Sacred Scripture, have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”*

Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. 105

God inspired the human authors of the sacred books. *“To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while he employed them in this task, made full use of their own faculties and powers so that, though he acted in them and by them, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more.”*

Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. 106

The inspired books teach the truth. *“Since therefore all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures.”*

Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. 107

Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures.

Luke 24:27 NABRE

Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and said, *“Do you understand what you are reading?”* He replied, *“How can I, unless someone instructs me?”*

Acts 8:30-31

The Bible

The Bible or Sacred Scripture is comprised of books which contain the truth of God's Revelation and were composed by human authors inspired by the Holy Spirit.¹

Since Sacred Scripture is inspired, there is another and no less important principle of correct interpretation; "*Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written.*"²

The Second Vatican Council indicated three criteria for interpreting Scripture in accordance with the Holy Spirit who inspired it.³

1. Be especially attentive "*to the content and unity of the whole Scripture.*" *Scripture is a unit by reason of the unity of God's plan, of which Christ Jesus is the center and heart, open since his Passover.*"⁴
2. Read the Scripture within "*the living Tradition of the whole Church.*" According to a saying of the early Church Fathers, Sacred Scripture is written principally in the Church's heart rather than in documents and records, for the Church carries in her Tradition the living memorial of God's Word, and it is the Holy Spirit who gives her the spiritual interpretation of the Scripture "*according to the spiritual meaning which the Spirit grants to the Church*"⁵.
3. Be attentive to the coherence of the truths of faith individually and working in concert with each other, and within the whole plan of Revelation. These truths are called "*analogy of faith*"⁶.

The earliest accounts of God's self-revelation to man were handed on from generation to generation in songs, narratives, and poetry. Moses recounting and recording the Creation story 2,000 years after it began to be circulated is evidence of this. Over time, these accounts were written down, influenced by the 'theology' of the time.

It was by the Apostolic Tradition that the Church discerned which writings were to be included in the list of sacred books. This complete list is called the Canon of Scripture. It is a collection of 73 writings (books) compiled over a period of more than 1,000 years. It includes 46 books for the Old Testament (45 if we count Jeremiah and Lamentations as one) and 27 for the New Testament.⁷

Jews and Protestants recognize only 39 books in the Old Testament as inspired. The other six books are referred to as the Apocrypha (hidden) and are not considered divinely inspired.

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para.105

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para.111

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para.111

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para.112

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para.113

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para.114

⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para.120

The inspired writers use different kinds of imagery and methods that were popular in their time to tell their stories. As readers, we should try to understand what the inspired writers were trying to say. We should not just interpret the writing literally, using the filters of our current geographic and social setting. We should have some understanding of the historical and social settings of that time. Therefore, it would be beneficial to apply “Historical Analysis” or “Historical Criticism” to move us in the right direction. Historical analysis gives us some understanding of the history - the period in world history, the literature – what literary form is being used, and the archeology –the conditions they were living under.⁸

The Bible is a collection of stories about the realities of human life; the triumphs and failings that occur over and over during the course of each of our lives as God reveals Himself to us and invites us to obey Him. Obedience will lead to the fulfillment of the life God planned for us. The Bible encourages the reader to be introspective, to ask the question, “*am I obedient to God’s will for me?*”

The books of the Bible are not listed in chronological order. The books allow the reader to see the hand of God at work in the lives of the people of God from the days of Noah to the coming of Jesus Christ the Messiah. Using a Catholic Bible with good explanatory notes and using a bible commentary approved by the Catholic Church will increase your understanding of what the author is trying to convey.

Biblical History

Biblical history’s main focus is to interpret the meaning of historical events with the purpose of showing how God is active in the lives of His people as His self-revelation unfolds. Within that context, events take on meaning because of belief, and events take on meaning because of faith.

There were great civilizations existing before God revealed Himself to Abram (Abraham). The Egyptians, Sumerians, Persians (Iranians), Babylonians, Assyrians, Hittites were all great powers of antiquity. Abraham’s family lived in the city of Ur in Sumer before his father Terah moved the family to the city of Haran. Haran was a major city in upper Mesopotamia, an area that is in modern Turkey. Ur was an extremely ancient city of the Sumerians in Southern Mesopotamia.

These civilizations of antiquity worshipped many deities who were not the “*only true God,*”⁹ as described in the Bible. In the Book of Genesis, the wife of Jacob, one of the three Patriarchs, stole her father’s household images.¹⁰ The concept of one god, one supreme God, the Creator and Lord of the world, was not introduced until later.

Some of the ancient gods worshipped were Baal, Ashtoreth, and Moloch by whom the Israelites were seduced to their peril. The Israelites forgot the first commandment

⁸ Charpentier, E. (1993) *How to Read the Old Testament* (p.12), New York, NY: (The Crossroad Publishing Company

⁹ Jn. 17:3 New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE)

¹⁰ Gen. 31:19

God gave them, *“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall not have other gods beside me.”*¹¹

Baal was the general name for a variety of local deities. Baal was a deity whose worship sometimes included the sacrifice of children by fire.¹² Ashtoreth (Astarte) was a deity associated with sexuality, fertility, and sometimes war. Moloch (Molech) was a deity similar to Baal who was worshipped with sexual rituals and child sacrifice. Early Israelite worship to Moloch can be traced back to Solomon when he erected a temple for Moloch¹³. The Israelite practice of worship to Moloch continued probably until the Babylonian captivity in 597 B.C.E.¹⁴ In the Book of Jeremiah God posed the question, *“Can human beings make for themselves gods?”*¹⁵

In the Book of Genesis, *“Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot, son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and brought them out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to go to the land of Canaan. But when they reached Haran, they settled there.”*¹⁶

Then God told Abram, *“Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you.”*¹⁷ Abram obeyed God and took his family and possessions and went to Canaan, which was between Mesopotamia and Egypt.¹⁸ God changed Abram’s name to Abraham in Genesis Chapter 17.¹⁹

This was the beginning of God’s self-revelation to man. The Old Testament chronicles the Biblical history of man’s relationship with God from the time of Abraham until just before the birth of Christ.

Analysis of the books of the Bible

Theologians have applied different types of analyses to the books of the Bible to determine what the inspired writers were trying to convey. This has led to the compilation of many commentaries on the Bible that help readers to better understand the general meaning of the texts.

Historical criticism is a method of historical analysis of biblical literature that investigates the origins of ancient texts and tries to distinguish the true from the false concerning facts of the past. It tries to understand the world, as it existed when the text was written, and the historical situation of the author and the recipients. It

¹¹ Ex. 20:2-3

¹² Souvay, C. (1907). Baal, Baalim. In The Catholic Encyclopedia. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved August 29, 2016 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02175a.htm>

¹³ 1 Kgs. 11:7

¹⁴ Reid, G. (1908). Captivities of the Israelites. In The Catholic Encyclopedia. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved August 29, 2016 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03315a.htm>

¹⁵ Jer. 16:20

¹⁶ Gen. 11:31

¹⁷ Gen. 12:1

¹⁸ Gen. 12:5

¹⁹ Gen 17:5

examines both the documents that have been handed down to us, and the facts themselves. Three sources are examined - written documents, unwritten evidence, and tradition.²⁰ This form of biblical analysis began in the 17th century and was refined over the centuries into the various other methodologies used by biblical scholars today.

Traditions in Old Testament times and in the early Christian Church were transmitted orally. In the Old Testament God instructed the Israelites, “*However, be on your guard and be very careful not to forget the things your own eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your heart as long as you live, but make them known to your children and to your children’s children.*”²¹ This instruction was handed down orally until centuries later when the Book of Deuteronomy was written.

In the New Testament we read at the beginning of the Book of Luke, “*Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us.*”²² The apostles immediately handed on what Jesus taught them by preaching, by their example, and by the institutions they established.²³ Then, as time passed and some of the events began to be written down, Luke wrote, “*I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence.*”²⁴

We also have to look at the structure of the writing. An understanding of the literary genre that is being used will allow us to understand more fully the meaning of the writing. We can then look at the Text without using the filters of our current culture and historical period.²⁵

A literary genre is a distinctive type or category of literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content. For example, the creation story can be considered a liturgical poem while the crossing of the Red Sea is considered an epic.²⁶ In order to discover the sacred author’s intention, the reader should take into account the conditions of that time and culture, the literary genres in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking, and narrating of that period. The reader should also consider the kind of truth the writer is trying to convey, “*For the fact is that truth is differently presented and expressed in the various types of historical writing, in prophetic and poetical texts, and in other forms of literary expression.*”²⁷

²⁰ De Smedt, C. (1908). Historical Criticism. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved August 29, 2016 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04503a.htm>

²¹ Deut. 4:9

²² Lk. 1:1-2

²³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para.76

²⁴ Lk. 1:3

²⁵ Charpentier, E. (1993) *How to read the Old Testament* (p. 13) New York, NY: (The Crossroad Publishing Company

²⁶ Charpentier, E. (1993) *How to read the Old Testament* (p. 25) New York, NY: (The Crossroad Publishing Company

²⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para.111

Examples of the major literary genres found in the Bible are - allegory, apocalypse, discourse, epic, epistle (letter), ethical instruction, gospel, myth, narrative, parable, poetry, prophesy, wisdom literature.

One notable literary form used in the Old Testament to try to explain profound questions is the myth. The myth tries to answer questions such as where did the world come from? Why do we exist? Why is there suffering and death? The Bible tries to answer these questions through the creation story.²⁸ The Bible leads us to the conclusion that we must have faith in God alone who intervenes in our history and wills for us to be free.²⁹

The Old Testament

The Roman Catholic Church accepts and venerates as inspired the 46 books of the Old Testament. When the Church reads the Old Testament, she searches there for what the Spirit, “*who has spoken through the prophets,*” wants to tell us about the coming of the Messiah.³⁰

The Old Testament tells the story of God’s creation and His self-revelation to Noah, then to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and then to Moses and the people of Israel. Through the Israelites, God demonstrated His power to save His chosen people from the worst of situations beginning with the Exodus and reaching its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, “*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law.*”³¹

In the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Jewish and Christian Bible, God created mankind in His image and likeness³², endowed him with faculties beyond all other creatures, and infused him with intellectual instincts, free will, and reasoning. God gave mankind dominion over everything³³ and mankind lived in friendship and harmony with God, all living things, nature and himself – the Garden of Eden. Man was created in a state of holiness and original justice to share in the Divine Life. God gave mankind one restriction, “*You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. From that tree you shall not eat; when you eat from it you shall die.*”³⁴ Mankind disobeyed God and broke the intimate relationship he had with God. But God immediately started the process of preparing mankind for reconciliation that would take two millennia to complete. He said to the evil one who tempted mankind, “*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and*

²⁸ Gen. Chapters 1-3

²⁹ Charpentier, E. (1993) *How to read the Old Testament* (p. 21) New York, NY: (The Crossroad Publishing Company

³⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para.702

³¹ Gal. 4:4

³² Gen. 1:26

³³ Gen. 1:27-28

³⁴ Gen. 2:16-17

*between your offspring and hers; They will strike at your head, while you strike at their heel.”*³⁵

From a theological perspective, ten generations passed from Adam to Noah to whom God revealed himself and made a covenant. As a result of man’s evil behavior and disobedience, God sent a flood to wipe out everyone except Noah and his family who were righteous and obedient to God.³⁶

From Noah’s three sons, Ham, Shem, and Japheth are descended the seventy nations of the civilized world. These nations all spoke the same language but disobeyed God. They tried to build a city with “*a tower with its top in the sky*” to make a name for themselves.³⁷ This displeased God and He “*scattered them from there over all the earth.*”³⁸

From a theological perspective, ten generations passed from Noah to Abram (Abraham). God selected Abram and his wife Sarai (Sarah), who was barren, and made a covenant with Abram. God said to Abram, “*Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will find blessing in you.*”³⁹

The Catechism tells us that in order to gather together scattered humanity, God called Abram from his country, his kindred, and his father’s house, and changed his name to Abraham which means, “the father of a multitude of nations.” God said to Abraham, “*In you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.*”⁴⁰

God chose Abraham because of his unique righteousness and obedience.⁴¹ He was to become the first progenitor of His people, the first of the three major patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob [renamed Israel by God]). Abraham was obedient to God’s instruction and, at the age of seventy-five years, “*went as the Lord directed him.*”⁴² This was in contrast to Adam who disobeyed God,⁴³ even though God had granted him a nature that exceeded that of all other creatures. As a result, man’s relationship with God was damaged, but God did not completely break off His relationship with, and His self-revelation to man.⁴⁴

“*The people that descended from Abraham would be the trustees of the promise made to the patriarchs, the chosen people, called to prepare for that day when God would gather all his children into the unity of the Church.*”⁴⁵ Abraham’s grandson Jacob,

³⁵ Gen. 3:15

³⁶ Gen. 6:7-22

³⁷ Gen. 11:4

³⁸ Gen. 11:8

³⁹ Gen. 12:1-3

⁴⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church.* para.59

⁴¹ Gen. 12:4

⁴² Gen. 12:4

⁴³ Gen. Chap. 3

⁴⁴ Gen. 3:15

⁴⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church.* para. 60

one of the Patriarchs, became the father of twelve sons who, with their progeny, became the twelve tribes of Israel.⁴⁶

One of Jacob's sons, Joseph, was sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers. Through God's divine plan Pharaoh placed him in charge of all the people and land in Egypt.⁴⁷ As a result of a severe famine, Joseph's father, brothers and their families went down to Egypt in search of grain and were reconciled with Joseph. They settled in Egypt.⁴⁸ As time passed, what Joseph had done for Egypt was forgotten and the Hebrews were subjected to slavery. The Hebrew midwives were ordered by Pharaoh to kill all the male children.⁴⁹ God commissioned Moses to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt to their own land.⁵⁰ The Hebrews dwelled in Egypt for 430 years.⁵¹

After the Hebrews were freed from slavery in Egypt, they entered into a covenant with God to be His people and to be shaped by the Ten Commandments and other laws.⁵² However, the Hebrews would prove to be a stubborn and rebellious people, rejecting God many times in their history. God would also say of them, "*I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are.*"⁵³ Time and again through the centuries God sent the prophets to plead with the Israelites to return to Him but they would not listen proving themselves to be a stubborn and rebellious people, rejecting God many times in their history.

God revealed Himself to man and man developed rituals and precepts as an act of worship and love of God.⁵⁴ More rituals and precepts were added throughout the centuries as the Israelites developed a theology based on God's self-revelation, but the rituals and precepts were not always added to foster a deeper relationship with God. In the Book of Isaiah God said, "*This people draws near with words only and honors me with their lips alone, though their hearts are far from me, And fear of me has become mere precept of human teaching.*"⁵⁵

God told the Israelites to be obedient to Him. He led them from the oppression of slavery in Egypt and established them as the people through whom he would reveal Himself to mankind. After they reached the Promised Land, they were led by a series of Judges and after the Judges, God anointed prophets to guide them. They demanded a king like the other nations and God allowed them to have Saul as the first King of Israel.⁵⁶ King Saul was followed by David around the year 1,000 B.C.E. who made Jerusalem the capital and brought together the twelve tribes that formed the

⁴⁶ Gen. 49:28

⁴⁷ Gen. 41:39-46

⁴⁸ Gen Chapters 42 to 47

⁴⁹ Ex. Chapter 1

⁵⁰ Ex. Chapter 3

⁵¹ Ex. 12:40-41

⁵² Ex. Chapter 24

⁵³ Ex. 32:9

⁵⁴ Charpentier, E. (1993) *How to read the Old Testament* (p. 20) New York, NY: (The Crossroad Publishing Company

⁵⁵ Is. 29:13

⁵⁶ 1 Sam. Chapters 8 & 9

kingdom of Israel. David was followed by Solomon who further consolidated the twelve tribes and built a Temple for the Israelites to worship God.⁵⁷ Solomon had 700 foreign wives and 300 concubines. God had forbidden Israelites to join with foreign women.⁵⁸ Solomon erected temples to foreign gods which was an abomination in the eyes of the one true God. God promised Solomon that he would tear the kingdom away from his son's hands.⁵⁹

Upon Solomon's death in 933 B.C.E.E., the kingdom of Israel split in two.⁶⁰ In the South were the two tribes named Judah and Benjamin with Jerusalem as the capital, and the temple. In the North were the other 10 tribes that formed Israel with Samaria as the capital. Israel in the North was not faithful to the Davidic Dynasty and began to follow some of the Canaanite religions and deities.

Around the year 721 B.C.E., the Northern Kingdom of Israel was captured by the Assyrians and some of the ten tribes were scattered among other countries to the North of Israel leaving a remnant behind in the Northern Kingdom.⁶¹ The leader of Assyria then brought in 5 kings from other nations and mixed them in with the remnant of Israel in Samaria.⁶² The Jewish religion and customs were adulterated with the customs and religions of their captors.⁶³ This mixed group of people became the Samaritans.

The Southern Kingdom Judah was captured around the year 608 B.C.E. and most of the people were deported to Babylon⁶⁴ where they remained in exile for approximately 70 years until the year 538 B.C.E. The exile finally ended when the Persian conqueror of Babylon, Cyrus the Great, gave the Jews permission to return to Palestine.⁶⁵ Several deportations took place; not all Jews chose to leave, some returned to their homeland and others dispersed to other lands, thus constituting the first of numerous Jewish communities living permanently in the Diaspora.⁶⁶

The Greeks and Romans then took turns in dominating the Middle East. In the year 333 B.C.E., Alexander conquered the Middle East and Greek language and culture took root. In the year 167 B.C.E., King Antiochus tried to force the Jews to renounce their faith and this gave rise to the Maccabees and the Israelite Martyrs. In the year

⁵⁷ Charpentier, E. (1993) *How to read the Old Testament* (p. 22) New York, NY: (The Crossroad Publishing Company

⁵⁸ 1 Kings 11:2

⁵⁹ 1 Kings 11:3:13

⁶⁰ 1 Kings Chapters 11 & 12

⁶¹ 2 Kings 17:6

⁶² 2 Kings 17:24

⁶³ 2 Kings 17:41

⁶⁴ 2 Kings 24:12-17

⁶⁵ Ezra 5:13

⁶⁶ Charpentier, E. (1993). *How to Read the Old Testament* (pp. 22-23). New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company

63 B.C.E. Rome dominated the Middle East with Herod as king of Israel from 40 B.C.E. to 4 B.C.E.⁶⁷

The Pentateuch

The books of the Old Testament (OT) are written in many different literary genres between approximately 1450 B.C.E. to 450 B.C.E. The first five books of the OT (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) comprise the Pentateuch and their authorship was ascribed to Moses. They form the theological foundation of the Bible.

In the Pentateuch, God explains how sin entered the world and reveals His Divine plan. He demonstrates His power through signs and wonders, and gives man laws to follow so that he could lead a life pleasing to God. God revealed the relationship man could have with Him if man was obedient, as well as the consequences of sin and man's disobedience.

The Pentateuch is partly historical and partly legal and "give us the history of the Chosen People from the creation of the world to the death of Moses. The books also acquaint us with the civil and religious legislation of the Israelites during the life of their great lawgiver."⁶⁸

The Pentateuch was written in four stages and each stage can be identified by a specific style. The four traditions below were collected into a single volume:⁶⁹

- Yahwist – Reference to this tradition by scholars is indicated by the letter J and comes from the time of Solomon around 950 B.C.E.
- Elohist - Reference to this tradition by scholars is indicated by the letter E and comes around 750 B.C.E. after the kingdom had split in two.
- The Deuteronomist - Reference to this tradition by scholars is indicated by the letter D.
- Priestly - Reference to this tradition by scholars is indicated by the letter P and it originated during the Babylonian exile in the years 587 B.C.E. to 538 B.C.E.

In Jewish theology, the first five books of the Old Testament contain Divine instruction. They are the source of Jewish religious teaching and law.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Charpentier, E. (1993) *How to read the Old Testament* (p. 23) New York, NY: (The Crossroad Publishing Company

⁶⁸ Maas, A. (1911). Pentateuch. In The Catholic Encyclopedia. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved August 29, 2016 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11646c.htm>

⁶⁹ Charpentier, E. (1993) *How to read the Old Testament* (p. 27) New York, NY: (The Crossroad Publishing Company

⁷⁰ Schühlein, F. (1912). Torah. In The Catholic Encyclopedia. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved August 28, 2016 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14779c.htm>

The Historical Books

Israel's Biblical history was recorded in 12 Historical Books – Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings and 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther. It begins with Israel entering the Promised Land in the Book of Joshua and ends with Israel's return from exile.

These books give a specific theological outlook. They show the fidelity or infidelity to Israel's covenant with God, and the resulting covenant blessing or covenant curse they experience. This interplay of choice and consequences serves to explain the disasters Israel brings upon itself throughout its history.

During this period of about 1,000 years, Israel fell in and out of God's grace many times, getting seduced by the religious practices of neighboring nations and taking up the practice of worshipping foreign deities.

The Judges

The term Judges was applied to the divinely appointed leaders of Israel who came after Moses and Joshua. The period of the Judges extended from the death of Joshua⁷¹ after the conquest of Canaan, for a period of about 200 years until the beginning of the monarchy when the prophet Samuel installed Saul as Israel's first king.⁷²

The Book of Judges tells of thirteen leaders who delivered Israel from oppression or danger. During the period of Judges, there is a pattern of infidelity to God and oppression by the enemies of the Israelites, and then the Israelites cry out to God and are delivered from their oppression.

The Prophets

*“Through the prophets, God forms his people in the hope of salvation, in the expectation of a new and everlasting Covenant intended for all, to be written on their hearts.”*⁷³ The prophets were intermediaries between God and His people and received communications from God through various means such as visions and dreams. The Prophets communicated to the people of God through prophetic utterances, sermons, writings, and in some cases through actions.

There were five Major prophetic books and 12 Minor prophetic books. The books are so designated not because of the importance of the prophets but because of their length. The Major prophetic books are long while the Minor prophetic books are short.

The prophetic books ascribed to the Major Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The prophetic books ascribed to the Minor Prophets are: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

⁷¹ Jos. 24:29–31

⁷² 1 Sam. 10:21–24

⁷³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 64

The function of a prophet is to instruct and reprove the people in God's name. Through the prophets, God told the people what would happen if they did not acknowledge Him as the one true God and heed His instruction. And their prophecies were always fulfilled.

The Poetry and Wisdom Books

The Poetry and Wisdom Books were traced back from the time of Abraham all through to the end of the Old Testament. These books deal with the struggles of Israelites in everyday life and use life experiences as a guide to avoid or resolve situations.

The books considered as Poetry and Wisdom Books are Job, Psalms Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs.

The Book of Job is considered the oldest and the author is unknown. The Psalms had different authors of which David is the most notable. However, the authors of many of the Psalms are unknown.

The writing of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs is primarily ascribed to Solomon.

The Poetry and Wisdom Books are designed to stimulate the imagination, inform the intellect, capture the emotions, and direct the will, and therefore deserve meaningful reflection and contemplation when read.⁷⁴

The New Testament

There are 27 books that most Christian denominations agree as comprising the "canon" of the New Testament writings. The Catholic Church accepts and venerates as inspired these 27 books which can be grouped as follows:

Four Gospels whose authorship has been ascribed to the four Apostles - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The Acts of the Apostles which was also written by the author of the Gospel of Luke.

Twenty-one letters or epistles - attributed to Paul (14), John (3), Peter (2), James, and Jude.

The Revelation to John.

The four Gospels occupy a central place in the New Testament because Jesus Christ is their center. The unity of the two Testaments proceeds from the unity of God's plan and his Revelation. The Old Testament points forward to the New Testament and the New Testament fulfills the Old; the two shed light on each other; both are true Word of God.⁷⁵

The Books of the New Testament reflect three distinct stages of its formation.

⁷⁴ <http://christianity.about.com/od/booksofthebible/qt/Wisdom-Books.htm>

⁷⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 138-140

- The words and deeds of Jesus Christ during His public ministry (28 A.D. to 30 A.D.)
- The first communities beginning to learn about Jesus and live the Gospel. St. Paul's preaching and letters (30 A.D. to 70 A.D.)
- The Gospels being put into writing (70 A.D. to 100 A.D.)

When God revealed Himself to Abraham, *“The Lord said to Abram: Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will find blessing in you.”*⁷⁶

The first promise of *“land that I will show you”* was fulfilled through Moses. Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt to the promised land even though he himself died before the Israelites entered the promised land. God made a covenant with Moses and the twelve tribes of Israel as written in Exodus and Deuteronomy.⁷⁷ The covenant was a blessing if the Israelites were faithful to God, but a curse if they were not.

The second promise was fulfilled through King David. Israel became a great nation under David. Again, God made a covenant with David and promised to establish his royal throne forever.⁷⁸

The third promise to Abraham and the promise to David were both fulfilled in Jesus Christ, from the tribe of Judah, descended from the royal line of David whose kingdom will stand forever.⁷⁹

The Gospels

The four Gospels were written by men who were among the first to have the faith and wanted to share it with others.⁸⁰ What is written is a true testimony of what was seen and experienced by those who were with Christ during His public ministry.⁸¹ What is written in the Gospels was set down there *“so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.”*⁸²

The four Gospels are actually four different presentations of the *“good news of the Kingdom of God,”*⁸³ as told and inaugurated by the life, works, teachings, passion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

⁷⁶ Gen. 12:1-3

⁷⁷ Ex. Chap. 24; Deut. Chap. 29

⁷⁸ 2 Sam. 7:9-17

⁷⁹ Heb. 7:14-17

⁸⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 515

⁸¹ Jn. 21:24; Mark 1:1

⁸² Jn. 20:31; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 514

⁸³ Lk. 8:1

Three of the Gospels are called Synoptic because they contain a large amount of similar content. Thus, those three Gospels seem to derive from the same source. Matthew and Luke also contain material from a source labeled “Q” that Mark did not use.⁸⁴

The Gospels were written in different decades after the death of Christ. Mark was written around the year 70 A.D.; Matthew and Luke were written between the years 80 and 90 A.D.; John was written between the years 95 and 100 A.D. The Gospels were written for different audiences.

Matthew was written for a Jewish audience in Palestine, Mark was written to a non-Jewish audience in Rome, Luke was written to Gentile converts, and John reflected the theology developing around the turn of the first century and was addressed to the early Christian community. It focused on the divine nature of the mission of Jesus.

Jesus

*“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption.”*⁸⁵ Jesus’ birth, his public ministry, and his suffering and triumphant death were all part of God’s plan of salvation and were foretold in the Old Testament. From the covenant with Abraham,⁸⁶ the Old Testament pointed forward to Jesus.

The prophet Isaiah spoke centuries earlier about the birth of Jesus; *“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign; the young woman, pregnant and about to bear a son, shall name him Emmanuel.”*⁸⁷ In the Gospel of Matthew, the angel spoke to Joseph about Mary’s pregnancy and said, *“She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”* All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: *“Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,”* which means *“God is with us.”*⁸⁸

Of his public ministry the prophet Isaiah foretold, *“Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased. Upon him I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry out, nor shout, nor make his voice heard in the street. A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench. He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow dim or be bruised until he establishes justice on the earth; the coastlands will wait for his teaching.”*⁸⁹

Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary in Nazareth around 6 B.C.E. and died around 30 A.D. Jesus was a member of the tribe of Judah and was descended from

⁸⁴ Gigot, F. (1912). Synoptics. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved August 29, 2016 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14389b.htm>

⁸⁵ Gal. 4:4-5

⁸⁶ Gen. 12:2

⁸⁷ Is. 7:14

⁸⁸ Mt. 1:21-23

⁸⁹ Is. 42:1-4

the royal line of David. His coming was announced by the angel Gabriel to his mother Mary when she was betrothed to Joseph. The angel Gabriel said, “Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus.”⁹⁰

Jesus was conceived when the Holy Spirit came upon the virgin Mary and “*the power of the Most High*” overshadowed her. Mary was also told that “*the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.*”⁹¹ Mary was obedient and accepted God’s will for her.⁹² Jesus was both human and divine, born of Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus began His public ministry after he was baptized by John the Baptist in the river Jordan at approximately 28 years of age.⁹³ Through many signs and miracles, He established Himself as the Son of God and preached about the Kingdom of Heaven. He spoke in parables using imagery from his day and encouraged all who heard him to follow the spirit of the Mosaic Law and not just the letter of the Law.

Jesus’ deeds, miracles, and words all revealed that, “*in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,*”⁹⁴ and that He was the Son of God, as attested to by God Himself.⁹⁵ When he raised Lazarus from the dead it showed that he had power over death.⁹⁶ When he healed a paralytic it showed that he had the power to heal and forgive sin.⁹⁷ He showed that he had power over nature when he quieted the storm.⁹⁸

It was the Son’s task to accomplish the Father’s plan of salvation in the fullness of time. Its accomplishment was the reason for his being sent. “*The Lord Jesus inaugurated his Church by preaching the Good News, that is, the coming of the Reign of God, promised over the ages in the scriptures.*” To fulfill the Father’s will, Christ ushered in the Kingdom of heaven on earth. The Church “*is the Reign of Christ already present in mystery.*”⁹⁹

The Ten Commandments (The Decalogue) was given to the Israelites by God during the Exodus from Egypt.¹⁰⁰ The Levites, the priestly class anointed by God, wrote many more laws explaining how God wanted His laws to be fulfilled.¹⁰¹ But over time the essence of the Laws of God sometimes became distorted.¹⁰² Jesus told His

⁹⁰ Lk. 1:31

⁹¹ Lk. 1:35

⁹² Lk. 1:38

⁹³ Mt. 3:16; Mk. 1:10; Lk. 3:21-22; Jn. 1:32

⁹⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para.515

⁹⁵ Mt. 3:17

⁹⁶ Mt. 8:23-27; Mt. 14:22-33, Jn. 11:32-44

⁹⁷ Mk. 2:3-12

⁹⁸ Mt. 8:23-27

⁹⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para.763; Mt. 4:17; Mk. 1:15

¹⁰⁰ Ex. 20:2-17

¹⁰¹ Lev. Chapters 11 to 26

¹⁰² Mk. 7:13

followers, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.”¹⁰³

From His life and His teaching, Jesus directly and indirectly bestows on us grace to strengthen us on our journey of faith. “His words and deeds, his silences and sufferings, indeed his manner of being and speaking —is Revelation of the Father.”¹⁰⁴ For Jesus said, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”¹⁰⁵ He gave us the Beatitudes,¹⁰⁶ the seven Sacraments,¹⁰⁷ the Virtues,¹⁰⁸ Works of Mercy,¹⁰⁹ and the Gifts and Fruits of the Spirit,¹¹⁰ all of which strengthen us to lead a holy life through God’s grace.

In the Gospel of John in the Bread of Life Discourse,¹¹¹ Jesus said, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.”¹¹² Before His suffering and death, Jesus instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper; “While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.”¹¹³

“The miracles of the multiplication of the loaves,¹¹⁴ when the Lord says the blessing, breaks and distributes the loaves through his disciples to feed the multitude, prefigure the superabundance of this unique bread of his Eucharist.”¹¹⁵ The Eucharist is the center of the Catholic Church’s life¹¹⁶ with essentially the same structure as it had in the time of Christ. The Church spiritually feeds thousands every day with the Body and Blood and blood of the risen Christ.

Through the Paschal Mystery, Jesus’ passion, crucifixion, death, burial, descent among the dead, resurrection, and ascension,¹¹⁷ Jesus allowed us to be reconciled to God, our Father, as he bore the sins of the whole world on the cross in our place.¹¹⁸ It is through this selfless act that God showed His love for us¹¹⁹ and Jesus showed His

¹⁰³ Mt. 5:17

¹⁰⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 516

¹⁰⁵ Jn. 14:9

¹⁰⁶ Mt. 5:3-12

¹⁰⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 774

¹⁰⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 798; 1266; 1844.

¹⁰⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 2447

¹¹⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1830; 1845

¹¹¹ Jn. 6:22-59

¹¹² Jn. 6:34

¹¹³ Mt. 26:26-30; Mk. 14:22-26; Lk. 22:14-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26

¹¹⁴ Mt. 14:13-21; Mk. 6:34-44; Lk. 9:10-17; Jn. 6:1-13

¹¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1335

¹¹⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1343

¹¹⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 512

¹¹⁸ 1 Pet. 2:24; Is. 53:5; Isa. 53:12

¹¹⁹ Jn. 3:16

obedience to God.¹²⁰ Jesus' obedience was in direct contrast to Adam's disobedience.¹²¹ Adam's disobedience damaged our relationship with God while Jesus' obedience resulted in our salvation. Man's nature was raised to something even greater than that of Adam's.¹²²

The Prophet Isaiah, speaking of Jesus' suffering and triumphant death said, "*See, my servant shall prosper, he shall be raised high and greatly exalted. Even as many were amazed at him—so marred were his features, beyond that of mortals his appearance, beyond that of human beings—So shall he startle many nations, kings shall stand speechless; For those who have not been told shall see, those who have not heard shall ponder it.*"¹²³

The Acts of the Apostles

The Acts of the Apostles was the second book written by Luke¹²⁴ and it tells of the acts of Jesus for the forty days between His resurrection and His ascension.¹²⁵ After the ascension of Jesus, Acts chronicles the beginning of the Christian Church and the difficulties some of the first communities experienced.

Acts tells of the birth of the Christian Church when the Holy Spirit that was promised by Jesus¹²⁶ came upon the Apostles at Pentecost. "*And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.*"¹²⁷

Acts tells us about how the first Christian community lived¹²⁸ in anticipation of the second coming of Christ who would preside over the Last Judgment and the end of the world. Chapters one through nine tells of how Peter took the lead in spreading the Christian religion among the Jews. We are also told about the first Deacons of the Christian Church who were needed to assist the Apostles so that they would not have to neglect preaching the word of God to attend to administrative matters.¹²⁹

Then we are told about Saul of Tarsus, a devout Pharisee, who persecuted the early Christians.¹³⁰ He was on his way to Damascus to find those who belonged to the Way to bring them back to Jerusalem in chains¹³¹ when, "*a light from the sky*

¹²⁰ Phil. 2:8

¹²¹ Gen. 3:17

¹²² Rom. 5:20; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 412

¹²³ Isa. 52:13-15

¹²⁴ Acts 1:1

¹²⁵ Acts 1:3

¹²⁶ Acts 1:4

¹²⁷ Acts 2:2-4

¹²⁸ Acts 2:42-47

¹²⁹ Acts 6:1-7

¹³⁰ Acts 8:3

¹³¹ Acts 9:2

suddenly flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” He said, “Who are you, sir?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do.” The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, for they heard the voice but could see no one. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him to Damascus. For three days he was unable to see, and he neither ate nor drank.¹³²

After Saul’s conversion, he fervently began to preach about Christ and Acts chapters 11-28 give us details about his spreading the Christian religion among the Gentiles. Saul was his Semitic name and his Greco-Roman name was Paul.¹³³

In writing the Acts of the Apostles, Luke records the spread of the Church after Pentecost and refers to the apostolic evangelization by the apostles and Paul as “they”. In Chapter 16 of Acts, Luke speaks as “we”, indicating that he is now accompanying them in the mission of spreading the faith.

The early Christian Church was not without its share of controversy. Some of the Jews were demanding that the Gentile converts observe fully the Mosaic Law. Paul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem to meet with Peter, the Apostles, and the Presbyters. The first Church council was convened.¹³⁴ The council concluded that, “*It is the decision of the holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities, namely, to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, from blood, from meats of strangled animals, and from unlawful marriage. If you keep free of these, you will be doing what is right.*”¹³⁵

The Epistles

There are 21 documents that take the form of letters or epistles in the New Testament canon. Paul’s letters were written before any of our gospels, though the sayings and deeds of Jesus stand behind all the New Testament writings. The dates of the other New Testament letters are more difficult to determine, but for the most part they belong to the second and third Christian generations rather than to the first.¹³⁶

The basic format of the letters uses the conventions of letter writing common in the ancient world with modifications by the Christian writers. The general form is usually as follows:¹³⁷

- A greeting
- The names of the sender(s) and the recipient(s)

¹³² Acts 8:3-9

¹³³ Acts 13:9

¹³⁴ Acts 15:1-35

¹³⁵ Acts 15:28-29

¹³⁶ Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. (2010). *New American Bible* (Revised ed., p. 1251). Totowa, NJ: Catholic Book Publishing Corp.

¹³⁷ Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. (2010). *New American Bible* (Revised ed., p. 1251). Totowa, NJ: Catholic Book Publishing Corp.

- A prayer
- Teaching on the issue that led to the letter
- Conclusion

The letters usually addressed specific situations encountered in the early Christian Churches. Some were systematic and doctrinal, as in the Letter to the Romans; some were forceful, as the Letter to the Galatians in which he said, “*O stupid Galatians! Who has bewitched you.*”¹³⁸.

Fourteen of the 21 letters have been traditionally attributed to Paul. Four of the letters were written while Paul was in prison and three were of a pastoral nature. Like the prophetic writings in the Old Testament, the letters are arranged primarily in descending order of length.

Revelation

The Book of Revelation was addressed to, “*the seven churches in Asia,*”¹³⁹ and is a revelation given to John in a series of visions in symbolic and allegorical language borrowed from the Old Testament. The symbolic descriptions are not meant to be taken as literal descriptions and the symbolism is not meant to be pictured realistically.¹⁴⁰ The reader does not know if the author experienced real visions or if the visions were simply literary conventions.

The literary style is apocalyptic and, even though it is difficult for modern day readers to understand, the early Christian communities would have understood it because that style of writing was popular between 200 B.C.E. and 150 C.E. The early Christian communities that were being persecuted would have understood the underlying spiritual message of hope.

Apocalyptic literature is a literary genre that foretells supernaturally inspired cataclysmic events that will transpire at the end of the world. A product of the Judeo-Christian tradition, apocalyptic literature is characteristically pseudonymous; it takes narrative form, employs esoteric language, expresses a pessimistic view of the present, and treats the final events as imminent.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Gal. 3:1

¹³⁹ Rev. 1:4

¹⁴⁰ Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. (2010). *New American Bible* (Revised ed., p. 1401). Totowa, NJ: Catholic Book Publishing Corp.

¹⁴¹ Lerner, R. E. (2008, May 28). Apocalyptic literature. In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved August 30, 2016, from <https://www.britannica.com/art/apocalyptic-literature>