



CHAPTER ONE

THE BIG PICTURE

Modern man views history with disdain. Many would agree with Shakespeare that history is “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” Others would echo the more blunt assessment of Henry Ford: “History is bunk!” Casual students find history a dull recitation of facts and dates. Believers, however, find God in all history. It is truly HIS-story! The unshakable conviction of the Christian faith is that the Lord rules forever; his throne is from generation to generation (Lamentations 5:19).

A couple of definitions are in order. *History* is that branch of knowledge that records and explains the past. *Bible history* is the recitation and interpretation of the past that is recorded in the Bible.

Nature of the Bible

God-focus. The Creator has seen fit to reveal some of himself, his ways, and his will at various points and in various ways throughout history (Hebrews 1:1-2). This revelation is recorded in the Bible. The Bible, however, not only *contains* the word of God, the Bible in a unique sense *is* the word of God. Christian teaching is that God inspired or guided the biblical writers so that they

recorded only what was true and what God intended for mankind to know (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21). So biblical history is not the history of man or any movement of man; it is God's history. God is the ultimate author. God is the main focus. As every episode unfolds the reader must ask, "Where is God in this? Why does God record this incident? How did God use this incident for his ultimate purpose?"

Christ-focus. The ultimate purpose of God was to bring his Son Jesus into the world to become our Savior. On some level the entire biblical story prior to his birth points forward to his coming. Jesus taught his disciples to look for him in all of the Scripture. *"He said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.' Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures"* (Luke 24:44-45).

In the Old Testament Christ is revealed prophetically; in the New Testament he is revealed historically. In the Old Testament Christ appears in shadow, picture, type, and ritual. In the New Testament he appears in substance, person, truth, and reality. The longing of the Old Testament saints for a Redeemer is captured in the words of Job: *"If only I knew where to find him"* (Job 23:3). The satisfaction of New Testament disciples is expressed in these paraphrased words of Philip: *"We have found him!"* (John 1:45).

Without Christ the Old Testament becomes unexplained ceremonies, unachieved purposes, unsatisfied aspirations, and unfulfilled prophecies. The Old Testament can be likened to a mighty river flowing toward the ocean. Remove Christ and there is no place for the river to go. It simply is swallowed up by the sands of time like a river that flows into a desert.

Structure of the Bible

Two main divisions: A casual look at the Bible indicates that it is a collection of sixty-six individual books. These books fall into one of two main divisions called *testaments*. The word testament

means *covenant* or *agreement*. The older of the testaments contains the books that were written at least four hundred years before the birth of Christ. These books constitute the Jewish Scriptures to this day. Christians call this division the *Old Testament*. It consists of thirty-nine books. The other books of the Bible were written within sixty years of the death of Christ. These books are called the *New Testament*. Together the two testaments constitute the Christian Scriptures. Christians derive their understanding of God's will and ways from these books.

Variety. The Bible does not display the uniformity that one might find in reading a modern book by a single author. God did not provide the biblical writers with a style manual. Each expressed the message in his own way. So there is great variety within the Bible. One can find in the Bible prose and poetry. There are narratives, census figures, genealogies, letters, songs, sermons, blueprints, laws, visions, parables, and many other types of literature.

Nonchronological. The books of the two testaments are not arranged in the order in which they were written. For example, many scholars think the earliest book of the Old Testament is Job. In the modern Bible, however, Job is book number eighteen. In the New Testament the twentieth book (James) is thought by many to be the first book to have been written. While reading the Bible through from cover to cover is valuable for some purposes, it will not yield an accurate picture of how events actually unfolded.

Similarities. While the two testaments of Scripture are very different, there are also some striking similarities as well. Both testaments begin with a representative man—Adam the son of God (Luke 3:38) and Jesus the Son of God (Mark 1:1). Satan intrudes early in both testaments, first in a garden (Genesis 3), then in a wilderness (Matthew 4). In both testaments God chose to work with a special nation—Israel in the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:2), the church in the New (1 Peter 2:9). A law was given in both testaments. Moses gave Israel a law at Mount Sinai (Exodus 20);

Christ gave a law for his kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Both testaments conclude with a prophecy of Christ’s coming (Malachi 3:1; Revelation 22:12).

Arrangement of books. The arrangement of Old Testament books resembles that of the New Testament. Both testaments begin with books setting forth *foundational* facts—Genesis–Deuteronomy in the Old, the four Gospels in the New. The foundational books are followed by books setting forth a historical *framework*—Joshua–Esther in the Old; Acts in the New. Next in both testaments comes a section of books *focusing* on everyday problems of believers—Job–Song of Solomon in the Old; Romans–Jude in the New. Both testaments conclude with a section dealing with the *future*—Isaiah–Malachi in the Old; Revelation in the New.

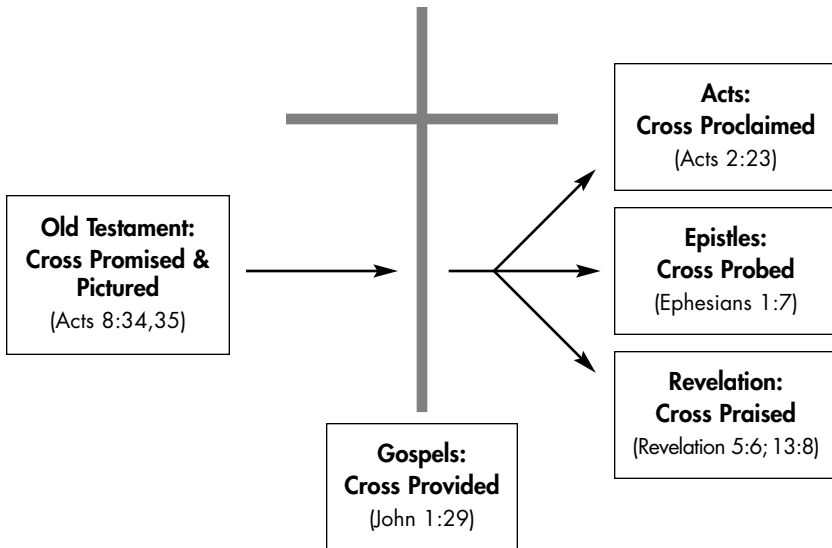
Unity of the Bible

Storyline. In the broadest possible terms one can see the unity of the Bible by comparing the opening chapters of the first book of the Bible (Genesis) with the concluding chapters of the final book (Revelation). The beginning/end comparison is displayed in the following chart.

Harmony of Theme	
In Genesis	In Revelation
Creation of Heavens & Earth	Creation of New Heavens & Earth
Beginning of Sin	Destruction of Sin
Beginning of Pain, Sorrow, Suffering, Death	End of Pain, Sorrow, Suffering, Death
Sinful man deprived of Tree of Life—Driven from Paradise	Redeemed Man Eats of Tree of Life—Restored to Paradise
Satan Victorious	Satan Defeated
Man Goes from Life to Death	Man Goes from Death to Life

Focus. At the Cross God provided redemption for sinful mankind. This means God paid the required price to release men from the bondage of sin. The required price was the blood of the perfect Lamb of God, Jesus. The New Testament centers redemption in Jesus Christ. He purchased the church with his own blood (Acts 20:28), gave his flesh for the life of the world (John 6:51). As the Good Shepherd, Jesus laid down his life for his sheep (John 10:11). He demonstrated the greatest love by laying down his life for his friends (John 15:13).

Norman Geisler's book *Christ the Key to Interpreting the Bible* (Moody Press, 1975) demonstrated that every section of Scripture, indeed every book of the Bible, points to Christ in some specific way. One could even argue that the Cross of Christ is the focus of the Old Testament, the Gospels, the Book of Acts, New Testament Epistles, and the Book of Revelation as the following diagram illustrates.



Biblical history is the history of redemption from start to finish. The Patriarchs (fathers of Israel) received the *promise* of redemption. In the rituals of Israel's worship there is a *picture* of

redemption. Throughout the history of Israel there is God’s *providence* leading to redemption. *Prophecies* of redemption characterize the Old Testament prophets. In the Gospels God made *provision* for redemption by sending his only Son into the world. In Acts there is the *preaching* of redemption. The Epistles stress the *perfection* of redemption. In Revelation the saints *praise* God for redemption.

Biblical Ages

All of the time covered in biblical history falls into three great Ages or Dispensations. An *Age* is a long period of time during which God deals with mankind according to an established set of principles. During each Age men are tested or judged according to their adherence (or lack thereof) to the principles that God has revealed. The three great Ages revealed in the Bible are:

- ❖ Patriarchal
- ❖ Mosaic
- ❖ Christian

THREE AGES OF BIBLE HISTORY		
Patriarchal Age	Mosaic Age	Christian Age
Time: <i>Creation to Sinai</i>	Time: <i>Sinai to Cross</i>	Time: <i>Cross to Coming</i>
Worship: <i>An Altar</i>	Worship: <i>Tabernacle/Temple</i>	Worship: <i>Church</i>
Sacrifice: <i>Burnt Offering</i>	Sacrifice: <i>Sin/Trespass Offerings</i>	Sacrifice: <i>Christ the Lamb</i>
Leader: <i>Family Head</i>	Leader: <i>Aaron’s Family</i>	Leader: <i>Christ</i>
God's Name: <i>El Shaddai</i>	God's Name: <i>Yahweh</i>	God's Name: <i>Father</i>
Illumination: <i>Starlight</i>	Illumination: <i>Moonlight</i>	Illumination: <i>Sunlight</i>
Key Word: <i>Promise</i>	Key Word: <i>Precepts</i>	Key Word: <i>Perfection</i>

God's expectations of his people were different in each of these three great ages. Each Age had its own *facts to believe, commands to obey, warnings to heed, and promises to embrace*. What God required and/or permitted in the Patriarchal Age was not necessarily tolerated or required in the Mosaic Age. By the same token, Christians are not required to obey all of the 613 commands in the Law of Moses. The specific terms of salvation after the Cross are not necessarily the same as those prior to the Cross. In the Mosaic and Christian Ages the light of God's truth shone ever brighter. God's nature, will, and goals became ever clearer. The chart above summarizes the major differences between the three great Ages.

Biblical Timeline

Pivotal characters. If one is familiar at all with biblical history, he will have heard of Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus. Another figure, perhaps not quite as well known, is Nehemiah, the last major character of the Old Testament. Using these five great figures of the Bible as anchors, we can establish a broad outline of biblical history. For now we will use only round figures for dates.

Abraham lived about 2,000 years before Christ. That is easy to remember because we live about 2,000 years after Christ. Roughly 600 years intervened between Abraham and Moses. That puts Moses at roughly 1,400 years before Christ. Between Moses and David roughly 400 years elapsed. That means that David lived roughly 1,000 years before Christ. Roughly 600 years intervened between David and Nehemiah. That puts Nehemiah (end of the Old Testament) at roughly 400 years before Christ. This scheme is easy to remember. It looks like this:

2000 BC Abraham	600	1400 BC Moses	400	1000 BC David	600	400 BC Nehemiah	400	AD 6 Christ
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We can remember the five key pegs of the Bible timeline with this mnemonic device:

A Mouse Drinks No Coffee

Timeline books. The timeline for Bible history is established primarily by eleven Old Testament books and five New Testament books. These books may be called *forward motion* books because they move the history of God’s people forward in a more or less chronological sequence. They are listed on the top line of the two charts below. Books on the second line may be designated *pause*, *sidestep* or *focus* books. The material in the focus books must be inserted into the timeline established by the top line.

OLD TESTAMENT TIMELINE								
Genesis	Exodus	Numbers	Joshua	Judges	1&2 Sam	1&2 Kings	Ezra	Nehemiah
↑↑Job↑↑	↑↑Leviticus↑↑	↑↑Deuteronomy↑↑		↑↑Ruth↑↑		↑↑Pss–Hab↑↑ 1&2 Chron	↑↑Esther↑↑ Haggai Zechariah	↑↑Malachi↑↑

NEW TESTAMENT TIMELINE		
Matthew Mark Luke John	ACTS	
	↑↑Romans–2 Thessalonians↑↑ Philemon James	↑↑1 Timothy–Titus↑↑ Hebrews 1 Peter–Revelation

Let’s  right here, catch our breath, and review what we have learned so far. It’s as simple as counting to five:

- ONE Unified Book
The Bible
- TWO Great Collections
Old and New Testaments
- THREE Major Ages
Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian
- FOUR Expectations
Facts, Commands, Warnings, Promises
- FIVE Pivotal Characters
Abraham, Moses, David, Nehemiah, Christ

Biblical Periods

Bible students generally break up the biblical timeline into periods based on the conditions of God's people, the nature of their leadership, or events that transpired. These periods are marked off on either end by major events designated *watershed events* in this study.

Patriarchal Age. In the Patriarchal Age there were four distinct periods. These periods will be discussed in detail in the chapters that follow. For now just concentrate on mastering the big picture.

- 1 **Beginnings**
- 2 **Scattering**
- 3 **Pilgrim (2092 BC)**
- 4 **Egyptian (1877 BC)**

In the Patriarchal Age God was educating his people in some of the fundamental principles of faith and obedience. Try this mnemonic device for recalling the four periods that make up the Patriarchal Age:

Beggars Scare Pilgrims in Egypt

The first letter of each word should jog your memory regarding the name of one of the four periods that constitute the Patriarchal Age.

Mosaic Age. More attention is given to the Mosaic Age in Scripture. Ten distinct periods are marked off by watershed events. These ten periods will be discussed in the chapters that follow.

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|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 5 Wilderness (1447 BC) | 10 Assyrian (723 BC) |
| 6 Conquest (1407 BC) | 11 Babylonian (605 BC) |
| 7 Judges (1367 BC) | 12 Persian 539 BC) |
| 8 Single Kingdom (1043 BC) | 13 Silent (400–6 BC) |
| 9 Sister Kingdoms (931 BC) | 14 Incarnation (6 BC) |

Jesus lived and died under the Mosaic Age. His death on the Cross as the perfect sacrifice for sin marked the climax of this Age, which lasted almost fifteen hundred years.

Now we have a real challenge. Can you remember the names of the ten periods that make up the Mosaic Age? Try this mnemonic device, or make up your own:

We Can Join Single Sisters And Bring Pickled Sandwiches In

Christian Age. The first seventy years of the Christian Age are part of New Testament history. These seventy years are divided by watershed events into three periods.

15 Pouring (AD 30)

16 Pauline (AD 39)

17 Persecution (AD 63)

Here is another one of those crazy mnemonic devices to help you remember the good things that God has promised us in the Christian Age. Our Christian promises are just as sweet as:

Plum Pudding Pie

We have completed our bird's eye view of the terrain to be traversed in the following chapters. So then, let's get started.