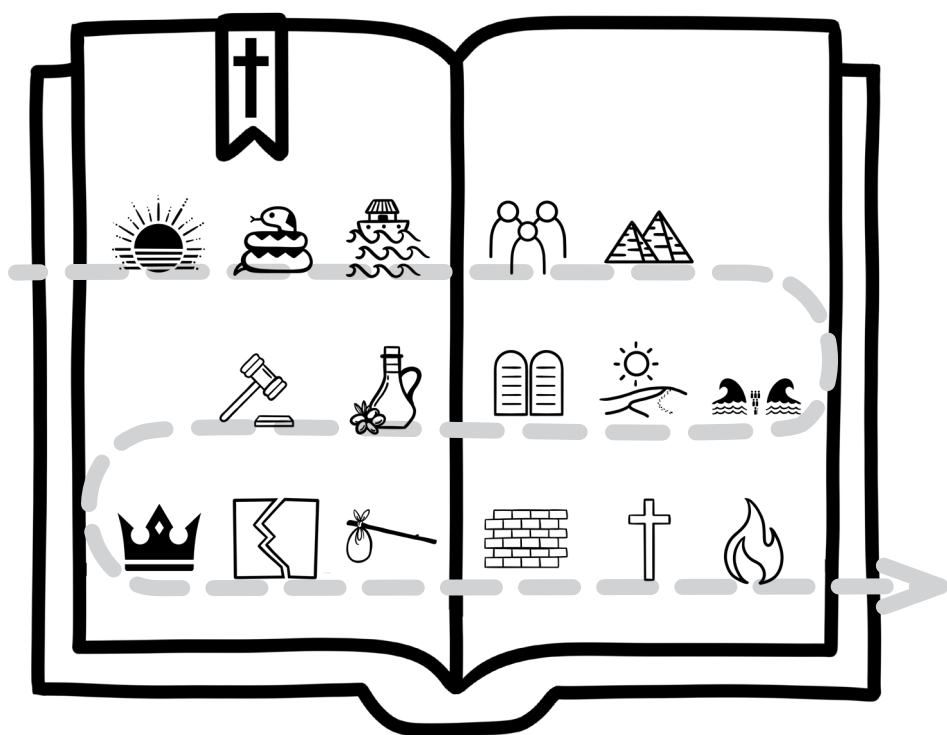


The Greatest Story Ever Told



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Most Christians don't read the Bible very often. And generally, it's not because they're lazy. We usually just can't make sense of it.

Here are four big reasons why.



The Bible is actually 66 different books put together into one big book. Check out the Bible's table of contents to see what I'm talking about. These 66 books were written over thousands of years by many different authors.



The books of the Bible are not placed in chronological order. That's right. If you read through the books of the Bible in the same order they appear in the table of contents, you will not be reading the events or books in the same order that they happened in history.



Most modern day books have only a few main characters. If you start reading on page one, you'll hear one story from start to finish. Not so with the Bible. The Bible does have what we're calling a central storyline, which includes many of the events that might seem familiar. Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit. Moses and Pharaoh. David and Goliath. Jesus and his disciples.

But that central storyline is the history of God's work over 4,000 years and includes countless other characters as well. The connection between all these people and events is far from obvious.



If this wasn't already complicated enough, many of the 66 books in the Bible don't directly talk about the central storyline at all! We are calling these books supporting books because they help bring deeper understanding of

the characters and events in the central storyline. Some of these supporting books are poetry written by main characters. Others are transcripts of sermons preached by main characters. A few supporting books tell side stories that happen within Biblical history, but don't directly reference the central storyline at all.

Talk about confusing! But this booklet aims to make it simple.

If you want to make the most of this guide, don't try to memorize all of the information you're about to read. Rather, think of it as a handy reference tool to skim once, and then grab again whenever you need.









- If you are already fairly familiar with most of the Bible's main stories, check out the **Visual Aid** on page 6. This illustration may be all that some of you need understand the big picture.
- If you've been around church a bit but are still pretty confused, THAT'S OKAY—we've all been there. Start by reading the **Plot Summaries of the Central Storyline** on page 8. We've used an easy-to-understand television metaphor to explain the main events that happen between the beginning and the end of the storyline. This section also will show you where to find this storyline throughout the 66 books.
- After you get your head around the central storyline, check out the **Plot Summaries of the Supporting Books** on page 20. Remember, these supporting books are all the ones that don't directly reference the central storyline, but relate to it in one way or another (see above). These summaries will help the more confusing supporting books to make a lot more sense.









Can't wait to see how God uses his word to change your life as you dive into the Greatest Story Ever Told.

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VISUAL AID

| Seasons | SEASON ONE A Nation Is Born | | | | SEASON TWO The Forming of a Nation | | | |
|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Episodes | Creation | Fall | Flood | Family | Egypt | Exodus | Wandering | Law |
| Characters | Adam, Eve, Satan | | Noah | Abram | Pharaoh, Moses, Aaron, Miriam, the Israelites | | | |
| Timeline | 4000 BC | | 2700 BC | 2400 BC | 2000 BC | 1600 BC | | 1600 BC |
| Main Storyline Books | Genesis | | | | Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy | | | |
| Supporting Books | Job | | | | | | | |

| SEASON THREE The Failure of a Nation | | | SEASON FOUR The Floundering of a Nation | | | SEASON FIVE The True King Arrives | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Promised Land | Judges | Kings | Division | Exile | Rebuild | Jesus | Holy Spirit |
| Joshua | Judges | Saul, David, Solomon | Solomon | Daniel | Ezra, Nehemiah | 12 Apostles | Paul |
| 1550 BC | | 1000 BC | 950 BC | 600 BC | 500 BC | AD 0 | AD 33 |
| Joshua | Judges | 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles | 1 & 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles | Daniel | Ezra, Nehemiah | Matthew, Mark, Luke, John | Acts |
| | Ruth | Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon | Jonah Isaiah Jeremiah Hosea Aoms Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah | Obadiah Ezekiel Lamentations | Haggai Zechariah Malachi Joel Esther | | Romans 1 & 2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians 1 & 2 Thessalonians 1 & 2 Timothy Titus Philemon Hebrews James 1 & 2 Peter 1, 2, 3 John Jude Revelation |

PLOT SUMMARIES OF THE CENTRAL STORYLINE

SEASON ONE A Nation Is Born



Season One EPISODE ONE: **CREATION**

Season one, episode one, begins with God creating the entire universe in six days. He places Adam and Eve in a world of perfection, free from any pain or suffering, and enjoying a perfect relationship with their creator.



Season One EPISODE TWO: **FALL**

Under the temptation of a serpent mankind sins against God and eats of the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The trajectory of history changes, and the people of earth find themselves enslaved to sin and no longer in harmony with the creator or the creation.



Season One

EPISODE THREE: **FLOOD**

Over the next 1,000-plus years humanity multiplies, but things go from bad to worse. People become increasingly evil and destructive toward one another. God eventually decides to end the human race with a world-wide flood, saving only Noah and his family, the few people on the planet who had any sign of being obedient to God. However, after the floodwaters recede, Noah and his family fall into corruption and evil themselves.



Season One

EPISODE FOUR: **FAMILY**

Several hundred more years go by, and the descendants of Noah are still broken and disobedient to God. Episode four unveils a divine plan that will unfold for the rest of the Bible. God chooses one man named Abraham and promises that God will bless Abraham beyond what the world has ever seen. Abraham's descendants will become a nation that enjoys a special relationship with God. This nation will also one day bring God's favor onto the entire world. The full picture of what this will look like is not yet revealed, but we are left hoping that through Abraham's family, perhaps God will bring all things back to the way they were at the beginning.

Similar to Noah's story, Abraham's family is fraught with failure, hatred, and abuse. But God remains faithful to his promise to stay connected their story, and Abraham's great grandson, Joseph, miraculously ends up second in command in the powerful nation of Egypt. Abraham's descendants move to Egypt and enjoy a position of privilege and prosperity with a chance to influence an entire nation toward obedience to God. In this moment, God's nation is born.

Will this position of power in Egypt be how God fulfills his promise to use Abraham's descendants to draw the world back into a perfect relationship with God? Season two picks up the storyline with this question.

◇ *All of season one occurs in the biblical book of Genesis.*

SEASON TWO

The Forming of a Nation



Season Two EPISODE ONE: **EGYPT**

Four hundred years have passed, and Abraham's family has multiplied to become the nation of Israel, living within the nation of Egypt. However, the Israelites have lost any position of power or privilege. A new Pharaoh of Egypt fears the strength of the Israelites and enslaves, mistreats, and commits infanticide against them. The promise to bless the Israelites seems to be forgotten.



Season Two EPISODE TWO: **EXODUS**

God's heart is moved by the plight of the Israelites, and he chooses a descendent of Abraham named Moses to lead the Israelites to freedom. Moses confronts Pharaoh armed with the supernatural power of God. When Pharaoh refuses Moses' request to let the Israelites go free, God inflicts 10 deadly plagues on Egypt that eventually force Pharaoh to release them.



Season Two

EPISODE THREE: **WANDERING**

The Israelites find themselves as a newly independent nation, but living as wanderers in a nearby desert under the leadership of Moses. As the descendants of Abraham they are officially God's chosen people, yet they do not have any real faith in God, nor any idea what it means to obey him. Almost immediately, the Israelites rebel by worshipping a false god in the form of a golden calf.



Season Two

EPISODE FOUR: **LAW**

Over the next 40 years of wandering, God begins an attempt to form the Israelites into a people who will be a beacon of hope and life to every other nation on earth. He demonstrates his love by providing food that supernaturally appears on the ground. He leads them by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He shapes their relationship to him and to each other through the giving of the 10 commandments, as well as a lengthy list of other laws to govern their lives. God also creates the tabernacle, a beautiful structure overseen by a new group of Israelite priests. The tabernacle is a place to meet with God and offer sacrifices to atone for sins and bring forgiveness.



Despite all of these interventions by God, as the Israelites meander through the desert they rebel against God and bring his wrath and judgement on themselves. In the midst of this chaotic situation, the Israelites long for the day when God allows them to leave the desert and take possession of the promised land of Canaan (present day Israel).

Season two ends with the Israelites approaching the border of the promised land just as Moses dies, and his apprentice Joshua steps into his place of leadership.

◇ Season two is recorded in the biblical books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

SEASON THREE

The Failure of a Nation



Ever since the promise to Abraham, we hope to see the Israelites living a lifestyle that draws every other nation toward a relationship with God. Season three follows the journey of the Israelites, God's chosen people, as they receive everything they ever wanted as they take possession of the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Will this be enough to allow them to become that kind of nation? Unfortunately not.



Season Three

EPISODE ONE: **PROMISED LAND**

Season three opens as God uses Joshua to lead his people into a series of battles to completely drive out the wicked people currently populating the land of Canaan. God has always intended to use the Israelites to bring judgment on the current residents of the promised land as punishment for countless years of savageness and child sacrifice. However, the Israelites fail to complete the task, and many of the barbaric locals remain.



Season Three

EPISODE TWO: **JUDGES**

The first few hundred years of Israel's occupation of the promised land are defined by cycles of failure. The leaders of this era are called judges. A few of the judges stay on God's path, but most fall into imitation of the surrounding nations, including the worship of false gods in the form of handmade idols. As each judge wanders from God's path the nation consistently follows suit. Whenever the people reach the height of corruption, God allows the Israelites to fall prey to war and domination of foreign powers. When the Israelites repent of their wicked practices, God raises up a new judge to lead the people in battle to regain their freedom. This ushers in a period of peace, until that judge also falls into corruption, and the cycle repeats.



Season Three

EPISODE THREE: **KINGS**

The cycle reaches its lowest point when the people of Israel cry out to their final judge, Samuel, demanding that they are given a king rather than another judge. The motivation to be ruled by a king is based on a rejection of God as their ultimate king and protector. Though Samuel warns against it, under God's direction Samuel eventually gives in. The first king, named Saul, is an utter failure both morally and strategically. But God chooses Saul's successor, a young boy called David. God tells Samuel that despite the misguided motivation of the Israelites, God will use the David's kingship to eventually produce a king in that royal lineage who will finally lead God's people to become the nation they were meant to be. In a flair of mystery, God also promises this eventual descendent of David will have a reign without end.



Though David is a better leader than Saul, he also falls into adultery, murder, and apathy. When his son, Solomon, takes the throne, we see Solomon fall into the same traps as the judges, worshipping idols and slipping into the many of the practices of the surrounding nations. Despite all of God’s blessings, the gift of the promised land, and the provision of the better king David, the Israelites have yet to become a nation with a culture that will draw all other nations toward God.

What will happen next? What will become of the intriguing promise about David’s descendant? We are left wondering as readers as we head into season four.

◇ *Season three is recorded in Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 1 & 2 Chronicles.*

SEASON FOUR

The Floundering of a Nation



Season Four
EPISODE ONE: **DIVISION**

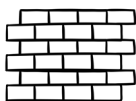
The generation following King Solomon leads to a brutal splitting of the people of Israel between northern and southern kingdoms. For the rest of the story there is never again a politically-united people of God. Neither the northern kingdom of Israel or the southern kingdom of Judah ever returns to obedience to their God. Idolatry plagues both halves and civil war is common. During this period of division, which lasts several hundred years, God sends prophets to

warn both kingdoms to turn from their wicked ways and return to following God's laws. The prophets warn if disobedience persists then Israel will face the disastrous consequences of having the promised land taken over by the foreign powers of Assyria in Babylon. As explained below in the season four side plot summary section, much of those prophetic warnings are recorded. However, neither the north or south listen, and the prophecies come true. Israel is invaded and then carried out of their homeland and into exile.



Season Four EPISODE TWO: **EXILE**

Very little of what happens in the exile is recorded, except for the book of Daniel. Daniel covers the experience of several Israelites living in exile in the land of Babylon. These particular Israelites experience God using them in incredible ways, even while held captive in a foreign nation. As we see God performing miracles and many Babylonians turning to worship him, we remember again God's promise to use the nation of Israel as a light to the whole world. Even in the darkest of times, God was still working.



Season Four EPISODE THREE: **REBUILD**

After roughly 50 years in exile, God moves the hearts of the leaders of these foreign nations to allow Israel to return to their homeland. Hopes are high that Israel has finally have learned its lesson and commits to obedience with a second chance in the promised land. However, only a generation later we see Israel again descending into disobedience and apathy. At roughly 400 BC, written records of God interacting with his people cease. During those 400 years of Biblical silence we know from extra-Biblical history that Israel was eventually taken over by the Roman government. Some Israelites

remain scattered across Assyria and Babylon while some lived in the promised land, now a province under Roman rule.



The nation that was once understood to be God's plan to reveal Himself to the whole world was now fragmented and shattered, lacking in any political unity or power. The prophecies of a king in the lineage of David, who would rule for all, time must have seemed ludicrous as Israel had no kingship to speak of after the period of the exile.

What will become of God's plan to bless and redeem the world though them? This is what we see miraculously come about in season five.

◇ *Season four is recorded in 1 & 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah.*

SEASON FIVE

The True King Arrives



Season Five EPISODE ONE: **JESUS**

After 400 years of silence, God's presence seems to be gone for the nation of Israel. Then one night in Bethlehem, a child is born to a girl named Mary, who has never slept with a man. The child is named Jesus, and is born in the lineage of King David, and is a distant descendent of Abraham. As an adult, he launches a traveling

preaching and healing ministry. He garners the attention of thousands of people. Though an Israelite himself, he frequently preaches against the hypocrisy and corruption of the surviving Israelite priesthood. After predicting that He will eventually be killed for his radical teachings and then rise again, Jesus is arrested by the local government and put on trial for political insurrection.

Though the charges are vague and inconsequential, the reigning Judge Herod eventually consents to the uproar of the crowd, which has turned against Jesus. Herod sentences Jesus to die by crucifixion on a wooden cross. Jesus is killed on a Friday and placed in a tomb. Though Jesus has predicted he will rise again even his closest followers, the 12 apostles, don't hold out any real hope. But on a Sunday morning the tomb is discovered to be empty. Jesus' own prediction has come true. He has risen from the dead.

Soon after the resurrected Jesus appears and meets with not only his closest followers, but hundreds of other people. The undeniable miracle of the virgin birth and the resurrection leads many people to embrace the teaching that not only is Jesus the final king of Israel who has come in the line of David, but somehow also God in the flesh. After instructing his followers to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit, Jesus ascends into heaven, leaving behind the promise that one day he will return to establish an ultimate and worldwide kingdom, the new heaven and new earth.



Season Five

EPISODE TWO: **HOLY SPIRIT**

Shortly following Jesus' ascension a small group of his followers received this Holy Spirit, and accordingly incredible supernatural power to perform the same miracles of healing and demonic deliverance that Jesus had demonstrated in his own life. This early group of miracle workers leads a movement of Jesus followers that become known as Christians (followers of Christ or "the messiah").

Christians are seen by most outsiders as a sect of Judaism who believe that Jesus is the final savior-king for the people of Israel. The Christians see themselves as the ultimate progression of Israel's story, but they also believe that Jesus is also the true king of the entire world. Jesus is a descendant of both David and Abraham. Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of the promises made that God would bless the whole world through Abraham's offspring and David's lineage. However, rather than leading a political nation, Jesus establishes a spiritual family.

Anyone can become a Jesus-follower, or Christian, and live under the reign of Jesus even if they were not ethnically Jewish. Shockingly for the time, Christians stop following Jewish customs and commandments that have been held sacred for millennia. They believe that strict adherence to these laws is no longer required under the new reign of Jesus. Jewish and non-Jewish followers of Jesus are understood to have equal standing in the movement. Though they face an incredible amount of persecution from the Roman government and non-believing Israelites they persevered and continue to grow as a movement across the known world.



In addition to the story of Jesus and the early church there are many letters sent back-and-forth between churches and church leaders. Many of those letters were written by the Apostle Paul, an Israelite/Jewish leader who formerly fiercely persecuted Christianity to the point of killing Christians. Paul was radically transformed through a supernatural encounter with Jesus and became a key leader, writer, and thinker in the early church. These letters, written by early Christian leaders, are crucial for understanding the theology and practices of the movement.

The central teaching of these letters is called the gospel or “good news.” The gospel teaches that human beings who place their faith in Jesus as their Savior and king will receive forgiveness for their

sins. Though we all will die, Christians also believe that we all will rise. Those who reject Jesus will be sent to a place of eternal separation from God and punishment for their sins. Those of us who are followers of Jesus in this life will receive entrance into the new heaven and new earth that Jesus will establish when he returns as the ultimate king of the universe.

This is where the story of the Bible ends. All of church history begins from this moment on. You are reading this booklet because that movement has survived more than 2,000 years. There are now billions of people who believe that Jesus was indeed the savior of the world.

- ◇ *The storyline of season five is found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts. The letters that circulated between the churches are described below in season five supporting book summaries.*

PLOT SUMMARIES OF THE SUPPORTING BOOKS

SEASON ONE

JOB

Job is the story of a guy named Job (pronounced with a long *o* like *go*). Job is a great guy who obeys God in all that he does which, ironically, puts a target on his back. One day, Satan approaches God and calls into question Job's faithfulness. Satan argues to God that Job is only obedient because of how God has richly blessed Job. God allows Satan to put human faithfulness to the test and lets Satan destroy Job's entire life. Job loses everything including his possessions, children, and health. In the midst of severe suffering, even as his friends give him terrible advice and bad perspective, Job keeps his faith and hope in God. Eventually, God restores Job with blessings that completely eclipse what Job had before.

The book is a challenging look into how to deal with suffering. What makes it especially compelling is that Job lived right around when Abraham did in season one. Job was able to stay obedient to God even though he had no knowledge of Jesus or any of God's long-term promises. Job has no immediate effect on the rest of the storyline of the Bible, but he is mentioned in the New Testament by the Apostle James in James 5:11.

SEASON THREE

RUTH

The book of Ruth tells the story of an Israelite woman named Naomi who is displaced from her homeland during a famine in the promised land. After Naomi loses her husband and sons, she is left with only her daughter-in-law, Ruth. Though Ruth is not an Israelite, she returns with Naomi back to Israel and sacrifices everything to help the elderly Naomi survive. God helps Ruth and Naomi, including providing an Israelite husband Boaz for Ruth. The book ends with a genealogy revealing that king David is a direct descendant of Ruth. The story is a beautiful picture about how God can use non-Israelites to further his plans, a concept that will be fully realized in the coming of Jesus and the creation of the church.

PSALMS

The book of Psalms is a collection of songs and poetry written around the time of King David in season three. At least some of the songs were written by David himself throughout the ups and downs of his life. Some of the Psalms are anonymous and some were written by other leaders of the time. The Psalms are especially encouraging for those wrestling through trials and tribulations in their lives.

PROVERBS

The book of Proverbs contains concise sayings of wisdom on how to live every day life. Many of them were likely written by Solomon, the son of King David, but some are ascribed to other authors.

ECCLESIASTES

The book of Ecclesiastes is written from the perspective of someone who has lost all sense of meaning and purpose about life. It is generally historically ascribed to being written by Solomon, although the book is vaguely ascribed to a “son of David.” Since the

book is framed by the phrase, “says the teacher,” there is a good deal of debate regarding whether the book was intended to be read as an accurate or an inaccurate view of life. What is the original author intending? Are we as readers to trust or distrust this “teacher?” Scholars have not yet reached a conclusion. Of all the Biblical books, Ecclesiastes is one of the most difficult to interpret and apply.

SONG OF SONGS

Historically understood to have been written by King Solomon the son of David, Song of Songs is a depiction of the love between a husband and wife. It is poetic in nature and alternates between the husband’s voice, the wife’s voice, and the voices of the friends of the couple. Like many books of the Bible, there is some debate regarding interpretation. Some see the book as a metaphor for God’s love for the Israelites as his metaphorical bride, while others see the book as primarily a handbook for happy Christian marriage.

———— SEASON FOUR ————

JONAH

While the kingdom of Israel was divided, God chose the prophet Jonah to leave his homeland and go to the city of Nineveh and command them to repent. The Ninevites were known for their brutality. Jonah at first rejects his mission because he longs for God to bring his wrath on Nineveh. However, God’s will prevails and Jonah eventually accepts his mission. When Jonah preaches, all of Nineveh commits to change their ways and worship God. Unlike much of the Old Testament, where the focus is on God’s dealings with his own people, the book of Jonah shows God’s incredible grace and mercy for other nations, a theme which is fully realized in Jesus.

ISAIAH

Isaiah was a prophet during the period of the divided kingdom. He specifically preaches to the leaders of the southern kingdom Judah about how their disobedience and idolatry will lead to the land of Israel being overtaken by Assyria and Babylon. He also heavily emphasizes the hope that one day David's lineage will produce a king who will bring a final redemption and restoration for God's people. Some of the most vivid passages prophesying the coming of Christ are contained in the book of Isaiah, though it was written hundreds of years before the very first Christmas.

JEREMIAH

Jeremiah is an Israelite priest who lived just before the Babylonian exile. He predicted it's coming as a result of Israel's idolatry. Jeremiah's predictions came true within his own lifetime.

HOSEA

Hosea is a prophet who lives during the era of the divided kingdom. He specifically prophesies against the wickedness of the reigning king of the time Jeroboam the second. Hosea incorporates a startlingly vivid and poetic metaphor depicting Israel as a wayward wife constantly embarking on sexual unfaithfulness to her husband.

AMOS

Amos is a collection of the writings of the prophet Amos who preaches during the time of the divided kingdom. Amos speaks out against the wickedness, idolatry, and excess of the evil king Jeroboam, the second who ruled in the northern kingdom of Israel.

MICAH

Micah is a prophet during the era of the divided kingdom. He specifically prophesies about Assyria attacking the northern kingdom of Israel and Babylon attacking the southern kingdom of

Judah because of the disobedience of both kingdoms. Both of these prophecies came true.

NAHUM

This book contains the writings of the prophet Nahum, who predicts that God will judge the foreign kingdom of Assyria due to its wickedness. Unlike other books, the primary subject is not the Israelites, but rather the Assyrians.

HABAKKUK

Habakkuk lives in the southern Kingdom during the era of division. He writes in the midst of the corruption and evil present all around him. Rather than prophesying directly against the leaders or Israelites living in sin, Habakkuk writes directly to God. The pages of Habakkuk show his struggle of trusting that God is good when the world is broken.

ZEPHANIAH

Zephaniah is a prophet living in the final days of the southern kingdom before its fall to Babylon. He writes specifically regarding how the disobedience of Israel will lead to the fall of the sacred city of Jerusalem.

OBADIAH

Likely living during the time when all of God's people had already been taken away into exile, Obadiah writes specifically about God's judgment on another nation, Edom.

EZEKIEL

Another book written during the time of exile, Ezekiel records the writings of the prophet with the same name. Ezekiel contains striking and abstract visions that stand as metaphors for God's work and redemption during this time period.

LAMENTATIONS

Lamentations is a book mourning over the losses incurred on the people of God after being taken into exile. However, there are glimmers of hope that one day God will lead his people out of exile and back to the promised land.

HAGGAI

Haggai lives and preaches during the period of time when Israel has now been released from exile. Many have returned to the promised land to attempt to rebuild the temple and their former way of life. Haggai warns his audience that rebuilding the physical temple will be of no use if the Israelites do not remain faithful to their God and steer clear of idolatry.

ZECHARIAH

Zachariah preaches during the time period when Israel has returned from captivity and is working toward reestablishing themselves in the promised land. Zachariah claims that the city of Jerusalem is still subject to corruption and that the Israelites have not learned their lesson after the exile.

MALACHI

Malachi writes to the Israelites during their efforts to regroup in the promised land after being released from exile. Malachi challenged the Israelites to find hope in the fact that if they remain faithful to God they would receive blessings from God in this new era.

JOEL

Joel lives during the rebuilding process in the promised land after Israel was released from exile. He preaches to the Israelites the central message that if they are to be faithful to God in this next season of history it will require more than just outward obedience, but inner heart to transformation.

ESTHER

Esther records the fascinating story of a young woman of the same name who lived during the time when much of Israel has already returned to the promised land. Though free to leave, Esther has remained in the foreign land along with many of her fellow Israelites. Through incredible bravery and heroism, Esther saves the Israelites from a genocide planned for them in that region.

————— SEASON FIVE —————

ROMANS

Romans is an in-depth theological treatise written by the Apostle Paul. There are many practical sections, but it is largely doctrinal and deeply theological in nature. Much of the logic of the gospel is flushed out in the book of Romans.

1 & 2 CORINTHIANS

These two letters are written by Paul to a church in the city of Corinth. The Corinthian church was highly dysfunctional in terms of their morality, sexuality, divisiveness, and approach toward the gifts of the Spirit. Paul wrote these two letters to correct these issues.

GALATIANS

Another letter written by Paul, Galatians aims to correct the drift of a Jewish Christian church in Galatia back toward adherence to Jewish customs. It also addresses the issue of Jewish Christians seeing themselves as superior to Gentile Christians. Another book depicting in detail the inner workings of the gospel, Galatians makes the strong case that adherence to Judaism is no longer required for followers of Jesus. All nations are now united under Christ.

EPHESIANS

Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians as an encouragement and exhortation to continue following Jesus. The Ephesians did not seem to have any major doctrinal or behavioral issues. The letter is an uplifting and encouraging reminder of the incredible hope believers have for this life and the next.

PHILIPPIANS

Philippians is letter written by Paul to a group of Christians in the city of Philippi. The Philippians do not seem to have fallen into any major theological or lifestyle problems. Paul writes to exhort them to remain steadfast and encouraged in their community.

COLOSSIANS

Paul wrote this letter to a group of Christians living in a city called Colossae. Though the Colossians had not drifted from God, they were experiencing intense cultural pressure to walk away from their faith. Paul wrote to them to remain steadfast in their devotion to Jesus.

1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

Both letters were written by Paul to a group of Christians in a city called Thessalonica. The Thessalonian Christians experience intense persecution, and Paul writes to encourage them to stick with their faith despite the risks.

1 & 2 TIMOTHY

These were two letters written by Paul to Timothy, a younger leader that Paul was mentoring. After going on many adventures and missionary journeys together, Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to oversee the churches there. These two letters were written to encourage and challenge the youth Timothy in his leadership role.

TITUS

The letter to Titus was written by Paul to advise Titus on how to deal with his leadership work on the island of Crete. Titus was instructed on helping the churches in Crete navigate through a complicated issue regarding false Christian leaders who were corrupting their devotion & integrity.

PHILEMON

Philemon was written by Paul to a man named Philemon on behalf of Philemon's slave Onesimus. Paul challenges Philemon to release Onesimus from his bondage and see him as a brother rather than a slave.

HEBREWS

The author of Hebrews is a subject of debate. The audience seems to be a group of Jewish Christians who are tempted to return to their Jewish customs rather than following Jesus as their one and only source of salvation and hope. The author gives striking challenges and warnings that a return to Judaism will mean certain destruction for their lives now that king Jesus has arrived.

JAMES

James is written by a key leader in the early church to the community at large rather than to a group of Christians in a specific location. It is a highly practical book challenging Christians to live out their faith, not just in what they say but in how they behave.

1 & 2 PETER

1 Peter and 2 Peter are letters written by the apostle Peter, who had been one of Jesus' 12 followers during His ministry on earth. Peter specifically sends 1 Peter to a group of churches in a province called Asia Minor in order to help them work through persecution and false teaching plaguing them. 2 Peter is later written to this same

group of churches to address on a deeper level how to resist false teachers and false teaching.

1, 2, 3 JOHN

These three books were written by the apostle John, who had been in Jesus' inner circle of leaders while Jesus was on earth. John writes to an audience of likely mostly Jewish Christians in a group of house churches. All three letters are written to exhort these early Christians to stay true to their faith in Jesus in the midst of false teachers and fellow believers walking away from their faith.

JUDE

Jude is one of Jesus' biological brothers born of the virgin Mary, who had become a key leader in the early church. Jude writes to a Christian Jewish audience. He writes against teachers who are corrupting this group of people through false teaching.

REVELATION

Revelation is written by John, one of the 12 members of Jesus' inner circle. John writes in an apocalyptic style as he depicts the return of Christ at the end of time. Revelation is an exceedingly difficult book to interpret. It has been misused for countless inaccurate foretelling of world events. The most helpful framework to read it is likely as an inspiring encouragement to stick to your faith through difficulty rather than as a predictive tool for political world events.

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE FOR YOURSELF

Now that you've got a short handbook to understanding the storyline of the Bible, we come to the question of how to apply it to your life. There are countless other great resources to help you with this endeavor, but we thought we would offer you a brief one here as well.

As you read any section of the Bible, here are the questions to ask yourself in order to apply each section of Scripture to your life. Since you can do a little research with this booklet to discover the background of any book of the Bible, the answers to these questions should be more reachable:

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

If God is a character in a story or described in a letter, what are you learning about him? Keep in mind that God's character doesn't change, but it is most fully revealed in the person of Jesus. Not every way that God interacts with people in the Old Testament is still true today. However, all scripture is God breathed, and the Old Testament is still invaluable in helping us understand the character and values of God. How does the depiction of God in the Bible challenge or affirm your own views of God?

2. What does this passage teach me about people?

Understanding our own human nature is crucial in helping us understand how to live. As you read that particular portion of scripture, ask yourself what it teaches you about how human beings think, speak, and act. How do you see your self in the characters

and events in the Bible? How does the nature of humanity in scripture challenge or affirm the way you chose to live life?

3. What do I need to do based on this passage?

When you have some insights on what the passage teaches you about God and about people, now you can ask yourself what you need to do in response. Is there a belief you need to adjust? A behavior you need to address? A posture you need to work on? Commit to take action based on the answer to this question.

CHECKLIST

OLD TESTAMENT

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Genesis | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Chronicles | <input type="checkbox"/> Daniel |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Exodus | <input type="checkbox"/> Ezra | <input type="checkbox"/> Hosea |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leviticus | <input type="checkbox"/> Nehemiah | <input type="checkbox"/> Joel |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Numbers | <input type="checkbox"/> Esther | <input type="checkbox"/> Amos |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deuteronomy | <input type="checkbox"/> Job | <input type="checkbox"/> Obadiah |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Joshua | <input type="checkbox"/> Psalms | <input type="checkbox"/> Jonah |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Judges | <input type="checkbox"/> Proverbs | <input type="checkbox"/> Micah |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ruth | <input type="checkbox"/> Ecclesiastes | <input type="checkbox"/> Nahum |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Samuel | <input type="checkbox"/> Song of Solomon | <input type="checkbox"/> Habakkuk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Samuel | <input type="checkbox"/> Isaiah | <input type="checkbox"/> Zephaniah |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Kings | <input type="checkbox"/> Jeremiah | <input type="checkbox"/> Haggai |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Kings | <input type="checkbox"/> Lamentations | <input type="checkbox"/> Zechariah |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Chronicles | <input type="checkbox"/> Ezekiel | <input type="checkbox"/> Malachi |

NEW TESTAMENT

- | | | |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Matthew | <input type="checkbox"/> Ephesians | <input type="checkbox"/> Hebrews |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mark | <input type="checkbox"/> Philippians | <input type="checkbox"/> James |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Luke | <input type="checkbox"/> Colossians | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Peter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> John | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Thessalonians | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Peter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Acts | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Thessalonians | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 John |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Romans | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Timothy | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 John |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Corinthians | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Timothy | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 John |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Corinthians | <input type="checkbox"/> Titus | <input type="checkbox"/> Jude |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Galatians | <input type="checkbox"/> Philemon | <input type="checkbox"/> Revelation |