The Pentateuch:
Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

1. Descriptive labels
   a. Pentateuch: term comes from the Greek phrase *pentateuchos biblos* – "five-fold book". The first five books are five divisions of a unified literary work. At some point these divisions were recognized and codified, possibly by the translators of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament begun around the 3rd century BC).
   b. Torah: the Jewish term for the first five books, meaning "instruction, law." (The term is also sometimes used of the entire body of Jewish sacred writings and oral tradition.)
   c. The book of Moses (or the book of the law of Moses): a term used in other parts of Scripture, both OT and NT, to refer to this portion of Scripture. Joshua 8:31, 2 Chron. 25:4, Neh. 8:1, Mark 12:26.
   d. The Law: sometimes used to refer to the Pentateuch (Luke 24:44: Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."), although the term can also include the wisdom books and other historical books of the OT.
2. Authorship
   a. Biblical testimony
      i. Jesus ascribes authorship to Moses. Luke 24:44, Matt. 19:7, John 7:19 This was in keeping with the received understanding among the Jews of the day.
      ii. The NT writers ascribe authorship to Moses. Acts 3:22, 15:21, 26:22, 28:23; Rom. 10:5; Heb. 7:14 (Acts 15:21 For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.")
      iii. OT passages refer to a "Book of Moses" with content consistent with the Pentateuch.
         (1) 2Ch 34:14 While they were bringing out the money that had been brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the LORD given through Moses.
         (2) Ezr 6:18 And they set the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their divisions, for the service of God at Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses.
      iv. The Pentateuch itself refers to Moses writing activity that covers a major portion of the content of the Pentateuch: 1) historical events (Ex. 17:14, Num. 33:2), 2) laws (Ex. 24:4; 34:27), 3) a song (Deut. 31:22, see Deut. 32)
   b. The views of liberal critics
      i. The JEDP theory, or documentary hypothesis, systematized ed by Julius Wellhausen in 1886 has prevailed in liberal circles for over 100 years. It claims that the Pentateuch was constructed by an editor, or *redactor*, in the post-exilic period (late 5th century BC) from four independent texts dating from different periods:
         (1) Jahwist (from Yahweh in German), due to a supposed preference for using this name for God
         (2) Elohist (from Elohim), due to a supposed preference for using this name for God
         (3) Priestly
         (4) Deuteronomist
      ii. More recent scholarship, even among liberal critics, has shown this view to have many problems.
         (1) Different styles or names for God do not necessarily indicate different sources but may result from styles chosen for literary reasons.
         (2) Scholars have failed over the years to develop a consensus in delineating the supposed sources.
         (3) Scholars are recognizing the unified literary purposes and excellence of the text, casting doubt on the documentary theory.
   c. What we should believe
      i. Moses clearly did not write every word of the Pentateuch.
         (1) His death is reported in Deut. 34.
         (2) The meekest man on earth probably wouldn't have reported this! Num. 12:3
      ii. Moses may have used sources for some of his material. The use of sources is no denial of authorship or inspiration. See Luke 1:1-4. God can providentially superintend the selection of sources as well as the selection of topic and words.
      iii. We affirm Mosaic authorship. We also acknowledge the existence of an editor who under divine guidance put Moses' writing together in final form with some limited editorial additions and changes.
3. Date
   a. Moses died approximately 1400 BC. Therefore, the essential content of the Pentateuch was determined by this time.
   b. There are many references to the Pentateuch in Joshua and Judges, which are written from the perspective that the Jebusites still held Jerusalem, before it was taken by David (2 Sam. 5:6-10).
   c. There are several references in the Pentateuch (Genesis 14:14, 36:31, 50:10, 11, Numbers 35:14) that seem to be written from the perspective of having already conquered Canaan.
   d. Therefore, conservative scholars are of the opinion that the Pentateuch reached its final form before 1000 BC, allowing for this evidence of later additions and editorial changes.

Genesis

1. Author – Moses, with minor editing via divine inspiration. See handout on Pentateuch for details.

2. Date – essential content by Moses' death around 1400 BC and finalized by 1000 BC.

3. Historical coverage:
   a. Begins with creation
   b. Ends around 1879 BC, with the descent into Egypt
   c. Probably covers a longer period of history than the entire rest of the Bible combined!

4. Structure – different structures can be discerned, depending on the interest of the reader.
   a. Family history structure – sections begin with "these are the generations" (2:4, 5:1, 6:9, 10:1, 11:10, 11:27, 25:12, 25:19, 36:1, 36:9, 37:2)
      i. Prologue in 1:1-2:3
      ii. Ten sections. Each section (with the exception of 2:4) begins with a name and generally ends with his death.
      iii. This structure cuts across the hypothetical sources of the documentary hypothesis!
   b. Stylistic structure:
      i. Primeval history – creation to the tower of Babel (Gen. 1-11)
      ii. Patriarchal narratives – Abraham's call to the family of Jacob (Gen. 12-36, 38)
      iii. The Joseph story – how Abraham's family came to Egypt (Gen. 37,39-50)
   c. Covenantal structure:
      i. Covenant of works (or life, or creation) with Adam (1-2)
      ii. Breaking of covenant of works and ongoing rebellion, and covenant of grace and promised seed revealed (3-5)
      iii. Covenant with Noah
         (1) flood (6-9)
         (2) the nations (10-11)
      iv. Covenant with Abraham and his descendants
         (1) Abraham (12-24)
         (2) Isaac (25-27)
         (3) Jacob (28-36)
         (4) Joseph (37-50)

5. Major themes and importance
   a. Creation
      i. Creator/creature relationship and distinction
      ii. Nature of man
         (1) man as male/female made in God's image
         (2) call to rule/subdue, be fruitful and multiply
         (3) creation ordinances – work, Sabbath, marriage
   b. Fall
      i. Guilt
      ii. Broken relationship
      iii. Corruption
   c. Promised seed
      i. Seed of the woman
      ii. Godly line of Seth
      iii. Preservation of the seed through the flood
      iv. Abraham's seed
      v. Preservation of the seed and people of God in Egypt through God's providence
   d. Promised land
      i. Land promised to patriarch
      ii. A recovery of Eden
      iii. A type of heaven

Exodus

1. Name – The Hebrew name for the book means "And these are the names", which comes from the opening words of the book. Even the name shows its continuity and unity with Genesis. The name *Exodus* comes from the Septuagint (Greek) translation of the Old Testament; the word means "departure" in Greek.

2. Author – Moses, with later, minor editing under divine inspiration. See handout on Pentateuch for details.

3. Date – essential content by Moses' death around 1400 BC and finalized by 1000 BC.

4. Date of the Exodus – generally dated by conservative scholars around 15th century BC. 1 Kings 6:1 says, "In the four hundred and eightieth year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, he began to build the house of the LORD." Historians generally date the beginning of the temple at 970-960 B.C., which leads to a 15th century BC date for the Exodus. A few other conservative scholars understand the dates and implications of these texts differently; the text does not provide certainty on a date. However, archeological evidence shows layers of destruction of cities in the 16th-15th centuries that corresponds well to the cities destroyed according to the text. Debates continue over the identity of the Pharoah (or Pharoahs) mentioned in the account, as well as the people groups conquered by the Israelites.

5. Major themes and importance
   a. God demonstrates his unmerited covenant love to his people, and he rescues and preserves his covenant people and the promised seed from the forces of evil to bring his people to the promised land.
   b. The typology of redemption is established:
      i. Passover lamb (John 1:29)
      ii. Rock that provides drink (1 Cor. 10:4)
      iii. Manna (John 6:32,35)
      iv. Pillar of fire (John 8:12)
      v. Tabernacle (Hebrews)
   c. Man is prepared psychologically for the necessity of redemption.
      i. No one can come to God in his own righteousness or through his own means (seen in the Mt. Sinai experience, in the law itself, and in the tabernacle).
      ii. We must have a substitute.
      iii. Only God can save.
   d. **Exodus is *the* major redemptive act in the Old Testament. It becomes the paradigm for future deliverances, both from Babylonian captivity and ultimately from sin and its consequences in the new heavens and new earth. Christ himself becomes faithful Israel who perfectly obeys God's law and overcomes all temptation in the wilderness; he finally becomes the Passover lamb who dies for the people.**

6. Structure:
   a. God saves Israel from bondage in Egypt (ch. 1-18)
      i. Israel in Egypt (1-13)
      ii. Israel in the wilderness (14-18)
   b. God gives Israel his law (19-24)
   c. God instructs Israel to build the tabernacle (25-40)

7. References:
   a. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.
   b. *Survey of the Bible*, 4th revised ed., W. Hendriksen, Baker, 1976.

Leviticus

1. Name – The Hebrew name means "And he called", from the opening words. The name *Leviticus* comes from the Vulgate (Latin translation), which used the Septuagint name, meaning "pertaining to the Levites."

2. Author and date– Moses wrote Leviticus, with later, minor editing under divine inspiration. See handout on Pentateuch for details. The essential content was finished by Moses' death around 1400 BC and finalized by 1000 BC.

3. Character – Leviticus is a historical narrative that unfolds the purity and ritual laws and their origin. Much of the book is a presentation of the law itself. The book does not have the literary sophistication of the other books of the Pentateuch; its primary characteristic is a straightforward communication of information for priests and laypeople alike concerning living and worshiping before a holy God.

4. Major themes and importance – these themes lay a foundation for understanding God's character as well as Christ's work of salvation.
   a. Holiness of God
      i. "I am the LORD your God." (18:2, 4, 5; 19:3-4, 10; 20:7)
      ii. "Therefore be holy, because I am holy." (11:45, 19:2, 20:26)
      iii. Sinners must approach God through sacrifice.
      iv. Sinners need the intercession of priests.
      v. Sinners need to maintain purity and a distinction from the world.
   b. Sacrificial system – the sacrifice of Christ cannot be fully understood apart from the groundwork laid here in the sacrificial system and priesthood (see Hebrews).
      i. Burnt offering – expiation (atoning, or making amends, for sin)
      ii. Grain offering – emphasized giving of gift to the sovereign Lord of the covenant
      iii. Fellowship (peace) offering – for fellowship between the worshiper and God and a celebration of that relationship.
      iv. Purification offering – deals with the removal of sin, particularly unintentional sin (see Numbers 15:22-31).
      v. Guilt offering – deals with the removal of sin, particularly in relation to offenses against "things of the Lord".
   c. Priesthood – the priests were necessary as mediators between God and sinful people and served both as a barrier between the two, as servants to direct the people in their worship duties, and as representatives of the people before God.
   d. Purity – purity laws are given that deal both with moral issues and with ritual issues relating to diet and ceremonial purity. It is often difficult to separate the moral from the ceremonial or to understand their purpose. However, Christ declared formerly unclean foods clean, so it is dubious to think these laws were primarily about health. A better alternative is to understand them as 1) arbitrarily setting them apart from the nations and 2) picturing moral purity by examples of wholeness in the natural realm.

5. Structure (Hendriksen):
   a. How the sinner attains fellowship with Jehovah 1-16
      i. Oblation (offerings) 1-7
      ii. Mediation (priestly) 8-10
      iii. Separation (clean and unclean) 11-15
      iv. Expiation (the day of atonement) 16
   b. How the believer maintains fellowship with Jehovah 17-27
      i. Sanctification (holiness in all areas of life) 17-22
      ii. Celebration (religious festivals) 23-25
      iii. Ratification (promises and threats) 26-27

6. References:
   a. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.
   b. *Survey of the Bible*, 4th revised ed., W. Hendriksen, Baker, 1976.

Numbers

1. Name – The Hebrew name means "In the wilderness," from the fifth Hebrew word in the book. This name describes the setting of the entire book, which records the movement of the people of Israel from Sinai through the wilderness of Paran to the plains of Moab. The name "Numbers" comes from the Septuagint title. While the book certainly contains lots of numbers – in censuses and various lists – it has much more to say than reporting numbers.

2. Author and date–Moses wrote the bulk of Numbers, and he died around 1400 BC. See handout on Pentateuch for details. However, some sections are most naturally understood to be post-Mosaic additions made by a later editor under divine inspiration. These include the poem taken from the "Book of the Wars of the Lord" in 21:14. Also, building activity by the tribes that settled across the Jordan after the conquest of Canaan is described in 32:34-42. This is widely understood even by conservative scholars to be a post-Mosaic elaboration. We also find the statement in 12:3 that Moses was the most humble man who ever lived, which would be an odd statement from the pen of the most humble man who ever lived!

3. Character – Numbers is often thought to be a dry, boring book, partly because of its name. However, it contains a huge number of literary genres within its pages – "narrative (4:1-3), poetry (21:17-18), prophecy (24:3-9), victory song (21:27-30), prayer (12:13), blessing (6:24-26), lampoon (22:22-35), diplomatic letter (21:14-19), civil law (27:1-11), cultic law (15:7-21), oracular decision (15:32-36), census list (26:1-51), temple archive (7:10-88), itinerary (33:1-49) ." (Quoted from Milgrom by Dillard and Longman) The broader context, however, is the same instructional history that characterizes the rest of the Pentateuch. This book is not considered the most literary of OT books. However, it does contain some parts–the story of Balaam, for instance–that are as skillfully composed as other OT narratives.

4. Major themes and importance:
   a. God perseveres in his relationship with his people in spite of their hard-heartedness and rebellion. He remembers his covenant, preserves his people, and moves forward his work of redemption even in the face of their unfaithfulness.
   b. The wilderness experience is a theme that is woven throughout the Bible. Christ is tempted in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11). Our journey in this present age is a journey in the wilderness prior to entering the land of promise (Heb. 13:14).
   c. God is holy. The Levites are appointed guardians of the holy things of God. God is concerned with the purity of his people. And he will not tolerate evil in his people.

5. Structure (Olson, D. T. – *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New* as cited in Dillard and Longman):
   a. The End of the Old: The First Generation of God's People Out of Egypt on the March in the Wilderness (1:1-25:18)
      i. The Preparation and Inauguration of the March of the Holy People of Israel (1:1-10:36)
         (1) Preparation and ritual organization of the march (1:1-10:10)
         (2) The inauguration of the march (10:11-10:36)
      ii. The Cycle of Rebellion, Death, and Deliverance of the Holy People of Israel With Elements of Hope but Ultimate Failure and Death (11:1-25:18)
         (1) Repeated incidents of rebellion and atonement, each involving the death and/or the threat of death of a portion of the first generation (11:1-20:29)
         (2) The end of the first generation: signs of hope coupled with ultimate failure (21:1-25:18)
   b. The Birth of the New: The Second Generation of God's People Out of Egypt As They Prepare to Enter the Promised Land (Num. 26:1-36:13)
      i. The Preparation and Organization of the New Holy People of God As They Prepare to Enter the Promised Land (26:1-36:13)
      ii. Will This Second Generation Be Faithful and Enter the Promised Land (Promise) or Rebel and Fail as the First Generation (Warning)?

6. Reference: *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.

Deuteronomy

1. Name – The Hebrew name means "The Words," from the opening phrase "These are the words." The name "Deuteronomy" comes from the Septuagint title, which is a Greek compound meaning "second law." Deuteronomy contains a second statement and publication of the law delivered on Mt. Sinai.

2. Setting and Character – The book is primarily a series of three addresses given by Moses to the people of Israel, delivered on the plains of Moab just before the people are to enter the land of promise. Some of the details of the law are modified slightly from the version given in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Liberal scholars have seen this as evidence that Deuteronomy was put together at a late date, possibly after the exile, to suit the political and religious agenda of the times. However, these variations are best understood according to the stated context of Deuteronomy. Some changes in emphasis and application are needed as the people of God transition from being a nomadic people with a tent for a sanctuary to a nation with their own land and permanent place of worship.

   An example of this is the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20 compared to Deuteronomy 5. In Exodus, the reason given for observance is God's pattern in creation. In Deuteronomy, the reason given is God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. The latter emphasizes the redemptive relationship, which is a significant theme in Deuteronomy (6:5; 7:9, 12-13; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 33:3). Another example is the centralization of worship (12:5, 14:23-25, 15:20, 16:2, 17:8, 18:6, 26:2) and the expanded role of Levites in the priesthood (Deut. 18:1-8). The Lord anticipates the need for some changes in how the worship of God will be regulated as the people move into a more stable, permanent living situation as a nation.

3. Author and date – Moses wrote the essential content of Deuteronomy (27:3, 8; 28:58; 29:21; 30:10; 31:24), and he died around 1400 BC. See handout on Pentateuch for details. However, some sections are most naturally understood to be post-Mosaic additions made by a later editor under divine inspiration. These include comments here and there that clarify geographical and historical information from a post-Mosaic perspective (2:10-11, 20-23; 3:9, 11, 13b-14; 10:6-9).

4. Viewpoints on Deuteronomy:
   a. As a treaty – Meredith Kline has shown how Deuteronomy follows the structure of a Hittite suzerainty treaty (a treaty between a lord and his vassals in the Ancient Near East), which provides confirmation for an early, conservative dating of Deuteronomy.
   b. As polity – Deuteronomy serves as something of a constitution for ancient Israel.
   c. As speech – The book is largely composed of three speeches by Moses. The character of the book as speech is reflected in the fact that the content is more focused on exhortation than legislation. This helps explain why Deuteronomy does not focus on all the details of the previously published law. The focus of the three speeches:
      i. recounts Israel's journey through the wilderness (ch. 1-4).
      ii. looks to the future and the life of the nation under the law and covenant of God (ch. 5-28).
      iii. leads the nation to renew the covenant with God (ch. 29-32).

5. Major themes and importance:
   a. Israel is depicted as what they should be ideally. They are a unified people in covenant with Yahweh. It is no mere legal contract but a living relationship that obligates both parties in loving obligation. Israel is the chosen nation, with a king chosen by God. The people of God relate to one another as brothers (1:16, 3:18, 10:9, 15:3, 17:20, 18:15).
   b. God promises to raise up a prophet like Moses (18:14-22). Joshua is provided as the successor to Moses, but he is not presented as this prophet (34:9-11). The Jews looked for another prophet (Jn. 1:21). Jesus provided bread in the wilderness and gave life-giving water (Jn. 6:14; 7:40). Peter and Stephen claim explicitly that Jesus is the prophet like Moses (Acts 3:22; 7:37).

Reference: *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.

Joshua

1. Theme – Joshua traces the fulfillment of God's promise of the land to Israel by describing their entry into Canaan and their progressive defeat of the peoples of Canaan. It presents a unified Israel moving out under the leadership of Joshua, Moses' successor, and functioning according to the "constitution" laid out in Deuteronomy.

2. Author and date – The author of Joshua is not explicitly stated in the book. Traditionally, the book was attributed to Joshua. At the very least, some of the book was written by Joshua or under Joshua's leadership. (Joshua 24:26 "And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God.") At least some source material dates to Joshua's time (Joshua 6:25, 16:10). However, there is disagreement over the extent of Joshua's contribution to the book. The phrase "to this day" recurs throughout the book (4:9, 5:9, 6:25, 7:26, 8:28-29, 9:27, 10:27, 13:13, 15:63, 16:10) and implies a later perspective. Some sections were clearly written somewhat later. For example, Joshua 24:29-33 describes not only Joshua's death but the lives of those leaders who succeeded Joshua. A comparison of Joshua 15:63 with 2 Sam. 5:6-10 suggests that the book was completed before David took Jerusalem.

3. Structure of the book (suggested by Joshua 1:2-7 – Hendriksen):
    a. God causes Israel to cross the Jordan and enter the land. (ch. 1-5)
    b. God causes Israel to conquer the land. (ch. 6-12)
        i. central campaign (Jericho, Ai, etc.)
        ii. southern campaign (the five kings, etc.)
        iii. northern campaign (Hazor, etc.)
    c. God causes Israel to inherit the land (divisions among the tribes). (ch. 13-22)
    d. Joshua, in his farewell address, emphasizes Israel's resulting obligation to worship and love God. (ch. 23-24)

4. Major themes and importance:
    a. Parallels and contrasts between Moses and Joshua
        i. Covenant is renewed at the end of their lives.
        ii. People are sent to possess their inheritance.
        iii. Moses parts the Red Sea, and Joshua parts the Jordan River.
        iv. Both lead Israel to military victories.
        v. BUT, Moses names a successor; Joshua does not. This leads to the tension that Judges describes.
        vi. AND, Joshua succeeds Moses and yet is not the "prophet like Moses." (Deut. 18:14-22 and 34:9-11). God does not speak to Joshua face-to-face. We must wait for another.
    b. There is a constant tension between the holiness of God and his graciousness toward his people. He sets forth choices on which blessings and curses are made conditional. Yet he also makes unconditional promises of grace toward his people.
    c. There is a tension in the book between the idea that the people have possessed and conquered the land (Josh. 21:45 "Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed.") and the reality that the conquest is incomplete (Josh. 17:13 "Now when the people of Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not utterly drive them out.")
    d. The rest provided by Joshua foreshadows but does not fulfill the rest of the gospel and ultimately of heaven (Heb. 4:10-11). The inheritance of the land foreshadows the imperishable hope in Christ (1 Pet. 1:3-5). The conquest of Canaan foreshadows the moving out and growth of the kingdom through the spread of the gospel.
    e. Joshua, the people of Israel, and Rahab of Jericho are presented as models of faith, those who were looking for a better country (Heb. 11:30-31).

References:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.
Survey of the Bible, 4th revised ed., W. Hendriksen, Baker, 1976.

Judges

1. Summary – Judges describes the period after the death of Joshua before the establishment of a king in Israel. When the people fail to drive out the Canaanites, they increasingly fall into the sins of the nations around them and then fall under the oppression of those peoples as a judgment from God. God then repeatedly and mercifully raises up "judges," or local military leaders, who lead the people to throw off their oppressors and enjoy peace. However, the people continue to spiral downward into idolatry and disunity. They need a king to lead them.

2. Author and date – The author of Judges is not explicitly stated in the book. Traditionally, the book was attributed to Samuel, since he was the last of the judges (1 Sam. 7:15) but also lived to see the establishment of the monarchy. The monarchy was clearly in place at the time Judges was written. (Jud. 21:25 " In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.") A comparison of Judges 1:21 with 2 Sam. 5:6-10 suggests that the book was completed before David took Jerusalem. It seems evident that a primary purpose of the author was to make the case that the kingship, particularly of David, was legitimate and necessary and established by God's blessing to help Israel in her weakness.

3. Structure of the book:
    a. Introduction:
        i. Initial success in driving out Canaanites (1:1-15)
        ii. Failure to complete the mission from the people's perspective (1:16-36)
        iii. Failure to complete the mission described, judged, and summarized from God's perspective (2:1-3:6)
    b. The failure of Israel and God's justice and mercy–we see a downward spiral that follows a recurring pattern (3:7-16:31). Each time, it seems that the sin grows worse, and the character of the judge is more and more flawed. The spiral pattern is:
        i. Israel does evil in the eyes of the Lord – usually idolatry and intermarriage with the pagan nations.
        ii. God's anger is kindled, and he gives the people over to foreign oppressors. They are unable to drive out the foreigners, and they become subject to them.
        iii. At some point in their oppressed state, Israel cries out to the Lord.
        iv. The Lord hears their cry and raises up a deliverer in the form of a judge.
        v. The enemy is thrown off, and Israel enjoys peace for awhile, until the death and burial of the judge.
    c. The people grow more and more like the nations around them and less and less unified until they are at war with themselves. (ch. 17-21)

4. Major themes and events:
    a. The judges and those they rule are deeply flawed individuals. ("The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD." 2:11, 3:7, 3:12, 4:1, 6:1, 10:6, 13:1) Gideon is reluctant to answer God's call and is something of a coward and a skeptic. After he wins the battle, he makes an ephod that leads the people into false worship. The presence of a female judge (Deborah) underscores the lack of strong male leadership on the part of Barak. Jephthah demonstrates self-interest in his negotiation to become a ruler. He makes a rash vow that costs his daughter her life. Samson is full of self-indulgence and becomes entangled by foreign women.
    b. In spite of their flaws, Scripture views them as believing people who "through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises" (Heb. 11:32-33). They are part of the "great cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1-12) that call us to persevere and fix our eyes on Jesus.
    c. The tension between grace and law, conditional and unconditional blessing continues from previous books and is heightened in Judges. God will not forsake his people, but they must trust and obey him. How will this tension be resolved? This points us forward in redemptive history. The provision of a king foreshadows how God will ultimately resolve this tension.

Reference: *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.

Ruth

1. Summary – In the days of the Judges, an Israelite man Elimelech and his wife Naomi flee to Moab because of a famine in Israel. Their two sons marry Moabite women. The sons die, and Naomi returns to Israel with Ruth, one of her daughters-in-law. Ruth finds favor in the eyes of Boaz as she gleans in his fields. As a kinsman-redeemer, Boaz takes her as his wife. Their son becomes the grandfather of David and thus an ancestor of Christ.

2. Author and date – The author of Ruth is not explicitly stated. Traditionally, the book was attributed to Samuel, but others believe he lived too early to explain the historical cues in the book. It must have been written after the monarchy was established, as the book begins with "in the days when the judges ruled," which implies that at the time of writing this is no longer the case. Also, this introduction indicates that the events themselves occur during the time period described by the book of Judges. The conclusion of the book with David's genealogy indicates that at least one purpose of the book was to affirm David's rule. Therefore, many have concluded that the book was composed during the time of Saul or early in the reign of David.

3. Character of the book:
    a. In our Bibles, Ruth is placed chronologically, but in the Hebrew Scriptures it is considered among the Writings, the third division of the Hebrew Scriptures. Its primary purpose is not merely historical.
    b. Ruth is not overtly polemical (arguing a point) either. Instead, it tells a story and gently draws the reader to discover certain truths.
    c. The book is rich in dialogue and literary excellence – succinctly telling a story while skillfully developing the characters. There are no villains in Ruth. For these reasons, some have drawn the conclusion that the book is fiction. However, a historical story can entertain as well as instruct, and there is no reason to believe Ruth is anything else.

4. Structure (from Hill and Walton):
    a. Elimelech's family leaves Israel and experiences tragedy. (1:1-5)
    b. Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem. (1:6-22)
    c. Ruth meets Boaz. (ch. 2)
    d. Naomi forms a plan, and it succeeds. (ch. 3)
    e. Ruth and Boaz marry and bear a son. (4:1-17)
    f. The genealogy of Perez leads to David. (4:18-22)

5. Major themes and events:
    a. God was still at work in the lives of people during the dark days of the Judges. Faith is kept alive in the lives of ordinary people and their families. Ruth explains for us how the strong faith of David did not appear out of nowhere but was cultivated through the faithfulness of his family.
    b. God uses faithfulness in human relationships to advance his purposes. Ruth is a model of faithfulness to Naomi, and Boaz is in turn a model of faithfulness to Ruth. This faithfulness reflects and foreshadows God's faithfulness in providing for his own and advancing his redemptive purposes.
    c. The kinsman-redeemer is an important concept in Ruth. The obligation of the kinsman-redeemer seems to be a principle derived from two specific laws: 1) If a family became impoverished and had to sell their land, their nearest relative was to buy it back (Lev. 25:23-55). 2) If a man died with no offspring, his brother was to marry the woman and produce offspring in the name of his brother (Deut. 25:5-10). While Boaz was not the brother of Ruth's deceased husband, this obligation may reflect a general application of the moral principles embodied in these laws. In this sense, Boaz is a pattern of Christ's redeeming love for his people.

References:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.
A Survey of the Old Testament, A. E. Hill and J. H. Walton, Zondervan, 1991.
Faithful God: An Exposition of the Book of Ruth, Sinclair Ferguson, Bryntirion, 2005.

1 & 2 Samuel

1. Name – The two books of Samuel were originally one book but were divided by the translators of the Septuagint (pre-Christ Greek translation of the Old Testament). The books bear the name of Samuel in the Christian Scriptures, not because he was the author but most probably because of his prominence at the beginning of the books and his crucial role in the establishment of the monarchy.

2. Summary – The books of Samuel provide a historical account of the period of transition from the judges to the establishment of a monarchy in Israel through the instrumentality of the prophet/judge Samuel. They detail the selection of Saul as the first king and then his demise. They then focus on God's selection of David as his choice of king through which he promises to establish a dynasty.

3. Author and date – The author of Samuel is not explicitly stated in the book. It is clear that records were kept (2 Sam. 20:24-25), which would suggest that the author was at least in part a compiler of existing contemporary records rather than writing as an eyewitness or under direct revelation. This observation in no way contradicts the supernatural, God-breathed nature of these Scriptures. Some scholars believe that Joshua through Kings represents a single Deuteronomistic History (DH), in which the history of Israel is detailed in light of the ideals, laws, prophecies, blessings, and curses described in Deuteronomy. If this is the case and these books are part of a larger work, the author would have worked late in the period in which Israel had divided into Northern and Southern kingdoms. The events recorded took place in the latter half of the 11th century and the early part of the 10th century B.C.

4. Structure of the book:
    a. Samuel the judge (1 Sam. 1-7)
        i. Boyhood and call (1-3)
        ii. Israel's folly (4-6)
        iii. Samuel's ministry (7)
    b. Saul the king (1 Sam. 8 - 2 Sam. 1)
        i. Institution of monarchy (1 Sam. 7-12)
        ii. Reign of Saul (13-15)
        iii. Saul's demise and David's rise (16 - 2 Sam. 1)
    c. David the king (2 Sam. 2-24)
        i. Coronation and God's covenant (2-7)
        ii. David's reign and success (8-9)
        iii. David's sin and failures (10-21)
        iv. Summary and celebration of David's reign and God's faithfulness (22-24)

5. Major themes and events:
    a. Saul's lack of faith and David's great faith – Saul fails to heed Samuel's word and takes the priestly duty upon himself (1 Sam. 13:13-14) out of fear. David repeatedly refuses to take matters into his own hands by killing Saul and claiming the kingdom. Instead, he entrusts justice to the Lord (1 Sam. 26:6-12).
    b. God's covenant with David (2 Sam. 7) – David is a type of Christ. When David decides to build a house for God, God tells David that He will build *him* a house, referring to a dynasty. God will make his name great, and God will establish Israel in the land securely. David's descendent will build the temple. David would have his throne established perpetually. All these promises point us past David to David's greater son, Jesus Christ. According to the NT, Jesus is sitting on David's throne as a beginning fulfillment of the promise to David. Acts 2:25-36, Acts 15:13-18. He has built an everlasting temple – in himself (Jn. 2:19-21) and his church (1 Cor. 3:16-17).
    c. David's moral failure with Bathsheba – David's sin leads to murder and the death of his child. David's repentance is deep (Ps. 51), and his sin is truly forgiven. Yet his sin continues to bring evil consequences for the rest of his life (Absalom's rebellion and resulting turmoil). But God overrules even this for his own glory, giving the people (and us!) the wisdom of Solomon and using even the flawed David as a type of Christ.

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.
A Survey of the Old Testament, Hill and Walton, Zondervan, 2000.

1 & 2 Kings

1. Name and Structure – The two books of Kings were originally one. The division of the two books seems to have little literary value because the break occurs in the middle of the account of King Ahaziah. The books bear the same name as in the Hebrew Scriptures, obviously because the book focuses on the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah. The Hebrew Scriptures are divided into three sections–the law, the prophets, and the writings. The books Joshua-Kings are grouped with the prophets, partly because they record the activity of the prophets and partly because the historical writings make the prophetic case that Israel had rebelled against God and therefore earned the covenant curses pronounced in Deuteronomy.

2. Summary – These books provide a historical account of the period beginning with the passing of the kingdom from David to Solomon (c. 931 B.C.). They then trace the lines and activities of the monarchy, including the division between the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. They conclude with the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah in Babylon (561 B.C.).

3. Author and date – Why do author and date matter? They matter to some degree because they tell us something of the perspective from which the author was writing and the kinds of issues that would have been important to the original audience. Though the author is anonymous, many theories of the development of the text of Kings have been proposed. These theories are often highly speculative and do very little to illuminate the text. It appears from what is left out at the end–the return to the land–that the book was completed during the exile. It is also clear that the author/compiler(s) used a wide variety of sources. Annals of the kings of Judah & Israel and the book of the acts of Solomon, for instance, are referenced in several places. While these references do not illuminate authorship, they demonstrate that the writer was being a) selective rather than comprehensive and b) careful to present a historical account.

   If we simply add and compare the lengths of reigns of the Northern and Southern kings, we find apparent contradictions. A number of solutions have been proposed. Different people groups and empires in that time had different methods for accounting for fractional years of reign. Furthermore, in a number of cases the reigns overlapped (1 Kings 16:21, for instance), suggesting that other, unrecorded, overlaps took place as well. Even with the ambiguity, these historical notices help order the events and establish the interrelationship between the divided kingdoms, as well as setting Israel's experience in the context of the larger world.

4. Structure of the books (Hendriksen):
   a. United kingdom under Solomon (1 Kings 1-11)
      i. kingship and prayer for wisdom (1-4)
      ii. glory of Solomon's kingdom (5-8)
      iii. decline due to foreign wives and idolatry (9-11)
   b. Divided kingdom after Solomon (1 Kings 12–2 Kings 17)
      i. account of kings to Uzziah in Judah and Jereboam II in Israel and the ministry of the prophets (1 Kings 12–2 Kings 14)
      ii. account of kings to Hezekiah in Judah and Hoshea in Israel and Assyrian exile of Israel (15-17)
   c. Remaining kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 18-25)
      i. Jehovah's blessing on the kingly reformers Hezekiah and Josiah (18-23)
      ii. Jehovah's curse upon rebellious Judah and Babylonian exile of Judah (23-25)

5. Major themes and events:
   a. God's faithfulness to his promises – God had promised to dwell in Jerusalem and to perpetuate the kingdom of David's line. These promises appeared to be broken. The writer of Kings shows us that God was still faithful to his promises. First, we see that God promised curses to those who forsook his worship, and we are shown how Israel and Judah forsook revealed worship for their own imaginations and were progressively cursed (2 Kings 21:14-15; 24:2). Second, we are given a hint of hope that God is continuing his work through the Davidic line, because 2 Kings ends with the note that the Davidic king was surviving in exile (2 Kings 25:27-30).
   b. God's faithfulness to his promises to David and the people of Israel reach their zenith in the reign of Solomon, demonstrating God's power, his wisdom, his peace, and his love. Yet Solomon's failures lead us not to rest our hope in Solomon but to look forward to a greater fulfillment of God's promises of a king who will rule over and bless his people and bring them peace and rest.

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.
Survey of the Bible, 4th revised ed., W. Hendriksen, Baker, 1976.

1 & 2 Chronicles

1. Name and Structure – The two books of Chronicles were originally one. The division into two books occurred when the Septuagint was translated. The Hebrew title is literally "the words of the days," referring to the days of the monarchies. This title is somewhat unusual in that it is taken from 1 Chronicles 27:24 rather than from the first verse of the book. The Septuagint entitles them "The Things Omitted," since they include material that is not included in Samuel-Kings. The English title derives from the statement of early church father Jerome, who referred to them as "a chronicle of the whole divine history."

2. Summary – These books supplement the histories in Samuel-Kings. Chronicles is one of only two books of the Bible to move from the beginning of human history up to the time of the author; the other book that does this is Matthew. Both accomplish this by beginning with a genealogy that begins with Adam and traces through human history to the author's day. The bulk of Chronicles is a historical account beginning with the close of Saul's reign, focusing on the reigns of David and Solomon and then tracing the divided kingdom through the exile and finally to the decree of Cyrus to rebuild the temple. The overall focus of Chronicles is on the legitimacy of the priesthood and temple worship and on the continuity between the covenant people of God of earlier times and the people living in the land after returning from the exile.

3. Author and date – The author is anonymous. Some believe that Chronicles was written along with Ezra-Nehemiah as one continuous work by the same author. Chronicles ends with the decree of Cyrus, and Ezra begins with it. Also, there is much shared terminology and linguistic style. However, recent scholarship has pointed out a number of differences in perspective between the two works: the prominence of the Sabbath in Ezra-Nehemiah and its absence in Chronicles, the emphasis on the prophets in Chronicles and the lack thereof in Ezra-Nehemiah, and the sense of unity between the divided kingdoms in Chronicles but hostility toward those occupying the northern kingdom in Ezra-Nehemiah. The genealogy traces at least two generations past Zerubbabel, who lived near the end of the 6th century B.C. The contributions to the temple in 1 Chron. 29:7 are expressed in *darics*, a coin named after Darius, which wasn't used until 515 B.C. Thus, the book could not have been completed before this coin had time to become widely circulated.

4. Theological message – Even though Samuel-Kings and Chronicles cover much of the same history, they have distinctive purposes. Chronicles is written to post-exilic Israel. Chronicles seeks to answer the question of whether God is done with Israel. What connection does Israel have with God's promises after the exile? What vision and hope should they have for the future? The Chronicler makes his case through the history of Israel that God will continue his work in Israel according to their faithful response to him.

5. Difficulties – The accuracy of Chronicles has been questioned more than any other OT book other than Genesis. Chronicles selectively presents information about David and Solomon to make them appear more glorious and righteous than they appear in Samuel-Kings. Chronicles adds material not found in the other books. Also, there are apparent discrepancies in the numbers reported between Chronicles and Samuel-Kings. Much of the difference can be attributed to the different purpose the Chronicler has compared to the author(s) of Samuel-Kings. A number of arguments can be made in reply to these apparent contradictions.

6. Structure of the book (Dillard & Longman):
    a. Genealogies (1 Chron. 1-9) – Modern readers are often put off in reading Chronicles because of the lengthy genealogies at the beginning. However, these genealogies serve some important purposes. They explicitly connect post-exilic Israel with the Israel of the promises. The northern kingdom is included as well, testifying to a future hope that the nation will be more fully revived.
    b. United monarchy (1 Chron. 10–2 Chron. 9) – David and Solomon are presented in an idealistic way, omitting David's adultery/murder and Solomon's apostasy due to foreign wives. Their reigns focus on the establishment of the temple under David and worship under Solomon, providing a paradigm for future Israel and a hope for the establishment of a more glorious Davidic king.
    c. Post-schism kingdom (2 Chron. 10-36) – The Chronicler demonstrates that Israel was not merely punished for the sins of their fathers; rather, there was an element of "immediate retribution" as well. Likewise, faithfulness results in immediate blessing. 2 Chron. 7:14 ("if my people who are called by my name humble themselves...") is probably the most famous verse in Chronicles and is also a key to the Chronicler's purpose. God will bless the faithful remnant according to their faithful response to his covenant claims.

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.
A Survey of the Old Testament, Hill and Walton, Zondervan, 2000.

Ezra-Nehemiah

1. Introduction – Ezra and Nehemiah are two closely related books that were probably originally a single book. In terms of the events recorded, Ezra-Nehemiah is probably the last book of the Old Testament. It records the return of the exiles of Judah from Babylon, the rebuilding of the temple and the wall of Jerusalem, and the reconstituting of the community of faith.

2. Author, date, historical setting – Hebrew Bibles did not print these two books separately until the Middle Ages; the Vulgate was the first Christian edition to separate the books. The Septuagint divided the books into two, just as it did with Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. Tradition assigns the book to Ezra, partly due to the first-person narrative in Ezra 8-10. However, this distinct first-person narrative is set off by third-person narrative, which could signal that Ezra's memoirs were merely a source for another author. Many scholars believe that the same author wrote Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, based in part on the observation that Ezra picks up exactly as Chronicles ends, suggesting another installment of a continuing saga. However, a more recent scholarly consensus has identified Ezra-Nehemiah as a separate work from Chronicles. Nehemiah's mission began in 445 B.C. However, Ezra's work is harder to date. Some believe Ezra preceded Nehemiah, yielding a date of 458 B.C., and others that he followed Nehemiah, leading to a date either of 428 B.C. or 398 B.C.

   Jeremiah had prophecied that God would bring his people back from Babylon after a seventy-year exile (Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10). As prophecied by Isaiah (44:28--45:1), God had raised up Cyrus the Persian to decree the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple. Some evidence indicates that this was part of a broader program to return people groups exiled by the Babylonians back to their land. One puzzling aspect of this program is the fact that Cyrus allowed the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, which might encourage them to rebel against the Persians. One reasonable theory is that Jerusalem was in a strategic position to serve as an ally and output for Persian strength to stand against the rebellion and restlessness exhibited by Egypt during this time.

3. Language and style – Ezra is the only OT book other than Daniel that has significant portions written in Aramaic. The books shifts from third to first person in places, underscoring the omniscient third-person perspective by confirming it with official, personal accounts.

4. Structure (modified from Eskenazi, as given in Hill and Walton):
   a. The goal is initiated–Cyrus decrees to build the house of God (Ezra 1:1-4)
   b. The community builds the house of God (Ezra 1:5–Nehemiah 7:72)
      i. The people prepare to return to the land (Ezra 1:5-6)
      ii. The community returns and rebuilds altar and temple in the midst of opposition (1:7–6:22)
      iii. Ezra and the people return to build a community while confronting the problem of intermarriage (7:1–10:44)
      iv. Nehemiah returns to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem in the face of opposition (Neh. 1:1–7:5)
      v. The returnees are listed (7:6–7:72)
   c. The goal is reached–the community celebrates the completion of the house of God according to the Word of God (7:73–13:31)

5. Themes:
   a. A shift takes place from focus on individual leaders to a focus on the community.
   b. The "holy space" is expanded from the temple to the entire city.
   c. A shift from oral to written authority in the book prepares the people for the long intertestamental silence.
   d. The unsatisfying nature of the rebuilding points us forward to a new temple (Jesus and his people) and a new Jerusalem.

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.
A Survey of the Old Testament, Hill and Walton, Zondervan, 2000.

Esther

1. Introduction – Without ever mentioning God's name, Esther tells us how God demonstrated his sovereign care over his people while living among a pagan people under pagan rule. Through the faithful action of Esther and her cousin Mordecai, God delivers his people while they triumph over their enemies.

2. Author, date, historical setting – The author of Esther is unnamed. The events take place during the reign of Xerxes (486-465 B.C.), also known as Ahasuerus. The northern kingdom of Israel had been exiled during the Assyrian period, and many of the Jews of the southern kingdom (Judah) had been exiled during the Babylonian period. After the Persians conquered Babylon, Cyrus had instituted a program of restitution to the land during his reign (550-530). However, many of the Jews had been unwilling or unable to return and still lived among the surrounding nations. Esther and her cousin and guardian Mordecai lived in the region of Susa, the capital of the Persian Empire.

3. Literary character – While Esther appears to be an unadorned historical narrative, the book actually has much in common with wisdom literature: 1) The book focuses on man's duty, while little attention is paid to concerns such as worship and sacrifice; 2) The themes relate to practical, ethical action and also instruct us about pride and about respect for authority; 3) Little attention is paid to the great redemptive acts of the past or the promises of the future; 4) Little emphasis is placed on the covenant promises of the land and the specifics of Jewish law. The author is a master of irony. Nearly every significant conflict results in an outcome completely backward from what is expected. The king of the empire cannot control his own wife. Haman inadvertently plans a parade for the man he despises, thinking that it is in honor of himself. Haman builds a gallows for Mordecai and is ultimately hanged on it himself. And the Jews are threatened with annihilation by their enemies but ultimately attack and subdue their enemies with government sanction.

4. Structure (modified from Dillard and Longman):
    a. Feasts of Xerxes (1-2:18)
        i. Vashti is deposed (1)
        ii. Esther is made queen (2:1-18)
    b. Feasts of Esther (2:19-7:10)
        i. Mordecai foils a plot (2:19-23)
        ii. Haman plots (3)
        iii. Mordecai persuades Esther to help (4)
        iv. Esther holds a banquet (5:1-8)
        v. The king chooses to reward Mordecai (5:9-6:14)
        vi. Esther holds a second banquet (7)
    c. Feasts of Purim (8-10)
        i. The king issues an edict on behalf of the Jews (8)
        ii. Purim is instituted (9)
        iii. Mordecai is promoted (10)

5. Message:
    a. Historically, Esther has a clear purpose to explain the origin of Purim, which commemorates God's deliverance of the Jews from Haman's plot. This reminds us of the importance of gathered worship on the Lord's Day and the need to be intentional in commemorating God's mighty works on our behalf.
    b. Although God may not appear bodily on the scene, he is working behind the scenes even in the seemingly trivial events of life. Every detail of Esther comes together to produce an outcome that could not possibly have been planned or predicted by man. All that transpires is meaningful and in the hands of a loving, sovereign God.

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.

Job

1. Summary – The book of Job deals with a question that is virtually universal: "Why am I suffering? What did I do to deserve this?" Unknown to Job, the LORD expresses his pleasure in Job to Satan; and Satan dismisses Job's faithfulness as nothing but a response to the easy life God has given him. The LORD gives Satan permission to afflict Job. Job suffers horribly but refuses to curse God. At the same time, he agonizes over his suffering. His three friends are convinced that he is suffering because of some sin he has committed. Job denies this but grows bolder in claiming that he is wise enough to vindicate himself before God. Finally, the LORD confronts Job and his three friends with unanswerable questions and demonstrates that He alone is truly wise. Job's friends are rebuked, and Job repents of his pride. In the end, God removes Job's suffering and restores his health, family, and fortunes. Job is never told why he suffered. However, we learn that not all suffering is an immediate response to particular sins and that God is wiser than we are in leading us through suffering.

2. Author and date – We must distinguish the date of composition from the date in which the account is set. Job was clearly a historical figure (Ezek. 14:14, 20; James 5:11). The author begins the book very similarly to statements in Judges 17 and 1 Samuel 1, which are clearly historical. Internal evidence indicates that Job lived during the patriarchal period, in the same general time frame as Abraham. Wealth is measured by cattle and servants (1:3; 42:12). Fatherhood implies priesthood (1:5), which would only be appropriate before the Levitical priesthood was established. Finally, Job lives in Uz (1:1), outside the borders of Israel. Therefore, Job should be viewed as a faithful servant of God living before the Abrahamic covenant narrowed the community of the faithful to a specific family.

   While Job lived in the patriarchal period, there is no reason to date the composition of the book that early. The language used seems to hint at a fairly late composition or at least a late update of an earlier work. The concepts in the book reflect a later period in redemptive history, with a clearer understanding of angels and Satan than would be expected in the patriarchal period. Early tradition attributes the book to Moses. However, there is no direct evidence for this. No clear scholarly consensus exists concerning the author or date. Thankfully, these issues have little bearing on our understanding of the book, since suffering is a universal experience throughout human history and the divine answer to it is still true today.

3. Character of the book – The book is a sandwich. It begins and ends with a prosaic account of Job's life and is filled in the middle with poetic dialogue. While other texts from various places and religions bear some similarity to Job, Job stands unique. "Nothing we know before it provided a model; and nothing since, including its numerous imitations, has risen to the same heights. Comparison only serves to enhance the solitary greatness of the book of Job." (F. I. Andersen)

4. Structure of the book (Dillard & Longman):
   a. Prose introduction (1-2)
   b. Job's dialogue with three "friends" (3-31)
      i. Job's lament (3)
      ii. Three cycles of dialogues (4-27)
      iii. Poem on divine wisdom (28)
      iv. Job's last speech (29-31)
   c. Elihu's monologue (32-37)
   d. Yahweh speaks from the whirlwind (38-42:6)
   e. Prose conclusion (42:7-17)

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.

Psalms

1. Name – The English name comes from the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT) title *Psalmos,* which was used to translate a Hebrew word that means "to sing" or possibly "to pluck." The Hebrew title means "praises," which describes the dominant theme of the book.

2. Author and date – Psalms is an anthology collected over a long period of time. The earliest known psalm is attributed to Moses (Ps. 90), while some seem to have been written after the exile (e.g., Ps. 126). Thus, Psalms was probably composed over 1000 years. David is clearly attested as the author of many of the psalms; several other authors are identified as well.

3. Structure – The book appears to have some organizational structure, but it seems that various psalms and groups of psalms were inserted into this structure rather than being added at the end. For example, Psalm 72 ends with "The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended." However, Psalm 72 itself as well as other psalms following Psalm 72 are attributed to David. The book as we have it is made up of 150 separate psalms. Internal evidence shows that some of these psalms that are now separate were actually written as a unified composition. For example, Psalm 9 and 10 form a continuous alphabet acrostic when read together (each verse beginning with the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet). Psalm 42 and 43 are also closely related. In general, however, psalms are not connected; contextual information cannot ordinarily be gleaned by looking at surrounding psalms.

   Psalms begins with a wisdom psalm, orienting the reader toward the sharp contrast between the righteous and the wicked. The last five psalms end with a crescendo of praise and are traditionally called the Great Doxology. In between, a wide range of styles, emotions, and truths are explored.

4. Titles and attributions – Many of the psalms begin with a title that provides information about the psalms. A great deal of debate has arisen about whether these titles are to be considered part of the inspired text or merely a later explanatory addition. The titles seem to have a similar form even across very different psalms, suggesting that they were added later. Some manuscripts even have different titles. These facts suggest that the titles should not be taken as original or inspired. However, they can be regarded as very early reliable tradition.

5. Interpretation – The psalms record a human response to God, but this does not mean they are unreliable in their teaching about God. Psalms is quoted many times in the NT, often to establish a theological point (e.g., Rom 3.:4 citing Ps. 51:4 and Rom. 3:10b-18 citing Ps. 14). Interpreters have often attempted to identify the historical setting of a psalm as a key to its interpretation. However, this approach undermines the psalms as an always-relevant guide to worship. The psalms can be helpfully interpreted by comparing them to other psalms of the same genre.

6. Categories of psalms – The variety of psalms underscore their value to express worship through the full context of human emotions and experiences. They rebuke the modern tendency to think that all singing to the Lord must be happy and up-beat. Seven different genres can be identified in the Psalms:
   a. Hymns (songs of orientation, e.g. Ps. 146) – the dominant type of psalm in terms of the overall tone of the book, constituting "praises," exuberant worship of God.
   b. Laments (songs of disorientation, e.g. Ps. 70) – an expression of sorrow due to enemies, oneself, or God. These are the single most common type of psalm but don't control the tone of the book.
   c. Thanksgiving (songs of reorientation, e.g. Ps. 18) – responses to prayers of lament, offering thanks to God.
   d. Songs of confidence (e.g. Ps. 11) – these express trust in God as protector.
   e. Songs of remembrance (e.g. Ps. 105) – these recount God's great redemptive acts.
   f. Wisdom songs (e.g. Ps. 119) – these express the contrast between the righteous and the wicked.
   g. Kingship songs (e.g. Ps. 3) – these songs celebrate kingship, both of God and of his anointed, pointing to God's covenant with David and its ultimate fulfillment in the Messiah.

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.

Proverbs

1. Overview – Proverbs is an anthology of writings and short sayings about true wisdom. The book addresses wise living in a fallen world.

2. Author and date – Proverbs is a compilation of writings by a number of different authors from various time periods. Some sections explicitly indicate authorship. Solomon (1:1), Agur (30:1), and King Lemuel (31:1) are mentioned by name. Prov. 1:1-7 introduces the book as being primarily associated with Solomon. However, the introduction does not claim Solomonic authorship for itself. Solomon's unsurpassed wisdom is an important theme in the historical account of his life (1 Kings 3:1-15; 4:29-31), including the writing of many proverbs and wise sayings (4:32). Therefore, it is natural to conclude that the book was initiated by Solomon, and much of the unattributed wisdom may have flowed from his thought and effort.

   The "men of Hezekiah" (25:1) appear to have had an editorial role in the book. Thus, we know from Solomon's contribution that the book was begun at least by the 10th century B.C. and from the contribution of Hezekiah's men that it was not finalized before Hezekiah's reign around 700 B.C. Some of the wisdom may have been collected by Solomon from an earlier period, and it may be possible that either the men of Hezekiah or some later editor arranged all the material and wrote the introduction (1:1-7). Because of the anonymous sections and the absence of historical information outside Proverbs about Agur and Lemuel, we cannot be more precise than this about the dating of the book.

3. Structure of the book (Dillard & Longman):
   a. Preamble (1:1-7)
   b. Extended discourses on wisdom (1:8-9:18)
   c. Solomon's proverbs (10:1-22:16; 25:1-29:27)
   d. Sayings of the wise (22:17-24:34)
   e. Sayings of Agur (30)
   f. Sayings of King Lemuel (31:1-9)
   g. Poem to the virtuous woman (31:10-31)

4. Principles of interpretation
   a. *Recognize the theistic framework.* Some people tend to read Proverbs as merely a collection of short, pithy sayings that provide practical, common-sense observations about how to get along in life. However, even though some of these Proverbs may have been derived from reflection and observation, we must ultimately attribute their source to God. "And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure...so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt." Furthermore, the very beginning of wisdom and knowledge is the fear of the LORD (1:7, 9:10). True wisdom is hopeless unless one is rightly related to God; that is, ethics presupposes relationship.
   b. *Recognize what is at stake.* Proverbs presents us with more than practical tips about how to get along in life. It presents us with a choice between life and death. Folly in ch. 9 has a house on the "highest point in the city" (9:14), which was the case for all the ancient Near East gods that so often drew Israel from the worship of Yahweh. Thus, we are presented with a choice between wisdom and folly, Yahweh and Baal, life and death. Proverbs is more than good advice! It is about the choice between two kinds of life.
   c. *Don't absolutize the Proverbs.* The individual proverbs were not intended to be read in isolation from the larger context of the book or the teaching of the Bible as a whole. Proverbs are not promises. They do not guarantee the described outcome in every instance but speak of general truths that are vindicated in the end. A soft answer does not always turn away wrath (15:1), but this is the general way of things.
   d. *Recognize the parallel structure.* Many of the proverbs are short couplets. They are intended to examine the *same* truth from two different perspectives. "A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish man despises his mother" (15:20). This does not mean that mothers alone are the target of a foolish son's bad attitude. Rather, wisdom and folly affect both parents.
   e. *See Jesus as the embodiment of God's wisdom.* John 1:1 and Col. 1:15 appear to refer back to Proverbs 8 concerning wisdom's role in and prior to creation. Jesus is the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:30).

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.

Ecclesiastes

1. Name – The name "Ecclesiastes" derives from the Greek translation of the Hebrew title "Qohelet." Qohelet is often translated "Preacher" in 1:1. The term actually means "assembler." The Greek word for church (ekklesia) literally means "assembly." The translation "Preacher" in 1:1 is often used as a result of guessing at the implied purpose of the assembling.

2. Author and date – The issue of authorship is important and difficult. Tradition (both Christian and Jewish) attributes the book to Solomon. A simple reading of 1:1 ("the son of David, king in Jerusalem") and 1:16 ("I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me") seem to point to Solomon as Qohelet. In this view, Ecclesiastes expresses Solomon's reflections and repentance after having tried to live with wisdom apart from the fear of God. However, many conservative scholars have questioned this equation. First, they point to 1:12, in which he says "I *was* king." But Solomon was a king until his death. Furthermore, the time described in Ecclesiastes does not appear to fit the golden age of Solomon, with misery and vanity, injustice, and tyranny. Furthermore, they point out that the statement in 1:16 would not mean much if only David and Saul had ruled in Jerusalem before Qohelet. The allusion to Solomon's wisdom and experience in 1:12-2:26 was employing Solomon's identity as a pseudonym, a common literary device in the ancient Near East. Why, they ask, would Solomon himself need to hide his identity by referring to himself as Qohelet? Finally, it appears that there are two voices in the book, the narrator in the prologue (1:1-11) and epilogue (12:8-14) and the autobiographical body (1:12–12:8).

   In response to these arguments, traditionalists note that Solomon was the son of David and king in Jerusalem. No other king could claim to have "acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me" if he were after Solomon. 1 Kings 3:12 says concerning Solomon, "Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that *none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you*." "I *was* king" does not mean that he is no longer king but merely that he was a king during the experience he records. Even "golden ages" in this fallen world have their share of misery, vanity, injustice, and tyranny; finding meaning apart from God is just as impossible in a golden age as at any other time. The claim of superior wisdom over all who were before him may mean those in his presence–his circle of wise men–rather than previous kings. The claim that another author spoke with Solomon's persona without clearly indicating this seems dishonest, even if it was commonly used as a literary device. Solomon's use of a title may be intended to describe rather than obscure his identity. Finally, the use of a prologue and an epilogue in the third person helps underscore the change of perspective, whether these are provided by Solomon himself or by a final editor summarizing Solomon's conclusions.

3. Message – The book is difficult to interpret in detail. Qohelet expresses his thought in a stream of consciousness, sometimes repeating himself and even seemingly contradicting himself at times. He wants us to draw the same conclusion as Proverbs–that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. But he does that in a very different fashion from Proverbs. Rather than beginning as a wise man he begins as a fool. He shows us the end result of seeking wisdom without the fear of the Lord. Thus, oftentimes he adopts a perspective that leads over and over to meaninglessness, and the statements along the way must be interpreted in light of this broader purpose. Along the way, he arrives at many insightful conclusions, but it is sometimes difficult to discern whether a particular conclusion has direct value or only points up the flaw of using wisdom without the fear of God.

   The great value of Ecclesiastes is that we get to see how far a man can go to find meaning and purpose in his own wisdom apart from the fear of God. Most of us will never have the opportunities with wealth and sensuality and mental acumen to do this kind of experiment; Qohelet has done it for us and spared us the pain and frustration if we will only heed his message. The wisest man who ever lived tried and failed completely to find meaning without God; these ultimate questions can only be answered from outside ourselves through the fear of the Lord.

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.

Song of Songs

1. Name – In the King James Version, this book is entitled "Song of Solomon," but both modern translations and Jewish and Christian have typically referred to it as "Song of Songs" from the phrase in the opening verse. The phrase can be taken as a superlative – "the best of songs."

2. Author and date – Much debate surrounds the author, and this has an impact on the interpretation of the book. Traditionally, the phrase "song of songs of Solomon" has been taken to indicate that Solomon wrote it. However, the Hebrew phrase translated "of Solomon" can be understood to mean "of/to/for/about Solomon," implying either that Solomon wrote it, that it was dedicated to him, or that he is a primary character in the action. While it is noted that Solomon composed many songs (1 Kings 4:32-34), there is nothing that attributes these songs to Solomon other than the ambiguous opening phrase. Traditionalists typically identify the main characters as Solomon and the daughter of Pharaoh (1 Kings 3:1). Ironically, she was apparently not his first wife, since Rehoboam was born to Naamah and was already one year old when Solomon began to reign (1 Ki. 11:41-42; 14:21). Because this relationship, as well as the 700 wives and 300 concubines to come, were hardly exemplary, many find Solomonic authorship to be extremely implausible. In fact, some see the song as a satire of Solomon's reign and treatment of women that casts Solomon as the "villain."

3. Approaches to interpretation
   a. *Allegorical/typological.* This approach views the primary meaning as symbolic of the relationship between God and his people or Christ and the church. The typological approach allows for a literal or historical basis for the song, while the allegorical approach does not. This approach has been the predominant approach to the book both in Jewish and earlier Christian tradition. However, it has been largely discredited. First, an allegorical approach seems to have arisen out of a discomfort with such clearly erotic language in the Scriptures. However, God is the good author of marriage and sexual relations; there is nothing unspiritual about celebrating and delighting in it. Second, very similar love poems have been discovered in Mesopotamia and Egypt, suggesting that readers would have understood the Song in the same literal way. Finally, the allegorical method leads to absurd interpretations when seeking to press the details of the Song into an allegory. For example, Cyril of Alexandra understood "My lover is to me a sachet of myrrh, resting between my breasts," to be a reference to Christ appearing between the Old and New Testaments.
   b. *Dramatic.* The current preference in interpreting the Song is to read it as a drama, with two or three characters (depending on whether the shepherd and the king are the same person) and a female chorus provided by the daughters of Jerusalem. Modern translations often assume this view by dividing the text with headers suggesting a drama. However, there is no example of drama anywhere else in Scripture or in the literature of the ancient Near East. The characters are difficult to identify (are there two or three?). It is difficult to discern any clear progress and resolution.
   c. *Historical.* Some understand the Song to be a poetic account, either of the relationship of Solomon and his beloved; or of two lovers, with Solomon seeking unsuccessfully to woo the Shulammite maiden away from her true love, a simple country boy. This is closely related to the dramatic approach but asserts that the story is actual history.
   d. *Didactic.* This approach may or may not assert a historical basis but focuses on the general lessons to be learned from pure love celebrated sexually and faithfully. The Song may simply be a collection of loosely related love poems without any intended overall plot or resolution.

4. Message – The Song extols the goodness, beauty and blessing from God of the wonder of sexual love when expressed within marriage. Marriage between the lovers is never clearly asserted but is assumed from its context within the canon. While not an allegory, the Song provides a clear picture of marriage that the Scriptures use as a metaphor for the relationship of God and his people (Eph. 5:22-33). Thus, it instructs us concerning the intimate, pursuing love between Christ and the church.

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.
A Survey of the Old Testament, Hill and Walton, Zondervan, 2000.

Isaiah

1. Introduction – The book of Isaiah contains the prophecies of Isaiah, who ministered as a prophet to Judah prior to the exile. The richness and beauty and length of this book set it apart from other books in the Hebrew Bible. The New Testament quotes frequently from Isaiah, making Isaiah a very important book for understanding the relationship between the Old and New Testament. Isaiah deals with God's judgment, his mercy, and his trustworthiness.

2. Author and date – Authorship and unity of the book are huge points of controversy. The very first verse attributes authorship to Isaiah, son of Amoz, He ministered during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (2 Kings 19-20, Isaiah 1:1) in the latter half of the 8th century B.C. In the late 18th century, the unity and authorship of Isaiah were called into question by liberal scholars based on two primary considerations: 1) they could not accept the supernatural claims of predictive prophecy and were forced to date the book after some of the detailed prophecies (like naming Cyrus (44:28)) had been fulfilled; 2) they recognized significant differences in the historical situation, linguistic style, and theological concerns in ch. 40-66 compared to ch. 1-39. It became fashionable to refer to ch. 40-66 as "deutero-Isaiah" (Second Isaiah). Later scholars found even more distinctions in the text and theorized a 3rd, 4th, 5th, and even 6th Isaiah!

   Conservative scholars responded with several counter-arguments: 1) Passages from both sections are attributed by the NT to Isaiah (e.g., John cites 6:10 and 53:1 in consecutive verses and identifies both as Isaiah). 2) Other prophets, such as Zephaniah, Nahum, and Jeremiah, seem to use very similar language to Isaiah 40-66, which suggests Isaiah was already available to them before the late date theorized by liberal scholars. 3) Many common themes and word choices are found in the two sections; 4) Extrabiblical literature and manuscripts from the 2nd century B.C. show no awareness of two authors, two sections, or two dates of composition. The Isaiah manuscript from Qumran shows no break at all between the end of ch. 39 and the beginning ch. 40.

   More recent conservative scholarship has shown an openness to considering the book as a product of a later editor or author writing an addendum or update under divine inspiration. This is not different in principle from allowances that conservatives make concerning editorial additions and updates in the writings attributed to Moses given that those writings include an account of his death (Deut. 34). However, at least two further considerations make this approach seem unsatisfactory: 1) in John's reference to Isaiah, he seems to attribute the sayings to a single *person* named Isaiah, not simply to a single *book* called Isaiah; 2) evidence indicates that Kings used the complete book of Isaiah, and Kings was completed by the middle of the exile. Therefore, a single author seems the most natural conclusion for those who accept the validity of predictive prophecy and the inerrancy of Scripture.

3. Major themes:
   a. **Sons' names as signs**: Isaiah's children – Shear-Jashub ("a remnant will return") and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz ("quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil"); God's son – Immanuel ("God with us") and the child in 9:6.
   b. **The servant**: Four sections have been identified as "Servant Songs" (42:1-7, 49:1-9, 50:4-11, 52:13-53:12). The servant will be used by God to fulfill God's plans. Interpreters have wrestled over the identity of the servant, whether the servant is corporate Israel or an individual (the Messiah). This can best understood as pointing to the faithful remnant of God's people; the faithful remnant is ultimately shown to be a single person, pointing us to the faithful Man, the true Israelite, Jesus.
   c. **The Holy One of Israel**: God reveals his holy character, the magnitude of Israel's offense against God, and God's gracious character in bringing the remnant back to himself.

4. Structure of the book (Hill and Walton):
   a. Introduction
      i. Overture (1-5)
      ii. Commissioning (6)
   b. Assyrian Context
      i. Oracles at the time of Syro-Ephraimite coalition (7-12)
      ii. Oracles against nations (13-23)
      iii. Apocalyptic conclusion to oracles against the nations (24-27)
      iv. "Woe" oracles at the time of the siege of Jerusalem (28-33)
      v. Apocalyptic conclusion of "woe" oracles (34-35)
      vi. Resolution of the Assyrian crisis (36-37)
      vii. Transition to Babylonian crisis (38-39)
   c. Projected oracles addressing exiles (40-55)
   d. Projected oracles addressing postexilic situation (56-66)

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.
A Survey of the Old Testament, Hill and Walton, Zondervan, 2000.

Jeremiah

1. Introduction – Jeremiah is the largest of the prophetic books. Jeremiah prophesied to the people of Judah just before and during the exile to Babylon. He called the people to repentance. When this message was steadfastly resisted, his message became one of certain judgment and eventual restoration.

2. Author and date – The book is a record of the ministry of Jeremiah. Baruch the scribe is said to have recorded the words of Jeremiah (36:4,32). He may have recorded the book as a whole. Much of the content of the book is directly attributed to the Lord. The phrase "says the Lord" occurs well over 100 times in the book. Many passages in both the OT and NT attribute the book to Jeremiah (2 Chron. 36:22, Dan. 9:2, Matt. 2:17-18). There are actually two quite different manuscript traditions of Jeremiah–one associated with the Septuagint translation and the other with the Masoretic text. They differ primarily in arrangement and length. The former text is about 1/7 shorter than the latter. Scholars theorize that the former may have been an earlier version of the book, possibly even a version associated with the one that King Jehoiakim burned (ch. 36). The Septuagint version may have been circulated by Jeremiah during his time in Egypt (41:16–44:30). The more extended version could have been written by Jeremiah later in life or expanded by his scribe Baruch after Jeremiah's death. Our modern version is based primarily on the Masoretic text. Jeremiah's ministry began during the reign of Josiah and continued through the fall to Babylon and the appointment of Babylonian governors over Judah.

3. Background and purpose – Josiah was the last king of whom it is said that "he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD." Subsequently, three of his sons and one grandson ruled, always under the domination of either Egypt or Babylon. The Assyrian empire had disintegrated, and Judah was now caught between the aspirations of Egypt and Babylon. Reforms were begun under Josiah, but the people were not committed to these from the heart. They were given to idolatry in their hearts. They were putting their hope in political power and alliances rather than in the Lord (Jer. 2:18,36). Jeremiah called them to repent and interceded on their behalf. Eventually, the Lord instructed Jeremiah not to continue to intercede for the people (7:16); judgment was now certain. The people were called to submit to the rule of the Babylonians; the exiles already there were told to settle down and live there (Jer. 29:4-7). Jeremiah was strongly opposed by the king and other officials as well as by many false prophets; he was whipped, put in stocks, accused of treason, lowered into a cistern, and arrested. Jeremiah records not only the call of God on the people but his own struggles with his suffering and feelings of being abandoned by God.

4. Major themes and ideas:
   a. God's sovereignty: Throughout the book, Jeremiah lifts up God's sovereignty. He rules over the nations and calls them to account. He is especially the God of Israel, but he exercises dominion and authority over the nations as well. He is the one who destroys as well as builds among the nations (1:10). God's word will accomplish its purposes (4:28).
   b. Covenant faithfulness from the heart: Mere outward conformity to God's law or to a religious tradition is unacceptable to God. God would still call them to account for their covenant unfaithfulness according to the curses announced in Deut. 27-28. The presence of the temple among them would not be sufficient to shelter them or ward off God's anger (7:1-6).
   c. The new covenant: Even though judgment was certain, God held out hope of his steadfast love and mercy. He would one day do such a work in his people that their hearts would incline to him. His law would be written there, and they would know him and be cleansed by him (31:31-34). A righteous branch of David would spring forth to rule justly and to save and protect God's people (23:5-6; 33:15-16)

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.

Lamentations

1. Introduction – The judgment of God threatened by Deuteronomy and announced by the prophets had fallen upon Israel and Judah because of their sins. Jerusalem and the temple had been destroyed, and the people had been taken into exile to Babylon. Lamentations expresses the despair and hopelessness experienced by the people as a result of God turning against them.

2. Author and date – Jeremiah is traditionally identified as the author. However, the book itself does not identify the author, and nowhere else in Scripture is Jeremiah identified as the author. Jeremiah certainly could have written it; he lived during the time addressed by the book. However, there is no clear evidence that allows us to identify the author with any confidence. This is not a significant problem; the interpretation of the book does not depend on identifying the author. The book was written in response to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, which occurred in 587 B.C. Due to the level and freshness of emotion expressed in the book, most scholars date the book shortly after this event. Thus, it is a product of the exilic period.

3. Historical background – The background of this event is rather confusing, so we lay it out here in some detail. King Josiah had instituted widespread reforms, but he did not succeed in gaining the hearts of the people. He died in battle against Egypt in 609 B.C., and his son Jehoahaz became king. Judah was caught between the two major powers of the day, Egypt and Babylon. Pharaoh Neco extended his power into Judah and deposed Jehoahaz to Egypt after Jehoahaz was on the throne only three months. Neco appointed Eliakim, Jehoahaz's brother, to be king, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim paid tribute to Neco; during his reign, Jehoiakim had many conflicts with the prophet Jeremiah, including cutting up and throwing into a fire a scroll containing Jeremiah's prophecy. In 605, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon defeated the Egyptians. The next year he returned to Judah and made Jehoikim his vassal. Soon after, Jehoikim turned to Egypt for help, provoking Babylon to invade Judah in 598. Jehoikim had died before the Babylonians arrived; his son Jehoiachin, only 18 years old, had been made king. Jehoiachin surrendered and was carried off to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar appointed Mattaniah, Jehoichin's uncle (another of Josiah's sons), as king, and changed his name to Zedekiah. In spite of Jeremiah's counsel from God to submit to Babylon (Jer. 27:1-14), Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon. This act led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 587-586. Lamentations pours out the anguish of soul that resulted from God's turning away from them in blessing and turning toward them in anger.

4. Literary character:
   a. While Lamentations is often read as an individual expression of anguish, it is better understood as a corporate lament, much like many of the Psalms (44, 60, 74, 79, 80). Occasional expressions from an individual are a literary device to communicate the personal nature of their suffering by personifying the people as an individual expressing grief. For example, the man in 3:1-21 is probably best understood as personified Jerusalem.
   b. Each of the five chapters corresponds to a literary unit. The first four are acrostics (the beginning of each verse or line starting with sequential letters of the Hebrew alphabet).

5. Structure and themes:
   a. Ch. 1 describes the city from an outside perspective, forsaken and full of distress.
   b. Ch. 2 focuses on the wrath of God experienced from the perspective of those within.
   c. Ch. 3 rehearses God's faithfulness even from the perspective of times of great trouble. This section is actually the most hopeful and includes the well-known statement: "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."
   d. Ch. 4 rehearses the sins of all classes of people who are suffering God's anger.
   e. Ch. 5 is a prayer for restoration; while not overtly hopeful, the very fact that they are looking to the Lord in their prayers is a sign of confidence in God.

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.

Ezekiel

1. Introduction – Ezekiel ministered as a prophet in exile in Babylon. He warned the people of God's impending judgment against Judah and Jerusalem. Using symbolic actions as well as language, he showed that God would destroy Jerusalem. The exile would continue for many years. However, God would judge the nations around Judah and ultimately restore a refined remnant of the people to the land and rebuild Jerusalem and a more glorious temple.

2. Author and date – While a few critical scholars have predictably raised questions about the authorship and date of the book, their arguments are unconvincing. The book is clearly attributed to Ezekiel. In fact, other than the prophetic call in 1:1-3, the entire book is written from the first person perspective. Ezekiel is the only prophetic OT book to be written entirely in the first person. The book is full of historical markers. In addition, it bears a strong literary unity that testifies to the fact that it was produced by a single author. The historical coverage of the book can generally be specified down to the day, since records both from the Bible and other documents allow us to correlate these events accurately with our own calendar. The book covers a date range of 593-573 B.C. Presumably, the book would've been in process of being written during this time and finalized shortly thereafter.

3. Historical background – Ezekiel was about one year old when King Josiah discovered the law books in the temple in the process of reform. He was probably among those who hoped that the decline of Assyria would mean peace and freedom for Judah. However, this was not to be. Josiah was killed in a battle with Neco of Egypt. His son Jehoahaz became king, but Neco immediately deposed him and made his brother Eliakim king, renaming him Jehoiakim. After Babylon defeated Egypt, Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. Jehoiakim died, and his son Jehoiachin was left to face the Babylonian armies. He was dethroned and taken captive in 597, along with many of the higher class, including Ezekiel. Ezekiel conducted his prophetic ministry from Babylon, first warning of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and then offering hope after his prophecy was fulfilled in 586.

4. Structure:
    a. Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem (1-24)
    b. Oracles against foreign nations (25-32)
    c. The watchman warns of destruction (33)
    d. Blessing for Judah (34-39)
    e. Blessings for Jerusalem and a new form of temple (40-48)

5. Themes:
    a. New Jerusalem – The NT refers to Ezekiel (without once mentioning the name!) directly or indirectly at least 65 times. Forty-eight of those references occur in Revelation. John builds on Ezekiel's vision of the new temple and shows us that in the new heavens and new earth the heavenly city will come to earth and God's dwelling place will be with men. Other NT writers pick up on the implications of the temple prophecy and depict the church as the temple, the building in which God manifests his special presence.
    b. Life-giving water – Ezekiel saw a trickle of water flowing from the temple that became a mighty river of life-giving, fresh water (48:1-12). Jesus alludes to this and proclaims himself to be the source of this life-giving water to all who ask.
    c. Individual responsibility – The people had adopted a proverb that "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." By this they were disclaiming any responsibility for the judgment that was about to fall. While the impending judgment was due in part to the guilt of their fathers, Ezekiel rebukes their unwillingness to face their own sin and places the responsibility for their judgment on their unwillingness to repent and turn to the Lord wholeheartedly.
    d. Holiness and mercy – God would demonstrate his justice and holiness by judging the people but exercise great mercy in restoring a remnant to the land in a more glorious manifestation of grace.

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.

Daniel

1. Introduction – The book of Daniel appears to be a split personality. The first half of the book is the beloved stuff of children's Bible stories, while the second half is in many respects a mystery even to serious students of prophecy. Furthermore, the book was written in two different languages, Aramaic and Hebrew. The basic message of Daniel is that God is sovereign even in hostile territory; he turns evil for his own purposes and will eventually crush it completely.

2. Author, date, historical setting – Until the beginning of the 20th century, the consensus among Christian and Jewish scholars was that the book was written by Daniel, an exiled Jew who served in the government of Babylon. Not surprisingly, this perspective has been questioned, in part because unbelieving scholars cannot accept the clarity of some of his prophecies before the fact. The internal evidence indicates that Daniel wrote at least the latter half (7-12). Daniel refers to himself in the first person throughout this prophetic section (e.g. 7:2). The New Testament names Daniel as the author in Matt. 24:15-16; however, this reference only cites portions from the prophetic second half of the book. One option open to conservative Bible believers is that Daniel wrote most of 7-12, with third-person introductions (e.g. 7:1) and other framing provided by a later editor under inspiration. It is conceivable that the earlier chapters were written by a later author *about* Daniel as an introduction to his prophecy. The internal evidence doesn't allow us to be dogmatic either way. The traditional view is certainly consistent with the evidence, and Daniel would have had access to the events recorded in the first part, since he himself was a central part of those events. Daniel was among those who were carried into exile in 605 B.C., about 18 years before the final destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians. Daniel's service in Babylon lasted through several kings and two separate empires. His prophecy concerns the rise and fall of future empires and God's sovereignty in the midst of these upheavals.

3. Literary character and language – Daniel is not considered to be one of the more outstanding examples of literary style among the books of the OT. The characters are flat and idealized; the stories are simple; questions about the Gentile kings' attitude toward God are left unanswered. Yet even these characteristics point us past the form to the purpose of the book. Daniel is roughly divided into two genres – court narrative and apocalyptic prophecy. Apocalyptic prophecy is generally characterized by a long-distance view of the end times, a revelation given by a mediator (an angel in this case), bizarre imagery, and a context in which God's people are oppressed. Daniel is written in two languages, 1:1-2:4a and 8:1-12:13 in Hebrew and 2:4b-7:28 in Aramaic. Oddly, these two sections do not coincide with the two different genres. Some of each genre (story, apocalypse) is written in each of the two languages. While speculation abounds to explain this, no compelling explanation exists. Nor is our understanding of the book affected by the lack of an explanation.

4. Message:
   a. Daniel and his friends are a model of Jeremiah's exhortation (Jer. 29:4-7) – "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." (v. 7). They work respectfully within the pagan system but with faithfulness to God as their ultimate principle. As such, they serve as an example for all believers who are in spiritual exile from their heavenly country (the new heavens and new earth).
   b. Faithfulness to God inevitably brings conflict with prideful idolaters. God sometimes chooses to rescue his people in dramatic ways; he demonstrates his power and commitment to rescue us from our final enemies–sin and death.
   c. All the nations are in God's hands and are working out his purposes, even in the midst of pride, ignorance, and rebellion. Evil concentrated in human government will often be a plague and trial for the people of God in this age, but the one who rides the clouds like a chariot and the Ancient of Days will crush all rebellion, and the King of Kings will reign righteously forever and ever.

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.

Hosea

1. Introduction – Hosea is best known as the minor prophet who was commanded by God to marry a prostitute as a symbol of God's marriage to unfaithful Israel (Chapters 1-3). The remaining chapters are not as well known and are more difficult to understand. As a general theme, Hosea announces God's judgment as well as his love for Israel (the northern kingdom) prior to Israel's fall to the Assyrians and exile into Assyria.

2. Author and date – The book is attributed to Hosea son of Beeri. Critical scholars have typically questioned this claim, pointing to 1) indications of a southern (kingdom of Judah) perspective in a number of passages (e.g., 2:2, 4:15, 5:5-14; 8:14, 10:11, 12:1-3) and 2) words of hope, which earlier critical scholars claimed were not to be found in pre-exilic prophets. Even critical scholars have given up the older critical notion that the prophets announced no hope. Many conservative scholars allow for the possibility that some later updates were added to the basic text under divine inspiration to reflect the perspective of Judah and apply the words of Hosea to that situation. However, the bulk of the work is to be assigned to Hosea, a fact which even critical scholars are beginning to acknowledge. Nothing is known of Hosea outside the book by his name. According to information from the contemporary kings listed in 1:1, he was a contemporary of Amos in the north and of Isaiah and Micah in the south. He is estimated to have been active during the period 750 to 715 B.C.

3. Background and purpose – As Hosea began his ministry, both the northern and southern kingdoms were experiencing a period of prosperity. Soon after, however, Assyria started to turn their attention to Israel. Israel began to pay tribute but then joined with Syria to attempt to throw off this control from Assyria. Israel and Syria tried to force Judah by military force to join with them to oppose Assyria. Ahaz king of Judah refused to do so and appealed to Tiglath-Pileser III, king of Assyria, to help him. Assyria responded by attacking the north, taking a portion of the Israelites into exile, and installing Hoshea as an Assyrian puppet king over Israel. Hosea speaks to this situation as well as the initial prosperity.

4. Major themes and ideas:
    a. Hosea's marriage: God directed Hosea to marry a woman whose marital unfaithfulness pictured Israel's unfaithfulness to God. After she demonstrated her unfaithfulness, Hosea was instructed to go after her to show God's faithfulness and the return of God's people back to the Lord in the latter days. Hosea was one of the first to draw out the connection between the marriage covenant and the covenant between God and his people; these are the only two relationships that should be exclusive. This analogy is picked up by New Testament writers and applied to the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:22-33).
    b. The covenant: Hosea's charges against Israel are based on God's covenant with Israel as prescribed in Deuteronomy. Hosea's judgment speeches confirm the curses announced by Deuteronomy (e.g., 4:10-11a cmp. Deut. 28:17-19, 32:24-28). Hosea says explicitly that judgment is coming because they broke the covenant (6:7, 8:1).
    c. Judgment and salvation: The structure and theme of Hosea are difficult to understand and summarize. However, a pattern that reveals cycles of judgment and hope can be discerned. They are judged due to evil priests, prophets, and rulers. Their willingness to trust foreign powers over God's protection is also condemned. They will wander again in the wilderness away from God's presence (2:14). But there is also hope. God will not forsake his people forever. He will heal their apostasy (14:4); they will return to God (14:7). The New Testament picks up on Hosea's mocking of death personified and God's offer of victory: "O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting?" The hope held out by Hosea is made effective by Jesus' victory over death and hell for his people.

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.
A Survey of the Old Testament, Hill and Walton, Zondervan, 2000.

Joel

1. Introduction – Joel describes a locust plague as a means of leading the reader to understand the Day of the Lord, a day in which the Lord's armies will invade and devastate the land.

2. Author, date, historical setting – The prophet Joel of Pethuel (1:1) is unknown outside of the book. Several Joels are mentioned in other places in Scripture, but none can be clearly identified as this prophet. Most scholars accept the unity of the book. However, a great deal of disagreement exists concerning the dating of the book. The book itself has no clear chronological notations, so the dating of the book must be determined on the basis of implications of the subject matter. Some believe the book was written as early as the 9th century B.C. This date is based on the order of Joel in the Hebrew canon. However, the Septuagint places Joel after Micah (late 8th century). The position of Joel is probably due to a thematic rather than a chronological grouping. Others have noted several features (or notable silences) of the subject matter: mention of elders and priests (1:2, 13; 2:16) but no mention of a king, no mention of idol worship or foreign deities, the theme of the nations arrayed in battle against the Lord (3:9-17), references to the Jews being dispersed into the surrounding nations (3:1-2), and references to the functioning of the temple (1:9, 13-16; 2:15-17). All of these factors seem to be most consistent with a date after the exile and the rebuilding of the temple.

3. Language and style – The very fact that Joel is difficult to date suggests that Joel was intended to be used as a public reading in worship that would be meaningful under a variety of circumstances. For example, the book calls for repentance, but no specific sins are mentioned. As a result of this non-specific nature, Joel strikes modern readers as more powerful and directly applicable than some other prophetic literature. Joel draws on many figures, phrases, and terms from the body of prophecy prior to the exile. For example, while Isaiah and Micah prophecy peace in terms of swords being beaten into plowshares, Joel picks up and reverses the figure, mocking the nations by calling on them to beat their plowshares into swords to gather themselves against the armies of the Lord (3:9-11). References to Ezekiel and Amos can also be identified.

4. Structure:
    a. The current disaster – a locust plague
        i. Description (1:1-12)
        ii. Call to lamentation (1:13-14)
        iii. A foretaste of the Day of the Lord (1:15-20)
    b. The Day of the Lord presented as a locust plague
        i. Description (2:1-11)
        ii. Call to repentance in hopes of mercy (2:12-17)
        iii. The Lord relents and assures (2:18-27)
    c. The coming Day of the Lord
        i. Description (2:28-32)
        ii. Judgment on the nations (3:1-17)
        iii. Salvation for the people of God (3:18-21)

5. Themes:
    a. God warns his people, sometimes with harsh judgments. But he warns with merciful intention and loves to show mercy to repentant people.
    b. The Day of the Lord will be a day of both salvation and judgment – salvation to those who belong to the Lord and are repentant but judgment to those who are God's enemies and are arrayed against him.
    c. The giving of the Spirit at Pentecost is referenced by Peter (Acts 2:16-21) as a fulfillment of Joel (2:28-32). This is a further step in God's merciful gathering of his exiled people and a step toward that Day in which the nations will be winnowed and judged.

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.
A Survey of the Old Testament, Hill and Walton, Zondervan, 2000.

Amos

1. Introduction – Amos, one of the minor prophets, records the message of the prophet Amos addressed to Israel and the surrounding nations prior to Israel's fall to the Assyrians and exile into Assyria.

2. Author and date – The book is attributed to Amos of Tekoa. There is no mention of Amos in Scripture outside the pages of his book. However, the book of Amos gives us a basic picture of the man. Although he was a prophet to the northern kingdom (Israel), he was from Tekoa, a town in the southern kingdom (Judah) about five miles south of Bethlehem. He was a shepherd (1:1) and apparently not a "career" prophet or from a line of prophets (7:14). Some have tried to make a case that Amos was actually a member of the upper society of Israel and his designation as a shepherd indicated a supervisory role, perhaps being the manager of shepherds or a large-scale breeder. However, the weight of evidence makes this quite implausible. He was also said to be a "dresser of sycamore figs", which was regarded as food for poor people. His position in the lower levels of society may have helped him to see more clearly the sins of the rich. Amos was a contemporary of Hosea in the north and Isaiah and Micah in the south, ministering in the first half of the 8th century B.C. There is a wide variety of opinion about the length of his ministry. Some believe the entire message of the book was delivered on a single occasion; others believe his ministry may have lasted many days or much longer.

3. Background and purpose – During the time of Amos, King Jeroboam in the north and King Uzziah in the south had prospered greatly. The combined land of the two kingdoms nearly encompassed the area held during the glory days of David and Solomon. During this time, a wealthy class had emerged. Much of Amos's message is aimed at the abuse of power and wealth among the rich. On the horizon, however, was the threat of Assyria. Amos spoke to Israel of her unfaithfulness in the shadow of this threat.

4. Major themes and ideas:
   a. Oracles against the nations (ch. 1-2): Amos brilliantly encircles Israel with the judgment of the surrounding nations only to zero in on Israel and her judgment as his central point. Amos mentions Syria to the northeast, Philistia to the southwest, Tyre to the northwest, then Edom, Ammon, and Moab to the southeast, and finally Judah to the south. Then he springs his trap, and Israel is caught in the middle. The nations are guilty of war crimes. And while the Israelites are readily agreeing to this indictment, Amos lays the charge to Israel that they are just as guilty of social injustices on the home front.
   b. Covenant lawsuit (ch. 3-6): Amos brings a covenant lawsuit on God's behalf against the people of Israel. This form of speech had a standard form in the covenant relationships in the ancient Near East. We see a close approximation of this form in 3:1-15 – a rehearsal of the history of the relationship and the failure to maintain it, witnesses and cross-examination, and a confirmation of the lawsuit messenger. Amos draws on ideas from the Pentateuch in a number of places to draw out his charges and the curses of disobedience. Amos' message is fully integrated with the earlier revelation of Moses and the covenant established there with Israel.
   c. The remnant: God was unalterably committed to a perpetual relationship with the offspring of Abraham. Yet he was also equally committed to his own holiness and glory and the requirement of holiness in his people. These two ideas are clearly in tension; they are dealt with through the concept of the remnant. God would judge and winnow his people, but a remnant would survive and thrive under God's blessing (9:9-15).

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.

Obadiah

1. Introduction – Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, consisting of only 21 verses in a single chapter. In a small package, Obadiah pronounces God's judgment upon Edom for their unjust treatment of God's chosen nation Israel.

2. Author, date, historical setting – At least a dozen Obadiahs are mentioned in the Old Testament outside the book of Obadiah; however, none of them appear to be the author of this book. Nothing other than authorship is revealed about Obadiah in his little book. A few scholars date the book in the 9th century B.C., based primarily on the order in which the book appears in the canon among the twelve minor prophets. The books are indeed in chronological order wherever we can verify it. However, the books that are not clear in their chronology appear to be grouped by similar theme and vocabulary. Furthermore, the Septuagint puts these books in a different order from the Hebrew text.

   Most scholars date the book in the 6th century B.C. after the Judean exile. This dating is based primarily on the condemnation of Edom in vv. 11-16 for raiding Judah when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. This event is also mentioned in other places (Ps. 137:7, Lam. 4:21-22, and the apocryphal book 1 Esdras 4:45). The Edomites were descended from Esau. From the moment of their birth, Jacob and Esau had been in conflict. This carried through to the Exodus, when the Edomites refused to allow Israel to pass through their territory on the way to Canaan (Num. 20:14-21). Israel had often subdued and ruled over Edom, but Edom had sometimes thrown off this yoke and raided Israel. During the reign of Ahaz (mid-8th century B.C.), Edom had thrown off Israelite control for the last time. Apparently, when Jerusalem fell, the Edomites either cooperated with Babylon or took advantage of the opportunity to stage their own raids against Judah. This event is the context into which Obadiah speaks.

3. Structure and literary observations – Many different structures have been proposed for Obadiah, but none of them seems to have any consensus support. Scholars have noted a significant literary link between Obadiah 1-9 and Jeremiah 49:7-16. It appears that one author was heavily influenced by the other in their composition; however, it is unclear which one depends on the other.

4. Themes:
   a. God is the God of all nations and will hold them all to account.
   b. God remembers his covenant with Abraham. The nations will be blessed or cursed as they relate to the people of God. Jesus echoed the same theme on a more personal level: "He who is not with me is against me" and "And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."
   c. Consider the sobering consequences of turning one's back on God's blessing when it is offered. Esau despised the blessing and turned his back on the covenant with Abraham. As a result, his offspring became long-term enemies of the people of God and were ultimately destroyed.
   d. Consider the sobering consequences when God's people do evil to those around them. Jacob's deception provoked Esau to become his enemy, which was a thorn in the side of Jacob's descendants for centuries.
   e. Consider the glory of God's sovereign election: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." (Mal. 1:2-3) This choice worked its way out both in their personal lives and in their offspring.
   f. The conflict between Israel and Edom foreshadows the attempt by Herod, an Idumean and descendant of Esau, to destroy the true Israelite, Jesus, at his birth. (Matt. 2:16)

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.

Jonah

1. Introduction – Jonah was a prophet, but the book of Jonah is focused more on an episode in the life of Jonah than the prophetic message of Jonah. In fact, only one sentence of Jonah's message is recorded in the book! The book concerns Jonah's reaction to the call to preach to a heathen nation, his vain attempt to run from God's call, and his frustration when God indeed demonstrates mercy to the enemies of Israel. The most memorable event in the book is when Jonah is swallowed by a great fish after being cast into the sea. This book has many implications for our view of God and our attitude toward God's enemies.

2. Author and date – The book does not indicate either the author or the time frame in which it was written. Jonah himself was a historical figure, a prophet who lived during the reign of Jeroboam II and prophesied the restoration of the borders of the northern kingdom (2 Kings 14:25). Liberal scholars have questioned the historicity of the book because they couldn't believe a man could survive for three days inside a fish. This attitude betrays an unwillingness to consider the supernatural intervention of God. Such an anti-supernatural presupposition is at odds with the entire testimony of Scripture. Even some conservative scholars have concluded that the book is a form of parable and not historical, not because of an anti-supernatural bias but because of some of the elements of the story itself. They point out the historical vagueness – Jonah is the only person named, even the king of Nineveh isn't named, and Nineveh was only the capital city of an entire empire over which a king ruled. According to this view, Jesus' references to Jonah should be taken as a reference to a character in a story, just as one might say "remember the good Samaritan." While we cannot be dogmatic, these arguments seem unsatisfying. To use a historical character in a fictional work that impugns his character as a prophet would seem to be unethical. Jesus didn't merely refer to Jonah as an object lesson, but he said that "The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here" (Matt. 12:41). That is, real, historical people who repented at the real preaching of Jonah will be at the final judgment to condemn those who refused to repent.

3. Literary character – Even though Jonah is a historical account, it is more than a simple record of action. It is a skillful literary work. A number of themes can be traced through the narrative. For example, the theme of "rising up" is prominent in the story. God calls Jonah to "arise, go to Nineveh." "...and Jonah rose up to flee..." The sailors call Jonah to "arise, call upon your god!" After being delivered by and from the fish, Jonah again receives the call to "arise, go to Nineveh." This time Jonah "arose and went." Many such devices can be identified.

4. Structure (two acts, two scenes in each act):
    a. Jonah flees from God's call (1-2)
        i. On the way to Tarshish (1)
        ii. In the belly of the fish (2)
    b. Jonah goes to Nineveh (3-4)
        i. Jonah warns and Nineveh repents (3)
        ii. Jonah is displeased by God's mercy (4)

5. Message:
    a. We cannot ignore or escape God's call. Our rebellion may endanger some and deny others the benefits of our labors.
    b. Discipline can be an act of great mercy. Jonah praises God in the belly of the fish.
    c. God is concerned about the welfare of the nations, not just the people of Israel. Even though we may be abused and persecuted, we must love our enemies as God loves his.
    d. Jesus is greater than Jonah (Matt. 12:41); Jonah preached reluctantly, while Jesus gave his life willingly.

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.

Micah

1. Introduction – Micah, one of the minor prophets, and a contemporary of Isaiah, ministered during the tumultuous times prior to the Babylonian exile. He announced God's judgment on injustice and made God's demands clear. He provided a glimpse of hope by prophesying a remnant and the reign of a king to come out of Bethlehem. The structure of Micah is difficult to follow. The book of Micah is best understood as an anthology of Micah's oracles, not necessarily arranged chronologically. However, he predicts the overthrow of Samaria and Sennacherib's invasion in the early part of the book and foresees the exile in Babylon and the restoration to the land near the conclusion.

2. Author and date – The book is clearly attributed to Micah of Moresheth. He is mentioned in Jeremiah (26:18-19) as having prophesied the same thing that Jeremiah was prophesying in his day. This reference indicates that Micah's ministry was prominent enough to be known and was probably therefore already written down by Jeremiah's time. It is fashionable among critical scholars to attribute only the first three chapters to Micah and the remainder to a later author/editor. However, there is no compelling reason to deny Micah full authorship if one accepts the possibility of predictive prophecy. Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah (latter half of the 8th century B.C.). He is said to have ministered during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (1:1).

3. Background and purpose – The military success of Uzziah had begun a period of economic development that had created a distinct merchant class. This class had begun to exercise economic and political power over the agrarian class. In addition, the Assyrians had risen to power and had already destroyed and deported the northern kingdom of Israel. They also invaded Judah multiple times. In this context, Micah delivered a message of God's judgment against injustice and superficial religion. He states his purpose in 3:8: "But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin."

4. Major themes and ideas:
   a. The judgment: God was angry with his people because of their sin. Their sin concerned both their worship as well as their social interaction and injustice. God would bring the Assyrians and the Babylonians to destroy them because they had broken covenant with their God.
   b. The deliverer: In two places (2:13 and 5:2-9) Micah speaks of a king who would deliver his people. He would come out of Bethlehem, which indicates a king from the line of David but distinct from the line of kings of that day, who ruled from Jerusalem. Micah's prophecy anticipates the coming of the Messiah, the ideal Davidic king, who delivers, rules over, and protects his people.
   c. What the Lord requires: Probably the most well known passage from Micah is 6:8:

      He has told you, O man, what is good;
      and what does the LORD require of you
      but to do justice, and to love kindness,
      and to walk humbly with your God?

      This is a beautiful call to God's people, directing them how to repent of their sins and renew their covenant relationship with the Lord. Obedience is better than sacrifice. Humility is better than prideful independence.

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.
A Survey of the Old Testament, Hill and Walton, Zondervan, 2000.

Nahum

1. Introduction – Nahum delivers a prophetic message in poetic form, a beautifully written but scathing condemnation of Ninevah for her role as the capital city of Assyria in attacking and taking Israel (the northern kingdom) captive. Nahum prophecies the demise of Nineveh.

2. Author, date, historical setting – Nahum is identified as the author in 1:1. His name means "comfort" or "compassion." He is said to be from Elkosh. There are several theories about its location, but knowledge of the location does little to help us understand the book. Nahum probably wrote somewhere between 652 and 626 B.C. Thebes had already fallen in 664 (3:8), and Nineveh was yet to fall to the Babylonians and Medes (612).

3. Literary character – Nahum is widely recognized as beautiful poetry with a harsh message. Nahum is a master of imagery as well as parallelism. Nahum uses an acrostic (beginning each line in sequence with the next letter of the alphabet) in Ch. 1. Unlike many other prophecies, Nahum is not a mixture of history and a record of prophecy occurring in the midst of the historical. Rather, the entire book is the message itself. The book is tightly structured, with taunts against Nineveh masterfully woven together and ending in a dirge.

4. Comparison to Jonah – There are several interesting points of comparison and contrast with the book of Jonah:
    a. Both are about prophecies directed toward Nineveh.
    b. Jonah is almost entirely historical, with only one verse devoted to the message delivered; Nahum is entirely composed of the message against Nineveh.
    c. Neither message offers hope, but the Ninevites repent at Jonah's message.
    d. In Jonah the end result is that the Ninevites repent; in Nahum the end result is that Nineveh is to be destroyed.
    e. In Jonah God is portrayed as merciful toward the nations; in Nahum he is portrayed as righteously indignant toward those who destroy his people.
    f. Both Jonah and Nahum end with a rhetorical question. No other book of the Bible ends with a rhetorical question.

5. Structure:
    a. God the divine warrior fights for his people and punishes their enemies (1)
    b. A vision and taunt concerning Nineveh's destruction (2)
    c. The case for Nineveh's destruction (3)

6. Message:
    a. God is sovereign and may use any instrument he pleases for the discipline of his people. And yet that instrument is morally responsible for its actions and will be held accountable for its own sin.
    b. God is a divine warrior. He fights on behalf of his people. This would have been a particular encouragement to the people of Judah, who lived through the threat of Assyria and were assured that their enemy would be cast down. This ought to encourage us as we face the enemies of souls all around and within us.
    c. Christ himself has become a warrior on our behalf, fighting against Satan, sin, and death on behalf of his people (1 Cor. 15:20-28, Col. 2:14-15, Eph: 4:7-11, Rev. 19:11-21).

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.

Habakkuk

1. Introduction – Habakkuk could in many respects be called a little Job. He wrestles with the question of God's justice in his dealings with humanity. However, while Job asks why the righteous suffer, Habakkuk asks why the wicked prosper. In Habakkuk, God chooses to provide some answers.

2. Author, date, historical setting – Habakkuk is identified as the author, and there is little dispute over the unity of the book. Nothing is known about Habakkuk except the little that can be gleaned from the book itself. The book is set late in the Assyrian period or early in the Babylonian period. Some argue that the unexpected nature of the Babylonian rise (1:5-6) suggests a prophetic statement and therefore a date prior to their actual rise. Others would place the book early in the period after the Babylonians had already established themselves, a conclusion based on past-tense references to their military successes (2:8). Therefore, the time period recorded is probably no earlier than about 640 B. C. since the Babylonian judgment would come "in your days" (1:5), and the Babylonian exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah occurred in 598. The time period was probably no later than the Babylonian exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah in 598 if 1:5 is taken as prophetic.

3. Message – Habakkuk first questions why God does not judge unrighteous Judah for her sins. God replies that he will judge Judah by sending Babylon against her. This raises an even larger question for Habakkuk – how can a just God allow an even more wicked nation to triumph over Judah? God answers Habakkuk in two ways. First, a righteous man will trust God and order his ways rightly, even if he does not have an immediate answer to his questions. Second, Babylon will be judged as well.

4. Structure (modified from Hill and Walton):
    a. Discourse 1
        i. Prayer: Habakkuk's complaint concerning wicked Judah (1:1-4)
        ii. Answer: oracle of judgment – Babylon to invade Judah (1:5-11)
    b. Discourse 2
        i. Prayer: Habakkuk's questions concerning God's justice (1:12-17)
        ii. Instruction from God (2:1-3)
        iii. Answer 1: responsibility of the righteous (2:4-5)
        iv. Answer 2: oracle of judgment against Babylon (2:6-20)
    c. Discourse 3
        i. Prayer: Habakkuk's request for mercy (3:1-2)
        ii. Reflection: the sovereign power of God to deliver (3:3-15)
        iii. Acceptance: Habakkuk's trust in God's sovereignty (3:16-19)

5. Themes:
    a. We cannot expect to understand all God's specific dealings with nations, but we can trust that he will bring about justice in his perfect timing.
    b. "The righteous shall live by his faith" (2:4b). Paul uses this same statement to establish the point that righteousness comes by faith and not works. That is, we must trust God to bring about justice and remove our guilt. We trust him even when we see what appears at first to be injustice, in that God does not treat us as our sins deserve.

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.
A Survey of the Old Testament, Hill and Walton, Zondervan, 2000.

Zephaniah

1. Introduction – Zephaniah speaks to the rebellious people of Judah about the coming day of the Lord, a day of judgment against Judah and the nations, and a day in which mercy is also shown to a remnant of the people.

2. Author, date, historical setting – The book describes the prophetic ministry of Zephaniah, who is shown to be a descendant of the godly King Hezekiah (1:1). Because of his family line, he probably had connections within the royal court so that he could observe first-hand and condemn the sins of those in leadership in Judah. Zephaniah ministered during the reign of Josiah. Josiah had instituted sweeping reforms in Judah, particularly in the worship of God, and had cleansed the nation of idol worship. However, the flagrant idolatry of King Manasseh over a period of 50 years before Josiah had done severe damage to the nation, and apparently Josiah's reforms had not changed the general heart attitude of the people. Zephaniah anticipates the day in which a powerful foe would come against Judah. Since even Assyria was to be a victim of this foe (2:13-15), it appears that the anticipated foe must have been Babylon. Zephaniah was a contemporary of Jeremiah.

3. Structure (Hill and Walton):
    a. Judgment (1:1-3:8)
        i. warning of universal judgment (1:1-3)
        ii. judgment against Judah and Jerusalem (1:4-13)
        iii. the Day of the Lord (1:14-2:3)
            (1) judgment against Philistia (2:4-7)
            (2) judgment against Cush (2:12)
            (3) judgment against Assyria (2:13-15)
        iv. indictment against Judah and Jerusalem (3:1-7)
        v. warning of universal judgment (3:8)
    b. Restoration (3:9-20)

4. Themes:
    a. The Day of the Lord is a concept used by previous prophets (e.g., Isaiah 2:6-22 and Amos 5:18-20, 8:3-13) to describe a day in which God will set things right, judging the wicked and delivering the righteous. This is a day in which God will vindicate his righteousness by showing the need for judgment against the wicked and executing it upon them according to his justice. The day of the Lord foretold by Zephaniah prefigures *the* Day of the Lord at the end of the present age, described in the New Testament both by Peter (Acts 2:20, 2 Pet. 3:10) and Paul (1 Cor. 5:5, 1 Thes. 5:2, 2 Thes. 2:2). The Day of the Lord is the final judgment that will purge away all wickedness (2 Pet. 3:10) and allow the righteous to pass through by God's mercy (1 Cor. 5:5).
    b. God will demonstrate his mercy toward a remnant that produces the fruit of faith. The remnant concept is found in a number of the prophets and is carried through to the New Testament (Acts 15:17, Rom. 9:27; 11:5).
    c. The God of the people of Israel is the God of all the nations. He is not merely a tribal god concerned only with the loyalty of a local tribe. He calls the nations to account and brings judgment on the peoples. He will both judge (3:8) and show mercy (3:9) to the nations. All of us must confront this universal God in the day of judgment.

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.
A Survey of the Old Testament, Hill and Walton, Zondervan, 2000.

Haggai

1. Introduction – In two short chapters, Haggai rebukes and stirs the returned exiles to build the temple and then encourages them about the glory of the temple in spite of its humble beginnings.

2. Author, date, historical setting – Haggai is traditionally regarded as the author of the book. In this view, the third-person perspective is understood to be a device that communicates objectivity and historicity to the reader. Others have taken the third-person perspective as an indicator that the book was written by a later disciple who, under divine inspiration, took Haggai's prophetic statements and set them into a narrative context. Similarities to Chronicles have been used by some to argue for a somewhat later date, after Chronicles was written. However, a better explanation of this similarity is that the Chronicler was influenced by Haggai and not the other way around. Very little is known about Haggai outside his book. He is mentioned by Ezra (5:1, 6:14) as a prophet along with Zechariah.

   Cyrus the Persian had issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their land and to rebuild their temple. However, most of the exiles were either old or had been born in exile and did not consider Judah their home; only 50,000 exiles returned (Ezra 2:64; Neh. 7:66). When the arrived, they encountered a number of challenges. Land and buildings were in disrepair, conflicts occurred with those who had remained behind, and opposition arose from nearby peoples and officials. The people had fallen into the temptation to look to their own interests instead of to the Lord and the temple project.

3. Structure:
   a. Haggai rebukes the people for neglecting the building of the temple (1:1-11).
   b. The people respond with action and are assured of God's presence (1:12-15).
   c. Haggai warns the people that holiness is not contagious, but work on the temple will be rewarded by God's blessing (2:1-19).
   d. Haggai points the people to the future realities prefigured by their leader and assures them of his love and his judgments on their behalf (2:20-23).

4. Themes:
   a. God speaks to a people whose relationship with him was only moderately important to them. This is unacceptable and worthy of God's discipline. The people were enjoying a degree of luxury while the house of God stood in ruins. Christians can get caught up in their own pursuits while neglecting to pursue their relationship with Christ and failing to build up his people.
   b. The people in Haggai's day encourage us with their wholehearted, immediate action in the face of a divine rebuke.
   c. Labors done with the Lord's presence are eternally significant. God gives the people two very powerful assurances: 1) "*Work, for I am with you*, declares the Lord of hosts."; 2) Their present effort would lay the foundation for the future glory of the house of God.
   d. The promised glory of the temple taught that the temple under construction was a provisional fulfillment that would find its highest meaning in Christ himself and his new covenant people (Matt. 12:6, John 2:19-21, 2 Cor. 6:16, 1 Pet. 2:5).
   e. Independent attempts to find significance will be of no value, but God can take even our feeble, weak obedience and establish it as significant before him.

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.

Zechariah

1. Introduction – Zechariah is the longest of the minor prophets and is often considered the most difficult. Zechariah was a contemporary of Ezra and Haggai, calling the people to spiritual renewal and readying them for worship in relation to the rebuilt temple and beyond.

2. Author, date, historical setting – Zechariah is likely the same individual named in Ezra 5:1; 6:14 and Neh. 12:16. If so, then he was from a family of priests that returned from the exile. He ministered to a people who had returned to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple and were faced with many temptations, questions, and trials. Scholars have noted a significant contrast in style and focus between chs. 1-8 and chs. 9-14. As a result, some scholars have theorized that the book was written by two (or more!) different authors, possibly separated by a large period of time. However, the differences between these two sections can be explained plausibly by noting that the same author can adopt very different styles when the subject changes. The first part is largely concerned with local issues; the second part looks further into the future. Zechariah may have lived long after the events alluded to in 1-8 and later wrote 9-14 as a more distant prophetic vision. Furthermore, there are many common themes between the two sections that confirm the unity of the book.

3. Language and style – Zechariah has an impressive literary structure. The parts of the books reflect a chiastic structure (a nested structure whose parts follow a pattern like A-B-C-C'-B'-A'). As the author works his way into the structure of 1-8, he works from a focus on the nations (1 and 8), to concerns of the restored community (2-3 and 6-7), and then zeroing in on the temple area (4, 5). 1-8 is primarily prose, whereas 9-14 is primarily poetry. 9-14 consists of two oracles, both concerning a more distant but fuller restoration and rescue of God's people.

4. Structure (Dillard and Longman):
    a. Zechariah's claim to authority (1:1-6)
    b. The night visions (1:7–6:8)
        i. the commander and his scouts (1:7-17)
        ii. four horns and four craftsmen (1:18-21)
        iii. man with a measuring line (2:1-13)
        iv. the high priest in filthy clothes (3:1-10)
        v. the menorah and olive trees (4:1-14)
        vi. the flying scroll (5:1-4)
        vii. the basket of wickedness (5:5-11)
        viii. four chariots (6:1-8)
    c. Crown for the high priest (6:9-15)
    d. A question about fasting (7:1–8:23)
    e. Two oracles (9-11; 12-14) about Israel's enemies and the coming of Zion's king and shepherd

5. Themes:
    a. The high priest is stripped of his filthy garments and dressed in clothing provided by God. This is a beautiful and powerful picture of the reality of justification by faith and the imputed righteousness of Christ.
    b. Zech. 9-14 is the most quoted part of the Old Testament in the gospel narratives of the death of Christ.
    c. The crowning of the high priest seems to point forward to the Messiah who is both priest and king in the same person.
    d. Zechariah points the people away from focusing on ritual holiness and toward obedience to the law from the heart.

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.
A Survey of the Old Testament, Hill and Walton, Zondervan, 2000.

Malachi

1. Introduction – Malachi confronts the sins of the Jews who have returned from exile and are now living as a restored people. The restored remnant manifests unfaithfulness just as their ancestors did, but God continues to demonstrate his faithfulness and to point the people forward to the hope of something more glorious than the present.

2. Author, date, historical setting – "Malachi" is unknown as a name elsewhere in the Bible. The meaning of the name, "my messenger," and the lack of a genealogical reference has led some to conclude that this is no name at all but merely an editorial introduction as part of an anonymous prophecy. However, the name has a similar structure to other Hebrew names and appears in the usual place for a prophet's name; therefore, it should be taken as a proper name. Most scholars accept the unity of the book. Some believe the last three verses are a later addition because they seem somewhat disconnected from the overall flow. However, these verses harmonize well as a further unfolding of concepts introduced earlier in the book; there is no need to view them as a later addition. Malachi was written in the Persian period. The temple had already been rebuilt (516/515 B.C.), and enough time had passed that the people had become disillusioned over their continued subjugation to the Persians. Since no mention is made of the leadership of Ezra (458 B.C. or later) or Nehemiah (445 B.C.), most scholars believe that Malachi was written earlier than this, probably in the 475 B.C. range to allow enough time after the completion of the temple for disillusionment to set in. Israel continued to be a small province within the Persian Empire and had not risen to Davidic glory. Material prosperity had been elusive. And the numbers of those returning had been a small trickle rather than a mighty flow. The people had become discouraged and had begun to wander from the Lord. Malachi speaks to this context.

3. Language and style – Malachi is structured into six disputations, each one roughly following the same pattern: 1) God challenges or accuses the people, 2) the people reply with a question that implies innocence and/or ignorance, and 3) God points to the evidence of their failure.

4. Structure (Dillard and Longman):
   a. Introduction (1:1)
   b. Dispute about God's love (1:2-5)
   c. Dispute about the contempt the priests show God (1:6-2:9)
   d. Dispute about Israel's covenant breaking (2:10-16)
   e. Dispute about God's justice (2:17-3:5)
   f. Dispute concerning repentance (3:6-12)
   g. Dispute about harsh words against the Lord (3:13-4:3)
   h. Appendix – Turn to the Lord and look for Elijah's preparatory work (4:4-6)

5. Themes:
   a. Disobeying God is unfaithfulness to a covenant relationship. God relates to us as a father and master and calls us to pure worship from the heart and faithful obedience.
   b. Marriage is a covenant before the Lord between a man and a woman in which two become one with the help of the Lord (2:14-16). One of the purposes of godly marriage is the raising up of godly offspring. God hates divorce and unfaithfulness. These things are at cross purposes with God's purpose. Faithfulness involves a heart commitment between fathers and children (4:6).
   c. God lifts the eyes of the Israelites to look for a messenger to prepare the way of the Lord (3:1). This messenger is identified with Elijah (4:6). Christ himself identifies John the Baptist with the Elijah prophesied by Malachi (Matt. 11:14; 17:10-12).

Reference:
An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.
A Survey of the Old Testament, Hill and Walton, Zondervan, 2000.