

Snap-Shots of the Bible

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Whatever you do, don't read these quickie summaries and think you've got yourself a handle on the whole Bible! Remember, I'm not a PhD, ThD or any other "D"! I'm still a learner myself. So, from one learner to another, here are some observations on what you'll find in the books of the Bible, and if the books are "easy" to read, "moderate" in difficulty, or just plain "difficult" on the subjective Pam-scale. Remember, "difficult" doesn't mean you can't understand them, just that they might not be crystal clear the first (or second) time around, and "easy" doesn't mean that there won't be any sticky issues of interpretation or application!

Old Testament

The Books of the Law

Genesis – Starts with the creation of the earth. Major storyline follows the lives of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Fifty chapters. Easy reading.

Exodus – Begins in Egypt with a new king (pharaoh) coming to power who did not know Joseph and what he had done for Egypt. Tells of the enslavement of the Israelites and their eventual exodus (leaving) from Egypt by the power of God. The main human character in the book is Moses. In Exodus, we have the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai and the institution of the tabernacle with a great deal of instructions relating to it, its contents, and the priests. The low point of

the book is the making of the golden calf while Moses is receiving the Law from God. Forty chapters. Moderate reading.

Leviticus – Rules and regulations for Israel! What sacrifices were required? What was required of the priest? Of the people? In the book of Leviticus we see what was required of a sinful people in the presence of a holy God. This book is often the undoing of people who try to read through the Bible in a linear fashion. Twenty-seven chapters. Difficult reading.

Numbers – Yes, Numbers has lots of numbers as the people are "numbered" by tribe and more instructions are given on sacrifices and offerings. But for a book that starts off with less than a bang, Numbers boasts some extremely memorable accounts from the wilderness wanderings, including Miriam (the sister of Moses) being struck with leprosy, Israel sending the spies into the promised land, and Korah, a rebellious Levite, being swallowed alive by the ground (bet you never heard that story in Sunday School!). Numbers also includes such memorable stories as the bronze serpent in the wilderness and the talking donkey of Balaam. Thirty-six chapters. Moderate reading.

Deuteronomy – Moses' life is drawing to a close and the children of Israel are just about to enter the promised land under the leadership of Joshua. With this background, Moses speaks to Israel reminding them of the works of God and calling them to obedience to the covenant and laying out for them the blessings and curses as-

sociated with keeping or breaking the covenant. After giving the commands to Israel on the east side of the Jordan River, Moses dies at the end of the book, being remembered in Deuteronomy 34:10b as one whom “the Lord knew face to face.” Thirty-four chapters. Moderate reading.

History

Joshua – What an AWESOME book! God leads Joshua (the successor to Moses) and the people of Israel across the parted Jordan River and into the land which He had promised to Abraham way back in Genesis. In this historical book, we find the familiar stories of Rahab the harlot and the toppling of the walls of Jericho. We also meet the incredible spy, Caleb, who followed the Lord fully! Throughout the book, we see both the results of obedience and the results of sinful actions. Twenty-four chapters. Easy reading (with the exception of a few chapters on the division of the land among the tribes of Israel).

Judges – After the death of Joshua, individual judges raised up by God lead the people of Israel. Judges is a book of cycles. The people forget God and sin against Him. God brings judgment against them in the form of oppression from another nation. When the people wake up and cry out to God for help, God sends a deliverer for them. They typically behave well enough while the judge is alive and then upon the death of the judge fall away and get thumped again. Some of the more memorable judges include Deborah, Gideon, and Samson. Twenty-one chapters. Easy reading.

Ruth – Biography of Ruth, a Moabite woman who becomes part of the line of Christ. Her faithfulness to her Israelite mother-in-law Naomi is legendary. Ruth marries the son of Naomi when Naomi, her husband, and two sons come to live in

the land of Moab during a famine in Israel. While in Moab, Naomi’s husband dies. Later, when both of her sons die, she decides to return to Israel. Ruth insists on going with her and the rest is history. Four chapters. Easy reading.

I Samuel – The book begins with the life of Samuel, the last judge in Israel, and ends with the life and death of Saul, the first king in Israel. Although mentioned in the lineage in the book of Ruth, David makes his first appearance in I Samuel. He kills Goliath, strikes up a friendship with Jonathan (King Saul’s son), and spends much of the book fleeing from King Saul. Thirty-one chapters. Easy reading.

II Samuel – II Samuel follows the ascension to power and life of King David. It includes the story of David and Bathsheba, and the death of David’s son Absalom. Ending on an uncharacteristic low note in David’s life (right down there, so to speak, with the Bathsheba event), the book draws to a close with the wrath of God being poured out against Israel in the form of pestilence in the land for three days as a result of David’s sin of taking a census and numbering the people. Twenty-four chapters. Easy reading.

I Kings – Beginning with the death of King David, I Kings follows the kingdom of Israel under David’s son, King Solomon as he asks wisdom of God and subsequently builds the temple at Jerusalem. In spite of all his wisdom, Solomon allows foreign women and their gods to turn his heart from the Lord. Because of this, God divides the kingdom under Solomon’s arrogant son, Rehoboam, leaving David’s line to rule the Southern Kingdom of two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) often called Judah. The Northern Kingdom of the other ten tribes retains the name Israel. The remainder of the book tells of the exploits of the kings of Judah and Israel, as well as the accounts

of the prophets Elijah and Elisha. The book ends with the account of King Ahaziah in Israel and the content continues right into the beginning of II Kings. Twenty-two chapters. Easy reading.

II Kings – A continuation of I Kings, this book follows the kings and kingdom of Israel up to their defeat and deportation by Assyria in 722 BC, and follows Judah to the time of the Babylonian captivity in 586 BC. The taking up of Elijah and the ministry of Elisha are also covered in II Kings. Twenty-five chapters. Easy reading.

I Chronicles – Heavy on the genealogies for the first nine chapters, then moves into chronicling the life of King David for much of the book. Twenty-nine chapters. Difficult reading in chapters 1–9 and 23–27. Easy reading remainder of book.

II Chronicles – Beginning with Solomon and the building of the Temple, II Chronicles tells of the subsequent kings of Israel and Judah, following Judah all the way to the time of Cyrus king of Persia who conquered the Babylonian Empire. Judah had been taken into captivity in Babylon in 586 BC. Thirty-six chapters. Moderate reading.

Ezra – Ezra continues the historical account, picking up the story of the people of Judah who are in captivity in Babylon and how a group is sent back to Jerusalem by King Cyrus of Persia to rebuild the temple. Ten chapters. Moderate reading.

Nehemiah – The book of Nehemiah tells of the reconstructing of the wall of Jerusalem and the renewing of the covenant after the Babylonian exile. Thirteen chapters. Moderate reading.

Esther – This book tells the story of Queen Esther, a Jewess who unwittingly became Queen of Persia and saved her people from extermination

at the hands of the wicked Haman. Ten chapters. Easy reading.

Poetry and Wisdom Literature

Job – Why do bad things happen to good people? Even people who don't read the Bible know what it means to suffer like Job. This godly man loses everything, but remains faithful to God through severe trials and tragedies. In the end, God restores his health and possessions, but it is a long time in coming. Forty-two chapters. Difficult reading.

Psalms – What a book of worship! King David wrote many of the psalms and as you read, you'll recognize that many of our current worship songs are lifted directly from this portion of the Bible. One hundred fifty chapters. Easy reading.

Proverbs – While many of the psalms are attributed to David, his son, Solomon wrote much of Proverbs. The Proverbs give practical advice on living, not promises *per se* but the results that generally follow from a given set of actions. Thirty-one chapters. Easy reading.

Ecclesiastes – Written by Solomon, a man who had everything, Ecclesiastes concludes that all that life has to offer apart from God is vanity. Twelve chapters. Moderate reading.

Song of Solomon – A love story written by Solomon. Shows the high biblical view of physical love within marriage. Not a good place to start your children reading the Bible. Eight chapters. Moderate reading.

Major Prophets

Isaiah – Writing to the Southern Kingdom of Judah before they are taken into captivity by Babylon, Isaiah not only warns of coming judgment, but

also has much to say about the coming Messiah and the millennial kingdom. Tradition says that Isaiah was eventually martyred by being sawn in two. Sixty-six chapters. Difficult reading.

Jeremiah – Jeremiah also prophesied to Judah, but after the time of Isaiah. Jeremiah is often referred to as the weeping prophet. He continually characterizes Judah as having stiff necks and ears that will not listen. They are stubborn with evil hearts, yet we have in this prophet the view toward the new covenant when God will write His laws on the hearts of His people (Jeremiah 31) and cause them to walk in His ways. Fifty-two chapters. Difficult reading.

Lamentations – Generally attributed to Jeremiah, the book of Lamentations laments the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon. Five chapters. Moderate reading.

Ezekiel – Ezekiel prophesied to the people of Judah who had been taken into captivity in Babylon. This book features great visions of God, but the end of the book is very difficult to wade through as it is a very detailed description of a yet future temple, probably during the millennial kingdom. Forty-eight chapters. Difficult reading.

Daniel – Taken into captivity in Babylon during his youth, Daniel rose to power under different leaders, but never compromised in his unswerving devotion to his God. The book of Daniel contains some difficult prophetic sections, in addition to the well-known stories of Daniel in the lion's den and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. Twelve chapters. Mixture of easy and difficult reading.

Minor Prophets

Hosea – Don't like your job? Just consider the job this guy is given. God tells Hosea to marry a

prostitute as a picture of God's faithful love to Israel even though she is continually unfaithful to Him. Hosea prophesied to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Fourteen chapters. Moderate reading.

Joel – Joel writes to Judah, the Southern Kingdom, prior to the Babylonian captivity and speaks of locusts, destruction, the coming day of the Lord and ultimate deliverance. Three chapters. Moderate reading.

Amos – A shepherd from Judah, Amos was sent to prophesy to the Northern Kingdom of Israel prior to their fall to Assyria. Nine chapters. Moderate reading.

Obadiah – Obadiah prophesies against the descendants of Esau, the people of Edom. One chapter. Moderate reading.

Jonah – Jonah, probably the most famous of the minor prophets, is sent not to the people of Israel or Judah, but to the wicked city of Ninevah. When he decides not to do his job, Jonah is swallowed by a great fish before he finally repents and delivers the message God has for him to give. Four chapters. Easy reading.

Micah – Micah of Moresheth prophesied to Judah well before the Babylonian captivity. He speaks of coming judgment, but also of a coming ruler "From the days of eternity," who will go forth from Bethlehem. Hmm, wonder who that could be? Seven chapters. Moderate reading.

Nahum – Nahum prophesies to Judah, the Southern Kingdom, prior to the Babylonian captivity. His message is the coming judgment against Ninevah, the capital of Samaria that had conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Three chapters. Moderate reading.

Habakkuk – Habakkuk prophesies to Judah of the impending judgment coming at the hand of

Babylon. He questions why God is using evil Babylon to judge His people. Three chapters. Moderate reading.

Zephaniah – Another prophet to Judah, Zephaniah also spoke of the coming judgment by Babylon, yet looks forward to the blessings of the millennial kingdom. Three chapters. Moderate reading.

Haggai – Haggai wrote after the Babylonian exile to call the people to finish the reconstruction of the temple. Two chapters. Moderate reading.

Zechariah – Like Haggai, Zechariah called the people to finish rebuilding the temple. Zechariah is filled with many references to the coming Messiah. Fourteen chapters. Moderate reading.

Malachi – Malachi wrote after the people had returned from captivity to their homeland. Apparently conquest by their enemies was far enough in the past that the people were once again drifting away from God. Four chapters. Moderate reading.

has to do with what the kingdom of God is like. It is like a mustard seed, like leaven, like a treasure hidden in a field. Twenty-eight chapters. Easy reading.

Mark – Mark wrote to a Roman audience. He also wrote, by far, the shortest of the gospel accounts. Sixteen chapters. Easy reading.

Luke – Luke, the physician, wrote to “Theophilus,” his Greek, Gentile friend. Luke is also the author of the book of Acts. Luke features the Christmas story that may be read at your house on Christmas Eve, it always is at mine, that is found in Luke 2:1–20. Also notable in Luke is the story of Zacchaeus (the wee little man). Twenty-four chapters. Easy reading.

John – John the apostle takes a different approach in writing his gospel. He tells us that he has written “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, you may have life in His name” (John 20:31b). Unlike the synoptic Gospels that take a more chronological approach, John’s outline follows seven major signs performed by Jesus. Twenty-wonderful chapters. Easy reading.

New Testament

The Gospels

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are often termed the synoptic gospels. They each chronicle the life of Jesus Christ but aim at different audiences. In the synoptics, some accounts are recorded by all three evangelists, some by two, others by only one of the three.

Matthew – Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience. The Sermon on the Mount appears in Matthew 5–7. Much of Jesus’ teaching in this gospel

The History of the Early Church

Acts – In Acts, Luke, the author of the gospel bearing his name, recounts the birth of the church. He tells of the ascension of Christ, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the martyrdom of Stephen, the preaching of Peter, and the conversion and subsequent ministry of Paul. Twenty-eight chapters. Easy reading.

The Epistles (Letters)

Romans – In his most thorough discussion of doctrine, Paul explains the righteousness of God

in the letter to the Romans. Excellent book to ground new Christians. Sixteen chapters. Moderate reading.

I Corinthians – You think your church has problems? The church at Corinth had issues out the ears! In this letter, Paul discusses such issues as divisions in the church, problems of gross immorality, marriage and divorce, as well as other topics. Sixteen chapters. Easy reading.

II Corinthians – Really, you have to figure a church with as many problems as Corinth was going to take more than one letter! Thirteen chapters. Easy reading.

Galatians – Confused on the relationship of the Christian to the Law? Galatians is the book for you! Often considered a mini-Romans, Paul emphasizes that the way to God is through faith alone, not working your way to Him. This is the book where you'll find the fruit of the Spirit listed. Six chapters. Easy reading.

Ephesians – Paul writes the church at Ephesus telling them who they are “in Christ,” and what this means as they live their lives. Six chapters. Easy reading.

Philippians – In the letter to the Philippians, Paul covers topics including joy, unity, and humility. Four chapters. Easy reading.

Colossians – Need to brush up on the person and work of Jesus Christ? Soak in Colossians for a couple of weeks! Four chapters. Easy reading.

I Thessalonians – Unlike the Corinthian church, the church at Thessalonica was apparently “doing the job,” and Paul tells them to “excel still more.” In addition to other topics, Paul addresses the question of the day of the Lord. Five chapters. Easy reading.

II Thessalonians – Paul spends much of this epistle setting people straight on the day of the Lord. Three chapters. Moderate reading.

I Timothy – Paul packs a number of contemporary issues in this one as he addresses the topics of church leadership and women in the church. Six chapters. Easy reading.

II Timothy – Just before his death as a martyr, Paul writes to his son in the faith, Timothy, to pass the baton and remind him to guard the gospel with which he has been entrusted, and to pass it along to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Four chapters. Easy reading.

Titus – Paul writes to tell Titus to exhort the church in sound doctrine and to engage in good deeds. He is to appoint elders and instruct those in the church on how to live in a manner that honors Christ. Three chapters. Easy reading.

Philemon – This is a personal letter from Paul to Philemon regarding his runaway slave Onesimus, who had come to faith in Christ. One chapter. Easy reading.

Hebrews – The author of Hebrews exhorts what is probably a primarily Jewish church facing persecution to consider Jesus, its merciful and faithful high priest who is able to save forever. Knowing this, they are to hold fast, to draw near, and to press on to maturity. Thirteen chapters. Some difficult subject matter, but wonderful reading.

James – I always get a good “toe-steppin’” from the book of James. Sure, the first thing that many associate with James is the concept of faith and works, but it's always the teaching on the tongue that has me confessing. Five chapters. Easy reading.

I Peter – The apostle Peter speaks of topics including the relationship of the husband and wife,

and the issue of suffering in the lives of those who follow Christ. Five chapters. Easy reading.

II Peter – In a letter that has many similarities to Jude’s, Peter stresses the concept of true knowledge of God in the face of false teachers. Three chapters. Easy reading.

I John – Wondering if you really have eternal life? Read I John; that’s why the apostle John wrote this letter. Five chapters. Easy reading (even in Greek).

II John – In this short letter, John talks about walking in the truth and abiding in the teaching of Christ. One chapter. Easy reading.

III John – This is a personal letter from the apostle John to a man named Gaius dealing with a specific problem in the church. One chapter. Easy reading.

Jude – Jude, the half-brother of Jesus, writes to tell the church to contend earnestly for the faith. He warns of coming judgment citing numerous Old Testament examples yet assures that God is

able to keep them from stumbling and to make them stand before His presence blameless with great joy. One chapter. Moderate reading.

Prophecy

Revelation – The apostle John writes a prophetic book that has yet to see its ultimate fulfillment. Awesome pictures of heaven and exhortations to endure. Do I understand it all? No. Do I love it? Yes. By the way, I hear the Precept courses on Revelation are excellent! Twenty-two chapters. Difficult reading, but worthwhile if for no other reason (and there are many other reasons) than to see the descriptions of the throne of God and of heaven. Let me whet your appetite:

And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp [is] the Lamb. (Revelation 21:22–23)