

The Bible STORY

UNLOCK THE MEANING &

MYSTERY OF THE BIBLE

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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever sat down and started reading the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, and quickly became discouraged because you had no idea what was going on? In this eBook I want to provide for you a very brief but detailed overview of the Bible so that whatever book you find yourself reading you will be able to know the exact context of the book, passage or verse. Every student of the Bible should know the key places, people, events and themes that make up each book of the Bible. I will provide key verses for you to read as stopping points along the way. Let's start with a few basic facts about the Bible.

“Every student of the Bible should know the key places, people, events and themes that make up the Bible.”

BIBLE *Fact*

- ▶ There are 66 books in the Bible (27 New Testament; 39 Old Testament)
- ▶ Written over a 1500 year period (OT – 1400 B.C. – 400 B.C., NT – 45 A.D. – 95 A.D.)
- ▶ Written by 40 authors of different walks of life such as fishermen, military leaders, kings, and physicians
- ▶ Written on 3 continents (Africa, Asia, and Europe) and in 3 languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek)
- ▶ Written in various literary styles such as poetry, narrative, prophecy, parables, and romance
- ▶ Addresses topics concerning almost every phase of life such as faith, family, love, and forgiveness
- ▶ There are more books written about the Bible than any other book in history
- ▶ The Bible has been translated into over 2,200 languages
- ▶ The Bible is 100% historically and scientifically accurate

WHAT IS THE MESSAGE *of the Bible?*

The first two chapters of the Bible describe a perfect environment. The last two chapters of the Bible describe a perfect environment. All the chapters in between describe the story of how God restores the perfect relationship between Himself and man that was destroyed because of sin to all those who exercise faith in Him.

HOW TO USE *this Ebook*

In order to get the most out of this study I highly recommend you read each Scripture reference in your own Bible and highlight them so that you know precisely where they are and how they connect with the story of the Bible. More importantly, I trust that God will speak to your heart as you stop and read each scripture as we take an exciting journey through this Best of the Bestsellers. If the Lord leads you to stop at one of the passages and read further then by all means follow that leading. My prayer is that this book would serve as a launching pad for your own study and you will get lost in His word and consumed with History. Take your time. It is more important that the contents of this book (the Bible) get through you than for you to get through it. Take a moment now and pray. Ask God to reveal the message of this book to you so that it goes from your head (understanding), to your heart (believing) then to your hands (living). It is my heart that you know that these are indeed the words of God and not man. The Bible is filled with lessons, principles and precepts. Throughout this study I will provide what I believe are some of the greatest lessons we can learn from this Book. So, grab your Bible, your highlighter, your journal, your pen and let's begin to take a chronological journey through the Bible!



LUCIFER CAST

OUT OF HEAVEN

When you open up the Bible and begin reading Genesis, you'll notice that in chapter 3 the devil shows up on the scene out of nowhere in the form of a snake. Have you ever wondered where he came from and why it's not recorded at the beginning of the Bible? Well, the story of how Lucifer, a perfect created angel of God, became Satan (lit. adversary) is actually recorded in 3 different passages of Scripture sprinkled throughout the Bible. Let's take a brief look at them to see what we can piece together.

EZEKIEL 28:12-15

The original context of this passage is dealing with an evil king from the city of Tyre. Biblical scholars believe that in verses 12-15 the prophet switches from talking about an earthly king to the evil power behind this king that influenced him, namely Satan. How do we know this is really talking about Satan and not this human king? There are some things in this passage that cannot be said about any human being which gives us the clue that God must be speaking of a spiritual being. This description gives us insight as to exactly why, where and how Satan originated.

*"Now, there are things that are true of this "king" that—at least ultimately—cannot be said to be true of human beings. For example, the king is portrayed as having a different **nature** from man (he is a cherub [angel], verse 14); he had a different **position** from man (he was blameless and sinless, verse 15); he was in a different **realm** from man (the holy mount of God, verses 13,14); he received a different **judgment** from man (he was cast out of the mountain of God and thrown to the earth, verse 16); and the superlatives used to describe him don't seem to fit that of a normal human being ("full of wisdom," "perfect in beauty," and having "the seal of perfection," verse 12 NASB)."*

So, from this passage we learn that Lucifer was **perfect** (v. 12, 15), full of **wisdom** and beauty. Some have suggested that Lucifer had some role in leading the heavenly worship because of the reference to his "timbrels and pipes." I believe it's difficult to deduce that with any great degree of accuracy. We also learn that he was the "anointed **cherub**", or the angel "set apart to cover the throne of God". There is some debate as to exactly when the angel Lucifer (lit. Morning Star), who became Satan (lit. adversary), was cast out of heaven. The point here is that at some point Lucifer's pride and desire to be like God and his discontentment with his heavenly position got him kicked out of heaven.

LESSON

Discontentment with what God has graciously given us is pride and can result in Him taking it away.

ISAIAH 14:12-15

This is the second passage of Scripture that describes the actual fall of Lucifer. This passage has been referred to as "*The 5 'I Wills'*". Five times in this passage Lucifer says, "*I will*". It begins by confirming that Lucifer indeed "fell" from heaven (v. 12). His pride and desire to be like God is what led to his destruction. It is this same attitude of pride that can also lead to our own personal destruction. Jesus confirms Satan's fall in Luke 10:18 where he said, "*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.*"

REVELATION 12:1-4

This passage confirms that when Lucifer was cast out of heaven one-third of the angels followed him in his rebellion at which point they became demons. This teaches us that just as humans were created with a will to choose, angels were as well.

SUMMARY

So, from these 3 passages we can deduce that Satan began as a beautiful created angel who was discontent with his position in heaven because he wanted to be like God. Because of this, God cast him out of heaven. Unfortunately, he was not content to leave by himself. Rather, he used his influence to persuade one-third of the angels to follow in his rebellion.

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THE FALL OF MAN

“THE SOURCE OF ALL OUR PROBLEMS”

Some time after Lucifer was cast out of heaven and after God created the earth Satan manifested himself in the form of a snake and tempted Eve in the garden (Gen. 3:1-7). Interestingly enough, he attempts to discredit the word of God by asking Eve, *“Did God really say...?”* He has been trying to discredit the authenticity of God's word ever since. When Adam and Eve sinned we inherited several aspects of sin that we struggle with every day.

Shame enters in verse 7. For the first time they were not comfortable around one another naked so much so that they attempted to cover themselves with fig leaves. This “shame” has remained within relationships hindering couples from becoming “naked,” vulnerable and totally transparent before each other (cf. Gen. 2:25).

Self-righteousness enters next. Notice that Adam and Eve tried to fix their shame and nakedness by covering themselves. Self-righteousness is man's attempt to make himself right before God. In doing so, we reject the free gift of forgiveness and grace that is only available in Jesus Christ without realizing what we're doing. We have been attempting to cover our own sins through obedience, good works, giving money, our good outweighing our bad and a litany of other good “works.” **Even we as Christians still operate with this faulty mentality.** But these good works are not sufficient enough to cover the totality of our sin. Isaiah 64:6 says,

“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags...”

Wow! Even on our best days when we think we are doing something amazing for God and living a perfect Christian life our attempts to be righteous before God is like a menstrual rag in His sight. There is not enough good we could ever do that would be sufficient to cover our own sin.

“We feel ‘unworthy’ to approach God and so at times we hide...that’s the beauty in what Christ has done for us. He has taken away our guilt.”

In verse 8 we see **guilt** enter in on the scene. If shame leads to hiding from each other in fear of being judged, guilt can lead us to hide from God. Before sin, Adam communed with God regularly. But now, as a result of sin, he knows he is naked and sinful and tries to hide from God. Don't we do the same thing when we sin? We feel "unworthy" to approach God and so at times we hide. We feel unworthy to worship, unworthy to pray and ask God for things because we feel we don't deserve it because of what we've done. That's the beauty in what Christ has done for us. He has taken away our guilt. Guilt implies that God is disappointed in us and so we must do something to earn His favor again. Instead of *guilt* we as Christians experience *conviction*. Conviction is given to us through the Holy Spirit Who lives within us. This is how God communicates to us that we are out of step with Him. However, this conviction should *never* hinder us from approaching God's throne with boldness (Heb. 4:14-16).

Finally in verses 12-13 we have **blame**. Both Adam and Eve pass the buck and fail to take responsibility for their sin. Don't we do this today? Instead of simply admitting our sin we try to make excuses for it, rationalize it and/or justify it. At times we blame others for it. Yes, this is what we inherited from Adam and Eve.



GOD'S PLAN OF REDEMPTION

DATES
2200-1500
BC

"I'LL START WITH ABRAHAM"

At the end of Genesis 3 we get the first glimpse of God's plan of redemption and if you read too quickly you might just miss it. The fig leaves that Adam and Eve used to cover themselves were not sufficient in God's sight. Instead, God killed an innocent animal, took the skins from that innocent animal and used them to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness (Gen. 3:21)!

"It is the idea that God, in His grace, would take out His punishment towards humans on someone other than the guilty party."

Here is the first instance in the Bible where we see God shedding the blood of an innocent animal and letting the guilty sinner live. Theologians refer to this as *substitutionary atonement*. It is the idea that God, in His grace, would take out His punishment towards humans on someone other than the guilty party. In this act we see both the justice and the love of God displayed. His justice is displayed through Him carrying out punishment for sin. His love is displayed through allowing us, the guilty, to live. This is clearly a foreshadowing of what God would later accomplish through Christ on the cross.

God unfolds His plan of redemption by first calling a man named Abraham to follow Him to a land he did not know. His choice of Abraham appears to be arbitrary as there is nothing in the Scripture that indicates otherwise. God makes a very important promise to Abraham and this promise has 3 parts to it.

- 1 God first promised Abraham and all of his descendants a piece of **land** (Gen. 17:8). But this wasn't just any piece of land; it happened to be the most valuable and precious land on the earth. This, by the way, explains why there is so much fighting over this land and has been throughout the history of time. The Israeli-Arab Middle East conflict exists today because both trace their lineage back to Abraham. The Israelites trace their lineage through Isaac and then to Abraham. The Arabs trace theirs through Ishmael then to Abraham. Because the promise for land was given to Abraham's descendants, both the Arabs and the Israelis believe the land is rightfully theirs. As Christians we believe that our Bible teaches that Isaac was the son of Promise through which Christ was born (Gen. 17:19-22). This is a promise of provision.
- 2 God promised that Abraham's **seed**, or his descendants, would be as numerous as the stars in the sky (Gen. 15:5; 17:5-6). This is a promise of posterity.
- 3 The third component of the promise was **blessing**. God would bless Abraham's descendants and through them all the families of the earth would be blessed. God promised to bless those who blessed them and curse those who cursed them. Some believe this is why the United States has remained protected since we are allies with Israel. This is a promise of protection.

As an aside, Job lived around this time even though his book appears towards the middle of the Old Testament.

Abraham and his wife Sarah set out to inhabit this Promised Land. They arrived in Canaan. Abraham and Sarah give birth to Isaac. Isaac and Rebekkah then give birth to Jacob and Esau. Esau was the older son but Jacob was the son whom God chose to continue His plan of redemption (Rom. 9:12-13). Jacob's name was later changed to Israel when he had an encounter with God (Gen. 35:10). Over time Jacob has 12 sons by 4 different women. You could say that Jacob was a bit of a "Rolling Stone...wherever he laid his hat was his home." (Gen. 30). One of these sons was named Joseph. Joseph was his favorite son because, he was born to Jacob "in his old age." It was more so because Joseph's mother was Rachel; the only woman Jacob ever truly loved.

Joseph's story is so important and filled with a litany of lessons that it consumes the last 14 chapters of the book of Genesis.

Because Joseph was so favored by their father (Gen. 37), his brothers hated him and eventually sold him into slavery. Joseph makes the best out of this very dark and dismal situation and continues to distinguish himself wherever he is. The Lord continues to prosper him whether he is a slave or in prison.

LESSON

**Learn to bloom right where you have been planted.
God can prosper you even in the midst of less than
ideal circumstances.**

Joseph ends up in Egypt and over time rises to become the second-in-command next to Pharaoh. You could say he was the "Vice President" so to speak (Gen. 41:38-45). After time God allowed a famine to strike the land and it affected the land in which Joseph's family was living (Gen. 42). The only food on the earth was in Egypt under Joseph's care. This caused Jacob and his family to have to migrate to Egypt for food in order to survive. The very same people that hated him now needed him to be gracious enough to give them some food to eat. Joseph now had a decision to make. "Should I treat them the way they treated me by withholding food from them thus getting back at them? OR should I treat them kindly even though they kicked me to the curb?" Joseph chose the high road and provided food for his family and that's how the Israelites ended up in Egypt as the book of Genesis comes to a close.

LESSON

**Always take the high road. Never take the opportunity to
seek revenge on those who have wronged you. Let God
discipline them while He blesses you at the same time.**



DATES
1300-922
BC

THE JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LAND

Now, let's move this story along! As the book of Exodus opens 400 years have passed and the Israelites are enslaved to the Egyptians under an evil ruler who was one of the Pharaohs (Ex. 1:1-7). They cry out for deliverance and God answers their cry by sending a deliverer named **Moses**. There are three key events in the book of **Exodus**. First, we have the exodus God delivers them out of Egypt and attempts to lead them back into the Promised Land they once inhabited in the days of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But now they are 2 million strong and ready to enter and take possession of the land.

LESSON

Sometimes God may have something for you, but it may not be the time for you to take possession of it.

Four hundred years prior they were not big enough; they were not strong enough; but now they are ready. The second major event is that God gave them the **Law**. This is sometimes referred to as The Mosaic Law because God gave it to Moses to give to the people. Now that they have been delivered from their past life, they needed to know God's standard of holiness. They needed to know how to obey God. Most of these are recorded in the books of Leviticus and sacrifice of Christ. God instituted the sacrificial system whereby the worshipper, becoming aware of his guilt, would select the appropriate animal, bring it to the priest and sacrifice it on the altar so they could be forgiven for their sins. Once again we see God instituting a system whereby the guilty sinner is able to continue to live and an innocent animal dies for their transgressions (Lev. 16:1-28). Theologians refer to this as The Scarlet Thread of Redemption. This refers to how blood sacrifices have always been the means to redemption through the entire word of God.

The third major event in Exodus was God giving Moses the plans to erect a **tabernacle**. God didn't want to be a distant God to His people. He wanted to be near and personal. The tabernacle was God's invitation for the people to worship Him. Each piece of furniture was symbolic of some specific way in which God desired for His people to approach Him during worship. A greater understanding of this tabernacle can lead to a deeper appreciation of the work of Christ on the cross.

With all of the miracles God had performed in their midst you would think that these Israelites would have been on their best behavior. Sadly, they were not. Shortly after they were miraculously delivered from Egypt, they quickly rebelled against God. God became angry with them for at least three reasons. First, they were **disobedient**. They were idolatrous. They worshipped graven images (Ex. 32). They were sexually immoral (Num. 25:1). They did not honor the authority of Moses (Num. 16). Second, they became **discontent**. God had provided food miraculously each morning, water in a dry desert, preserved their clothes, kept them healthy and protected them from all hurt, harm and danger. Instead of being thankful for what God was doing for them they became discontent and expressed it through constant complaining (Num. 14:1-4). Third, they were **doubtful**. Despite the fact that God had promised them the land of Canaan they continued to doubt God's promises and didn't have the courage to go in and possess the very land God already said was theirs. They lacked the faith to trust God. They did not believe they could conquer the inhabitants of the land because they only trusted in their own strength and failed to trust God (Num. 13).

Hmmm, do any or all of these sound familiar? The Old Testament is a great picture of the Christian life. The truth is that we all struggle with these same three reactions. We are disobedient. We often complain and we struggle to trust God. As a result God decided that this generation did not deserve to inherit the Promised Land so with the exception of Joshua and Caleb He allowed them to wander around in the wilderness for some forty years until they all died.

During that time they had children and it was this *new* generation that God would prepare to inherit the Promised Land (Num. 14:31-35).

LESSON

The quickest way to relinquish God's blessings is to live in disobedience, become discontent with what He's already given you and doubt the power and promises of God.

Now, this generation was not alive when Moses first communicated God's laws to the nation of Israel (most of which are contained in Leviticus). They were now poised to enter the Promised Land. So, Moses had to communicate God's laws to this new generation for the first time but second time overall. This is what the book of Deuteronomy (*lit.* Second Law) is about. Due to Moses' disobedience he was disqualified from entering into the Promised Land (Num. 20; see also Deut. 34:4). Wow! After 40 years of leading God's people and putting up with their murmuring he was allowed to look at the Promised Land but never enter. There is a very high price for leadership.

LESSON

**The higher up you are in leadership the greater the stakes are
if you fall.**

LESSON

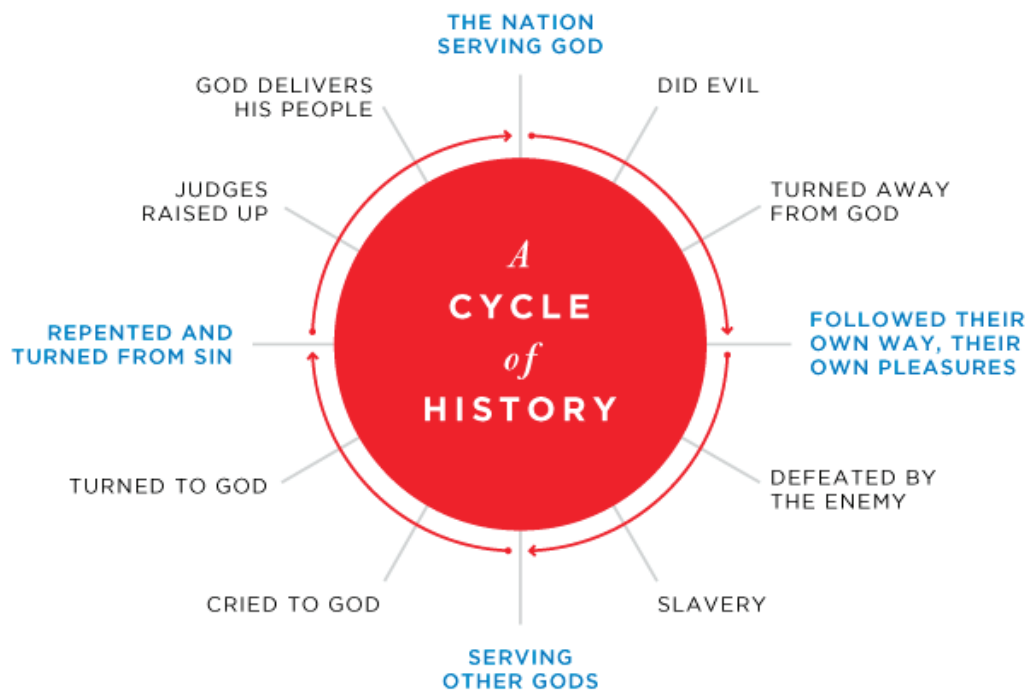
**You can do many great things for God,
but one poor decision can indeed hinder you from receiving
God's very best for your life.**

After Moses' death, a new leader named Joshua (Moses' apprentice) emerges and leads God's people victoriously and courageously into the Promised Land. God clearly instructed them to destroy all the nations in the land. Instead, they left many of the inhabitants in the land and decided to use them as slaves (Judges 1). As a result of this disobedience, these nations became thorns in their side and ended up influencing the Israelites towards sinful behavior.

LESSON

**When God says to remove something or someone from
your life you had better listen.
When we don't, things have a way of coming back
to hurt us later.**

Once settled in the Promised Land, God's plan was for His people to be alight in the midst of the pagan nations that surrounded them. His people were supposed to influence the other nations towards worshipping the one true God. Unfortunately, the opposite occurred. The Israelites were negatively influenced and began to worship other gods (Judg. 2:11ff), and a cycle of disobedience began. It looked sort of like this. Israel begins to **disobey** God. God **disciplines** them by allowing a foreign nation to attack them and **defeat** them. They become **discouraged** and cry out to God for help. God, in His mercy and love, responds by sending a military leader called a judge. God would then send deliverance by empowering that leader to be victorious over their enemies. There was peace in the land and the people could relax. Ahhh...But then when that judge would **die** and there was no leader, the cycle began again. Each time the people were without leadership they rebelled against God and found themselves being heavily chastised by God.



Does this sound familiar? Isn't this what we do? God blesses us then we relax and rebel. We find ourselves in trouble so we cry out to God, "Help me!!" He delivers us and we make promises not to do this again only to shortly find ourselves struggling again. What I want you to see is that the Old Testament is a microcosm of the Christian life. The same struggles the people of God had then are the same struggles we have now. God is always caught between His holiness/justice and His love/mercy.

"...the Old Testament is a microcosm of the Christian life. The same struggles the people of God had then are the same struggles we have now."



DATES
1050-922
BC

THE UNITED KINGDOM

SAUL, DAVID & SOLOMON

After some time passes the people are discontent with these “judges.” Other nations have a king they can boast of and put on a throne. They wanted to be like other nations and have a king. But, God wanted to be their *King*. They insisted and believed they knew what was best for them. So, God gave them what *they thought* was best for them only for them to find out that he was not what was best for them (1 Sam. 8). I think the lesson is obvious here.

LESSON

**Anytime we try to replace God with people God seldom blesses those relationships.
He often takes these people away. He is a jealous God and wants to be King of our lives.**

KING SAUL “NO HEART”

A man named Saul became the first king of Israel and he was not a good king. Sound familiar again? How many times do we think we want something because we want to be like others only to find out that we were better off where we were? Saul reigned for 40 years but was rejected by God because of his disobedience and because his heart was not right before God (1 Sam.15:17-26).

KING DAVID "WHOLE HEART"

David took his place and reigned as king of Israel for 40 years as well. David was a warrior but he was also a musician and a poet. At various times in his life David wrote poems to God to express his feelings. Many of these are recorded in the book of Psalms. For instance, after his embarrassing adulterous affair with Bathsheba he wrote Psalms 32 and 51. When he was running from King Saul who was trying to kill him he fled to a cave at which time he wrote Psalm 57.

KING SOLOMON "HALF HEART"

After David reigned as king for 40 years his son Solomon succeeded him. Now, if Saul had "no-heart" and David had a "whole heart", Solomon we would say had "half-a-heart." He started out great! God gave him a blank check and said, "ask for whatever you wish" (1 Kings 3:5-15) and instead of asking for riches Solomon asked for wisdom. God was pleased with this. But the Bible says that Solomon began to accumulate wives. He actually had 700 wives and 300 concubines! What a busy man he must have been trying to keep them all happy. This was a direct violation of the law that says, "*a king must not multiply wives*" (Deut. 17:17). The accumulation of these wives was not primarily because he had an uncontrollable libido. He would make alliances with these foreign nations by intermarrying with their women. The only problem was that these nations worshipped gods other than the one true God Yahweh. Over time, Solomon's heart was torn away from worshipping God and he began to worship their gods. Could the lesson here be any more obvious?

LESSON

When we engage in intimate relationships with people to whom God commands us not to, we tend to stray away from God as a result of the negative influence.



DATES
922-539
BC

THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

“THE BIG SPLIT”

As a result of Solomon's disobedience God snatched 10 of the 12 tribes away from him leaving his son Rehoboam, his successor, with only two to reign over (1 Kings 11:9-13). This is where the Old Testament can get a little confusing. Because of this split there is now a “northern” kingdom and a “southern” kingdom. The northern kingdom is referred to as *Israel* for the remainder of the Old Testament. The southern kingdom is referred to as Judah for the remainder of the Old Testament. Both kingdoms had their own individual kings which explains why there are so many kings mentioned in the books of 1st & 2nd Kings and 1st & 2nd Chronicles. These books are the stories of the two kingdoms and so the stories go back and forth between them. King Solomon contributed three books to the Old Testament. He wrote the book of Song of Solomon most likely when he was a young man. Because he was the wisest man who ever lived he wrote most of the Proverbs. Towards the latter part of his life he also wrote the book of Ecclesiastes.

LESSON

Wisdom unapplied is simply knowledge.

PROPHETS – “SHAPE UP OR GOD WILL SHIP YOU OUT!”

Now, after Solomon reigned as king the northern and southern kingdoms each had several kings. Some were good kings but many of them were evil. Because there were so many corrupt kings, the people tended to follow the corruption of their leadership. Their sins consisted of idolatry, intermarrying with other pagan nations, child sacrifices, oppression of the poor, and injustice to name a few. Now we see God's love and patience on display

of their leadership. Their sins consisted of idolatry, intermarrying with other more than ever! Instead of wiping them out like He did in the days of Noah, He sent them men called prophets. These prophets were to *foretell* and *forthtell* the word of God. They were to tell the people what God's will was for them by reminding them of God's laws given to them previously through Moses. They were also to warn the people that if they did not change their ways that severe judgment was to come. So He sent Isaiah, Amos, Habakkuk, Joel, Micah and several others. He sent non-writing (meaning they don't have books named after them) prophets such as Elijah and Elisha in a desperate effort to warn the people of impending judgment. It is clearer now more than ever that God didn't desire to chastise His people. But the people were stiff-necked, stubborn and stuck in their ways. So He sent the sternest warnings through Hosea and Jeremiah. In Hosea He likened the people to an adulterous wife (Hos. 1:1-5) and ordered Hosea to pursue his own wife who had cheated on him to illustrate how God pursues Israel in their spiritual adultery. It was a very serious message. But once again they failed to even heed this warning. After hundreds of years of warnings God's patience had finally run out. Once again God used a foreign nation to attack His own people in an effort to discipline them. Imagine letting a bully in school beat up your own child so they would learn the right lesson! That's what God did.

GOD SERVES HIS PEOPLE WITH AN EVICTION NOTICE

DATES
722 - 539
BC

Because the people refused to listen to the message of the prophets God allowed the evil nation of Assyria to attack the northern kingdom of Israel and take them into captivity in 722 BC (2 Kings 17:5-23). Then, because at least a few of the southern kings of Judah were good, God relented from judging His own people again until 539 BC when He allowed Babylon to come in and raid Jerusalem. They burned down the city and its temple and took the king alive and plucked out his eyes and dragged God's people off into captivity to Babylon. They also stole some of the articles from God's holy temple in the process (2 Kings 25). Imagine the prophet Jeremiah standing in the center of the city of Jerusalem as he remembers a beautiful temple and a beautiful city only to see the city of God burned down and trashed into ruins. I can imagine he thought, *"If only they had listened to God's warnings we could've have avoided this judgment."* He weeps as he thinks about how their stubbornness led to their tragic downfall. His thoughts on this are recorded in the book of Lamentations. The book begins with the words,



**"How deserted lies the city, once so full of people!
How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations!" (Lam. 1:1).**

THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN CAPTIVITY

**DATES
587 - 539
BC**

Through the prophet Jeremiah God still yet speaks to His people who have since been evicted. They are now under the rule and oppression of the Babylonians. They are discouraged. They are heartbroken. They feel as though their God has forgotten about them. Jeremiah then comes along to inform them that the total time they will be in captivity will be seventy years at which time God will allow His people to return to their homeland. So essentially God says, *"Get comfortable. You'll be here for a while."* (Jer. 29:4-14) In response to their discouragement God encourages them with the words, *"I know the plans I have for you..."* This is the exact context for this well-known passage of scripture. During this time prophets such as Daniel and Ezekiel spoke to the people to encourage them and remind them of God's love. Also during this time the Babylonians were overtaken by the Persians and a new king named Cyrus was on the throne. When Daniel realizes that the 70 years earlier prophesied by Jeremiah are coming to a close he begins to pray asking God to prepare His people's hearts for the return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the temple of God (Dan. 9:1-19).

THE PEOPLE OF GOD RETURN AND REBUILD THE CITY AND THE TEMPLE

**DATES
539 - 333
BC**

After 70 years of being in exile, God was ready to gather His people to return to the blessed land promised to Abraham hundreds of years prior. So, God placed it on King Cyrus's heart to let the Israelites return to their homeland and rebuild (Ezra 1:1-8). This occurred in 539 B.C. Interestingly enough, in 688 B.C. (approx. 150 years prior) God had prophesied that a king named Cyrus would indeed release His people to return. He wrote in Isa. 44:28,



"...who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, 'Let it be rebuilt,' and of the temple, 'Let its foundations be laid.'"

LESSON

**God is not only omniscient, but is also omnipotent!
He not only knows the future but He is in control of it too.**

God is so good that this pagan king not only allowed them to return but also sent materials with them to help them rebuild (Ezra 1:4). Look at God! When He blesses He goes beyond what we could ever ask or think. The Bible says, *"The heart of the king is in the Lord's hand"* (Prov. 21:1). Here we have yet another display of God's sovereignty. What benefit would it be for king Cyrus to let God's people return? But God is in control of all History.

Now, you would think that the nation of Israel would be so excited about returning home to rebuild their land. However, many of them had become comfortable in Babylon and the oppression wasn't so bad under this new king so they didn't make the 800-mile trek back to their homeland to rebuild. They did not care enough about their history and heritage to invest in the land God had blessed them with. Rather, they stayed behind to strengthen the Israelite community there. One such individual was Esther. She was a Jewish woman who became the Queen of Persia.

But, a small number of them, called the remnant, cared enough to return home and begin the process of rebuilding their land and their temple. It took several months and they risked danger along the way. The story of those who returned is found in the books of Nehemiah and Ezra. As always, God's people needed prophets to remind them of God's laws and precepts. So, God sent prophets such as Zechariah, Haggai and Malachi when they returned so they would not repeat the same foolish behavior that got them into that mess to begin with. And that, my friends, is how the Old Testament ends!



DATES
4 BC - 29 AD

THE GOSPELS

WHO IS JESUS?

THE TIME BETWEEN THE NEW AND OLD TESTAMENTS

Between the Old and New Testaments is 400 years of silence. Theologians have called this time frame "*The Silent Years*". There was no written prophetic voice between Malachi and John the Baptist. John the Baptist was called by God to prepare people's hearts for the coming Messiah. He was not baptizing people to salvation since Jesus had not yet introduced Himself as the Messiah. He was baptizing people unto repentance. In other words, his goal was to get people to take their sins seriously and to repent from them because he knew that the Messiah (Jesus) was soon to present Himself to the world.

WHY DO WE HAVE FOUR GOSPELS?

The first four books of the New Testament are the story of the birth, life, death, burial and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. However, the question arises, "*Why do we have 4 gospels?*" The answer is because each gospel writer wrote to different people for a different purpose. After Jesus' death there was a ton of information about His life. There were stories about the events of His life, His miracles, His sermons, His teachings, His parables, etc. So, each gospel writer, under the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet.1:21), carefully crafted their gospel to persuade a specific group of people to believe that Jesus was God our Savior. For example, if a man's children were to write a letter to convince people their dad was a great father they would highlight certain things he did. If a man's wife were to write a letter to convince people he was a great husband she would highlight certain things. And if that same man's mother were to write a letter to describe how great a son he is, she would highlight certain things. And finally, if that man's boss were to write a letter to describe how great an employee he was he would highlight certain things. All four stories would be a correct description of this man but written for different purposes. Some of the stories would overlap no doubt, but there would be differences. The same is true with the gospels.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

Matthew was a Jewish man writing primarily to a Jewish audience. The Jews believed that the Messiah that the Old Testament prophesied about would be a powerful "warrior-type" king that would deliver them from the Roman oppression they were under. Where did they get that crazy idea? They misinterpreted the prophecies concerning Jesus' first and second coming. When Jesus returns the SECOND time He will return as a powerful King ready to rule and reign on the earth. That was not His purpose for His first coming. Because they didn't understand that, they rejected Jesus as the Messiah. Matthew's goal in writing His letter was to convince these Jews that this same Jesus whom they had just crucified was indeed the Messiah that the Old Testament had promised to come. He did this by using more references to the Old Testament than the other 3 gospel writers (see Mt. 1:22-23; 2:15; 2:17-18; 2:23; 3:3). He kept going back to the OT like a lawyer to prove that the OT did indeed prophesy many of the events of Jesus' life. Nine times he refers to Jesus as "the Son of David" in an effort to remind his readers that Messiah was a descendant of David just as the OT prophets predicted.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

Mark was a Jewish man but he was writing primarily to a Roman audience. Once again, the Jews were under Roman control at the time of Jesus' ministry. Understand that the Romans had very little knowledge or concern about the Jewish Old Testament. Using the OT to prove that Jesus was the Messiah is like trying to use the Bible to convince a Muslim that Jesus is the Messiah. It's pointless because the very foundation of your argument, the truth of the Bible, is rejected as valid. In other words, the Romans had no respect for the Jewish Old Testament. So, Mark focused his gospel primarily on what Jesus did. He omitted many of Jesus' sermons and focused most of his attention on Jesus' miracles. He also omitted any sort of genealogy anticipating that a Roman would be unfamiliar and disinterested in a long list of Jewish names that meant nothing to them (Mk. 1:1). Mark also went out of his way to explain certain Jewish customs and words that he anticipated his Roman readers would be unfamiliar with (Mk. 5:41; 7:2-4, 11, 34; 15:42). For these reasons Mark is the shortest gospel of the four.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE

Luke was the only Gentile writer of Scripture and seemed to be writing primarily to a Gentile audience. Understand that Gentiles were considered dirty and despicable by the Jews because they primarily worshiped other gods in the Old Testament. Gentiles along with other groups such as prostitutes, lepers, Samaritans, tax collectors and "sinners" were all considered rejects. For this reason, Luke included stories in his gospel that are not found in other

gospels. He included stories about Jesus' love and ministry to gentiles, lepers, Samaritans, prostitutes and sinners. The hope was that as these groups read this gospel or heard these stories they would be convinced that Jesus came to save them as well despite how rejected they may have felt according to societal standards.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

John is distinct from the other 3 gospels in that 90% of John is unique to John. John omits Jesus' genealogy, birth narrative, childhood, temptation, transfiguration, and His appointment of the disciples. It also does not contain any parables or mention of His ascension. John's purpose is clearly stated in John 20:31 which was "so that they may believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that by believing they may have life in His name." He did this by focusing on the words and works of Jesus Christ. He centered his gospel around 7 "I AM" statements focusing on the *words* of Jesus. These were statements Jesus made about Himself signifying He was indeed God (I AM...the good Shepherd, the way, the truth, the life, etc.). He also included 7 miracles focusing on the *works* of Jesus. These 7 miracles were proof enough that Jesus was not just a man; He is God!

Allen PARR



DATES
29 - 68
AD

THE BIRTH AND SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY

The gospels end with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The book of Acts begins with Jesus giving convincing proof of His resurrection for 40 days (Acts 1:3). It's important to understand that the gospels and Acts make up the only historical books of the New Testament. In other words, the information contained in the other 22 books is supplemental to the events recorded in these 5 books. This will become evident as we continue. The book of Acts chronicles the birth of the church and shows how the gospel of Jesus spread from Jerusalem to Rome including many cities in between. God's goal for the church was clearly stated in Acts 1:8. It says,



"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

God desired for the church to take the gospel to the remotest parts of the earth. However, they became complacent and many of them remained in Jerusalem where it was comfortable. So, God allowed a severe persecution against all who proclaimed to be a Christian to take place in Jerusalem forcing many of the Christians to flee for their lives to various surrounding cities (Acts 8:1). This naturally caused the gospel to spread to other cities and God's will was accomplished. Do you see how God's sovereign will presided?

LESSON

**Following God's will may not be comfortable.
When we resist it sometimes God has to allow difficulty
to get our attention so His will is ultimately done.**

So, as the gospel began to spread the tension between Jews and Gentiles continued to increase. For so long these two groups hated one another but now for the first time in history they are brought together through Christ. Many of the Jews rejected the message of grace and were holding on to the Old Testament Law of Moses. In other words, they were saying that in order to be saved you had to believe in Jesus *and* keep the entire OT law! Duh! That's the whole reason why Jesus came! It's impossible to keep all of those laws! So, God saved a man named Saul and changed his name to Paul. God gave him and others the task of sharing the gospel of grace primarily to a Gentile audience (Acts 9:15).

THE APOSTLE PAUL BEGINS PLANTING CHURCHES

How did he do this? Paul and his team would travel to various cities (Corinth, Ephesus, Thessalonica, Galatia, etc.) and he would preach in their Jewish synagogues. He would then establish churches in these cities. Yes, Paul was the first church planter! However, because he was only one man on a mission he could not stay in those cities for very long. He had to keep it moving! So, in order to keep in touch with them and still exercise pastoral care, he would write letters to these churches. Twelve of these letters make up a large percentage of the New Testament. These letters are God's message to the churches at that time, but obviously they have present day application for all churches. Similar to our churches today some of these churches had severe problems. Some had moral problems (Corinth). Others had doctrinal problems (Galatia and Colosse). As a pastor, it was Paul's responsibility to straighten these churches out. And he did so through writing them letters. That's what the books of Romans, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and 1st and 2nd Thessalonians are all about.

Titus and 1st and 2nd Timothy were letters written by Paul not to churches but to individuals with the said names. He wrote to these young pastors primarily to encourage them and remind them of their responsibilities as pastors of local churches. It is from these three books that we get most of our instruction for how our churches should be led and the character of church leaders.

THE GENERAL EPISTLES

With the gospels, Acts and Paul's letters out of the way that leaves 10 more books. All of the remaining books, with the exception of the book of Revelation, theologians have referred to as the "*General Epistles*". These letters were not written to a specific church or individual, but rather, they were written to a general audience encouraging the readers in the faith. Letters such as James, 1st and 2nd Peter and Hebrews would fall into this category.



DATES
95AD - TBD

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Well, that leaves one book left; The Revelation of Jesus Christ. While we cannot take the time to go into much detail about this amazing book, I want to provide for you a basic timeline of events. Theologians debate as to some of the details of this prophetic book. However, I take what is called a pre-millennial and pre-tribulation view. That means nothing to most non-seminary students so...let me explain.

- 1** We are currently living in what theologians refer to as *the church age*. This is the period (dispensation) of time in which the church is supposed to be the light of the world. In a sense you could say that we are to function in the same way the Israelites were in the Old Testament. We are the main instrument God desires to use to represent Him on earth to those far from Him.
- 2** *The rapture* is the next event on God's prophetic calendar. It is explained in 1 Thess. 4:13-18 and 1 Cor. 15:51-57. In a brief moment, a twinkling of the eye, the church will be removed from the earth and taken to heaven. Those that do not believe in Christ will be left behind and will remain here.
- 3** The next event on God's calendar will be *the tribulation*. God will graciously give those who are alive and remain yet another opportunity to believe in Him. This will last for 7 years. It will be at this time that God will unleash His wrath upon the remaining inhabitants of the earth. All sorts of judgments will take place unlike anything the world has ever experienced (Rev. 6-19). For those who accept Christ at this time, it will be very hard to be a Christian due to intense and severe persecution.
- 4** The next event will be *The Battle of Armageddon*. Towards the end of this tribulation period the evil nations will all gather together at a place called Har Megiddo to battle against Christ (Rev. 16:16). They will be severely beat down because Christ has already won the victory (Rev. 20:1-3)! This battle marks the end of the tribulation period and introduces what is called the Millennial Reign of Christ

- 5 Next is ***The Second Coming/Millennial Kingdom***. After destroying Satan and his demons Jesus will return to the earth to reign with us, the church, for 1000 years. This will be a time of peace, righteousness and joy as all evil influence will be removed from the earth (Rev. 20:1-5).
- 6 Next will be ***The Judgments of the End Times***. After the millennial kingdom ends, there will be a series of judgments. First, Satan and his demons will be judged then cast into the Lake of Fire, which is their final destination. Secondly, all unbelievers will stand before God at the Great White Throne judgment (Rev. 20:1-15). Finally, the earth, contaminated by the effects of sin, will be judged and destroyed by fire (2 Pet. 3:7-10).
- 7 Finally we will live in ***The New Heaven and New Earth***. With Satan, his demons and all unbelievers from every age cast into the Lake of Fire, their final destination, we who believe, along with believers from every age, will spend eternity with God, the angels and all believers throughout history in the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1-2)!

Allen PARR

SUMMARY

The first two chapters of Genesis are perfect. The final two chapters of Revelation are perfect. Every chapter in between these four contains the story of how man sinned and God reconciled man to Himself. There were foreshadowings of His plan of redemption throughout the Bible, but it had its culmination and fulfillment through Christ's death on the cross. On the cross He overcame the *power* of sin (bondage) and the *penalty* of sin (eternal separation from God). One day we will be freed from the presence of sin when we spend eternity with God. And that my friends, is the Bible story!

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