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## CHAPTER 1.1

# Studying the Bible

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**ERIC C. REDMOND**

*Man shall not live on bread alone, but man shall live  
on everything that comes out of the mouth of the LORD.*

DEUTERONOMY 8:3

The words above were quoted by Jesus in Matthew 4:4 and Luke 4:4 during His temptation in the wilderness. They remind us that life consists of more than our physical appetites and corporeal existence. Food would have satisfied Jesus' hunger after forty days and strengthened his body, since the human body certainly requires "bread," i.e., physical sustenance, and Jesus acknowledged that. However, man is not merely a creature of physical existence. Made in the image of God, man reasons, creates, has language, and can make moral decisions. He "shall not live on bread alone," but his deepest needs are met by "everything that comes out of the mouth of the LORD." In this particular scenario, Jesus called on the Word of God during His battle with the devil. In feasting on the Word of God, the Lord Jesus experienced victory and blessings from God the Father.

This image of words coming from the mouth of God agrees with previous and later descriptions of the Word of God in Scripture (e.g., 1 Kings 8:15; 2 Chron. 35:22; 36:12; Ps. 36:3). All Scripture is inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16), originating in His mouth before being penned accurately by the hand of the human author. The writer to the Hebrews describes the Scriptures as God *speaking*, having power greater than any earthly, human-made sword that pierces and exposes what is inside of a person (Heb. 1:1–2; 4:12–13; 12:25).<sup>1</sup> The assumption of the biblical authors is that God has spoken, that what they have written are the very words God has spoken,

that these words continue to speak because they are living, and that God makes His person, works, and will known through these very same words.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, becoming readers of Scripture with understanding is important to the task of hearing God speak. This chapter presents tools for reading Scripture well so that we might become discerning hearers of the voice of God. We will discuss the preparation for hearing the Lord speak from Scripture, focusing on the tools of spiritual orientation and background study. We will then examine hermeneutics, or interpretation, giving attention to various literary genres represented in Scripture, then move to discerning the message, and end with application.

### PREPARATION: SPIRITUAL ORIENTATION

*Spiritual orientation* relates to the nature of the Word of God as a divine work, and our relationship to it as such.

God is a being completely different from us. The Lord is without beginning and end, having life within Himself, being the only completely independent being—one whose existence depends on no one and nothing else. He is the “I AM” (Ex. 3:14), the everlasting God (Isa. 40:28). His speech is divine and unique. It comes from an eternal being—the Creator Himself, who spoke all things into existence.

In contrast, though made in His image, as fallen creatures we are sinful, spiritually blind, ignorant of God, and darkened in our understanding of Him.<sup>3</sup> Our natural capacities allow us to obtain information in knowable areas such as math, science, literature, the arts, and history. But God is not knowable to sinners by means of our own capability, and we cannot force our way into knowing Him. Knowing Him must be something He initiates by His grace, on the basis of Christ’s work of redemption for us (Eph. 1:17–19; 2:1–6).

Therefore, in order to hear God’s voice from Scripture and in order to know the mind of God, one must be a believer (1 Cor. 2:14–16), a person who has placed his or her faith in Christ and has been redeemed by Christ from the fallen, spiritually blind state.

As believers, however, we are not then left to our own intellectual capacities to make sense of what we are reading or hearing the Lord say. Instead, Scripture portrays the need for the Lord to open our eyes in order for us to gain insight from His Word. We may pray with the psalmist, “Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your Law” (Ps. 119:18). The psalmist does not lack in physical vision; instead, the psalmist is asking for spiritual insight into God’s ways.

Therefore, because we understand the Word of God to be *living*, being the very voice of God, we must ask the Author of Scripture to make Himself and His truth

known to us. We cannot barge into His presence and attempt to know Him by force of our will. The need for the Lord to open our capacity to understand His truth and its significance places us in a position in which we must seek Him and walk in humility in our own knowledge before Him. We must ask the Lord, in His mercy and grace, to reveal the truth of His Word to us.

### **PREPARATION: BACKGROUND STUDY**

*Background study* relates to the Word of God as a human work written by, to, and within ancient cultures. Not only should we pay attention to the spiritual orientation of our hearts in preparing to study God's Word, we also need to orient ourselves to the world of the biblical text. That is, we must attend to its historical, cultural, and social context.

While reading the Scriptures, we should be cautious to avoid both *under-reading* ancient cultural understandings in our texts and *over-reading* the ancient cultural practices into the significance of the text. Under-reading implies not paying enough attention to the historical background of a text and thus missing some of the purpose or richness of a passage or book. Likewise, an over-reading of a portion of Scripture can result in treating it as of mostly historical significance than of the spiritual message it intends to convey.

#### **UNDER-READING TEXTUAL BACKGROUNDS**

We must first recognize that the original readers were aware of cultural ideas inherent in the text but unfamiliar to us. They understood practices such as a barren woman giving her handmaiden to her husband as a surrogate, so the story of Sarah and Hagar in Genesis 16 might seem to be a natural or common occurrence to them. They would be familiar with the hospitality customs of the first century that Simon the Pharisee failed to practice when Jesus commended the woman from the city who wiped His feet with her tears and hair (Luke 7:36–50). We cannot ignore that such a cultural literacy exists in the milieu of the biblical writers and their original audiences.

It is within the work of background study that one endeavors to discern the *occasion* of a biblical book.<sup>4</sup> "Occasion" connotes the historical circumstances of the writer and original audience in relationship to each other that prompt the writing. For example, in Habakkuk, the references to the violence in Judah (Hab. 1:2), the Lord's calling of the Chaldeans to bring judgment upon Israel (1:6–11), the three "Selah" insertions (3:3, 9, 13), and the note to the choirmaster (3:19) allow one to reconstruct an occasion for the writing of this book. Seeing the lack of judgment

as promised in the law, the prophet Habakkuk questions the justice of God and receives prophetic oracles. The prophecies answer questions concerning justice for both the prophet and the people who are reflecting on the destruction of Jerusalem and deportation of the children of Judah. While Habakkuk spoke to a generation facing coming judgment, the writing of his prophecy gives evidence of reception by an exiled audience in need of explanation of the justice of God's judgment through their oppressors. That audience is invited to *sing* the words of Habakkuk with the same settled disposition the prophet has with the Lord's sovereignty in Judah's judgment.

Similarly, in 2 Timothy, there are references to Timothy's tears (2 Tim. 1:4), shame concerning Paul's imprisonment (1:8), the "last days" (3:1), Paul's coming martyrdom (4:6), the desertion of Paul's coworkers in the gospel (4:9–12, 16), and the coming of winter (4:21). Such references, and many like these, allow the reader to discern a tone of urgency. The writing of 2 Timothy is prompted both by Timothy's need to remain steadfast in the work of the gospel in the face of being without Paul, his spiritual father and mentor, and by Paul's desire to receive ministry from Timothy before his execution. In each of these examples, we observe the importance of identifying the historical occasion that informs the writing.

### **OVER-READING TEXTUAL BACKGROUNDS**

Although understanding the historical situation behind a text is important, we should remember that the biblical writer is a prophet of the revelation of God, not simply a purveyor of his particular social and literary context. When a cultural allusion is found in a passage of Scripture, we may assume it is there to illumine the spiritual aspect of that text.

For example, salt had many uses in the first century, such as to flavor, preserve, fertilize, parch, heal, or repair, and even to reduce slipperiness over marble surfaces after a rain. Biblical writers do not need to communicate an entire cultural milieu within a single text that mention salt; they do not suggest that we must understand the full gamut of how salt was used. Instead, they draw from the culturally relevant aspect that transcends cultures.<sup>5</sup>

Having a recently published Bible dictionary and Bible encyclopedia (to benefit from the latest scholarship) will help an interpreter ascertain information about the various ancient cultures represented in Scripture. It is recommended that Bible study reference works come from a conservative interpretive stance that holds to the inerrancy of the Scriptures. This guideline is especially important about the dating of biblical books. For example, Exodus, Isaiah, Daniel, Mark, John, and 2 Peter, whose dates of writing strongly influence the interpretation of their works, are a few of the books receiving unnecessary skepticism due to misinterpretation of

background-related data and the reconstruction of the occasion of these writings.<sup>6</sup> Fortunately, we have many excellent resources that hold to the truth of Scripture to aid our understanding.

## HERMENEUTICS: GENRE, MESSAGE, AND APPLICATION

With a posture of humility before the Lord and background information in hand, one can move toward interpreting a text—a process often referred to as *hermeneutics*. Hermeneutics is the art and science of interpreting a text, so biblical hermeneutics is the art and science of interpreting biblical texts. We study a text both in relation to its immediate literary context, as well as in relation to the broader context of Scripture. In this chapter, our hermeneutical approach considers matters of genre, message, and application. These three elements will help us draw out the meaning of a passage and suggest how to put the passage into obedient Christian practice.

### GENRE

Genre simply refers to a *type* or category of literary work and incorporates a recognizable pattern that has its own features and communicates its meanings to us in a manner different from other types. For example, *narrative* as a genre communicates meaning via the interactions of characters within the plot of a story. One recognizes this genre when the writer tells a story, such as the account of Joseph in Genesis or the beautiful book of Ruth. *Poetry* communicates through expressive language. One recognizes poetry when reading a psalm, proverbial statements, the speeches in Job, much of Old Testament prophecy, and the songs in Luke 1–2.<sup>7</sup> The biblical writers most often employ narrative and poetry within the canon of Scripture to communicate the voice of God.<sup>8</sup>

Given the different interpretative tools for just these two categories, we are reminded of the importance of respecting genre as we read. Proper interpretation involves reading according to the particular rules of a given genre, rather than imposing the rules of another. To ignore this would be to ignore the means by which the Holy Spirit uses the writer to communicate the revelation of God. We would not use the same tools, for example, to interpret the book of Romans as we would Ecclesiastes.

While some variation exists among scholarly designation of genres in Scripture, there is general consensus of these: narrative (which includes history), parable, poetry, law, letters, wisdom, prophecy, and subsets of each. We will examine these seven with a view toward approaching Scripture intelligently for greatest understanding.<sup>9</sup>



**Narrative:** As indicated above, at the most basic level, narrative literature is story. The narrative genre in the Bible encompasses the historical books, the Gospels, and Acts. These books tell of true events. Narrative consists of a sequence of events, tied around a *plot*, the intentional sequencing of the movement of a story from beginning to middle to end. The story revolves around a *goal*, a *conflict* or series of conflicts, and the *resolution* thereof. Every biblical story has a plot, whether in the Old or New Testament. Thus, all biblical stories work the same way at a macro level.

The *plot goal* is *the intended outcome of the story*. In order to identify the *goal* of a story's plot, one should ask questions of the passage such as "Where is this story going?" "What is at stake in this passage?" "Based on the opening verses or scenes of the story, how would one expect this story to unfold and resolve?" The plot goal invites us to consider what we would expect to happen if, without interruption, the character(s) in question achieves, completes, finds, or understands at the end of the story what the character(s) intends to achieve, complete, find, or understand at the beginning of the story. The plot goal sets the literary trajectory of the story, inviting a reader to anticipate or imagine how a story on this trajectory might travel and end in a perfect world.

The *plot conflict(s)* are the hurdles, obstacles, interruptions, or changes that take place in a story to keep the plot goal from coming to immediate fulfillment. In order to identify the conflict or conflicts, one may wish to ask about the passage, "What takes place here that prevents the plot goal from being achieved immediately?" "What do the characters in question need to overcome to achieve a positive outcome (or a negative outcome) to the story?"

The *plot resolution* is the outcome of the story and how it unfolds. In order to identify the resolution, one should ask, "How were the original tensions in the story resolved?" or, "What outcomes occur and how?" Everything in a story that is not part of the plot goal or plot conflict(s) is part of the plot resolution, whether that be dialogue, an unexpected ending or twist, narrator commentary, more story, or even the absence of any movement toward relieving the story's tension. The plot must account for everything in a narrative passage of Scripture.

The story of Abram in Genesis 15 is a good example of narrative. In this account, we find the plot goal: assurance for Abram that God's promise that he will have a son will be fulfilled. The plot conflict is Abram's lack of an heir in his household. In the resolution, the writer of Genesis resolves the tension between Abram's desire for assurance and the lack of an heir as God gives Abram a promise, Abram responds in faith, God provides a covenant with pronouncement, and Abram sleeps.

**Parable:** Parable is a narrative sequence that makes a comparison between common experiences and historical realities to clarify, exemplify, or magnify historical

theological discourse.<sup>10</sup> As a narrative sequence, it is an interaction of setting, character, point of view, and dialogue revolving around a plot. Thus, parables need to be analyzed as stories. As literature that makes a comparison between the common experience and historical reality, parables draw from shared experiences of hearers such as sowing, baking, fishing, feasting, shepherding, building, squandering wealth, relations between the rich and the poor, canceling of debts, and the planting of vineyards. Common experiences, although drawn from realities, are not historical realities in their telling. The common experience is then related to something in the real (nonfiction) world of the audience and author of the parable. The parables themselves teach theological truth indirectly, like truth about forgiveness or truth about being a neighbor (e.g., Matt. 18:35; Luke 10:36–37).

Parables' correspondence to historical realities requires the interpreter to ask, "What issue does the parable raise?" No parable is told in isolation from the gospel account's history around the speaker of the parable. Consider Luke 10:25–37: The legal expert's question about the identity of his neighbor prompts the parable of the Good Samaritan. Only with the expert's attempt to justify himself—which is part of an attempt to ascertain the congruency of Jesus' teaching on eternal life with the law of Moses—does Jesus begin the parable.

One should approach this parable as a narrative, in which the plot goal is for someone to stop to help the man robbed and beaten. This goal comes into conflict with the priest's and Levite's apathy toward the man and his plight and is resolved when a journeying Samaritan provides abundant and sacrificial compassion to the man. Bandaging and providing medicinal help would have been common, but the progress to the inn and events thereafter reveal excess and sacrifice.

The characters and issues within the parable correspond to the characters outside of the parable. For example, the priest and the Levite, being religious experts in the Mosaic law, correspond to the legal expert who posed the original question about who was his neighbor. The man robbed corresponds to the "neighbor" in question. The Samaritan, as model neighbor, portrays one ideally following the law—as one who demonstrates possession of eternal life. The Samaritan proves himself a neighbor.

Luke 10:36–37 provides a common post-parable dialogue in which Jesus is able to commend the expert to do the same as the one who showed mercy. That is, the Samaritan's evidence of being a neighbor receives Jesus' commendation to be followed by the expert in the law. This idea then informs the resolution of the full narrative: *eternal life's relationship to the law demands those who know about the law to be a neighbor.*

**Poetry:** Poetry is highly concentrated language used to communicate the poems, prayers, prophecies, and songs of the people of God throughout the Old Testament and in some passages of the New Testament (e.g., Luke 1:46–55, 68–79; 1 Cor. 13; Phil. 2:5–11; 1 Tim. 3:16; 2 Tim. 2:11–13; 1 John 4:7–12).

Unlike English poetry, which functions largely according to the conventions of rhyme and meter, Hebrew poetry communicates via many literary devices, a common one being parallelism.<sup>11</sup> *Parallelism* is the sharpening or focusing of meaning in two or more lines of poetry.<sup>12</sup> For example, in Proverbs 16:32, there are two lines of poetry, and the lines have similar, parallel ideas in them. One can visualize by writing them out:

One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty,  
and one who rules his spirit, than one who captures a city.

We can easily catch that the two lines together actually convey a singular idea. The broader idea, “slow to anger,” is sharpened in the second line, “rules his spirit.” The spirit of a person is ruled so that anger does not control. The imagery of someone conquering a city portrays this mighty person as a warrior who commands others en route to victory. The person with self-control over his or her individual anger proves to be one of greater might than the person who commands troops to rout a municipality.<sup>13</sup>

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations are considered the books of poetry in the Bible, though poetic passages permeate Scripture. For example, Judges is classified as a historical book, yet Deborah’s song, poetry, is recorded in chapter 5. As has been reiterated, the genres in Scripture do not fall within concrete boundaries. A book or a passage may contain more than one genre.

Other literary devices such as imagery, metaphor, simile, and personification are found throughout the Bible’s poetic literature. Imagery is a poetic device that adds flavor to prose by creating a response. Song of Solomon is loaded with imagery that beguile the senses. In chapter 2 alone we have sweet fruit (v. 3), lovely flowers (v. 12), singing birds (v. 12), fragrant vines (v. 13). The rich imagery in the six short verses that comprise Psalm 23 evoke responses of peace, care, darkness, hope, assurance.

Metaphor and simile are techniques that make use of comparison. These techniques are illustrated in passages such as Psalm 23; Proverbs 1:8–9; 10:20; 25:11; Lamentations 4:2; and countless others. Personification is endowing nonliving or nonhuman things with human characteristics. Psalm 98:8 is a well-known example of this device. Proverbs chapter 1 through 9 is a tribute to wisdom and often speak of wisdom as a woman who should be heeded (e.g., 4:6–9, 13).

The student of poetic literature in the Bible will be greatly enriched by keeping an attitude of discovery of the various literary techniques employed throughout Scripture.

**Law:** The first five books of the Old Testament are considered the books of the law. However, because Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers are historical narrative, we will consider Exodus 20–40, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy as the major portions that present the law—the Mosaic law.

The Mosaic law covers civil, ceremonial, and moral matters. As Francis Turretin surmised, “The law given by Moses is usually distinguished into three species: moral (treating of morals or of perpetual duties towards God and our neighbor); ceremonial (of the ceremonies or rites about the sacred things to be observed under the Old Testament); and civil (constituting the civil government of the Israelite people).”<sup>14</sup>

Civil laws provide instruction for social relations between the people or between the people and their leaders, such as the kings. They instruct in matters of governing authority. The ceremonial laws instructed the Israelites on the prescribed system of religious sacrifices, holidays and feasts, offerings, and other rites. Moral laws intended personal piety based on God’s holy character; the Ten Commandments are the epitome of the moral law.

As the civil and ceremonial laws were tied to Israel as a covenant nation, they seem to have come to an end in Christ’s earthly work in redemption. The local church member does not need to provide a wave offering, make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times per year, keep the Passover, or give the land rest every seventh year. It would seem that these aspects of the law have passed away (Matt. 5:18; Rom. 10:4).

However, the stipulations of the moral law seem to be consistent throughout history and binding on all persons. Except for the command to keep the Sabbath, all the Commandments are repeated in the New Testament as instructions for believers.<sup>15</sup> Even so, it is Paul who writes, “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God” (1 Cor. 7:19). It is evident that no one principle governs the interpretation of the law, and neither is it possible to draw out any so-called universal principles from the law. Instead, faithful interpretation of each passage of the law should consider the relationship of a moral law to one of the Ten Commandments. Similarly, it should consider how as each civil, ceremonial, and moral law points to Christ and His work, and how the work of Christ has fulfilled that law in part or whole.

**Letters:** Another category or genre in the New Testament is the letters. Thirteen letters are attributed to Paul, with others written by Peter, John, James, and Jude. The authorship of the epistle to the Hebrews is uncertain.

Among the letters, “epistles” generally follow the form of Greco-Roman letter-writing of the time, beginning with the greeting from the writer to the recipient(s), a blessing, the body of the letter, and ending with a final exhortation and often personal greetings. In the body of the work, epistles offer readers logical structuring of their arguments, greater familiarity with the biography of the author, the historical setting of the audience, and many clues to the historical situation in focus. Without either a greeting or ending, “sermonic letters” like Hebrews, James, and 1 John share a similar content to the epistles. Therefore, interpreting the literature of the letters requires the reader to understand the characteristics of the audience and the historical occasion prompting the writing in order to accurately follow the flow of arguments of the writer.<sup>16</sup>

Various themes found in the letter include the preeminence of Christ and the joy of knowing Him, the priority of the grace in sanctification, justification by faith, works as evidence of conversion, correction of false teaching and its resulting false morality, encouragement in the midst of persecution, exhortation to remain faithful, future events, spiritual fruit and gifting, and church governance. The letters are replete with personal touches (2 Tim. 4:13) and emotion (Phil. 1:3–4; 2 Tim. 1:4). The entirety of the content of the letter stems from the gospel of the four Gospels; the letters are the outworking of the gospels in the life of the church universal and local assemblies, and the lives of individual believers.

A reader should approach the letters looking for the writer and recipients; clues to the historical occasion of the letter; any conflict, misunderstanding, or exhortation; and references to the death and resurrection of Christ. All the letters were written to address what was occasional to the original recipients, but their teaching is as relevant and practical to the church today as it was in the first century.<sup>17</sup>

**Wisdom:** Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes are generally classified as books of wisdom, since all three works have complex literary designs of mixed subgenres. That is, Proverbs’ large passages in chapters 1–9 and chapter 31 differ from the aphoristic and axiomatic statements of chapters 10–30. The observations in Ecclesiastes 1–2 differ from those in 4–6, the proverbial statements of 7–11, and the monologues of chapters 3 and 12. Very evidently the narrative portions of Job 1–2 and 42 differ from the cycles of dialogue in 3–42.

Therefore, focusing only on the proverbial statements of wisdom, two guidelines are important for reading wisdom.<sup>18</sup> First, wisdom literature is revelation

from God about the sages' observations of people over the course of their lives. As revelation from God it is true and truth. But it is true in the sense that wisdom is true: *it speaks in generalities, not promises*. However, in the truth of wisdom, to ignore wisdom is to ensure one's own destruction.

Second, within the individual statements, clusters, themes and chapter-units of the proverbial statements, the statements with respect to wisdom and righteousness invite the reader to choose to follow their truths in order to be blessed by staying on the path of blessing. A whole chapter may lead to a choice (e.g., Prov. 5), or a smaller unit may lead to a choice (e.g., Prov. 16:1–9).

Third, specifically related to the Proverbs, but important for reading all proverbial statements, one discerns three types of purposes: (1) to give people skill for navigating the issues and events of life, (2) to give people discipline (training) for living the skilled life, (3) and to give people discernment for counseling and insight into the words and ways of others. Thus, one should attempt to discern if the statements in Proverbs are for gaining skills for living, for training that will lead to skillful living, for gaining discernment, or a combination of such.

**Prophecy:** Prophecy is revelation that reproves, pronounces judgment, and announces consolation to historical audiences in Israel through the composition of a prophet's sermons or oracles.<sup>19</sup> It is *revelation* from God as evidenced by a statement such as "the word of the LORD came" (Hag. 1:1; Jer. 14:1) or the word "vision" (Dan. 8:1; Obad. 1:1; Nah. 1:1). It reproves the sin of the nation or individual within the nations (Isa. 1:2–23), pronounces judgment upon such sins (Isa. 1:24–25), and announces consolation to such a one (Isa. 1:26–31). It is most often in poetic form, which allows one to analyze its meaning using the same conventions for analyzing the poetical literature.

The fulfillment of prophecy is a complex issue because a prophet often spoke of events of a near historical fulfillment in the same sermon or oracle as events of far futuristic fulfillment (Isa. 61:1 in Luke 4:18–19), or spoke of both in the same terms (Ps. 24:7–10).<sup>20</sup> We refer to the discerning of the differences in prophetic fulfillment as *historical fulfillment*, *first advent fulfillment*, and *second advent fulfillment*. Historical fulfillment refers to completion of a prophetic promise within the period of Old Testament history. First advent fulfillment refers to the completion of a prophetic promise within the time of the earthly ministry of Jesus and the ministry of the apostles. Second advent fulfillment concerns prophetic promises associated with the events of the tribulation period and Christ's earthly return.

Prophetic fulfillment also may be *partial* or *complete*. Partial fulfillment indicates that a portion or aspect of a prophetic oracle has been fulfilled at a point in history, but the fulfillment of the remaining aspects and/or portions of an

oracle await later fulfillment. Complete fulfillment means that every aspect of a prophetic oracle was completed when its fulfillment was announced or revealed in history.

### MESSAGE

Integrating spiritual orientation and background studies with hermeneutics, including consideration of genre, prepares the reader to discern the *message* of the passage. Each biblical writer intended to communicate one central idea in a passage, and that such an idea can be restated by the reader in one complete sentence. This sentence will be reflective of the cultural setting, genre, and structure of a portion of Scripture.<sup>21</sup> This sentence also is intended to reflect God's voice in the passage, if we understand that God is the one speaking through the human writer and has safeguarded the writing and transmission of the biblical text so that it is free from error.

The message of a passage consists of two parts: *subject* and *complement*. The *subject* is what the author is talking about, and will be stated as an incomplete sentence, as it will be *completed* by the *complement*. More specifically, the subject is *the most talked about idea in a passage that unifies all other ideas in a passage*.<sup>22</sup> The *complement* is what the author is saying about the subject, adding more detail.

Discerning the subject and the complement prepares the reader to hear, obey, and communicate God's voice. For what we are saying in this stage is that the Divine Author of the passage, speaking through the human author of the written work, has spoken one main idea to His audience. Recovery of the message intends to help the reader hear what God is talking about in a passage rather than allowing one simply to bring one's own ideas to and impose them on the passage. Faithful interpretation requires submitting oneself to the authority of the author and the author's ideas—the central idea of the text.

In order to discern the subject of the message, the reader should begin asking, "In general, what is the main thing this passage is talking about?" and/or, "What idea takes up the most space in this passage or unifies the ideas in this passage?" Using Matthew 1:18–25 as an example, we see that Joseph's response to the announcement of Mary's virgin conception is key to the passage. The focus on his response begins with "she was found to be pregnant" and carries through the remainder of the passage. The subject is not the birth of the Christ, the fulfillment of the promise of the virgin birth, or trouble surrounding the announcement of the birth of Christ. These are ideas in the passage, but they do not unify the passage or take up the bulk of space. *Joseph's response*, however, brings all these ideas together.

Once you approach a subject, ask six questions of the proposed subject: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? The goal of asking these questions of the subject is to narrow down the nuances of the author's message so that the one-sentence meaning will be as accurate as possible.

You want to identify if there is a person *who* is the focus of the subject, *what* the action of that person is, *when* the action of the subject occurs, *where*, if location is relevant, *why* the subject happens, and *how* the subject happens. Every passage answers at least one of these questions, and some passages answer more than one.

The complement consists of everything in the passage that is not the subject. The complement is the commentary made on the subject by the writer, i.e., what the writer is saying about it.

In the example above, the commentary on Joseph's response to the announcement of Mary's virgin conception is that it honors the angelic announcement (1:20–21, 24), allowing Christ's birth to fulfill Scripture (1:22–23) in righteousness and without shame on Mary (1:19, 25), and naming the child Jesus (1:25). The complement gathers together the ideas communicated by all the other contents in the passage. The subject plus complement forms one sentence that communicates God's voice in this passage: Joseph's response to the announcement of Mary's virgin conception honors the angelic announcement, allowing Christ's birth to fulfill Scripture in righteousness and without shame on Mary, and naming the child Jesus. This is the *message* of Matthew 1:18–25. All passages of Scripture, regardless of genre, have a subject and complement, and work in a similar way.

### **APPLICATION**

*Application* is the task of relating what God has said in His Word to a modern audience. It addresses concerns such as worldview, conviction and repentance, obedience, and service. The Scriptures must be acted on, not simply heard and learned (Deut. 12:28; Ps. 119:109–10; Acts 20:32; Col. 3:16; James 1:19–25), so the process of understanding ends in humble, obedient practice in response to the message of a passage.

Asking these questions begins the process of application: (1) Does this apply to me? and (2) How do I apply this? The first question concerns the *relevance* of a passage to a modern audience, and the second concerns one's *response* to the relevance of the passage. For a spiritual leader or teacher, these questions must extend to relating them to the congregation or group you are keeping charge over.

The authors of the Scriptures intended their writing to speak to an *original* audience. Therefore, a question we should ask of each passage of Scripture is, "Does this message relate to us in the same way in which it did to the original hearers?"



For example, do the instructions for building the tabernacle relate to the church in the twenty-first century the same way they related to Moses's recipients who lived centuries before Christ? If so, then why do we not assemble before the tabernacle three times per year to celebrate the feasts of Israel? If not, why not, and what then shall we do with the entirety of Exodus 25–40 as believers?

Or, as another example, do Paul's instructions concerning tongues and prophecy relate to us in the same way they related to the Corinthians? If so, should we have interpretation of tongues available when we assemble for worship, and should women in the gathering be silent during the speaking and interpretation of tongues? If not, then to what issue(s) should we relate Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 14?

Proper application of any passage of Scripture requires us to reconstruct the message of a passage into a contemporary applicational statement.<sup>23</sup> We employ two strategies to assist in this reconstruction. First, we must consider the message in light of what else the Lord reveals as He continues to speak in Scripture. Second, we must consider the message in comparison to how the Lord was dispensing His purposes in an ancient period versus what has changed in dispensing His purposes in light of Christ's entrance into the world.

Now let's briefly return to the sample passage from which we have already gleaned a message: *Joseph's response to the announcement of Mary's virgin conception honors the angelic announcement, allowing Christ's birth to fulfill Scripture in righteousness and without shame on Mary, and naming the child Jesus*. The three elements of the message—Joseph, Mary, and the naming of the Christ child—do not continue in the remainder of the revelation of Scripture. But this does not mean the passage only applied to Joseph and Mary. The believer will ask how this passage is relevant to him or her today—whether it is the presentation of a tenet of Christianity or how the faith is lived out. Likewise, a pastor in a corporate setting or a Bible study leader will guide in application of Scripture. Those of us reading Matthew 1 today are neither Joseph nor Mary, the historical figures. Can the pronouncement of the virgin conception be applied, since that was a one-time event in history?

What is gained by considering the message of Matthew 1:18–25 in light of the full canon of Scripture, and the changes in the dispensing of God's purposes, is that the passage invites a modern-day audience to live in response to the truth of the fulfillment of the virgin birth prophecy. That is, the relevance of this passage to a modern audience concerns the manner in which a righteous person responds to the completed revelation about the virgin birth of Jesus. A modern reader does not likely receive a divinely authoritative revelatory dream, meet a young maiden who is pregnant with the Savior via a virgin conception, or fulfill

the related Isaiah prophecy (Isa. 7:14). All these concepts within the passage have been completed. However, the Scriptures continue to speak about the significance of the virgin birth of Jesus for the believer. Part of our Christian living rests on the fact of the virgin birth and God's faithfulness to His prophetic word, foretelling of that birth.

We need not use this space to analyze Matthew 1:18–25 in depth, but the reader or church leader can take a few principles of application in a way that will bear on application of other passages. The subject of this one—*Joseph's response to the announcement of Mary's virgin conception*—calls the believer to act in grace and righteousness in accordance with God's Word, following the example of Joseph. We can maintain righteousness, like Joseph, and be gracious—as gracious as it is for the Lord to give the Christ on our behalf and be faithful to His promise to do so. We can give grace because of the faithfulness the Lord showed to His promise. God's faithfulness and the power of God for us—power that was displayed in the virgin-born Christ—are both supporting us as we also try to respond righteously to another's sin or shame.

Unlike Joseph and Mary, we have not been called on to name the Christ, but to trust the name of Jesus—the Christ of whom fallen history has awaited and now has been revealed (see Col. 3:17; 2 Thess. 1:12; Heb. 1:4; 12:2; 13:20–21).

Having read a passage as part of all of Scripture and in light of the entirety of redemptive history—the story from creation to the kingdom of Christ, that is all of Scripture—we need to be obedient to what we have read. So now we want to put into practice the teaching, rebuke, correction, or training in a passage of Scripture. We need specific responses that tell us what to *do* with the truth of the passage in our daily walk with Christ—in our love of God and of our neighbor.

## CONCLUSION

The goal of reading Scripture is to produce lives that honor Christ and experience intimacy with God. To live in this manner, we must first hear God speak from the ancient text. Once we have used our genre clues and discerned the message God is speaking through the terms of the text, we then also must discern how that message applies relevantly and practically to our own walks before the Lord. These are the first steps in cultivating Christian lives that do not live on earthly bread alone, but on the very words of God.

## NOTES

1. See also Ephesians 6:17 and Revelation 1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21.
2. See Isaiah 40:8; Zechariah 1:6; Matthew 24:35; Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11; 1 Peter 1:23, 25.
3. See 2 Corinthians 3:12–4:4 and Ephesians 4:17–23 for a fuller discussion.
4. Space limitations do not permit a lengthy discussion of the reconstruction of the occasion of texts and the rhetorical strategy of the writer and/or editor(s) with respect to an original audience. Many individual commentaries on each book of Scripture will provide such discussions with respect to the biblical book in focus.
5. For more on discerning the meaning of terms based on a pattern of usage of terms—or “types”—also known as a process of “type-logic,” see E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 25.
6. For introductory matters related to the dating of Old Testament books, see K. A. Kitchens, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Tremper Longman III and Raymond Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006); Eugene Merrill, Mark Rooker, et al., *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2001). For New Testament books, see Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament: Countering the Challenges to Evangelical Christian Beliefs* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016); D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005); Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, et al., *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016); Peter J. Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).
7. Historically, the church refers to the four poetical passages in Luke 1–2 as “Magnificat” or “Mary’s Song” (1:46–55), “Benedictus” or “Zechariah’s Song” (1:68–79), “Gloria Patri” or “The Angels’ Song” (2:13–14), and “Nunc Dimittis” or “Simeon’s Song” (2:29–32). Yet it is evident that Zechariah’s song is a prophetic oracle (1:67) and Simeon is offering a prayer (2:28).
8. “Next to story, poetry is the most prevalent type of writing in the Bible” (Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984], 87).
9. For general instruction on interpreting the various genres of literature, see Robert H. Stein, *Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).  
 Space limitations for this submission do not permit detailed discussions of every genre used in Scripture. For more on interpreting the letters and epistles, see Lisa M. Bowens, *African American Readings of Paul: Reception, Resistance, and Transformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020); Sherri Brown and Francis J. Moloney, *Interpreting the Gospel and Letters of John: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017); John Harvey, *Interpreting the Pauline Letters: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012); Karen H. Jobes, *Letters to the Church: A Survey of Hebrews and the General Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); and Thomas R. Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).  
 For interpreting apocalyptic literature, see Paul Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach*, rev. and exp. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2006); and Richard A. Taylor, *Interpreting Apocalyptic Literature: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2016).
10. For more on this theory of parable, see Elliott E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 173–74.
11. I use “Hebrew poetry” here rather than “biblical poetry” in order to contrast it with a form of Western literature. In doing so, I also recognize that New Testament poetry is largely spoken or written by descendants of Israel who had faith in Christ. Therefore, New Testament poetry reflects the conventions of Hebrew poetry, as the speakers and writers made use of the forms of the Hebrew culture. It is easy to see that the New Testament hymns of Paul reflect a Hebrew form rather than a Homeric form (e.g., Phil. 2:5–11; 1 Tim. 3:16).
12. Following Robert Lowth’s *Lectures on Sacred Poetry of the Hebrew* (1753); an older definition of parallelism said that it is the *repetition* of meaning in two or more lines of poetry. The idea was that the second (and third, and fourth lines, etc.) only repeated the first line in different terms. However, works by Kugel, Berlin, Alter, and Garrett have advanced the discussion. See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1993); James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981).
13. There are multiple types of parallelism in biblical poetry. Non-technical discussions on various parallelism types include George L. Klein, “Poetry,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed., Baker reference library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 615–616; T. Longman, “Poetry,” *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 938; Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Proverbs* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 39–42.

14. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 11.24.1.
15. In order of the commandments:  
 1st—Luke 4:8; Rev. 14:7; 2nd—Acts 15:20; 1 Cor. 6:9–10; 3rd—1 Tim. 6:1; James 2:7; 5th—Eph. 6:1–3; Col. 3:20; 6th—Mark 10:19; Rev. 21:8; 7th—Matt. 5:27–28; Rom. 7:2–3; 8th—Eph. 4:28; 1 Peter 4:15; 9th—Matt. 19:18; Eph. 4:5; 10th—Rom. 7:7; Eph. 5:3–5; Col. 3:5.
- Some places in the New Testament will give many of the Ten Commandments in a group listing, as in Mark 10:17–19 and Rom. 13:9. In 1 Tim. 1:8–10, Paul refers to the bulk of the Ten Commandments implicitly: “We know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and worldly [3rd], for those who kill their fathers or mothers [5th], for murderers [6th], for the sexually immoral [7th], homosexuals [7th], slave traders [8th], liars, perjurers [9th], and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching.”
16. In addition to other resources mentioned in this article for interpreting letters, the student would do well to consult the works of John Harvey and Andreas Köstenberger to address specific concerns in the interpretation of letters: John Harvey, ed., *Interpreting the Pauline Letters: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012); Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Hermeneutical and Exegetical Challenges in Interpreting the Pastoral Epistles,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 7 (Fall 2003): 4–17.
17. The basis of such a claim rests on believer’s shared identity as “God’s holy people” (aka “saints,” Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1), “brothers and sisters” (Col. 1:2; James 1:2), “the church” (1 Cor. 1:2), “churches” (Gal. 1:2), “in Christ” (Eph. 1:1), and like terms. Consider the shared identity of contemporary believer with the original recipients of 2 Peter: “To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours” (2 Peter 1:1 NIV).
18. The “guidelines” are not intended to suggest the student vanquish the *literal* (meaning of a term in its context), *grammatical-historical* (historical meaning of terms and the full implications of such terms), *literary* (consideration of the genre and structure in which meaning is communicated), and *theological* (revelation of God and His works) premises which guide one to the message (meaning) with a text or texts. They are the application of such premises to the book of Proverbs.
19. For more on understanding the various forms of prophetic speech, see Bill T. Arnold, “Forms of Prophetic Speech in the Old Testament: A Summary of Claus Westermann’s Contributions,” *Ashland Theological Journal* 27 (1995): 30–40; Al Fuhr and Gary Yates, *The Message of the Twelve: Hearing the Voice of the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016); Peter Gentry, *How to Read and Understand the Biblical Prophets* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017); Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Back Toward the Future: Hints for Interpreting Biblical Prophecy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003); O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2008); Gary Smith, *Interpreting the Prophetic Books: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014); Willem A. VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); Clause Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991); and Clause Westermann, *Prophetic Oracles of Salvation in the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1987).
20. In Luke 4:16–21, Jesus only quotes Isaiah 61:1, not claiming to fulfill Isaiah 61:2–11 in His earthly ministry. However, the reader of Isaiah cannot tell that 61:1 would be fulfilled at a period different than 61:2–11. Similarly, the initial fulfillment of Ps. 24:7–10 occurs in Matt. 21:1–11. However, all that the psalmist describes in Ps. 24:7–10 does not occur in Matt. 21:1–11 but awaits fulfillment within the second advent.
21. My idea of “message” is very similar to what Haddon Robinson identifies as the “Big Idea” of a passage (Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001], 36–54). It also is similar to what David Helm calls the “Melodic Line” of a passage (David Helm, *Expositional Preaching: How We Speak God’s Word Today* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014], 47–50).
22. For more on this concept of *subject*, see Elliot E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).
23. Intentionally, the method of application I propose here avoids finding so-called timeless principles or universal principles, for such principles are highly subjective. I am offering a concept that seeks to ground application in the story of Scripture. Neither am I advocating for an analogy of faith or rule of faith, for such approaches intend to prioritize certain passages or genres of Scripture over others. While I believe Scripture cannot contradict itself, I do not believe any one place of God’s voice in Scripture has priority or weight over another place. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable (2 Tim. 3:16).

# Survey of the Old and New Testaments

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**WILLIAM MARTY**

The Bible is composed of multiple books written by different authors, in different places, and at different times; but it is not a random collection of stories. The Bible is a continuous story about God and humanity. Unfortunately, the story of God's amazing plan of redemption is often lost in a survey because the focus is on individual books rather than the overarching storyline. The emphasis in this survey is on the biblical story. I have divided the storyline into sixteen historical periods.

## **The Old Testament (Creation—400 BC)**

Primeval

Patriarchal

Egyptian

Wilderness

Conquest

Judges

United Kingdom

Divided Kingdom (Israel and Judah)

Single Kingdom

Exile

Return from Exile (Restoration)

**Between the Testaments—400 Years**

**The New Testament (5 BC—AD 100)**

Expectation (Life of Christ)

Establishment (Birth of the church; Growth of the church in Jerusalem)

Extension (Growth of the church from Jerusalem to Samaria)

Expansion (Growth of the church throughout the Roman world)

Consolidation (Two Threats—Persecution and Heresy)

**PRIMEVAL (GENESIS 1–11)**

The story of redemption begins with the history of all humanity from Adam and his descendants to Abraham. The first eleven chapters of Genesis describe four major events.

**CREATION (1–2)**

Genesis 1 tells us why there is something rather than nothing. God created everything that exists in six days. Original creation was “good,” perfect for God’s intended purpose. On the sixth day He created male and female in His image; thus like God, Adam and Eve had intellect, emotion, and will.

The Lord placed Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden and permitted them to eat from any trees in the garden except one. They were warned that if they ate from “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” they would surely die. The prohibition gave Adam and Eve opportunity to prove submission and loyalty to their Creator.

The Lord gave humankind dominion over creation. He permitted Adam to name the animals, and established marriage as an inseparable bond between one man and one woman by joining Adam and Eve together as one flesh.

**FALL (3–5)**

Without explanation of his origin, Satan entered the drama of redemption in the form of a serpent. He convinced Eve that she would become like God—able to determine for herself what is right and wrong. After eating fruit from the forbidden tree, she gave some to Adam, and both became sinners alienated from their Creator.

God pronounced judgment on all three; but in His mercy, He did not impose the death penalty on Adam and Eve. They died spiritually but not physically. As a preview of substitutionary sacrifice God covered their nakedness with the skins of animals.

The sin of Adam and Eve corrupted all of creation, including their descendants. Cain killed his brother Abel. Lamech boasted about getting revenge on those who

offended him. The genealogy of death in Genesis 5 exposes the lie of Satan. Everyone died, except Enoch, whose bodily translation gave hope for life after death.

### **FLOOD (6–11)**

It grieved the Lord that humankind had become hopelessly wicked, and He made the painful decision to destroy the world He had created. One man, however, found grace in the eyes of the Lord. God instructed Noah to build an ark for protection from the destruction of the flood. Noah demonstrated remarkable faith by doing everything exactly as the Lord had commanded.

## **PATRIARCHAL (GENESIS 12–50)**

The focus moves from a general account of redemptive history to a specific focus on four individuals.

### **ABRAHAM (12–25)**

While Abraham was living in Ur, God made an unconditional covenant with him. God promised to bless the patriarch, multiply his physical descendants, and honor those who by faith would become his spiritual descendants. The unconditional provisions are personal, national, and universal, and are foundational for the unfolding plan of redemption. God swore on His divine honor that He would keep His promises by walking alone between the animals Abraham had sacrificed.

The story of Abraham gives a paradigm of the faith journey of both Old and New Testament believers. Though at times his faith wavered, Abraham never abandoned the Lord. God blessed him and Sarah with Isaac, the son of promise. Abraham passed the ultimate test of faith when God asked him to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac. The patriarch obeyed because he believed God would raise Isaac from the dead (Heb. 11:19), and we see the concept of a substitutionary sacrifice in God's provision of an animal in place of Isaac.

### **ISAAC (26–27)**

The covenant God made with Abraham was confirmed to Isaac not Ishmael, and God blessed Isaac with two sons, Jacob and Esau. Though Isaac favored Esau, God chose to bless Jacob, the second born.

### **JACOB (28–38)**

After tricking his brother into selling him the family birthright, Jacob fled to Haran because Esau intended to murder him. Jacob married Leah and Rachel, and

fathered twelve sons, who became the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. Though a self-made man, Jacob surrendered to the Lord in a dramatic nighttime encounter with God at the Jabbok River.

### **JOSEPH (39–50)**

Born to Rachel, Joseph was Jacob's favorite son, and was important because God sovereignly controlled his circumstances to protect the chosen family from destruction by the Canaanites. Joseph became a powerful official in a foreign land and relocated his extended family to Egypt. In Egypt, God's chosen people prospered and multiplied under the protection of one of the most powerful nations in the ancient world.

The patriarchal period concludes with uncertainty about God's promises to Abraham. His descendants are few and in a foreign land under the control of a foreign power. How will God fulfill His promises to make Abraham's descendants into a great nation, and how will God bless the world through Abraham's seed?

## **EGYPTIAN (EXODUS 1–12)**

The book of Exodus continues the story of God's plan to rescue fallen humanity. Exodus can be divided into two main sections: (1) the redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt (1–12), and (2) the revelation of the Law and instructions for the building of the tabernacle at Mount Sinai (13–40).

### **OPPRESSION OF GOD'S PEOPLE (EXODUS 1–2)**

Four hundred years passed from the time the descendants of Abraham moved to Egypt. Initially the Egyptians considered the Israelites an asset to their nation, but that changed when a new dynasty came to power. Pharaoh, a title for Egyptian rulers, enslaved the Hebrews (Israelites). The term *Hebrew* was a derogatory name given to the Israelites.

But God had not forgotten His promises to Abraham and raised up Moses to lead His people out of bondage. To stem the population growth among the Hebrews, Pharaoh ordered the midwives to kill all the males at birth, but they ignored his edict. To protect her son, Moses's mother committed him to God by placing him in a basket on the Nile River when he was three months old.

In the providence of God, Pharaoh's daughter found the infant, and adopted him as her son. Though Moses was raised in Pharaoh's palace, he knew that he was a Hebrew not an Egyptian. When he killed an Egyptian, who was mistreating a Hebrew, he was betrayed by his own people and forced to flee to Midian.



### **DELIVERANCE OF GOD'S PEOPLE (EXODUS 3–12)**

Moses could flee from the Egyptians but not from God. God appeared to Moses in a burning bush as the LORD (Yahweh), the eternal "I AM," and commanded Moses to return to Egypt.

Moses confronted Pharaoh in the name of the Lord, but Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to release God's people.

To force Pharaoh to obey, Moses inflicted ten plagues on the Egyptians. Each plague was directed at the gods and goddesses the Egyptians worshiped, including the death of the firstborn because the Egyptians believed in the deity of Pharaoh. Before the tenth plague, the Lord instructed the children of Israel to observe the Passover. This redemptive event became an everlasting memorial to remember Israel's deliverance from Egypt and to preview the atoning death of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 5:7).

### **WILDERNESS (EXODUS 13–40, LEVITICUS, NUMBERS, DEUTERONOMY)**

Because the Israelites had lived in the environment of Egyptian polytheism for 400 years, they needed instruction on the nature of the true and living God. This period contains the divine revelation that enabled God's people to have a relationship with a holy and loving God, and traces Israel's wilderness journey from Egypt to Canaan (the promised land).

#### **To SINAI (EXODUS 13–LEVITICUS 27)**

After the Israelites left Egypt, Pharaoh ordered his army to pursue them. The pursuit came to an abrupt end when the Lord destroyed Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea.

The Lord led the Israelites on a southern route to Mount Sinai, guiding them with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, and miraculously sustaining them with a daily provision of manna, quail, and water.

At Mount Sinai, the Lord met with Moses and gave him the constitution for the incipient nation. Israel would become a theocracy—a nation governed by God through appointed rulers. The Ten Commandments served as the preamble and were elaborated in hundreds of laws governing Israel's relationship with God, one another, and other nations.

The priesthood was established to represent the people before God. Aaron was appointed as the high priest, his sons as priests, and the tribe of Levi as assistants. Leviticus gives the specific instructions for worshiping God and the necessity for holiness in every aspect of life. The fundamental principle is stated in Leviticus 19:2 (NIV), "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy."

### **IN THE WILDERNESS (NUMBERS)**

Numbers derives its name from the census Moses took to determine military strength before leaving Mount Sinai. From Sinai the Israelites traveled north to Kadesh Barnea. At Kadesh Moses sent out twelve spies to make a reconnaissance of Canaan. They discovered the land was fertile but occupied by powerful tribal groups who had built fortified cities. Though Joshua and Caleb encouraged the people to trust God, Israel rebelled, and were made to wander in the wilderness until the unbelieving generation died. After forty years, the new generation arrived on the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River. They took a second census, only to discover that a new generation had entirely replaced the old.

### **ON THE PLAINS OF MOAB (DEUTERONOMY)**

The Greek term “Deuteronomy” means “second law,” and refers to the three prophetic messages of Moses recorded in the book. In a form resembling an ancient suzerainty-vassal treaty, Moses assures Israel of God’s covenant love. He warns of judgment for disobedience, but promises that if they repent, God will restore His covenant people to the promised land. Before his death, Moses passes the mantle of leadership to Joshua.

### **CONQUEST (JOSHUA)**

The book of Joshua records Israel’s conquest of the promised land. The Israelites make a miraculous crossing of the Jordan River that confirms Joshua as Israel’s divinely appointed leader and strikes fear in the hearts of the Canaanites. With God’s help, Israel conquers Jericho in the center of the land, defeats a coalition of five kings in the south, and another in the north led by Jabin, the powerful king of Hazor. After taking control of the land, Joshua gives an allotment of land to eleven tribes, and assigns the tribe of Levi to live and minister in towns within the boundaries of the other eleven tribes. Before his death, Joshua leads Israel in a covenant renewal ceremony at Shechem, in which he challenges Israel to love and obey the Lord and warns of judgment for worshipping Canaanite deities and engaging in their pagan practices.

### **JUDGES/PRE-KINGDOM (JUDGES)**

Judges explains Israel’s transition from a tribal confederacy to a monarchy. Judges were charismatic leaders whose rule was limited to tribal territory and temporary.

The book describes seven cycles of judges with the rule of Deborah, a godly woman, and Samuel, Israel's king maker, as bookends on the period.

The book concludes with stories about idolatry and immorality that illustrate how incredibly wicked people can become when they do what is right in their own eyes (Judg. 17–21). The repetition of two expressions stressed the need for a king: “In those days Israel had no king,” and “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 17:6, author's paraphrase; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

## **UNITED KINGDOM (1 AND 2 SAMUEL; 1 KINGS 1–11; BOOKS OF POETRY)**

Samuel, the last of the judges, anointed Saul and then David as Israel's first and second kings. David designated his son, Solomon, as his successor. God blessed Solomon with wisdom, but his sins and the oppressive policies of his foolish and arrogant son divided the United Kingdom.

### **SAUL (1 SAMUEL)**

The transition from a tribal confederacy to a monarchy began with the birth of Samuel. Because Hannah and Elkanah were unable to have children, they promised to dedicate their son to the Lord. God heard their prayer and blessed them with Samuel. They kept their promise and dedicated Samuel to serve in the tabernacle. After the death of Eli, Samuel became the high priest and judge over all Israel. Instead of limiting his ministry to one tribal area, Samuel was a circuit-riding judge, serving all Israel from Bethel to Gilgal and Mizpah (1 Sam. 7:15–17).

As Samuel neared the end of his life, the people pleaded with him for a king “like all the nations” (1 Sam. 8:5). Though Samuel interpreted the people's request as a personal rejection of his leadership, the Lord instructed him to grant their request though it was a rejection of His lordship over Israel.

Samuel anointed Saul as Israel's first king in a private and then public ceremony (1 Sam. 10:1, 17–24). Saul gained popular support to serve as king when he rescued the men of Jabesh-gilead (1 Sam. 11). Though the Lord would have blessed Saul's rule, he was foolish and disobedient, and quickly lost the right to serve as the Lord's appointed ruler.

### **DAVID (1 SAMUEL 16–31; 2 SAMUEL)**

Samuel rebuked Saul and sought “a man after [God's] own heart” (1 Sam. 13:13–14). The Lord guided Samuel to anoint David to replace Saul (1 Sam. 16:1–13).

David was the youngest of Jesse's eight sons, and unknown in Israel. He gained recognition of all Israel when he defeated Goliath (1 Sam. 17:1–58). Though anointed

king, David refused to overthrow Saul by violence, though he was ruthlessly pursued by the paranoid king for fifteen years. David became king when the Philistines wounded Saul, who took his own life rather than risk capture and torture.

Though the tribe of Judah recognized David as king, the northern tribes remained loyal to Saul's son, Ishbosheth. After a season of struggle and intrigue between the two dynasties, David became king over all Israel when two foreigners murdered Ishbosheth.

David captured Jerusalem, a Jebusite fortress, and made it the political capital and religious center for all Israel. David wanted to build a temple to honor the Lord, but Nathan, the prophet, said that his son was the one who would build the temple. Instead, the Lord made an eternal and unconditional covenant with David (2 Sam. 7). In his genealogy, Matthew traces Jesus' ancestry through David to Abraham showing that Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic covenant (Matt. 1:1).

Though the "ideal king," David was not perfect. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband killed to hide his sin (2 Sam. 11). After the prophet Nathan rebuked him, David repented, but suffered the grievous consequences of his transgression (2 Sam. 12:1–14; Ps. 51). The child Bathsheba conceived died, and she later gave birth to Solomon. There was continual conflict in David's household, and his son Absalom almost succeeded in taking the throne from David.

### **SOLOMON (1 KINGS 1–11)**

Before he died, David made arrangements to ensure that his son Solomon would become king. Solomon is known for his wisdom, wealth, and fame. His greatest achievement was building the temple. At the height of Solomon's career, the Queen of Sheba traveled to Jerusalem to see for herself if what she had heard about Solomon and his kingdom was true. After questioning Solomon and seeing his accomplishments, she testified that indeed the Lord had blessed Solomon, and his people had much to be grateful for (1 Kings 10:8–9).

Though known for his wisdom, Solomon foolishly took wives from foreign nations, and worshiped their gods. Because his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord, the Lord announced to Solomon that his kingdom would be divided. The king with a divided heart left behind a divided kingdom.

## **BOOKS OF POETRY (JOB, PSALMS, PROVERBS, ECCLESIASTES, SONG OF SOLOMON)**

The Poetical Books or Wisdom Literature were composed during the United Kingdom Period by Israel's sages (wisdom teachers) and contain both practical and reflective wisdom.

The book of Job is a reflection on human suffering and the sovereignty of God. The story is from an earlier period (perhaps the Patriarchal) but was passed down from generation to generation and composed in its final form in the United Kingdom Period. Job is a theodicy taking on the age-old question: How are we to understand the suffering of the righteous if God is good and great (sovereign)?

The Psalms are quoted more times in the New Testament than any other book in the Old Testament. They record real life experiences in prayers, hymns, and meditations. Many are lament psalms, but there are also psalms of praise and wisdom. Some record experiences that anticipate the life and work of the Messiah (Christ).

Proverbs contains practical wisdom and not reflective wisdom as found in Job and Ecclesiastes. The individual proverbs are concise and memorable observations on life. They are generalizations, not absolute truths, intended to develop godly character and provide practical skill or wisdom for daily living. Many are formatted as a father's advice to his son.

Ecclesiastes, like Job, is reflective or philosophical wisdom. Though some think the author gives a negative view of life, the exact opposite is true. The purpose is to show the futility and meaninglessness of life without God. The author forces the reader to the conclusion: "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind" (Eccl. 12:13 *NIV*). Then despite confusing and difficult uncertainties, life can be meaningful and fulfilling.

The Song of Solomon or Song of Songs is a poem about love. Though some interpret it as an allegory about God's love for Israel or Christ's love for the church, the book encourages and endorses a romantic and sexual experience between a man and a woman in the context of marriage.

## **KINGS OF ISRAEL (1 KINGS 12:1–2 KINGS 17; 1 CHRONICLES)**

While Solomon was still living, Ahijah the prophet announced to Jeroboam, who was from the rival tribe of Ephraim, that he would become king of ten tribes. Ahijah's prophecy was fulfilled when Solomon's son, Rehoboam, imposed heavy taxes and harsh labor practices on Israel. Ten tribes revolted and organized the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to

Rehoboam, Solomon's son, and descendant of David. Thus, the United Kingdom was divided into two kingdoms—Israel in the north and Judah in the south.

Though he was not perfect, David set the standard for kings in the north and south. The succession of the nineteen kings in the north was a spiritual disaster. They were all evil and were not faithful to the Lord as David had been. The Lord would have blessed Jeroboam, but he corrupted the worship of Yahweh by establishing apostate worship centers at Bethel and Dan and appointing non-Levitical priests (1 Kings 12:25–33).

Some of the kings were especially bad. Ahab married Jezebel, a fanatical Baal worshiper, and introduced Baal worship into the northern kingdom. To stem the tide of Baalism in the north, God raised up the prophet Elijah. He confronted Ahab and challenged the false prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel but could not stop Israel's slide into apostasy. Near the end of his life, he was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot, but passed his prophetic mantle to Elisha, who continued the struggle against Baal worship.

Hoshea, the last king in the north, was evil but not like the kings who preceded him; however, it was too late (2 Kings 17:2). The king of Assyria invaded Israel and captured Samaria, the capital, in 722 BC, and dispersed the northern tribes throughout the Assyrian Empire.

### **KINGS OF JUDAH (2 KINGS 18–25; 2 CHRONICLES)**

Of the twenty kings who ruled in Judah, only eight were good. Second Chronicles provides the complete record of the eight good kings. We see the detrimental impact of Solomon's marriage to foreign wives in the rule of his son Rehoboam, the first king of Judah. He was undoubtedly influenced by his mother, Naamah, an Ammonite, and set up shrines to worship other gods and encouraged the detestable practices of pagan nations.

Asa, Rehoboam's son, did what was pleasing to the Lord as David had done (1 Kings 15:11). Though he did not remove all the pagan shrines, he led Judah in a national covenant renewal (2 Chron. 15:9–15). Asa made a tragic mistake when he accepted military help from Ben-hadad, king of Aram. He died from a fatal disease in his feet after ruling for forty-one years.

The seven good kings after Asa were considered revival kings because they reversed the evil policies and practices of their predecessors.

Hezekiah was the greatest of the revival kings. His father, Ahaz, was godless, closed the temple, and robbed it to pay tribute to Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria. Hezekiah reopened the temple, organized a huge Passover celebration, and invited

Israel to join Judah in the celebration. When the Assyrians attacked Judah and Jerusalem, the Lord destroyed the Assyrian army, and Sennacherib was forced to return to Nineveh. When Hezekiah became terminally ill, he sought help from Isaiah the prophet, and the Lord healed him. One of his remarkable engineering feats was building a tunnel from the Gihon spring to provide a water supply for Jerusalem during times of siege. Hezekiah was known as “a second Solomon” because his scribes added to Solomon’s collection of Proverbs (Prov. 25:1–29:37).

Manasseh was extremely evil. He rebuilt the pagan shrines his father had destroyed, practiced witchcraft, sacrificed his son, and persecuted the prophets. In a remarkable change of heart, Manasseh repented when the Assyrians took him captive to Babylon. His repentance and return to Judah previewed the return of Israel from exile. During the reign of Josiah, the priests discovered the Book of the Law when repairing the temple, and Josiah used the book as a guide for the nation’s spiritual renewal.

Judah’s end came in 586 BC when the Babylonians captured Jerusalem, and carried thousands into exile. As Jeremiah had predicted, God’s people suffered seventy years of exile for abandoning the Lord and refusing to heed the prophets’ warnings (Jer. 25:11).

### **THE EXILE (EZEKIEL AND DANIEL)**

The exile was devastating. The unthinkable happened: God abandoned His chosen people. Everything was lost. The Babylonians destroyed entire towns, including Jerusalem; even the temple was sacked and burned. Thousands were deported to Babylon.

But God had not permanently abandoned His people or His plan to redeem the world. God was still at work preparing Israel for Messiah’s coming. The prophets Ezekiel and Daniel inspired hope for both the near and distant future. Ezekiel describes the miraculous renewal of God’s people and restoration to the land. Scholars hold different eschatological views about Ezekiel’s detailed description of the rebuilding of the temple and the reinstatement of sacrifices (Ezek. 40–48). In the stories of Daniel and his friends in exile, the prophet emphasizes God’s sovereignty over all nations and the panorama of history until the establishing of God’s everlasting kingdom.

**RESTORATION—RETURN FROM EXILE  
(EZRA, NEHEMIAH, ESTHER, HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH, MALACHI)**

The story of Israel's return from exile or the Post-Exile period is recorded in the three historical books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther and the three prophetic books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

God continued speaking through the prophets but was also at work through the rise and fall of nations. The Persians conquered the Babylonians, and Cyrus the Great allowed the Jews to return to the promised land. Isaiah named Cyrus as Israel's deliverer 150 years before he issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their homeland (Ezra 1:1–4; Isa. 44:28–45:6). The historical books of Ezra and Nehemiah record the events of the return and the rebuilding of the temple. The book of Esther tells how God providentially protected the Jews who remained in Persia.

**BOOKS OF PROPHECY**

In the worst of times, God is often at His best. This is true in the years leading up to the exile. By worshiping other gods, Israel broke the covenant God had confirmed with them when He delivered them from bondage in Egypt (Deut. 29–30). God did not abandon His people; He raised up His servants, the prophets, to remind His people of their covenant obligations. They warned of judgment (curses) for rebellion but promised forgiveness and restoration for repentance (blessings).

The ministry of the prophets can be divided into three eras as indicated in the chart that follows. The prophets before the exile indicted Israel for rebellion but also promised that God would send a Savior to rescue them from their sins (Isa. 53). Some of the prophets, like Isaiah, looked into the distant future and anticipated not only the return from exile but the re-creation of all things including the new heavens and earth.

Ezekiel and Daniel ministered during Judah's exile in Babylon. In a series of bizarre visions, Ezekiel sees the departure of God's glory from the temple and the destruction of Jerusalem. But he also prophesied the defeat of Israel's enemies, the forgiveness of sins, and the restoration of Israel. Taken to Babylon as a hostage, Daniel became an advisor to the kings of Babylon and later to the Persians. His prophesies emphasize God's sovereignty over all the earth. God, not man, controls the rise and fall of the kingdoms of the world, and history is moving inexorably toward the establishment of God's eternal kingdom.

After the exile, Habakkuk and Zechariah encouraged returnees to finish



rebuilding the temple. In rebuilding the temple, they were not only building for themselves but for the future. Zechariah, the most messianic book in the Old Testament, predicts that the Messiah who was rejected at His first coming, will come again as a conquering king and rule over all the earth in peace and holiness. Written after Haggai and Zechariah, Malachi uses a series of questions and answers to correct Israel's hypocritical abuse of their privileged covenant relationship.

**BEFORE THE EXILE**

<i>To Judah</i>	<i>To Israel</i>	<i>To Edom</i>	<i>To Assyria</i>
Joel	Hosea	Obadiah	Jonah
Isaiah	Amos	Nahum	
Micah			
Habakkuk			
Zephaniah			
Jeremiah (Lamentations)			

**DURING THE EXILE**

Ezekiel  
Daniel

**AFTER THE EXILE**

Haggai  
Zechariah  
Malachi

**BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS (400 YEARS OF SILENCE)**

The 400-year interval between Malachi and Matthew is sometimes called “The 400 Years of Silence” because the voice of prophecy ceased with Malachi and did not resume until the coming of John the Baptist.

Under the dynamic leadership of Alexander the Great, the Greeks conquered Persia and extended their empire south to Egypt and as far east as the Indus River. Alexander is known as “the Apostle of Hellenism” because he was a fervent proponent of the Greek culture and language in the countries he conquered. Through his influence Greek became the common language throughout the Middle East.

On his death at an early age, Alexander’s empire was divided between his four generals. Israel came initially under the benevolent control of the Ptolemies in

Egypt. One of the rulers, Ptolemy II Philadelphus, had an interest in Jewish law, and authorized the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. The translation is known as the Septuagint from LXX, the Roman numeral abbreviation for the number seventy, because according to tradition seventy Jewish scholars produced the translation.

Antiochus the Great defeated the Ptolemies in 190 BC, and Israel came under the control of the Seleucids (Syrians). The notorious Seleucid ruler, Antiochus Epiphanies, hated the Jews, and tried to destroy Judaism. He is infamous for sacrificing a pig on the temple altar, a sacrilege known as “the Abomination of Desolation,” and which previews future abominable events by the Romans and the “man of lawlessness,” or the Antichrist.

Antiochus’ oppressive policies precipitated a Jewish revolt. By sheer determination and remarkable courage, the Maccabees won decisive victories over the Syrians, and eventually established an independent state. Named for Hashmon, an ancestor of the Maccabees, the Hasmonean kingdom ended when the Roman general Pompey captured Jerusalem in 63 BC. Therefore, when Christ was born in approximately 5 BC, Palestine was ruled by the Romans under the client king, Herod the Great.

## **THE NEW TESTAMENT (5 BC—AD 100)**

### **EXPECTATION (FOUR GOSPELS)**

When Christ was born, messianic hopes were high in Israel. Rome had extended its empire in the east, and had conquered Israel, making it a Roman province. Most Jews despised the Romans and were anxiously awaiting a Davidic king to lead them in a revolt against their Roman overlords. Israel’s religious leaders were generally corrupt and were more concerned about money and power than godliness. Some, however, like the parents of John the Baptist and Jesus, were godly and recognized their need for a Savior.

The four gospels record the life of Christ. Though the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are similar, they are not identical. The gospel of John is unique in its interpretative and theological perspective on the life of Jesus. Together, the Gospels give us a multifaceted portrait of Christ.

Most scholars opt for the priority of Mark believing that Mark was written first and that Matthew and Luke borrowed and expanded on Mark’s shorter version of the life of Christ. Some, however, believe that Matthew was the first gospel. The unanimous view of the church fathers, the placement of Matthew in the canon,

and the need for a gospel explaining Israel's rejection of their messianic king support the priority of Matthew.

### **MATTHEW**

Matthew was a tax collector before Jesus called him to become a disciple (Matt. 9:9). Matthew responded immediately and invited Jesus to dinner at his house.

Matthew emphasizes that Jesus was Israel's long-awaited Messiah-King by focusing on how Jesus fulfilled prophecy. More than sixty times, he repeats the fulfillment formula: This was to fulfill what the Lord said through the prophet.

Despite the evidence, the religious leaders oppose and reject Jesus. They charge He was a false prophet, law breaker, and phony messiah. Their opposition culminated when they secretly arrested Jesus, charged Him with blasphemy, and turned Him over to the Romans for execution.

Matthew makes it clear that Jesus is Immanuel, "God with us," and the Savior of the world, Israel's Messiah. He traces Jesus' genealogy through David to Abraham and concludes his gospel with the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20).

### **MARK**

Mark was not one of the Twelve, but he was a companion of both Paul and Peter. He started the first missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas but abandoned them and returned to Jerusalem when they began ministering to Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas ended their partnership in ministry when they sharply disagreed about taking Mark on the second journey. Later, when imprisoned in Rome, Paul wrote favorably about Mark's usefulness in ministry (2 Tim. 4:11).

After opening his gospel with a statement that Jesus Christ is "the Son of God," Mark holds his readers in suspense about Jesus' identity. Even His disciples are slow in recognizing Jesus as the Son of God. A Gentile centurion in charge of Jesus' execution makes the final and climatic statement about Jesus' identity when he testifies, "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:39).

Mark focuses on Jesus' ministry to establish the kingdom of God. The greatest obstacle to God's kingdom is not the Romans but Satan. After announcing the arrival of the kingdom, Jesus begins His ministry in a synagogue in Capernaum where He is confronted by a demon-possessed man. With a stern command, Jesus orders the demon out of the man and continues to exercise His power over demons, sickness, and nature until His arrest and crucifixion. To settle an argument about who is the greatest, Jesus explains His mission to His disciples, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for the many" (Mark 10:45).

**LUKE**

Luke, a physician, is the only Gentile writer of the New Testament. He traveled with Paul on his second and third missionary journeys and went with the apostle when Paul was transferred to Rome as a prisoner. Luke also wrote Acts. The two books were originally two volumes in a single work but were separated when the canon was organized.

Luke is the longest and most comprehensive of the four gospels. He begins with the birth of John the Baptist and concludes with Jesus' resurrection and ascension. Two major themes in the gospel are Jesus' compassion for the poor and disfranchised and the importance of repentance in the conversion experience. These two themes are graphically revealed in Jesus' interaction with Zaccheus, a despised chief tax collector. Zaccheus repents, offering to sell half of his possessions to repay those he has cheated and help the poor. Jesus commends him and declares, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

Luke focuses more on Jesus' humanity than the other gospel writers. He is a descendant of Adam; but unlike the first Adam, who failed when tempted by Satan, Jesus resists and is victorious. Though fully divine, Jesus needed to pray seeking His Father's guidance at critical moments in His life.

Luke offers proof of the resurrection through Jesus' surprise appearance to those whose hopes had been dashed by the crucifixion. The account of Jesus' resurrection appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus is a classic short story (Luke 24:13–35).

**JOHN**

John, who was the son of Zebedee and was a fisherman, gives a unique theological and interpretative perspective on the life of Christ. He states his purpose in John 20:30–31. He wants to convince people that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God and promises eternal life to all who will believe. He emphasizes that Jesus is God's unique Son and that the Father sent His Son into the world because He loves the world and is not willing that any should perish (John 3:16).

John begins his gospel with a simple yet profound statement. Jesus is the *Logos*, the preexistent Word. He has always been with God, and He is God (John 1:1). Jesus claims deity seven times by referring to Himself as "I AM," the divine name for God in the Old Testament (Ex. 3:14). When Jesus declares that He and His Father are one, the Jews attempt to stone Him (John 10:32–33).

John advances his gospel primarily through seven miracles, which he calls "signs," and seven messages (John 1:19–12:50). In John, Jesus does not merely fulfill Scripture, He exceeds Old Testament expectations. For example, Moses gave the people manna in the wilderness, but Jesus is the "Bread of Life" that has come

down from heaven to give life to the world (John 6:32–33). John gives an extended account of Jesus’ teaching in the upper room (John 13:1–26). His announcement about His departure is upsetting, but Jesus promises to send another “Comforter,” the Holy Spirit. The section concludes with Jesus’ high priestly prayer for Himself, His disciples, and all believers (John 17:1–26).

Jesus’ death was not a tragic mistake but was His voluntary sacrifice for the sins of the world (John 19:28–30). Joseph and Nicodemus gave Jesus a burial suited for a king, but Jesus conquered death as He had promised. When Mary went to the tomb, it was empty. Later, Peter, John, and all the disciples saw the resurrected Lord. When Jesus appeared to “doubting” Thomas, he exclaimed, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). The gospel concludes with Jesus meeting with His disciples on the Sea of Galilee and the reinstatement of Peter, who had denied Jesus.

### **ESTABLISHMENT (ACTS 1:1–6:7)**

In his gospel, Luke wrote about the life of Christ; in Acts he continued the story of Jesus by tracing the birth and growth of the church from Jerusalem to Rome.

Jesus fulfills His promise to build His church on the day of Pentecost (Matt. 16:18). He pours out the promised Holy Spirit on all His followers (John 14:16) and empowers them by the Spirit. Peter proclaims that the resurrected Jesus is Lord and Messiah. The church is born when in response to Peter’s message 3,000 believe and are baptized (Acts 2:36–41).

Luke describes how the church experienced supernatural growth in spite of external opposition and internal problems. He alternates between external opposition and internal problems ending each section with a statement of victory and continued growth. The pattern is as follows:

The arrest of Peter and John (4:5–31)

The deceit and death of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1–16)

The arrest and miraculous release of all the apostles (5:17–42)

The complaint over the care of widows (6:1–7)

### **EXTENSION OF THE CHURCH (ACTS 6:8–9:31)**

To explain the growth of the church beyond Jerusalem, Luke focuses his inspired spotlight on three men. Stephen is arrested and becomes the first martyr when he indicts his countrymen for the murder of Jesus (the Prophet like Moses) and their callous rejection of the Holy Spirit. When persecution forces believers to leave

Jerusalem, Philip takes the gospel to Samaria. Paul, a fanatical Jew, tries to destroy the infant church, but becomes a zealous follower of Christ when the resurrected Lord appears to him on the Damascus Road and commissions him as the apostle to the Gentiles.

### **EXPANSION (ACTS 9:32–28:31)**

Peter set a precedent for ministry to the Gentiles when he preached the gospel to Cornelius, a Gentile centurion, and his family. His conversion was validated by the same gift of the Spirit that was given to the Jews on the day of Pentecost (Acts 11:15–17).

Beginning in Acts 13, Luke focused on the ministry of the apostle Paul. His purpose was to give an account of the supernatural growth of the church and affirm Paul's unique apostleship to the Gentiles. He recorded Paul's three missionary journeys and concluded with Paul's arrest and transfer by ship to Rome. Between the first and second journeys, Luke gave a detailed account of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). Hardcore Jews, known as Judaizers, jeopardized the growth of the church by insisting that Gentiles submit to circumcision. After discussing the issue, the Jerusalem Council decided against imposing the Law of Moses on Gentiles (Acts 15). This important decision preserved the doctrine of salvation by grace and allowed for the universal growth of the church by the inclusion of all ethnic groups. Acts concludes with Paul under house arrest in Rome but with freedom to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom.

### **THE JOURNEY EPISTLES (IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER)**

During the era of rapid expansion, Paul wrote ten of his thirteen epistles. After his first journey, he writes Galatians to refute Jewish legalists who tried to impose the Jewish law on Gentile believers. Paul insists that his message is the only true gospel for the salvation of Jews and Gentiles.

While at Corinth on his second journey Paul writes 1 Thessalonians to commend the new converts for their steadfastness in faith, love, and hope. They are a model (*tupos*) church. He assures them the resurrection of Jesus gives hope for both the dead and the living. Six months later, Paul writes the second epistle to refute misleading teaching about the day of the Lord.

On his third journey, Paul receives a report from Chloe's household about chaos in the church at Corinth. He writes to correct and instruct the Corinthians because of their misunderstanding of the gospel, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the resurrection of Christ. Second Corinthians is the most personal of Paul's

epistles because he defends his apostleship and hopes to convince the Corinthians that as a minister of the new covenant, his ministry is in every way superior to that of his Jewish opponents.

Romans is the most doctrinal of Paul's epistles. He argues persuasively that Gentiles and Jews need God's provision of righteousness, and all are justified by faith not the works of the law. Salvation is a three-part process of justification, sanctification, and glorification. In his sovereignty and wisdom, God has included Gentiles in the church, which Paul compares to a body. To promote unity between Jews and Gentiles, Paul emphasizes that all parts of the body are significant and needed in God's amazing plan of redemption.

### **THE PRISON EPISTLES**

I take the view that Paul was imprisoned two times. During his first confinement of house arrest in Rome, Paul had the freedom to write the four Prison Epistles.

Ephesians was written to assure believers who had been involved in the occult that Christ was triumphant over all powers and authorities in heaven and earth. It also explained how this made Jews and Gentiles one in Christ and transformed their life and walk in the world.

In Colossians, Paul assured believers that Christ was their all-sufficient Savior and that they do not need to submit to Jewish legalism, Eastern mysticism, or any kind of self-imposed asceticism.

Paul assured the Philippians that he was not discouraged by his imprisonment; rather he was thankful and joyful because it had given him unique opportunities for ministry in Rome. He urged them to humbly serve one another even as Christ humbled Himself and suffered an ignominious death on the cross. Because He was obedient to a shameful death, God exalted His Son over all powers and authorities.

Philemon was related to the widespread practice of slavery in the first century. The apostle urged Philemon, an elder in the church in Philippi, to forgive and accept Onesimus, a runaway slave, as a beloved brother in the Lord.

## **CONSOLIDATION**

The epistles written during the second half of the first century address two major threats: persecution and false teaching.

### **THE PASTORALS**

Paul wrote the Pastorals, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, to instruct his pastoral representatives at Ephesus and Crete on the importance of sound doctrine, the

management of the church, and their pastoral and personal responsibilities. Written from Rome during his second imprisonment, 2 Timothy was Paul's last epistle and his final instructions for the perpetuation of the Christian faith.

### **THE GENERAL EPISTLES**

The unknown author of Hebrews emphasized the superiority of Christ over all aspects of Judaism and warned about the danger of turning back to the obsolete system of the law.

First Peter inspired hope for believers who were slandered and sometimes physically abused for their radically different and godly lifestyle.

Second Peter and Jude were somewhat similar. Both exposed false teachers and warn of severe judgment but assured true believers that their Savior was faithful and able to keep them from falling.

The apostle John wrote three epistles. First John was written to refute a heretical view of the person of Christ. John emphasized that true believers will live righteously, love one another, and recognize the full humanity and deity of Christ. Second John was written to an elect lady, possibly a church, commending her for her love of the truth but cautioning that she might be inadvertently giving hospitality to false teachers. In his third epistle, John commended Gaius for his love of the truth but criticized Diotrephes, an egotistical elder, for refusing to welcome John and his associates.

Written to the seven churches of Asia Minor, the book of Revelation gave assurance to believers, who were persecuted during the rule of Domitian, the Roman Emperor, that God was in absolute control of history. The book opens with John's vision of the triumphant Christ. John then includes elements of the vision in his letters to the seven churches. He described how the Lamb will pour out on the earth three series of judgments that culminate with the coming of Christ to cast Satan and all his diabolical forces into a lake of fire. John concluded with a description of the magnificence of the new Jerusalem and heaven where believers of all ages will worship and dwell with God and Christ forever.

### **THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD (FROM CREATION TO THE NEW CREATION)**

The Bible tells a dramatic story of redemption. The drama begins with the creation of the heavens and earth and Adam and Eve in the image of God. But seduced by Satan, Adam and Eve rebelled against their creator. Their sin wrecked God's perfect creation, but instead of destroying them God initiated an amazing plan of redemption. His plan moved from a descendant of Adam to Abraham and his descendants.



The hope for a Redeemer burned bright through the eras of Egyptian bondage, the exodus, wilderness wanderings, the conquest of the land, the judges, and the establishment of a kingdom. But then, because of disobedience God allowed their enemies to defeat them. Though scattered among the nations, God brought His people back to the land, and was ready to make His most dramatic move to rescue rebellious humanity.

God the Father sent His one and only Son into the world as the perfect and final Redeemer. Jesus voluntarily gave up His life as a sacrifice for sins, conquered death, and was exalted to the right hand of His Father. As exalted Lord and Savior, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to empower believers to tell “the good news” to the world. There was hope for sinful humanity. Anyone who believed on Christ would receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The dramatic story of redemption concluded with the destruction of Satan and his followers and the creation of new heavens and earth where believers would enjoy life with the Father and Son forever.