

Understanding the Bible

OLD TESTAMENT



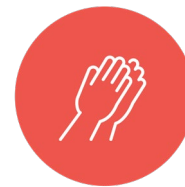
PENTATEUCH



HISTORICAL



WISDOM



PROPHETIC

Genesis	Exodus	Leviticus	Numbers	Deuteronomy
Joshua	Judges	Ruth	1 Samuel	2 Samuel
1 Kings	2 Kings	1 Chronicles	2 Chronicles	Ezra
Nehemiah	Esther	Job	Psalms	Proverbs
Ecclesiastes	Song of Solomon	Isaiah	Jeremiah	Lamentations
Ezekiel	Daniel	Hosea	Joel	Amos
Obadiah	Jonah	Micah	Nahum	Habakkuk
Zephaniah	Haggai	Zechariah	Malachi	

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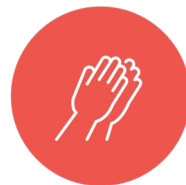
GOSPELS



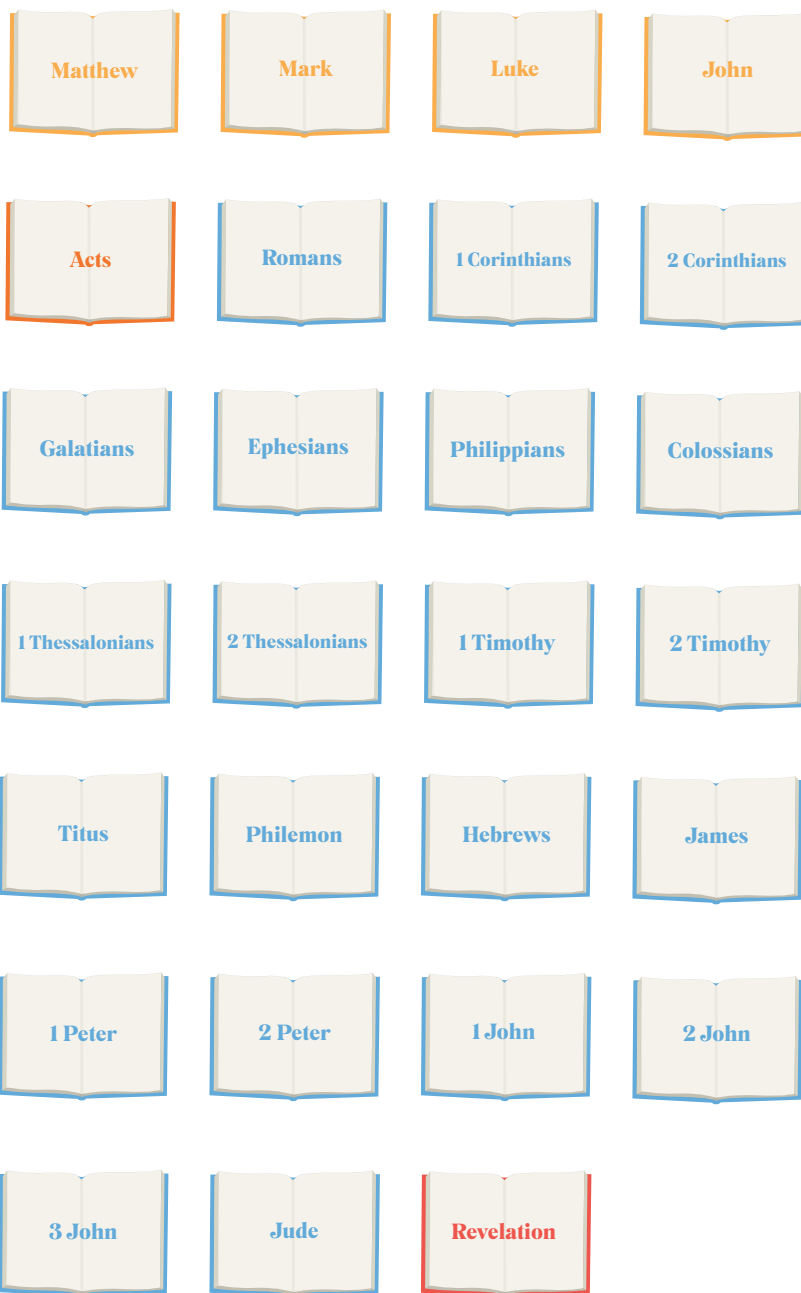
HISTORICAL



LETTERS



PROPHETIC



You Don't Have to be Intimidated By the Bible

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 1:37-38

Bible Readings:

Psalm 119

Have you ever picked up the Bible and felt lost in the massive text in front of you? The Bible is both God's story and his Word to his people, but when you read a verse or a chapter, do you understand what he is saying?

As we go through this study together, we want to help give you a big picture of what each part of the Bible means and give you a better understanding of how to approach it. First and foremost, you are not alone in navigating this big book of Scripture. Each word was written by humans but was inspired by God. This means that God, through the Holy Spirit, commissioned human authors to write his Word. Therefore, as you dive into Scripture, ask him to speak to you. God has given you the Holy Spirit as your helper, and he will not leave you with his story in your hands without a guide to help you understand it. As you open your Bible, ask the Holy Spirit to lead you.

The Bible allows us to see God's presence throughout history. From the first words of creation until today, a pattern within humanity of fellowship-rebellion-exile-restoration has repeated itself. Seeing this same pattern in our own lives, we come to terms with the reality that our struggles are universal and there is only one redeemer capable of rescue. The Bible is one big story of God rescuing his people.

THE STORY OF SCRIPTURE

The basic story line of the Bible is:

- **Creation:** God created everything, and he had a plan.
- **The Fall:** Humans screwed it up. We wanted to go our own way, and selfishness spread to all humanity, which means every single person is born into sin. There is an enemy that spoke into that selfishness and speaks into our lives today.
- **Flood:** There was judgment and a flood—a reset where Noah and the animals survived. Given the chance, humanity again completely screwed it up. But God redeemed the story with a chosen people.
- **Covenant people through Israel:** He began a new story through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. A baby is born to Abraham in his old age and that baby would be the seed that would eventually lead to Jesus.
- **Jesus the Messiah:** Jesus, the Messiah, is born into the people of Israel. He put the sins of the earth on his shoulders and died for our sins so we could live forever with God.
- **The Church:** Today, the church is the family of God. All those who have trusted in Jesus. That church is supposed to be about one thing: giving the great hope of Jesus away.
- **Our Hope:** There is a future hope that is coming. We're going to be with Jesus forever in the new heavens and new earth. We are the family of God. So, our purpose here is joining the story of God and giving it away.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible tells this story, but when you open up the table of contents and see sixty-six different books, how do they all fit together? What order are they in and why? Whether you are new to the Bible—or you just need help remembering how it all fits together—we are going to give you a big overview of the books of the Bible so that you know how to understand what you're reading when you open this big book.

We live in between Jesus revealed and Jesus returning. With the Bible, we hold in our hands God's expression of the full arc of his grace, and our most useful tool for both getting to know God and discovering our calling. Thanks be to God.

**Both the Old and New Testaments show us nothing is a surprise to God.
How does knowing that nothing can derail God's story (Romans 8:38 and
Hebrews 12:28) motivate you to love and study your Bible more?**

The Bible is both God's _____ and his Word to his _____ .

What is the Old Testament?

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

DEUTERONOMY 6:4-7

Beginning with Genesis, the Old Testament is comprised of thirty-nine books written in Aramaic and Hebrew over the span of approximately 1,000 years. While God declares in his Word that he is sovereign over all of humanity (Isaiah 45:22–24), Genesis through Malachi is the story of his relationship with the people of Israel.

Bible Readings:

Psalms 105–106

The Old Testament is a cautionary tale. But it is a cautionary tale filled with hope. It is a record of God’s covenant relationship with a particular people through whom he would

reveal himself to all of humankind. It is story of humanity's struggle to choose faithfulness to God. Our desperate need for a redeemer is woven through every covenant, every sacrifice, every generation. It is an epic story, and in weeks two, three, and four, we're going to do a deeper dive into the books of the Old Testament. Before we get there, let's look at a big picture overview of the first thirty-nine books of the Bible:

CREATION

(Genesis 1 and 2) "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth . . . Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness' And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good (Genesis 1:1, 26, 31).

CATASTROPHE

(Genesis 3) Humanity rejected God. Adam and Eve questioned God's love for them; they questioned his goodness. God gave them everything they would need for a full life in fellowship with him, but they believed the lie of the enemy when he suggested God was a cosmic killjoy. Stained by sin, humanity could no longer have fellowship with God.

COVENANT

God made a covenant, or an unbreakable promise, with Abraham to bless him, give him land, and make him into a great nation (Genesis 12:1-3). Abraham's line continued through Isaac and Jacob, and God declared he would be their God and they would be his people" (Genesis 17:7). Through Jacob's son, Joseph, God's people were saved from famine by moving to Egypt.

CAPTIVITY

Eventually, a Pharaoh came to power that did not know Joseph (Exodus 1:8), and the Israelites endured four hundred years of slavery in Egypt. But "the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew" (Exodus 2:23–25).

COUNTRY

God never forgot his promises. Israel arrived in Egypt as the twelve sons of Jacob, but they set out for God's promised land, led by Moses, with more than a million strong. After they wandered the desert due to their own disobedience, God led them into the promised land through Joshua. God delivered the people of the land over to them, and they ruled there for many generations. Again, God promised he would be their God, and they

would be his people. He told them if they kept his ways, he would bless them with peace and abundance. But if they abandoned his ways, he would give them over to their enemies (Leviticus 26).

CONQUERED

Because Israel turned away from the one true God and turned to false gods and foreign kings for provision and protection, he gave them over to their enemies and they lived in exile for seventy years. Then, just as they endured four hundred years of slavery in Egypt before entering the land promised to Abraham, God's people now waited through four hundred years of silence before Isaiah 11:1–5 would be fulfilled.

CONCLUSION

We live in an age when the concept and consequences of sin are dismissed as an outdated guilt trip. And according to today's culture-makers, God—if he exists at all—is distant and unaware of the daily details and decisions of our lives.

But the siren call of the Old Testament is Remember! Remember who God reveals himself to be. Remember his faithfulness even in the face of our sin, rebellion, stubbornness, and doubt. Remember that God is mighty to save. He is “. . . a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and [who] did not forsake them” (Nehemiah 9:17). If we are to have a real appreciation for how far we have fallen in our sin and how powerless we are to rescue ourselves, we must remember the lessons of Old Testament Israel. You will be surprised at how much of yourself you see in their journey!

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**Even though Jesus is the centerpiece of Christianity, why is the
Old Testament essential to a full understanding of God's plan for salvation?**

The Old Testament consists of _____ books.

_____ through _____ is the story of his relationship with the people of Israel.

What is the New Testament?

SCRIPTURE:
ROMANS 1:16–17

Bible Readings:
Philippians 2:1–15

Who is Jesus? What was it like to follow in his footsteps? What was his message? To whom was it given? Who believed? What is the connection between the narrative and prophecy of the Old Testament and the gospel (good news) of the New Testament?

The New Testament, twenty-seven books written in Greek between AD 50 and 100, reveals the fulfillment of the Old Testament's promise of a savior—Jesus. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John use eye-witness accounts of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament's promise of the one who would save us from sin and death. And the rest of the New Testament chronicles the spread of Christianity in the first-century world. Together, the Gospels and letters of the New Testament offer wisdom and hope for Christ-followers living in a broken world. And that hope will be fully realized when Jesus returns, as promised in the final book of Revelation.

The ministry of Jesus isn't just something to be observed. There is a call to action found throughout the New Testament. Jesus called his followers to go into the all the world, making disciples (Matthew 28:19–20). The book of Acts records those first missionary journeys and church plants. Led by Paul and Peter, the earliest believers in Jesus as Messiah set out to share the good news of salvation and to equip local groups of Christians with truth for living transformed by Jesus.

And so, the church was born.

As we know well, throwing off the sin that so easily entangles us and running with Jesus is hard. We get tripped up by tradition. Beset by bad habits. Discouraged by doubts. Caught up in comparison. Worn down by worldliness. And the early church did too; we see it played out all through the New Testament.

Paul and the first evangelists didn't just covert Christians and move on. They continued to equip and encourage. The letters that

follow the Gospels were written to specific groups of Christ-followers within the first hundred years after Jesus's life and resurrection. In them, we see that the Christian life is only successfully lived when it is empowered by the Holy Spirit and lived within the context of community. In these letters, we find the answers to questions we should never stop asking. What is church life supposed to look like? How are we supposed to engage with unbelievers? How do we admonish the wayward brother or sister in Christ? In what do we place our hope? What awaits us in eternity?

The fulfillment of this last question is breathtakingly displayed in the Bible's final book, Revelation. In it, God promises that one day there will be no more sin and sorrow, only light and life—Revelation gives us the hope we need to press on.

“
**God promises
that one day
there will be no
more sin and
sorrow, only
light and life**
”

**What steps can you take so that your engagement with God's
Word leads to ever-increasing spiritual maturity?**

**The New Testament offers _____
and _____ for Christ-followers living in a broken world.**

Literary Styles and Genres in the Bible

Imagine walking into a library. Inside you will find books of all different genres and styles. Some are full of poetry, some are full of letters, some are full of history. The Bible is no different. Inside you will find sixty-six different books, but, unlike a library, they each fit together to tell one big story.

The Bible includes law, history, wisdom, poetry, letters of correspondence, and teaching texts. Uniquely, God's Word also includes promises for the future that we can be assured will come to pass. Why? Because the body of evidence in Scripture that's already been fulfilled proves that God always does what he says he will.

HISTORICAL / NARRATIVE

Let's break it down. In the coming weeks, we will go into more depth about each section of Scripture, but for now, let's talk about a big overview, starting with the historical/narrative books. Nearly half of the Bible is written in narrative form—this is true in both the Old and New Testaments. It makes sense. The Bible is a record of God's relationship with a particular group of people.

From Genesis through Deuteronomy, we have a front row seat for the events that take us from Adam to the Exodus, from the garden of promise (Eden) to the land of promise (Canaan), with the law given and census taken in between.

“

**All Scripture is
breathed out by God
and profitable for
teaching, for reproof,
for correction,
and for training in
righteousness, that
the man of God may
be complete, equipped
for every good work.**

”

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

Bible Readings:

2 Timothy 3:14-17

The history lesson continues through Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, and Esther. These books continue to recount the nation of Israel's history and their ups and downs with God. While it can seem overwhelming to keep track of so many kings, foreign enemies, and false gods in these books, there are countless valuable lessons to learn about our utter inability to be faithful to God by our own willpower.

In Ezra and Nehemiah, we read of God's people returning to the promised land after the exile and rebuilding the temple and walls of Jerusalem.

PROPHECY

Next are the books of prophecy. When God says holiness matters, he means it. And when he says there are consequences for abandoning holiness, he means it. But he never disciplines his people without plenty of warning. God is slow to anger and abounding in love (Psalm 103:8), and so he filled the mouths of prophets with words of warning for Israel, calling them to repent, to abandon false idols; and to look to him rather than neighboring nations for deliverance. (These books are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel [which also features apocalyptic literature], Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.)

POETRY AND WISDOM

If the narrative and prophetic books record the facts of Israel's bumpy ride as God's chosen people, the poetry and wisdom books (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs) express the inner life of God's people—worship, wisdom, temptation, confession.

NEW TESTAMENT: HISTORICAL / NARRATIVE

After four hundred years of silence, the word of God bursts onto the scene again. This time, in the person of Jesus. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John recount the earthly ministry of Jesus, culminating in his death and resurrection. All four authors contribute unique perspectives, divinely inspired, to paint a full portrait of Jesus as savior. And acting in obedience to Jesus's parting command, the apostles then set out to teach others about Jesus throughout the known world. This Spirit-led growth of the first-century church is recorded in the book of Acts.

EPISTLES / LETTERS

All of those new believers reached through the missionary journeys recorded in Acts established churches in their hometowns, but, like us, they often struggled at the intersection of faith and life. To equip, encourage,

and admonish these believers, Paul and others wrote letters: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, Jude.

PROPHECY IN REVELATION

Just as the Old Testament closed with promises of rescue for an exiled Israel, the New Testament concludes with a dramatic depiction of God’s ultimate victory over sin and death. Revelation—with its combined genres of epistle, prophecy, and apocalyptic literature—may seem beyond our understanding in the here and now, but one day it will be fulfilled just as the Old Testament prophecies were.

The historical/narrative books of the Bible tell the story of what God has done in the lives of people in the past. The prophetic books tell us what God will do in the future. And the wisdom literature and New Testament epistles answer the question of “how then shall we live?” Only when we know where we’ve been, and have full assurance of where we are going, can we fully embrace the call on our lives for today.

Which part of God’s Word feels most intimidating to you—the figurative language of poetry? The long history of wayward kings and foreign enemies? What resources can you use to support your study of God’s Word so that you don’t become overwhelmed?

There is a total of _____ different books in the Bible.

How to Study the Bible



**For the word of God is living and active,
sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing
to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints
and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts
and intentions of the heart.**

HEBREWS 4:12

Bible Readings: *James 1:22–25*

So now that you have the big picture, how do you bring the Bible's epic story into focus for your day-to-day life with Jesus? How do you move past names you can't pronounce and places you've never been to engage with every word in the Bible in a way that equips you with wisdom and strengthens your faith?

The more you relate to the Bible as one large story of salvation rather than isolated passages of wisdom, the more powerful God's Word will become in your life. So, rather than jumping around choosing passages at random, consider making a plan. You could set out to read through the Bible in a year or two—maybe using a chronological plan. Work your way through the Gospels or read Acts, adding Paul's letters where they fit in the timeline. Whether you use an app, or work from a paper copy, set an intention.

Throughout this study, we're going to go into more detail about each book and section of the Bible, and we want to give you some guidance when it comes to studying Scripture too. On days four and five of every week, you will have the chance to put the study

process into practice. There are lots of different ways to study the Bible, but we want to give you one method that can be extremely helpful: inductive study. Here are some steps to take:

START WITH PRAYER

Whether you have ten minutes or an hour to sit with God's Word, always start with prayer. It can be something as simple as, "Lord, here I am. Show me something about you today; show me something about myself today. Give me eyes to see where I am falling short. Give me a heart to receive your truth. Transform me and help me to engage the world around me."

OBSERVE: WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Because the Bible was written by particular people at a particular time, its message becomes much more powerful and relevant when we understand the framework. To thoroughly observe the text, we will focus on several different aspects of it. First, we ask:

WHAT

What is discussed throughout the chapter?

What is happening in the text?

What type of instructions does the author note?

WHEN

When does or when will the event take place?

Past, present, or future?

WHERE

Where did the event take place?

Where does this passage fall in the story of the book you're reading? The whole story of the Bible?

INTERPRET: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

While observation helps us look at what the text is saying, interpretation helps us understand the meaning of the text. Approach the Bible with humility. The Holy Spirit is the one who helps us interpret Scripture, so pray for a teachable heart, and open eyes to see what's true. As we seek to accurately interpret the Scriptures, we should reflect on several key components: context, themes, contradictions, and teaching.

Ask yourself:

- Is your interpretation of the text consistent with the main point or intent of the book?
- Does your interpretation match other Scriptures that discuss a similar topic?
- Are you taking into account the cultural and historical context of this passage?

OBSERVE: WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Like everything we learn, the power is in the practice. As we read in James 1:22, we want to be doers of the Word and not just hearers. By “doing” the Word of God, we become more like Jesus, which is our ultimate goal as his followers. The application of Scripture opens the door for God to work in our lives. As we attempt to apply the Scriptures to our lives, let us remember to seek out the teaching of each passage, to examine our hearts and lives for anything contradictory to God's Word, and to ask the Lord what he is trying to teach us through each passage

**What is the difference between studying the Bible for knowledge
and reading God's Word as a spiritual discipline?**
