

100 DAYS

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE ENTIRE BIBLE

Together
In The Word

GENESIS

Genesis 1-11 (God and all of Creation)

Key Themes: Big Questions: Is there a God? Where does the world come from? Why is creation beautiful and orderly, yet messed up? Does the world have a purpose? Do I have a purpose?

Major Biblical Themes Introduced: Monotheism, Creator God, the Word of God, Imago dei, sin, Satan, God's justice and mercy, God's plan for redemption, blessing.

The Need for Jesus: Adam is portrayed as a King-Priest. He failed. The world needs a better King-Priest, and humanity needs a better head. Noah is the Savior of the world, yet He failed in a garden the same way Adam did. We need a better Savior. We need someone who will crush the serpent and reverse the curse. We need Jesus.

Key Verses: Genesis 1:28; Genesis 3:15; Genesis 6:5

Key Takeaway: The Bible is presenting a worldview that is radically different to the way that fallen men view the world. We all need to have our minds renewed and conformed to view the world the way the Bible tells us to.

Genesis 12-50 (God and One Chosen Family)

Key Themes: One Chosen Family: The Bible quickly zooms in and focuses on one family. This sets the stage for the rest of the Bible. From Abraham comes Israel, David, and Jesus!

Land, Seed, and Blessing: These three words provide a comprehensive summary of God's plan for this family. And the blessing is not just meant for the family, the way God plans to bless them will make them a blessing to all the nations of the earth.

The Gospel: You will notice fairly quickly that this family is pretty messed up. So why did God choose them? Because God's means of salvation has been by grace through faith since the beginning (Gal 3:7-8)!

Key Verses: Genesis 12:1-3; Genesis 50:20

Key Takeaway: Genesis preaches the gospel. Abraham was chosen by grace through faith, as are all of his spiritual children.

Exodus

Exodus 1-18 (A Nation Rescued)

Key Themes: The Faithfulness of God: In the first few verses we see that God has kept His promise and made a great nation out of Israel. Then we see His miraculous power as He works to rescue them from slavery and deliver them into a land flowing with milk and honey.

The opposition of Egypt: Egypt is the most powerful nation in the world, but Egypt's king and gods are no match for the one true God. God uses them to display His glory.

The opposition of Israel: Israel is barely out of Egypt before they start complaining about being hungry and tired and missing the good old days in slavery (Exodus 16:2-3).

The foreshadowing of the gospel: Reading Exodus on this side of the cross enables us to see all sorts of things that foreshadow the gospel: namely how Moses points to Jesus, how God judges those who oppose Him, and how the exodus from physical slavery in Egypt points to the Exodus from spiritual slavery to sin (hence the Passover meal turning into the Lord's Supper).

Key Verses: Exodus 1:7; Exodus 3:14

Key Takeaway: God is mighty to save, even when we are not worth saving.

Exodus 19-40 (A Nation Established)

Key Themes: Covenant Made: In the second half of the book God reveals His law to Moses. The summary of the law is the Ten Commandments. Laws also include instructions for the tabernacle and entering the land.

Covenant Broken: The Israelites agree to keep the covenant, but they break it before Moses even comes down from the mountain. Moses throws the tablets down to signify the breaking of the covenant.

Covenant Renewed: Moses intercedes. God relents, shows him His glory, reveals His character, and writes the laws again (which signifies that the Covenant has been renewed).

Key Verses: Exodus 19:6; Exodus 34:5-7

Key Takeaway: The cross is the only way. God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, but will by no means clear the guilty? How can this be true? Jesus. The cross of Christ is the only way God can be both just and the Justifier.

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LEVITICUS

Key Themes: The Holiness of God: The central theme of Leviticus is the holiness of God. The fact that God is holy means that He is completely devoted to being all that He is, which is righteous, just, wise, sovereign, loving and good. This devotion to Himself makes Him completely set apart from all of creation. Thus when reading Leviticus, behold the holiness of God.

The Presence of God: Leviticus mentions the phrases “before the Lord” 60 times and “the tent of meeting” 40 times. This implies that the Lord’s presence among His people is also central.

God’s Desire for Israel to be Holy: God’s holy presence amongst His unholy people creates a problem. But God, in His grace, desires for His people to be holy so that He can dwell with them without consuming them in judgement. Hence the priestly sacrificial system.

Sacrifice: The gracious means by which God makes a way for His people to make atonement for their sins is sacrifice. The punishment for sin is death, and the priestly sacrificial system made a way for Israel’s sins to be imputed to an animal in their place.

Key Verses: Leviticus 17:11 (The wages of sin is death. The shedding of blood implies that a life has been taken). Leviticus 19:2 (You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy). Leviticus 26:11-12 (From the garden, to Jesus, to the New Jerusalem, God dwelling amongst His people is the goal).

Key Takeaway: The elaborate priestly system should help make us that much more thankful for Jesus, whose one sacrifice perfected for all time those who are being made holy (Heb. 10:14).

NUMBERS

Key Themes: The Faithfulness of God: The book of Numbers shows how God is faithful to gradually fulfill His promises to Abraham (land, seed, and blessing). Israel has been made into a great nation, God is blessing them with revelation and His presence, and they are on their way to Canaan to inherit the promised land.

The Rebellion of Israel: The faithfulness of God is in spite of Israel’s rebellion. The 40 years in the wilderness is a series of Israel rebelling, God punishing them, and Israel rebelling again. From year 1 to year 40 they do not get any better.

The Wilderness: The word “wilderness” is used 48 times in the book. Out of the 40 years that Israel spent in the wilderness, Numbers provides the historical account of years 2-40. Chapters 1-14 focus on year 2, and chapters 20-36 focus on year 40. The lack of information about years 3-39 speaks to what a waste it is to live life of rebellion against God.

Key Verses: Number 1:1 (The Lord speaks to Moses (incredible grace) from inside the Tent of meeting (this is proof that Leviticus worked!). Numbers 6:24-27 (Despite Israel’s rebellion, God was still determined to bless them).

Key Takeaway: Consider the character of God as revealed in Numbers. God is gracious and merciful, yet He will by no means clear the guilty. He punishes sin, yet He always provides a way of salvation from His judgement (like the ark, the bronze serpent, and the cross).

DEUTERONOMY

Key Themes: The Second Law: Deuteronomy means “second law”, not in the sense that it is a new law, but rather it recounts, reiterates and expands upon the previous four books. In Leviticus the emphasis was from the perspective of the priests (or the Levites), in Deuteronomy the emphasis is on the people and their obedience.

Moses’ Farewell Speeches: The majority of the book consists of 3 sermons and 2 poems from Moses. He is speaking to the second generation of Israelites, and he pleads with them throughout the book to obey the covenant and remain faithful to God, unlike their parent’s generation.

The Heart: As Moses pleads with the Israelites, he puts a special emphasis on their hearts. He commands them to “love the Lord their God with all their hearts.” The book also recognizes the reality that the Israelites need a new heart in order to follow the Lord. Prophets like Ezekiel and Jeremiah pick up on this and then this is ultimately fulfilled in the New Covenant.

Key Verses: Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (This is known as the shema, which became a daily prayer for Jews. The contents of this passage highlight all the major themes of this book. And Jesus later declares that this is the most important commandment in the entire Old Testament).

Key Takeaway: Obeying God is a matter of the heart, and we all needed a new heart as bad as these Israelites did. This should make us that much more thankful for the gospel, which makes a way for our heart to be made new.

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MAJOR THEMES IN THE PENTATEUCH

Key Themes: The Character of God: God is merciful and gracious, but He will by no means clear the guilty. The Pentateuch is full of sin, it is full of God punishing sin, and it is full of God graciously providing means of salvation from the judgement He is justly administering.

Covenants: The major storylines in the Pentateuch (and the entire Bible) hinge on the different covenants (Covenants with: Creation, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the New Covenant). The common denominator in every covenant is that God is faithful despite the fact that man is consistently not. Deuteronomy recognizes this and expresses the need for man to get a new heart, which is then ultimately fulfilled in the New Covenant.

Land, Seed, and Blessing: The Pentateuch zooms in and focuses on how God will fulfill His promises to Abraham. It ends with Israel being a great nation (in number), but it remains to be seen how they will inherit the promised land and how they will be a blessing to the nations.

Key Verse: Genesis 12:1-3 (Land, Seed, and Blessing); Exodus 34:5-7 (The character of God is revealed); Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (The Greatest Commandment)

Key Takeaway: The Lord is steadfast and faithful to fulfill all of His promises. But He needs a better human covenant partner. We need a better King (Adam), a better Savior (Noah), and better Son (Israel). We need Jesus.

JOSHUA

Key Themes: Possessing the Promised Land: Joshua provides a theological record of how Israel possessed the promised land. Ever since Genesis 12 the plot line has been developing to show how God is fulfilling His promises to Abraham (land, seed, and blessing). The emphasis in Joshua is on the fulfillment of the promise of land, as the word is used 102 times.

God as Warrior: Joshua is not a book about Israel slaughtering Canaan with God's permission. Rather, the book clearly shows that God and God alone is the one who is fighting (consider how the walls of Jericho fell), and that He is merely using Israel as an instrument of His judgment against a sexually perverted, child sacrificing, idol worshipping people.

Joshua is the new Moses: Like Moses, Joshua commands Israel to remain faithful to God and obey the covenant. Like Moses, Joshua sends spies into the land of Canaan. Like Moses, Joshua

leads Israel through divinely parted waters. Like Moses, God shows Joshua that He is steadfast and faithful, but will by no means clear the guilty.

Key Verses: Joshua 1:8 (If Joshua wants to lead like Moses did then he needs to meditate on the law day and night) Joshua 6:14 (God is the Warrior, Israel is just His weapon) Joshua 24:15 (Choose this day whom you will serve).

Key Takeaway: Everyday is a new day where we need to declare whom we will serve. And even when we are faithless, He is faithful.

JUDGES

Key Themes: Israel's Apostasy: Joshua ends with Israel's leader pleading with them to put away false gods and remain faithful to the covenant. Judges shows Israel's complete and utter failure to do this as Israel breaks the covenant in every conceivable way.

The need for a King: Judges is written as a justification for the monarchy. The fundamental problem with Israel's wickedness is that everyone did what was right in their own eyes, and the book attributes this to the lack of a king. This sets the stage for the rest of the Bible. The proceeding books look forward to a King who will do what is right in the Lord's eyes, not his own. Israel needs a king like David, a man after God's own heart. Or better yet, they need a King like Jesus.

Imperfect Leaders: The book of Judges gets its name because of the leaders at the time. Some of the judges helped stall Israel's apostasy for a moment, but as time goes on they get worse and worse to the point where the judges are responsible for accelerating the apostasy. The point that the book makes is that Israel needs a king, but their problems are deeper than political. Israel needs a spiritual leader, they need King Jesus.

Key Verses: Judges 2:11 (Israel did was evil in the eyes of the Lord) Judges 21:25 (everyone did what was right in their own eyes).

Key Takeaway: God has put certain restraints in place to mitigate human evil (like government). Behold what happens when some of those restraints are slightly removed.

PREVIEWING 1 SAMUEL

Key Theme: Israel gets a king: Judges ends with Israel's need for a king. 1 Samuel records how Israel gets a king. But this king fails as well. And even the man after God's own heart is not enough to change Israel. Israel needs more than a human king. They need Jesus.

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1 & 2 SAMUEL

Special Note: 1 and 2 Samuel were originally written as one book, which is very important to consider when studying the overall structure. The reason Samuel is broken up into two books in our English Bibles is simply because the scribes who translated the book from Hebrew to Greek could not fit it on one scroll. The same is true for Kings and Chronicles as well.

Key Themes: God is King: The major theme of Samuel is the universal Kingship of Yahweh. Yes, Samuel records the establishment of the monarchy in Israel, as well as the rise to power of both Saul and David. However, the narrator is clear from beginning to end that God is High King and earthly kings are subject to Him. This is evidenced most clearly in the fact that God is the one who raises kings to power, and God is the one who derails their reign when they forsake His Word.

History from God's Perspective: It is natural to interpret life's events through a merely human perspective. But Samuel teaches readers to look for God's sovereign hand in all things. Whether it be a major world event, like the rise of political powers, or a seemingly mundane event, like which cave you choose to relieve yourself in, the theocentric view of history that Samuel presents teaches readers to interpret every aspect of life through the lens of God's Sovereign Reign.

Messianic Promise: The events recorded in the book of Samuel took place roughly 1,000 years after God's promise to bless all the nations of the earth through Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3), and roughly 1,000 years before Christ came as the ultimate fulfillment of that promise. In 2 Samuel 7 God reveals that He will fulfill His promise to Abraham through David's line. This is known as the Davidic Covenant, where God promises to bless all the nations of the earth through a son of David who will sit on David's throne forever and ever. This is a monumental event in salvation history. Even though David was a man after God's own heart, he still failed and his kingdom suffered for it. Israel needed a king like David, but they needed a better David. They needed King Jesus.

Key Verses: 1 Samuel 2:1-10 (the theology of Hannah's prayer precludes all the major themes of the book). 2 Samuel 7:1-29 (specifically 13-19) (In one of the most important chapters in the Bible, God reveals that He will bless all the nations of the earth through a son of David).

Key Takeaway: Consider Samuel's theocentric presentation of history and let it encourage you to look everywhere for God's sovereign hand as you live out your life in His story.

1 & 2 KINGS

Rough Timeline:

- Around 1400 B.C. Israel entered the promised land.
- 1010-970 B.C. King David reigned.
- 970-931 B.C. King Solomon reigned.
- Around 930 B.C. The Northern Kingdom of Israel (10 tribes) split from the Southern Kingdom (Judah and Benjamin).
- 722 B.C. The Northern Kingdom is conquered and exiled by Assyria.
- 586 B.C. The Southern Kingdom is conquered and exiled by Babylon.

Key Themes: God is King: The book of Kings records 400 years of history about kings, kingdoms, empires, armies, prophets, and miracles, but what remains consistent throughout is that God is the One who is completely in control. Even when it seems like everything is out of control, God reigns supreme and accomplishes all of His purposes.

True Worship: The narrator evaluates every king based on the same criteria: Did they worship the God of Israel alone? Did they strive to rid Israel of its idolatry? Were they faithful to the covenant? These were the determining factors regarding whether or not the king (and therefore the nation) succeeded or failed. The Northern Kingdom had 0 of its 20 kings meet the criteria, while Judah had 8 faithful kings and 12 wicked kings.

The Word of God that Never Fails: On a specific note, the book of Kings has echoes of Deuteronomy throughout. The narrator is explicitly showing that everything that is happening is a direct result of obeying or forsaking the covenant, just as Deuteronomy said it would. Consider Deuteronomy 17 and the guidelines God gives for kings; Solomon breaks every single one of them and the appropriate judgements/consequences ensue. In short, the narrator's position is clear: Israel is getting exactly what they deserve. But on a broader note, despite Israel's apostasy, God is still faithful to keep His promises to Abraham and David, hence His preservation (even in Exile) of the Davidic line.

Key Verses: 1 Kings 2:2-4 (Echoing Moses to Joshua, David urges Solomon to remain faithful to the covenant), 2 Kings 17:7-23 (Israel gets exactly what they deserved).

Key Takeaway: Life is full of events that seem really important at the time. But when it is all said and done, in the grand scheme of eternity the only thing that will matter about your life is this: Did you worship God and God alone? Or did you lust after other gods?

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ISAIAH

Rough Timeline: 1010-970 B.C. David reigned → 970-931 B.C. Solomon reigned → 930 B.C. Israel and Judah split → 740-681 B.C. Isaiah prophesied to Judah → 722 B.C. Israel conquered by Assyria → 626-586 B.C. Jeremiah prophesied to Judah → 586 B.C. Judah conquered by Babylon

Interpretive Key: Isaiah does not have a neat introduction--body--conclusion. Rather, Isaiah has a thesis (judgement and restoration through the Messiah) that he presents and develops from 7 different angles. Each angle is a section on its own, but when they are all put together the 7 sections form one glorious picture. The 7 sections are: 1-2; 3-4; 5-12; 13-27; 28-39; 40-55; 56-66.

Key Themes: Judgement: Isaiah prophesied in the Southern Kingdom from 740-681 B.C. The Southern Kingdom was rampant with idolatry and social injustice. In other words, they were major violators of the first and second greatest commandments, and therefore breakers of the covenant in every conceivable way. Thus the prophet Isaiah preaches Deuteronomy in order to warn of the coming judgement and exile (See Deuteronomy 32:1 and compare it with Isaiah 1:2).

Restoration: Judgement is inevitable, but God has not forgotten His promises to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) and David (2 Samuel 7). Isaiah ends every series of judgement with hope of restoration (see sections above). The essential message of Isaiah is this: Zion (Jerusalem/the city of David/the capital city of God's chosen people) will be burned in judgement; but God will preserve a remnant and restore Zion to eternal glory and fulfill all of His promises to the patriarchs.

Messianic Hope: How will God restore this wicked nation and transform them into a nation that blesses all the nations of the earth? How will God take this split kingdom on the brink of destruction and establish from it a throne that lasts forever? Clearly the only hope is the coming Messiah. According to Isaiah, the Messiah will be born of a virgin (7), He will sit on David's throne forever (9), He will be anointed with the Holy Spirit (11), and He will come to set the captives free (61). But He will accomplish all of this, not as a conquering warrior, but as a dying servant (53).

The Centrality of God: The Bible is all about God, but Isaiah is explicit in its God-centeredness. Isaiah reveals a God who is holy, glorious, and completely in charge of history.

Key Verses: Isaiah 1:16-18 Judgement and hope for restoration. Isaiah 9:6-7 Why there is reason for hope for restoration. Isaiah 53 The way restoration will be accomplished.

Key Takeaway: Behold your God! Isaiah 40-55 contains some of the richest theology in the Bible.

JEREMIAH

About the Prophet Jeremiah: Jeremiah was a prophet in the Southern Kingdom. His ministry began during King Josiah's reign (626 B.C) and lasted for 40 years until they were conquered by Babylon in 586 B.C. Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet because his ministry was so difficult. The Bible only records him making 2 converts over the course of his 40 year ministry. He was unanimously rejected by his own people and eventually kidnapped and taken off to Egypt where he lived out the rest of his days.

Key Themes: Judgement: Jeremiah lived in the final days of Judah. He prophesied about the inevitable judgement (Jeremiah 11 lays out the covenant curses from Deuteronomy), and then he lived long enough to see his words come true. His message consistently shows how Israel has forsaken the covenant. Their nation is full of idolatry and social injustice (even to the point of child sacrifice). In chapter 25 Jeremiah announces that judgement is coming in the form of Babylon. But Jeremiah's focus is not limited to Judah. In chapters 46-49 Jeremiah announces that God will use Babylon to judge the surrounding wicked nations as well. Then in 50-51 Jeremiah announces that God will judge Babylon for its own wickedness and pride.

Salvation: Jeremiah primarily preaches a message of judgement and destruction. But sprinkled throughout is a message of hope that will build up and restore. Despite Israel's wickedness God is determined to remain faithful to the promises He made to Abraham and to David. In the middle of Jeremiah we find a beautiful promise that though Israel will be exiled, God will rescue them after 70 years (29:10-11). And the promises continue as assurance is given that David's throne is more certain than the rising and the setting of the sun (33:14-23).

The New Covenant: Beyond the hope of return from exile after 70 years, Jeremiah includes hope for all believers for all time. In chapter 31:31-34 God reveals that there will be a New Covenant. Up to this point, God has been faithful, but man has consistently broken his end of the covenant. But in the New Covenant God will write it on people's hearts so that it cannot be broken. Revelation of the New Covenant provides the trajectory for the entire New Testament.

Key Verses: Jeremiah 1:10 This provides a theme/framework for the whole book. Jeremiah 17:9 Jeremiah's diagnosis of all humanity is this: The heart is desperately sick. Jeremiah 31:31-34 Behold God's plan to give us a new heart!

Key Takeaway: 100's of years of Israel's history should convince us by now that our only hope to keep the covenant is a new heart.

EZEKIEL

Interpretive Key: The book of Ezekiel contains lots of visions. Ezekiel is attempting to use human words to describe apocalyptic visions of things humans have never seen. Therefore, naturally, they are hard to explain and hard for readers to understand. But that is okay. Just behold how transcendent our God is. Ezekiel also contains lots of oracles (a pronouncement from God through a prophet). Most oracles are initiated by Ezekiel saying “The word of the Lord came to me” (over 50x), and concluded by him saying “they shall know that I am the Lord (over 50x). Pay attention to when the oracles begin and end, and note that most of them will use imagery, poetry, and illustrations to communicate a message of judgement or a message of blessing.

Timeline: Ezekiel was among the first group of Jews that were captured and exiled to Babylon (around 598 B.C.). The siege and final destruction of Jerusalem officially culminated in 586 B.C. Ezekiel 1:1 picks up 5 years after he had been exiled (around 593 B.C) with Ezekiel in an Israelite refugee camp in Babylon. Ezekiel’s life would have overlapped with Jeremiah, and he clearly is aware of Jeremiah’s writings. But there is no evidence that they ever met.

Key Themes: The Holiness and Supremacy of God: Ezekiel writes to counter the popular assumption of the day that military victory was directly related to the strength of a nation’s gods. Thus Ezekiel shows that Israel is defeated and exiled, not because their God is weak, but rather because He is holy and punishing His people for their sin. Ezekiel defends the holiness, supremacy and reputation of God who is God over all peoples, nations, and idols.

Judgement of God’s people and the Nations: Chapters 12-24 uses poems, illustrations, and metaphors to communicate the depth of Israel’s sin. They have broken the covenant, they deserve the judgement they are getting, and the nations are God’s instrument of judgement. Then in chapters 25-32 the focus shifts to the judgement that is coming to the nations. God is not just the God of Israel; He is the God of all creation. Everyone will have to give an account to Him.

Hope for Restoration: Despite Israel’s sin, covenant infidelity, and exile, God’s mercy and faithfulness never end. After exile Israel has hope for a new heart that can actually obey the Lord (36). Even though the nation of Israel is dead, both physically and spiritually, the Spirit of God will breathe life into their dry bones and recreate a new people (37, which is reminiscent of Genesis 2 and foreshadows how one is born again (John 3)). And the temple will be rebuilt and the glory of the Lord will return! But this time, the glory will not stay in the temple. God’s glory will cover the earth and He will make all things new for all nations to enjoy a new eden (40-48).

HOSEA

Timeline: Hosea lived in the northern kingdom about 200 years after they broke off from Judah (930 B.C). He prophesied while Jeroboam II reigned, right before the Assyrians conquered them in 722 B.C. The book covers about 25 years.

Main Theme: Spiritual Adultery and the Lord's Compassion: Gomer's serial adultery against Hosea represents Israel's spiritual adultery against God. And Hosea's faithfulness to Gomer represents God's faithfulness to Israel. Even though Israel has broken the covenant, and even though exile is coming, God is promising a new exodus from slavery to sin through the seed of David in order to fulfill His promises to Abraham.

Structure: 1-3 covers Hosea's marriage to Gomer. In 4-11 Hosea accuses and warns Israel of breaking the covenant and the judgement that is coming. His main accusation is that Israel does not know their God. If they did they would not whore after other gods. In 12-13 Hosea gives a history lesson of Israel's unfaithfulness. And in 14 he concludes that there is still reason to hope because of God's promises to Abraham and to David.

JOEL

Timeline: Scholars do not know when Joel was written. But since he does not mention a king it is assumed that he wrote after the exile.

Key Themes: The Day of the Lord: Joel meditates on how God has punished evil and saved his people in the past (think Exodus), and this gives him hope that he will do this again in the future.

Repentance: The Day of the Lord is only good news to those who repent. So a major message of Joel's book is this: Repent! For the Day of the Lord is coming.

The Presence of the Lord: The Day of the Lord will be awful for those who do not repent. But for those who do it will bring restoration, mainly in the form of the Lord pouring out His Spirit.

AMOS

Timeline: Amos was a shepherd in the northern kingdom. His ministry overlapped with Hosea's.

Key Theme: The Justice of the Lord: Israel was very prosperous under the reign of Jeroboam II. Their prosperity led them to assume that the Lord was blessing them and that the Day of the Lord that the prophets kept talking about would only bring punishment on the surrounding wicked nations. Amos shows up to burst their bubble. He calls attention to their rampant idolatry and extortion of the poor. Amos calls out Israel's injustice and points them to the justice of the Lord.

Structure: 1-2 God is going to judge wicked nations, especially Israel. 3-6 Amos recalls the Abrahamic covenant and explains how if they really knew God it would change the way they treat people. 7-9 Judgement is coming, but there is still hope because of God's promise to David.

OBADIAH

Date: Sometime after the fall of Jerusalem (586 B.C.) and before the fall of Edom (553 B.C.).

Main Message: Edom descended from Esau (Jacob/Israel's brother). Despite this familial tie, Edom joined forces with Babylon and plundered Israel in 586 B.C. Thus Obadiah prophesies their downfall, as well as the downfall of all arrogant, wicked nations like them. But the book ends with a message of hope because of the coming king who will crush evil and establish justice.

JONAH

Date: Jonah lived in the northern kingdom a few decades before Assyria (whose capital city was Nineveh) wiped them out in 722 B.C.

Main Message: The book of Jonah is designed to prompt readers to marvel at the steadfast love and mercy of God and to reflect upon how far short their compassion for their enemies is compared to God's. This point is made abundantly clear at the end of the book as the prophet (supposed man of God) cares more about the life of a plant than an entire city's worth of people. Upon reflection readers should be (unlike Jonah) thrilled that God loves His enemies (Rom 5:8).

MICAH

Date: Micah's ministry roughly paralleled Isaiah and Hosea in Judah (around 730-700 B.C.).

Main Message: Micah is full of warnings of judgement and hope for restoration. Judgement is coming because Israel has broken the covenant (1-2). Judgement is coming in the form of Assyria and Babylon (3-4). But there is hope because God is like a shepherd who will gather His sheep. Chapters 5-7 continue the pattern of warning and hope with the conclusion that there is hope because God's promises to Abraham and David will never be defeated by Israel's sin. The name Micah means "who is like Yahweh?" The book ends with this rhetorical question (7:18).

NAHUM

Date: The book was probably written 30 to 50 years before Assyria fell to Babylon (612 B.C.).

Main Message: Nahum acts as a sequel to Jonah. Nineveh's repentance didn't stick, therefore their destruction was imminent. The book is a hymn of victory (before the battle had been won) meditating on the character of God (from Ex 34:6-7) and proclaiming the timeless truth that God does not allow wicked nations to stand forever, but He does preserve His faithful remnant.

HABAKKUK

Date: A few decades before Judah fell to Babylon (586 B.C.) around King Josiah's reign (640ish).

Main Message: The book consists of Habakkuk's prayers and God's responses. Prayer 1: "Why are you not doing something about all of Israel's wickedness?" God's Response: "I am. I am

sending Babylon.” Prayer 2: “What?! How is it just to punish us with a nation even more wicked than us?” God’s response: Babylon and all wicked nations like them will be punished. But there is hope because a Davidic King is coming to crush evil and lead a new exodus from slavery to sin.

ZEPHANIAH

Date: After the northern kingdom fell (722 B.C) and before the southern kingdom fell (586 B.C.).

Main Message: The destruction of Israel has done nothing to discourage Judah from its wicked ways. Thus Zephaniah announces God’s coming judgement on Judah and all wicked nations like them. But the book concludes with hope for all nations (think Abrahamic covenant) because Jerusalem will be restored, the people will worship God, and God will sing over them.

HAGGAI

Key Themes: The Persians conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. King Cyrus permitted Joshua (a high priest) and Zerubbabel (line of David) to lead a remnant home in 538. Haggai writes in 520 B.C.

Main Message: Haggai confronts the people for putting all their resources into rebuilding their own houses while the temple remained in shambles. Rebuilding the temple is vitally important because it represents the restoration of the covenant. The people agree, but their morale is low because they were hoping that the messianic promises would have been fulfilled by now. So Haggai encourages them to be faithful because God will be faithful to His promises, and the temple plays a key role in God’s fulfillment of His plans for the world through the Messiah.

ZECHARIAH

Date: Same time as Haggai (520 B.C.).

Structure: The first 6 chapters contain 8 visions. Visions 1 and 8 depict four horsemen who represent God’s rangers who keep watch over the whole earth. Visions 2 and 7 depict Israel’s past sin that led them into exile. Visions 3 and 6 depict the rebuilding of the New Jerusalem with a nation that is purified by the Scriptures. Visions 4 and 5 are about Joshua (the current High Priest) and Zerubbabel (of the line of David). These visions point to the fact that the future Davidic Messiah will be both Priest and King. Chapters 7-8 conclude these visions by talking about when the kingdom will come. Chapters 9-14 introduce a new genre of the book that look forward to the future messianic kingdom. This section reveals that Israel’s leaders will reject the Messiah, but they will not reject Him forever. There will be a day when God’s justice will defeat wickedness once and for all and the New Jerusalem will be a New Eden.

MALACHI

Date: About 100 years after the exiles returned home (roughly 440 B.C.).

Main Idea: The people did not learn anything in exile. They are just as hard hearted as their ancestors. God confronts their idolatry, their defilement of the temple, their divorce, and their lack of tithing (among other things). The people do not respond well. They accuse God of neglecting them and they conclude that it is pointless to serve Him because the wicked prosper and get away with it. The book’s final passage acts as a conclusion to the Torah and the prophets as a whole by pointing to a day where a new Moses and a new Elijah will come.

100 DAYS

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE ENTIRE BIBLE

Together
In The Word

PSALMS

General Overview: The book of Psalms (or the Psalter) is a collection of poems, songs, and prayers. It includes prayers of lament and songs of praise. It is honest about the full spectrum of human emotion. And it is explicitly God-centered, as it teaches readers to shape their emotions through the theological lens of the sovereign God of the universe who has promised to bless the nations and crush evil through the Davidic Messianic King. With all that said, the Psalter is not a random collection of writings thrown together in a book. Rather, it is very intentionally ordered with the intent of expressing Israel's history and anticipated salvation through song.

Date and Authors: The composition of the individual Psalms range from Moses (see Psalm 90), who lived in the 1,400's B.C., all the way down to after the return from exile (early 500's B.C.). Thus the dates stretch across 900 years, but the bulk (at least 73) of the Psalms were written by David (who lived 1,000 B.C.).

Genre: The Psalms introduce a new genre of literature and a new section in the Hebrew Bible (the order we are following). The first section is the Torah (Genesis - Deuteronomy). The word "torah" means law with an emphasis on instruction or teaching. The first five books certainly include lots of history, but the emphasis is on the law of the Lord that has been given to His chosen people. The second section is the Prophets (Joshua - Malachi), which record a history of Israel through the lens of the Torah (i.e. see how God has been faithful to His promises, see how Israel has failed to obey the Torah, and lots of preaching from the prophets to remember and obey the Torah). This background is incredibly important for understanding the purpose of the Psalms (and the rest of the Wisdom literature). The Psalms are not merely random poems meant to encourage you when you are having a bad day. The Psalms are a meditation on and celebration of the Torah, and a Holy Spirit inspired poetic retelling of Israel's history, with an emphasis on the hope that Israel has because of the Messiah. Thus the perspective of the psalmists is that theology is so relevant to your personal situation that your emotions can be shaped from lament to praise if you delight in the law of the Lord and long for the Messiah.

How to Read the Psalms Consecutively: Psalm 1 and 2 can be read together, as Psalm 1 begins with the promise of blessing for those who delight in the Torah, and Psalm 2 ends with the promise of blessing for those who take refuge in the Messiah. These two Psalms form an introduction and framework by which readers ought to read the rest of the Psalter. The Psalter is broken up into 5 Books: Book 1 (1-41), Book 2 (42-72), Book 3 (73-89) Book 4 (90-106), and Book 5 (107-150). Look for the theme of God's Word and God's Messiah to be central and developed

throughout each of the 5 books. God's people sing God's praises because of the gracious gift of the Torah, and the hope of the coming Messianic King who will be the perfect keeper of the Torah and establisher of a heavenly Kingdom where the Law of the Lord is enforced and obeyed. Thus look for the themes of God's Word and God's Messiah throughout, and see how the authors connect these themes to their present situations and allow them to shape their view of their sin within and the broken world around them.

The Overarching Message: Taking all of the above information into account enables us to construct the overarching message of the Psalter. Songs of praise are sprinkled throughout the first 3 Books (1-89), however they are outnumbered by prayers of lament. But there is a shift in Books 4 and 5 (90-150) where praise songs far outnumber lament, which culminates at the end with Psalms 145-150 each beginning and ending with the command to sing Hallelujah (which means "praise Yahweh"). This shift from lament to praise is profound, as the Psalms are honest about the hardships of life. So how do we get there? How do we get from lament to praise? The order of the Psalms is the key.

Books 1 & 2: The majority of Books 1 and 2 consist of Davidic Psalms that were prompted from specific situations that took place during David's life (many of which can be read about in 1 and 2 Samuel).

Book 3: Book 2 ends with a Psalm from Solomon, and Book 3 contains the Psalms about the exile, and ends with a Psalm lamenting the apparent end of the Davidic monarchy (Psalm 89). Thus it has been suggested that Books 1 and 2 give poetic commentary on the life of David, the transition from Book 2 to 3 marks the beginning of the reign of Solomon, and Book 3 sings the story of Solomon to exile.

Book 4: Book 4 is a response to the reality of the exile, and it starts with a Psalm written by Moses. The point is to encourage Israel to consider how God rescued their sinful ancestors from slavery in Egypt in order to give them hope for a second Exodus from exile.

Book 5: Considering the faithfulness of God moves readers into Book 5, which contains more Davidic Psalms. But these Davidic Psalms are not linked to certain recorded events in David's life. It is as if they are pointing to the future David, the promised Son of David. These Psalms sing about the Messiah who will keep the law perfectly, establish justice, crush evil, sit on David's throne, and warrant the praises of God's people and all of creation for ever and ever. Thus the transition from lament to praise is rooted in delighting in the law of the Lord, which points to the promised Davidic King.

JOB

Timeline: We know that Job was a real person (Ezekiel 14:14, 20; James 5:11), who lived in a real place that was far from Israel (Uz). There is no clear historical setting for the book, but this might be intentional considering the fact that the problem of suffering is timeless and universal.

Purpose: The book of Job seeks to equip readers to think theologically about the suffering in this world. It does this by recording lengthy dialogues between multiple characters who grapple with a few big questions: Is God just? Does He rule the universe according to justice? And if so, how does one explain Job's suffering? Each character presents a different perspective, and then God shows up and deconstructs every human perspective by revealing how limited it is.

Perspective A: Job's three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) argue that God is just, and that He always rules according to justice, therefore they conclude that Job must have done something to deserve what He is getting.

Perspective B: Job mostly rejects the theology of his 3 "friends." He knows his suffering is not a result of his sin. But Job is still infected with the over simplified theology to a degree. According to his theology, someone needs to be blamed. And at some points throughout the book he concludes that the only possible explanation is that God is to blame (see 19:6-7).

Perspective C: The fourth "friend" (Elihu) shows up in chapters 32-37 to rebuke the 3 friends and offer a more sophisticated reason for why Job is suffering. He suggests that God might not be punishing Job for past sins, but rather warning him and protecting him from future sins.

God's Perspective: God shows up in 38-41 and completely obliterates the simplistic theology of the friends, as if the God who orchestrates the universe can be put in a box. And He reveals to Job that he made conclusions about Him based on very limited evidence. Thus readers are encouraged to conclude that the reasons for suffering might not always be answered in this life, but God can be absolutely trusted to always do what is right.

PROVERBS

The Purpose of Wisdom: Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon are known as Wisdom Literature. The wisdom books do not appear to advance the storyline of Scripture, as they do not explicitly focus on the covenants or the coming Messiah. But taking a step back allows us to see how they fit perfectly into God's plan for redemptive history. God created the world, chose Israel, and sent Jesus for one primary purpose: His glory (Isaiah 43:7). Every other reason is secondary. God created man in His image so that He could populate the earth with His

image bearers, and thus bring glory to Himself. When man marred His image with sin God elected to choose one people and give them His law so that they could be a Kingdom of Priests (Exodus 19:6), mediating the glory of God to the world by becoming a holy nation through obedience to His law (Deuteronomy 4:5-8). And the purpose of wisdom literature serves towards this end; for people who fear the Lord, trust Him in the midst of suffering, and live according to the wisdom of His moral design for the universe will live a life that is glorifying to God.

How to Read Proverbs: A proverb is a short saying that offers some type of wisdom. It is not a promise, guarantee, or formula; rather it is based on probability according to the created order. While Proverbs is full of wisdom that promotes a life that leads to blessing, it is important to read it with the balancing perspectives of Job and Ecclesiastes. Yes, in general a life that fears the Lord and obeys His law leads to blessing. However, life is not always that simple (see Job).

Structure: Chapters 1-9 consist of 10 speeches from a father to a son and 4 poems from lady wisdom. Ch. 10-29 string together hundreds of proverbs that apply the wisdom of fearing the Lord to every aspect of life. Chapters 30-31 conclude with poems about the ideal proverb reader.

RUTH

Timeline: The events of Ruth took place a few generations before King David, during the time that the Judges ruled (approximately 1,100 B.C.).

Main Message: The author of Ruth demonstrates how God orchestrates the seemingly mundane events in life to weave them into His overarching purposes for redemptive history. For Ruth was a gentile widow who was graciously redeemed, became the great grandmother of King David, and foreshadowed the future Davidic King whose reign would bless Jews *and* Gentiles like Ruth.

SONG OF SOLOMON

Overall Message: The Song of Solomon (could have been written by Solomon, about Solomon, or simply in the wisdom tradition of Solomon) is a collection of love poems. The poems oscillate back and forth from the perspective of a woman and her beloved. The end of the book seems to suggest that the purpose is to communicate that sexual love is a divine gift that is to be cherished and stewarded. For love is like fire: it can give life or destroy it.

Interpretation: The interpretation of the Song of Solomon has prompted more debate and gained less consensus than any other book in the Bible. Jewish tradition has interpreted it as an allegory depicting God's love for Israel. Christians have historically interpreted it as an allegory of Christ's love for the Church. Recent scholarly arguments have suggested that it is simply meant to depict the divine gift of sexual love. A combination of all three interpretations is plausible. There are echoes of the garden of Eden throughout. This seems to suggest that the book depicts what relationships would be like unhindered by sin, what is still made somewhat possible because of the power of love, and what believers have to look forward to because of the coming Kingdom.

ECCLESIASTES

Main Message: Ecclesiastes records the oral teachings of a man referred to as the “Preacher” (or teacher), whom many people believe to be King Solomon. A word which the ESV translates as “vanity” occurs 38 times throughout the book. “Vanity, vanity, everything is vanity.” The word literally means “vapor” or “smoke.” The point being that life is so temporary and fleeting. The Preacher tells poems about time and death in order to show that no matter who you are and what you accomplish in your short little life, it will quickly disappear and be forgotten. Therefore the book is a challenge to consider what really brings purpose and meaning in life.

Purpose: The conclusion of the book is key to understanding the purpose of its message. The author (who is not the same person as the Preacher) reveals that the reason he records the teachings of the Preacher is not to communicate that everything under the sun is meaningless; but rather to communicate that living your life for the One who is above is the only thing that can give life meaning. Therefore, after the author uses the Preacher’s teaching to deconstruct any attempt to find meaning in life from anything other than God, he concludes by telling his readers to fear God, obey His commandments, and remember that judgment is coming. Thus living your life for the Lord is the only thing that is not “vanity.”

LAMENTATIONS

Timeline: The Babylonians laid siege to Jerusalem for years (which led to starvation, intense suffering, and lots of death), and then ultimately sacked and burned the city in 586 B.C. Lamentations is a poetic expression of pain, reflection, and hope from a man who experienced and survived this devastating event. Many assume that the author was Jeremiah the prophet.

Literary Design: Lamentations has been referred to as a “literary masterpiece.” Chapters 1-4 are acrostic poems, which means that each line starts with a corresponding letter in the alphabet. The Hebrew alphabet has 22 letters, therefore each poem has 22 verses (with the exception of chapter 3, which gives 3 lines per letter). The point seems to be that the author is expressing the full spectrum of pain and suffering from “A-Z”, he is giving order to that which is chaos, he is attempting to emphasize the reason for hope (in ch. 3), and he is admitting that even he cannot make complete sense of all the suffering (which is why chapter 5 is not an orderly acrostic poem).

Main Message: Life is hard (especially when you rebel against the Lord), but God is good. Israel forsook the Lord and broke the covenant. They received the just judgement that the prophets had warned about for centuries. However, nothing can thwart the covenant faithfulness of God. His mercies are new every morning. Therefore hope in him. That is the message of Lamentations.

ESTHER

Timeline: The story of Esther takes place in the capital city of the Persian Empire about 100 years after the Babylonian Exile. Some Jews had returned home upon the decree from Cyrus in 538 B.C., but many did not. Hence the population of Jews scattered throughout the Persian Empire.

Main Message: Unlike any other book in the Bible, Esther never mentions God. However, this is clearly by design to make a point because God's fingerprints are glaringly obvious throughout. It is a thrilling story about kings, queens, villains, vengeance, justice, courage, romance, and (most of all) God's sovereignty. Haman was not the first man to come up with a plan to exterminate the Jews, nor would he be the last. But Esther is a story of one of the many ways that God has faithfully preserved His people throughout history. And because He did so the offspring of Abraham and David were preserved, Jesus was born, the nations are being blessed with the gospel, and David will never lack a son to sit on his throne for all of eternity.

DANIEL

Timeline: Daniel was included in the first wave of Babylonian exiles (605 B.C). He served Nebuchadnezzar and his sons in the Babylonian court until Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. Cyrus made a decree that allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem (as prophesied by Isaiah and Jeremiah). But Daniel, who would have been 90+ stayed in exile.

Key Themes: The Preservation of God's People: Daniel is a story of hope for God's people who endure suffering and persecution at the hands of wicked, arrogant, worldly kingdoms. Daniel and his 3 friends are models for how to respectfully serve pagan leaders without compromising ultimate loyalty to God. The book includes multiple examples of how God can miraculously deliver those who are faithful to him (such as the fiery furnace and the lion's den).

The Humbling of God's Enemies: The events in the book of Daniel take place in wicked earthly kingdoms ruled by wicked, arrogant kings, and it includes multiple visions and prophecies of future earthly kingdoms which will also be wicked and oppressive. The book consistently reveals the kings (who represent the kingdoms) as beastly figures (whether it be in real life in the case of Nebuchadnezzar, or in the visions). The point seems to be that when people and kings and kingdoms arrogantly rebel against God it reverses the created order (think Genesis 1-2). Instead of having dominion over the beasts (like Adam was given), pride turns kings into the beasts they are supposed to rule.

The Hope of God's Kingdom: Even though the course of history has seen every wicked human kingdom be replaced by another wicked human kingdom, there will be a day when the Kingdom of God will be ushered in and the kingdoms of this world will fade away forever and ever. And God will do this through the one who is like the Son of Man (from chapter 7), the one born of a woman, who will crush the Serpent and his beastly seed, who will bring triumph for those who trust in Him, and who will reign forever and ever in a heavenly Kingdom that never ends.

EZRA/NEHEMIAH

Background and Structure: Ezra and Nehemiah were originally composed as one book, and the book is structured around its 3 main characters. Ezra 1-6 focuses on Zerubbabel (you might remember him from Haggai and Zechariah), who was among the first group of exiles that returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple upon the decree from the Persian King Cyrus in 538 B.C. The section starts with this decree and ends with the completion of the temple in 516 B.C. The next section (Ezra 7-10) skips forward about 60 years to focus on Ezra who leads another group of exiles home from Persia in order to cultivate spiritual renewal in Jerusalem. This section covers events from 458-433 B.C. The events in Nehemiah 1-7 overlap with the events in Ezra 7-10, but this section focuses on Nehemiah who leads a group of exiles home to rebuild the Jerusalem city wall (445 B.C.). Each section listed above begins with a Persian King being prompted by God to send a Jewish leader home to Jerusalem, then it records the success and opposition the leaders faced, and it ends with an unexpected and rather anti-climactic conclusion. All this sets up the point of the book, as revealed in Nehemiah 8-13.

The Pattern in Ezra 1-6: In fulfillment to the prophetic promises (see Isaiah 45; Jeremiah 29), King Cyrus was moved by God to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. The building project took about 20 years because of opposition from the descendants of the non-exiled Jews and the foreigners who had moved into the land over the past 70 years, and because of the moral depravity of the people. Once the temple was finally completed the presence of the Lord did not descend to the temple, which grieved the leaders as this was a major discouragement to their hopes of the near fulfillment of the Messianic promises.

The Pattern in Ezra 7-10: 60 years later God moves King Artaxerxes to appoint Ezra to lead another wave of Jews home. Ezra was an expert in the Torah, and he hoped to return and lead a spiritual renewal, but he was disturbed when he found that many of the Jews who had returned before hand had married foreign women (which was a major contributor to Israel getting exiled in the first place!). Ezra responds by issuing a mandate of divorce for all inter-racial marriages (for religious reasons, not racial), which is perplexing because of God's hatred of divorce.

The Pattern in Nehemiah 1-7: Upon permission from King Artaxerxes, Nehemiah returns home to rebuild the Jerusalem city wall. However, the locals believed that this was in contrast to the message of Zechariah, who prophesied that all nations would freely flow into Jerusalem.

Conclusion in Nehemiah 8-13: Ezra and Nehemiah combine efforts and attempt to lead the people in spiritual renewal as they emphasize not making the same mistakes that got their fathers exiled. But chapter 13 shows that their efforts ultimately failed, which contributes to the overarching point of the Old Testament: the only hope for the people of God is a new heart.

CHRONICLES

Timeline: 1,010-970 B.C David reigned → 970-931 B.C. Solomon reigned → 930 B.C. The Kingdoms Split → 722 B.C. The Northern Kingdom was exiled by Assyria → 605 B.C. First wave of Babylonian Exiles → 586 B.C. Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple → 539 B.C. Babylon fell to Persia → 538 B.C. King Cyrus made a decree to allow Jews to return to Jerusalem → 516 B.C. The temple was completed. → 458 B.C. Ezra returned to Jerusalem → 445 B.C. Nehemiah returned → Chronicles was composed sometime after this (probably around 400 B.C.)

Purpose: Chronicles (originally one book) is the last book in the Hebrew Bible. Internal evidence suggests that it was written after the events recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah. Thus the exiles had returned and the temple had been rebuilt, but the presence of the Lord had not returned and the promises of a Messianic Kingdom were nowhere in sight. Therefore the Chronicler provides a survey of Israel's history reminding them of God's faithfulness in the past in order to encourage obedience in the present and hope for the future. The basis of the Chronicler's message of hope is the Davidic Covenant, which leads to the emphasis of David's monarchy and Solomon's temple for the purpose of cultivating hope in the new David and the new temple that are still to come.

Structure: 1 Chron 1-9 record genealogies, which start with Adam and emphasize the royal line of Judah and the priestly line of Levi. 1 Chron 10-29 focuses on David, the ideal king who is a type of the one to come. 2 Chron 1-36 traces the history of the kings of Judah (unlike 1 & 2 Kings, which goes back and forth between Judah and the Northern Kingdom) in order to demonstrate to the coming generations what happens when you seek the Lord, and what happens when you forsake Him.

Key Themes: The New David: 1 Chronicles 17 recounts the Davidic Covenant (from 2 Samuel 7) where God promises to establish an eternal kingdom through David's offspring. The prophets develop this into the backbone of the Biblical narrative, and the Chronicler intends to encourage readers with hope by demonstrating that this promised Davidic King has yet to come.

The New Temple: The centrality of the Davidic Covenant implies the emphasis of two institutions. The first being the monarchy (see above), the second being the temple that was built (and rebuilt) by David's son(s) (see 1 Kings 8 & John 2:19). The new David and the new temple are foundational aspects of the coming kingdom of God, and therefore central to the reason for hope.

Forgiveness and Restoration: The Chronicler evaluates every event through the lens of seeking or forsaking the Lord. Even the best example (David) forsook the Lord at times, hence the emphasis on forgiveness and restoration to God that is made possible through atoning sacrifice and humble, repentant prayer.

Conclusion: Even though Chronicles was written after the return from exile, it ends (and therefore the Hebrew Bible ends) with the decree from Cyrus, and it literally ends mid sentence! This seems to communicate that the reason for hope is not the second exodus (the return from exile). Rather, it points beyond (we now know) to a new exodus from slavery to sin into the promised land of the Kingdom of God, led by the new Moses (Torah fulfilled), the new David (Prophets fulfilled), the perfect Son of God (Writings fulfilled): Jesus Christ, our prophet, preist, and king.

GOSPELS OVERVIEW

Why are there 4? Matthew, Mark, Luke and John provide theological interpretations of the most important historical events in the history of the world. Each gospel has its own key distinctives and unique points of emphasis, which are highlighted when comparing them to each other. Then when each individual portrait is studied as one they come together to provide one cohesive, inherent, compelling, masterful, beautiful picture of the life, identity, and work of Jesus Christ.

Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke are known as the synoptic gospels. The word “synoptic” literally means “to see with one eye.” They are named this way because of the significant overlap in content. Over 97% of Mark’s content is also in Matthew, and a significant portion of Mark is in Luke as well. While 90% of John’s content is unique to John.

How to Read the Gospels: The gospels are the climax of the best story ever told. They should be read and studied by every Christian for as long as he or she lives, for the beauty and the glory of what they communicate and how they fit together will never be exhausted. With that said, every reader should ask 2 questions of every section: (1) What is the author trying to communicate about who Jesus is? Every single passage is intentionally chosen to reveal the glory of the God Man. (2) Why did the author place this passage in the order that he did? The order of each section is generally chronological, but it is ALWAYS theological. For example, Mark includes a story of Jesus healing a blind man (Mark 8:22-26) right before Peter confesses that He is the Son of God (8:27-30). Do you see the connection? Many people could not “see” who Jesus truly was. But just like Jesus opened the physical eyes of the blind man, the Spirit opened the spiritually blind eyes of Peter. Peter once was blind but now he sees. The first miracle points to the second!

MATTHEW

Key Distinctives: Jewish Audience: The gospel according to Matthew was written by a Jew to a Jewish audience in order to show that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah and the fulfillment of the Old Testament. He begins his gospel with a genealogy that highlights the lines of Abraham and David in order to show that Jesus is the promised offspring who will bring blessing to the nations and the promised Son of David who will sit on his throne forever and ever. Matthew goes on to quote the OT 45 times, therefore providing a significant bridge from the OT to the New.

The Identity of Christ: While other gospels focus on Jesus’ identity as the Savior of the world, Matthew’s Jewish audience leads him to focus on the fact that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of David, the New Moses, and Immanuel.

Discourse: Matthew’s emphasis on Jesus being the New Moses leads him to include 5 lengthy sermons, with the major focus being the Kingdom of Heaven (AKA the Kingdom of God. Matthew’s Jewish audience was reluctant to use God’s name).

MARK

Key Distinctives: Narrative: In contrast to Matthew, Mark focuses on narrative, not discourse. Mark aims to reveal the identity of Jesus by showing what He did over against what He said. The narrative moves very quickly (“immediately” 45x), so it reads like a series of snapshots.

Miracles: Mark’s emphasis on Jesus’ actions results in over a third of his book consisting of miracle accounts. The purpose of these accounts is to inspire faith in Christ, who Mark is presenting as the Son of God (thus high Christology is a key distinctive of Mark, specifically the cross of Christ. For if He can walk on water and raise the dead, surely the resurrection is true).

Discipleship: Mark focuses on Jesus’ actions because he wants his readers to not merely know what Jesus taught, he wants them to live like Jesus lived. Anyone can acquire knowledge, but it is hard to follow Jesus. Mark’s aim is to compel people to follow Christ, for He is worthy.

LUKE

Key Distinctives: Salvation and Outcasts: Luke used the verb “to save” more than any other gospel. He went to great lengths to communicate that anyone can be saved, no matter who they are or what they have done. Tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners can be saved because Jesus came to save the sick, not the healthy. This emphasis leads Luke to include 17 stories about women (13 of them unique to his gospel) in order to show that women are welcome in the Kingdom (women were not allowed to be disciples of Rabbis at the time). Luke himself was a gentile outcast, which certainly contributed to his emphasis on the fact that anyone can be saved.

Prayer and the Role of the Holy Spirit: At every important event of Jesus’ life Luke records that Jesus was praying. Closely related to this is Luke’s emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit. These themes continue in the book of Acts as they are both mentioned in just about every chapter.

JOHN

Key Distinctives: 7 Signs: John’s purpose for writing was to convince readers that Jesus is the Son of God (20:31). Therefore he records 7 spectacular miracles that serve as “signs” to point to Jesus’ true identity. These signs include Jesus: turning 175 gallons of water into wine (2), healing a boy on his deathbed without even seeing him (4), healing a man who had not walked in 38 years (5), feeding 15,000+ people (6), walking on water (6), healing a blind man (9), and resurrecting a man who had been dead for 4 days (11). Each sign has special theological significance, and the overall point is to lead readers to conclude “Surely Jesus is the Son of God.”

7 “I AM” Statements: John records Jesus making 7 explicit claims to deity by stating “I AM... the bread of life (6:35), the light of the world (8:12), the gate for the sheep (10:7), the Good Shepherd (10:11), the resurrection (11:25), the way, the truth, and the life (14:6), and the true vine (15:1).”

The Upper Room Discourse: John 13-17 records Jesus’ last words to His disciples the night before He was crucified. This entire section is unique to John, but it includes some of the most precious passages in the Bible (such as teaching on the Holy Spirit, abiding, and the high priestly prayer).

ACTS

Structure: Luke wrote Acts as a sequel to his gospel in order to show how Jesus empowered His Church by His Spirit to bear witness about Him in Jerusalem (1-7), Judea and Samaria (8-12), and to the ends of the earth (13-28) (see Acts 1:8). The emphasis in the first 12 chapters is on Peter, who was the lead apostle to the Jews, but as the gospel spread into the gentile world the emphasis switches to Paul (the lead apostle to the gentiles) and Peter is phased out of the narrative. In order to legitimize the apostolic ministry of Paul (which many people doubted) Luke shows the parallels between his ministry and Peter's. Notice how both Peter and Paul preach that Jesus is Messiah, both cast out unclean spirits, both heal the lame, both raise the dead, both unknowingly heal someone (shadow/cloth) , and both are miraculously freed from prison!

Overall Message: Acts is all about the spread of the gospel, and it sets the tone for how the Church has fulfilled the Great Commission ever since. Key features of the gospel spread include: the gospel is for all nations, social classes, and genders; its spread is empowered by the Spirit; and spreading it might bring persecution or even death. The message to spread is that Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection prove that He is the Messiah, that He is King, and that His Kingdom has come. The necessary response is to repent and believe. The result of repentant faith is entrance into Christ's Kingdom, adoption into His family, and the privilege to continue His work.

Historical Context: For the past 2,000 years (Abraham to Jesus) the Jews had enjoyed being the lone people in covenant relationship with God. Their religious, cultural, and racial differences from gentiles fueled disdain and animosity between them. The reality of the New Covenant (which unifies Jews and gentiles as one under Christ) did not remove the animosity overnight. Luke is honest about this struggle, and it is a key factor in many of the New Testament epistles.

ROMANS

Purpose: Paul wrote his letter to the Roman church in order to unify the divisions between the Jews and gentiles. He aimed to do this so that they could be a healthy flagship church that could support his missionary ambitions to Spain. The result: the best gospel presentation ever given.

Structure: The gospel reveals the righteousness of God, the righteousness of man (both Jews and gentiles), and the power of God to save (1-4). The gospel brings redemption for all mankind and all creation through the man Christ Jesus (5-8). The gospel fulfills all of God's promises to Israel (despite how it might seem in the moment) (9-11). And the gospel is what unifies the Church.

Key Themes: All people are sinners in need of salvation. God is able to judge sin and save sinners. Justification has always been by faith. The law is good, but has never had the power to save. The death of Christ is central to salvation. God is completely sovereign over salvation. The Spirit empowers believers to live a holy life. And the gospel is for the glory of God!

1 CORINTHIANS

Purpose: Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians in order to address some of the many problems that had arisen since he left. The purpose of the book is straightforward: He names each problem and then helps them think about each one from a gospel perspective.

Problems and Gospel Solutions: Paul first responds to the divisions over who is the best Christian leader by reminding them that Christianity is all about Jesus. Leaders in the church are merely servants of Christ (1-4). He then addresses the many sexual perversions in the church and proclaims that purity matters because a believer's body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (5-7). He then deals with whether or not Christians should eat meat that was sacrificed to idols (8-10) and what is and is not appropriate during a church gathering (11-14). The answer to both of these problems is to love your neighbor as yourself. He concludes by destroying the notion that the bodily resurrection of Christ is irrelevant to being a Christian (15).

2 CORINTHIANS

Purpose: In this letter we learn that the Corinthians did not respond very well to Paul's first letter. Their response prompted Paul to return in person to rebuke them in what he calls "a painful visit" (2 Cor. 2:1). The painful visit led some of the Corinthians to humble themselves and repent. This letter was written to assure them that Paul had forgiven them and that they were fully reconciled, and to challenge those who still rejected him and to warn them of coming judgement.

Structure: In 1-7 Paul assures them of his forgiveness and responds to some of the reasons why they had rejected him as an apostle. He argues that his suffering does not disqualify him, in fact it does the opposite because of the paradox of the cross. He also has a long discussion about the old and new covenants, arguing that the Spirit being written on their hearts is further proof of his legitimacy. In 8-9 he talks about generosity being a gospel issue, not a money issue. And in 10-13 he concludes the letter with his challenge to those who still reject him.

GALATIANS

Purpose: A group of Judaizers had infiltrated the Galatian churches and convinced them that gentiles needed to be circumcised, abide by the kosher food laws, and observe the Sabbath in order to be part of God's covenant family. Paul writes to passionately refute them.

Structure: There is only one gospel: justification by faith alone (1-2). Salvation has always been by faith alone, even in the Old Covenant (3-4). Genuine faith leads to gospel transformation (5-6).

EPHESIANS

Key Theme: Unity in Christ: Paul writes to help the Ephesians marvel at God's eternal plan for salvation which has resulted in the redemption of all creation (including gentiles!) through Jesus Christ. In addition to being unified to Christ, Jews and gentiles can be unified with each other as one Church body, with Christ as the head.

Structure: Theology proclaimed (1-3) and theology applied (4-6).

EPISTLES OVERVIEW

The overarching aim of the New Testament epistles is to show the relationship between what one believes and how one lives. The perspective of the NT writers is that the gospel ought to change everything about you. How you live is a reflection of what you believe, and what you believe will determine how you live. The 2 major threats to sound doctrine and holy living are false teachers and persecution, which are both orchestrated by demonic forces waging war against the Church.

PHILLIPIANS

Historical Background: Philippi was home to a lot of retired Roman soldiers and therefore the city was brimming with patriotic nationalism and loyalty to Caesar. Paul wrote from prison to encourage the Phillipians as they endured intense persecution for their loyalty to King Jesus.

Overall Message: All the themes of the letter spring from the beautiful poetic retelling of the gospel in 2:5-11. Just as Christ humbled Himself, suffered, died, and then was exalted by God as King of creation; Christians likewise should seek to serve rather than be served, expect suffering, be willing to die for the gospel, and trust that God will one day exalt them. Paul spends the rest of the letter encouraging them to consider his example as he has followed Christ's, for it has brought him joy in the midst of suffering because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ.

COLOSSIANS

Historical Background: The Colossian church was in danger of being infiltrated by false teachers. Some false teachers were pressuring them to become Jews (think Galatians). Others were pressuring them to merely add Jesus to the pantheon of Greek gods.

Overall Message: Believing that Christ is one god among many, or that His gospel is not sufficient to save reveals a clear misunderstanding of who He is. Thus Paul writes to exalt Christ as the supreme Lord over all creation (no other gods besides Him) who perfectly fulfilled the law on our behalf (no works need to be added to His gospel). The response to who Jesus is ought to be complete devotion to Him and a transformed life through the power of His gospel.

1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

Historical Background: Paul saw many people come to faith within the first month of his arrival in Thessalonica. This prompted an intense wave of persecution that drove Paul and his travel companions out of the city before they had much time to disciple the new believers.

Overall Message: Paul uses both letters to encourage them to endure persecution and to answer their immediate questions, specifically about the Second Coming. In the first letter Paul rebukes false teachers and clarifies that Christ is in fact coming back. And since Christ is coming back it really matters how you live. Therefore, be holy! In the second letter Paul addresses those who were afraid that Christ had already returned and reassures them that nothing in all of creation will miss His return. Therefore the message of both letters: Christ is coming! But He hasn't come yet.

1 TIMOTHY

Historical Background: Timothy was Paul's spiritual son whom he sent to Ephesus in order to confront the infiltration of false teachers. The false teachers were majoring on the minors (like genealogies), they were teaching abstinence from food and sex, and they were motivated by greed. This letter aims to help Timothy work through the issues and establish a healthy church.

Overall Message: Timothy's task was not merely to remove the false teachers, he needed to fix the damage and raise up a healthy church. Paul helps explain that this starts with establishing godly leaders whose lives have actually been transformed by the gospel they claim to believe. Then these godly leaders can build up the church through prayer and sound doctrine so that their people can have the power and structure necessary for a transformed, holy life.

2 TIMOTHY

Historical Background: Paul wrote this letter as he awaited his execution. Most of his friends had abandoned him, therefore he was nearing death alone in a prison cell. He wrote to Timothy to pass along his mission to him and to encourage him to endure through persecution.

Overall Message: Paul encourages Timothy to consider Christ's example, who endured suffering for the joy that was set before Him; just as athletes, soldiers, and farmers endure hardship for the joy set before them. He encourages him to keep standing up to the false teachers, to major on the core doctrines of the faith, and to stand on the authority of the Scriptures which have the power to save and transform. Following Christ in this way will bring suffering, but Christ is worthy and will be with you in the midst of the suffering.

TITUS

Overall Message Paul had sent Titus to the island of Crete in order to address issues that had arisen in the churches. Cretans were notorious for lying, stealing, and brutal behavior. Some of this corruption had infiltrated the church. This letter aims to help instruct Titus as he removes the corrupt leaders, establishes godly leaders, and teaches the life transforming gospel of Jesus.

PHILEMON

Overall Message: Philemon was a Christian slave owner who had a slave (named Onesimus) wrong him and run away. Onesimus eventually became friends with Paul and gave his life to Christ. Paul writes to Philemon to show how the gospel transcends social status and has the power to reconcile any relationship. Thus Paul write to Philemon to reconcile with Onesimus and to invite him back as a brother and fellow slave of Christ.

JAMES

Overall Message: James was the half brother of Jesus who confessed faith in his brother after His resurrection and then became a prominent leader in the Jerusalem church. James is known as the Proverbs of the New Testament, and it echoes the Sermon on the Mount throughout. The first chapter acts as a table of contents, then the rest of the book picks up on each theme and expounds upon it. The main theme throughout is this: Faith without works is dead.

HEBREWS

Historical Background: The author and audience of Hebrews is unknown, but they were most likely Jewish (hence the name) because the author expects them to have a robust understanding of the Old Testament. Hebrews is written to encourage perseverance in the face of persecution.

Overall Message: The author encourages endurance by communicating the supremacy of Christ over all things. Christ is the supreme way that God has revealed Himself, better than angels and better than the Torah (1-2). Christ is the new and better Moses leading us into the new and better promised land of the Kingdom of God (3-4). Jesus is the great high priest and superior to the Levitical priesthood because He is perfect and always lives to make intercession for us (5-7). Christ's sacrifice is supreme because His one death is perfecting for all time those who are being saved (8-10). Therefore the author concludes: Christ's supremacy means that Christians should live by faith and not neglect such a great salvation, no matter how much we are persecuted for it.

1 PETER

Overall Message: 1 Peter is a letter to gentile Christians who were spread throughout modern day Turkey. Peter writes in order to help them view their suffering through the lens of the gospel, and then he shows how this applies to every area of life. Peter does this by proclaiming the greatness of salvation which has enabled these gentiles to be born again and adopted into the covenant family of God. Peter shows how they are the new exodus people rescued from slavery to sin and passed over because of the blood of Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God. Therefore Peter calls these gentile exiles to be holy, for they are the new temple, a holy priesthood, and a people called to be a blessing to the nations by proclaiming the excellencies of Him who rescued them out of darkness and brought them into His marvelous light. Peter uses all of this theology to encourage his readers to persevere through the suffering caused by oppressive authorities, unbelieving husbands, and wicked culture. And he especially encourages church leaders to shepherd their flocks to suffer well by urging them to follow the Chief Shepherd who suffered on their behalf.

2 PETER

Historical Background: Peter writes with the awareness that he is on the verge of execution. Therefore this letter acts as a farewell speech jam packed with his important last words. He specifically addresses false teachers who were teaching that Jesus is never coming back and that it does not matter how you live (in order to excuse their own sexual promiscuity).

Overall Message: Peter writes to announce that Jesus is absolutely coming back. Peter defends this claim by pointing to the Old Testament (which was written by the Holy Spirit) and his own eyewitness testimony (the transfiguration). Therefore Peter concludes that Christians should be holy, and that God has granted us everything we need to live a godly life. This is of utmost importance because worldwide judgement is coming, just as it did in the days of Noah.

1, 2, 3 JOHN

Background and Overview: John is writing to a group of house churches who are in crisis because some of the church members had forsaken the faith and were stirring up trouble in the congregations as they were trying to get people to leave the faith and deny Christ with them. 2 and 3 John give counsel regarding how to work through the interpersonal issues that have arisen as John encourages specific churches to love one another and beware of false teachers. 1 John is a poetic meditation on Jesus' teaching recorded in John 13-17.

Overall Message of 1 John: John writes to people who have been deceived by people who they thought were true believers so that they may know the true marks of a genuine Christian. John uses two metaphors about God in order to help illustrate what true Christians look like. (1) God is light, therefore those who are born of Him walk in the light and not in the darkness. (2) God is love, therefore those who are born of Him love Him and love others. Additionally true believers believe what the Scriptures say about Christ, that He came in the flesh as the God man and dwelt among us, and they desire to have fellowship with Him (the word abide is used 20+ in the letter). Therefore right Christology, obedience to the commandments, love for one another, and fellowship with Christ are all marks of a genuine Christian.

JUDE

Overall Message: Jude (a half brother Jesus) writes to encourage his readers to contend for the faith and fend off the false teachers who were claiming that God's grace is a license to sin. Jude gives multiple examples (like Sodom and Gomorrah) showing how this has never been the case. He ends with a charge to stay faithful to Jesus who is worthy of all glory, dominion, and authority.

REVELATION

Overall Message: John wrote to 7 churches in Asia Minor in order to encourage faithfulness through persecution warning them that it is going to get worse before it gets better. This leads him to write the climactic culmination of the entire Bible revealing where the history of the world is headed and how it will end. The book's overarching message unveils how the kingdoms of this world (along with the demonic powers behind them) will ultimately be conquered by the Lamb who was slain who will reign over His Kingdom with His blood bought saints forever and ever.

Tips for Reading: (1) Just about every verse of Revelation is an allusion to the OT in one way or the other. Specifically be aware of the cosmic conflict between Satan (the dragon) and his seed vs. Christ and His seed (Gen 3:15), the beasts that represent ugly sinful kingdoms (from Daniel), the Son of Man (Daniel 7), Babylon being the archetype city of Satan representing all kingdoms of this world in opposition to Christ, echoes of the Exodus plagues, the New Heavens and the New Earth representing a new and better Eden, and many more. (2) Notice how the conquering nature of the Lamb and His Kingdom comes through sacrifice, not bloodshed. His followers are called to faithfulness, not fighting. (3) Don't allow all the symbols, Old Testament allusions, and questions of historical timeline distract you from the main point: Jesus wins. All earthly kingdoms will fade. Only Christ's kingdom will stand forever. Therefore, remain faithful to Him, for He is worthy.