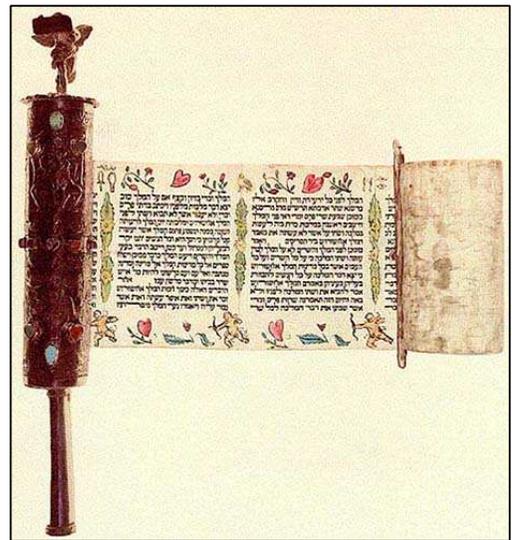


## **Bite-Sized Bible Guide 1** by Andrew Rowland

Each unit is called a book, originally written on papyrus scrolls. Here's a brief guide to each.

**Old Testament** – the happenings before Jesus. The first five books are the Law. Then come some history books, some poetry (Job-Song of Songs) and finally the many prophets, Major and Minor. Don't try reading from the beginning to end; you'll get bored by Numbers! Beware the Books are not particularly arranged in historical order, but it does all start with creation. Read Genesis, Exodus and Isaiah first. Leave Numbers and Leviticus until last.



Genesis – The creation, Adam & Eve, serpents and apples, Babel towers and Noah's Ark - the earliest sagas are all here. God calls Abram from Ur in Chaldea (Iraq) to begin a journey of enormous consequence and the story of faith begins. In their 100's Abram and Sarai produce a miracle child, as God makes an eternal covenant with Abraham. Ha! God changes their names. Sarah laughs, so she calls the boy 'Isaac' (she laughed). Abraham is prepared to sacrifice Isaac, but doesn't have to. The next son Jacob's life is a struggle (having stolen his older brother Esau's birthright) and he becomes Israel. Note: Esau's descendants the Edomites are claimed as the forefathers of the Arab peoples. Later still Jacob's son Joseph has a jealous argument with his many brothers over a colourful coat and is sold into slavery by them - but rises to Pharaoh's right hand as the action moves to Egypt.

Exodus – Years later Jacob's descendants 'Israel' end up enslaved in Egypt. Moses like Joseph rises from slave to prince, then has to flee to Midian where he too meets God in a burning bush on The Holy Mountain. Many years later Moses returns to Egypt and with his brother Aaron, calls on Pharaoh to 'set my people free'. They, guided by God, lead the Hebrews through sea, sand and scarcities to the Promised Land.

Leviticus – Dry! Rules for worship and social development of the Hebrew tribes. Written by Moses during the Exodus. Understanding this is important to understanding early Judaism.

Numbers – What went on for 40 years in the desert wilderness under Moses.

Deuteronomy – Moses speaks mainly about being faithful to God, the covenant and the consequences of unfaithfulness. Probably heavily edited hundreds of years after the events it describes and very influential in codifying Jewish life and faith.

Joshua – The next generation of leadership a warrior, trumpets and all. The Jews enter into their Promised Land. A bit too much divinely ordered violence for modern sensibilities? With a sound of trumpets Jericho's walls tumble, reality is nothing like the rhetoric though.

Judges – Stories of Hebrew/Israelite leaders including the hairy story of Sampson. Judges: male and female wise patriarchs, but not kings, preside over the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

Ruth – A foreign Moabite woman becomes kosher and from her comes the Davidic line.

1 & 2 Samuel – Two history books about the change from Divine to Earthly rule – God is no longer good enough, so here are very fallible Kings; Saul, David and Solomon who ruin things, even with Samuel's advice and God's help. Samuel tells them it will all end in tears.

1 & 2 Kings – The stories of the mainly appalling kings thereafter – the peoples of the Northern Kingdom and Judah are torn apart between the major powers Egypt, Assyria and Babylon - exile and destruction is the inevitable result. Elijah and Elisha are truly great and interesting prophets featuring in Book 1 and required reading.

1 & 2 Chronicles – more stories parallel to Kings, written from a different perspective.

Ezra – a Priest who leads the return from exile after 50 years in Persia as God works through King Cyrus of Babylon.

Nehemiah – Rebuilds Jerusalem's broken walls in 52 days despite heavy opposition.

Esther – A young maiden prevents a holocaust by being in the right place at the right time and being brave. Still commemorated today at the Jewish feast of Purim.

Job – a very early saga stranded in the middle of the Old Testament, heavy going but very influential. About suffering, why does God allow it? Early philosophy.

Psalms – A collection of 150 poetic songs and hymns from King David's era. Well loved down through the ages. Monks had to sing all 150 in a day! Ugh. Quite a mixture of themes and emotions, many used as a foundation for our famous hymns.

Proverbs – Fascinating collection of truisms and wise sayings – quite fun really on a dull day. Something for everyone! Many still oft quoted in everyday speech.

Ecclesiastes – What's the point...? Nothing makes sense – musings of a doubter?

Song of Songs – A sensual love song dressed(?) in religious terms. Quite obscure.

Isaiah – Presented as one scroll, but prophecies from three eras. Often known as the 'Fifth Gospel', reinterpreted and treasured by Christians. A towering book; Exile, Return, Messianic prophecies, Servant Songs...truly inspirational. No 1 Prophet!

Jeremiah – The reluctant but important prophet who predicts and witnesses Jerusalem's fall. "Can a leopard remove its spot's?" – apparently not, the leopard being the people of God. Jeremiah is thrown down a well! Important book.

Lamentations – lots of regrets in retrospect for the distraught Jewish peoples. Sad!

Ezekiel – A doom & gloom merchant (Priest/Prophet) with weird visions, many which are realised, but then Ezekiel predicts better times and is hopeful. The valley of dry bones is the famous bit. God restores life in the midst of death.

Daniel - Twelve chapters from two distinct eras. Two well known stories; 'Daniel and the Lion's Den' and the 'Fiery Furnace'. Last six chapters need decoding much like Revelation from the New Testament.

Hosea – The prophet who marries a prostitute who is unfaithful despite her chance for honour. The children are named *God Scatters*, *No Mercy* and *Not my People*! An analogy of the relationship between God and the Israelites. Love prevails, all is well, the children will be called, *Children of the Living God*, *My People* and *Shown Mercy*.

Joel – The judgement day of the Lord: swarms of locusts - is not this natural disaster God's judgement? Beating plowshares into swords and pruning hooks into spears.

Amos – Prophet who stood up for the poor, who had no voice, God hears their cries.

Obidiah – God will see that eventually the bad guys won't win. He is just.

Jonah – Whales and reluctant prophets, but great fun and well known to this day. Laugh as you read it. A humorous Jewish self-critique and recognition that God is not exclusive property of the Jews.

Micah – paints a portrait of God. God stands against evil and the nation consequently will fall, but he loves them nonetheless. Famous bit about beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks in more peaceful times to come.

Nahum – Middle East reign of terror to end as Assyria's fall is prophesied.

Habakkuk – poses the question, where is God when his people suffer? The only answer, the wicked will be judged. This prophet questions God more than deliver His message.

Zephaniah – The end of the world for Judah. Depressing stuff.

Haggai – Mainly about rebuilding the Jerusalem Temple 18 years after return from exile.

Zechariah – Mainly about rebuilding the Temple (also).

Malachi – by 450 B.C. Animal sacrifice in the Temple is not really what God wants.

## Bite-Sized Bible Guide 2 by Andrew Rowland

**New Testament** - New, because it is about a new covenant between God and man through His Son, Jesus Christ. The whole story has run out of steam until Jesus is born. (Note: Jesus = Ye Shua = God Saves). With Jesus the Christian church is born, the (old) Jewish faith is re-interpreted by Jesus and his fulfilment of many of the Old Testament prophecies of a Messiah of God. Thus the New Testament is the story of Jesus Christ, his Apostles and the early church. The Gospels are faith based life stories of Jesus, Gospel = Good News! 'So that you might believe and be saved.' Read Luke, Acts, Romans, Ephesians & 1 John first.



**Matthew** – The most Jewish of Gospels, with parallels of Jesus being the new Moses.

**Mark** – Shortest but the original gospel, written in poor Greek and drawn on by Matthew and Luke when they wrote their longer Gospels with the help of another source, now lost. The end chapter is missing and the beginning is not at Bethlehem, as one might expect, but at the River Jordan and the Baptism of Christ.

**Luke** – The most inclusive Gospel in terms of women and the underclass. Well written by an educated Greek physician who knew Peter and Paul, but not Jesus.

**John** – the Fourth and most theologically developed Gospel, written very thoughtfully slightly later than the others. It reflects upon and interprets the events it describes. A favourite gospel of many Christians, merits a life-times study.

**Acts** – Luke writes a follow-up to his Gospel following Peter and Paul and events in the early Christian church, especially the ministry of God by His Holy Spirit. Saul the arch enemy of Christ is converted on the road to Damascus and becomes his great Apostle. Required reading for new Christians.

**Romans** – The first of Saint Paul's letters; this, his greatest. Written to establish his credentials with the fledgling church in Rome. All people are enslaved by sin and fall short of God, but in Christ God has redeemed and saved all. Theology to set one thinking...

**Corinthians 1 & 2** – Several letters written to the early church at Corinth who suffer very normal problems and need Paul's strong guiding, but loving help.

**Galatians** – Paul is angry and shocked at the 'Foolish Galatians' who seem to want to work their way to salvation rather than trusting in Christ alone. Hard-hitting.

**Ephesians** – A beautiful sermonic letter. May have not been written by Paul – or to the Ephesians, but it is highly valued for its themes and language.

**Philippians** – A joyful letter from Paul in Jail. Captivating spiritually. 'At the name of Jesus every knee shall bend'.

**Colossians** – Paul defending against other, fake, religions. Paul establishes orthodoxy!

**Thessalonians 1& 2** – The vexatious question of when Jesus will return sidetracks this church.

Timothy 1& 2 – Paul instructs Timothy on how to be a good Pastor and says farewell.

Titus – Paul’s instructions to Titus in organising the Cretan church.

Philemon – Very short letter packed with interest concerning an escaped slave Onesimus, including ‘Really Useful’ word-play. Needs unpacking to be useful.

Hebrews – An extended treatise on how Jesus fulfils Hebrew scripture, especially for converted Jews who perhaps wanted to give up and go back to their origins.

James – ‘Talking the Talk’ is not enough. Genuine Christians, ‘Walk the Walk’.

1 Peter – Dealing with the tough reality of living as a Christian in a time of persecution. Let your goodness rub off on others and not their evil on you.

2 Peter – More questions about the return of Jesus, probably not written by Peter.

1 John – Battling against distorted teachings about Jesus. Jesus was truly man, not just a spirit. A widely circulated letter in the early church. Essential reading. ‘God is love’.

2 John – Perhaps a P.S. to 1 John ?

3 John – A short letter to Gaius who is suffering from his church Pastor Diotrephes!

Jude – Sin is sin. Salvation is not an excuse to sin without consequence!

Revelation – Starts with letters to seven specific churches and then by chapter 4 becomes a visionary letter to the entire church. Needs to be read with a commentary, otherwise obscure and inaccessible. Lot’s of coded language. Rome is portrayed as the ‘Great Whore, Babylon.’