

# Reading the Bible in one Year

*“These are not just idle words for you—  
they are your life.” Deuteronomy 32:47*

*“All Scripture is God-breathed and is  
useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting  
and training in righteousness, so that the  
man of God may be thoroughly equipped  
for every good work”. II Timothy 3:16-17*

*“Faith comes from hearing the message,  
and the message is heard through the  
word of Christ”. Romans 10:17*

*“Blessed are those who hear my words  
and take to heart what is written in it”.  
Revelation 1:3*

*Everyone who hears my words and puts  
them into practice is like a wise man who  
built his house on the rock. Matthew 7:24*

# 15 Reasons to Read the Whole Bible

## 1. **You will know God better (Hebrews 4:2).**

J.I. Packer wrote the classic book, *Knowing God*. In that book, he tells his readers that the only way to truly know God is by reading his word.

## 2. **You will know yourself better (Jeremiah 17:9).**

As we read the Bible we realise that there is a battle that takes place inside of each person. We are being constantly pulled away from God into sin. Knowing ourselves will help us better deal with these battles. Romans 7

## 3. **You will see how the whole bible points to Jesus (Luke 24:27).**

The New Testament is not God's plan B but the whole Bible is part of God's plan for Jesus and our redemption. It is a grand picture to see how all the parts fit together perfectly and to realise that, in Christ, we are part of that grand picture.

## 4. **You will be more in awe of the gospel (Ephesians 1:3-5).**

The Gospel is "good news" of salvation. When the angels announce this good news they describe it as good news of great joy. Luke 2:11 and Paul describes the gospel as "the power of God for salvation to all who believe." Romans 1:18

## 5. **You will develop eternally-significant habits**

Once you realise the benefit of reading the bible, you will gain a habit that you will not want to give up for the rest of your life. This "habit" that is developed by discipline and worship, will transform your mind (Rom 12:1-2).

## 6. **You will avoid tunnel vision.**

Tunnel vision is simply living and thinking and doing what we have always done, or what we have been taught. Tunnel vision does not question how we see the world, but the Bible shows us God's way is far better.

## 7. **You will discover answers to life's most important questions.**

We all want to have our questions answered, particularly the most important questions of life. Who am I? Why am I here? What is the meaning of life? Is there life after death? Is there forgiveness? Only the one who created us can answer these questions and bring joy and contentment to life.

## 8. **You will be more comfortable with all the parts of the Bible**

As you wade your way through Leviticus, or Song of Solomon, you might be confused with the type of literature there is in the Bible. Some may be hard to understand when you first read it. There's prophecy, poetry, history etc. However, the more you read it, the easier it is to understand it. Remember you are reading a very ancient document.

**9. You will gain a Christian “worldview” rather than a self-centered one.**

A Christian worldview is given to all who seek to live by God’s word. It is seeing the world from God’s perspective. This applies to work, family, conflict, sex, possessions, guilt, forgiveness, happiness etc. In fact, everything in life can be viewed from a Christian worldview when we apply the Bible to these events. A Christian worldview is the best antidote to selfishness.

**10. You will experience and appreciate God’s faithfulness**

To get a complete overview of the Bible is to get a fuller view of God’s faithfulness to his people. This increases our appreciation of God’s patience and mercy and grace over a very long period. We can then say with the Psalmist, “Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, and your faithfulness to the skies”.

**11. You will naturally grow in your prayer life.**

Prayer is simply speaking to God and the more we know a person the easier it is to speak with them. Reading God’s word changes the way we see prayer, from being a religious duty to a delight of speaking with our heavenly Father.

**12. You will bear fruit**

The Prophet Isaiah says in Isaiah 55:11 “My word that goes out from my mouth will not return empty.” In John 15:4 Jesus says, “If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit”. Bearing fruit is simply the godly outworking of hearing and putting in practice God’s word.

**13. You will develop a deeper desire to share the good news.**

One of the greatest fears that people have in sharing the good news of Jesus is their lack of understanding the Bible and the fear that someone may ask them a question they do not know. We are told that the Holy Spirit will remind us of all that Jesus taught, but he cannot remind us if we do not know it in the first place.

**14. You will know a freedom**

The world tells us that freedom is doing whatever you want to do. But that’s not true freedom if what we want to do is based on ignorance. True freedom is living the way we have been created to live. A fish does not experience freedom if it goes onto land, for it wasn’t made for land. In John 8:31 Jesus says to his followers. “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

**15. You will learn how to avoid the dangers of sin.**

The Psalmist knew the answer. “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word” (Ps 119:9). During his own temptation in the wilderness, Jesus resisted Satan’s temptations by quoting scripture, “It is written..”

# 2017 Bible Reading Roster

- 1-Jan Genesis 1-3
- 2-Jan Genesis 4-7
- 3-Jan Genesis 8:1-11:9
- 4-Jan Genesis 11:10-14:13
- 5-Jan Genesis 14:14-18:8
- 6-Jan Genesis 18:9-21:21
- 7-Jan Genesis 21:22-24:27
- 8-Jan Genesis 24:28-26:35
- 9-Jan Genesis 27-29
- 10-Jan Genesis 30:1-31:42
- 11-Jan Genesis 31:43-34:31
- 12-Jan Genesis 35:1-37:24
- 13-Jan Genesis 37:25-40:8
- 14-Jan Genesis 40:9-42:28
- 15-Jan Genesis 42:29-45:15
- 16-Jan Genesis 45:16-48:7
- 17-Jan Genesis 48:8-50:26; Exodus 1
- 18-Jan Exodus 2:1-5:9
- 19-Jan Exodus 5:10-8:15
- 20-Jan Exodus 8:16-11:10
- 21-Jan Exodus 12:1-14:20
- 22-Jan Exodus 14:21-17:16
- 23-Jan Exodus 18:1-21:21
- 24-Jan Exodus 21:22-25:9
- 25-Jan Exodus 25:10-27:21
- 26-Jan Exodus 28-29
- 27-Jan Exodus 30-32
- 28-Jan Exodus 33:1-35:29
- 29-Jan Exodus 35:30-37:2
- 30-Jan Exodus 38:1-40:16
- 31-Jan Exodus 40:17-38; Levit 1-4
- 1-Feb Leviticus 5-7
- 2-Feb Leviticus 8:1-11:8
- 3-Feb Leviticus 11:9-13:39
- 4-Feb Leviticus 13:40-14:57
- 5-Feb Leviticus 15:1-18:18
- 6-Feb Leviticus 18:19-21:24
- 7-Feb Leviticus 22-23
- 8-Feb Leviticus 24:1-26:13
- 9-Feb Lev 26:14-27:34; Num 1:1-41
- 10-Feb Numbers 1:42-3:32
- 11-Feb Numbers 3:33-5:22
- 12-Feb Numbers 5:23-7:59
- 13-Feb Numbers 7:60-10:10
- 14-Feb Numbers 10:11-13:16
- 15-Feb Numbers 13:17-15:21
- 16-Feb Numbers 15:22-16:50
- 17-Feb Numbers 17-20
- 18-Feb Numbers 21-23
- 19-Feb Numbers 24:1-26:34
- 20-Feb Numbers 26:35-28:31
- 21-Feb Numbers 29:1-31:47
- 22-Feb Numbers 31:48-33:56
- 23-Feb Num 34-36; Deut 1:1-15
- 24-Feb Deuteronomy 1:16-3:29
- 25-Feb Deuteronomy 4:1-6:15
- 26-Feb Deuteronomy 6:16-9:21
- 27-Feb Deuteronomy 9:22-12:32
- 28-Feb Deuteronomy 13:1-16:8
- 1-Mar Deuteronomy 16:9-19:21
- 2-Mar Deuteronomy 20:1-23:14
- 3-Mar Deuteronomy 23:15-27:10
- 4-Mar Deuteronomy 27:11-28:68
- 5-Mar Deuteronomy 29:1-32:14
- 6-Mar Deut 32:15-34:12; Joshu 1:1-9
- 7-Mar Joshua 1:10-4:24
- 8-Mar Joshua 5:1-8:23
- 9-Mar Joshua 8:24-11:9
- 10-Mar Joshua 11:10-14:15
- 11-Mar Joshua 15-17
- 12-Mar Joshua 18:1-21:12
- 13-Mar Joshua 21:13-23:16
- 14-Mar Joshua 24; Judges 1-2
- 15-Mar Judges 3-5
- 16-Mar Judges 6-7
- 17-Mar Judges 8-9
- 18-Mar Judges 10-13
- 19-Mar Judges 14-16
- 20-Mar Judges 17:1-20:11
- 21-Mar Jud 20:12-21:25; Ru 1:1-2:13
- 22-Mar Ruth 2:14-4:22; 1Samuel 1
- 23-Mar 1Samuel 2-4
- 24-Mar 1Samuel 5:1-9:10
- 25-Mar 1Samuel 9:11-12:18
- 26-Mar 1Samuel 12:19-14:42
- 27-Mar 1Samuel 14:43-17:25
- 28-Mar 1Samuel 17:26-19:24
- 29-Mar 1Samuel 20-22
- 30-Mar 1Samuel 23:1-25:31
- 31-Mar 1Samuel 25:32-30:10
- 1-Apr 1Sam 30:11-31:13; 2Sam 1-2
- 2-Apr 2Samuel 3:1-6:11
- 3-Apr 2Samuel 6:12-10:19
- 4-Apr 2Samuel 11-13
- 5-Apr 2Samuel 14-16
- 6-Apr 2Samuel 17-19
- 7-Apr 2Samuel 20:1-22:34
- 8-Apr 2Samuel 22:35-24:17
- 9-Apr 2Sam 24:18-25; 1Kin 1:1-2:18
- 10-Apr 1Kings 2:19-4:19
- 11-Apr 1Kings 4:20-7:39
- 12-Apr 1Kings 7:40-9:9
- 13-Apr 1Kings 9:10-11:25
- 14-Apr 1Kings 11:26-13:34
- 15-Apr 1Kings 14-17
- 16-Apr 1Kings 18:1-20:25
- 17-Apr 1Kings 20:26-22:36
- 18-Apr 1Kin 22:37-53; 2Kin 1:1-4:28
- 19-Apr 2Kings 4:29-8:15
- 20-Apr 2Kings 8:16-10:24
- 21-Apr 2Kings 10:25-14:10
- 22-Apr 2Kings 14:11-17:18
- 23-Apr 2Kings 17:19-19:24
- 24-Apr 2Kings 19:25-23:9
- 25-Apr 1Kin 23:10-25; 1Chro 1:1-16
- 26-Apr 1Chronicles 1:17-3:9
- 27-Apr 1Chronicles 3:10-6:30
- 28-Apr 1Chronicles 6:31-8:28
- 29-Apr 1Chronicles 8:29-11:21
- 30-Apr 1Chronicles 11:22-15:29
- 1-May 1Chronicles 16:1-19:9
- 2-May 1Chronicles 19:10-23:11
- 3-May 1Chronicles 23:12-26:19
- 4-May 1Chronicles 26:20-29:30
- 5-May 2Chronicles 1:1-4:10
- 6-May 2Chronicles 4:11-7:22
- 7-May 2Chronicles 8:1-11:12
- 8-May 2Chronicles 11:13-15:19
- 9-May 2Chronicles 16:1-20:13
- 10-May 2Chronicles 20:14-24:14
- 11-May 2Chronicles 24:15-28:27
- 12-May 2Chronicles 29-31
- 13-May 2Chronicles 32:1-35:19
- 14-May 2Chro 35:20-36:23; Ezra 1-3
- 15-May Ezra 4-7
- 16-May Ezra 8-10; Nehemiah 1
- 17-May Nehemiah 2-5
- 18-May Nehemiah 6:1-8:8
- 19-May Nehemiah 8:9-11:21
- 20-May Nehemiah 11:22-13:22
- 21-May Nehem 13:23-31; Esther 1-4
- 22-May Esther 5-10
- 23-May Job 1:1-5:16
- 24-May Job 5:17-8:22
- 25-May Job 9:1-12:12
- 26-May Job 12:13-16:10
- 27-May Job 16:11-20:11
- 28-May Job 20:12-24:12
- 29-May Job 24:13-29:13
- 30-May Job 29:14-32:10
- 31-May Job 32:11-35:16
- 1-Jun Job 36:1-39:12
- 2-Jun Job 39:13-42:9
- 3-Jun Job 42:10-17; Psalms 1:1-5:7
- 4-Jun Psalms 5:8-8:9
- 5-Jun Psalms 9-10
- 6-Jun Psalms 11:1-17:5
- 7-Jun Psalms 17:6-18:36
- 8-Jun Psalms 18:37-21:13
- 9-Jun Psalms 22:1-24:6
- 10-Jun Psalms 24:7-27:6
- 11-Jun Psalms 27:7-31:5
- 12-Jun Psalms 31:6-33:5
- 13-Jun Psalms 33:6-35:21
- 14-Jun Psalms 35:22-37:26
- 15-Jun Psalms 37:27-39:13
- 16-Jun Psalms 40-42
- 17-Jun Psalms 43:1-45:12
- 18-Jun Psalms 45:13-48:14
- 19-Jun Psalms 49:1-51:9
- 20-Jun Psalms 51:10-54:7
- 21-Jun Psalms 55:1-57:3
- 22-Jun Psalms 57:4-60:12
- 23-Jun Psalms 61-64
- 24-Jun Psalms 65:1-68:4
- 25-Jun Psalms 68:5-69:4
- 26-Jun Psalms 69:5-71:16
- 27-Jun Psalms 71:17-73:20
- 28-Jun Psalms 73:21-76:7

- 29-Jun Psalms 76:8-78:24
- 30-Jun Psalms 78:25-72
- 1-Jul Psalms 79-82
- 2-Jul Psalms 83-86
- 3-Jul Psalms 87:1-89:37
- 4-Jul Psalms 89:38-91:13
- 5-Jul Psalms 91:14-94:16
- 6-Jul Psalms 94:17-98:3
- 7-Jul Psalms 98:4-102:7
- 8-Jul Psalms 102:8-104:4
- 9-Jul Psalms 104:5-105:24
- 10-Jul Psalms 105:25-106:33
- 11-Jul Psalms 106:34-107:38
- 12-Jul Psalms 107:39-109:31
- 13-Jul Psalms 110-113
- 14-Jul Psalms 114:1-118:9
- 15-Jul Psalms 118:10-119:40
- 16-Jul Psalms 119:41-96
- 17-Jul Psalms 119:97-160
- 18-Jul Psalms 119:161-124:8
- 19-Jul Psalms 125-131
- 20-Jul Psalms 132:1-135:14
- 21-Jul Psalms 135:15-138:3
- 22-Jul Psalms 138:4-140:13
- 23-Jul Psalms 141:1-145:7
- 24-Jul Psalms 145:8-148:6
- 25-Jul Psalms 148:7-150:6; Prov 1:1-2:9
- 26-Jul Proverbs 2:10-5:14
- 27-Jul Proverbs 5:15-8:11
- 28-Jul Proverbs 8:12-11:11
- 29-Jul Proverbs 11:12-13:25
- 30-Jul Proverbs 14-16
- 31-Jul Proverbs 17-20
- 1-Aug Proverbs 21-23
- 2-Aug Proverbs 24:1-27:10
- 3-Aug Proverbs 27:11-30:33
- 4-Aug Proverbs 31; Eccles 1:1-3:8
- 5-Aug Ecclesiastes 3:9-8:17
- 6-Aug Ecclesiastes 9-12; Song 1-2
- 7-Aug Song 3-8; Isaiah 1:1-9
- 8-Aug Isaiah 1:10-5:17
- 9-Aug Isaiah 5:18-9:12
- 10-Aug Isaiah 9:13-13:16
- 11-Aug Isaiah 13:17-19:10
- 12-Aug Isaiah 19:11-24:6
- 13-Aug Isaiah 24:7-28:22
- 14-Aug Isaiah 28:23-32:20
- 15-Aug Isaiah 33:1-37:29
- 16-Aug Isaiah 37:30-40:31
- 17-Aug Isaiah 41-44
- 18-Aug Isaiah 45-49
- 19-Aug Isaiah 50-54
- 20-Aug Isaiah 55:1-60:9
- 21-Aug Isaiah 60:10-65:25
- 22-Aug Isaiah 66; Jeremiah 1:1-2:25
- 23-Aug Jeremiah 2:26-5:19
- 24-Aug Jeremiah 5:20-8:22
- 25-Aug Jeremiah 9-12
- 26-Aug Jeremiah 13:1-16:9
- 27-Aug Jeremiah 16:10-20:18
- 28-Aug Jeremiah 21-24
- 29-Aug Jeremiah 25-27
- 30-Aug Jeremiah 28:1-31:20
- 31-Aug Jeremiah 31:21-33:26
- 1-Sep Jeremiah 34-36
- 2-Sep Jeremiah 37:1-41:10
- 3-Sep Jeremiah 41:11-45:5
- 4-Sep Jeremiah 46-48
- 5-Sep Jeremiah 49:1-51:10
- 6-Sep Jeremiah 51:11-52:34
- 7-Sep Lamentations 1:1-3:51
- 8-Sep Lament 3:52-5:22; Ezekiel 1-2
- 9-Sep Ezekiel 3-8
- 10-Sep Ezekiel 9-12
- 11-Sep Ezekiel 13:1-16:43
- 12-Sep Ezekiel 16:44-20:17
- 13-Sep Ezekiel 20:18-22:12
- 14-Sep Ezekiel 22:13-24:27
- 15-Sep Ezekiel 25:1-28:10
- 16-Sep Ezekiel 28:11-31:18
- 17-Sep Ezekiel 32:1-34:24
- 18-Sep Ezekiel 34:25-38:9
- 19-Sep Ezekiel 38:10-40:49
- 20-Sep Ezekiel 41-43
- 21-Sep Ezekiel 44-47
- 22-Sep Ezekiel 48; Daniel 1:1-2:30
- 23-Sep Daniel 2:31-4:27
- 24-Sep Daniel 4:28-7:12
- 25-Sep Daniel 7:13-11:13
- 26-Sep Dan 11:14-12:13; Hosea 1-3
- 27-Sep Hosea 4-9
- 28-Sep Hosea 10-14; Joel 1:1-2:17
- 29-Sep Joel 2:18-3:21; Amos 1-4
- 30-Sep Amos 5-9; Obadiah 1:1-9
- 1-Oct Oba 1:10-21; Jonah; Micah 1-3
- 2-Oct Micah 4-7; Nahum 1-2
- 3-Oct Nahum 3; Habak; Zeph 1:1-13
- 4-Oct Zeph 1:14-End; Haggai
- 5-Oct Zechariah 1:1-7:14
- 6-Oct Zechariah 8-13
- 7-Oct Zechariah 14; Malachi
- 8-Oct Matthew 1-4
- 9-Oct Matthew 5-7
- 10-Oct Matthew 8:1-10:15
- 11-Oct Matthew 10:16-12:21
- 12-Oct Matthew 12:22 – 14:12
- 13-Oct Matthew 14:13-17:13
- 14-Oct Matthew 17:14-20:34
- 15-Oct Matthew 21-22
- 16-Oct Matthew 23:1-25:13
- 17-Oct Matthew 25:14-26:68
- 18-Oct Matthew 26:69-28:20
- 19-Oct Mark 1-3
- 20-Oct Mark 4-5
- 21-Oct Mark 6-7
- 22-Oct Mark 8:1-10:12
- 23-Oct Mark 10:13-12:12
- 24-Oct Mark 12:13-14:11
- 25-Oct Mark 14:12-15:47
- 26-Oct Mark 16; Luke 1
- 27-Oct Luke 2-3
- 28-Oct Luke 4:1-6:26
- 29-Oct Luke 6:27-8:25
- 30-Oct Luke 8:26-10:16
- 31-Oct Luke 10:17-12:12
- 1-Nov Luke 12:13-14:11
- 2-Nov Luke 14:12-16:31
- 3-Nov Luke 17:1-19:27
- 4-Nov Luke 19:28-21:9
- 5-Nov Luke 21:10-22:46
- 6-Nov Luke 22:47-24:23
- 7-Nov Luke 24:24-53; John 1:1-2:11
- 8-Nov John 2:12-4:38
- 9-Nov John 4:39-6:51
- 10-Nov John 6:52-8:20
- 11-Nov John 8:21-10:18
- 12-Nov John 10:19-12:11
- 13-Nov John 12:12-14:11
- 14-Nov John 14:12-17:13
- 15-Nov John 17:14-19:42
- 16-Nov John 20-21; Acts 1:1-2:13
- 17-Nov Acts 2:14-4:37
- 18-Nov Acts 5:1-7:29
- 19-Nov Acts 7:30-9:22
- 20-Nov Acts 9:23-11:30
- 21-Nov Acts 12-13
- 22-Nov Acts 14:1-16:10
- 23-Nov Acts 16:11-18:28
- 24-Nov Acts 19-20
- 25-Nov Acts 21:1-23:25
- 26-Nov Acts 23:26-27:8
- 27-Nov Acts 27:9-28:31; Rom 1:1-15
- 28-Nov Romans 1:16-5:11
- 29-Nov Romans 5:12-8:25
- 30-Nov Romans 8:26-11:24
- 1-Dec Romans 11:25-15:33
- 2-Dec Romans 16; 1Corin 1:1-4:13
- 3-Dec 1Corinthians 4:14-7:40
- 4-Dec 1Corinthians 8:1-12:11
- 5-Dec 1Corinthians 12:12-15:28
- 6-Dec 1Corin 15:29-16:24; 2Cor. 1-2
- 7-Dec 2Corinthians 3-7
- 8-Dec 2Corinthians 8-12
- 9-Dec 2Corin 13; Galatians 1:1-4:11
- 10-Dec Gal 4:12-6:18; Ephe 1:1-14
- 11-Dec Ephesians 1:15-5:14
- 12-Dec Eph 5:15-6:24; Philip 1-2
- 13-Dec Philippians 3-4; Colossians 1
- 14-Dec Coloss 2-4; 1Thess. 1:1-2:12
- 15-Dec 1Thess 2:13-5:28; 2Thess.
- 16-Dec 1Timothy 1-5
- 17-Dec 1Timothy 6; 2Timothy
- 18-Dec Titus; Phile; Hebr 1:1-2:10
- 19-Dec Hebrews 2:11-6:20
- 20-Dec Hebrews 7-10
- 21-Dec Hebrews 11-13
- 22-Dec James 1:1-4:10
- 23-Dec Jam 4:11-5:20; 1Pet 1:1-3:12
- 24-Dec 1Peter 3:13-5:14; 2Peter 1-2
- 25-Dec 2Peter 3; 1John 1:1-3:12
- 26-Dec 1Jn 3:13-end 2 John 3 John
- 27-Dec Jude 1:1-25; Revelation 1-4
- 28-Dec Revelation 5:1-9:11
- 29-Dec Revelation 9:12-14:8
- 30-Dec Revelation 14:9-18:24
- 31-Dec Revelation 19-22



\*\*\*\*\* **Genesis** \*\*\*\*\*

The word GENESIS means “beginning, origin,” and is a foundational theme that winds throughout the book.

The first eleven chapters of Genesis paint the early history of the human race in broad strokes. After the great flood, the focus narrows to God’s dealings with one family living in Mesopotamia, a family headed by Abram, later called Abraham. From the Euphrates River (in modern-day Iraq) over to what is now Syria, events move south into Canaan (modern-day Israel) and Egypt.

Genesis covers the most extensive period of time in all of Scripture, longer than the other books in the Bible combined! While the ancient history recounted in the first eleven chapters gives no indication of time span, Abram’s story begins around 2091 BC (Genesis 12:1), and the book ends with Joseph’s death in Egypt around 1805 BC (50:26).

### **Why is Genesis so important?**

To the original readers of Genesis, the book was valued as a history of their people. It told them the story of how God created the world and dealt with all humanity until He initiated a personal relationship with their forefather Abraham. Genesis revealed to them the eternal promises God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—promises which extended to their descendants. It provided comfort and hope for the downtrodden Hebrews as they waited to return to their “promised land.”

For later readers, Genesis offers a thorough background to the rest of the Bible. Here we learn ancient history and geography and are introduced to significant people and events found later in the Bible. God also reveals many facets of His nature through His dealings with people. We learn of the origin of sin, of its destructive effect on humanity, and of God’s plan to atone for that sin through a future Son of the people of Israel (Genesis 3:15; 22:18; 49:10).

### **What's the big idea?**

The Bible is divided into two major parts, the Old and New Testaments. Testament is another word for covenant. Covenants figure prominently into the story of Genesis, for they help define God’s relationship with His people at various times. Sin broke the perfect peace between God and humanity (Genesis 3) and instead of enjoying the blessing God intended, humanity was burdened with the curse. But God established His plan for redemption and blessing through covenants, first with Abraham (Genesis 12:1–5), reaffirmed with Isaac (26:1–35), then with Jacob (28:1–22). These promises applied to the Israelites in Egypt and to later generations. Genesis sets the stage for the rest of God’s plan to redeem the world through His Son, Jesus Christ.

### **How do I apply this?**

It’s easy to get lost in the genealogies and accounts in Genesis without seeing the big picture. Keep God, not just the people, in mind as you read through the book. Consider His character qualities. If you were an Israelite just released from slavery and reading this for the first time, would you marvel at God’s power over creation? Or His anger over sin? Or the way He fulfilled His promises to everyone? Awareness of each of these characteristics should evoke worship . . . and hope. Remember that the Lord is strong, faithful, and just. And His desire to bless His creation will one day be fully realized.

\*\*\*\*\* **Exodus** \*\*\*\*\*

The title “Exodus” comes from the Septuagint, which derived it from the primary event found in the book, the deliverance from slavery and “exodus” or departure of the Israelite nation out of Egypt by the hand of Yahweh, the God of their forefathers.

**Where are we?**

Exodus begins in the Egyptian region called Goshen. The people then traveled out of Egypt and, it is traditionally believed, moved toward the southern end of the Sinai Peninsula. They camped at Mount Sinai, where Moses received God’s commandments. The book covers a period of approximately eighty years, from shortly before Moses’s birth (c. 1526 BC) to the events that occurred at Mount Sinai in 1446 BC.

**Why is Exodus so important?**

In Exodus we witness God beginning to fulfill His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Though the children of Israel were enslaved in a foreign land, God miraculously and dramatically delivered them to freedom. He then established Israel as a theocratic nation under His covenant with Moses on Mount Sinai. The ten plagues, the Passover, the parting of the Red Sea, the fearsome majesty of God’s presence at Mount Sinai, the giving of the Ten Commandments, the building of the tabernacle . . . these events from Exodus are foundational to the Jewish faith. And they provide crucial background context to help future readers of Scripture understand the entire Bible’s message of redemption. The frequency of references to Exodus by various biblical writers, and even Jesus’s own words, testify to its importance.

**What's the big idea?**

The overall theme of Exodus is redemption—how God delivered the Israelites and made them His special people. After He rescued them from slavery, God provided the Law, which gave instructions on how the people could be consecrated or made holy. He established a system of sacrifice, which guided them in appropriate worship behavior. Just as significantly, God provided detailed directions on the building of His tabernacle, or tent. He intended to live among the Israelites and manifest His shekinah glory (Exodus 40:34–35)—another proof that they were indeed His people.

The Mosaic Covenant, unveiled initially through the Decalogue (Ten Commandments), provides the foundation for the beliefs and practices of Judaism, from common eating practices to complex worship regulations. Through the Law, God says that all of life relates to God. Nothing is outside His jurisdiction.

**How do I apply this?**

Like the Israelites who left Egypt, all believers in Christ are redeemed and consecrated to God. Under the Mosaic Covenant, people annually sacrificed unblemished animals according to specific regulations in order to have their sins covered, or borne, by that animal. The author of the New Testament book of Hebrews tells us, “But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:3–4 NIV). Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross fulfilled the Law. As the perfect Lamb of God, He took away our sin permanently when He sacrificed Himself on our behalf. “We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (10:10 NIV).

## \*\*\*\*\* Leviticus \*\*\*\*\*

The word Leviticus comes from the tribe of Levi, whose members were set aside by the Lord to be His priests and worship leaders.

### **Where are we?**

The Law found in Leviticus was spoken by God to Moses at or near Mount Sinai, where the Israelites camped for some time. Because God delivered these detailed laws after the original Ten Commandments, the most probable date for their revelation is 1446 BC. Whether every law was written down at that time is impossible to determine; it may be that they were codified progressively during the ensuing forty-year wandering.

### **Why is Leviticus so important?**

“The book of Leviticus was the first book studied by a Jewish child; yet is often among the last books of the Bible to be studied by a Christian.”<sup>2</sup> Today’s readers are often put off by the book’s lists of laws regarding diet, sacrifice, and social behavior. But within these highly detailed directives we discover the holiness—the separateness, distinction, and utter “otherness”—of God. And we learn how sin devastates humanity’s relationship with their Creator.

God established the sacrificial system so that His covenant people might enjoy His fellowship through worship; it also allowed for repentance and renewal:

When an Israelite worshiper laid his hand on the animal victim, he identified himself with the animal as his substitute . . . this accomplished a symbolic transfer of his sin and a legal transfer of his guilt to the animal victim. God then accepted the slaughter of the animal . . . as a ransom payment for the particular sin which occasioned it.<sup>3</sup>

Many years after Moses wrote Leviticus, Jesus came to offer Himself as the ultimate sacrifice, holy and perfect, once for all, fulfilling the Law and rendering future animal sacrifices unnecessary and void (Hebrews 10:10).

### **What's the big idea?**

The overall message of Leviticus is sanctification. The book communicates that receiving God’s forgiveness and acceptance should be followed by holy living and spiritual growth. Now that Israel had been redeemed by God, they were to be purified into a people worthy of their God. “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy,” says Leviticus 19:2. In Leviticus we learn that God loves to be approached, but we must do so on His terms.

### **How do I apply this?**

This theme of holiness extends to the church. In the New Testament, 1 Peter 1:15–16 references Leviticus 19:2 when it says: “like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” Those who are redeemed by the mercies of God offer different sacrifices today; they offer themselves (Romans 12:1).

Like He did with the Israelites, God has redeemed and consecrated Christians. Jesus offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice on our behalf, taking the punishment that we deserved so that we might be forgiven. Those who place their trust in Jesus’s atoning act become God’s children, saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8–9).



If you are His child, then He wants you to reflect His character. He is sanctifying you much like He did the nation of Israel. Does your life echo His? In what ways are you growing more like Christ?

\*\*\*\*\* **Numbers** \*\*\*\*\*

The name “Numbers” is a translation of Arithmoi, from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It is titled “numbers” because the book contains many statistics, population counts, tribal and priestly figures, and other numerical data.

**Where are we?**

The events of the book began in the second year after the Israelites departed Egypt, as they camped at Mount Sinai around 1444 BC (Numbers 1:1). The narrative ends thirty-eight years later “in the plains of Moab by the Jordan opposite Jericho” (36:13) in 1406 BC. Numbers records the people’s long wandering in the desert of Sinai, and their eventual arrival at the banks of the Jordan River across from the Promised Land.

The Lord directed the message of Numbers toward the younger generation, children of the former slaves who escaped through the Red Sea. Except for Joshua, Caleb, and Moses, the older generation—everyone twenty years old or older at the time of the first census—died before the completion of Numbers, due to their disobedience and disbelief (Numbers 14:22–30). Moses completed the book before his death (Deuteronomy 31:24).

**Why is Numbers so important?**

Numbers takes the reader on a long and winding path through a desert of excruciating detail. The book records census results for all twelve tribes not once, but twice; it documents priestly instructions for handling the Ark of the Covenant and the tabernacle; and it even spells out the placement of the tribes when they camped. But through it all, we cannot doubt God’s unfailing direction over the nation.

As a history of the nation not yet established in the land promised them long ago, this book unveils significant events sometimes referenced later in Scripture. Joshua and Caleb alone among the twelve spies encouraged Israel to take possession of the land (Numbers 13–14; Joshua 14:7); Moses struck a rock and water spouted forth (Numbers 20:11; Psalm 106:32); Moses lifted up a bronze serpent on a pole so that believing Israelites might be healed of their snake bites (Numbers 21:6–9; John 3:14); and Balaam was rebuked by his donkey (Numbers 22:21–34; Revelation 2:14).

**What's the big idea?**

In this book, the people of Israel tested God’s patience, and He in turn tested their endurance and faithfulness. Though the people failed many times, God showed His own faithfulness by His constant presence leading the way: through a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

More than just a history lesson, the book of Numbers reveals how God reminded Israel that He does not tolerate rebellion, complaining, and disbelief without invoking consequences. He taught His people how to walk with Him—not just with their feet through the wilderness but with their mouths in worship, hands in service, and lives as witnesses to the surrounding nations. He was their God, they were His people, and He expected them to act like it.

## **How do I apply this?**

Modern readers can take away from Numbers not only a thorough history of Israel's early days but also a renewed sense of God's delight in obedience. He is our God, too, and He wants us to live righteously, worshipping Him through our words and works.

The journey of the Israelites through the wilderness earned the apostle Paul's notice when he penned his first letter to the Corinthian church. "These things happened," he wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:6, "as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved." Do you see any resemblance between the grumbling, rebellious Israelites and yourself? How can you avoid following their example? With humility and sincerity, pray for a soft heart, open to God's guiding hand.

## \*\*\*\*\* Deuteronomy \*\*\*\*\*

Deuteronomy means, "Second Law". It records this "second law" — which are a series of sermons that Moses gave as he restated God's commands originally given to the Israelites some forty years earlier in Exodus and Leviticus.

### **Where are we?**

Deuteronomy was written around 1406 BC, at the end of the forty years of wandering endured by the nation of Israel. At the time, the people were camped on the east side of the Jordan River, on the plains of Moab, across from the city of Jericho (Deuteronomy 1:1; 29:1). They were on the verge of entering the land that had been promised centuries earlier to their forefathers (Genesis 12:1, 6–9). The children who had left Egypt were now adults, ready to conquer and settle the Promised Land. Before that could happen, the Lord reiterated through Moses His covenant with them.

### **Why is Deuteronomy so important?**

Moses addressed his words to "all Israel" at least twelve times. This phrase emphasized the nation's unity, initiated by their covenant with God at Mount Sinai and forged in the wilderness. In the midst of widespread polytheism, Israel was distinctive in that they worshiped one God, Yahweh. Their God was totally unique; there was none other like Him among all the "gods" of the nations surrounding them. Deuteronomy 6:4 codifies this belief in the Shema, the basic confession of faith in Judaism even today. "Hear, O Israel! The LORD [Yahweh] is our God, the LORD [Yahweh] is one!"

Deuteronomy also restates the Ten Commandments and many other laws given in Exodus and Leviticus. The book delivered to Israel God's instructions on how to live a blessed life in the Promised Land. Chapters 27 and 28 specify the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience.

### **What's the big idea?**

Unlike the unconditional covenant God made with Abraham, the covenant between Yahweh and Israel was bilateral—a two-way street. God would keep His promise to bless the nation if the people remained faithful. The adult Israelites were too young to have participated in the first covenant ceremony at Mount Sinai. Therefore, Moses reviewed the Law at the doorstep to the Promised Land, urging this new generation to re-covenant with Yahweh, to recommit themselves to His ways.

## **How do I apply this?**

In Moses's conclusion, he entreated the people,

“I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days.”

(Deuteronomy 30:19–20)

“This” in verse 20 refers to loving the Lord your God, obeying, and holding fast to Him. That is life! Our relationship with God is to be marked by faithfulness, loyalty, love, and devotion. Think of an ideal marriage—that's the picture of how God wants us to cling to Him (Ephesians 5:28–32).

\*\*\*\*\* **Joshua** \*\*\*\*\*

## **Where are we?**

The events of the book of Joshua span about twenty-five years, starting soon after the death of Moses (Joshua 1:1) around 1406 BC, before the conquest commenced. The conquest of Canaan took about seven years, and Joshua's final address and subsequent death came almost twenty years later. The book begins with the nation of Israel poised at the banks of the Jordan River, across from Jericho. It records the details of numerous military campaigns that defeated the inhabitants of the land. The book ends with Joshua's regathering of the nation for his final exhortation.

This history was written to the victorious Israelites who had settled the land. Though they were newly established as conquerors, Joshua reminded them that the conquest was incomplete: “very much of the land remains to be possessed” (13:1).

## **Why is Joshua so important?**

The book of Joshua records the culmination of Israel's journey to the Promised Land. Here we see God fulfill His promise to give the land of Canaan to Jacob's descendants. Joshua portrays the Lord as their general, the One who would lead His people in victorious battle if they would trust and obey.

Joshua recounted a story of contradictions. On the one hand, God gave the land that He had promised to the nation. On the other hand, the people failed to possess the land completely, allowing some inhabitants to remain. God fulfilled His side of the bargain, but the Israelites did not finish the job. The Canaanite peoples became a damaging influence on Israel as years went by.

In this book we find accounts of faithfulness: Rahab the harlot (Joshua 2:1–21), the battle of Jericho (6:1–27), and Caleb the warrior (14:6–14). We also witness disobedience and its consequences: Achan's sin (7:1) and the resulting loss at Ai (7:5), failure of some tribes to annihilate the enemy as God commanded, and even Joshua making a treaty with the Gibeonites without first seeking the Lord (9:1–27).

## **What's the big idea?**

The book of Joshua was written to the descendants of those who conquered the land, as a historical account of how they had come to settle there. It celebrates God as general, defender, and king. It shows the geographical boundaries given to each tribe of Israel. Even more significantly, the book of Joshua serves as the connecting narrative between the days of Moses and the days of the judges, during which the book was first circulated. That which Moses began and endured in the wilderness, Joshua was able to claim

victoriously in the land. God’s promises through the ages were being fulfilled before the people’s eyes. “Not one of the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass” (Joshua 21:45).

### **How do I apply this?**

The last few verses of Joshua narrate three burials: Joshua (Joshua 24:29–30), the bones of Joseph (24:32), and Eleazar the high priest (24:33). Strange as it may seem, these burials proclaim God’s character. All three men were associated with Israel’s days in captivity (Joseph long ago when Jacob’s family first settled in Egypt, and Joshua and Eleazar as young men on the long journey through the wilderness). And now all three lay at rest in the land of promise, witnesses to God’s faithfulness.

God is the ultimate promise-keeper. As faithful and present as He was with Israel, so He is with us. “Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (1:9).

## \*\*\*\*\* JUDGES \*\*\*\*\*

### **Where are we?**

We think about the judges as both a period of time and a book of the Bible. The period of the judges began after the death of Joshua in the early fourteenth century BC (Joshua 24:29) and continued until Saul was crowned king of Israel by the prophet Samuel in 1051 BC (1 Samuel 10:24). The book of Judges acts as the sequel to the book of Joshua, linked by comparable accounts of Joshua’s death (Joshua 24:29–31; Judges 2:6–9). Events within the book of Judges span the geographical breadth of the nation, happening in a variety of cities, towns, and battlefields. Scholars believe some of the judges ruled simultaneously in separate geographical regions. Attempts to calculate the exact amount of time covered in Judges are inconclusive, but generally, the book begins soon after the death of Joshua and ends in the years just before the entrance of Samuel onto the scene, a period of about three hundred years.

The contents of Judges were likely not written chronologically. The final few chapters (Judges 17–21) give an overview of the moral climate during those days and, rather than occurring after the period of the judges listed earlier in the book, they probably happened in and around the times of various judges mentioned in earlier chapters.

### **Why is Judges so important?**

The time of the judges brought about great apostasy in Israel. The nation underwent political and religious turmoil as the people tried to possess those parts of the land that had not yet been fully conquered. The tribes fought among themselves, as well, nearly wiping out the tribes of Manasseh (Judges 12) and Benjamin (20–21). The pattern of behavior in the book of Judges is clear: the people rebelled through idolatry and disbelief, God brought judgment through foreign oppression, God raised up a deliverer—or judge, and the people repented and turned back to God. When the people fell back into sin, the cycle started over again.

Ironically, in this book we meet many heroes of faith: Othniel, Gideon, Samson, Shamgar, Deborah, Jephthah, Ehud . . . flawed individuals who answered God’s call to deliver the Israelites in sometimes dramatic form. The book includes many of the most graphic, violent, and disturbing scenes in all Scripture—some in the name of righteousness, others in the name of evil.

## **What's the big idea?**

The primary message of Judges is that God will not allow sin to go unpunished. As Exodus established, Israel was God's people—He was their King. They had forsaken the covenant established at Mount Sinai. In Judges, He disciplined them for following other gods, disobeying His sacrificial laws, engaging in blatant immorality, and descending into anarchy at times. Yet because they were His people, He listened to their cries for mercy and raised up leaders to deliver them. Unfortunately, even these godly individuals did not wield sufficient influence to change the nation's direction. The people's inability to resist sinful Canaanite influences eventually revealed their desire for a centralized monarchy, led by a righteous king whom God would choose as His intermediary.

## **How do I apply this?**

Memory is a gift. Remembering the past teaches us countless lessons about how to live today. The Israelites forgot. They did not remember the miraculous events that brought them to their land or the covenant that united them to their God. But God did not forget His covenant—and because of His great love for His people, He disciplined His sinful children so that they might return to Him.

Have you forgotten the great works God has done in your life? Perhaps your difficult circumstances are overpowering your faith. Do you feel as if He is disciplining you right now? Know that He disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12:5–11). Return to Him. Remember, trust, and obey. He is waiting with open arms.

\*\*\*\*\* **RUTH** \*\*\*\*\*

## **Where are we?**

The events of Ruth occurred sometime between 1160 BC and 1100 BC, during the latter period of the judges (Ruth 1:1). These were dark days, full of suffering brought about by the Israelites' apostasy and immorality. Part of the judgments God brought upon His sinful people included famine and war. The book of Ruth opens with a report of famine, which drove Naomi's family out of Bethlehem into neighboring Moab. Naomi eventually returned with Ruth because she heard "that the LORD had visited His people in giving them food" (1:6).

Readers can identify this interlude as part of the cyclical pattern of sin, suffering, supplication, and salvation found in Judges. But this story stands as a ray of light, showing the power of the love between God and His faithful people. The author gave the reader a snapshot perspective—one family, in a small town, at the threshing floor—as opposed to the broader narratives found in Judges.

## **Why is Ruth so important?**

The book was written from Naomi's point of view. Every event related back to her: her husband's and sons' deaths, her daughters-in-law, her return to Bethlehem, her God, her relative, Boaz, her land to sell, and her progeny. Almost without peer in Scripture, this story views "God through the eyes of a woman."<sup>1</sup>

Naomi has been compared to a female Job. She lost everything: home, husband, and sons—and even more than Job did—her livelihood. She joined the ranks of Israel's lowest members: the poor and the widowed. She cried out in her grief and neglected to see the gift that God placed in her path—Ruth.

Ruth herself embodied loyal love. Her moving vow of loyalty (Ruth 1:16–17), though obviously not marital in nature, is often included in modern wedding ceremonies to communicate the depths of devotion to which the new couples aspire. The book reveals the extent of God’s grace—He accepted Ruth into His chosen people and honored her with a role in continuing the family line into which His appointed king, David, and later His Son, Jesus, would be born (Matthew 1:1, 5).

### **What's the big idea?**

Obedience in everyday life pleases God. When we reflect His character through our interactions with others, we bring glory to Him. Ruth’s sacrifice and hard work to provide for Naomi reflected God’s love. Boaz’s loyalty to his kinsman, Naomi’s husband, reflected God’s faithfulness. Naomi’s plan for Ruth’s future reflected selfless love. The book of Ruth showed the Israelites the blessings that obedience could bring. It showed them the loving, faithful nature of their God. This book demonstrates that God responds to His people’s cry. He practices what He preaches, so to speak. Watching Him provide for Naomi and Ruth, two widows with little prospects for a future, we learn that He cares for the outcasts of society just as He asks us to do (Jeremiah 22:16; James 1:27).

### **How do I apply this?**

The book of Ruth came along at a time of irresponsible living in Israel’s history and appropriately called the people back to a greater responsibility and faithfulness before God—even in difficult times. This call applies just as clearly to us today. We belong to a loving, faithful, and powerful God who has never failed to care and provide for His children. Like Ruth and Boaz, we are called to respond to that divine grace in faithful obedience, in spite of the godless culture in which we live. Are you willing?

## \*\*\*\*\* FIRST SAMUEL \*\*\*\*\*

First Samuel 27:6 refers to the divided monarchy, when the ten tribes of Israel rebelled against the two tribes of Judah, which occurred after Solomon’s reign. From this we can conclude that the book came together sometime after the death of David (971 BC) and perhaps even after the death of Solomon (931 BC). Because the book contains no reference to the Assyrian invasion in 722 BC, it likely originated before the period of the exile.

The events that happen in 1 Samuel took place over a period of about 110 years, stretching from the closing days of the judges, when Samuel was born (ca. 1120 BC) through the death of Saul (1011 BC). We see the birth of Samuel, his call from God and subsequent prophetic ministry, the rise and fall of King Saul, and the anointing and maturity of young David.

First Samuel is set in the land of Israel, where the Hebrews invaded and settled (see Joshua). Numerous other peoples continued to dwell alongside Israel, often disrupting the peace and encouraging the Israelites to stray from their faith.

### **Why is First Samuel so important?**

In this critical period of Israel’s history, the people of God transformed from a loosely affiliated group of tribes into a unified nation under a form of government headed by a king.

First Samuel focuses on the establishment of that monarchy. The people demanded a king, similar to the kings of the surrounding nations (1 Samuel 8:5). Saul, the first king, though “head and shoulders above the rest” did not have a righteous heart, and his line was destined never to inherit the crown (9:1–15:35). God instructed Samuel to anoint David, the youngest son of Jesse of Bethlehem, as the next king (16:1–13).

Much of 1 Samuel follows David’s exploits as a young musician, shepherd, and warrior. We witness his underdog victory over Goliath (17:1–58), his deep friendship with Jonathan (18:1–4), and his growing military prowess (18:5–30). He waited patiently for the throne, often pursued and driven into hiding by Saul. The book concludes with Saul’s death (31:1–13), which serves as a natural dividing marker between 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel.

### **What's the big idea?**

First Samuel chronicles the beginning of Israel’s monarchy, following the lives of the prophet Samuel, the ill-fated King Saul, and God’s ultimate choice of David as king. Several themes feature prominently.

**Providence:** God repeatedly made everyday events work for His purposes. He used Hannah’s contentious relationship with Peninnah (1 Samuel 1:1–28), led Saul to Samuel during Saul’s search for lost donkeys (9:1–27), and caused David to learn of Goliath while taking food to his brothers (17:1–58). These are but a few examples.

**Kingship:** As the divine King, God designated a human vice-regent, David, to rule over His people. This history validates David’s house as the legitimate rulers of Israel. It also fulfills Jacob’s promise that the scepter will never depart from Judah, David’s tribe (Genesis 49:10).

**Reversal of human fortune:** Hannah’s barrenness gave way to children (1 Samuel 1:1–28; 2:21); Samuel became prophet instead of Eli’s sons (2:12; 3:13); Saul rose to prominence though he was from a lowly tribe; and David was anointed king though he was the youngest son (16:1–13). Normal human patterns were reversed by God so that His plan could be furthered, showing His sovereignty over all.

### **How do I apply this?**

God is still sovereign in the twenty-first century. He will accomplish His purposes with or without our cooperation. But as was true in the lives of Samuel, Saul, and David, our response to God’s call affects our outcome. Will we obey Him as Samuel and David did and live lives marked by blessing? Or will we, like Saul, try to live on our own terms? “To obey is better than sacrifice,” Samuel told Saul (1 Samuel 15:22). That truth still speaks to us today.

## **\*\*\*\*\* SECOND SAMUEL \*\*\*\*\***

### **Where are we?**

Second Samuel is set in the land of Israel during the reign of David and follows the course of his forty years as king of Israel (1011–971 BC).

### **Why is Second Samuel so important?**

First Samuel introduces the monarchy of Israel, and 2 Samuel chronicles the establishment of the Davidic dynasty and the expansion of Israel under God’s chosen leader. The book

opens as David learned of Saul's death. His lament over the deaths of Saul and of Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:19–27), David's unlikely best friend, demonstrated David's personal grief over their demise. The Lord soon set David over the tribe of Judah (2:4) and then over all Israel as His anointed king (5:3), uniting all twelve tribes into a tight-knit nation.

The first ten chapters show David as victorious in battle, praised by the people, compassionate to the sick and poor, and righteous in God's sight. We see David dance before the Lord in the streets of Jerusalem as his men brought the ark of the covenant back home (6:12–16). We also meet Mephibosheth, the crippled son of Jonathan to whom David extended grace, "for the sake of [his] father Jonathan" (9:7).

Yet biblical writers did not overlook their heroes' flaws. In the chapters that follow, we note that David's adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1–27) was followed by a series of tragedies: their child's death (12:18), David's daughter Tamar's rape by his son Amnon (13:1–39), Amnon's murder (13:28–30), David's own political overthrow by his son Absalom (15:1–37), and Absalom's subsequent death (18:1–33).

Despite the turmoil in his later years, David enjoyed the Lord's forgiveness and favor. His genuine sorrow and regret over his sins revealed his repentant heart, with which the Lord was pleased.

### **What's the big idea?**

Key to the book and to the entire biblical record is 2 Samuel 7:16, "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever." This divine promise marked the beginning of an additional covenant, called the Davidic covenant, in which God promised an eternal throne to the house of David. "Because of David's faith, God did not treat [David's] descendants as He had treated Saul's. Sin would be punished, but David's line would never be completely cut off."

God's unconditional promise to David would be fulfilled ultimately in David's descendant Jesus Christ. The covenant also included a continuing promise that the people of Israel would have a land of their own forever.

### **How do I apply this?**

David is known as a "man after [God's] own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14) because, though he sinned greatly and made mistakes, he acknowledged those failures and repented before God. Repent means to turn away from sin and turn toward righteousness. Our Father knows we are not perfect. So His Son, Jesus Christ, paid the price for our sins so that we can become righteous in God's sight through faith. And although our salvation is secure, our daily sins can hinder our relationship with God. When we confess our sins, turning to the Lord in humility, He will forgive us and restore our relationship with Him.

The apostle James has written what might be an appropriate epitaph for David. It can be yours, too: "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you" (James 4:10).

\*\*\*\*\* FIRST KINGS \*\*\*\*\*

### **Where are we?**

First Kings opens describing the final days of King David (around 971 BC) and the conspiracies surrounding his succession. When David died (1 Kings 2:10), Solomon



ascended the throne and established himself as a strong and wise leader. In the early years of Solomon's reign, Israel experienced its "glory days." Its influence, economy, and military power enjoyed little opposition; its neighbors posed no strong military threat. Shortly after Solomon's death in 931 BC (1 Kings 11:43), the kingdom was divided into northern (Israel) and southern (Judah) entities. First Kings follows the history of this divided kingdom through the year 853 BC.

### **Why is First Kings so important?**

Those kings who reigned under God's authority—who remained faithful to the Law—experienced God's blessings. But those kings who deviated from the Law experienced curses.

First Kings reveals Solomon's relationship with Yahweh, emphasizing Solomon's divinely given wisdom and wealth. Solomon's reputation reached far beyond Israel's borders to modern-day Yemen, the queen of Sheba's likely home (1 Kings 10:1–13). Solomon's numerous marriages and extensive harem are the stuff of legends, but they led to his wandering faith in later years. Solomon did, however, build the temple, God's permanent dwelling place among His people.

First Kings also introduces the prophet Elijah, who pronounced God's judgment on the evil northern king Ahab. In addition to performing other miracles, Elijah won a dramatic confrontation with false prophets on Mount Carmel (18:1–46).

### **What's the big idea?**

First Kings was written "to record history but, more important, to teach the lessons of history."<sup>2</sup> As with other historical books in the Old Testament, the history recorded here was meant to preserve not just important events but spiritual truths learned through those events.

In the books of 1 and 2 Kings, each king is evaluated by "his reaction toward his covenantal responsibility to the Law of the LORD. That was the acid test of whether he 'did evil' or 'that which was right in the eyes of the LORD.'"<sup>3</sup> Readers will notice scathing rebukes of some kings—reports not typically recorded by purely historical writers. In addition to the kings, the prophets figure heavily in this book. They are God's spokesmen, proclaiming His word to mostly hard-hearted rulers. It is through the prophets' eyes—always connecting the nation's fortune with its kings' faithfulness (or lack thereof)—that we learn the history of Israel and Judah.

### **How do I apply this?**

Solomon was known as the wisest man of his day. He was arguably the wealthiest man of his time. He enjoyed God's favor in many ways, yet his legacy is tarnished by the faithlessness he displayed in his later years. In direct contradiction to God's command for a king not to "multiply wives" (Deuteronomy 17:17), Solomon married many foreign women. First Kings laments, "When Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods" (11:4). Solomon began to rely on his fortune, his military might, and his political alliances instead of the God who gave all of those blessings to him. He focused on the gifts, forgetting the Giver.

How often do you do the same? Are there any direct commands from God you are ignoring? Today, take time to recall the blessings in your life, and then thank the Lord for

them. Rely on Him, not your possessions or position, as your source of strength and significance.

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. (Psalm 20:7 NIV)

\*\*\*\*\* SECOND KINGS \*\*\*\*\*

### **Where are we?**

Second Kings continues the history of the divided kingdom, picking up the story around 853 BC. In 722 BC, the powerful nation of Assyria invaded the northern kingdom, scattering and taking captive the people of Israel. Only Judah remained intact. But then Assyria suffered a stunning fall to the Babylonians, who took the Assyrian capital of Nineveh in 612 BC. By 605 BC Babylon dominated Judah, had taken some captives away, and in 586 BC Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and took additional prisoners into captivity. Many people who were considered valuable to the invaders, such as the prophet Daniel and members of the royal family, were taken to Babylon early on. By the end of Kings, the people of God no longer inhabited their Promised Land. Many areas of the country had been rendered virtually uninhabitable due to the razing, burning, and other destructive tactics of the Babylonian army, while the people had been enslaved, scattered, and decimated by their enemies.

The book ends with an epilogue of sorts, giving a peek into the good fortune of Jehoiachin—Judah’s last true ruler before a series of puppet kings were installed by Babylon. If Jeremiah did write much of Kings, he could not have written this section, set in Babylon, for he had been taken away to Egypt years earlier.

### **Why is Second Kings so important?**

Second Kings features many unique events and people. Two people were raised from the dead (2 Kings 4:32–37; 13:20–21). The prophet Elijah left this earth without dying (2:1–18); Enoch was the only other man in the Bible to do so (Genesis 5:21–24). The waters of the Jordan River rolled back twice (2 Kings 2:8, 14). These and other miraculous events testify to God’s continuing work among His people.

The time period covered by this book saw the emergence of the first writing prophets in Israel. Amos and Hosea went to the people of Israel, while Isaiah, Joel, Micah, Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah prophesied in Judah, both groups calling the people to repentance and warning them of God’s coming judgments. The author devoted extensive space to Elisha’s ministry after Elijah was taken to heaven, giving special attention to the numerous miracles Elisha performed.

None of the kings of Israel are described as having done right in God’s eyes; each led the people deeper into idolatry. Several of Judah’s kings were righteous, notably Joash, Uzziah, Hezekiah, and Josiah. Hezekiah held off the Assyrians by trusting in the Lord for deliverance. Josiah later instituted an even greater spiritual reformation. Neither effort, however, was enough to stem God’s eventual judgment on the nation in fulfillment of the curses of the Mosaic Covenant (Deuteronomy 28).

### **What's the big idea?**

World affairs played a heavy role in Israel’s and Judah’s destinies. Yet, the author of 2 Kings directly connected the Israelites’ apostasy—led by their wicked kings—to their

national destruction, pointing it out as God's judgment on His wayward children. Despite repeated warnings from God's prophets to turn from their ways and return to God, the people continued to live in sin. To their regret, they did not believe that God would allow their nation to be ruined by foreign invaders.

Yet God did not forget His promise to David, either. God saved a remnant from among the people and kept the royal line intact so that one day His people could return to their land to await the promised Redeemer.

### **How do I apply this?**

Second Kings teaches an important life lesson: actions have consequences. "Repent! Sin will incur judgment," God warned in effect through the prophets. Israel and Judah learned the hard way that God means what He says.

How will we learn? Consider your heart. Is it hard, resistant to God's call? Or can you acknowledge your sin and turn back to Him?

## \*\*\*\*\* FIRST CHRONICLES \*\*\*\*\*

### **Where are we?**

The time frame covered in 1 Chronicles mirrors parts of 2 Samuel and 1 Kings. The chronicler focused on David's reign in 1 Chronicles, including and omitting different events recorded in the other biblical histories, so that his document recorded those events significant to his purpose. For instance, 1 Chronicles does not include David's adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11), which was a well-known fact even before the chronicler began his work, and so it did not bear repeating.

Chronicles was most likely written during the time of Ezra or Nehemiah, while the Jews were dispersed throughout Persia, some having returned to Israel. Archaeological evidence supports this premise. "Fragments of an actual manuscript of Chronicles found at Qumran makes a date in the Persian period (538–333 BC) almost certain."<sup>2</sup>

### **Why is First Chronicles so important?**

Readers will note the extensive space devoted to genealogies. Why are these family lists so common in Chronicles? Scholars say that genealogies serve many purposes, among them

To demonstrate the legitimacy of a person or family's claim to a particular role or rank . . . to preserve the purity of the chosen people and /or its priesthood . . . to affirm the continuity of the people of God despite expulsion from the Promised Land.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to family history, 1 Chronicles lists priests, Levites, armies, temple officials, and other leaders of various ministries.

In Chronicles, the history of Israel is told through a priestly perspective. The chronicler devoted significant attention to proper worship of Yahweh and adherence to the regulations of His Law. The author included David's decisions on the proper manner in which to undertake moving the ark of the covenant (1 Chronicles 13, 15–16) and detailed descriptions of its return to Jerusalem. The chronicler even highlighted one of David's psalms (16:8–36). We read the story of how David purchased the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, which he then designated as the future site of the temple (21:15–30). Though David desired to build the temple, God revealed to him that David's son Solomon would have that honor (17:1–14).

## **What's the big idea?**

Why do we need the books of 1–2 Chronicles when we already have the history of 2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings? Just as the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each offer a different perspective on the life of Jesus, so the books of Chronicles present Israel's history with a purpose different than the other historical books. The books of 2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings reveal the monarchies of Israel and Judah—in particular the sins of the nations that resulted in the exile. But the books of Chronicles, written after the time of the exile, focus on those elements of history that God wanted the returning Jews to meditate upon: obedience that results in God's blessing, the priority of the temple and priesthood, and the unconditional promises to the house of David.

David's prayer in 1 Chronicles 29:10–19 summarizes the themes the chronicler wished to communicate: glory to God, gratitude for gifting David's family with leadership of the nation, and the desire that David's descendants continue to devote themselves to God. Remaining faithful to God would reap blessing.

When the book was written, David's descendants no longer ruled as monarchs over Israel. But the chronicler desired the people to remember the royal Davidic lineage, for God had promised a future ruler would rise from that line. After the seventy-year exile in Babylon, Jewish political and social power resided more with the religious rather than political rulers. Telling Israel's history through a priestly and kingly lens was intended to prepare the people for a future Messiah.

## **How do I apply this?**

Read David's magnificent prayer in 1 Chronicles 29. Consider your own spiritual heritage. Would you like to model such godly strength and character as his to your own children? What steps do you need to take in order to echo truthfully David's attitude in verse 11, "Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours" (NIV)?

Knowing that He tests the heart and is pleased with integrity (1 Chronicles 29:17), ask the Spirit to fill you daily and guide your steps that future generations might be blessed.

\*\*\*\*\* **SECOND CHRONICLES** \*\*\*\*\*

## **Where are we?**

Second Chronicles covers the time from Solomon's ascension to the throne (971 BC) until the southern kingdom of Judah was finally carried into exile in Babylon in 586 BC. The focus of the book is on Judah. The author was more concerned with telling the story of David's descendants, who reigned over Judah, than with the history of the northern kingdom of Israel. The centrality of Jerusalem, where the temple was located, falls in line with the book's overarching focus on the priesthood as well.

Again, 2 Chronicles was probably written in the fifth century BC, "following the return of a small group of Jews to Judah following the fall of the Babylonian Empire. Intent on rebuilding the temple and resettling the Holy Land, the little community soon found itself in a struggle simply to survive."<sup>1</sup> The Jews eventually rebuilt the temple but languished for years in their fight to reclaim the land. Against this backdrop, the chronicler portrayed Jewish history, focusing on the blessings God bestowed when leaders were faithful to His Law.

## **Why is Second Chronicles so important?**

The book opens with Solomon establishing his throne over a unified nation, solidifying his authority and squashing early rebellions (1 Kings 2). He then built the magnificent temple of God, using the plans God gave to his father, David. Six of the nine chapters devoted to King Solomon focus on the temple construction, a task reserved for him since before his birth (2 Chronicles 2–7).

When the kingdom split under the rule of Rehoboam, Solomon's son, the Levites from all over Israel sided with Rehoboam and flocked to Jerusalem to continue their priestly duties (10:1–19). But a cycle of righteousness and corruption characterized the throne. Some kings were completely evil, disregarding God's Law and leading the people into sinful behaviors. A few kings, such as Solomon, started off as righteous but fell away. Others strayed but repented, such as Manassah (33:1–25). A few kings, such as Hezekiah and Josiah, were honored with the epitaph "he did right in the sight of the LORD" (29:2; 34:2). Throughout 2 Chronicles, faithfulness was rewarded; betrayal was judged.

A history lover will enjoy the numerous mentions of secular historical figures during this time period. From Tilgath-pilneser of Assyria, to Sennacherib of Assyria, to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, non-Jewish foreign leaders played prominent roles in the political fortunes of Judah.

## **What's the big idea?**

The post-exilic Jews needed a reminder of who their God was and how He worked. History provided the best lesson for them. "The author uses the history of Judah to demonstrate that God blesses His people when they remain faithful and joyfully worship the Lord."<sup>2</sup>

One writer stated that:

History itself is a call to worship and an invitation to hope. If the struggling community of Jews in Judah will put God first as did godly generations of the past, and show their commitment by a similar zeal for worship, the Lord will surely show His faithfulness to them. The line of David will yet again take Zion's throne and the kingdom of God be established over all the earth.<sup>3</sup>

## **How do I apply this?**

As it did for the Israelites, history can jog our memories. Can you remember times when God blessed you? Such memories are blessings in themselves, as well as encouragements to press on in holiness, with hope and confidence.

If you are hard-pressed to recall specific times when God worked in your life, consider your devotional habits. A prayer journal that recalls prayers asked and those answered can act as your own "history" manual. God wants us to remember His works, so we, too, can praise Him for His goodness and have hope for our future!

\*\*\*\*\* EZRA \*\*\*\*\*

## **Where are we?**

The book of Ezra records two separate time periods directly following the seventy years of Babylonian captivity. Ezra 1–6 covers the first return of Jews from captivity, led by Zerubbabel—a period of twenty-three years beginning with the edict of Cyrus of Persia and ending at the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (538–515 BC). Ezra 7–10 picks up

the story more than sixty years later, when Ezra led the second group of exiles to Israel (458 BC). The book could not have been completed earlier than about 450 BC (the date of the events recorded in 10:17–44).

The events in Ezra are set in Jerusalem and the surrounding area. The returning exiles were able to populate only a tiny portion of their former homeland.

### **Why is Ezra so important?**

The book of Ezra provides a much-needed link in the historical record of the Israelite people. When their king was dethroned and captured and the people exiled to Babylon, Judah as an independent nation ceased to exist. The book of Ezra provides an account of the Jews' regathering, of their struggle to survive and to rebuild what had been destroyed. Through his narrative, Ezra declared that they were still God's people and that God had not forgotten them.

In the book of Ezra we witness the rebuilding of the new temple, the unification of the returning tribes as they shared common struggles and were challenged to work together. Later, after the original remnant had stopped work on the city walls and spiritual apathy ruled, Ezra arrived with another two thousand people and sparked a spiritual revival. By the end of the book, Israel had renewed its covenant with God and had begun acting in obedience to Him.

Ezra also contains one of the great intercessory prayers of the Bible ([Ezra 9:5–15](#); see [Daniel 9](#) and [Nehemiah 9](#) for others). His leadership proved crucial to the Jews' spiritual advancement.

### **What's the big idea?**

Ezra's narrative reveals two main issues faced by the returning exiles: (1) the struggle to restore the temple ([Ezra 1:1–6:22](#)) and (2) the need for spiritual reformation ([7:1–10:44](#)). Both were necessary in order for the people to renew their fellowship with the Lord. A broader theological purpose is also revealed: God keeps His promises. Through the prophets, God had ordained that His chosen people would return to their land after a seventy-year exile. Ezra's account proclaims that God kept His word, and it shows that when God's people remained faithful to Him, He would continue to bless them. Hence, the book emphasizes the temple and proper worship, similar to Chronicles (which was also written during these days).

### **How do I apply this?**

God moved the hearts of secular rulers (Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes) to allow, even encourage and help, the Jewish people to return home. He used these unlikely allies to fulfill His promises of restoration for His chosen people. Have you encountered unlikely sources of blessing? Have you wondered how God can really work all things together for the good of those who are called by His name ([Romans 8:28](#))? Take time today to acknowledge God's sovereignty and mercy in your life. Recommit to Him your trust, your love, and your obedience.

### **Where are we?**

The book of Nehemiah opens in the Persian city of Susa in the year 444 BC. Later that year, Nehemiah traveled to Israel, leading the third of three returns by the Jewish people following their seventy years of exile in Babylon. (The previous chapter on Ezra describes the earlier two returns.) Most of the book centers on events in Jerusalem. The narrative concludes around the year 430 BC, and scholars believe the book was written shortly thereafter.

Nehemiah is the last historical book of the Old Testament. Although the book of Esther appears after Nehemiah in the canon, the events in Esther occurred in the time period between Ezra 6 and 7, between the first and second returns of the people to Israel. The prophet Malachi was a contemporary of Nehemiah.

### **Why is Nehemiah so important?**

Nehemiah was a layman, not a priest like Ezra nor a prophet like Malachi. He served the Persian king in a secular position before leading a group of Jews to Jerusalem in order to rebuild the city walls. "Nehemiah's expertise in the king's court equipped him adequately for the political and physical reconstruction necessary for the remnant to survive." <sup>1</sup> Under Nehemiah's leadership, the Jews withstood opposition and came together to accomplish their goal. Nehemiah led by example, giving up a respected position in a palace for hard labor in a politically insignificant district. He partnered with Ezra, who also appears in this book, to solidify the political and spiritual foundations of the people. Nehemiah's humility before God (see his moving intercessory prayers in chapters 1 and 9) provided an example for the people. He did not claim glory for himself but always gave God the credit for his successes.

### **What's the big idea?**

Nehemiah recorded the reconstruction of the wall of Jerusalem, Judah's capital city. Together, he and Ezra, who led the spiritual revival of the people, directed the political and religious restoration of the Jews in their homeland after the Babylonian captivity. Nehemiah's life provides a fine study on leadership. He overcame opposition from outsiders as well as internal turmoil. He exercised his administrative skills in his strategy to use half the people for building while the other half kept watch for the Samaritans who, under Sanballat, threatened attack (Nehemiah 4-7). As governor, Nehemiah negotiated peace among the Jews who were unhappy with Persian taxes. He exhibited a steadfast determination to complete his goals. Accomplishing those goals resulted in a people encouraged, renewed, and excited about their future.

### **How do I apply this?**

The book of Nehemiah shows us the kind of significant impact one individual can have on a nation. Nehemiah served in secular offices, using his position to bring back to the Jews order, stability, and proper focus on God.

God uses all manner of people in all manner of places doing all manner of work. Do you feel you must be "in ministry" in order to serve God? Be encouraged; He is not limited by your vocation. In fact, God has placed you where you are for a purpose. Have this attitude about your work: "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father" (Colossians 3:17).

### **Where are we?**

The events in the book of Esther occurred from 483 BC to 473 BC, during the first half of the reign of King Xerxes, who chose Esther as his queen. During this time period, the first remnant of Jews who had returned to Judah were struggling to reestablish temple worship according to the Law of Moses. But Esther and Mordecai, along with many other Jews, had chosen not to make the trek back to Judah. They seemed content to stay in Susa, the capital city of Persia, in which the story is set.

The book was written no earlier than 470 BC and probably no later than 424 BC, during the reign of Xerxes' son Artaxerxes.

### **Why is Esther so important?**

Esther is the only book in the Bible not to mention the name of God. But that is not to say that God was absent. His presence permeates much of the story, as though He were behind the scenes coordinating "coincidences" and circumstances to make His will happen.

Haman, the king's evil second-in-command, was a descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites, who were ancient enemies of God's people (Numbers 24:7; 1 Samuel 15:8). He cast the lot, called "pur," in order to determine the day that the Jews would be exterminated (Esther 3:7-9). The feast of Purim, still celebrated by Jews today, commemorates the Jews' deliverance from Haman's plot (9:24-32).

### **What's the big idea?**

While the primary purpose of the book of Esther was to relate the dramatic origins of the feast of Purim, a greater theme shines through the story. The sovereignty and faithfulness of God permeate each scene. Nothing is truly coincidental, the book of Esther says to us. God's sovereignty is best summarized in Mordecai's exhortation to Esther: "And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14).

When events seemed out of control to Esther and Mordecai, when the king dictated ruin for their people, when evil was poised to triumph . . . God was at work. He worked through their dark days (Esther was taken to the harem [2:1-16]), their faithful obedience (Esther risked her life before the king [5:1-3]), and their victories (Esther revealed Haman's plot and the Jews' destruction of their enemies [7-9]). This message is clear: God is sovereign even when life doesn't make sense.

God is also the great Promise Keeper. Mordecai said to Esther: "If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish" (Esther 4:14). Mordecai's words reflected his faith that God would honor His eternal covenant with Abraham and David.

### **How do I apply this?**

Life can be hard. Difficult times happen, and pain cannot be avoided. When life doesn't make sense, do you turn to God or away from Him? Let the book of Esther encourage you that God is always present. Jesus called us "friends" (John 15:15), and the Spirit is our "Helper" (14:26). Trust and obey, as Esther did. And watch God silently weave all events for His glory . . . and for our good.



### **Where are we?**

Though the text does not directly identify its setting, internal clues indicate that Job lived during the time of the patriarchs, approximately 2100 to 1900 BC. According to Job 42:16, Job lived an additional 140 years after his tragedies occurred, perhaps to around 210 years total. His long lifespan generally corresponds to that of Terah (Abraham's father), Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Also, Job's wealth was measured in livestock (Job 1:3; 42:12), as was Abraham's (Genesis 12:16). Like the patriarchs, Job used God's unique title "El Shaddai" (God Almighty). The book of Job does not mention the Mosaic Law; indeed, Job's daughters were equal heirs with his sons, and Job himself, though not a priest, offered sacrifices—things not possible under the Law (Leviticus 4:10; Numbers 27:8). Though we cannot be certain, Job may have lived during the time of Jacob or shortly thereafter.

Job lived in the land of Uz (Job 1:1), but no one really knows where Uz was located. Scholars believe it was outside of Canaan, near the desert because "the customs, vocabulary, and references to geography and natural history relate to northern Arabia."<sup>1</sup>

### **Why is Job so important?**

The Israelites categorized Job within their wisdom literature. The book includes language from ancient legal proceedings, laments, and unique terms not found elsewhere in the Bible. In addition, the majority of Job is written in parallel lines which are indicative of poetry.

The book delves into issues near to the heart of every human who experiences suffering. The prologue provides a fascinating peek into the back story—why God allowed Satan to afflict Job with such pain and turmoil. Then, through a series of dialogues and monologues arranged in a pattern of threes, human wisdom attempts to explain the unexplainable, until finally God Himself speaks.

The final chapters of Job record God's masterful defense of His majesty and unique "otherness"—of God's eternal transcendence above creation—in contrast with Job's humble and ignorant mortality. "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? / Tell Me, if you have understanding" (Job 38:4).

### **What's the big idea?**

Job's plight of undeserved suffering compels us to ask the age-old question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" The answer given to Job may or may not satisfy the reader. God allows pain for good reason, but He may never reveal those reasons.

Job did not reject God, but Job did challenge and accuse Him. The Almighty quieted Job decisively when He finally thundered His own perspective on the situation. God did not answer Job's question of "Why?"—He instead overwhelmed Job and his friends with the truth of His majesty and sovereignty. Job came away with a deeper sense of God's power and splendor, trusting Him more:

"I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear;  
But now my eye sees You;  
Therefore I retract,  
And I repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:5–6)

## How do I apply this?

Pain inevitably afflicts each one of us. Suffering is unavoidable in this life. Will your relationship with God be enough when trials come? Will you trust Him through your suffering? Read [Job 38–42](#). Spend time with the Almighty. Pray for a stronger faith in the powerful Creator described in those chapters. Pray for a right perspective of Him so that you might see your situation through His eyes.

Instead of asking where God is in the midst of your pain, the book of Job affirms God's control and asks us, "Where are we in our pain? Are we trusting our Creator, even though we cannot understand our circumstances?"

## \*\*\*\*\* PSALMS \*\*\*\*\*

### Where are we?

Individual psalms were written as far back in history as Moses's time, through the time of David, Asaph, and Solomon, to the time of the Ezraites who most likely lived after the Babylonian captivity, meaning the writing of the book spans one thousand years. Some of the psalms attributed to David have additional notations connecting them with documented events in his life (for example, [Psalm 59](#) is linked with [1 Samuel 19:11](#); [Psalm 56](#) is connected with [1 Samuel 21:10–15](#); [Psalm 34](#) is associated with [1 Samuel 21:10–22:2](#); and [Psalm 52](#) is linked with [1 Samuel 22:9](#)).

The psalms are organized into five books or collections. They were probably collected gradually, as corporate worship forms developed along with temple worship. It is likely that by the time of Ezra, the books of the Psalter were organized into their final form. Each section concludes with a doxology, with the entire Psalter capped by [Psalm 150](#), a grand doxology.

### Why is Psalms so important?

The psalms comprised the ancient hymnal of God's people. The poetry was often set to music—but not always. The psalms express the emotion of the individual poet to God or about God. Different types of psalms were written to communicate different feelings and thoughts regarding a psalmist's situation.

Psalms of lament express the author's crying out to God in difficult circumstances. Psalms of praise, also called hymns, portray the author's offering of direct admiration to God. Thanksgiving psalms usually reflect the author's gratitude for a personal deliverance or provision from God. Pilgrim psalms include the title "a song of ascent" and were used on pilgrimages "going up" to Jerusalem for three annual festivals. Other types of psalms are referred to today as wisdom psalms, royal psalms (referring to Israel's king or Israel's Messiah), victory psalms, Law psalms, and songs of Zion.

The psalms include unique Hebrew terms. The word *Selah*, found seventy-one times, is most likely a musical notation added by worship leaders after the Israelites incorporated the psalm into public worship. Scholars do not know the meaning of *maskil*, found in thirteen psalms. Occasionally, a psalm appears with instructions for the song leader. For example, we see instructions such as "For the director of music" (occurring in fifty-five psalms [NIV]); "To the tune of 'Lilies'" (similar references found in [Psalms 45](#), [60](#), [69](#), [80](#) NIV); "To the tune of 'The Doe of the Morning'" ([Psalm 22](#) NIV); "To the tune of 'Do Not Destroy'" ([Psalms 57–59](#), [75](#) NIV). These and others can refer to melodies used with the given psalm or perhaps to suggestions for liturgical use.

## **What's the big idea?**

The book of Psalms expresses worship. Throughout its many pages, Psalms encourages its readers to praise God for who He is and what He has done. The Psalms illuminate the greatness of our God, affirm His faithfulness to us in times of trouble, and remind us of the absolute centrality of His Word. As the Psalms present a clear picture of God lovingly guiding His people, the responses of praise and worship to God are never far from the psalmists' pens. The portrayal of worship in the Psalms offers us glimpse after glimpse of hearts devoted to God, individuals repentant before Him, and lives changed through encounters with Him.

## **How do I apply this?**

Read Psalm 1, then Psalm 150. Thank God for allowing you to express your deepest emotions to Him. If you are hurting, use Psalm 13 as a guide and write your own lament to God. If you are rejoicing, meditate on Psalm 30 and echo the praise found there. No matter your circumstance, the psalms contain a corresponding word that will help you share your heart with the Lord.

## \*\*\*\*\* PROVERBS \*\*\*\*\*

## **Where are we?**

The composition of Proverbs remains one of the most difficult questions about the book. Its strong association with Solomon means most of its contents were completed prior to his death in 931 BC. Clearly the book stayed in the southern kingdom of Judah, as Hezekiah's men compiled more of Solomon's proverbs in Proverbs 25–29. This indicates that the book was likely in its final form sometime before the end of Hezekiah's reign in 686 BC.

## **Why is Proverbs so important?**

Proverbs accomplishes something no other biblical book does: it simply compiles numerous short instructions for living an effective life on earth. While other books articulate profound theological truths, lengthy narratives of triumph and failure, or prophetic preaching to a disobedient people, Proverbs concerns itself completely with instructing people in the path of wisdom. The writers of the book recognized the varied circumstances of a person's life and provided principles to apply in a variety of situations rather than instructions to follow in only a few specific instances.

## **What's the big idea?**

Proverbs states its theme explicitly very early in the book: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7). The fear of the Lord refers to our viewing Him with the respect He deserves. It means living our lives in light of what we know of Him, holding Him in the highest estimation, and depending on Him with humble trust. Only then, Proverbs teaches, will we discover knowledge and wisdom (see also 9:10).

In writing the Proverbs, Solomon hoped that his readers would attain practical righteousness in all things and that we would do this by living our lives under the authority and direction of God. He specifically explained the book's purpose in 1:2–6, focusing on imparting understanding that would impact every facet of our lives. Much of the book emphasizes listening to others so that we might learn from them and apply the combined

knowledge of those who have gone before us—such as parents and elders—to the unique circumstances of our own lives (1:5, 8). Wisdom then involves appropriating a measure of humility, first before God and then before others. If instead, we decide to speak rashly rather than listen attentively . . . well, Proverbs deals with that too (12:15; 13:3).

### **How do I apply this?**

Read it! Then live it! Proverbs contains some of the most applicable nuggets of truth in all of the Bible. Most of the proverbs are pithy statements brimming over with imagery from the real world. This approach allows us to see very clearly how any particular proverb might be applied to any number of everyday situations we encounter—from getting out of bed in the morning to building a strong foundation in our relationships with others.

Proverbs reminds us that God concerns Himself not just with the big, cataclysmic events of life but even those mundane, “invisible” moments in our lives as well.

Are you following God, even in those seemingly “small” circumstances? Allow Proverbs to refocus your attention on all the hidden moments of your life.

## \*\*\*\*\* ECCLESIASTES \*\*\*\*\*

### **Where are we?**

With Solomon as the author of the book, we know it had to have been written sometime before his death in 931 BC. The content of Ecclesiastes reflects someone looking back on a life that was long on experience but short on lasting rewards. As king, he had the opportunity and resources to pursue the rewards of wisdom, pleasure, and work in and of themselves. Yet the world-weary tone of the writing suggests that late in life, he looked back on his folly with regret, pointing us to a better, simpler life lived in light of God’s direction (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14).

### **Why is Ecclesiastes so important?**

Ecclesiastes presents us a naturalistic vision of life—one that sees life through distinctively human eyes—but ultimately recognizes the rule and reign of God in the world. This more humanistic quality has made the book especially popular among younger audiences today, men and women who have seen more than their fair share of pain and instability in life but who still cling to their hope in God.

### **What's the big idea?**

Ecclesiastes, like much of life, represents a journey from one point to another. Solomon articulated his starting point early in the book: “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 1:2), indicating the utter futility and meaninglessness of life as he saw it. Nothing made sense to him because he had already tried any number of remedies—pleasure, work, and intellect—to alleviate his sense of feeling lost in the world. However, even in the writer’s desperate search for meaning and significance in life, God remained present. For instance, we read that God provides food, drink, and work (2:24); both the sinner and the righteous person live in God’s sight (2:26); God’s deeds are eternal (3:14); and God empowers people to enjoy His provision (5:19). Ultimately, the great truth of Ecclesiastes lies in the acknowledgment of God’s ever-present hand on our lives. Even when injustice and uncertainty threaten to overwhelm us, we can trust Him and follow after Him (12:13–14).

## **How do I apply this?**

We all desire meaning in life. Often that search takes us along winding, up-and-down paths filled with bursts of satisfaction that shine bright for a time but eventually fade. In one sense, it's satisfying to see that experience echoed throughout Ecclesiastes. An appreciation for our common humanity emerges from reading its pages. We relate to the journey of Solomon because, for so many of us, it is our own. When we attempt to find meaning in the pursuit of pleasure, the commitment to a job, or through plumbing intellectual depths, we all eventually find in each of these pursuits a dead end. Ecclesiastes shows us a man who lived through this process and came out on the other side with a wiser, more seasoned perspective. When we're surrounded by the temptation to proclaim life's ultimate emptiness, we can find in Ecclesiastes a vision tempered by experience and ultimately seen through divinely colored lenses. Life is destined to remain unsatisfying apart from our recognition of God's intervention. It only remains to be seen whether or not we will place our trust in His sure and able hands. Have you struggled with misplaced pursuits in life? Does your life lack the meaning and purpose you desire? Hear the words of Solomon that they might encourage you to place your trust solely in the Lord.

## \*\*\*\*\* SONG OF SONGS \*\*\*\*\*

### **Where are we?**

Solomon wrote the book during his reign as king of Israel, meaning he composed it sometime between 971 and 931 BC. Scholars who hold to Solomon's authorship tend to agree that the song was written early in his reign, not merely because of the youthful exuberance of the poetry but because his harem of 140 women, mentioned in 6:8, is relatively low in number compared to the final tally of 1,000 ([1 Kings 11:3](#)). Also, the author mentioned place names from both the north and the south of the country, including Lebanon and Egypt, reminding us of the relative peace and good relations among these nations early in Solomon's reign.

### **Why is Song of Solomon so important?**

This book remains singular within the Old Testament for at least two reasons: its character as a single poem and its subject matter, particularly the frank discussion of love between a married couple. The Song of Solomon's willingness to broach the topic of physical love within marriage has made many of its readers throughout history uncomfortable, so much so that Rabbi Aqiba had to vigorously defend the book's place in the Jewish canon even as late as AD 90 at the Council of Jamnia.<sup>2</sup> But as a testament to the beauty of the marriage relationship in its fullness, Song of Solomon stands out with its uniquely detailed vision of this beautiful reality.

### **What's the big idea?**

The fullness of the union that takes place at marriage is described in some of the most splendid poetic language in the entire Bible. In a world where so many speak of God's special gifts with coldly clinical or apathetic statistical language, the passion of Solomon's poetry refreshes a world thirsty for the truth about marriage. Solomon began his rendering of this relationship with the two lovers in courtship longing for affection while expressing their love for one another ([Song of Solomon 1:1–3:5](#)). Eventually, they come together in

marriage, the groom extolling his bride's beauty before they consummate their relationship (3:6–5:1). Finally, she struggles with the fear of separation, while he reassures his bride of his affections for her (5:2–8:14). All of this reinforces the theme of the goodness of marriage. Some suggest the book also pictures in a more general way Christ's love for His bride, the church.

### **How do I apply this?**

From courtship to marriage to the assurance of love, Song of Solomon poetically presents a broad range of events and feelings in the days leading up to and during marriage, offering encouragement toward an enduring love amid the petty jealousies and fears sure to threaten even the strongest of relationships. We should heed the Song's sublime words by continuing to value marriage as one of the bedrocks of society, appreciating the goodness and the beauty borne out of the union of two people in holy matrimony. Would you consider your marriage a sign of God's goodness and beauty working in your life, or has it become something less than that over time? Song of Solomon reminds us that both marriage and the physical union that follows originate in God; we should therefore consider each of them as evidence of His grace working itself out in the world.

\*\*\*\*\* ISAIAH \*\*\*\*\*

### **Where are we?**

Isaiah prophesied from 739–681 BC to a nation that had turned a deaf ear to the Lord. Instead of serving Him with humility and offering love to their neighbors, the nation of Judah offered meaningless sacrifices in God's temple at Jerusalem and committed injustices throughout the nation. The people of Judah turned their backs on God and alienated themselves from Him, which created the need for Isaiah's pronouncements of judgment—declarations made in the hope that God's chosen people would return to Him.

### **Why is Isaiah so important?**

The book of Isaiah provides us with the most comprehensive prophetic picture of Jesus Christ in the entire Old Testament. It includes the full scope of His life: the announcement of His coming (Isaiah 40:3–5), His virgin birth (7:14), His proclamation of the good news (61:1), His sacrificial death (52:13–53:12), and His return to claim His own (60:2–3). Because of these and numerous other christological texts in Isaiah, the book stands as a testament of hope in the Lord, the One who saves His people from themselves.

### **What's the big idea?**

Isaiah's overall theme receives its clearest statement in chapter 12: "Behold, God is my salvation, / I will trust and not be afraid" (Isaiah 12:2). This echoes the meaning of Isaiah's name, which means the "salvation of Yahweh."<sup>2</sup> Having read the book, one might wonder about the strong presence of judgment that runs through the first thirty-nine chapters when the theme is salvation. How can the two coexist? The presence of judgment indicates its necessity for salvation to occur. Before we can have salvation, we must have a need for it!

So the bulk of those early chapters in Isaiah detail judgments against the people who have turned their backs on the Lord, showing us that those who persist in their rebellion will receive judgment. On the other hand, we also see God's faithfulness to His promise. He

will preserve a small remnant of faithful believers, those who will continue on into the glorious renewed world He has prepared for His children in the end times (65:17–66:24).

### **How do I apply this?**

Because of its scope, Isaiah contains one of the clearest expressions of the gospel in all the Old Testament. Even from the first chapter, it is clear that the people have turned away from God and failed in their responsibilities as His children ([Isaiah 1:2–17](#)). Yet God miraculously holds out hope to this unrepentant people, offering cleansing of sins and the blessing that comes with faith and obedience in Him (1:18–20). Salvation lies only in God—the only question is whether or not we will accept His offer.

In addition to its gospel message, the book of Isaiah clearly articulates the sins of God’s people—dealing with others unjustly which resulted in their offering hypocritical sacrifices to God. Do you see anything in your own life that might fall under Isaiah’s critique of injustice—treating family, colleagues, or even strangers with unkindness or even disdain? Isaiah’s message is also a call for believers to come back to purity in our love for God and for our neighbors ([Luke 10:26–28](#)).

\*\*\*\*\* **JEREMIAH** \*\*\*\*\*

### **Where are we?**

Jeremiah’s ministry began in 627 BC and ended sometime around 582 BC with his prophecy to the Jews who fled to Egypt ([Jeremiah 44:1](#)). For the majority of this time, Jeremiah based his ministry out of Jerusalem. The southern kingdom of Judah fell during Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry (586 BC), having been threatened for many years by outside powers—first Assyria and Egypt and then by their eventual conquerors, Babylon. Jeremiah found himself addressing a nation hurtling headlong toward judgment from God. The Israelites may have feared the future as the outside powers drew near, but rather than respond with humility and repentance, the people of Judah primarily lived as islands unto themselves, disregarding both the Lord’s commandments and the increasing danger that resulted from their disobedience.

### **Why is Jeremiah so important?**

The prophecies of Jeremiah offer us a unique insight into the mind and heart of one of God’s faithful servants. The book includes numerous personal statements of emotional engagement, painting Jeremiah not merely as a prophet brought on the scene to deliver God’s message but also as a red-blooded human being who felt compassion for his people, desired judgment for evildoers, and was concerned about his own safety as well.

Significantly, the book of Jeremiah also provides us the clearest glimpse of the new covenant God intended to make with His people once Christ came to earth. This new covenant would be the means of restoration for God’s people, as He would put His law within them, writing it on hearts of flesh rather than on tablets of stone. Rather than fostering our relationship with God through a fixed location like a temple, He promised through Jeremiah that His people would know Him directly, a knowledge that comes through the person of His Son, Jesus Christ ([Jeremiah 31:31–34](#); see also [Hebrews 8:6](#)).

### **What's the big idea?**

Because Jeremiah prophesied in the final years of Judah before God’s people were exiled

to Babylon, it makes sense that the book's overarching theme is judgment. Indeed, the first forty-five chapters focus primarily on the judgment coming to Judah because of its disbelief and disobedience. However, an element of grace is also present in these events. The fall of Jerusalem comes nearly nine hundred years after the original covenant between God and the Israelites in the Sinai desert (Exodus 24:1–18). Such an extended period of time witnesses to God's great patience and mercy, allowing His people the opportunity to turn from their sinful ways—a lifestyle they began not long after they struck the original covenant with God (32:1–35).

### **How do I apply this?**

Seeing God's patience with His people in the Old Testament reminds us that God has always been and continues to be merciful. That His chosen people routinely ignored the covenant they made with Him for the better part of a millennia without immediate death and destruction should give us hope in our own struggles with living well for God. Though we fail Him, He is patient with us, working in us to bring about the best for our lives. But the book of Jeremiah also reminds us that an end will certainly come, a truth that should spur us to follow after God wholeheartedly. Will you follow Him?

## \*\*\*\*\* LAMENTATIONS \*\*\*\*\*

### **Where are we?**

"How lonely sits the city / That was full of people!" (Lamentations 1:1), so goes the beginning of Lamentations. The city in question was none other than Jerusalem. Jeremiah walked through the streets and alleys of the Holy City and saw nothing but pain, suffering, and destruction in the wake of the Babylonian invasion of 586 BC. It also makes sense to date the book as close to the invasion as possible, meaning late 586 BC or early 585 BC, due to the raw emotion Jeremiah expresses throughout its pages.

### **Why is Lamentations so important?**

Like the book of Job, Lamentations pictures a man of God puzzling over the results of evil and suffering in the world. However, while Job dealt with unexplained evil, Jeremiah lamented a tragedy entirely of Jerusalem's making. The people of this once great city experienced the judgment of the holy God, and the results were devastating. But at the heart of this book, at the center of this lament over the effects of sin in the world, sit a few verses devoted to hope in the Lord (Lamentations 3:22–25). This statement of faith standing strong in the midst of the surrounding darkness shines as a beacon to all those suffering under the consequences of their own sin and disobedience.

### **What's the big idea?**

As the verses of Lamentations accumulate, readers cannot help but wonder how many different ways Jeremiah could describe the desolation of the once proud city of Jerusalem. Children begged food from their mothers (Lamentations 2:12), young men and women were cut down by swords (2:21), and formerly compassionate mothers used their children for food (4:10). Even the city's roads mourned over its condition (1:4)! Jeremiah could not help but acknowledge the abject state of this city, piled with rubble.

The pain so evident in Jeremiah's reaction to this devastation clearly communicates the significance of the terrible condition in Jerusalem. Speaking in the first person, Jeremiah pictured himself captured in a besieged city, without anyone to hear his prayers, and as a



target for the arrows of the enemy (3:7–8, 12). Yet even in this seemingly hopeless situation, he somehow found hope in the Lord (3:21–24).

### **How do I apply this?**

Lamentations reminds us of the importance not only of mourning over our sin but of asking the Lord for His forgiveness when we fail Him. Much of Jeremiah's poetry concerns itself with the fallen bricks and cracking mortar of the overrun city. Do you see any of that destroyed city in your own life? Are you mourning over the sin that's brought you to this point? Do you feel overrun by an alien power; are you in need of some hope from the Lord? Turn to Lamentations 3:17–26, where you'll find someone aware of sin's consequences and saddened by the results but who has placed his hope and his trust in the Lord.

## \*\*\*\*\* EZEKIEL \*\*\*\*\*

### **Where are we?**

Ezekiel lived among the Jewish exiles in Babylon at a settlement along the river Chebar called Tel-abib (Ezekiel 3:15), less than one hundred miles south of Babylon. The invading Babylonians brought about ten thousand Jews to the village in 597 BC, including Ezekiel and the last king of Judah, Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:8–14).

Ezekiel's prophecy began a mere five years into his time at Tel-abib (Ezekiel 1:2), and he continued to prophesy among the people for at least twenty-two years (29:17). Because he spoke to a people whom God had exiled due to their continued rebellion against Him, a majority of Ezekiel's message communicates judgment for sins committed (1:1–32:32). However, like all the prophets, he also provided his people, now without a land of their own, some hope for the future (33:1–48:35).

### **Why is Ezekiel so important?**

The book of Ezekiel pronounces judgment on both Israel and surrounding nations, but it also provides a vision of the future millennial kingdom that complements and adds to the vision of other Old and New Testament texts. Not only does the book present a striking picture of the resurrection and restoration of God's people (Ezekiel 37), it also offers readers a picture of the reconstructed temple in Jerusalem, complete with the return of God's glory to His dwelling place (40:1–48:35). This latter section of Ezekiel's prophecy looks forward to the people's worship after Christ's return in the end times, when He will rule Israel and the nations from His throne in Jerusalem during His thousand year reign.

### **What's the big idea?**

God didn't exile the Israelites primarily to punish them. God never has been nor is He now interested in punishment for punishment's sake. Rather, He intended the punishment or judgment in Ezekiel's day as a means to an end—to bring His people to a state of repentance and humility before the one true God. They had lived for so long in sin and rebellion, confident in their own strength and that of the neighboring nations, that they needed God to remind them of His holy nature and their humble identity in a most dramatic way. After centuries of warnings, prophetic messages, and invasions, God decided that more significant action was required—He had to remove the people from their promised land.

## **How do I apply this?**

Ezekiel's entire prophetic ministry centered around the small exiled community at Tel-abib, a people uprooted from their homes and livelihoods living out their days in a foreign land. Can you imagine the feelings of disorientation and confusion that accompanied these people? Even though many of the exiles were directly engaged in the sinful behavior that led to God's judgment, that would not prevent them from wondering why all this was happening to them.

We sometimes find ourselves in that predicament as well, asking "Why, Lord?" and waiting in silence for the answer. The exiles had to wait five years for God to send Ezekiel, and when God did, His prophet had a message that the people likely didn't want to hear: God is the Lord of heaven and earth, and the judgment the people were experiencing was a result of their own sin.

The book of Ezekiel reminds us to seek out the Lord in those dark times when we feel lost, to examine our own lives, and to align ourselves with the one true God. Will you consider doing so today?

\*\*\*\*\* DANIEL \*\*\*\*\*

## **Where are we?**

The Babylonians exiled the group containing Daniel and his three friends—best known by their Babylonian names, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego—to the cultural center of the their empire, the city of Babylon, in 605 BC. This move was part of the first of three deportations (605, 597, and 586 BC) carried out by the Babylonians in Israel after they subdued Jerusalem and the unfaithful King Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:36–24:2). The teenaged Daniel found himself in the midst of a strongly polytheistic religious culture, meaning he had ample opportunities to fall into error. However, he stood firm in his faith among the Babylonian people on several significant matters—including dietary regulations and worship practices (Daniel 1:8–16; 6:6–12).

## **Why is Daniel so important?**

Daniel is one of the few Bible books that takes place during a period of judgment (many books foretell it and a few look back on it) and in a foreign nation. Whether it's in the contrast between the culture's idol worship and Daniel's faithful purity or in the account of the arrogant Nebuchadnezzar and his humbling encounter with God, the pagan backdrop in Daniel makes the Lord's power shine through in a magnificent and majestic way that stands out in Scripture. The book of Daniel makes it clear that the true God is the supreme ruler over heaven and earth (Daniel 4:17), even when all seems lost and the consequences of sin seem overwhelming.

## **What's the big idea?**

The book of Daniel stands as a unique mix in the Old Testament, for while it begins with history, it makes a strong transition at chapter 7, where it contains visions of future events significant to the Jews. In particular, Daniel 9:24–27 gives a meticulous timeline of when Israel's Messiah would appear and the events that would follow.

In both the historical and the prophetic sections, Daniel presents a strong case for the absolute sovereignty of God, even over a multiplicity of self-absorbed foreign powers. This theme of sovereignty occurs on numerous occasions, including Daniel's deliverance

from the lions' den, his friends' rescue from the fiery furnace, and the future arrival of the Ancient of Days to save His people from the forces of evil ([Dan 3:23–30](#); [6:19–23](#)).

### **How do I apply this?**

Daniel and his God-fearing friends were forced to live in Babylon, far from home and far from the land their Lord had promised them. Later in the book, Daniel prophesied of terrible trials still to come in the Promised Land ([Daniel 11:31](#)). Whatever the trial was, though, it was always the result of sin.

Have you ever endured the weight or consequences of sin and felt as though God had left you behind, that He had stranded you in a world far from the comforts associated with home? The book of Daniel paints a portrait of how to serve God faithfully in the middle of such a world and how to persevere in hope even with no immediate solutions to the problems that get us down.

\*\*\*\*\* **HOSEA** \*\*\*\*\*

### **Where are we?**

In [Hosea 1:1](#), the prophet identified the kings that ruled during his prophetic ministry. The first four—Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah—reigned over the southern kingdom of Judah from 790 BC to 686 BC, while Jeroboam II ruled the northern kingdom of Israel from 782 BC to 753 BC. This indicates that Hosea lived in the middle to late eighth century BC (755–715 BC), making him a contemporary of the prophets Isaiah and Micah. Hosea directed the early portion of his prophetic warnings to Jeroboam II, a descendant of the house of Jehu whose son, Zechariah, would soon come to ruin ([Hosea 1:4](#); [2 Kings 15:8–12](#)). Because this prophecy against the descendants of Jeroboam involved the birth of Hosea's children, we can conclude that he lived in the northern kingdom, where the names of his children would have had the greatest impact.

### **Why is Hosea so important?**

More than any other prophet, Hosea linked his message closely with his personal life. By marrying a woman he knew would eventually betray his trust and by giving his children names that sent messages of judgment on Israel, Hosea's prophetic word flowed out of the life of his family. The cycle of repentance, redemption, and restoration evident in Hosea's prophecy—and even his marriage ([Hosea 1:2](#); [3:1–3](#))—remains intimately connected to our lives. This sequence plays itself out in the lives of real people, reminding us that the Scriptures are far from a mere collection of abstract statements with no relation to real life. No, they work their way into our day-to-day existence, commenting on issues that impact all our actions and relationships.

### **What's the big idea?**

Structured around five cycles of judgment and restoration, the book of Hosea makes clear its repetitious theme: though God will bring judgment on sin, He will always bring His people back to Himself. God's love for Israel, a nation of people more interested in themselves than in God's direction for their lives, shines through clearly against the darkness of their idolatry and injustice ([Hosea 14:4](#)).

Throughout the book, Hosea pictured the people turning away from the Lord and turning toward other gods ([4:12–3](#); [8:5–6](#)). This propensity for idolatry meant that the Israelites lived as if they were not God's people. And though God told them as much through the

birth of Hosea's third child, Lo-ammi, He also reminded them that He would ultimately restore their relationship with Him, using the intimate and personal language of "sons" to describe His wayward people (1:9–10; 11:1).

### **How do I apply this?**

Do you know the saving power of God, now offered to us through His Son, Jesus? If so, as a redeemed child of God, have you offered "redemption" or forgiveness to those in your life who were once under your judgment? Not only does the book of Hosea provide an example of God's love to a people who have left God behind, but it also shows us what forgiveness and restoration look like in a close relationship. The book of Hosea illustrates that no one is beyond the offer of our forgiveness because no one sits outside God's offer of forgiveness. Certainly, God brings judgment on those who turn from Him, but Hosea's powerful act of restoration within his own marriage set the bar high for those of us seeking godliness in our lives.

## \*\*\*\*\* JOEL \*\*\*\*\*

### **Where are we?**

The book focuses its prophetic judgment on the southern kingdom of Judah with frequent references to Zion and the temple worship ([Joel 1:13–14](#); [2:23](#), [32](#); [3:16](#), [21](#)). Joel's familiarity with this area and the worship in the temple suggests that he lived in Judah, possibly even in the city of Jerusalem itself.

### **Why is Joel so important?**

The book of Joel's importance to the canon of Scripture stems from its being the first to develop an oft-mentioned biblical idea: the day of the Lord. While Obadiah mentioned the terrifying event first ([Obadiah 15](#)), Joel's book gives some of the most striking and specific details in all of Scripture about the day of the Lord—days cloaked in darkness, armies that conquer like consuming fire, and the moon turning to blood. Rooted in such vibrant and physical imagery, this time of ultimate judgment, still future for us today ([2 Thessalonians 2:2](#); [2 Peter 3:10](#)), makes clear the seriousness of God's judgment on sin.

### **What's the big idea?**

Using what was at that time the well-known locust plague in Judah, Joel capitalized on a recent tragedy to dispense the Lord's message of judgment and the hope of repentance. In referring to the terrible locust plague, Joel was able to speak into the lives of his listeners and imprint the message of judgment into their minds, like a brand sears the flesh of an animal.

One commentator notes that the day of the Lord, which is a reference not to a single day only but to a period of judgment and restoration, consists of three basic features:

The judgment of God's people

The judgment of foreign nations

The purification and restoration of God's people through intense suffering.

We find each of these elements in the book of Joel, as it offers one of the most complete pictures in Scripture of this ultimately redemptive event ([Joel 2:1–11](#); [2:28–32](#); [3:1–16](#)).

## **How do I apply this?**

Visions of the future, such as the kind we find in Joel or even in the pages of the more well-known book of Revelation, can often seem remote from our day-to-day existence. However, their vivid pictures of destruction should serve to awaken us from our spiritual stupor. Do you ever struggle with feeling complacent? A strong dose of apocalyptic imagery like we find in Joel might just do the trick of opening your eyes to the necessity of faithfully following after God every moment of your life.

\*\*\*\*\* AMOS \*\*\*\*\*

## **Where are we?**

Amos prophesied “two years before the earthquake” ([Amos 1:1](#); see also [Zechariah 14:5](#)), just before the halfway point of the eighth century BC, during the reigns of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam, king of Israel. Their reigns overlapped for fifteen years, from 767 BC to 753 BC.

Though he came from the southern kingdom of Judah, Amos delivered his prophecy against the northern kingdom of Israel and the surrounding nations, leading to some resistance from the prideful Israelites ([Amos 7:12](#)). Jeroboam’s reign had been quite profitable for the northern kingdom, at least in a material sense. However, the moral decay that also occurred at that time counteracted any positives from the material growth.

## **Why is Amos so important?**

Amos was fed up. While most of the prophets interspersed redemption and restoration in their prophecies against Israel and Judah, Amos devoted only the final five verses of his prophecy for such consolation. Prior to that, God’s word through Amos was directed against the privileged people of Israel, a people who had no love for their neighbor, who took advantage of others, and who only looked out for their own concerns.

More than almost any other book of Scripture, the book of Amos holds God’s people accountable for their ill-treatment of others. It repeatedly points out the failure of the people to fully embrace God’s idea of justice. They were selling off needy people for goods, taking advantage of the helpless, oppressing the poor, and the men were using women immorally ([Amos 2:6–8](#); [3:10](#); [4:1](#); [5:11–12](#); [8:4–6](#)). Drunk on their own economic success and intent on strengthening their financial position, the people had lost the concept of caring for one another; Amos rebuked them because he saw in that lifestyle evidence that Israel had forgotten God.

## **What's the big idea?**

With the people of Israel in the north enjoying an almost unparalleled time of success, God decided to call a quiet shepherd and farmer to travel from his home in the less sinful south and carry a message of judgment to the Israelites. The people in the north used Amos’s status as a foreigner as an excuse to ignore his message of judgment for a multiplicity of sins.

However, while their outer lives gleamed with the rays of success, their inner lives sank into a pit of moral decay. Rather than seeking out opportunities to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly, they embraced their arrogance, idolatry, self-righteousness, and materialism. Amos communicated God’s utter disdain for the hypocritical lives of His people ([Amos 5:21–24](#)). His prophecy concludes with only a brief glimpse of restoration,

and even that is directed to Judah, rather than the northern kingdom of Israel (9:11–15).

### **How do I apply this?**

Injustice permeates our world, yet as Christians we often turn a blind eye to the suffering of others for “more important” work like praying, preaching, and teaching. But the book of Amos reminds us that those works, while unquestionably central to a believer’s life, ring hollow when we don’t love and serve others in our own lives. Do you find yourself falling into that trap at times—prioritizing prayer over service?

The prophecy of Amos should simplify the choices in our lives. Instead of choosing between prayer and service, the book of Amos teaches us that both are essential. God has called Christians not only to be in relationship with Him but also to be in relationships with others. For those Christians whose tendency has been to focus more on the invisible God than on His visible creation, Amos pulls us back toward the center, where both the physical and the spiritual needs of people matter in God’s scheme of justice.

### **\*\*\*\*\* OBADIAH \*\*\*\*\***

#### **Where are we?**

Dating the book of Obadiah accurately is nearly impossible due to the scant historical information contained in the book. While several options have been proposed by scholars, the best argument places Obadiah in the 840s BC, making him the earliest writing prophet, a few years prior to Joel, and a contemporary of Elisha. The biggest piece of evidence for this early date comes from Obadiah 1:10–14, which indicates an Edomite invasion of Jerusalem. While Edom was too weak a nation to ever invade Judah on its own, Edom no doubt participated with other nations when the winds of change blew in its favor.

In the 840s, when Edom rebelled against King Jehoram of Judah, the Philistines and the Arabians also invaded Jerusalem (2 Kings 8:20–22; 2 Chronicles 21:16–17). While 2 Chronicles does not indicate the Edomites’ participation in the invasion, Obadiah 1:10–14 pictures the violent behavior that the Edomites carried out on their neighbors, waiting on nearby roads to cut down those fleeing from the invaders within Jerusalem. The Edomites could have easily heard of Jerusalem’s invasion by foreign powers and entered themselves into the fray so that they too might benefit from plundering their neighbors in Jerusalem.

#### **Why is Obadiah so important?**

The majority of the book pronounces judgment on the foreign nation of Edom, making Obadiah one of only three prophets who pronounced judgment primarily on other nations (Nahum and Habakkuk are the others). While others of the prophetic books contain passages of judgment against Edom and other nations, Obadiah’s singular focus points to a significant, albeit difficult, truth about humanity’s relationship with God: when people remove themselves from or place themselves in opposition to God’s people, they can expect judgment, rather than restoration, at the end of life.

#### **What's the big idea?**

Obadiah’s name, meaning “worshipper of Yahweh,” offers an interesting counterpoint to the message of judgment he pronounced on Edom, Judah’s neighbor to the southeast.<sup>1</sup> As a worshipper of Yahweh, Obadiah placed himself in a position of humility before the Lord; he embraced his lowly place before the almighty God.

That God sent a man named “worshipper of Yahweh” to the people of Edom was no mistake. Edom had been found guilty of pride before the Lord (Obadiah 1:3). They had thought themselves greater than they actually were; great enough to mock, steal from, and even harm God’s chosen people. But the “Lord GOD,” a name Obadiah used to stress God’s sovereign power over the nations, will not stand idly by and let His people suffer forever (1:1). Through Obadiah, God reminded Edom of their poor treatment of His people (1:12–14) and promised redemption, not to the Edomites but to the people of Judah (1:17–18). The nation of Edom, which eventually disappeared into history, remains one of the prime examples of the truth found in Proverbs 16:18: “Pride goes before destruction, / And a haughty spirit before stumbling.”

### **How do I apply this?**

Obadiah’s prophecy focuses on the destructive power of pride. It reminds us of the consequences of living in a self-serving manner, of following through on our own feelings and desires without considering their impact on those around us. Do you struggle to set aside your own wants and desires for those of God and others? Though such pride has been part of the lives of fallen human beings since the tragedy of the fall in Eden, Obadiah offers us a stark reminder to place ourselves under God’s authority, to subject our appetites to His purposes, and to find our hope in being His people when the restoration of all things comes.

## \*\*\*\*\* JONAH \*\*\*\*\*

### **Where are we?**

During Jonah’s years as a prophet, Israel stood tall among the nations, though in a political rather than a spiritual sense. The reign of Jeroboam II (793–753 BC), who was an evil king before the Lord, saw Israel’s borders expand to their greatest extent since the time of Solomon. Increased prosperity resulted in a materialistic culture that thrived on injustice to the poor and oppressed, one of the key messages of Jonah’s prophetic contemporary, Amos.

However, rather than direct Jonah to prophesy to his own people, God commissioned him to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. At first unwilling to make the journey northeast to deliver God’s message, Jonah turned and aimed for the farthest westward point known to him—Tarshish, located in modern-day Spain. After God eventually turned Jonah in the right direction, the prophet obediently prophesied to the people of Nineveh while Ashurdan III (772–754 BC) sat on the throne of Assyria. Though Assyria had been in a politically weakened state for some time, by the time of Jonah their cruelty to captives and other undesirables was well-known in Israel, creating an obvious need for Jonah’s message of repentance.

### **Why is Jonah so important?**

Jonah was one of only four writing prophets that Jesus mentioned by name during His earthly ministry (Isaiah, Daniel, and Zechariah were the others). But Jonah received more than a mere mention. Jesus actually identified Himself with the prophet’s three-day sojourn in the belly of the great fish, noting it as a foreshadowing of His own death, when Jesus would spend three days “in the heart of the earth,” before His resurrection (Matthew 12:39–41). Jesus’s identification with the prophet at the lowest point of Jonah’s life finds

echoes in the book of Hebrews, where it teaches that Jesus “had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest” (Hebrews 2:17). The book of Jonah stands as an important link in the prophetic chain, giving readers a glimpse of Christ’s death and resurrection hundreds of years before they actually occurred.

### **What's the big idea?**

When the call of God came to him, Jonah could not see beyond his own selfish desire for God to punish the Assyrians. How could God want him to take a message of mercy to such people? Before Jonah could relay God’s message, he had to be broken. He had to learn something about the mercy of the Lord. Through his flight to Tarshish, his shipwreck, and his time in the great fish, Jonah was convinced in a powerful way that all salvation comes from the Lord (Jonah 2:9). And because of God’s supreme power, only God decides where to pour out His salvation and His mercy (4:11).

### **How do I apply this?**

Do you ever find yourself fighting God—your desires pulling you one way, God’s desires pulling you another? Jonah found himself in that very position, but his own desire won out over God’s for a time. Or so he thought. As we often see in our own lives, God accomplished His purposes through Jonah even though it meant God doling out a heavy dose of humility on a prideful and unwilling heart.

While Jonah eventually departed and proclaimed God’s message, the lesson of his story does not end there. Jonah prophesied to Nineveh but he wasn’t happy about it (Jonah 4:1). Herein we find another touchstone for our lives: aligning our desires with God’s is always a process. Just because we go through the motions of following God’s will does not mean our hearts are aligned with His. God wanted Jonah’s actions and his heart. He wants ours as well.

\*\*\*\*\* MICAH \*\*\*\*\*

### **Where are we?**

As a contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea, Micah prophesied during the momentous years surrounding the tragic fall of Israel to the Assyrian Empire (722 BC), an event he also predicted (Micah 1:6). Micah stated in his introduction to the book that he prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah in Judah, failing to mention the simultaneous string of dishonorable kings that closed out the northern kingdom of Israel. During this period, while Israel was imploding from the effects of evil and unfaithful leadership, Judah seemed on a roller-coaster ride—ascending to the heights of its destiny in one generation, only to fall into the doldrums in another. In Judah at this time, good kings and evil kings alternated with each other, a pattern seen in the reigns of Jotham (good, 2 Kings 15:32–34); Ahaz (evil, 2 Kings 16:1–4); and Hezekiah (good, 2 Kings 18:1–7).

### **Why is Micah so important?**

The book of Micah provides one of the most significant prophecies of Jesus Christ’s birth in all the Old Testament, pointing some seven hundred years before Christ’s birth to His birthplace of Bethlehem and to His eternal nature (Micah 5:2).



Surrounding Micah's prophecy of Jesus's birth is one of the most lucid pictures of the world's future under the reign of the Prince of Peace (5:5). This future kingdom, which scholars call the millennial kingdom, will be characterized by the presence of many nations living with one another in peace and security (4:3–4) and coming to Jerusalem to worship the reigning king, that is, Jesus Himself (4:2). Because these events have not yet occurred, we look forward to the millennial kingdom at some undetermined time in the future.

### **What's the big idea?**

Much of Micah's book revolves around two significant predictions: one of judgment on Israel and Judah (Micah 1:1–3:12), the other of the restoration of God's people in the millennial kingdom (4:1–5:15). Judgment and restoration inspire fear and hope, two ideas wrapped up in the final sequence of Micah's prophecy, a courtroom scene in which God's people stand trial before their Creator for turning away from Him and from others (6:1–7:20). In this sequence, God reminds the people of His good works on their behalf, how He cared for them while they cared only for themselves. But rather than leave God's people with the fear and sting of judgment, the book of Micah concludes with the prophet's call on the Lord as his only source of salvation and mercy (7:7), pointing the people toward an everlasting hope in their everlasting God.

### **How do I apply this?**

Much of Micah's indictment against Israel and Judah involves these nations' injustice toward the lowly—unjust business dealings, robbery, mistreatment of women and children, and a government that lived in luxury off the hard work of its nation's people.

Where does the injustice dwell in your own life? Who are the lowly in your life? Do you need a call toward repentance, like the people of Israel and Judah did?

Micah's impassioned plea for God's chosen people to repent will cut many of us to the quick. Most of us don't decide daily to cut people down or find ways to carry out injustice. Instead, we do it out of habit. Let's allow the words of Micah to break us out of our apathy about extending justice and kindness to others and press on toward a world that better resembles the harmonious millennial kingdom to come. Let's determine to live as God desires—"to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God" (Micah 6:8).

\*\*\*\*\* NAHUM \*\*\*\*\*

### **Where are we?**

The book of Nahum mentions the recent fall of No-amon, or Thebes, which occurred in 663 BC (Nahum 3:8), as well as the coming destruction of Nineveh, which happened in 612 BC (1:1; 3:11–15). But when, during this more than fifty-year period, did Nahum preach? The Assyrian Empire, which had its capital at Nineveh, was at its most powerful in the first half of this period, having a stranglehold on Judah during King Manasseh's reign (2 Chronicles 33:10–13). Also, while the book of Nahum mentions the destruction of Thebes, it does not mention its reconstruction, which took place in 654 BC. This leads us to date Nahum's prophecy between the years of 663 and 654 BC.

Nahum preached during the reign of King Manasseh, one of the most evil kings in Judah's long history, a man who needed the pain of his own experience to teach him the lessons of being a good king. Commentator J. Barton Payne suggests that Manasseh's great

conversion took place late in his reign, around 648 BC, a mere half-dozen years before his death.<sup>1</sup> That means Nahum preached during the darkest period in Judah's history to that point, a time filled with idolatry of all kinds in a nation that had completely turned its back on God. The Lord's willingness to send Nahum, whose name means "comfort," into such a hopeless situation evidences His unrelenting and overwhelming grace.<sup>2</sup>

### **Why is Nahum so important?**

Nahum's singular focus on the impending judgment of Nineveh offers a continuation of the story that began in Jonah. Sometime around 760 BC, God sent Jonah to Nineveh to preach repentance and hope to the Assyrian people, a message they heard and adopted—at least for a time. One hundred years later, during the time of Nahum, the Assyrians had returned to their bullish ways, conquering the northern kingdom of Israel and lording their power over Judah in the south (2 Kings 17:1–6; 18:13–19:37). Jonah failed to realize what Nahum reminded the people of Judah: God's justice is always right and always sure. Should He choose to grant mercy for a time, that good gift will not compromise the Lord's ultimate sense of justice for all in the end.

### **What's the big idea?**

After allowing approximately two hundred years of powerful Assyrian kings and rulers, God announced through Nahum His plans to judge the city of Nineveh. While the book as a whole clearly shows God's concern over sin, His willingness to punish those guilty of wickedness, and His power to carry out His desire for judgment, it also contains rays of hope shining through the darkness. Most significant, the people of Judah would have immediately taken hope in the idea that Nineveh, their primary oppressor for generations, would soon come under judgment from God. Also, a small but faithful remnant in an increasingly idolatrous Judah would have been comforted by declarations of God's slowness to anger (Nahum 1:3), His goodness and strength (1:7), and His restorative power (2:2).

### **How do I apply this?**

No doubt we all have felt overwhelmed by the darkness both within ourselves and in our world. Nahum lived in a dark time, a time in which the faithful few must have wondered how long they would have to resist cultural and spiritual compromise. Have you ever found your will to do what's right weakening as you became discouraged with what you saw in your life and in the world around you? The prophet Nahum reminds us of God's active hand, working even in the darkest of times to bring justice and hope throughout the world.

\*\*\*\*\* **HABAKKUK** \*\*\*\*\*

### **Where are we?**

Determining the date of the book of Habakkuk is quite a bit easier than dating most books. He spoke often of an imminent Babylonian invasion (Habakkuk 1:6; 2:1; 3:16), an event that occurred on a smaller scale in 605 BC before the total destruction of Judah's capital city, Jerusalem, in 586 BC. The way Habakkuk described Judah indicates a low time in its history. Habakkuk prophesied in the first five years of Jehoiakim's reign (609–598 BC) to a king who led his people into evil.

Habakkuk's prophecy was directed to a world that, through the eyes of God's people, must have seemed on the edge of disaster. Even when the northern kingdom had been destroyed in 722 BC, God's people remained in Judah. However, with another powerful foreign army on the rampage, faithful people like Habakkuk were wondering what God was doing. Hadn't He given the land to His people? Would He now take it away? Habakkuk's prayer of faith for the remainder of God's people in the face of such destruction still stands today as a remarkable witness of true faith and undying hope.

### **Why is Habakkuk so important?**

Habakkuk provides us one of the most remarkable sections in all of Scripture, as it contains an extended dialogue between Habakkuk and God (Habakkuk 1–2). The prophet initiated this conversation based on his distress about God's "inaction" in the world. He wanted to see God do something more, particularly in the area of justice for evildoers. The book of Habakkuk pictures a frustrated prophet, much like Jonah, though Habakkuk channeled his frustration into prayers and eventually praise to God, rather than trying to run from the Lord as Jonah did.

### **What's the big idea?**

As the prophet Habakkuk stood in Jerusalem and pondered the state of his nation, Judah, he must have been dumbfounded. So much evil thrived, completely in the open, but God remained strangely silent. Where was He? How long would He allow this mess to continue? Not long, according to the Lord (Habakkuk 2:2–3). Another nation, the Babylonians, would come and execute justice on the Lord's behalf. The wicked in Judah, those who thought they would get away with their evil deeds forever, were soon to be punished.

The book of Habakkuk offers us a picture of a prideful people being humbled, while the righteous live by faith in God (2:4). It reminds us that while God may seem silent and uninvolved in our world, He always has a plan to deal with evil and always works out justice . . . eventually. The example of the prophet Habakkuk encourages believers to wait on the Lord, expecting that He will indeed work out all things for our good (Romans 8:28).

### **How do I apply this?**

Habakkuk asked God the kind of question that so many of us have pondered, "Why do you force me to look at evil, / stare trouble in the face day after day?" (Habakkuk 1:3 MESSAGE). We have all seen the evidence of evil in our lives. We've all been touched by it. And we bear scars at various stages of healing. Surrounded by evil as if we are trapped in a dark prison cell of our own making, we are often downtrodden by our poor choices and our fallen world. However, the book of Habakkuk reminds us that no place is too dark and no wall too thick for God's grace to penetrate in a powerful and life-affirming way.

\*\*\*\*\* ZEPHANIAH \*\*\*\*\*

### **Where are we?**

The book tells us that Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah, the king of Judah from 640 to 609 BC (Zephaniah 1:1). We can begin to pinpoint exactly when Zephaniah prophesied by accounting for a few details in the text. First, in 2:13 the prophet predicted the fall of Nineveh, an event which occurred in 612 BC. Further, Zephaniah made frequent

quotations from the Law (for example, compare 1:13 to Deuteronomy 28:30, 39), a document that remained lost in Judah for much of Josiah's reign. Therefore, Zephaniah more than likely prophesied in the latter part of Josiah's rule, after the king discovered the scrolls of the Law in 622 BC (2 Chronicles 34:3–7).

This all means that Zephaniah grew up under the reign of Josiah's predecessors: Josiah's grandfather, the evil king Manasseh, and Manasseh's son, the young and evil Amon. As a young man, the prophet-to-be would have been surrounded by the trappings of idolatry, child sacrifice, and unjust killings—strong influences on a young mind (2 Kings 21:16; 2 Chronicles 33:1–10). But Zephaniah grew into a man of God, able to stand before the people and proclaim God's message of judgment and hope to a people that had gone astray.

### **Why is Zephaniah so important?**

This book mentions the day of the Lord more than does any other book in the Old Testament, clarifying the picture of Judah's fall to Babylon and the eventual judgment and restoration of all humanity in the future. In this case, it refers primarily to God's impending time of judgment on the nation of Judah. Zephaniah saw in the day of the Lord the destruction of his country, his neighbors, and eventually the whole earth (Zephaniah 1:2, 4; 2:10). Zephaniah wrote that the day of the Lord was near (1:14), that it would be a time of wrath (1:15), that it would come as judgment on sin (1:17), and that ultimately it would result in the blessing of God's presence among His people (3:17).

### **What's the big idea?**

Like the writings of many of the prophets, the book of Zephaniah follows a pattern of judgment on all people for their sin followed by the restoration of God's chosen people. Zephaniah's primary target for God's message of judgment, the nation of Judah, had fallen into grievous sin under the reign of their king, Manasseh. Zephaniah's prophecy shouted out for godliness and purity in a nation sinful to its core. The people of Judah had long since turned their backs on God, not only in their personal lives but also in their worship. This reflected the depth of their sin and the deep need for God's people to be purged on their path to restoration.

### **How do I apply this?**

Those living in Judah had turned the worship of God into a fiasco. Not only had they built their own places of worship to revere other gods (called "high places" in the Old Testament), but they had begun to desecrate the temple, which at that time was the dwelling place of God (Zephaniah 1:9).

As modern-day believers in Christ, we, too, make a mockery of worship when we live in open sin. Do you come before the Lord with a false face, week in and week out, looking the part without acting it? Allow Zephaniah to remind you how seriously God takes your life and your relationship with Him. And if you have failed, remember the message of Zephaniah 3—God is always a God of restoration and hope.

\*\*\*\*\* **HAGGAI** \*\*\*\*\*

### **Where are we?**

Haggai's prophecy came at a time when the people of Judah were extremely vulnerable. They had been humbled by their exile to Babylon, hopeful in their return to their Promised

Land, and then so discouraged by opposition in their rebuilding of the temple that they had quit (Ezra 4:24). Now, sixteen years later, with Haggai blaming their lack of food, clothing, and shelter on their failure to rebuild the temple, the Jews were receptive to his message of rebuilding the Lord's house.

Unlike most of the other prophets, Haggai explicitly dated his prophecies, down to the day. He gave four separate messages, the first on August 29, 520 BC (Haggai 1:1); the second on October 17, 520 BC (2:1); and the final two on December 18, 520 BC (2:10, 20). These messages encouraged the people of Judah to finish building the temple and to have hope in God for the promise of blessings in the future.

### **Why is Haggai so important?**

After thousands of years, the book of Haggai remains largely unique among the books of Old Testament prophets for one key reason: the people of Judah listened! Haggai's message to rebuild the temple was passionate, simple, and straightforward (Haggai 1:8). No one could mistake whether or not his direction had been followed—the results would be evident for all the people to see. Through the physical act of rebuilding the temple, the people began to indicate a shift in their spiritual lives: from devotion to self toward devotion to God.

### **What's the big idea?**

Haggai had an important message for the Jews who had recently returned from exile. They had forgotten their God, choosing instead to focus on their own interests, so it was time for them to “consider [their] ways” (Haggai 1:5, 7). Nothing was more important for the Jews than to show that the Lord was at the center of their thoughts and actions, so Haggai directed them to finish rebuilding God's temple.

However, rather than leaving them alone with the task of rebuilding, Haggai continued to preach to the Jews, encouraging them with the hope of future glory in the temple and a victory to come over the enemies of God's people (2:7–9, 21–22). According to Haggai's message, if the people would place God at the center of their lives, they would realize the future blessings that God had in store for His people.

### **How do I apply this?**

The Jews who emigrated from Babylon to their original homeland of Judah faced intense opposition, both external and internal. Ezra 4:1–5 records the external resistance to the project of rebuilding the temple. The enemies of Judah first attempted to infiltrate the ranks of the builders, and when that didn't work, they resorted to scare tactics. Haggai, on the other hand, focused on the internal opposition they faced, namely from their own sin. The Jews had thoughtlessly placed their own interests before the Lord's interests, looking after their own safety and security without giving consideration to the status of the Lord's house.

Haggai's encouragement to rebuild the temple in the face of the Jews' neglect brings to mind the apostle Paul's exhortation to Christians to build our lives on the foundation of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:10–17). Are you building a life that reflects your status as a temple of the Holy Spirit, leaving a legacy that will stand the test of time?

Find encouragement for that project in the passionate sermons from this OT prophet.

### **Where are we?**

Zechariah, a young man, especially when compared to his contemporary Haggai, came alongside the older prophet to deliver messages from the Lord to the Jewish remnant recently returned from Babylon. While Haggai's overall message had more of a cautionary tone to it (pointing out the Jews' sin and self-focus), Zechariah emphasized a tone of encouragement to the struggling Israelites trying to rebuild their temple.

Zechariah's dated visions and messages in chapters 1–8 all take place in the same general time period as Haggai's, beginning in October–November 520 BC with a call for the people of Judah to repent (Zechariah 1:1). He then received eight visions on the restless night of February 15, 519 BC (1:7), followed by four messages that he preached on December 7, 518 BC (7:1). Though his final messages in chapters 9–14 go undated, the mention of Greece in 9:13 suggests the prophecies came much later in his life, presumably sometime in the 480s BC, before Ezra (458 BC) and Nehemiah (444 BC) arrived to again revitalize the Jewish people.

### **Why is Zechariah so important?**

The book of Zechariah contains the clearest and the largest number of messianic (about the Messiah) passages among the Minor Prophets. In that respect, it's possible to think of the book of Zechariah as a kind of miniature book of Isaiah. Zechariah pictures Christ in both His first coming (Zechariah 9:9) and His second coming (9:10–10:12). Jesus will come, according to Zechariah, as Savior, Judge, and ultimately, as the righteous King ruling His people from Jerusalem (14:8–9).

### **What's the big idea?**

Meaning “Yahweh remembers,” Zechariah's name was appropriate to the purpose of his prophecies.<sup>2</sup> His book brims over with the hope that God would remember His promises to His people, even after all the time they spent outside the land. The prophet used a simple structure of eight visions (Zechariah 1:1–6:15), four messages (7:1–8:23), and two oracles (9:1–14:21) to anticipate the completion of the temple and, ultimately, the future reign of the Messiah from Jerusalem. Like many of the prophets, Zechariah saw isolated snapshots of the future; therefore, certain events that seem to occur one right after the other in Zechariah's prophecy actually often have generations or even millennia between them.

For a people newly returned from exile, Zechariah provided specific prophecy about their immediate and distant future—no doubt a great encouragement. Their nation would still be judged for sin (5:1–11), but they would also be cleansed and restored (3:1–10), and God would rebuild His people (1:7–17). Zechariah concluded his book by looking into the distant future, first at the rejection of the Messiah by Israel (9:1–11:17), and then at His eventual reign when Israel will finally be delivered (12:1–14:21).

### **How do I apply this?**

Have you struggled with discouragement? Read Zechariah. While the book contains its share of judgments on the people of Judah and beyond, it overflows with hope in the future reign of the Lord over His people. It's easy to get caught up in the oftentimes depressing events of day-to-day life, to lose our perspective and live as people without

hope. The book of Zechariah serves as a correction for that tendency in our lives. We have a hope that is sure. How refreshing!

\*\*\*\*\* MALACHI \*\*\*\*\*

### **Where are we?**

Malachi certainly wrote to the people of Judah (Malachi 1:1; 2:11), but the historical setting becomes clearer in Malachi 1:8. Here the prophet used the Persian word for governor, indicating a time period between 538–333 BC, when the Persian Empire ruled the Promised Land. Malachi also wrote about the corruption of the temple sacrifices, meaning that he likely delivered his message many years after the Israelites rebuilt the temple in 515 BC. The prophet's concerns mirror those of Nehemiah's, suggesting that Malachi prophesied to the people while Nehemiah left the city for several years, beginning in 432 BC (Nehemiah 13:6).

### **Why is Malachi so important?**

Malachi's unique position as the final book of the Old Testament offers a glimpse into the hearts of Israelite men and women, members of a nation that had been specially chosen by God, descendants of Abraham, and inheritors of the rich tradition of the Jewish people. Their history told of glories like the exodus from Egypt and the faithfulness of God to King David. But they had also experienced the judgment of wandering in the desert and the shame of exile from the Promised Land.

At the time of Malachi, well over a thousand years after Abraham's era, the Israelites had the advantage and weight of history on their side; they could see the shining rewards of faithfulness and the punishments associated with judgment, even to the point of being uprooted from their land. But even then, with all that perspective, the book of Malachi teaches us that they still strayed from the Lord's path. They needed God's intervention as much as ever, so this book, as a final statement of judgment in the Old Testament, anticipates God's saving work through the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

### **What's the big idea?**

The people of Judah began to be exiled from the Promised Land in 605 BC, returning from Babylon seventy years later. By the time of Malachi, they had been back in the land for more than a hundred years and were looking for the blessings they expected to receive when they returned. Though the temple had been rebuilt, the fervor of those early returning Israelites gave way to a thorough apathy for the things of God. This led to rampant corruption among the priesthood and a spiritual lethargy among the people. Malachi came along at a time when the people were struggling to believe that God loved them (Malachi 1:2). The people focused on their unfortunate circumstances and refused to account for their own sinful deeds. So God pointed the finger back at them, and through Malachi, God told the people where they had fallen short of their covenant with Him. If they hoped to see changes, they needed to take responsibility for their own actions and serve God faithfully according to the promise their fathers had made to God on Mount Sinai all those years before.

### **How do I apply this?**

Throughout Israel's history, the nation failed and God called His people back to Himself.

Each time, Israel would fail again, prompting the cycle to begin again. God's final word of the Old Testament concerns judgment for sin and testifies to our inability to love Him without the help of His grace.

Do you struggle to follow God consistently? Malachi's call prompts us to live faithfully before God and offers hope that God is not yet through with extending mercy to His people ([Malachi 3:1](#); [4:2](#), [5-6](#)).

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The following QR codes can be scanned by mobile phones and will take you directly to a short overview of the following books of the Bible. See more codes on church website.

Genesis Part 1



Genesis Part 2



Exodus Part 1



Exodus Part 2



Leviticus



Numbers



Deuteronomy



Joshua



Judges



Ruth



1 Samuel



2 Samuel



Ezra-Nehemiah



Esther



Job



Psalms

