

How do Lutherans read the Old Testament (or “Hebrew Scripture”)?

In his own introduction to the Old Testament, Luther suggested that readers not be put off by the “simplicity of language and stories” of the Old Testament, since they are “the swaddling cloths and the manger in which Christ lies.... Simple and lowly are these swaddling cloths, but dear is the treasure, Christ, who lies in them” (*LW* 35:236). Modern Lutherans may not be as daring as Luther was in looking for and finding Jesus Christ prefigured in each story of Genesis or predicted everywhere in the Psalms and Prophets. Nevertheless, Lutherans read the Old Testament in much the same way they read the New Testament: distinguishing Law and Gospel. That is, Lutherans read the Old Testament instructed and convicted by God’s commandments, so that they might be pointed toward the promised Messiah, the one the Prophet Isaiah called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (9:6).



Numbering the Ten Commandments

In general, there are three traditional ways to number the Commandments.

	Jewish	Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Eastern Orthodox	Reformed, Anglican, other Protestant traditions
1	I am the Lord your God.	You shall have no other gods.	You shall have no other gods.
2	You shall have no other gods.	You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God.	You shall not make for yourself a graven image.
3	You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.	Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.	You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
4	Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.	Honor your father and your mother.	Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.
5	Honor your father and your mother.	You shall not murder.	Honor your father and your mother.
6	You shall not kill.	You shall not commit adultery.	You shall not kill.
7	You shall not commit adultery.	You shall not steal.	You shall not commit adultery.
8	You shall not steal.	You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.	You shall not steal.
9	You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.	You shall not covet your neighbor's house.	You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10	You shall not covet your neighbor's wife; and you shall not desire anything that is your neighbor's.	You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.	You shall not covet your neighbor's wife; and you shall not desire anything that is your neighbor's.

The list used in Judaism begins with the declaration, "I am the Lord your God."

The list used by Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Eastern Orthodox Christians comes from Augustine, a fifth-century bishop. Augustine placed the command against graven images (idols) under the first commandment and counted the material about coveting as two commandments.

The list used by the Reformed, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, and other traditions started with Origen and other early church leaders. It counts "You shall have no other gods" and "You shall not make for yourself a graven image" as two separate commandments.

to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

12 Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

13 You shall not murder.^a

14 You shall not commit adultery.

15 You shall not steal.

16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.



20:13 You shall not murder: The word used for murder refers to intentional premeditated murder, not all killing.



20:15 You shall not steal: The Hebrew word for stealing includes kidnapping.

^a Or *kill*



Judges 7:20

JUDGES

☼ Background File

The book of Judges is a collection of stories about some of the heroes from the early days of God's people, between about 1200 and 1020 B.C.E. These heroes or leaders were called "judges." The tales were told in families and clans, in villages and in towns. Finally the stories were written down, collected, arranged, and new material was added to them. The book was put together when the people were in exile in Babylon, between 587 and 539 B.C.E.

☼ What's the Story?

Judges tells the story of God's people after the exodus from Egypt (Exodus), the wandering in the wilderness (Numbers), and the invasion of Canaan, or the promised land (Joshua). For about two hundred years the people lived in the land without a king, under the leadership of individuals called judges. The book tells about twelve of them. Some called "minor judges" are mentioned only briefly: Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon. Longer stories are told about the others.

What sort of people were these judges? During the frontier time in North America (in the United States referred to as the "wild west"), independent leaders or heroes such as Buffalo Bill, Annie Oakley, and Davey Crockett stepped into leadership roles when needed. These were mostly young people doing wild and crazy things to help others in trouble. God's people, Israel, also had its wild and crazy heroes, especially in the early years in the land. Legends grew up around some of these heroes or judges. There was Samson, the strongman, who picked up a donkey's jawbone one day and went on a rampage, killing a thousand of Israel's enemies (15:14-17). There was Deborah, who led an army of thousands to drive out the evil Canaanites who were harassing her people (chapters 4-5). And there were the seven hundred left-handed marksmen who could sling a stone at a hair and not miss (20:16)! There are many stories about these superheroes in the Bible. And every one of them received his or her superpower from God. Since they lived in the area that even today is called the West Bank (the land west of the Jordan River), we could talk about the Bible's tales from the "wild, wild West Bank."

Kings of Judah and Israel

United Kingdom

Saul 1030-1010 B.C.E. • David 1010-970 B.C.E. • Solomon 970-922 B.C.E.

Divided Kingdom

Judah		Israel	
Rehoboam	922–915	Jeroboam	922–901
Abijah (Abijam)	915–913	Nadab	901–900
		Baasha	900–877
Asa	913–873	Elah	877–876
		Zimri	876
		Omride Era	
		Omri	876–869
Jehoshaphat	873–849	Ahab	869–850
		Ahaziah	850–849
Jehoram	849–843	Jehoram	849–843
Ahaziah	843–842		
		Jehu Dynasty	
		Jehu	843–815
Athaliah	842–837		
Joash	837–800		
		Jehoahaz	815–802
Amaziah	800–783	Jehoash	802–786
Uzziah (Azariah)	783–742	Jeroboam II	786–746
		Assyrian Intervention	
Jotham	742–735	Zechariah	746–745
		Shallum	745
		Menahem	745–737
		Pekahiah	737–736
Ahaz	735–727 or 715	Pekah	736–732
		Hoshea	732–722
Hezekiah	727 or 715–687		
		Fall of Samaria 722	
Manasseh	687–642		
Amon	642–640		
Josiah	640–609		
Jehoahaz	609		
Jehoiachim	609–598		
Jehoiachin	598–597		
First capture of Jerusalem by Babylonians	597		
Zedekiah	597–586		
Destruction of Jerusalem	586		



Micah 6:8

MICAH

☼ Background File

During much of the eighth century B.C.E., leaders in Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom) lived comfortably. They seemed unaware of the threatening situation developing in surrounding countries. Four prophets responded to the situation. At mid-century, Amos and Hosea warned leaders in the north. Later Isaiah prophesied in Jerusalem to warn leaders in the southern kingdom. During this time, the prophet Micah came from a small village called Moresheth (twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem) to speak out against problems in both kingdoms.

☼ What's the Story?

In the mid-eighth century B.C.E., the Assyrian Empire (see Map 8, p. 2106) began expanding westward. By 732 B.C.E., Tiglath-pileser III had conquered the city of Damascus. Then he surrounded Samaria, Israel's capital city, for three years. Finally, in 722, he forced the city to surrender (See 2 Kgs 17). The cities and countryside of Israel were laid waste. The people were removed to live in exile in various locations in Mesopotamia.

In 711 a new Assyrian king, Sargon II, defeated the coastal city of Ashdod (see Map 7, p. 2105). His successor, Sennacherib, terrorized the countryside of the southern kingdom. Forty-six towns and villages in Judah were destroyed, including many near Micah's home at Moresheth. By 701, Sennacherib's army surrounded Jerusalem, Judah's capital city.

Archaeologists have uncovered layers of burnt material at many places, especially Lachish. A large stone tablet from Nineveh, known as the Sennacherib Prism, gives the Assyrian side of the story. It describes the final stage of this invasion as Jerusalem was surrounded. Judah's King Hezekiah was like a bird in a cage, it says. The situation looked hopeless for the residents of Jerusalem. The future of the people and the kingdom was at risk.

Sennacherib eventually retreated, and Jerusalem was spared (Isaiah 37:36-37). The prophet Isaiah praised the leadership of King Hezekiah. He set the people to work repairing the city walls. He also dug a water canal, known still today as Hezekiah's tunnel (see Map 6, p. 2104). It winds nearly one-third of a mile underground to carry fresh water from the Gihon spring to the pool of Siloam. Most of all, Isaiah recognized Hezekiah's faithful worship of God. All proclaimed "God is with us" in the city (Isaiah 7:14; see NRSV footnote c).


²¹So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²²beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.” ²³So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴Then they prayed and said, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵to take the place^a in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” ²⁶And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.


The Coming of the Holy Spirit


2 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

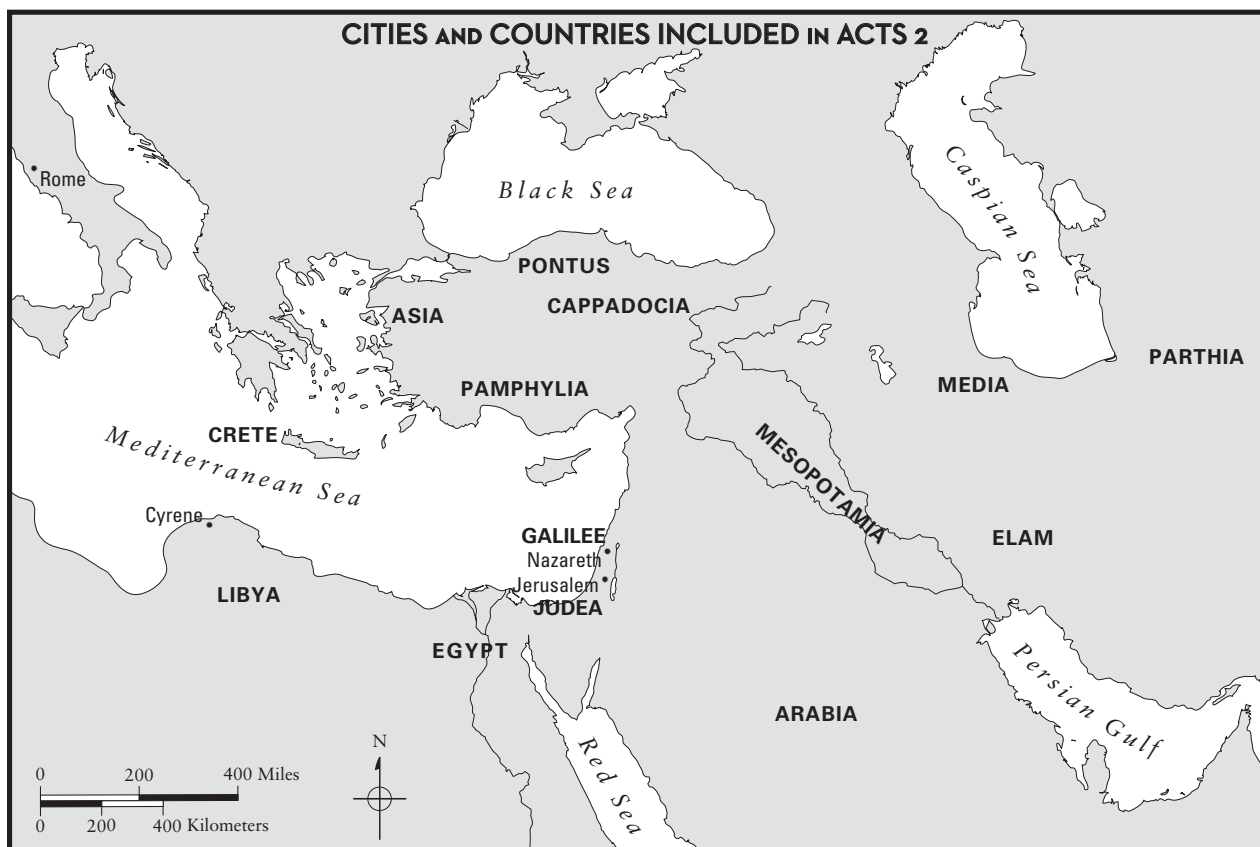
5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was

^a Other ancient authorities read *the share*

 **1:26 cast lots...added to the eleven apostles:** In the process of casting lots marked stones or twigs were thrown or drawn to determine an answer to a question. The apostles probably cast lots to be sure the decision was God’s and not theirs. As twelve was considered a holy number, the apostles sought someone to replace Judas Iscariot, preserving the group of twelve apostles appointed by Jesus.

 **2:1 day of Pentecost:** The word *pentecost* means fifty. Pentecost is the Jewish festival that comes fifty days after Passover (see Lev 23:15-16). It is also called the Feast of Weeks, and originally celebrated the wheat harvest (see Exod 23:16; Deut 16:9-10). Many Jews would have gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. (See Jewish Festivals and Feasts, p. 227.)

 **2:4 filled with the Holy Spirit:** This is a fulfillment of Jesus’ promise in Luke 24:49. The disciples are led by the Spirit—not only in what they say, but also in the languages they speak. This miracle is sometimes seen as the reversal of what happened at the Tower of Babel (see Gen 11:1-9), when God confused the languages to curb human pride.





1 Timothy 6:12

1 TIMOTHY

✻ Background File

This letter starts with Paul's name. But that does not necessarily mean that Paul wrote the letter. In ancient times, people sometimes used the name of a famous person for their own letters. This might be compared to watching a new Walt Disney movie. Mr. Disney is no longer alive, yet movies continue to feature his name because the Walt Disney Company produces them. People at the company try to continue Disney's legacy. In a similar fashion, it is likely that an unknown person wrote 1 Timothy near the end of the first century C.E., many years after Paul had died. This person respected Paul and was familiar with his ideas. He wrote 1 Timothy—as well as 2 Timothy and Titus—to continue Paul's mission.

✻ What's the Story?

This letter is addressed to Timothy, who had been close to Paul. The two men met in the city of Lystra (see Acts 16:1-4) and then worked together (see Rom 16:21; Phil 2:19-23). In this letter, Timothy appears as a leader and teacher of his local church (4:13, 16). Due to his position as a church leader, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are called the “pastoral epistles”—letters to pastors and other church leaders.

Paul leaves the city of Ephesus, but Timothy stays behind (1:3). Timothy is facing false teachers by himself. The background situation of this letter, however, is the church at the end of the first century. This is why 1 Timothy combines some ideas of Paul with ideas found in the Gospel of John, which likely was written around 90 C.E. At the time of this letter, Christian congregations had grown larger. Thus it was necessary to explain who could lead them and which teachings were false or true. First Timothy can be outlined in this way:

Directives to guide church life (1:1-3:13)

False teachings and faith (3:14-4:5)

Advice for church leaders (4:6-6:21)

Readers today may understand the name Timothy in a different way. “Timothy” can be each reader, as the intended audience of this letter is all people who respect Paul's message of God's grace and want to continue Paul's mission. The end of the letter reveals this. Here the original Greek text of the greeting “Grace be with you” (6:21) addresses not a single person but many people—the plural *you*.