

This book offers visual resources to help understand the Bible better:

- Timelines of salvation history, from Abraham to the present day.
- Maps for the most significant events in the story of the People of God up to the first expansion of the Church.
- Graphics explaining each of the books of the Old and New Testaments in the Catholic canon.

Bible Portico is thus a reference work that complements currently available editions of the Bible, handbooks on Sacred Scripture, Bible study books, Religious Education and catechism textbooks, and in general any teaching and learning material related to the Word of God.



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JESÚS GIL & JOSEÁNGEL DOMÍNGUEZ

Bible Portico

LEARNING RESOURCES FOR UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE:
TIMELINES, MAPS AND GRAPHICS FOR EACH BOOK

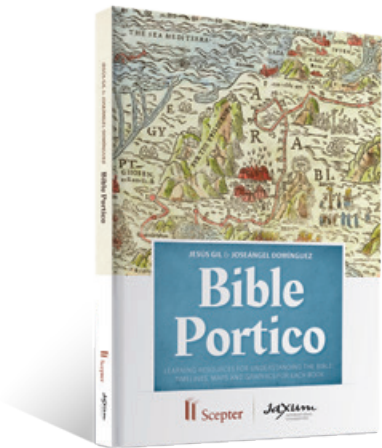


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Map in *The Bible in English*. London: Richard Harrison, 1562;

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Contents

Introduction	7
I. The Composition and Compiling of the Bible	12
II. The Canons of the Bible	14
III. God’s Covenant with Mankind	16
IV. The Lands of the Bible	18
V. Timeline of the Old Testament	20
1. The Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob	22
📍 The Journey of Abraham (c.1850 BC)	24
📖 Genesis	26
2. The Journey to the Promised Land	28
📍 The Exodus from Egypt (c.1250 BC).....	30
📖 Exodus	32
📖 Leviticus.....	33
📖 Numbers.....	34
📖 Deuteronomy	35
3. The Conquest of Canaan and the Time of the Judges	36
📍 The Tribes of Israel in Canaan (1200–1000 BC)	39
📖 Joshua	40
📖 Judges	41
📖 Ruth	41

4. Beginnings of the Monarchy	42
📖 1 and 2 Samuel.....	44
📍 The Kingdom of Solomon (970–931 BC).....	46
📖 1 Kings 1–11.....	47
📖 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles 1–9.....	48
📖 Psalms.....	50
📖 Proverbs.....	52
📖 Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth).....	53
📖 Song of Solomon.....	53
5. The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah up to their Destruction and the Exile	54
📍 Israel and Judah (931–722 BC).....	56
📖 1 Kings 12–22.....	57
📖 2 Kings.....	58
📖 2 Chronicles 10–36.....	59
📍 The Assyrian Empire (722 BC).....	60
📖 Tobit.....	62
📖 Judith.....	63
📖 Minor Prophets up to 587 BC (Amos, Hosea, Micah, Jonah, Nahum, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk).....	64
📖 Isaiah.....	66
📍 The Babylonian Empire (587 BC).....	68
📖 Jeremiah.....	70
📍 Jerusalem from Solomon’s Reign up to the Destruction of the Temple (970–587).....	72
📖 Lamentations.....	73
📖 Baruch.....	73
📖 Ezekiel.....	74
📖 Daniel.....	75
6. Return of Judah from Exile	76
📍 The Persian Empire (538 BC).....	78
📖 Ezra and Nehemiah.....	80
📖 Post-exilic Prophets (Obadiah, Joel, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi).....	81
📖 Job.....	82
📖 Esther.....	83

7. Hellenistic Era	84
📍 The Conquests of Alexander the Great (336–323 BC).....	86
📍 Hellenization of Judea (323–167 BC).....	88
📖 Books of the Maccabees.....	89
📖 Sirach (Ecclesiasticus).....	90
📖 Wisdom.....	91
8. Roman Era	92
📍 The Roman Empire (c. AD 65).....	94

VI. Timeline of the New Testament..... 96

1. First Roman Era	98
🔍 The Public Life of Jesus	100
📍 Roman Judea (63 BC – AD 39).....	102
📖 The Gospel According to Matthew.....	103
📖 The Gospel According to Mark.....	104
📖 The Gospel According to Luke.....	105
📖 The Gospel According to John.....	106
📍 Jerusalem in Jesus’s Time.....	107
🔍 The Church in the First Century	108
📍 The Apostolic Journeys of St Paul (AD 45–58).....	110
📖 Acts of the Apostles.....	112
<i>The First Writings Attributed to St Paul</i>	
📖 Letters to the Thessalonians.....	113
<i>Long Letters by St Paul</i>	
📖 1 and 2 Corinthians.....	114
📖 Galatians.....	115
📖 Romans.....	115
<i>St Paul’s Captivity Letters</i>	
📖 Philippians.....	116
📖 Philemon.....	116
📖 Colossians.....	116
📖 Ephesians.....	116
<i>St Paul’s Pastoral Letters</i>	
📖 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus.....	117

<i>The Last Book Added to the Pauline Writings</i>	
■ Letter to the Hebrews	117
<i>The Catholic Epistles</i>	
■ James.....	118
■ 1 and 2 Peter	118
■ 1, 2 and 3 John	119
■ Jude.....	119
<i>The Last Book in the New Testament</i>	
■ Revelation or Apocalypse.....	119
2. Second Roman Era.....	120
3. Byzantine Era.....	122
4. The Rashidun, Umayyad, Abbasid and Fatimid Caliphates	124
5. The Crusader Kingdoms.....	126
6. The Mamluk and Ottoman Periods.....	128
7. Palestine and the State of Israel.....	130
Bibliography and Recommended Reading.....	132

Introduction

From the early 12th century, French cathedrals began to be built with porticos or porches at the main entrance filled with reliefs and statues, teaching the Faith through art. This feature spread to other countries, so that as Christians in Western Europe entered their churches, they could see their Faith graphically represented; these Romanesque and Gothic portals thus helped them to prepare for the encounter with God they were about to experience inside the church, especially when they participated in the Eucharist. The entrances in places such as Vézelay and Chartres in France, Compostela in Spain, and Cologne in Germany have offered this experience to pilgrims from all over the world for centuries. In Barcelona, to give a more recent example, the *Sagrada Família* basilica designed by Gaudì and under construction from the late 19th century until the 21st, took up and reinvented this legacy of the great medieval churches.

The title of this book expresses the authors' desire for it to act like those great porches: its aim is to make different aspects of the Bible graphically visual. Salvation history, as understood and taught by the Catholic Church down through the centuries, is here set out in timelines, maps and graphics for each book in the Bible, to help believers prepare for an encounter with the Word of God.

The cover image shows how effective maps and timelines are. It is from an explanation of the book of Numbers published in a 16th-century Bible preserved in the National Library of Israel (*The Bible in English*, London: Richard

Harrison, 1562), based on a map by the Frenchman Guillaume Postel (1510–1581), an outstanding Christian Hebraist, diplomat and distributor of astronomical and cabalistic texts. His map illustrates the Israelites' journey with drawings of the main episodes from Exodus, citing references to the relevant chapters of the book.

There are countless editions of the Bible, including educational ones with graphics, maps, images and glossaries. There are also resource books offering material for Scripture-related teaching, like Biblical timelines, historical atlases, and reading guides with notes on each book. *Bible Portico* brings these visual resources together in one book, but never forgets that its role is merely supportive: what really matters is always for every believer to have their own encounter with God's Word, and to be able to read the Old and New Testaments within the Church's Tradition, and understand them.

As it is intended to complement the Bible text and other studies or handbooks, *Bible Portico* has no full-text pages apart from this Introduction. Nevertheless, this is no coffee-table book. It might look like one at first glance, but some of the double-page spreads contain so much concentrated information that it will take considerable time and attention to read them all.

The Bible as a library

The word "Bible" is derived from the Greek word *biblia*, meaning "books" in the plural. This underlines the fact that it was not written by one author from beginning to end, but is a whole library in itself – a collection of books belonging to different literary genres, written by people from different times, cultures and historical backgrounds.

Bible scholars agree that the final composition of many of the books of the Old Testament began in Babylon during the exile from Judea (starting from 586 BC) and continued after the return to Jerusalem (from the edict of Cyrus, in 539/538 BC). The composition process used previous oral and written accounts. The earliest texts of the New Testament date from AD 50 or 51, and the latest could date from as late as the beginning of the 2nd century.

Just as the composition of the books was spread over centuries, so too it took time for the community to discern



Map from Richard Harrison's 16th-century English Bible. It locates the main events of Exodus and the Israelites' journeying in the desert until they reach the plains of Moab – crossing the Red Sea, being fed with manna,

overcoming Amalek, Moses receiving the tablets of the Law on Mount Horeb and the Covenant with the people, the golden calf and the bronze serpent.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF ISRAEL, ERAN LAOR
CARTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION
(SHELFMARK Pal 575)

what was or was not to be accepted as Sacred Scripture, God's word addressed to mankind. Since this double process (the composition process of the books and their acceptance as writings inspired by God) is examined in Biblical studies, a timeline of **The Composition and Compiling of the Bible** is given (☞ p. 12).

It is also relevant that this process resulted in several different collections of books. The different **Biblical Canons** are shown together (☞ p. 14), to enable comparison of the parallels and divergences between the Hebrew Bible, its Greek translation, and the Christian Bibles.

Overview of salvation history

The unifying thread that runs through the various books of Sacred Scripture is that all of them make God known. In their different literary genres, they each aim to give an answer to the question: If God has revealed himself as the Creator of a good world that he loves and has left to the care of beings created in his own image and likeness, why does evil exist? The Bible's answer is not an argument but an account of the history of salvation. Evil exists because of man's disobedience to God's plans, but God himself takes the initiative to put an end to injustice, suffering and death. To do so he first chooses Abraham and prepares a Covenant with him; then, through Moses, he makes this Covenant with his descendants, and finally offers salvation to the whole human race, with a new and eternal Covenant, through Jesus Christ. This is detailed in an overview of **God's Covenant with Mankind** (🔗 p. 16).

In order to give a clearer picture, the overview deliberately does not include dates or biblical references. But salvation history is real history: God makes himself known and offers his friendship to people living in real places at specific times, and all of this is set down and proclaimed in books inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Next comes a presentation of **The Lands of the Bible** (🔗 p. 18). It is followed by a general **Timeline of the Old Testament** (🔗 p. 20), from the Patriarchs to the time of Jesus Christ: God's Covenant with Israel, as told in the Hebrew Bible, which is the Christian Old Testament. The story of the Old Testament can be divided into eight periods (🔗 pp. 22–95). For each period, three features are given:

- A detailed timeline, plus a list of the books in the Bible that relate to that period, not according to when they were written, but because of their content, the time they are set in, or the author they are attributed to in the texts themselves. For the historical books it is easier to establish these connections; for the poetical, wisdom and prophetic books they are sometimes only approximate.
- Maps, indicated in the list of Contents by the location icon 📍.
- Infographics about each book in the Bible, indicated in the list of Contents by the bookmark icon 📖. They

The genres of the Bible

Recognizing the literary genres of the books of Sacred Scripture helps grasp the authors' intentions in writing them and so understand the deep truth they wished to pass on. Each book also needs to be read within the unified setting of the whole Bible, and within the faith and living Tradition of the Church (see Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum, no. 12).

include dates of the oldest extant manuscripts for each book. This information, gathered by *National Geographic Magazine*, shows the reliability of the sources used by scholars to establish the texts of Sacred Scripture. The central band of the graphics highlights common themes — Sacrifice, Law, Anointing, Temple, Prophet, King, Priest — which are marked by a compass icon 📏.

A new and eternal Covenant

Salvation history reaches its zenith with the death and Resurrection of Jesus. “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets,” says the opening of the Letter to the Hebrews; “but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” (Heb 1:1–2).

This section begins with a general **Timeline of the New Testament** in Jesus Christ (🔗 p. 96). It is an open-ended timeline because salvation history continues in the life of the Church and will continue until the end of time, when Jesus returns at his Second Coming.

This section adopts the standpoint of the Holy Land and its historical periods: the **Roman Era**, in two parts, before and after the destruction of Jerusalem ordered by Hadrian (🔗 pp. 98 and 120); the **Byzantine Era** (🔗 p. 122); **The Rashidun, Umayyad, Abbasid and Fatimid Caliphates** (🔗 p. 124); **The Crusader Kingdoms** (🔗 p. 126); **The Mamluk and Ottoman Periods** (🔗 p. 128); and the current situation of **Palestine and the State of Israel** (🔗 p. 130).

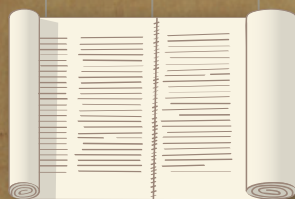
Between the first and second Roman eras come two more detailed timelines: one on the three years of **The Public Life of Jesus** (🔗 p. 100), which is necessarily approximate; and one on the development of **The Church in the First Century** (🔗 p. 108). These are accompanied by maps and infographics for each book of the New Testament.

This book ends with a suggested **Bibliography and Recommended Reading** (🔗 p. 132), listing some editions of the Bible, and other books, which *Bible Portico* hopes to complement usefully. ■

The Composition and Compiling of the Bible

Down through many centuries, believers handed on traditions, histories, and teachings, and wrote them in books inspired by God. Those writings were gathered and later translated into other languages. That is how the Bible as we know it was put together.

700 BC 600 BC 500 BC 400 BC 300 BC 200 BC 100 BC AD 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900 1000 1100 1200 1300 1400 1500 1600



The oldest existing fragments of the Old Testament, from the 2nd century BC, are written on rolls of papyrus.

500–300 BC

The final version of many of the books is produced during the Babylonian exile and after the exiles' return to Judah.

640–609 BC

During the reign of Josiah in Judah, the "book of the Law" is rediscovered. This means that there are already written traditions before the Babylonian exile.

2 Kings 22
2 Chronicles 34

c.445–398 BC

Nehemiah, governor of Jerusalem, gathers the people and the scribe Ezra reads "the book of the Law of Moses" to them.

Nehemiah 8

c.250 BC – AD 100

Formation of the Greek Bible. The Hebrew Bible is translated into Greek (the Pentateuch is finished c.285–246 BC); this Greek "Septuagint" also includes books composed in Greek. This is the basis of the Catholic Old Testament. The New Testament is composed in Greek during the 1st century AD.

190–180 BC

Composition of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), translated into Greek 50 or 60 years later. In the prologue of the translation the author refers to "the reading of the Law and the Prophets and the other books of our fathers."

Sirach, Prologue

c.AD 50–51

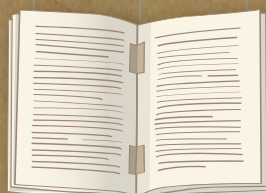
Date of St Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, making it the oldest document in the New Testament. Others may be written as late as the beginning of the 2nd century.

c.AD 180–200

Evidence of awareness of a Christian canon: St Irenaeus of Lyons, and later Origen, testify that the Christian community accepts the four Gospels and only those four.

c.AD 70–90

Rabbinical discussions about the canon at Jamnia, which later enable the books of the *Tanakh* or Hebrew Bible to be defined.



AD 367

Earliest appearance of the list of books of the New Testament exactly as we have it today, although in a different order, in a letter by St Athanasius of Alexandria.

AD 382

St Jerome embarks on his Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate.

AD 393

The provincial council of Hippo (in present-day Algeria) lists the canon of the Catholic Church (except the Apocalypse) which will be reproduced later by the Ecumenical Councils of Florence (1442) and Trent (1546).

AD 500–1500

Rabbis (Masoretes) add vowel-signs and other symbols to the Hebrew Bible (written in consonants alone) to preserve correct reading and pronunciation.

AD 1517

Start of the Protestant Reformation. Reformers raise objections to some Catholic teachings and demand changes in Church liturgy and theology. One of their rallying-cries is for a return to Bible in its pristine form, so that they limit the canon of the Old Testament to the *Tanakh*.

AD 1054

Differences between the Patriarch of Constantinople and the Pope become so acute that they result in the Great Schism.

AD 1455

The Gutenberg Bible.

AD 1527

Santes Pagnini's Latin translation of the Bible is the first to divide the chapters into verses.

AD 1551

Robert Estienne revises Pagnini's division into verses: all modern editions use his version.

AD 1611

King James Version of the Bible.

The Canons of the Bible

The *Tanakh*: the Hebrew Bible

Judaism calls its 24 sacred books the *Tanakh*. This is an acronym formed by the initial letters of the three sets of books: the *Torah* or Law; the *Nevi'im* or Prophets; and the *Ketuvim* or Writings.



The canon of the Rabbinical Bible (the Hebrew Bible) was probably fixed around the 2nd century AD.

Torah (Law, instruction, teaching)

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy

Nevi'im (Prophets)

Former Prophets (*Nevi'im Rishonim*)

- Joshua
- Judges
- Samuel
- Kings

Latter Prophets (*Nevi'im Akharonim*)

- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Ezekiel
- Twelve minor prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi)

Ketuvim (Writings)

Poetic Books

- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Job

“Five Rolls” (*Chamesh megillot*)

- Song of Solomon
- Ruth
- Lamentations
- Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth)
- Esther

Historical Books

- Daniel
- Ezra-Nehemiah
- Chronicles

Septuagint: the Greek Bible

The Greek translation of the *Tanakh*, made between the 3rd century BC and the 1st century AD, differs from the present Hebrew version in several respects. It accepts more writings, some written directly in Greek, as sacred; the books come in a different order; some are split into two; each of the 12 minor prophets is counted as one book; and the books of Esther and Daniel include additional passages. The total number of books are the 46 books of the Catholic Old Testament.

Pentateuch and Historical Books

- | | | |
|---------------|----------------|---|
| • Genesis | • Joshua | Each pair is presented as one single book in the Hebrew Bible |
| • Exodus | • Judges | |
| • Leviticus | • Ruth | |
| • Numbers | • 1 Samuel | |
| • Deuteronomy | • 2 Samuel | |
| | • 1 Kings | |
| | • 2 Kings | |
| | • 1 Chronicles | |
| | • 2 Chronicles | |
| | • Ezra | |
| | • Nehemiah | Not included in the Hebrew Bible |
| | • Tobit | |
| | • Judith | |
| | • Esther | |
| | • 1 Maccabees | |
| | • 2 Maccabees | |

Poetic and Wisdom Books

- Job
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth)
- Song of Solomon
- Wisdom
- Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) — Not included in the Hebrew Bible

Prophetic Books

- Isaiah
 - Jeremiah
 - Lamentations
 - Baruch — Not included in the Hebrew Bible
 - Ezekiel
 - Daniel
 - Hosea
 - Joel
 - Amos
 - Obadiah
 - Jonah
 - Micah
 - Nahum
 - Habakkuk
 - Zephaniah
 - Haggai
 - Zechariah
 - Malachi
- All 12 are one single book in the Hebrew Bible

The list of books accepted as genuinely sacred by each community of believers, and the order in which they come, is called the “canon”.

The Catholic Bible

The Bible of the early Christians was the Septuagint. The authors of the New Testament, writing in Greek, took it as their reference. However, the books ended up in a different order. Just as the People of Israel had had to sift the writings that contained God’s revelation, the Church too had to discern the truthfulness of the stories about the life of Jesus and the teachings of his Apostles, and eventually agreed on the 27 books that now form the New Testament canon.

OLD TESTAMENT

Pentateuch

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy

Historical Books

- | | |
|----------------|------------------------|
| • Joshua | Later Historical Books |
| • Judges | |
| • Ruth | |
| • 1 Samuel | |
| • 2 Samuel | |
| • 1 Kings | |
| • 2 Kings | |
| • 1 Chronicles | |
| • 2 Chronicles | |
| • Ezra | |
| • Nehemiah | |

Poetic and Wisdom Books

- Job
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth)
- Song of Solomon
- Wisdom
- Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)

Prophetic Books

- | | |
|----------------|--------------|
| Major | Minor |
| • Isaiah | • Hosea |
| • Jeremiah | • Joel |
| • Lamentations | • Amos |
| • Baruch | • Obadiah |
| • Ezekiel | • Jonah |
| • Daniel | • Micah |
| | • Nahum |
| | • Habakkuk |
| | • Zephaniah |
| | • Haggai |
| | • Zechariah |
| | • Malachi |

NEW TESTAMENT

Gospels

- Matthew
- Mark
- Luke
- John

Acts of the Apostles

Writings attributed to St Paul

- Romans
- 1 Corinthians
- 2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- 1 Thessalonians
- 2 Thessalonians
- 1 Timothy
- 2 Timothy
- Titus
- Philemon

Letter to the Hebrews

Catholic Epistles

- James
- 1 Peter
- 2 Peter
- 1 John
- 2 John
- 3 John
- Jude

Apocalypse

The Bible of the Orthodox Churches

For the Old Testament, they accept the Septuagint plus other writings considered apocryphal by the Catholic Church including Psalm 151, 2 Ezra, 3 and 4 Maccabees (and for some, Enoch and Jubilees), ending up with a longer canon of 53 books.

The Bible of the Protestant Communities

They recognize the *Tanakh* as valid, and the additional 7 books that passed from the Septuagint into the Catholic Old Testament as apocryphal. However, they accept the order and distribution into 39 books of the Greek version: Pentateuch, the Historical books, the Wisdom books and the Prophetic books.

The New Testament canon is currently agreed on by all Christians, although the Ethiopian Orthodox add eight more books in their “Broader Canon”.

God's Covenant with Mankind

The Bible, though written by men, is not presented as a human answer to religious questions, but as the true revelation of God and his plans.

Creation

Mankind is placed in a **paradise** created for his enjoyment and for him to tend. God the Creator reveals himself to man, speaks with him as a friend, and gives him a task in this world: to rule it and care for it.

After Noah the generations go by and men again become proud, building a great tower and believing themselves independent of their Creator. God confuses their language and mankind scatters.

Evil Appears

Tempted by the devil, the man and the woman think that they can be happy without their Creator. By rejecting God's plans, they bring evil, division and death into the world. But God does not abandon them and promises that a **descendant** of the woman will be the Savior.

Covenant with Noah

Evil grows so much that God repents of having created mankind. Before destroying it he finds one good man, Noah. After the Flood God makes a **Covenant** with Noah and his sons.

Abraham

To be able to bring mankind together again God chooses one of Noah's descendants: Abraham.

God promises Abraham a **land** for his possession, a new world to rule and care for.

God promises Abraham that he will make his **descendants** into a people as numerous as the stars in the sky.

God renews his **Covenant** with mankind through Abraham. He will be their God and Abraham's descendants will be his people.

The Patriarchs

God renews his **Covenant** with Abraham's son

Isaac;

and with Isaac's son

Jacob;

and with Jacob's 12 sons and their descendants, who become a nation:

Israel.

- Reuben
- Simeon
- Levi
- Judah
- Dan
- Naphtali
- Gad
- Asher
- Issachar
- Zebulun
- Joseph, with his sons
- Manasseh
- and Ephraim
- Benjamin

Exodus from Egypt

After many generations the **people** of Israel has grown but is enslaved in Egypt. God intervenes again: he calls a man,

Moses,

and tells him to guide the people to the **land** he promised to Abraham. In the desert, God establishes his **Covenant** with Israel. The people promise to be faithful, but turn away from God again and again. The Israelites wander in the desert for 40 years until Moses' death.

Conquest of Canaan

The settlement of the tribes of Israel in Canaan is not a peaceful process and takes a long time. First it is led by

Joshua;

later by judges like

Deborah, Gideon and Samson;

by prophets like

Samuel;

and by kings:

Saul, David and Solomon.

In Jerusalem, Solomon builds a Temple which is a sign of God's presence among his people and the place where Israel offers sacrifices. When Solomon dies the Kingdom is divided in two:

The Kingdom of Israel in the north, whose capital is Shechem, Tirzah and Samaria, successively. Its kings are not faithful to the **Covenant**. It is conquered by the Assyrian Empire and its inhabitants exiled.

The Kingdom of Judah in the south, whose capital is Jerusalem. Its kings, faithful and unfaithful to the **Covenant** with God, are always David's descendants. Conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, its inhabitants are exiled for a time.

God sends the prophets

Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah

and others to recall God's promises to the people and prevent them from falling into idolatry.

The New Covenant

After the return from Babylon, Israel comes to understand that God is patient, compassionate, merciful, and faithful to his word. And God keeps his promises. From the descendants of Abraham, the tribe of Judah and the family of David,

Jesus

is born: the eternal Son of the Father, God made man. By his death and Resurrection Jesus Christ establishes a new and eternal **Covenant** which restores mankind to friendship with God.

With Pentecost begins the time of the **Church**, the new **people** of God: the new **Covenant** will continue to bring salvation to the whole **world** until the culmination of history with the Second Coming of Christ.

The Lands of the Bible

1 The Promised Land

Canaan, Israel, Judah, Yehud, Judea, Palestine, the Holy Land... Different names for the same place: the strip of land between the Mediterranean Sea and the River Jordan, which was the only way for the Nilotic civilizations to expand northward, and the civilizations of the Fertile Crescent to expand southward. God promised Abraham that his descendants would possess this land, and God chose it for his Word to become man.

2 Babylon

Abraham's native land, but also the power which, in the 6th century BC, conquered the Kingdom of Judah, destroyed the Temple of Jerusalem, and exiled the leaders of the people.

3 Egypt

In the Bible, Egypt is mainly the scene of the Exodus. Additionally, in the time of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Egypt disputed regional hegemony with the Northern powers. In the New Testament, St Matthew relates that the Holy Family took refuge in Egypt for a time during Jesus's infancy.

4 Nineveh

The capital of the Assyrian Empire, which conquered the Northern Kingdom and its capital Samaria in 722 BC.

5 Persia

The expansion of the Persian Empire in the 6th century BC ended the decades-long domination of the region by Babylon. Cyrus, King of Persia, gave permission for deportees from Jerusalem to return home in 539/538 BC. Yehud (Judah) was a province of the Persian Empire for two centuries.

6 Syria

The Acts of the Apostles state that it was in Antioch in Syria that the disciples were first called "Christians". The scattering of the first faithful after the martyrdom of St Stephen took the Gospel to Phoenicia (present-day Lebanon), Cyprus, and Syria.

7 Asia Minor

Many Christian communities flourished here (present-day Turkey): some were founded by St Paul and St Barnabas on their first missionary journey. In the Apocalypse St John sends messages to seven of these churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

8 Rome

The last part of the Acts of the Apostles gives a detailed account of St Paul's journey to Rome as a prisoner. St Luke ends his account with St Paul's arrival there. From Rome, capital of the Empire, the paths of the Gospel are opened to the whole world.



Historical Ages in the Mediterranean and the Near East

BRONZE AGE 3000–1200 BC

Bronze used for tool-making; appearance of writing; development of urban life.

IRON AGE 1200–500 BC

Marks the end of prehistory in the Mediterranean.

2200 BC 2100 BC 2000 BC 1900 BC 1800 BC 1700 BC 1600 BC 1500 BC 1400 BC 1300 BC 1200 BC 1100 BC 1000 BC 900 BC 800 BC 700 BC 600 BC 500 BC 400 BC 300 BC 200 BC 100 BC AD

Timeline of the Old Testament

1 The Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

c.1850 BC
Abraham arrives in the land of Canaan.

c.1750 BC
Joseph and his brothers move to Egypt.

2 The Journey to the Promised Land

c.1250 BC
Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt through the Red Sea, guided by Moses.

3 The Conquest of Canaan and the Time of the Judges

c.1200–1030 BC
Conquest of Canaan by the Israelites.

c.1200–1030 BC
Israel fights for control of Canaan with small independent kingdoms: Amorites, Hittites, Jebusites, Perizzites, Hivites, Philistines, Amalekites.

c.1500–1200 BC
City-states centering on Egypt.

4 Beginnings of the Monarchy

c.1030–1010 BC
Saul is King of Israel.

c.1010–970 BC
David is King of Israel.

970–931 BC
Solomon is King of Israel.

931–911 BC
Rehoboam is King of Judah (Southern Kingdom).

928–907 BC
Jeroboam is King of Israel (Northern Kingdom).

5 The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah up to their Destruction and the Exile

722 BC
Tiglath-Pileser III, King of Assyria, conquers Israel and its capital, Samaria. Its population is taken captive by Sargon II.

587–539 BC
Province of the Babylonian Empire.

c.1030–587 BC
Kings in Israel. The North under Assyrian control from 722 BC.

539–332 BC
Province of the Persian Empire.

6 Return of Judah from Exile

539/538 BC
Cyrus, King of Persia, frees those deported from Jerusalem.

520–515 BC
Rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

587–586 BC
Nebuchadnezzar conquers Jerusalem. Second deportation, and destruction of the Temple.

323–198 BC
Ruled by the Hellenistic dynasty of the Ptolemies of Egypt.

332–323 BC
Empire of Alexander the Great.

198–167 BC
Ruled by the Syro-Hellenistic Seleucids.

7 Hellenistic Era

198 BC
Judea falls under the control of the Seleucids.

167–141 BC
Rebellion of the Maccabees.

8 Roman Era

63 BC
The Roman general Pompey conquers Jerusalem.

40–4 BC/AD 2
Herod the Great is King of Judea.

63 BC
Roman rule.

141–63 BC
Independent Jewish rule in Judah.

Crossroad of Civilizations

The history of Israel is intertwined with the histories of the peoples and civilizations struggling for hegemony in the region: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, the Empire of Alexander the Great, Rome.

1 The Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

2600 BC 2500 BC 2400 BC 2300 BC 2200 BC 2100 BC 2000 BC 1900 BC 1800 BC 1700 BC 1600 BC 1500 BC

Events in Other Civilizations

2580–2560 BC
Completion of the Great Pyramid of Giza, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

2400–2200 BC
Stonehenge built.

c.2000 BC
Ziggurat of Ur of the Chaldees built.

c.1792 BC
Hammurabi, King of Babylon, draws up the Code of Hammurabi, the oldest legal code found to date.

c.1750 BC
Completion of the Palace of Knossos, capital of the Minoan Civilization in Crete.

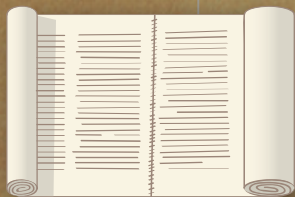
c.1600 BC
Decline of the Cycladic civilization which had flourished in the islands of the Aegean.

Events among the People of Israel

c.1850 BC
Abraham arrives in the land of Canaan.
Genesis 12

c.1750 BC
Joseph and his brothers move to Egypt.
Genesis 42

Books of the Bible for this Period



Genesis

Genesis 1–11: Creation and first ages of mankind.

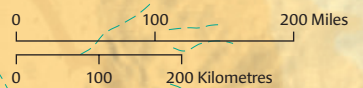
Genesis 12–50: Origin and development of the Chosen People: Abraham and his descendants.

THE JOURNEY OF Abraham

c. 1850 BC



Route reflected in the story of Abraham



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Genesis | Gen

Literary genres

Genesis includes several genres:

- **Allegory and sapiential (wisdom):** The creation and early stages of mankind (chapters 1 to 11) is a figurative account situated outside historical time.
- **Legend:** The story of the chosen people starting from Abraham (chapters 12 to 50) is based on real facts and people, but with some aspects imaginatively magnified.
- **Genealogy:** Genesis includes ten series of ancestors / descendants, that structure the story and give it a sense of progression.
- **Poetry:** Such as the blessings of Isaac (chapter 27) and Jacob (chapter 49).

Composition history

The final version of the Book of Genesis seems to have been completed around 400 BC, after the Babylonian exile. The authors started off from ancient traditions handed down from generation to generation orally and in writing. In the 19th century, four strands were proposed:

- **Elohist:** From the Northern Kingdom before its destruction in the 8th century BC.
- **Deuteronomist:** Taking shape in Judah during the 7th-century BC religious reform.
- **Yahwist:** The narratives at the start of Deuteronomy.
- **Priestly:** Produced by Israelite priests in exile in Babylon.

But scholars now consider it impossible to trace the traditions with any certainty.

Teaching

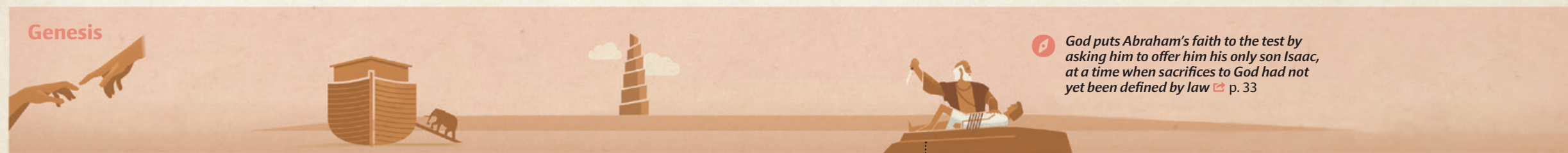
In the first chapters, Genesis offers an answer to the origin of evil and its presence throughout history: it does not come from God, who created the world full of goodness and mankind in his image and likeness to care for it; evil comes from humans, tempted by the devil. To this teaching, other truths are added, in sapiential or allegorical language:

- the existence of only one God, who transcends the created world and is its supreme ruler;
- the relationship of love and friendship he wishes to set up by revealing himself to mankind;
- and the unity of the human race.

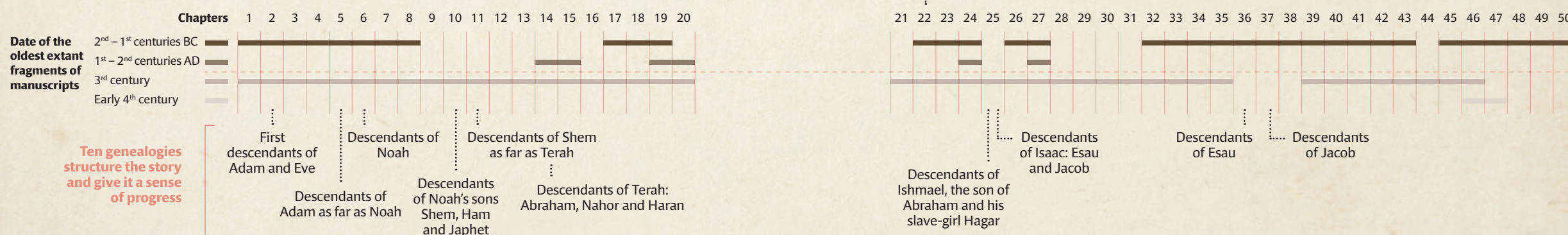
There is also a promise of salvation, which begins with the calling of Abraham, the first step in God's choosing of Israel. Abraham follows his call in total obedience, to the point of consenting to sacrifice his son Isaac.

Key concepts

- **Creation:** It is the beginning of the history of salvation and the basis of all God's salvific plans, which culminate in Jesus Christ.
- **Blessing:** God affirms the goodness and beauty of his work of creation by blessing it. People also bless. Blessings remain forever with those who receive them.
- **Sacrifice:** The worship of God is an acknowledgment that he is Creator and Lord. From the Christian viewpoint the sacrifices of the Old Testament are an image of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross.
- **Covenant:** On his own initiative, God establishes covenants with men, promises that do not demand a return – pure grace. God promises Noah that he will not punish mankind again; to Abraham he promises divine help, numerous descendants, and the land of Canaan.



God puts Abraham's faith to the test by asking him to offer him his only son Isaac, at a time when sacrifices to God had not yet been defined by law p. 33



Ten genealogies structure the story and give it a sense of progress

Chapters 1-3
By contrast with the Babylonian myths, the account of the origins of the world and mankind relate that there is only one God, creator of all that exists, who transcends his creation, and who seeks a relationship of friendship with mankind.

- **The origin of evil:** God sees that everything he created is very good. However, the initial harmony between mankind, nature, animals and God is broken by the sin of our first parents.

Chapters 4-11
God's free choice is shown from the start, when he prefers Abel's sacrifice to Cain's. As the human race grows, evil spreads, until God repents of creating mankind and sends the Flood. Only Noah and his family are saved. After the Flood the great family of mankind is divided up according to its different languages.

Chapters 12-25
Abraham, Sarah and their family are the first-fruits of mankind freed from the evils of idolatry and the confusion evidenced at Babel. Their story shows how God holds to his choice and reaffirms his promises of descendants and a land to live in.

Chapters 25-26
Almost everything referring to Isaac and Rebecca is told as part of the story of Abraham (in the previous chapters) or Jacob (in the remaining ones). In practice, Isaac is the link that transmits God's promises from Abraham to Jacob.

Chapters 27-37
The story of Jacob draws on two cycles of traditions: one relating to Jacob and Esau, and the other to Jacob and Laban. It is set out as follows:

- stories about the acquisition of the birthright;
- flight from his brother and the Promised Land, marriage to Leah and Rachel;
- Jacob's return, meeting with his brother, and settling of Jacob in Canaan and Esau in Edom.

Chapters 37-50
The story of the sons of Jacob, centering on Joseph and the vicissitudes that lead Israel into Egypt. This prepares for the account of the Exodus. At the end of the book the blessings of Jacob on his 12 sons are prophetic: they show the pre-eminence of the tribe of Judah and allude to its connection with the Messiah.

2 The Journey to the Promised Land

1450
BC

Events in Civilizations near Israel

c.1450 BC

Region of Phoenicia conquered by Egypt under Thutmose III (c. 1479–1425 BC). Egyptian Empire reaches its greatest extent.

1400
BC

1350
BC

1353–1336 BC

Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten), Pharaoh of Egypt, introduces short-lived monotheistic worship of the sun-god Aten.

1300
BC

1250
BC

1279–1213 BC

Rameses II is Pharaoh of Egypt.

1200
BC

1200 BC
Trojan War.

Events among the People of Israel

Books of the Bible for this Period



Exodus

Story of the departure from Egypt.

Leviticus

Collection of laws.

Numbers

A mixture of legal texts and the story of Israel's wandering in the desert.

Deuteronomy

Historical narratives, discourses, exhortations, and a second collection of laws.

c.1250 BC

Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt through the Red Sea, guided by Moses.




Exodus 14

The Exodus

FROM EGYPT

c.1250 BC



-  Possible route reflected in the Exodus story
-  Possible alternative routes
-  Line of border fortresses

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Exodus | Ex

Literary genres

- **Narrative**, especially the first 19 chapters, which relate the people's departure from Egypt and the arrival at Sinai.
- **Legislative**: The Ten Commandments and the Covenant laws, regulating the whole of Israel's life.

History

- **Content**: Narrates events dating from about 1250 BC.
- **Composition**: Traditionally ascribed to Moses. Some references suggest versions that predate Israel's arrival in Canaan, but the text must have been finalized during the Babylonian exile (586–538 BC).

Teaching

God reveals himself as One and Omnipotent, and also as close to mankind and coming in search of them. Moses' relationship with God is one of friendship, speaking with him face to face, and he thus brings to the people a Covenant which is both a Law and a promise of freedom.

Key concepts

- **Promise**: God reveals himself as faithful to his word.
- **Prophet**: God promises Moses that a prophet like him will come, whom God will call his son and treat as his son.
- **Law**: The *Torah* is the sign of God's special love for his People.

Leviticus | Lev

Literary genre

- **Legislative**: Israel's laws are set out in some chapters of Exodus (the Laws of the Covenant) and Deuteronomy (the Deuteronomic Code) but especially throughout the book of Leviticus.

History

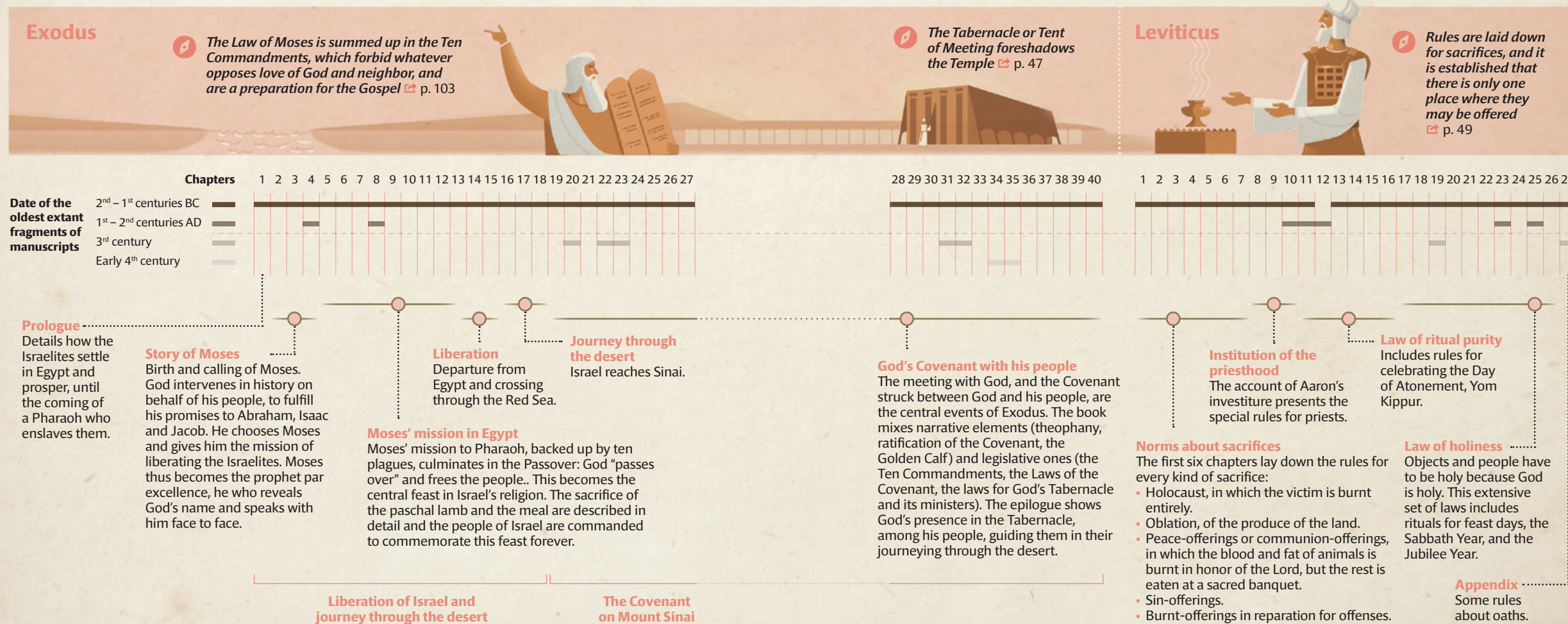
- **Content**: Narrates the people of Israel's time at Sinai, in the 13th century BC.
- **Composition**: Leviticus includes legal codes from several eras; its high point is the Law of Holiness, which contains extremely ancient elements. Leviticus seems to have reached its final form during the Babylonian exile (586–538 BC) and immediately afterwards.

Teaching

Leviticus was the ritual book of Jewish liturgy: it laid down how to offer sacrifices, make consecrations or offerings, and celebrate feasts. These norms contain and transmit a profoundly religious sense of life: "Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy" (Lev 19:2).

Key concepts

- **Holiness**: This is the sphere of God, who no longer speaks from the mountain but dwells in the midst of his people, and who does not tolerate impurity, disobedience, or anything connected with evil and death.
- **Priests**: They are instituted to offer God gifts and sacrifices for sins.



Numbers | Num

Literary genres

- **Statistics:** Censuses ordered by God, showing that the people of Israel belongs to him.
- **Legislation:** Several lengthy legal texts.
- **Narrative:** Relates Israel's journeyings from the Sinai Desert to the plains of Moab, before entering Canaan.

History

- **Content:** Narrates events c.13th century BC.
- **Composition:** Like all the Pentateuch, it contains very ancient traditions, which were given their final form during the Babylonian exile or shortly afterwards.

Teaching

The desert is a place of testing. The people of Israel are tempted to rebel against God who brought them there. But the desert is also the place where Israel learns about God's mercy and faithfulness. Despite his people's rebelliousness, God fulfills his plan of bringing them to the Promised Land.

Key concept

- **Cloud:** The presence of God accompanying and guiding his people is symbolized by the cloud that covers the Tent of Meeting. Israel organizes its camps around this tent. They travel with God's blessing, as a people consecrated to him.

Deuteronomy | Deut

Literary genres

- **Speeches:** Three long speeches by Moses, representing his testament.
- **Narrative:** Relates the last stage of the Israelites' journeying under Moses, as they camp in Moab.
- **Legislation:** What looks like a second set of laws is in reality a re-presentation of the Law of the Covenant.

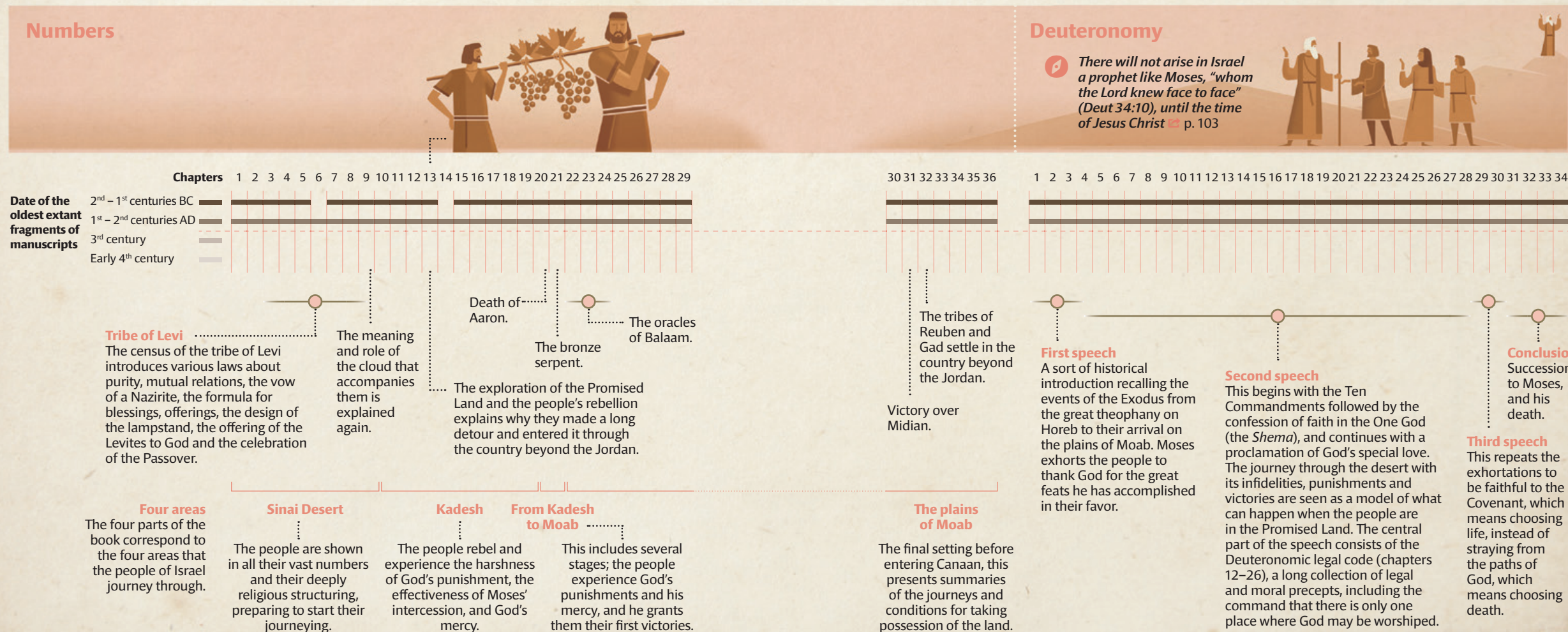
History

- **Content:** Narrates events c.12th century BC.
- **Composition:** Has theological, literary and stylistic features in common with Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. This suggests the authors start from ancient traditions

and earlier writings to produce a great theological account of the history of Israel, from its first settling in Canaan up to the Babylonian captivity. Deuteronomy may originally have been the prologue to that account (6th century BC) but may have been slightly remodeled a little later (5th–4th centuries BC) to form the concluding book of the Pentateuch.

Teaching

The theological teaching of Deuteronomy can be summed up as: one God, one people, one Temple, one land, one law.



3 The Conquest of Canaan and the Time of the Judges

1200 BC

1150 BC

1100 BC

1050 BC

1000 BC

Events in Civilizations near Israel

1200–500 BC

Doric invasion: Mycenaean civilization in decline; Greece progressively occupied by tribes from the north.

1114–1076 BC

Tiglath-Pileser I restores the Assyrian Empire.

Events among the People of Israel

c.1200–1000 BC

Conquest of Canaan by the Israelites, either forging alliances or fighting against local peoples: Moabites, Edomites, Amalekites, Arameans, Ammonites, Philistines, Amorites, Hittites, Jebusites, Perizzites, Hivites.
Joshua and Judges

c.1125 BC

Victory over the Canaanites by Deborah and Barak.
Judges 4–5

c.1050 BC

Israel defeated by the Philistines. The Ark of the Covenant captured.
1 Samuel 4

c.1040 BC

The prophet Samuel builds the shrine at Shiloh.

c.1030 BC

Saul is King of Israel.
1 Samuel 8–31

Books of the Bible for this Period



Joshua

Story of Israel's arrival in the Promised Land.

Judges

Story of the struggles of the twelve tribes to settle in Canaan.

Ruth

Story of David's forebears.



1 What Moses Saw from Mount Nebo (Deut 34:1-3)

Panoramic view from the top of Mount Nebo. It is possible to make out the Dead Sea (called the Sea of Arabah or the Salt Sea in the Bible), the Jordan valley, the oasis of Jericho and the mountains of Judah.



2 The Map of Madaba

A 6th-century mosaic pavement representing the Promised Land. Discovered in 1897 in a church in Madaba (biblical Medeba, Jordan).



Joshua | Josh

Literary genres

- **Narrative:** Idealized account of the people of Israel taking possession of the Promised Land led by Joshua.
- **Speeches:** The book closes with a speech by Joshua and the renewal of the Covenant.

History

- **Content:** Narrates events c.1150 BC.
- **Composition:** The people of Israel probably passed down an oral account of their arrival in Canaan for centuries, and some episodes were written down. The book must have been completed in the time of King Josiah (7th century BC) and included in the *Nevi'im* of the Hebrew Bible during the Babylonian exile.

Teaching

God is faithful and always fulfills his promises. He gives the Promised Land to the Patriarchs and their descendants, through the cooperation of the twelve tribes acting as one people. From then on the Promised Land is an essential part of God's Covenant with Israel.

Key concepts

- **Faithfulness:** God is faithful and expects man to respond with faithfulness.
- **Promised Land:** The land of Israel and the people of Israel merge into one concept.
- **Joshua:** The Hebrew name is the same as "Jesus", and means "The Lord saves".

Judges | Judg

Literary genres

- **Narrative:** Relates Israel's settlement in the land of Canaan, and its difficulties.
- **Popular legends:** Gathers stories of twelve epic heroes, one for each tribe.

History

- **Content:** Narrates events c.1200–1030 BC.
- **Composition:** As for the book of Joshua.

Teaching

God reveals himself progressively. While the wonderful events show forth God's justice, mercy and faithfulness to his Covenant, specific deeds by the characters are not always exemplary.

Ruth | Ru

Literary genre

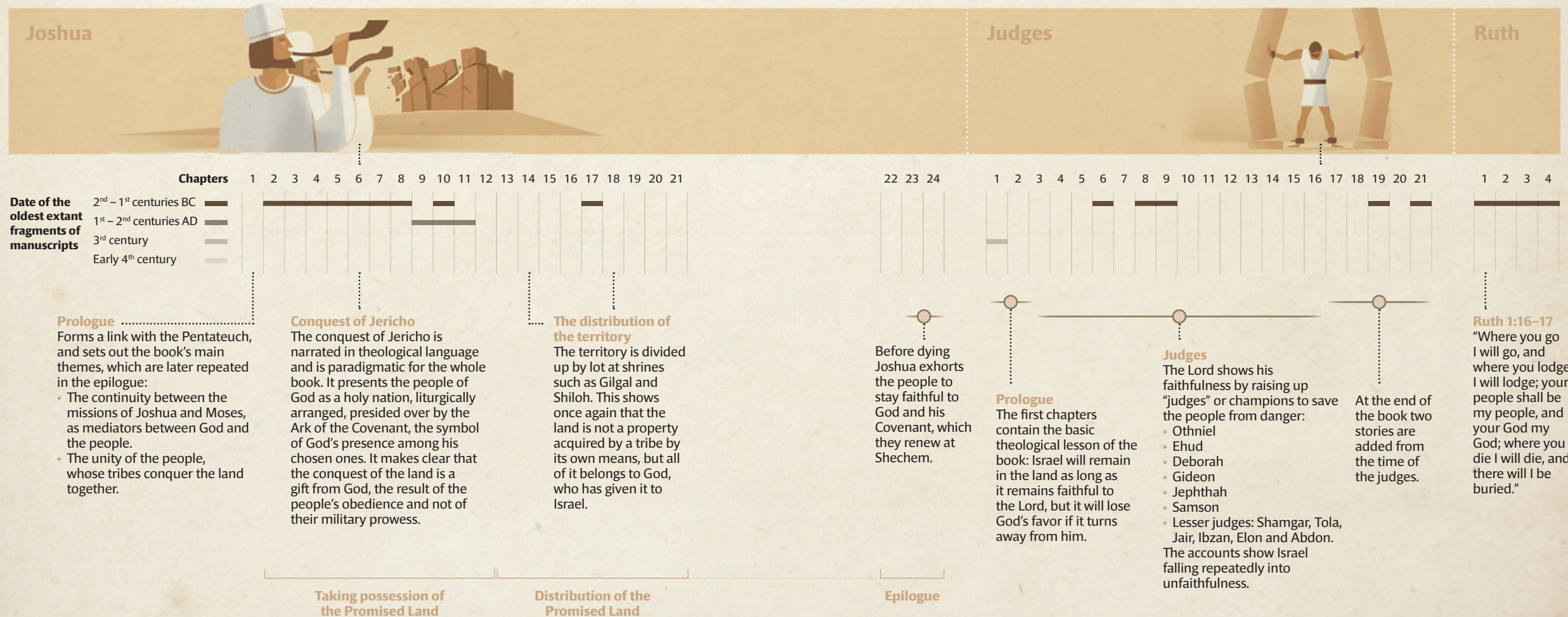
- **A short popular story:** The Hebrew Bible places it outside the historical books, with the rolls read on certain Jewish feast days.

History

- **Content:** Ruth is the great-grandmother of King David, which places these events a few decades before 1000 BC.
- **Composition:** Probably when Judah was part of the Persian Empire (6th–4th c. BC).

Teaching

God rewards the faithfulness of Ruth the Moabite woman by including her in the Chosen People. God is not to be outdone in generosity.



4 Beginnings of the Monarchy

1100 BC

1050 BC

1000 BC

950 BC

900 BC

Events in Civilizations near Israel

Two centuries of decline for Assyria and Babylon in the north, and Egypt in the south, enable the tribes of Israel to settle in Canaan and develop an independent Kingdom.

c.1000 BC
King David conquers Jerusalem and consolidates his victories over the peoples of Canaan.
2 Samuel 5

c.1030–1010 BC
Saul is King of Israel.
1 Samuel 8–31

c.966–959 BC
Building of the Temple in Jerusalem.
1 Kings 6

Events among the People of Israel

c.1050 BC
Israel defeated by the Philistines. The Ark of the Covenant captured.
1 Samuel 4

c.1010–970 BC
David is King of Judah and King of Israel.
2 Samuel 2–4

970–931 BC
Solomon is King of Judah and Israel.
1 Kings 2

930 BC
Assembly at Shechem; the Kingdom is divided.
1 Kings 12

Books of the Bible for this Period



- 1 Samuel**
Story of the prophet Samuel and King Saul.
- 2 Samuel**
Story of King David.
- 1 Kings 1–11**
Story of King Solomon.
- 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles 1–9**
Story of Israel from Adam to David.

Psalms
Religious poems and songs, many of them attributed to King David.

Proverbs
Collections of maxims, sayings and aphorisms, many of them attributed in the book to King Solomon.

Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth)
Book of wisdom literature, attributed in its first verse to a king in Jerusalem, son of David.

Song of Solomon
Book about spousal love, interpreted as a love-story between God and mankind, attributed in its first verse to King Solomon.

1 and 2 Samuel | 1 Sam and 2 Sam

In the Hebrew Bible the books of Samuel are placed immediately after Joshua and Judges, and before the books of Kings. All together they form the set of Former Prophets, as distinct from the Latter Prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the twelve minor prophets.

Literary genres

- **Narrative:** This is the main genre of both books, although they also contain powerful lyrical compositions like Hannah's canticle (1 Sam 2:1–11) and David's psalm (2 Sam 22).
- **Prophetic traditions:** In some passages the voice of the prophets (Samuel, Nathan) makes God present among men.

History

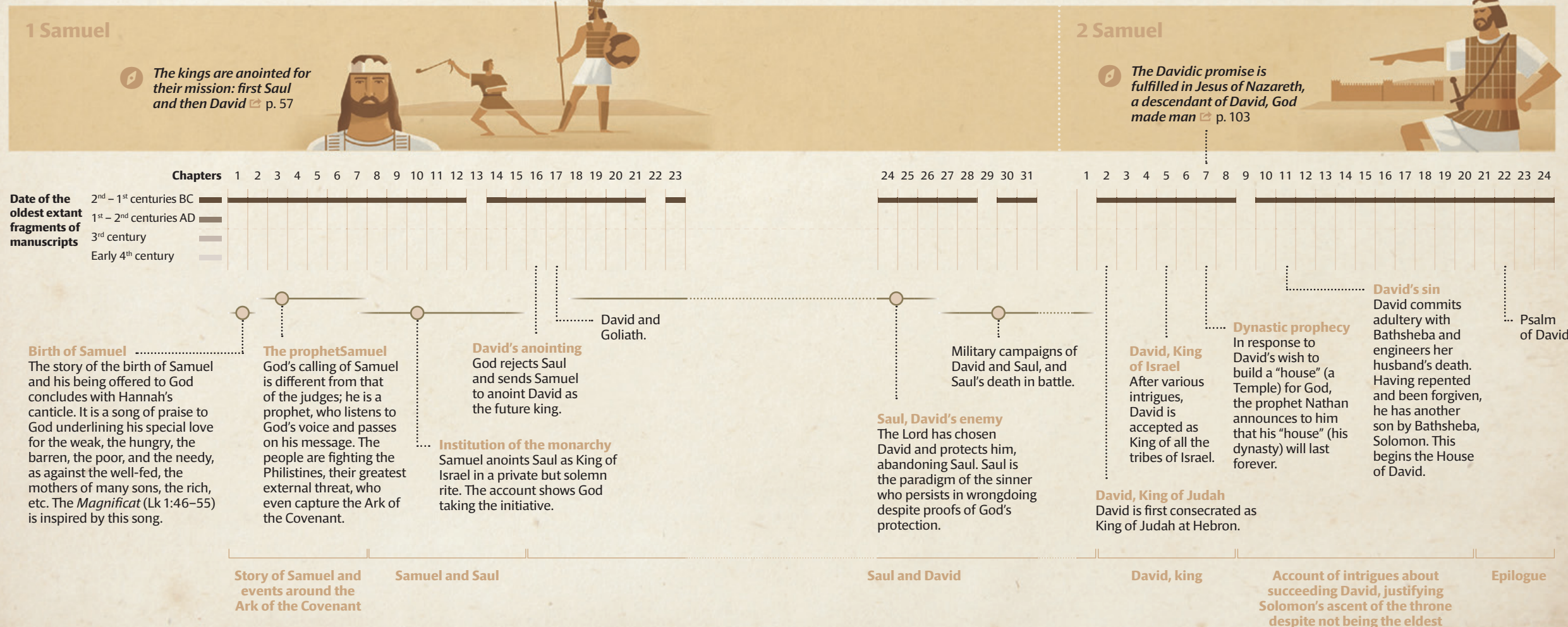
- **Content:** Relates the transition from the era of judges, when each tribe acted separately, to the institution of the monarchy (c. 1070–970 BC).
- **Composition:** The two books form the center of "Deuteronomist" history. Probably the various events were passed on orally and some episodes written down and copied, until a first version was compiled in the time of Josiah (640–609 BC). The books must have been finalized during the exile in Babylon or shortly afterwards.

Teaching

The books of Samuel highlight the religious meaning of history. God chooses a people to carry out his saving purpose, and within that people chooses certain individuals. In a way, God adapts to the choices they make. The establishment of a monarchy of Israel is presented as a defiance of God, but he uses it to further his plan of salvation. God always rejects evil and demands justice, but in some cases he tolerates his chosen ones' unloving deeds, seeking reconciliation and forgiveness: God is faithful to the Covenant, all-powerful and rich in mercy.

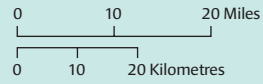
Key concepts

- **Anointing:** The man chosen by God to save and guide the people must be anointed with oil (*messiah*) as a sign of the permanent presence of God's spirit in him.
- **King of Israel:** God accepts the installing of the monarchy and uses it to make a still closer Covenant with his people.
- **House of David:** God promises David that he will build him an eternal house, that there will always be a descendant of David on the throne of Israel. The promise is understood from the start as a confirmation of God's Covenant with the Patriarchs. Jesus will bring this Covenant to fulfillment.



THE KINGDOM OF Solomon

970–931 BC



I–XII Solomon's administrative districts (1 Kgs 4:7–19)

■ Places fortified by Solomon



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1 Kings 1–11 | 1 Kgs 1–11

Literary genre

• **Narrative:** The histories from the books of Samuel continue in the books of Kings.

History

- **Content:** Half of 1 Kings centers on the succession to David and the reign of Solomon (970–931 BC).
- **Composition:** The books of Kings were written during the Babylonian exile, based on previous written accounts, some of which are mentioned in the text.

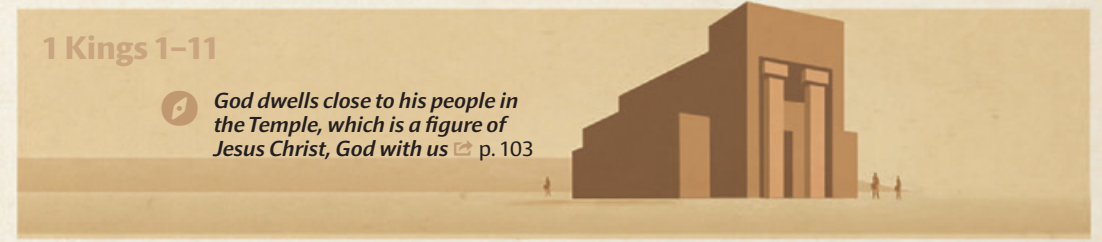
Teaching

The books of Kings, intended for the Jews in exile in Babylon, aim to rouse awareness that

people are destined for disaster when they are unfaithful to God and the Law of God and turn away to worship other gods.

Key concepts

- **Temple:** The Temple building, planned by David and completed under Solomon, becomes the center of Israel. The Temple is God's home, the place where the people go to meet their Lord. It is the only place where sacrifices can be offered to him.
- **God's presence:** The Lord tells Solomon: "I have consecrated this house which you have built, and put my name there for ever; my eyes and my heart will be there for all time" (1 Kgs 9:3).



Gift of wisdom
Solomon asks God for a wise and understanding heart. God is pleased with this choice, and grants it to the new king, plus power, riches, peace and glory.

Building and dedicating the Temple
Solomon fulfills his father David's promise and builds a Temple to God in Jerusalem. The Ark of the Covenant is kept there, and its altar is the only one where sacrifices may be offered to God.

New promise by God
God renews to Solomon the promise he had made to his father: that there will always be a descendant of David on the throne of Israel. But the promise is conditional on the people keeping God's commandments under the king's leadership.

Choice of Solomon and death of David

Splendor of Solomon

Weakening of Solomon's kingship

Psalms | Ps

Literary genre

The Psalms are religious poems. In the original Hebrew, 57 of the 150 psalms are named *mizmor*, meaning songs accompanied by a musical instrument such as the lyre or harp. The Hebrew title of the book is *Tehillim*, meaning “prayers of praise”. The psalms express people’s basic attitudes toward God in the varied circumstances of their lives, and so take varied forms, including praise:

- Supplication, both individual and communal.
- Songs of thanksgiving.
- Songs of praise.
- Songs of wisdom.

Composition history

Composition of the psalms reaches from the time of the monarchy to the 2nd century BC, when they were finally collected together. The book seems to have been compiled from pre-existing partial collections:

- A “Yahwist” collection: Psalms 3 to 41 are attributed to David and use the divine name YHWH.
- An “Elohistic” collection: God is referred to as “Elohim” in a group of psalms attributed to the sons of Korah (42–49), David (51–72) and Asaph (73–83).
- Other collections: Psalms 90 to 119 appear to come from other shorter collections.
- Collections of psalms of praise: The “songs of ascents” to the Temple in Jerusalem

(120–134), another group of “psalms of David” (138–145), and the Praise psalms that conclude the book (146–150).

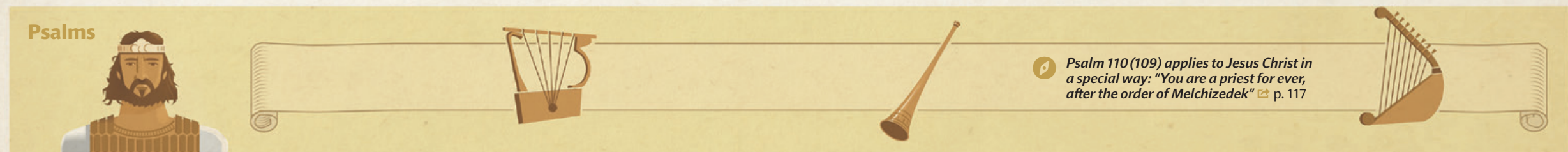
Teaching

Psalms is a book of prayer and praise, speaking either to God or about him, always with reference to his actions in creation, in history, and in people’s lives. According to the Gospels Jesus had recourse to the Psalms at heightened moments of his life, relating them to himself and his teachings. He also said expressly that the Psalms, as well as the Law and the Prophets, were talking about him. He thus gave them a new, fuller meaning, going beyond their

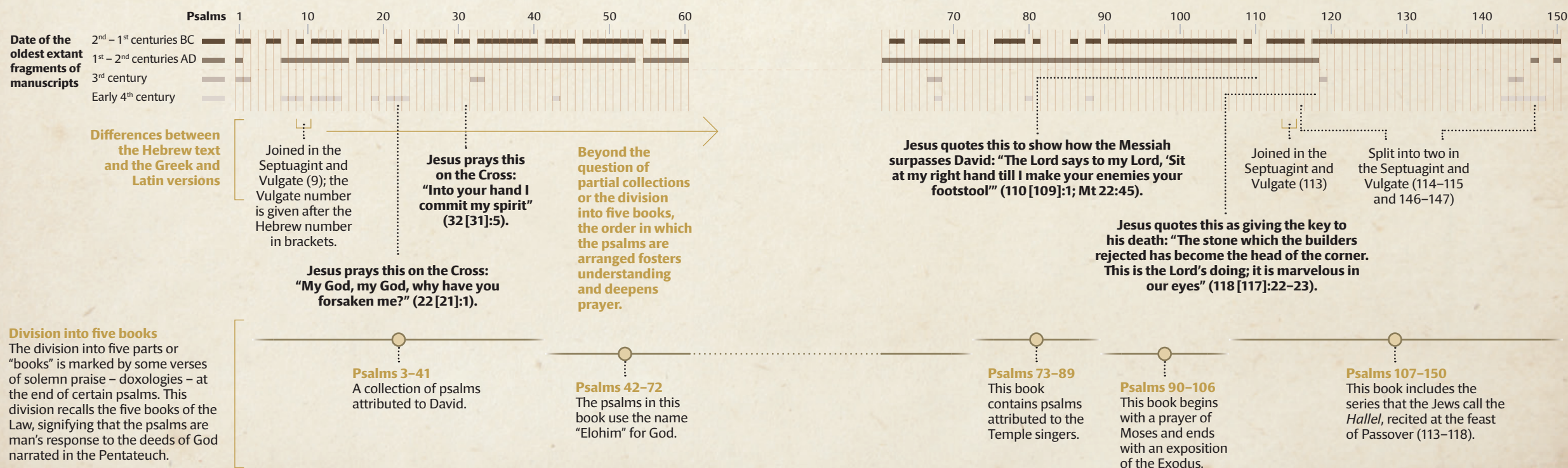
literal meaning in the Old Testament but in continuity with it. Additionally, when they are read and re-read the psalms reveal a relevance to the present of the person reading them, and so become prayer.

Key concept

- **Praise:** A way of prayer that is totally disinterested, addressing God and singing to him for his sake, giving him glory not only for what he has done but for what he is.



Psalm 110 (109) applies to Jesus Christ in a special way: “You are a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek” p. 117



Proverbs | Prov

Literary genre

- **Proverbs**, including several collections of maxims, sayings and similes, integrating human wisdom with faith in the God of Israel. This book best typifies the sapiential or wisdom literature of the Bible.

Composition history

Several collections are attribute to Solomon. He was said to have expressed his legendary wisdom in three thousand proverbs (1 Kings 4:32). The core of Proverbs may have been a collection of these maxims, either oral or written, to which were later (c.700 BC) added the collection of the “proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied” (Prov 25:1).

Teaching

The book reveals the path opened by God for people to attain happiness in the affairs of daily life. It does not stress faithfulness to the Covenant, sacrifices, or participation in religious feasts. The counsels are set in the spheres of family, work, justice, generosity, and personal or business relations, and are based on deep faith in the God of Israel.

Key concept

- **Wisdom:** Represented as a person in Chapter 8, a first step towards the revelation of the mystery of the Blessed Trinity.

Ecclesiastes | Eccles (Qoheleth)

Literary genre

- **Instruction:** In the Hebrew Bible it is one of the rolls read on Jewish feast days.

Composition history

Although the book is attributed to “the son of David, king in Jerusalem” it was probably written in the 3rd century BC, when the influence of Greek culture reached Judah.

Teaching

Ecclesiastes is read on the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*), when the harvest is over. It invites the people to rejoice with gratitude for good things, without forgetting they are a gift from God.

Song of Solomon | Song

Literary genre

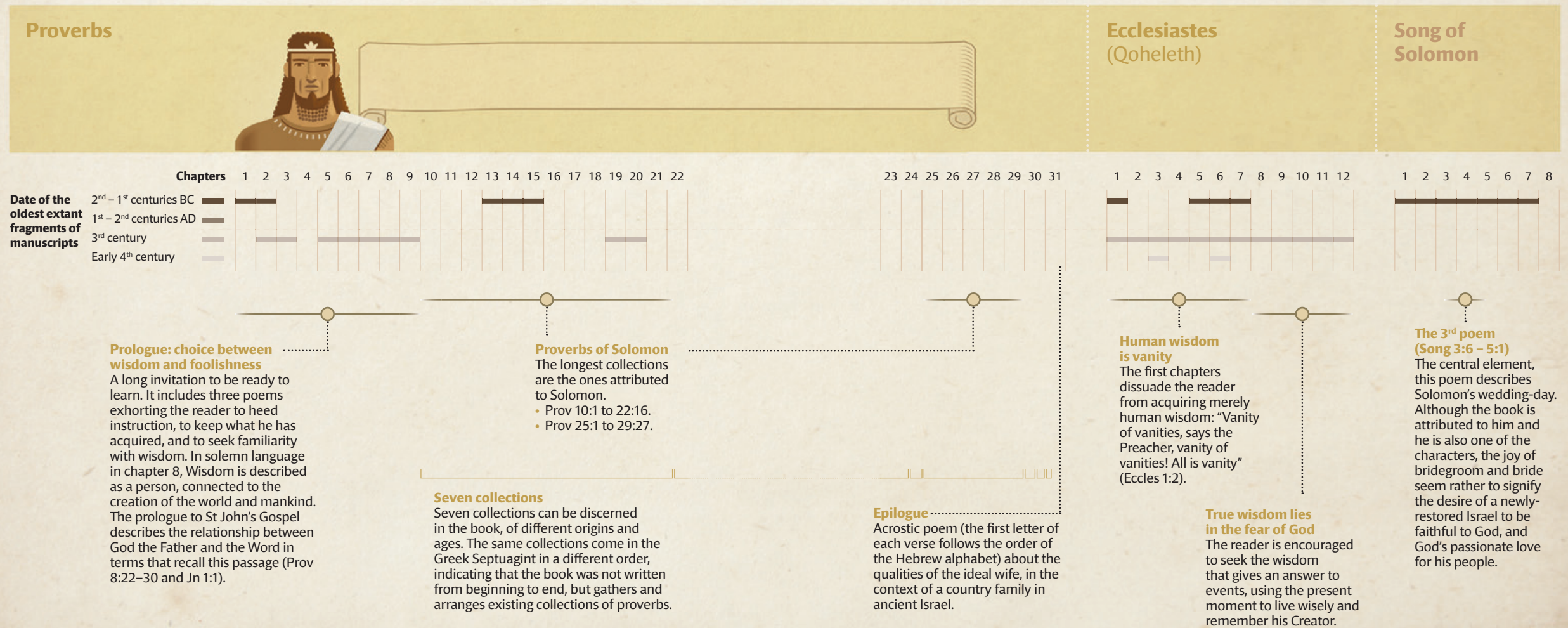
- **Lyric poetry**, read on the night of Passover.

Composition history

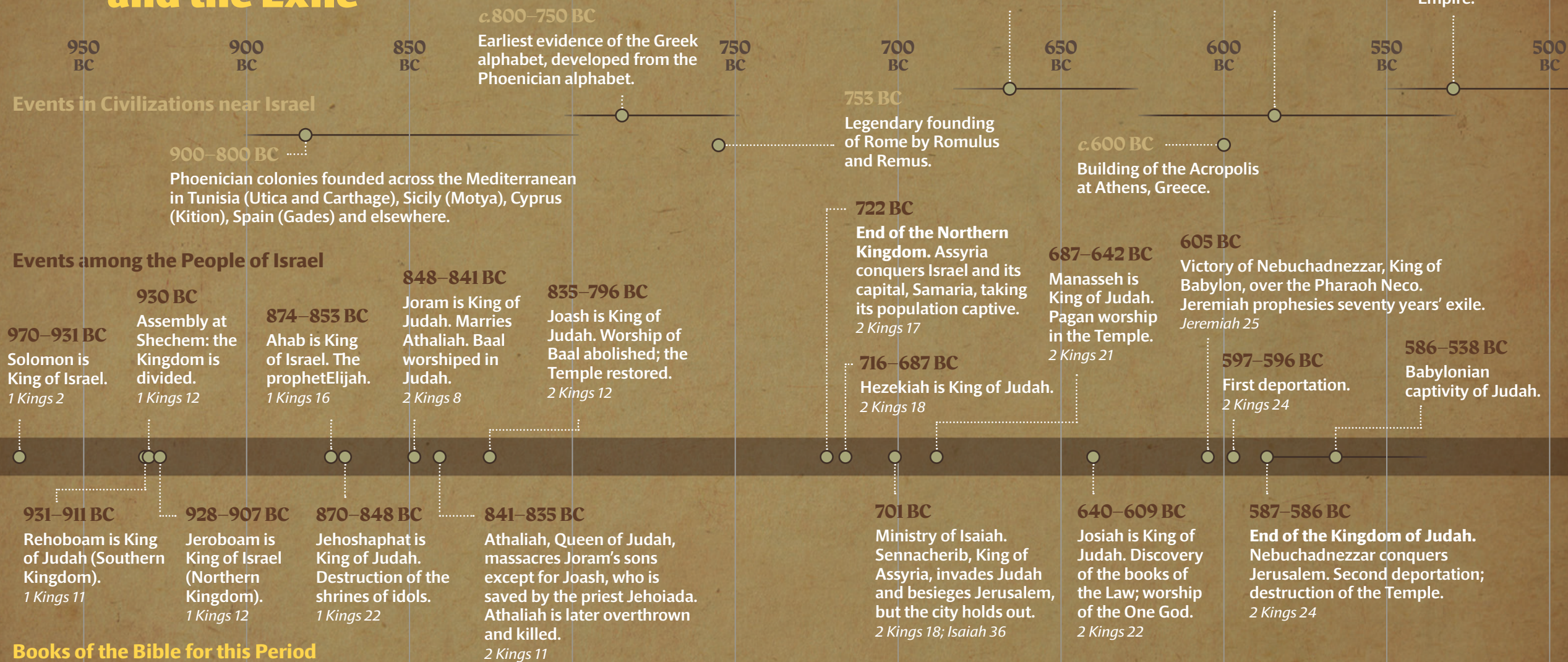
The book probably brings together several different love-songs (pastoral, the wedding of Solomon or other kings), combined into one after the Babylonian exile.

Teaching

- **Hope:** The Song of Solomon expresses the joy of human love but also God’s love for his people and the joy of his people at knowing they are specially loved.

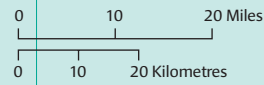


5 The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah up to their Destruction and the Exile



Israel AND Judah

931–722 BC



Approximate boundary between Israel, Judah and Philistia



1 Kings 12–22 | 1 Kgs 12–22

Literary genres

- Narrative.
- Prophetic traditions.
- Archive data.

History

- **Content:** Narrates events after the death of Solomon in 931 BC. The Kingdom splits in two: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. This section of 1 Kings presents the dynasties of both kingdoms simultaneously up until the time of the prophet Elijah (9th century BC).
- **Composition:** During the exile in Babylon, but based on previous written accounts, some of which are named in the text.

Teaching

The life of each of the kings of Israel or Judah is judged on whether he obeyed God or “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.” God is the measure of good and evil. Besides its political consequences, the division of the Kingdom involved a religious split, shown in the offering of sacrifices elsewhere than the Temple at Jerusalem. Set in the era of the great prophets, the “men of God”. The Lord reveals himself through them as God of all creation, absolutely transcendent, the one true God who does not admit other gods with him, but also as the God who fulfills his promises and blesses the people.

1 Kings 12–22

The prophets, of whom Elijah is a model, are anointed for their mission just as the kings are

p. 67

Death of Ahab

“A certain man drew his bow at a venture, and struck the king of Israel between the scale armor and the breastplate” (1 Kgs 22:34).



Succession of Solomon

The twelve tribes are divided when Solomon dies. The southern tribes remain faithful to Solomon's son Rehoboam, while the northern ones choose Jeroboam, a former royal servant and rebel, who sets up altars to offer sacrifices in Bethel, Dan and other places. This schismatic worship will later turn into idolatry.

Early dynasties

In Judah the throne is hereditary, maintaining David's line. In Israel, however, kings take power for themselves, through violent revolt or because God arranges it in order to punish the sins of the reigning dynasty.

Cycle of Elijah

In this section of 1 Kings, it is no king but the prophet Elijah who really stands out. He ministers in the Northern Kingdom between 874 and 852 BC, mainly during the reign of Ahab. Elijah defends faith in the true God against the Canaanite worship of Baal.

Kings of Israel and Judah

2 Kings | 2 Kgs

Literary genres

- Narrative.
- Prophetic traditions.
- Archive data.

History

- **Content:** Narrates events from the death of Ahab in Israel (853 BC) to the deportation of Judah to Babylon (587 BC). It features many notable characters and times: Elisha, kings Hezekiah and Josiah, the Assyrian invasion, the fall of Jerusalem, and many more.
- **Composition:** During the exile in Babylon, but based on previous written accounts, some of which are named in the text.

Teaching

Continuing from the 1 Kings, it talks about the connection between freedom and obedience. God has chosen his people, has given them his Law, brought them to dwell in the Promised Land, given them kings to guide them, promised to listen to them in his Temple, and sends prophets to remind them of the Covenant. And at the same time he always expects the people to obey him freely.

Key concept

- **Kingship:** Despite the division of the Kingdom and the kings' evil behavior, God is faithful to his promise to David, whose dynasty retains the throne of Judah.

2 Chronicles 10–36 | 2 Chron 10–36

Literary genre

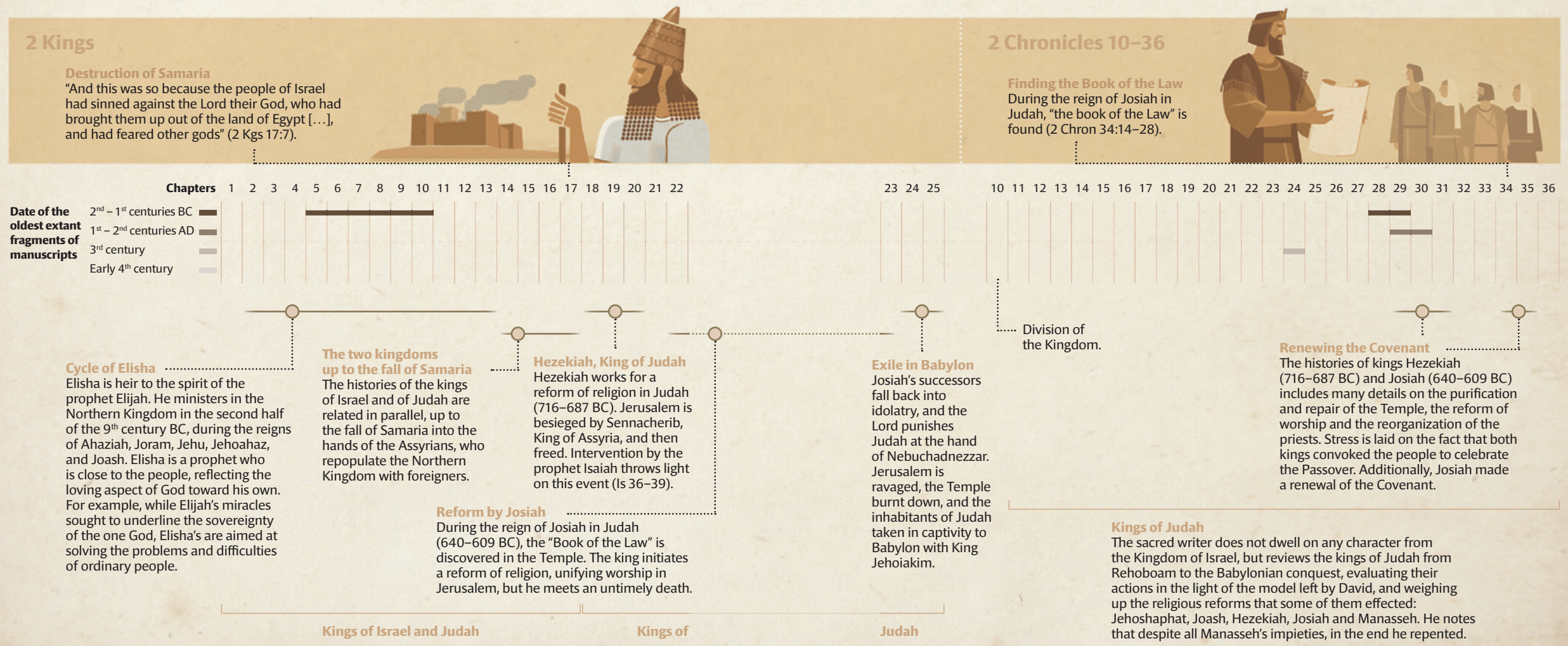
- Narrative.

History

- **Content:** narrates events from the division of Solomon's Kingdom, like the books of Kings. However this part centers solely on the kings of Judah and continues the narrative up to the edict of Cyrus that ended the Babylonian exile (539/538 BC).
- **Composition:** Chronicles appears to have been written around the years 400–350 BC based on ancient sources, when Judah, or Yehud, was a province of the Persian Empire.

Teaching

The people, as a community, are called to be faithful to the Covenant, and can trust in the ancient promises, because the Lord is always with his own. At the same time as being community, each person is responsible for his or her own answer to God, and can rely on the hope that it is always possible to begin again and again. Every time, every reign and every person begins their own journey under God's protection, not burdened with the sins of their forefathers. God, who demands faithfulness, is a just judge, repaying each individual according to their deeds.

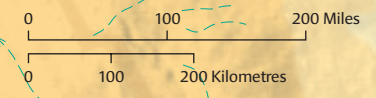


THE Assyrian Empire

722 BC



Approximate extent of Assyrian domination in the latter part of the 8th century (Later, in the years 680–669, Assyria conquered Egypt)



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Tobit | Tob

Literary genre

- **Sapiential (wisdom) narrative:** It reads like a historical book, but in fact it is really a “moral story”, whose aim is to instruct and edify.

History

- **Content:** It is set in ancient Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian Empire and supremely pagan city, to which the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Israel had been deported in 722 BC.
- **Composition:** Around 200 BC, when the Jewish people were subjects of the Seleucid Empire and found it hard to keep their faith or practice their religion.

Teaching

The main idea is God’s goodness to his faithful people. God’s love accompanies those who turn to him in their suffering with sincere, trusting prayer. Sometimes his angels are the ministers of his protection. God’s way of acting is not immediately apparent to us; but even misfortunes are permitted by God, for reasons that may not be evident until the end of the story.

Deuterocanonical

Tobit is one of the “deuterocanonical” books of the Old Testament, and so it is not included in the canons of the Hebrew or the Protestant Bibles.

Judith | Jud

Literary genre

- **Sapiential (wisdom) narrative:** Like Tobit, the book of Judith is a fictional account with a powerful religious purpose.

History

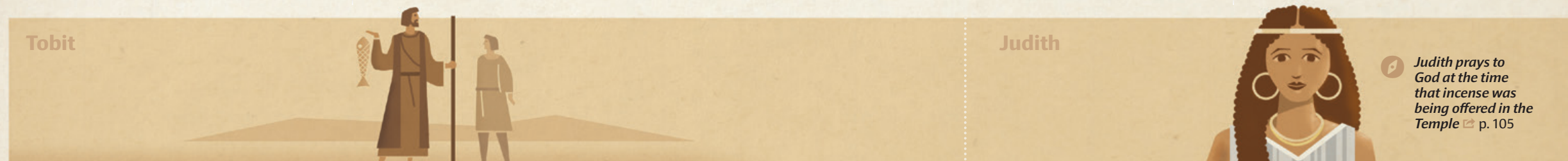
- **Content:** The story refers to Nebuchadnezzar, King of Nineveh, shortly after the Jews had returned from captivity and rebuilt the Temple; whereas in fact Nebuchadnezzar was King of Babylon. The author uses symbolism: the city of Bethulia is Israel, and Judith is the whole people.
- **Composition:** Around 150 BC, in the context of the persecution by Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the revolt of the Maccabees.

Teaching

While the book of Tobit expresses faith in God’s care for individuals and families, the book of Judith proclaims that same care for the whole people of Israel. In both cases, faith in God’s providence goes hand in hand with human cooperation. The defeat of the Assyrians in the story is the fruit of Judith’s daring, initiative and skill, not of a spectacular intervention by God.

Deuterocanonical

Like Tobit, Judith is one of the “deuterocanonical” books of the Old Testament, and so it too is not included in the canons of the Hebrew or the Protestant Bibles.



Misfortunes and prayers of Tobit and Sara

Tobit and his family live in Nineveh (Assyria), and Sara and her family in Ecbatana (Media/Persia). Both are pious Jewish families, deported from Israel, and smitten with misfortune despite their faithfulness to God:

- Tobit, blinded and impoverished, also has to endure his wife’s incomprehension.
- Sara is tormented by the demon Asmodeus, who has killed each of the seven husbands to whom she has been married, on their wedding nights.

Both pray to God, asking to die. The Lord answers their prayers by sending his angel Raphael to help them.

Journey of Tobias and Raphael

Tobit sends his son Tobias to Ecbatana to recover some money he had deposited there. The angel Raphael appears in the form of a young man, and accompanies him. In the first stage of their journey they catch a fish in the River Tigris. The fish’s gall, heart and liver will be used to heal Tobit and Sara. On arriving at Ecbatana, the angel tells Tobias that according to the Law he should marry Sara, as her closest relative, and he explains to him how to drive away the evil spirit tormenting the girl. Tobias does this successfully, and they celebrate their wedding joyfully.

Return to Nineveh

Tobias and companions return to Nineveh. Tobias heals his father of his blindness with the fish-gall; Tobit blesses his daughter-in-law, and the angel Raphael reveals his true identity and disappears. Then Tobit breaks out in a song of praise to God.

Judith



Judith prays to God at the time that incense was being offered in the Temple p. 105

Achior’s speech

A summary of the history of Israel from the time of the Patriarchs to the occupation of Canaan, with a further reference to the conquest and sack of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar II.

Prayer of Judith

Expresses the faith of the people of Israel: God is Lord, able to scatter their enemies like a mighty warrior.

Song of Judith

One of the most beautiful poetic compositions in the Old Testament, rich in images and with great depth of content.

The Israelites are threatened by a powerful enemy

A great army, on its way to Jerusalem, lays siege to the city of Bethulia. A strong contrast is drawn between the military might of the troops under their general Holofernes, and the faith in God shown by the Israelites.

God uses Judith to confound Israel’s enemies

When the situation is desperate, Judith prays confidently and begs God to help her carry out her plan to save her people. It is a bold and dangerous plan, but she succeeds: Holofernes is killed and his army melts away.

Minor Prophets up to 587 BC

Amos | Am

- **Literary genres:** Oracles, discourses and visions.
- **Historical setting:** Amos was a shepherd from Tekoa in Judah, but God sent him to prophesy to the Kingdom of Israel, in the north, between 769 and 743 BC, in the times of Jeroboam II, mainly around the shrine at Bethel. Amos was the first of the “writer prophets”.
- **Teaching:** At a time of prosperity in Israel he denounces the chasm between the rich and powerful, and the rest of the people. He condemns corruption and social injustice, and shows that the Lord rejects merely exterior worship.

Hosea | Hos

- **Literary genre:** Prophetic oracles.
- **Historical setting:** Hosea is contemporary with Amos, and was born in the Northern Kingdom. His preaching can be dated to around 750 BC, during the reign of Jeroboam II.

- **Teaching:** No prophet equals Hosea in expressing God’s love for his people, presented under the image of marriage. God asks for faithfulness to his Covenant, and so Hosea adds sins of idolatry to the social sins denounced by Amos. At the same time, God’s mercy is always at the ready, and he forgives without waiting for conversion.

Micah | Mic

- **Literary genres:** Warnings and prophecies of disaster alternate with promises of salvation and pleas.
- **Historical setting:** Micah was from Moresheth, near Hebron in Judah, where he preached at the end of the 8th century BC, during the reigns of kings Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. He was a contemporary of Isaiah.
- **Teaching:** He recalls God’s judgment against social injustices so as to call the people to conversion, but also reminds them that God is faithful and that a “remnant of Jacob” will be saved.

Jonah | Jon

- **Literary genre:** Narration of the life and vicissitudes of a reluctant prophet.
- **History and composition:** The story may date from the Kingdom of Israel before the fall of Nineveh (612 BC), but the style and composition suggest that the book was written during the Persian period.
- **Teaching:** The book should be read as a fable showing God’s dominion over all nations, whom he embraces in his mercy. His threats of punishment are actually calls to conversion and penance.

Nahum | Nah

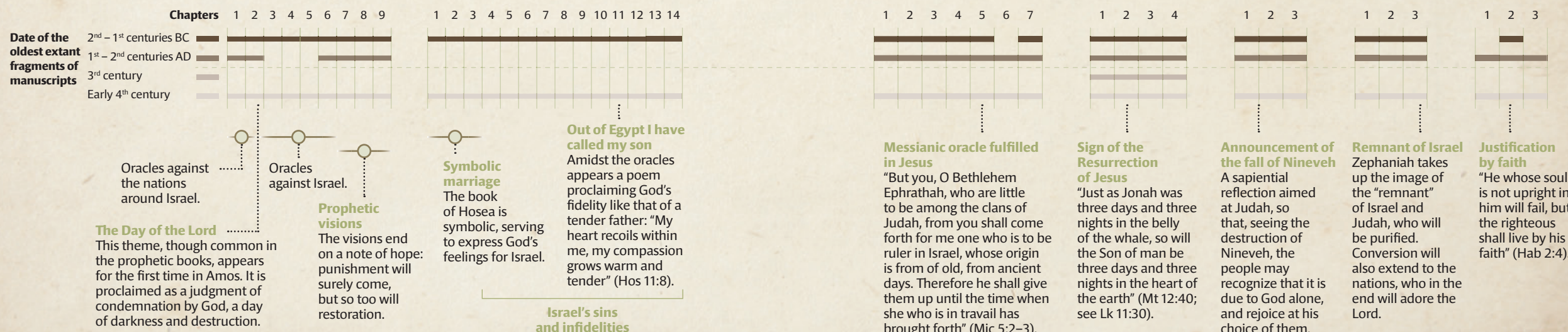
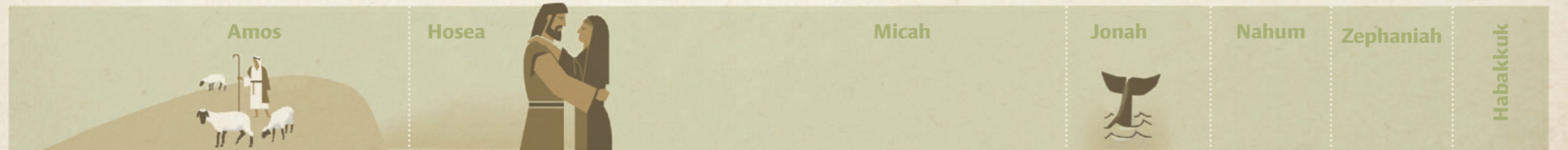
- **Literary genre:** Prophetic reflection.
- **Historical setting:** Nahum was from Elkosh in Judah. He preached between the time of the widest expansion of the Assyrian Empire (663 BC, when it reached Thebes or No-Amon, in Egypt), and the destruction of Nineveh at the hands of the Neo-Babylonian Empire (612 BC).
- **Teaching:** God’s sovereignty over all nations, and his special providence toward Israel.

Zephaniah | Zeph

- **Literary genre:** Prophetic oracles.
- **Historical setting:** He preached in Jerusalem in the time of King Josiah (640–609 BC), probably before Josiah’s religious reform and before Jeremiah.
- **Teaching:** Zephaniah’s main charges against Judah are idolatry and injustice. The people’s iniquities mean that the “day of the Lord” will come as a “day of wrath”.

Habakkuk | Hab

- **Literary genres:** Prophetic oracles, imprecations, and epic psalms.
- **Historical setting:** Habakkuk’s prophecy dates from between the fall of Nineveh (612 BC) and the conquest of Jerusalem by the Neo-Babylonian Empire (587 BC).
- **Teaching:** Instructed in the traditional faith of Israel, Habakkuk firmly believes that God, as the one sovereign Lord, guides the paths of nations, and he questions himself about the punishments that befall Israel. The answer is that every nation that oppresses them will be punished by the Lord of the Universe, while the just will be saved if they persevere in faithfulness to God.



Isaiah | Is

In the Catholic Bible the book of Isaiah is the first of the four major prophets, one of the longest of the prophetic books and maybe the most important. In the Hebrew Bible it is also the first of the "Latter" prophets, preceding Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the twelve minor prophets.

Literary genre

- Prophetic oracles.

History

- **Content:** the prophecies of Isaiah are set within a period of about forty years: between the death of Uzziah (733) and Hezekiah (716–687). This is the period of the expansion of the Assyrian Empire.

- **Composition:** although the book has reached us as one item attributed by Jewish and Christian writers to Isaiah, it seems to have been compiled in stages.
- The first stage of this process may be Isaiah's own lifetime, reflected in most of chapters 1–39.
- A second stage is the Babylonian captivity, seen in chapters 40–55.
- The final stage is in Judah on the return from exile, for chapters 56–66. But experts disagree about the order of composition, the number of authors, and whether the present book was compiled on the basis of pre-existing pieces. In any case, it is reasonable to think that the book took its present form at the end of the 6th century BC.

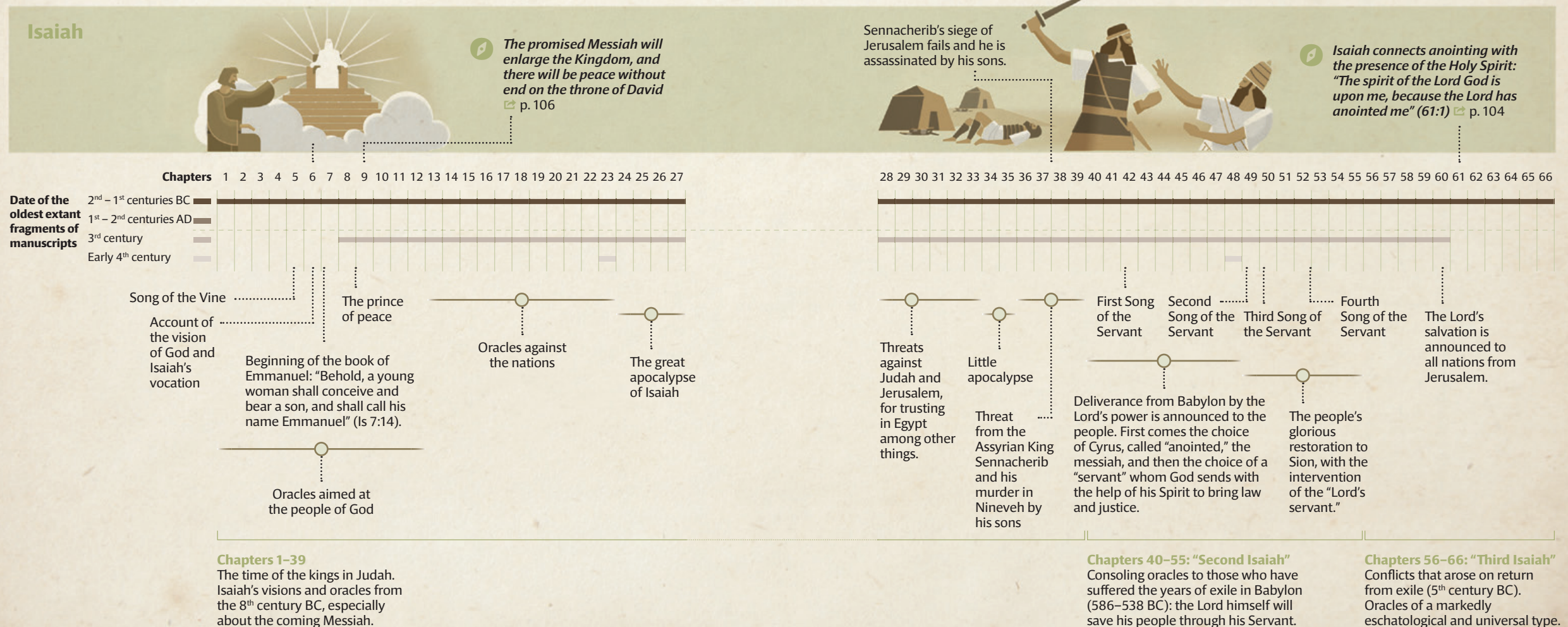
Teaching

Isaiah offers a summary of the faith of Israel and announces Jesus Christ more clearly than any other prophet. It is the Old Testament book most quoted in the New Testament after the Psalms, and the most-read prophet in Catholic liturgy. Some themes run throughout the book:

- **God's transcendence.** This theme is clearly influenced by Isaiah's own calling, which happens in the setting of a vision of God's majesty. The Lord is shown as transcendent and at the same time personal, with anthropomorphic qualities.
- **The offense given to God by people's sins.** The counterpart to God's holiness is the

sinfulness of human beings, who persist in rebelling against their Creator.

- **The announcement of the future messiah,** a savior described with kingly characteristics. He is Emmanuel, who will restore David's dynasty.
- **The universality of salvation;** Israel's position as the chosen people is underlined, but presented as the channel of salvation for all the nations on earth.
- **Eschatological hope,** directed towards a final, permanent world, a new creation, freed from sorrow and war.

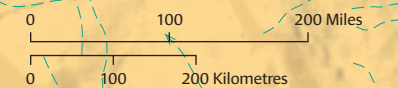


THE Babylonian Empire

587 BC



Approximate greatest extent of Babylonian domination
 (The Halys river marked the border of the Median and Lydian Empires after the Battle of the Eclipse in 585 BC)



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Jeremiah | Jer

Literary genres

- **Prophetic oracles** written in verse and collected by theme, not in chronological order.
- **“Confessions” or lamentations:** Poetical pieces where the prophet pours forth his soul in trusting prayer to God.
- **Narrative:** Prose accounts about Jeremiah’s doings, attributed to his scribe Baruch.

History

- **Content:** Jeremiah was active in Judah when the neo-Babylonian Empire was becoming a threat (605 BC on). He witnessed the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (587 BC) and the deportation to Babylon.

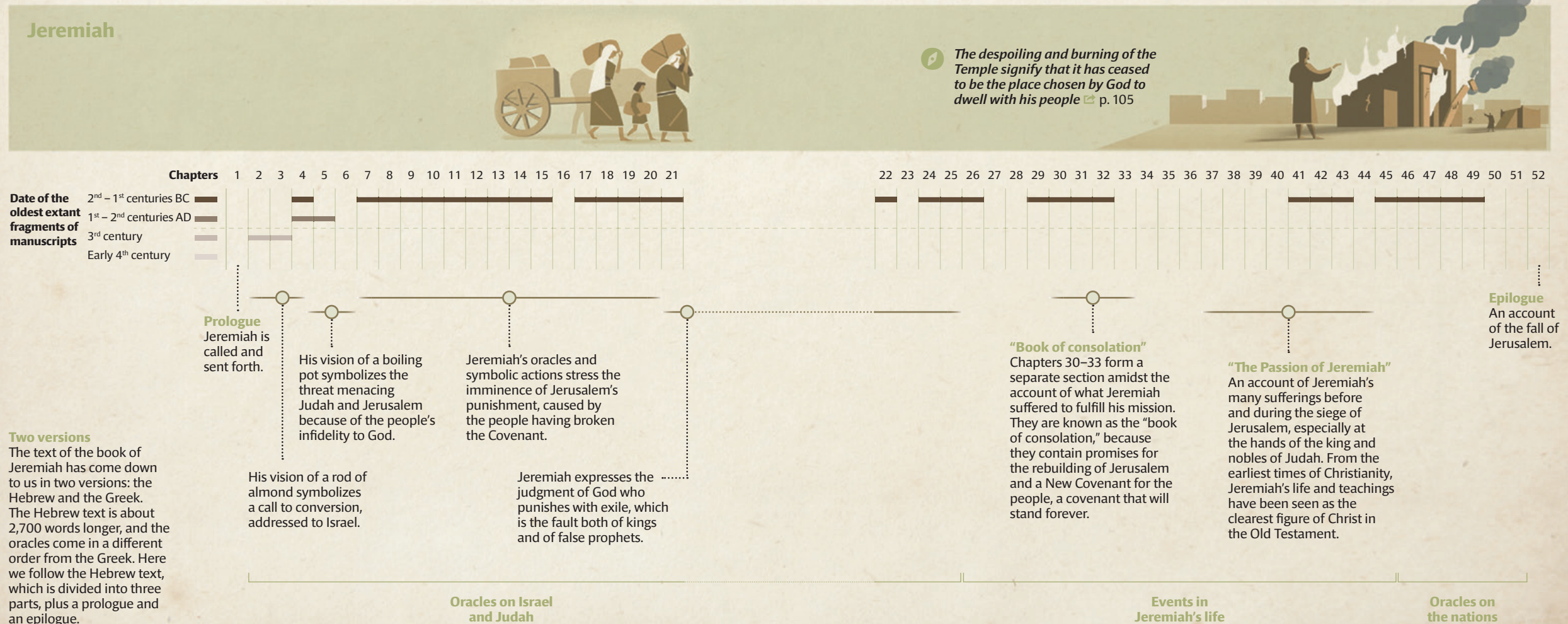
- **Compilation:** The book itself tells, in chapter 36, how Jeremiah was commanded by God to write down his oracles (605–604 BC). The set of oracles was read in the Temple before the people, and then before King Jehoiakim, who had them burned. At the Lord’s command Jeremiah dictated the oracles again to Baruch, who wrote them down again, adding more. This seems to be the origin of the book, but it appears then to have been enriched and updated in light of later events (exile and restoration), being put in its final form around the 5th century BC.

Teaching

The book of Jeremiah is full of Deuteronomist teachings, rooted in the fact that the prophet is passing on God’s word, and is the authorized interpreter of history. Jeremiah repeatedly stresses that the misfortunes that have come upon Judah, and the exile, are the result of sinning and breaking the Covenant. However, God’s last word is not destruction but restoration. This final salvation is the result of a conversion of heart, which does not come about by man’s attempts to act ethically, but is granted by God. Jeremiah announces the Messiah, descended from David, but gives a purified view of him: he will be Savior as well as king.

Key concept

- **New Covenant:** in the “book of consolation” Jeremiah announces a spiritual covenant: “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer 31:31–33).

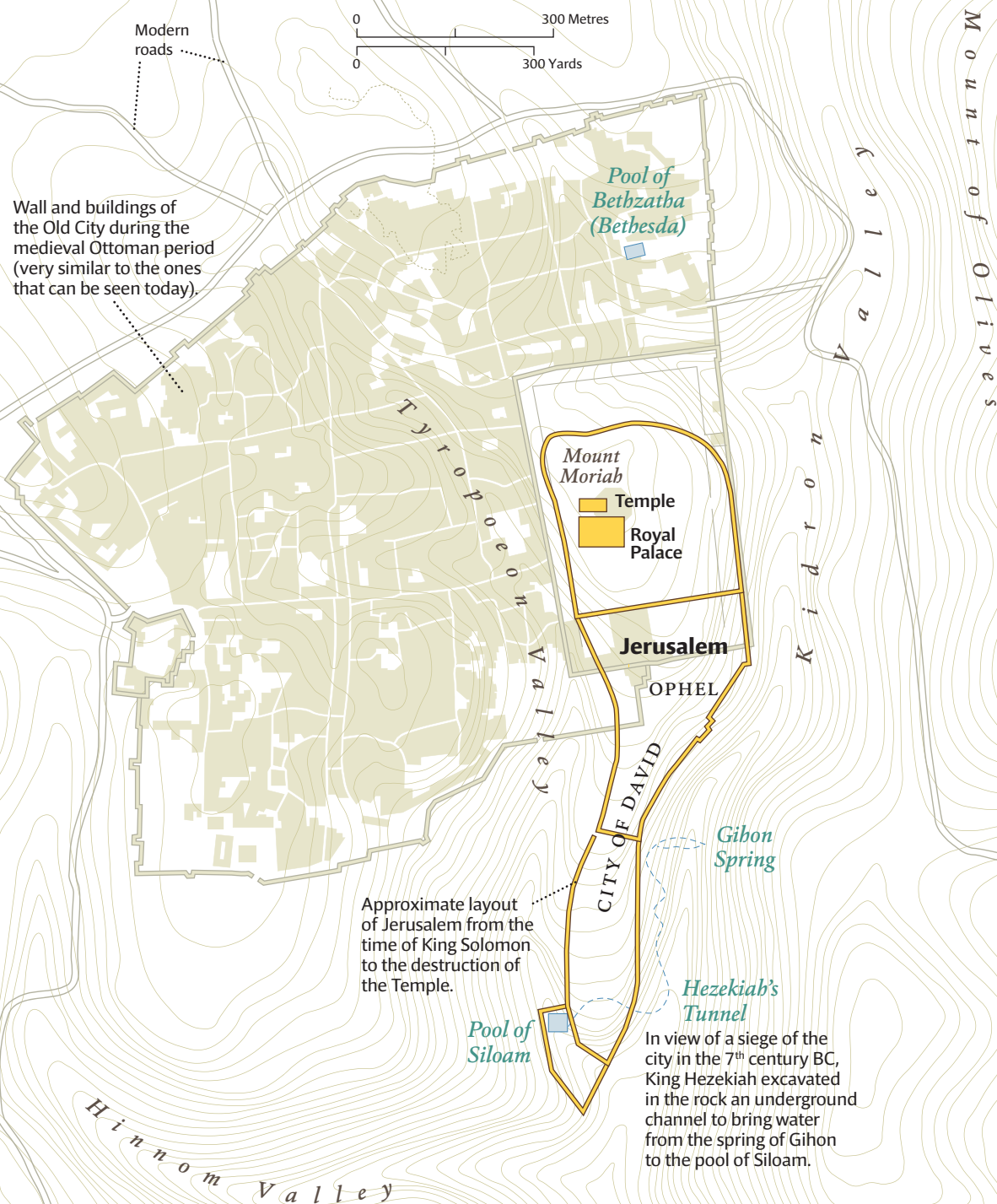


Two versions
The text of the book of Jeremiah has come down to us in two versions: the Hebrew and the Greek. The Hebrew text is about 2,700 words longer, and the oracles come in a different order from the Greek. Here we follow the Hebrew text, which is divided into three parts, plus a prologue and an epilogue.

Jerusalem

FROM SOLOMON'S REIGN UP TO THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE

970–587 BC



Approximate layout of Jerusalem from the time of King Solomon to the destruction of the Temple.

In view of a siege of the city in the 7th century BC, King Hezekiah excavated in the rock an underground channel to bring water from the spring of Gibion to the pool of Siloam.

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Lamentations | Lam

Baruch | Bar

Literary genre

• **Elegy.** Five songs of lamentation (four of them being acrostics) on the devastation of Jerusalem.

History

- **Content:** The epilogue of Jeremiah is a narration of Judah's defeat and deportation to Babylon (587 BC). Lamentations is like a second, sapiential and poetic epilogue.
- **Composition:** Traditionally believed to be written shortly after the fall of Jerusalem.

Teaching

Suffering can lead to conversion and be filled with hope if it is met with faith in God.

Literary genres

Several genres, both prose and verse: letters, prayers of petition and contrition, songs of praise, consolation and lamentation.

History

- **Content:** An account of the Jews deported to Babylon.
- **Composition:** Some time between the 5th and 1st centuries BC. Greek versions survive but none in Hebrew.

Key concept

- **Wisdom:** Personified in the book, which declares that her nature is divine.



Jerusalem desolate
First the desolation of Jerusalem is described, and then the Holy City expresses, in the first person, her sorrows and her petition to God.

The causes
This destruction, says the prophet, is caused by God's anger: Judah needed to be purified of her sins.

Suffering and personal conversion
At the center of the book the author shares his personal experience: desolation has taught him patience, and to look to the Lord. He calls others to examine their actions and be converted, so that all together they might acknowledge their sins and beg for forgiveness from God, who grants salvation.

Appeal
The book ends with an impassioned appeal to God for help.

Those responsible
The fourth song is like the second, but focuses on the attitude of those responsible.

Introduction
Confession of sins and plea for forgiveness, in prose.

Praise of Wisdom, in verse. Judah is in exile for having left the paths of the Lord, who is Wisdom.

Conversion and joy of Jerusalem, in verse. Passages of lament alternate with hope and consolation.

Letter by Jeremiah
Exhortation not to fall into worshipping the idols of the nations into which the people have been scattered because of their sins.

Ezekiel | Ezek

Literary genres

- Oracles, visions, threats and symbolic acts.
- Parables, allegories, sapiential proverbs, legal cases, poems.

History

- **Content:** Account of Ezekiel, from a family of priests, who was exiled from Judea in the first deportation to Babylon (597 BC). His prophecies may date from between 592 and 571 BC.
- **Composition:** The book's doctrinal and linguistic unity point to a single author. This may be Ezekiel, or one of his disciples under his guidance.

Teaching

The book aims to give hope at a critical time for Israel, when David's descendants are no longer kings, the Temple has been destroyed, and the people are exiled from the Promised Land. Ezekiel's oracles repeat the phrase "You shall know that I am the Lord" 54 times. It is a call to trust in the true God who is holy, sovereign, transcendent and almighty, unlike the idols of Babylon, and to seek conversion of heart, shown in respect for the other's life, generosity to the poor, and remedying oppression and usury. In any case, God will forgive the people for the glory of his Name.

Daniel | Dan

Literary genres

- **Instructional narrative:** Third-person accounts of Daniel and other Jews in exile.
- **Visions:** Written in the first person.

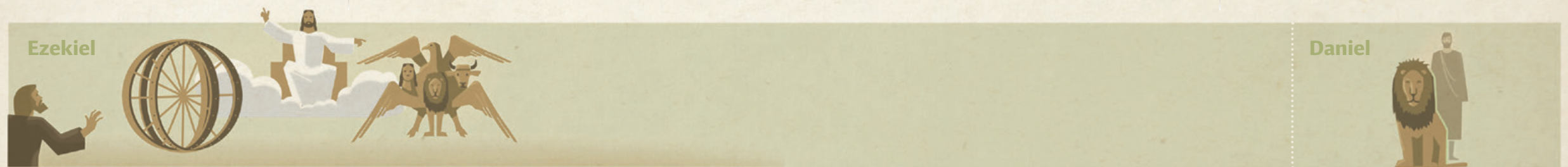
History

- **Content:** Set in Babylon in the time of the exile, although the historical references are unclear.
- **Composition:** The book includes material from different times and places, and is written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek (the parts in Greek are not included in the Hebrew Bible). It must have been compiled in the 2nd century BC, in the time of the Hellenizing policy of Antiochus IV

Epiphanes, which culminated with placing a statue of Olympian Zeus in the Temple and suppressing traditional Jewish worship.

Teaching

The book of Daniel is a reflection about history rather than a prophetic book. It is an exhortation to Jews to be faithful to their religion and worship the true God, even at the risk of their lives. Nevertheless, integration into a heathen society and collaboration with its kings is shown to be possible. The heathen rulers will recognize the God of Israel, or their power will be destroyed, until God finally displays his universal dominion in favor of his people.



Opening vision and calling
God calls Ezekiel to prophesy after showing him a majestic vision of his glory.

Symbolic acts
At God's command, Ezekiel performs some symbolical acts to announce the siege of Jerusalem.

Second vision
Ezekiel has a vision of how the "glory of God" deserts the Temple at Jerusalem because of the sins committed by the people. The oracle ends with a promise of salvation: "I shall gather you from the peoples, and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. (...) I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezek 11:17–20).

Oracles of condemnation
As the Babylonian invasion looms, the oracles against Judah are a call to conversion and to trust in God alone.

Announcement of the siege of Jerusalem, and condemnation of Judah and Israel

Oracles against the nations
The oracles against the nations highlight the fact that God is Lord of history, the one sovereign ruler over Israel and all nations, as against the polytheism of the times. The gods of the nations cannot defend anyone because they are false gods.

Judgment and condemnation of the nations

Oracles of salvation for Judah
After the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC, Ezekiel's oracles speak of hope and renewal.

Prophecy of hope and renewal for Israel

Third vision of God's glory
The last vision describes the Temple in detail and "the glory of the Lord" entering it. It is followed by rules for worship, and the distribution of land in the time of renewal.

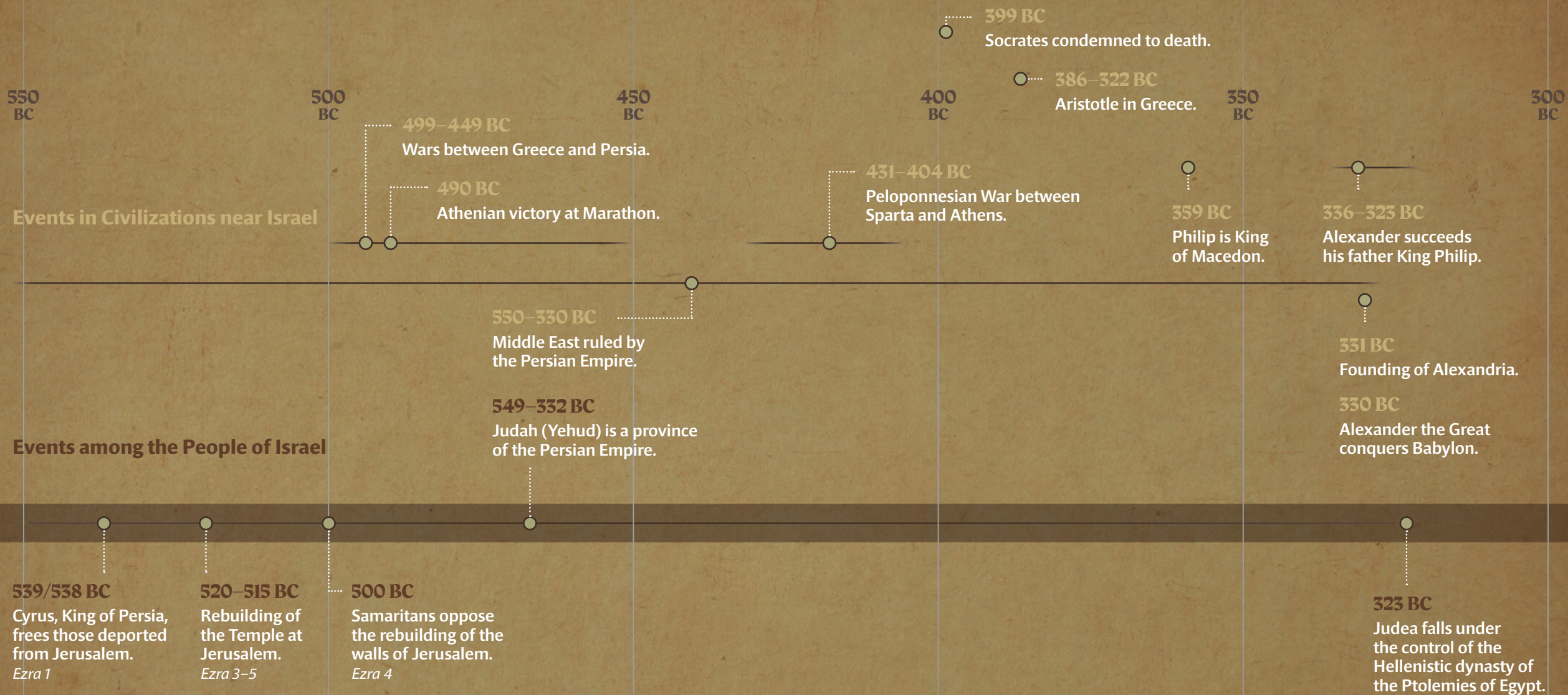
Prayer of the three youths in the furnace of fire.

Stories from the Babylonian court
Daniel and his companions enter the service of Nebuchadnezzar. God saves them after they refuse to worship the king.

Other stories
The story of Susannah and two episodes of idols. These are written in Greek.

Visions of Daniel
These aim to make God's plans known in the critical period of persecution by Antiochus IV.

6 Return of Judah from Exile



Ezra and Nehemiah

Outstanding episodes from the civic and religious rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Post-exilic Prophets

Obadiah, Joel, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Job

A sapiential book set in the Persian period.

Esther

Story of an episode of persecution suffered by the Jews dispersed in the Persian Empire.



The Persian Empire

538 BC

Ezra and Nehemiah | Ezra and Neh

Literary genre

- **Narrative histories;** a continuation of Chronicles, but underlining God's intervention in history, to evoke a response of faith and moral commitment in the reader.
- Lists and liturgical prayers.

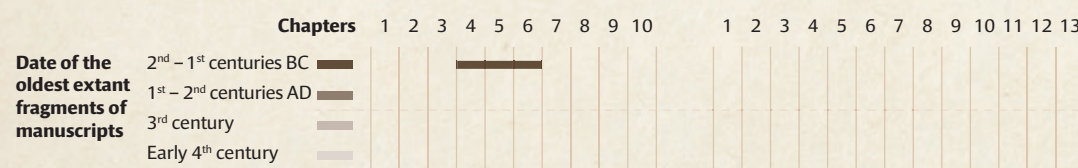
History

- **Content:** Narrates events from the decree of Cyrus (539/538 BC) authorizing the Jews to return to Jerusalem, up to the rebuilding of the Temple (520–515 BC) and restoration of civic and religious life.
- **Composition:** References in the texts, and their historical continuity, suggest they were written in the 4th or 3rd century BC.

Teaching

Ezra and Nehemiah are presented as the restorers of Judaism after the Babylonian exile. The author of the books aims to show this as a new stage in the history of salvation, in continuity with God's overarching plan. Additionally, the importance of the scribes and the synagogues is shown, still relying on the essential pillars of Mosaic tradition:

- The People, exclusively the Jews.
- The Law, the absolute rule for every aspect of life.
- The Promised Land, God's property which he gave to his chosen people.
- The Temple at Jerusalem, where God dwells.



Narration of episodes

Neither of these books narrates events in sequence; instead they give the most outstanding events from the history of Judah when it was part of the Persian Empire. The facts are selected according to doctrinal importance rather than chronological order.

Rebuilding the Temple

Ezra's mission

Ezra is said to have brought the Law and imposed it as the law of the state for all Jews.

Nehemiah's mission

Nehemiah is said to have restored the wall around Jerusalem, organized Judah's civic and economic life, and strengthened the returnees' identity through a renewal of their pact with God in the style of Deuteronomy, enforcing Sabbath observance and forbidding certain mixed marriages.

Chronological order

The existing historical data suggest that Nehemiah was active in Jerusalem around 445–424 BC and that Ezra arrived there in 398 BC; another hypothesis is that they were contemporaries.

Post-exilic Prophets

Obadiah | Obad

- **Literary genre:** Prophetic oracles.
- **Historical setting:** It appears to be set after the fall of Jerusalem (587 BC).
- **Teaching:** An oracle against Edom, which had assisted in the siege of Jerusalem. It calls on God to intervene and announces the coming of the "Day of the Lord" when justice will fill the earth and Israel will be restored.

Joel | Joel

- **Literary genre:** Prophetic oracles.
- **Historical setting:** It is hard to assign a specific time, though it must have been after the ruin of Judah.
- **Teaching:** The "Day of the Lord" runs through the whole book. It is seen as God intervening in history either to judge and punish, or to restore and bless. It will take place in the "valley of Jehoshaphat" or "of decision" (Joel 3:12.14 or 4:12.14), which in the Christian era was identified as the Kedron valley at Jerusalem.

Haggai | Hag

- **Literary genre:** Prophetic oracles.
- **Historical setting:** Around 520 BC, when the people had returned from Babylon and settled in Jerusalem.

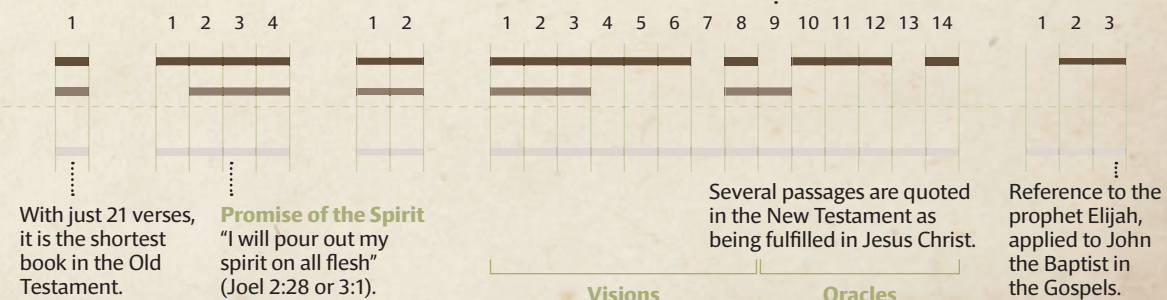
- **Teaching:** The rebuilding of the Temple is commanded by God. Hope in the ancient promises is nurtured by the accession to the throne of Zerubbabel, a descendant of David.

Zechariah | Zech

- **Literary genre:** Visions, symbolic acts and prophetic oracles.
- **Historical setting:** The time of the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the exile.
- **Teaching:** Through Zechariah, God gives his people a message of hope: the Temple will be rebuilt because that is his will, and then he will dwell there and will be the source of salvation for all nations. The promise also includes the coming of a Messiah who will bring peace to Jerusalem.

Malachi | Mal

- **Literary genre:** Oracles and controversies.
- **Historical setting:** In the Catholic canon, this is the last book of the Old Testament. It is set between the completion of the rebuilding of the Temple (515 BC) and the reform of Ezra (4th century BC).
- **Teaching:** Recalls that the Covenant is still alive, and offers hope in God's justice in Messianic tones. Malachi announces the coming of the Lord to his Temple, preceded by the prophet Elijah as his messenger.



Job | Job

Literary genres

- **Popular narrative:** Unlike the other sapiential books (composed of maxims, aphorisms and sayings) the book of Job begins and ends like a story.
- **Discourses:** Taking up most of the book, they are written in a mixture of verse and prose.

History

- **Content:** The book gives no details of the time when Job lived, nor his ancestry. He is shown simply as a man of integrity who remains faithful amidst disasters.
- **Composition:** Probably in the Persian era, but before Maccabees or Daniel, before any light had been thrown on the question of the next life.

Teaching

The book's theme is the suffering of the innocent. First it is seen to be a test of faithfulness to the Lord. Then doubt is cast on the traditional view that "God rewards the good and punishes the evil", because not all suffering is a punishment, or the result of evil-doing. Finally, the Lord himself intervenes to point to the real explanation: all the elements of creation have a reason, and suffering can be seen as forming part of God's mysterious designs. This is just one step away from contemplating the mystery of the Cross of Jesus, whose love lights up the meaning of suffering and death.

Esther | Esth

Literary genre

- **Narrative:** The account evokes an episode of persecution possibly suffered by the Jews scattered in the Persian Empire. The sacred author took inspiration from it to write a beautiful passage to be read on the feast of Purim.

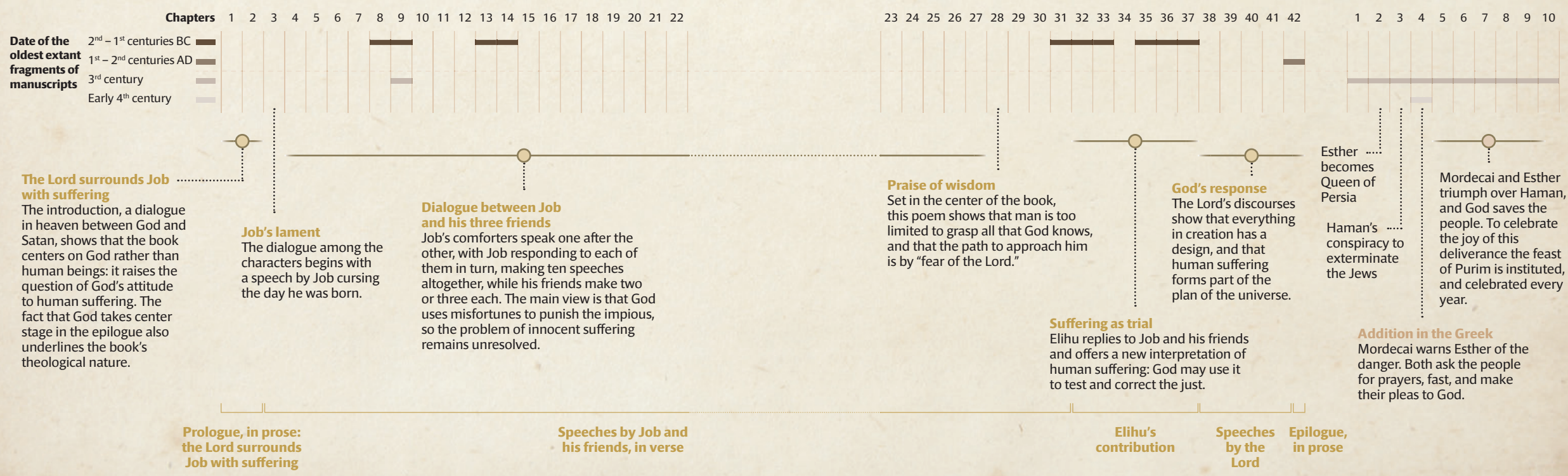
History

- **Content:** Set in the court of the Persian Empire (6th–4th centuries BC) when one of the leading figures is plotting to exterminate the Jews.
- **Composition:** Maybe early 1st century BC. Manuscripts in Hebrew and Greek exist. The Greek text is not simply a translation from the Hebrew but has long additions

giving a greater religious sense to the narrative.

Teaching

The Hebrew version makes clear that God's providence is at work caring for his people and protecting them from their enemies, and nurtures the hope that God will never abandon the people he chose. The Greek version adds the importance of prayer, which God always hears, while at the same time his people are called to do their part. Mordecai and Queen Esther place all their confidence in God, do penance and pray intensely, but at the same time act with initiative and astuteness.



7 Hellenistic Era

300 BC

250 BC

200 BC

150 BC

100 BC

50 BC

Events in Civilizations near Israel

c.280 BC

Founding of the library at Alexandria and building of the Pharos or Lighthouse of Alexandria, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

264–241 BC

First Punic War, between Rome and Carthage.

218–201 BC

Second Punic War: Hannibal against Rome.

188 BC

Peace of Apamea between Rome and Antiochus III, ruler of the Seleucid Empire.

149–146 BC

Third Punic War: Scipio Aemilianus against Hasdrubal. Destruction of Carthage.

146 BC

Destruction of Corinth. Greece becomes a Roman province.

71 BC

Spartacus leads a slaves' revolt against the Roman Republic.

64 BC

Roman province of Syria created.

Events among the People of Israel

323 BC

Judea falls under the control of the Hellenistic dynasty of the Ptolemies of Egypt.

198–167 BC

Judea passes into the hands of the Syro-Hellenistic dynasty of the Seleucids. *1 Maccabees 1*

175 BC

Hellenistic reforms in Jerusalem. *2 Maccabees 4*

169 BC

Antiochus IV profanes the Temple at Jerusalem and persecutes Jews opposed to Hellenization. *1 Maccabees 1*

167 BC

Mattathias and his sons Judas, Jonathan and Simon, raise a rebellion against the Hellenizing Jews in Jerusalem. *1 Maccabees 2*

164 BC

Judas Maccabeus reconquers Jerusalem and re-dedicates the Temple. This is the origin of the Jewish feast of Hanukkah. *1 Maccabees 4*

141–37 BC

The Hasmoneans, successors of the Maccabees, rule in Judea.

63 BC

The Roman general Pompey conquers Jerusalem.

Books of the Bible for this Period



c.200–100 BC

The Hebrew Bible is translated into Greek over a period of time (the Pentateuch was completed before 200 BC). This Greek version, known as the Septuagint ("the Seventy", or LXX), is the basis of the Catholic Old Testament canon.

Books of the Maccabees

Story of the rebellion against the Seleucids. The second book belongs to a different genre from the first, and is not a continuation of it. They are not included in the Hebrew Bible.

Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)

Last of the canonical wisdom books in the Septuagint and the Vulgate.

Wisdom

A wisdom book attributed to Solomon, but actually written in the cultured Greek of Lower Egypt around the second half of the 1st century BC.



THE CONQUESTS OF Alexander the Great

336–323 BC



Books of the Maccabees

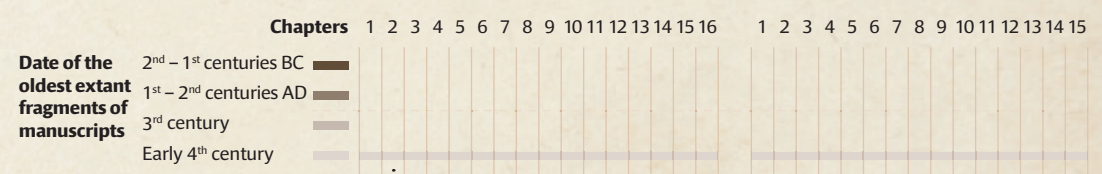
1 Maccabees | 1 Mac

- **Literary genre:** Narrative. It aims to set out events objectively and in order, though this aim is subordinated to showing how God guides history.
- **Content:** Narrates events from the accession to the throne of Syria of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175 BC) to the death of Simon the Maccabee, the last of Mattathias's sons (134 BC) who led the revolt against the Hellenizing Seleucids in Judea.
- **Composition:** Around 100 BC, by a very religious, patriotic Jew from Jerusalem. The original was in Hebrew but only Greek translations survive. It is not included in the Hebrew Bible.
- **Teaching:** The central reference-point is the Law, understood as the witness to the Covenant that God made with his people, which they must faithfully observe. The

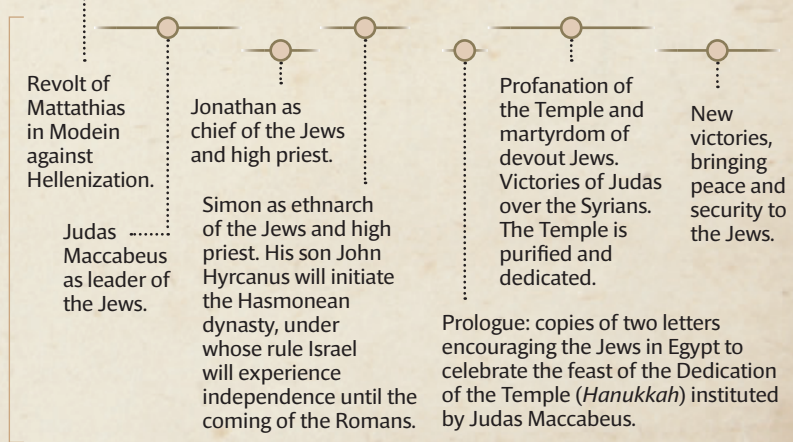
conflict is not between Seleucids and Hasmoneans but observers of the Law and their adversaries.

2 Maccabees | 2 Mac

- **Literary genre:** "Rhetorical history", it does not aim to give an accurate account but to move and persuade, and so highlights the religious sense of the narrative.
- **Content:** Narrates events from the predecessor of Antiochus IV to the victory of Judas Maccabeus over Nicanor (161 BC).
- **Composition:** End of 2nd century BC, written in Greek in Alexandria. It is not included in the Hebrew Bible.
- **Teaching:** Among other elements the book highlights the value of martyrdom. Giving one's life to remain faithful to God makes sense because of faith in the resurrection, and in eternal life after death for the just.



Heroes of the uprising
The first book focuses on the Maccabean uprising and its heroic leaders. Their victory leads to restoration of the monarch, who also becomes high priest. The union of political and religious power in one same figure later causes a split in Judaism that will lead to the parties or groups that were active in the times of Jesus: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots.



Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) | Sir

Literary genre

- **Hebrew proverbs.** It includes maxims, sayings and parables. The rhythmic text is poetry in the broadest sense.

History

- **Historical setting:** From the early 2nd century BC, when Judea is ruled by the Syrian Seleucid dynasty. The Seleucids' Hellenizing program will soon become outright persecution, and this book is a call to be faithful to the traditions of Israel.
- **Composition:** Written in Hebrew around 190–180 BC by “Jesus, the son of Sirach, the son of Eleazar, of Jerusalem” (Sir 50:27). Later, probably after 132 BC, it

was translated into Greek by the author’s grandson in Egypt. It is not included in the Hebrew Bible.

Teaching

Israel knew the wisdom to be acquired by observing nature and reflecting on the wisdom God shows in creation. Ben Sirach accepts this preceding sapiential tradition, but goes on to integrate it in his contemplation of the history of Israel and its Law. Thus supreme wisdom is the Law of Moses, the *Torah*, written in a book; and the wise man is the one who knows and practices it in all circumstances, applying the human power of reasoning.

Wisdom | Wis

Literary genre

- **Persuasive discourse:** The author praises wisdom, but with a clearly religious goal, showing it as an attribute of the Lord, the One God of the Old Testament.

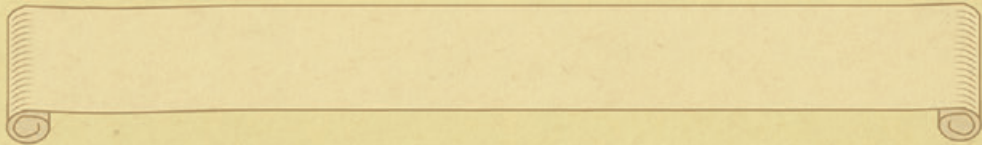
History

- **Historical setting:** Although it is attributed to King Solomon, its author appears to be a wise man from Alexandria, whose work is a dialogue between his own Jewish tradition and the pagan Greek world where he lives.
- **Composition:** Chronologically the most recent book in the Old Testament, since it must have been written in Greek at the end of the 1st century BC. It is not included in the Hebrew Bible.


Teaching

The book’s theological content includes the major themes of Revelation and religious thought: God, the world, mankind, creation, providence, life and death, recompense in this world and the next, moral virtues, and more. A first novelty is that the Old Testament legacy is expressed in terms taken from Greek culture. Other contributions are the clear distinction between soul and body; and belief in life after the death of the body, because of the immortality of the soul or spirit. This legacy brings us to the threshold of the New Testament, where God’s Incarnate Son reveals the full truth about what humans are.

Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)



Wisdom



Chapters 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29

Date of the oldest extant fragments of manuscripts

- 2nd – 1st centuries BC
- 1st – 2nd centuries AD
- 3rd century
- Early 4th century

30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19

Parallel structure to the Law
The central idea of the book is that “he who holds to the law will obtain wisdom” (Sir 15:1). Hence the translator offers it to “those living abroad who wished to gain learning, being prepared in character to live according to the law” (Sir Prologue). The book’s structure itself, in five parts, evokes the five books of Pentateuch, the Law. Each part begins with a short doctrinal introduction and continues with a long collection of teachings and practical applications.

1. God has the fullness of wisdom
Reflection on the divine origin of wisdom.

2. God infuses wisdom into his works
Reflection on wisdom in creation.

3. God grants wisdom to those who keep the commandments
Reflection on wisdom and faithfulness to the Covenant. The primordial reference-point of fulfilling the Law is worshipping God in the Temple in Jerusalem.

4. The fullness of wisdom is fear of the Lord
Fearing the Lord means acknowledging God’s transcendence, his rule over created beings, and the reward or punishment of people according to their behavior, at the moment of death.

5. The lesson of past generations
Reflection on God, the Lord of the world and history, and praise of past generations as valid reference-points for their faithfulness to the Covenant and the Law.

Wisdom and human destiny
Reflection on the opposition between just and impious, set against God’s judgment, reward or punishment, and immortality.

Action of wisdom in history
Gives a broad view of providence and God’s actions in the history of Israel, with special reference to the events of the Exodus. It also criticizes philosophers and idolatry.

Origin and nature of wisdom
The wisdom that leads to God is not the fruit of human efforts but a gift obtained from God by prayer.

8 Roman Era

80 BC

60 BC

40 BC

20 BC

AD

Events in Civilizations near Israel

71 BC

Spartacus leads a slaves' revolt against the Roman Republic.

64 BC

Roman province of Syria created.

44 BC

The Ides of March: Julius Caesar assassinated.

31 BC

Battle of Actium: victory of Octavian over Mark Antony and Cleopatra.

27 BC – AD 14

Octavian Augustus is Emperor of Rome.

19 BC

Rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem begins.



Events among the People of Israel

141–37 BC

The Hasmoneans, successors of the Maccabees, rule in Judea.

63 BC

The Roman general Pompey conquers Jerusalem.

37 BC – AD 2

Herod the Great is King of Judea.

c.6/1 BC

Birth of Jesus. The 6th-century Scythian monk Dionysius Exiguus proposed the birth of Jesus as the reference point of history and the center of time. Using the information at his disposal, he fixed the birth of Christ in the year 753 since the foundation of Rome. Since the 17th century it has been considered that it must have been a little earlier, but recent studies suggest caution in this regard.

4 BC

Herod's Kingdom is divided up between his sons Archelaus (Judea), Philip (Iturea) and Herod Antipas (Galilee and Perea). The three brothers may have initiated a possible co-regency until the death of their father some time between 4 BC and AD 2.

Ages in the history of the Mediterranean

ANCIENT 3000 BC – AD 476

MIDDLE AD 476–1453

MODERN AD 1453–1789

CONTEMPORARY

From the emergence of writing to the fall of the Western Roman Empire.

The Middle Ages ended with the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire.

The French Revolution marks the boundary between the Modern and Contemporary ages.

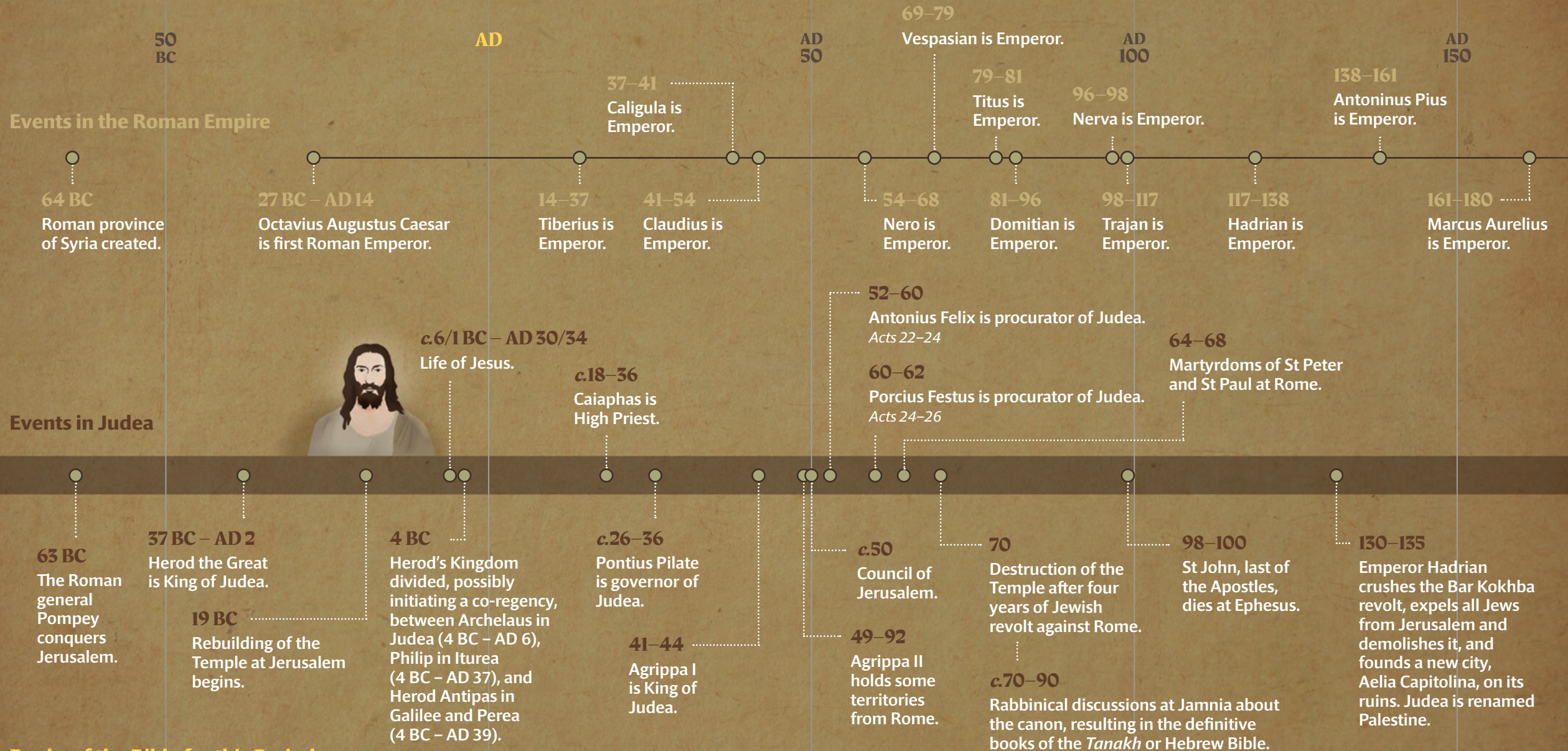
100 BC AD 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900 1000 1100 1200 1300 1400 1500 1600 1700 1800 1900 2000

Timeline of the New Testament



1 First Roman Era

Until the Destruction of Jerusalem



Books of the Bible for this Period



Gospels

The preaching of the Apostles on the life of Jesus was put into writing in the four Gospels.

Acts of the Apostles

Account of Christianity's first steps, as connected with the missionary work of the two most outstanding Apostles, St Peter and St Paul.

Writings Attributed to St Paul and the Letter to the Hebrews

Fourteen letters that develop the Apostles' preaching about Jesus theologically, and apply his teachings to the lives of the early faithful.

The Catholic Epistles

Seven universal letters on the saving work of Jesus Christ.

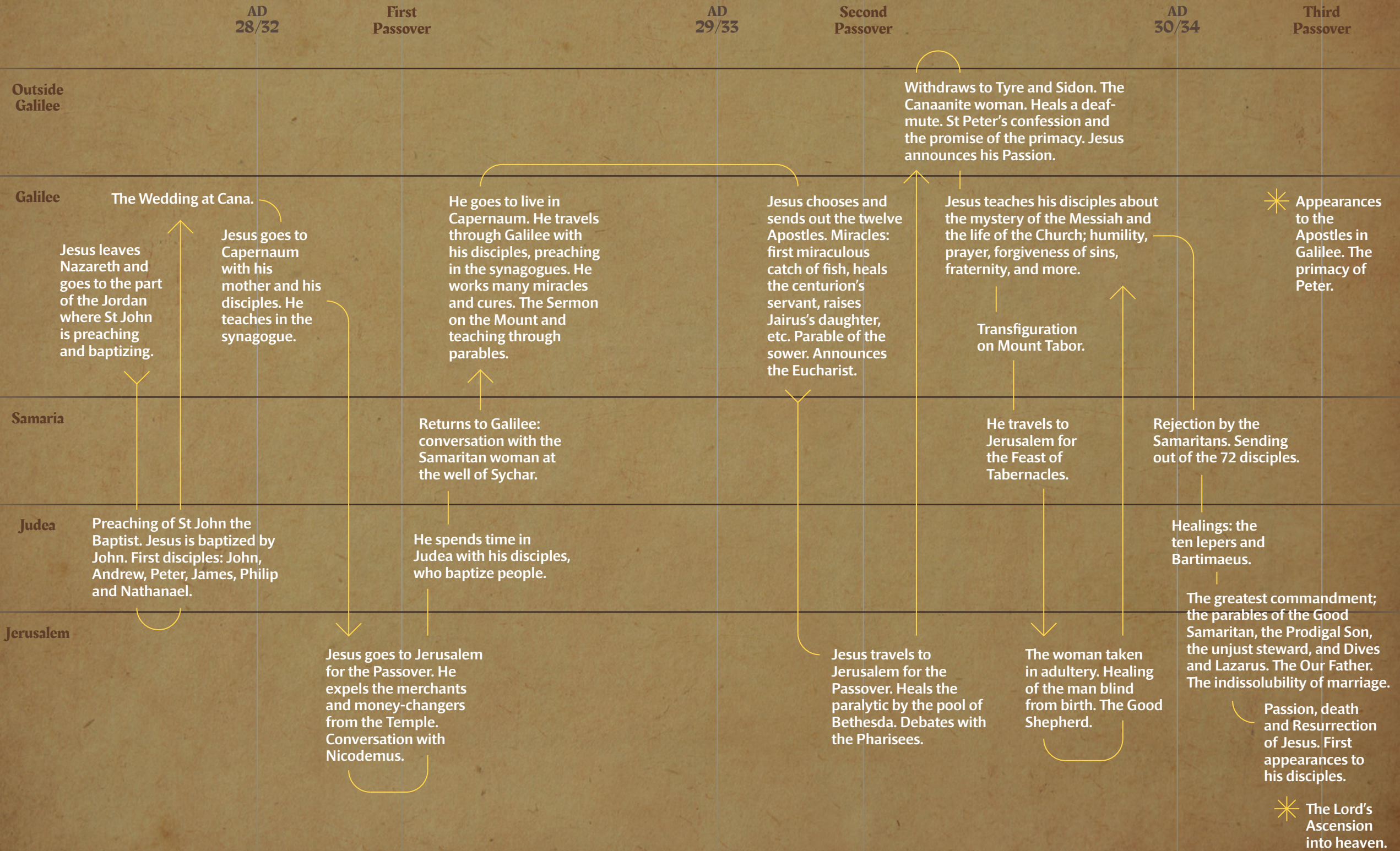
Revelation or Apocalypse

The last book of the New Testament, written around the year 96.



The Public Life of Jesus

The Gospels do not give enough information to date the years of Jesus's public life or determine whether he celebrated the Passover in Jerusalem three times or four. As a point of reference, the preaching of St John the Baptist is dated around the year 27 or 30, depending on the various hypotheses argued by scholars.



ROMAN Judea

63 BC – AD 39

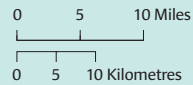
Political boundaries
(AD 6–39)

Places mentioned in
the New Testament

Cities of the Decapolis

Cities of the
Decapolis
mentioned in the
New Testament

Fortresses



The Gospel According to Matthew | Mt

Literary genre

• **Gospel:** The preaching of the Apostles about the Incarnate Word, written in narrative form. The first four books of the New Testament belong to this genre.

History

- **Content:** The life and teaching of Jesus Christ, starting with a genealogy of St Joseph, spouse of the Virgin Mary, and ending with Jesus's universal apostolic command to his disciples.
- **Composition:** The first Gospel is attributed to the apostle Matthew. A first version in Hebrew, which has not survived, must have been written around AD 50 or 60.

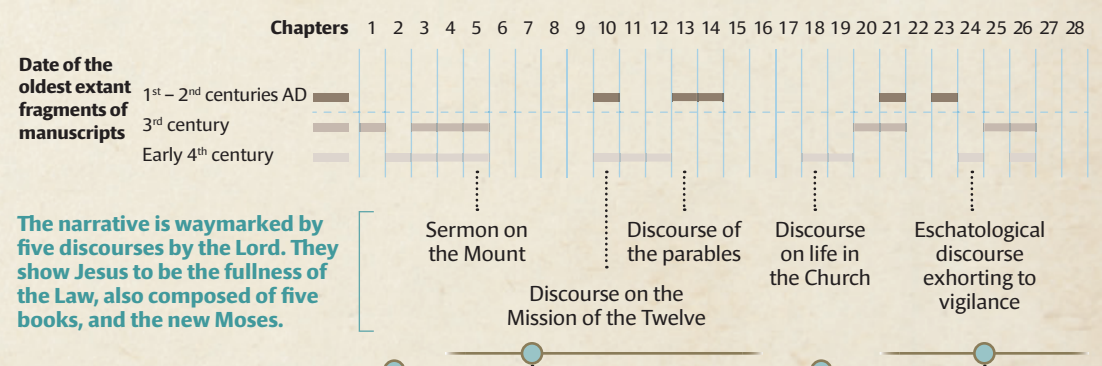
The Greek version may date from some years later. Its immediate target readership seems to be Christians converted from Judaism.

Teaching

The first Gospel states that Jesus is the promised Messiah and that the Scriptures are fulfilled in him. Matthew also teaches that Jesus accomplished the true and lasting renewal of Israel, the people of the Old Testament, by founding the Church as the new people of God: he shows that Christianity is rooted in the Jewish people and opens up to the whole world, as announced by Isaiah and Daniel.

Matthew

- Jesus is proclaimed as Emmanuel, God with us, because he is God made man pp. 45, 47
- Jesus teaches the Law of the Gospel especially in the Sermon on the Mount, where he presents himself as the new Moses pp. 32, 35



Descendant of David
The account of Jesus's birth and infancy, followed by the Baptism and the temptations, show that Jesus is the true Son of God, born of the Virgin by the work of the Holy Spirit, and at the same time true man, descended from David. He is the Messiah of Israel and the Savior of all mankind, who triumphs where others succumbed to temptation.

Jesus's Galilean ministry
Jesus proclaims in word and deed that the Kingdom of Heaven has come. He calls his disciples and convokes the new people of God. He promulgates the new Law. His teaching is confirmed by his miracles. St Peter confesses him as the Messiah, the Son of God.

Jesus on the way to Jerusalem
The announcements of the Passion, and the Transfiguration, point to Jesus's betrayal and death. But after death will come his Resurrection and glorification.

Jesus's ministry in Jerusalem
Jesus enters Jerusalem as the Messiah and purifies the Temple (John places this episode at the start of the Lord's public life) and argues with the Jews. The account of the Passion highlights Jesus's serene self-surrender to his mission as God's Servant, and Israel's rejection of God's plans.

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The Gospel According to Mark | Mk

Literary genre

- **Gospel:** The book by St Peter's disciple and interpreter Mark seems to be the oldest Gospel, and it was he who gave this genre the name "gospel", meaning good news or glad tidings, a term he identifies with Jesus.

History

- **Content:** The life and teachings of Jesus Christ from the appearance of John the Baptist until the Lord's Ascension.
- **Composition:** Tradition attributes the book to St Mark, who is said to have written it when requested by the Christians of Rome to write down St Peter's preaching. It likely

dates from the AD 50s or 60s; it is not clear whether it was written before or after St Peter's martyrdom.

Teaching

Mark's is a simple, unstudied account of Jesus's life and his disciples, with eye-witness descriptions of events. It brings before us the manifestation of Jesus's divinity and also the feelings and emotions of his true humanity. We witness the Gospel story as though taking part in it, and so we are invited to commit ourselves to him as the disciples did, following Jesus to the extreme of taking up our own cross.

The Gospel According to Luke | Lk

Literary genre

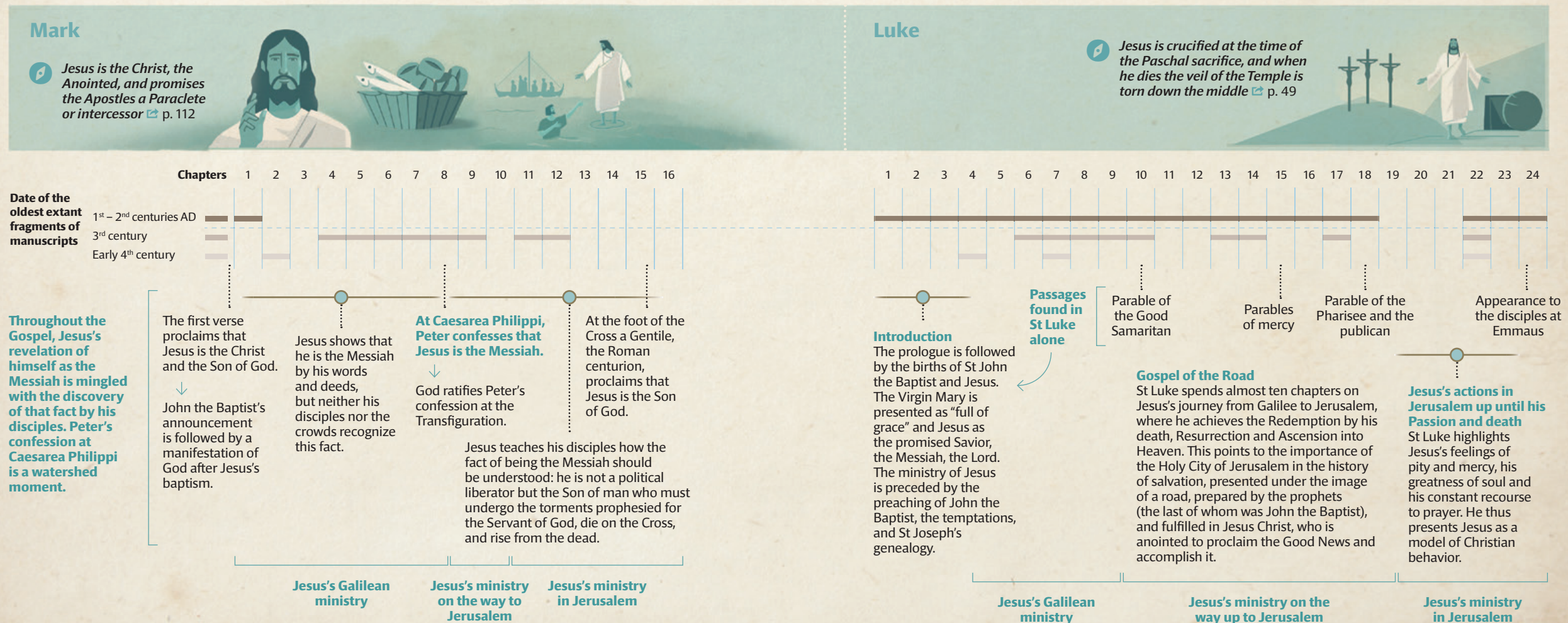
- **Gospel:** Written in more elegant Greek than the other three Gospels.

History

- **Content:** Jesus Christ's life and teachings from the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah, up to the Lord's Ascension.
- **Composition:** Attributed to St Luke, a doctor from Antioch and disciple and companion of St Paul. He appears to have written his Gospel, and the Acts of the Apostles, in Achaea, Boeotia or Rome, either around AD 63–65 or 67–80.

Teaching

Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles are joined by style and content, to form a single whole. St Luke writes them for communities of Christian converts from paganism, to show them the solid foundations of the faith they have received. As a disciple of St Paul he underlines God's saving mercy, perfectly revealed in Jesus, universal in character, and offered to all, Jews and Greeks alike. The fulfillment of these promises of salvation is shown in the *Benedictus*, the *Magnificat*, the announcement to the shepherds, and the Song of Simeon, and also when Jesus cures diseases, forgives sins and tells the parables about mercy.



The Gospel According to John | Jn

Literary genre

- Gospel.

History

- **Content:** The life and teachings of Jesus Christ from the preaching of John the Baptist to Christ's appearances after his Resurrection.
- **Composition:** Tradition says this book was written by St John, the youngest of the Apostles, in Ephesus in the 90s (some scholars suggest it could be earlier). Some elements in the narrative read as though it was finalized, or revised, by another person who refers to St John at the end of the Gospel: "This is the disciple who is

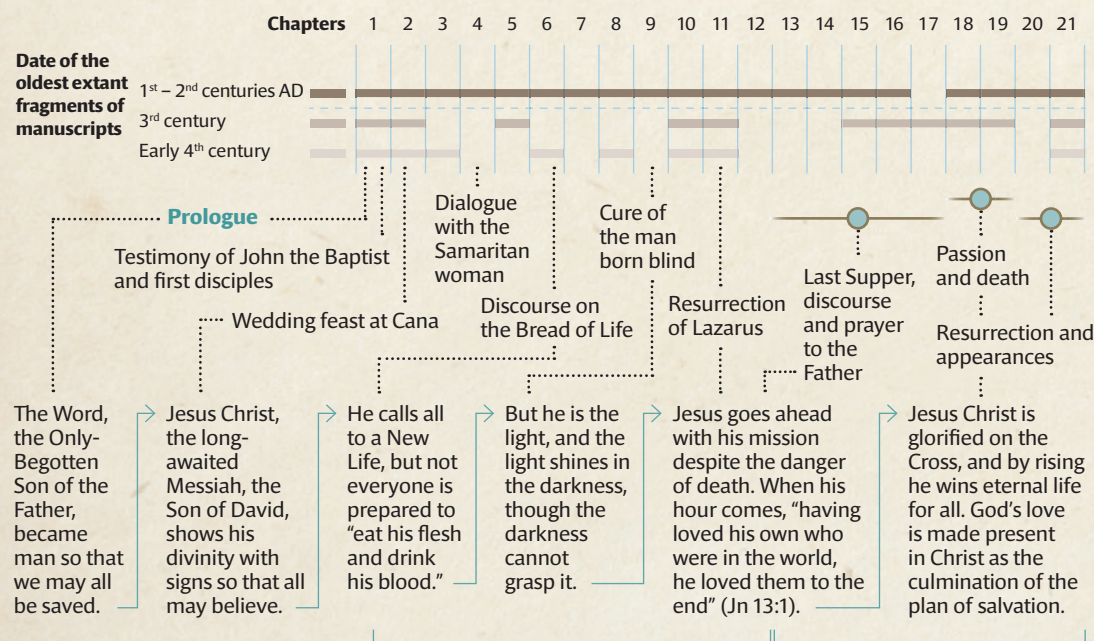
bearing witness to these things and has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true" (Jn 21:24).

Teaching

The book was written with a clear purpose: "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (Jn 20:31). Accordingly it centers on Jesus's identity, mission, and relationship with God the Father. There is a progressive manifestation of Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, punctuated by the Jewish feasts and Jesus's various visits to Jerusalem, and by some carefully selected events and discourses.

John

Pilate asks Jesus if he is a King: "You say that I am a king. For this I was born and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice" (Jn 18:37) p. 66

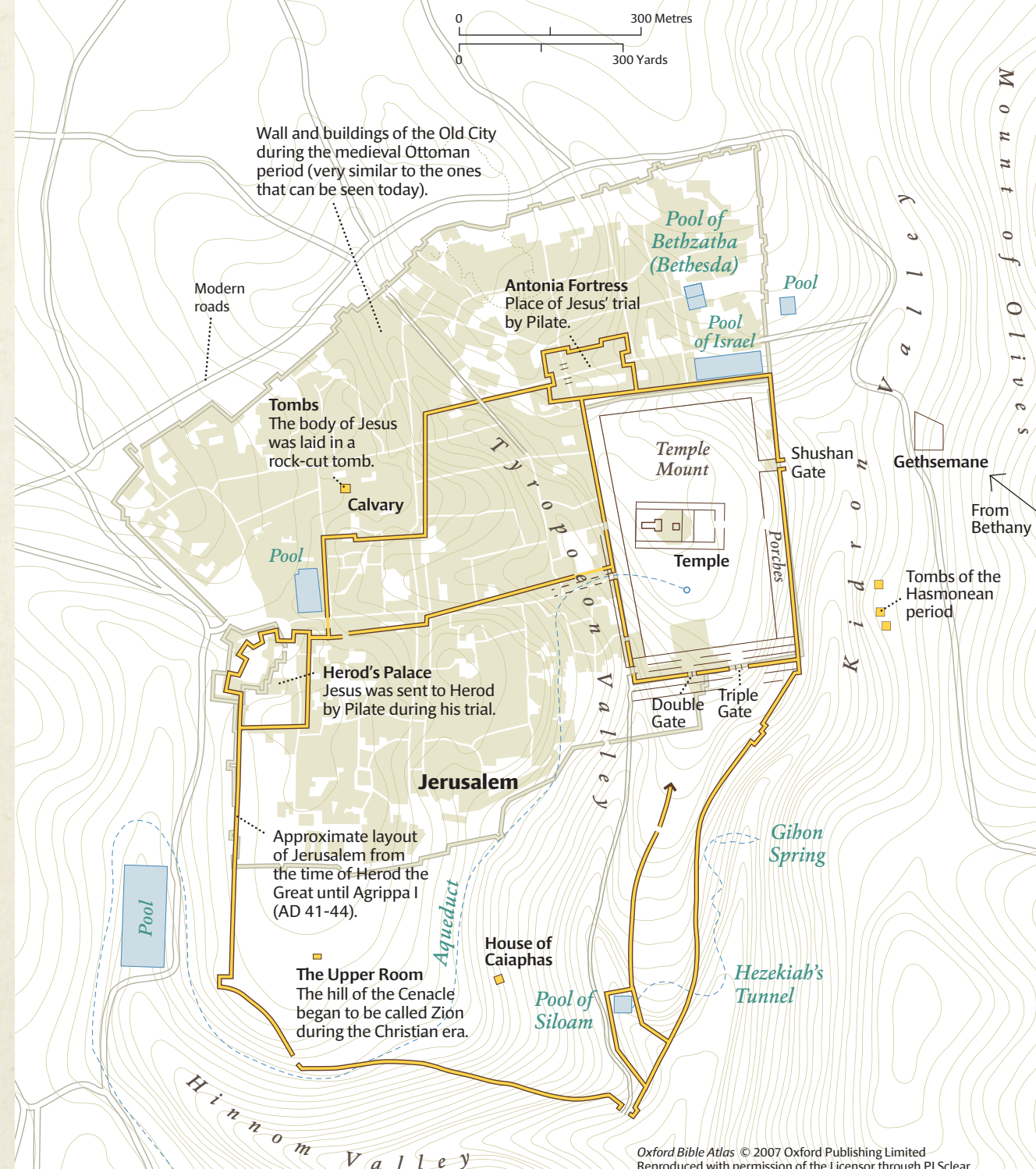


Jesus is shown to be the Messiah by his signs and words

Jesus is shown to be the Messiah, the Son of God, in his Passion, death and Resurrection

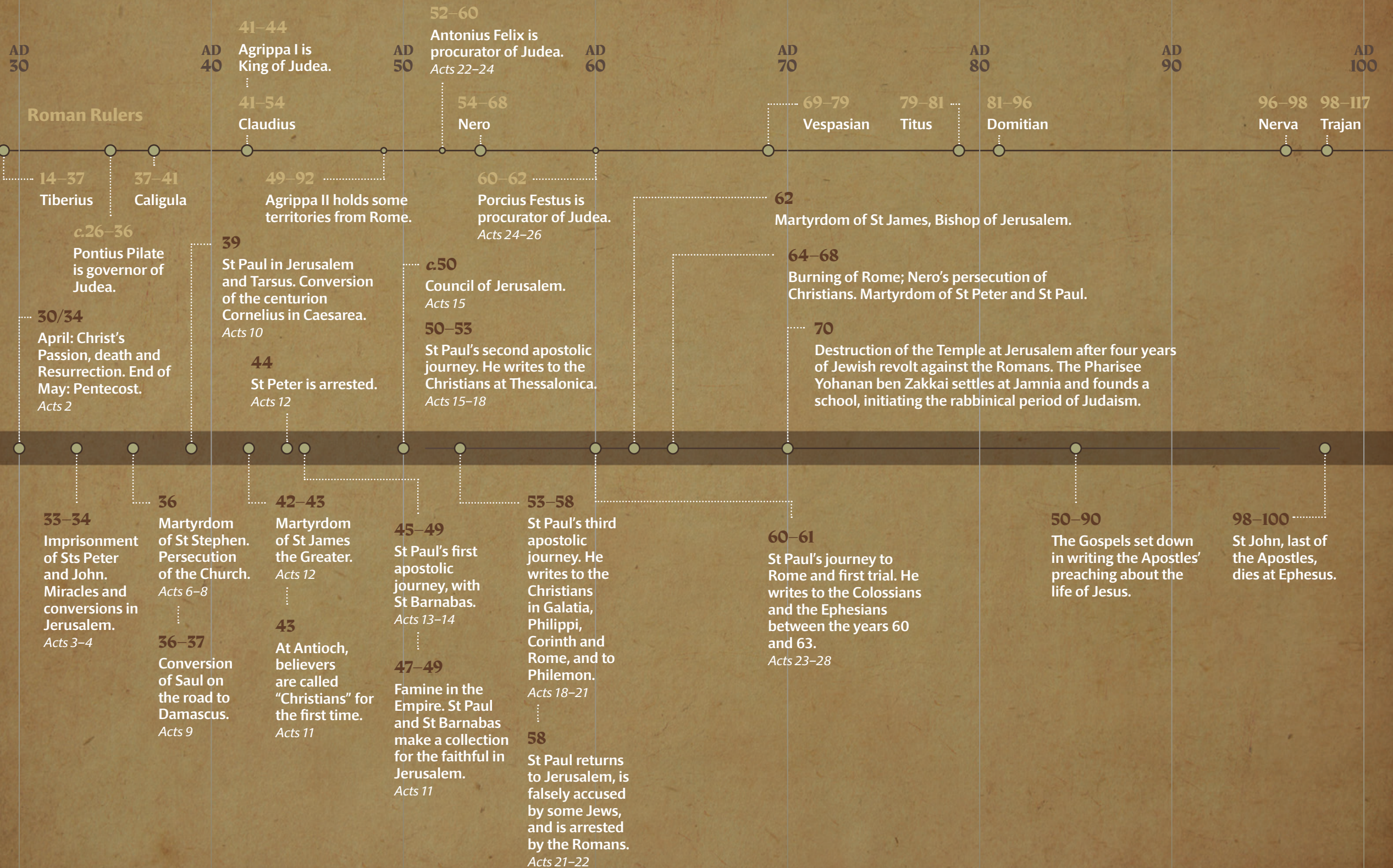
Jerusalem

IN JESUS'S TIME



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The Church in the First Century



THE APOSTOLIC JOURNEYS OF St Paul

AD 45-58



- Paul's 1st Journey
- Paul's 2nd Journey
- Paul's 3rd Journey

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Acts of the Apostles | Acts

Literary genre

- Narrative.

History

- **Content:** Acts starts from the Ascension, where Luke's Gospel ended, and narrates the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the initial preaching of the Gospel from Jerusalem, and the establishing of the first Christian communities in relation to the missionary work of Peter and Paul. It ends with Paul's arrival in Rome around AD 61.
- **Composition:** Some scholars date Acts to AD 63-65 and others to 67-80. The attribution to Luke, the author of the third Gospel, is generally accepted.

Teaching

St Luke presents the main Christian truths and the basics of the sacramental and liturgical life of the nascent Church. The Church is shown as prolonging Jesus Christ's work of redemption, and as God's instrument to fulfill the promises of the Old Testament.

Key concept

- **Holy Spirit:** Acts can be seen as the *Gospel of the Holy Spirit*, whose name occurs 57 times. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Jesus's disciples find the strength and wisdom to be his witnesses at every moment.

Letters to the Thessalonians

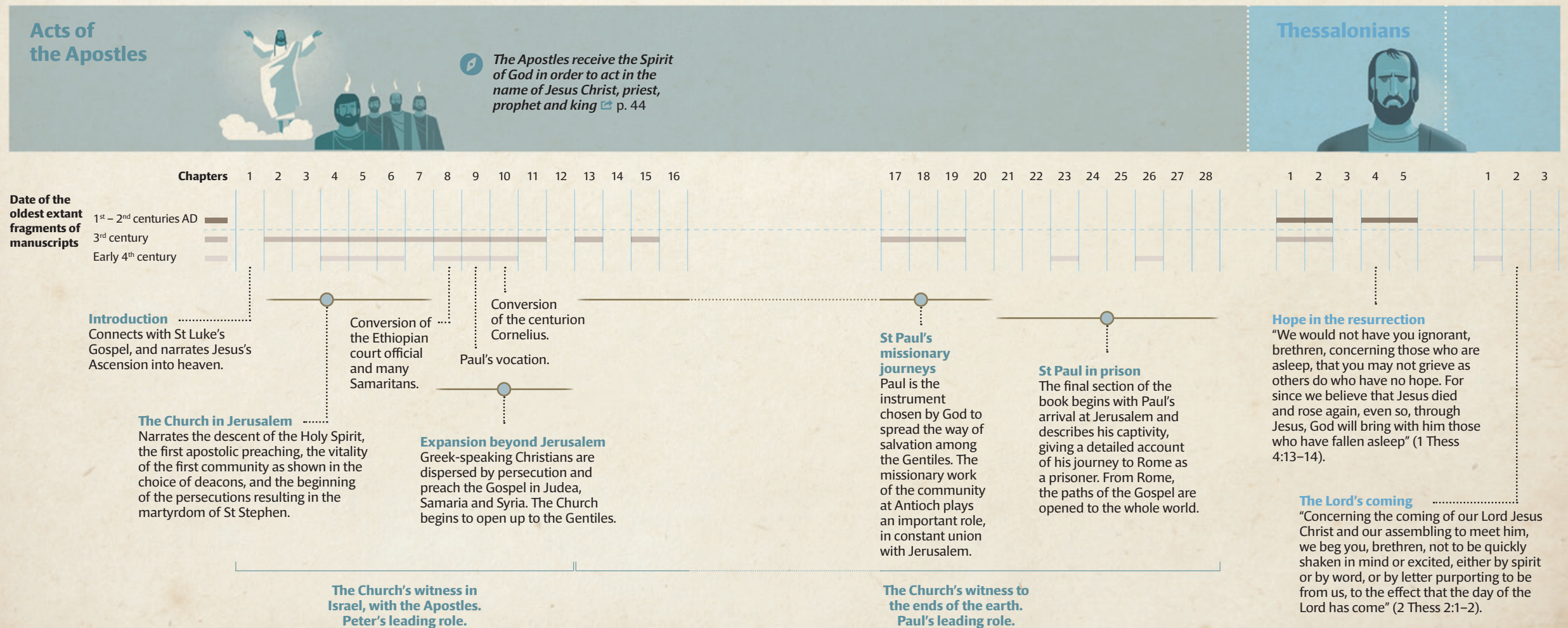
1 Thessalonians | 1 Thess

- **Literary genre:** Rather than a doctrinal explanation it is a document of personal memories relived in the light of faith.
- **History and composition:** St Paul, with Silas and Timothy, founded a flourishing Christian community at Thessalonica at the start of his second apostolic journey. However, he was obliged to leave in a hurry. In the winter of AD 50-51, he writes from Corinth to the faithful in Thessalonica to confirm their faith. This is certainly the oldest book in the New Testament.
- **Teaching:** The letter gives a picture of the work of evangelization and the content of Christian teaching: the good news of our

salvation, announced by the prophets and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The letter features the truths of the faith that will later be summarized in the Creed, the basics of morality (sanctification), and the main elements of prayer.

2 Thessalonians | 2 Thess

- **Literary genre:** Doctrinal letter.
- **History and composition:** Date and circumstances cannot be established. The only thing it has in common with 1 Thess is the addressees.
- **Teaching:** He exhorts the Thessalonians to maintain the tradition received from him, and stresses that the *Parousia* is not imminent.



Long Letters by St Paul

1 and 2 Corinthians | 1 Cor and 2 Cor

- **Literary genres:** 1 Cor is markedly pastoral, tackling problems arising among the community at Corinth. 2 Cor, which may be put together from parts of St Paul's letters to these early Christians, includes his defense of his life and ministry.
- **History and composition:** The Christian community at Corinth was founded by St Paul with the help of Silas and Timothy in AD 50 or 51, during his second apostolic journey. He stayed there for a year and a half before returning to Syria. After writing 1 Cor at Ephesus, he must have returned to Corinth on his third apostolic journey, in

AD 57. Then some painful event must have occurred that gave rise to the explanations and defense in 2 Cor.

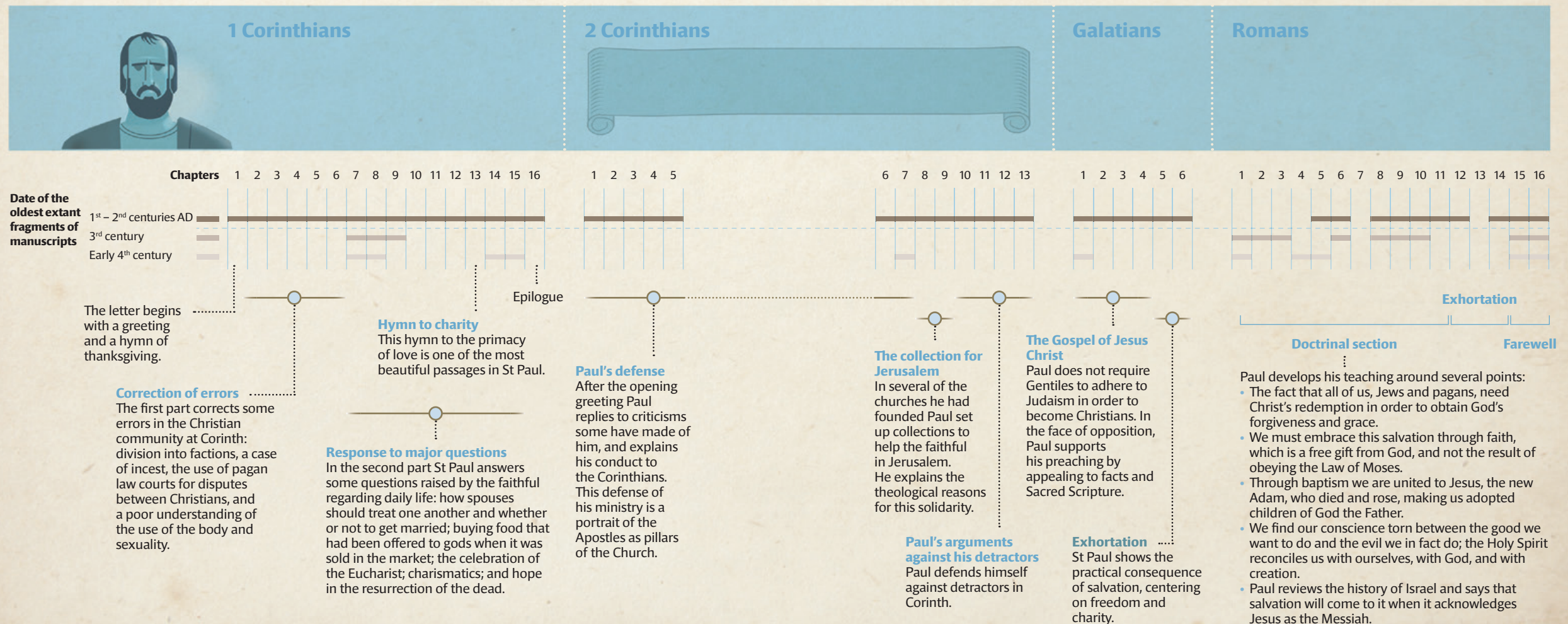
- **Teachings:** In 1 Cor, as well as correcting the Corinthians' errors and resolving their doubts, St Paul gives some major teachings on the supernatural nature of the Church as Christ's Mystical Body; on the institution of the Eucharist, its sacrificial character and connection with the Church, and the Real Presence of Christ under the appearances of bread and wine; and on Christ's Resurrection, the pledge of our own resurrection. In 2 Cor, he presents his apostolic ministry as a sharing in Christ's work of redemption.

Galatians | Gal

- **Literary genre:** A family-type letter, dictated to a secretary.
- **History and composition:** St Paul preached the Gospel in Galatia on his second journey (AD 50–52). He was delayed there by sickness. He returned in 53 or 54. Meanwhile some Judaizing Christians also went to Galatia and wanted to impose their own traditions. To dispel any confusion Paul wrote this letter to the Galatians from Ephesus around AD 54–55.
- **Teaching:** This is the best commentary on the outcome of the Council of Jerusalem, where it was decided that Christian converts from paganism should not be obliged to keep the Jewish law. It thus introduces the main theme of the Letter to the Romans which was written shortly afterwards: justification by faith in Christ, not by observance of the Mosaic Law.

Romans | Rom

- **Literary genre:** A treatise in the form of a letter, St Paul's most important one. It is always placed first among his letters, from the oldest (2nd century) manuscript onward.
- **History and composition:** By AD 57–58, the Gospel has spread from Jerusalem to the Adriatic Sea. Paul is planning to go to Hispania via Rome, and writes to the Romans from Corinth.
- **Teaching:** Centered on the salvation brought by Christ, as a pure gift from God that frees people from the precepts of the Law of Moses. Paul explains the deep newness of the Gospel and the transformation that God's grace works in the believer, who becomes a child of God in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. He also sets out the basics of Christian moral conduct in line with this new dignity.



St Paul's Captivity Letters

Philippians | Phil

- **Literary genre:** A friendly letter written in personal, affectionate terms.
- **History and composition:** The rather ill-defined structure suggests this may be an amalgamation of two or three different letters. If so, the central part may have been written at Ephesus during Paul's imprisonment on his third journey (54–57).
- **Teaching:** In affectionate language Paul passes on news about the spread of the Gospel, and encourages his readers to practice his teachings and grow in virtue.

Philemon | Philem

- **Literary genre:** A friendly letter.
- **History and composition:** Probably written between AD 54 and 57 in Rome, where the escaped slave Onesimus had taken refuge.
- **Teaching:** St Paul lays down the Christian principle that eventually led to the abolition of slavery: the freedom of God's children.

Colossians | Col

- **Literary genre:** A letter of exhortation, warning against syncretism and urging fidelity to the faith received.
- **History and composition:** Since Colossae was destroyed by an earthquake in AD 60 or 64, it must have been prior to that time.
- **Teaching:** The letter reflects, from the viewpoint of the Gospel, on the creation and governing of the universe, and God's plan for the salvation of the human race, which also embraces the things of the earth.

Ephesians | Eph

- **Literary genre:** A doctrinal letter, possibly addressed to the churches in different cities of Phrygia (Ephesus, Laodicea, Colossae).
- **History and composition:** From its parallels with Colossians, it is thought that both letters were written in similar circumstances.
- **Teaching:** Jesus Christ is Lord of all creation, uniting redeemed mankind in harmony; and he is the Head of the Church, which is his body.

St Paul's Pastoral Letters

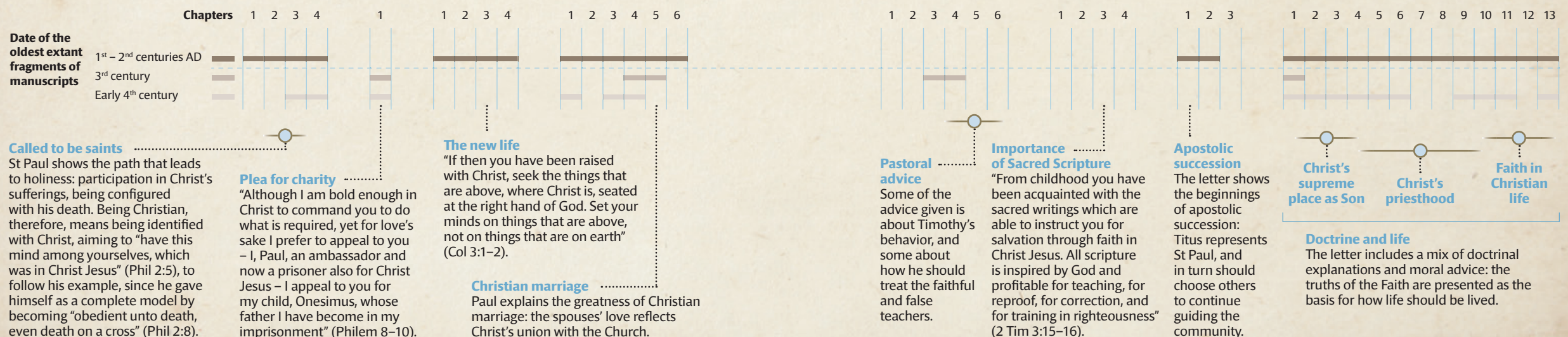
1 and 2 Timothy | 1 and 2 Tim

Titus | Tit

- **Literary genre:** Paul gives guidance to Timothy and Titus, who are at the head of the Christian communities in Ephesus and Crete respectively.
- **History and composition:** Paul would have written 1 Tim and Tit after being released from prison in Rome (his authorship of these letters is not unanimously recognized). 2 Tim has a different, more personal tone, as a sort of spiritual testament in the face of approaching death.
- **Teaching:** Paul defends a central theme of the Gospel he preached: God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4). This plan has been proclaimed and fulfilled by Jesus Christ, the one Mediator, who "came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim 1:15).

Letter to the Hebrews | Heb

- **Literary genre:** Falls somewhere between a letter and a sermon, while its structure, order and method resemble those of a theological treatise.
- **History and composition:** Written by a Jewish Christian, well versed in both Greek culture and Sacred Scripture, familiar with contemporary theological questions, and certainly very close to St Paul in his thought and activity. It must have been written before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (AD 70).
- **Teaching:** the letter aims to show that the New Law is the fulfillment of the Old Covenant, which it surpasses. This is the doctrinal basis for the writer's exhortation to persevere in the Faith, which is the letter's main message. It is the only text in the New Testament that explicitly states that Jesus Christ is the Eternal High Priest.



The Catholic Epistles

- **Literary genre:** Letters instructing Christian communities about the saving work of Jesus Christ. They are grouped together as “Catholic” because of their universality, and are called by the names of their authors instead of their addressees.

James | Jas

- **History and composition:** Addressed to communities of Christian converts from Judaism, to correct certain disorders that had begun to appear. It seems to have been written in Jerusalem in the 1st century (the exact date is unknown). Tradition attributes it to Jesus’s cousin St James.
- **Teaching:** The need to live in accordance with the faith. St Paul taught that “a man is not justified by works of the Law, but through faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal 2:16); St James clarifies that “faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (Jas 2:17). There is no contradiction here. For St Paul, arguing

against Judaizers, “works” are the rules and regulations of the Old Law. For St James, “works” are the moral actions of the person who believes in Jesus Christ.

1 and 2 Peter | 1 Pet and 2 Pet

- **History and composition:** the initial greetings of both letters are explicitly from “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.” However, the authorship of 2 Peter is disputed; some argue that it dates from the beginning of the 2nd century. Both letters are addressed to Christian communities in Asia Minor.
- **Teaching:** both letters reflect early Christians’ difficulties in living by their faith and passing it on. 1 Peter stresses the value of a Christian presence in the world when surroundings are hostile to them. Baptism and Christ’s death on the Cross are their two reference-points. 2 Peter warns of the danger of false teachers. Hope in Christ’s second coming pervades the whole letter.

1, 2 and 3 John | 1 Jn, 2 Jn and 3 Jn

- **History and composition:** A tradition going back to the 2nd century states that St John wrote his three letters in Ephesus on returning from exile on Patmos at the end of the 1st century AD.
- **Teaching:** In 1 and 2 John the author recalls the commandment of love, the sign of the Christian. Against errors that were appearing at the time, he reaffirms that Jesus is the Son of God Incarnate. All three letters warn believers to shun false teachers.

Jude | Jude

- **History and composition:** The author introduces himself to his readers as “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James.” It was probably written in Palestine.
- **Teaching:** A warning to Christians who are threatened by false teachers from within their own communities. Such people lead immoral lives themselves. The author exhorts his readers “to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3).

Revelation | Rev (Apocalypse)

Literary genres

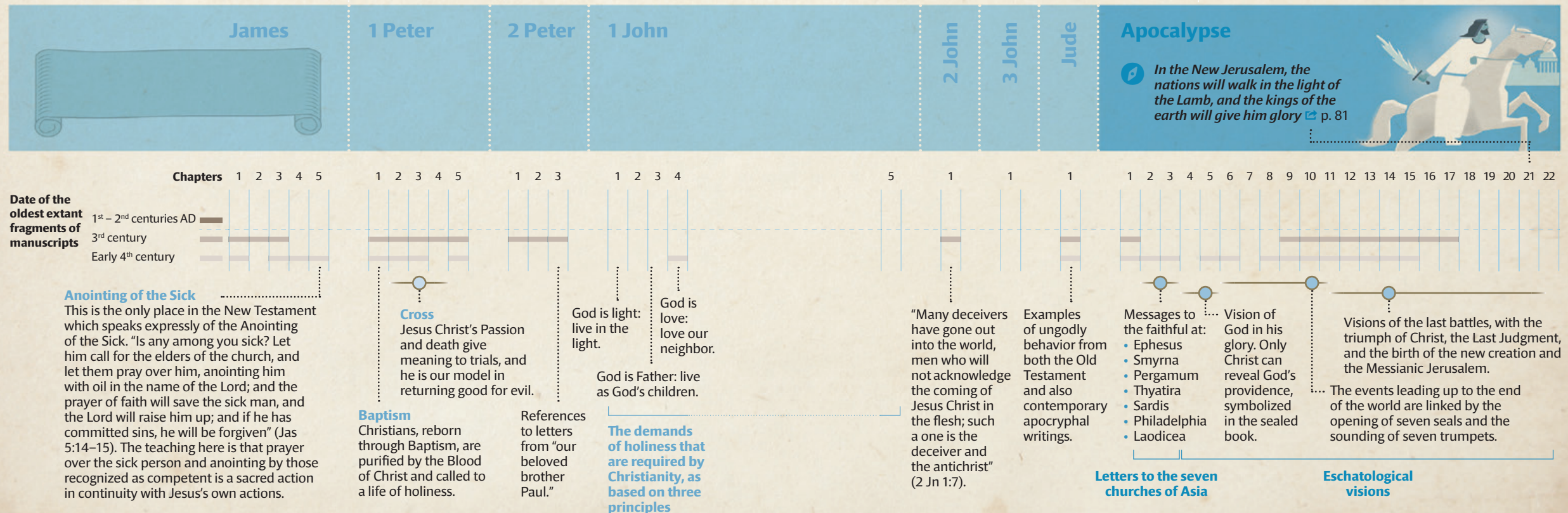
- **Letter:** Messages to 7 churches in Asia Minor.
- **Prophetic:** The eschatological visions aim to give hope to Christians who are being persecuted by the Roman Empire and are seeing their faith weakened by the first heresies.

History

- **Content:** God reveals how he guides the destinies of the world and the Church, and shows that evil will not have the last word at the end of time.
- **Composition:** Around AD 96, shortly before the death of Domitian. The earliest witnesses, from the 2nd century, recognize the Apostle John as the author.

Teaching

God does not abandon his Church, nor those who are persecuted for the faith. In Christ, God has overcome evil. At the Lord’s Second Coming, he will establish his Kingdom forever.



2 Second Roman Era

Until Freedom of Religion Is Decreed in the Empire

AD
150

AD
200

AD
250

AD
300

AD
350

Events in the Roman Empire

161–180
Marcus Aurelius

180–284
Many of the Emperors from Commodus onwards incurred the *Damnatio memoriae* or official repudiation of any commemoration.

284–305
Under Diocletian, government is divided into a tetrarchy of two Augusti and two Caesars.

306–337
Constantine enters the Tetrarchy in 306; he takes absolute power in 324 and moves the capital of the Empire to Byzantium, later renamed Constantinople.

Events in the Church

155
Martyrdom of St Polycarp, disciple of St John the Apostle.

197
Tertullian writes the *Apologeticum*.

c.185
St Irenaeus writes his work *Against Heretics*.

200
Clement heads the theological School of Alexandria.

202–210
Persecutions under Septimius Severus, who forbids the dissemination of Christianity and Judaism. Many Christians martyred at Carthage (Perpetua and Felicity), Alexandria (Leonidas, the father of Origen), Rome and Corinth.

232
Origen, exiled from Egypt, founds the theological School of Caesarea in Palestine.

257–259
Persecution under Valerian. Pope St Sixtus II and St Lawrence the Deacon martyred in Rome; Bishop St Cyprian in Carthage.

311
Galerius, Augustus in the West, promulgates a decree of toleration of Christianity.

312
Founding of the School of Antioch.

148–161
St Justin writes the *Apologia* or “Defense” of Christianity. He is martyred in Rome around the year 165.

177
Persecution of Christians in Lyons, France.

250
Persecution under Decius. Pope Fabian martyred in Rome.

304–305
Great persecution under Diocletian. Martyrdoms in Rome of St Sebastian (288), St Pancras and St Agnes; in Cilicia (south-east Anatolia), Sts Cosmas and Damian; and in Nicomedia (capital of the eastern Empire), St Barbara.

313
Constantine and Licinius, the Augusti in the West and the East, decree freedom of religion throughout the Empire.

325
First Ecumenical Council, in Nicaea (in present-day Turkey). Arianism condemned.

Events in Judaism

c.200
Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi compiles the *Mishnah*, the first written collection of the Jewish oral traditions complementing the *Torah*.

212
Emperor Caracalla extends Roman citizenship to the free inhabitants of the provinces, including Jews.

222
Caesarea becomes the capital of Palestine.

222–235
Emperor Alexander Severus abolishes religious restrictions and permits Jews to visit Jerusalem.

270–272
Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra (in present-day Syria) rebels against Rome and conquers Palestine and Egypt before being defeated.

3 Byzantine Era



4 The Rashidun, Umayyad, Abbasid and Fatimid Caliphates



5 The Crusader Kingdoms



7 Palestine and the State of Israel



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Multimedia tour in the Saxum Visitor Center.



The road to Emmaus, leading from Saxum.



Participants in the Holy Land Dialogues.



Congress in the Visitor Center auditorium.

Enhance your Holy Land Experience

One step after another on the gray stone streets of Jerusalem. That is how Cleopas and his companion begin the 160-furlong journey – about 20 miles – that will take them back to their village. It is early on the first day of the week. The walk will take them all day, lengthened by the sorrow weighing on their hearts. They trace the streets in silence, leaving the City of David and Herod's palace behind them. Cleopas and his companion are desolate, their heads full of the events of the past week: the Teacher's crucifixion, all the hopes of the past three years shattered, and worst of all the fact that they will never see Jesus again. They are going home, but home will be flat and dull without him.

Their path leaves the Holy City and descends westwards through the Judean hills. They have now been walking for several hours, under the brilliant spring sunshine of the Eastern Mediterranean. They are wondering what sort of life they will lead from now on, now that Jesus is dead and buried. Another traveler draws abreast of them without their noticing. Neither of them is feeling in a chatty mood, but this Traveler breathes nobility and simplicity, seeming somehow familiar. And something in his voice shakes their hearts.

They speak of the painful subject at the forefront of their minds: the Messiah, and the agony of his loss. The Traveler starts talking of the Scriptures, not like the scribes and Pharisees, but authoritatively. Cleopas and his friend listen to the Traveler's account: it is the story of his own life. Their hearts begin to burn. Then, as evening comes on, they reach Emmaus, and recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread. And simultaneously they recognize themselves as disciples of the Risen Messiah. Joy lends wings to their heels

as they race back to the Cenacle; their overflowing happiness impels them to proclaim the news to the four winds.

The scene of the disciples at Emmaus is repeated in the life of every person. We often lead a dull life devoid of any wide perspectives. Then an encounter with Jesus lifts us out of our grayness. In Scripture, or in the Holy Land – the "fifth Gospel" – we find Jesus coming to meet us.

Picturing oneself in the scenes while reading the Scriptures was what Opus Dei's founder St Josemaria Escriva always advised. He dreamed of creating a center close to Jerusalem where people from all over the world could receive Jesus's invitation to his first disciples. They asked him, "Teacher, where do you live?" and he answered, "Come and see."

St Josemaria's first successor, Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, who was always his rock and support (*saxum*, in Latin) made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land just before he died. Afterwards some people in Opus Dei decided to set up the Saxum project, which has been accomplished with the help of co-operators and friends on every continent. They were driven by the wish to enable many people to re-live the experience of the disciples at Emmaus, to meet Jesus in Scripture, in the Holy Land and in the Breaking of the Bread (the Eucharist), impelling them to lead a fuller, more meaningful life. Saxum thus joins in with the evangelizing work done by many institutions of the Church in the Holy Land, down through the ages.

As part of its mission, Saxum International Foundation invites pilgrims in the Holy Land (or in life!) to use the resources offered on its website and join in the activities organized in the Saxum Visitor Center, which was inaugurated in 2018.

The book *In the Footprints of Our Faith*, which helps prepare for a Holy Land pilgrimage and re-live it at home afterwards.

