

AN INTRODUCTION TO **THE BIBLE**

*A 4 week course to help you find
your way in the Word of God*



WEEK 1 - Welcome to the bible

The Bible is like a library, made up of 66 separate books, which were written over a period of roughly 2,000 years by 40 different authors from three continents, who wrote in three different languages.

Fun facts

- The bible has sold more than 5 billion copies (5,000,000,000 - that's 4.2 billion more than any other book ever created!)
- It has been translated into more than 3,000 languages (that's 2890 more than any other book ever created!)
- It has been used to shape laws and constitutions in many countries around the world.

How to navigate your way around the bible

At the beginning of the bible there is always a contents page, which shows you a list of all the different books and the page number that each book starts on. That will help you to find any book that you want.



Each book has been divided into chapters, and each chapter into verses, so that you can easily find the part of the bible that a person is referring to. Usually a particular verse will be given by referring to the book, then the chapter, then the verse.

For example see if you can find 1Samuel, chapter 23, verse 6. This is commonly written as 1Sam 23:6

Here's a list of scriptures to find. You might like to hold a bible race.
Isa 34:4, Ps 16:2, Deut 18:18, 1Jn 2:12, Jas 4:5

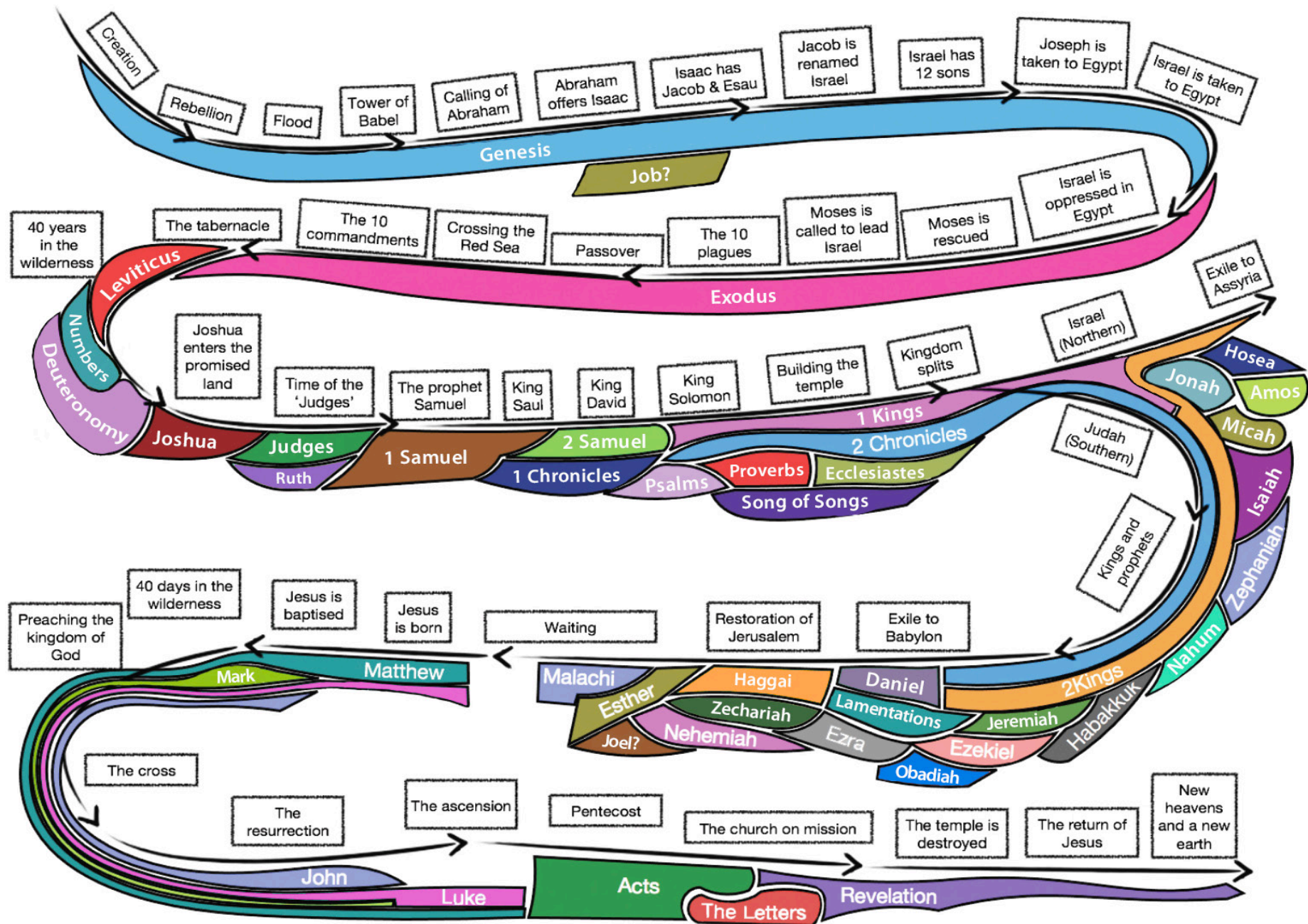
How to understand the bible

What exactly is the bible? The answer to this question is key for how you will understand and interpret the bible. Is it a book of rules to live by? A book of promises to believe? A book to teach us about God? An explanation of how to get to heaven when you die? Take a moment to consider what you think about the bible.

- 1) What do you expect to read when you open it?
- 2) Have you had any problems understanding the bible?

HOW THE EVENTS OF THE BIBLE UNFOLD

The chart below shows how the main events of the bible are joined together, along with where each book in the bible belongs. You can use it as a reference to remind yourself of what is happening when you read any particular book.



Understanding the bible as a big story

The bible is the story of God. Throughout the many books, the different plots and twists, it contains one overall story.

- To start with, it introduces us to who God is, why he made everything, and the special role he made for mankind. (Gen 1-2)
- It goes on to explain what has gone wrong with the world, and what God intends to do about it. (Gen 3-12)
- Throughout the story, it's clear that God has a plan to rescue his creation from the powers that want to destroy it, and to restore the world to its original purpose.
- His plan involves people. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's family, the people of Israel. However, people are also the cause of the problems. (Gen 12 - Mal 4)
- Ultimately God's plan is only possible through God's son, Jesus, who comes to the world as a human. Jesus demonstrates what God is really like, but is rejected and killed by the people he came to rescue.
- However, even in his death, Jesus was fulfilling God's plan, as God raised Jesus from the dead and so defeated all the powers of death and destruction that were opposed to God and his good creation.
- Jesus has led the way into a new world, which all his followers can also enjoy. We are made 'new creations'. His plan is that his new world will one day fully take over the old world, and every part of creation will be restored to its original purpose of bringing glory to God.

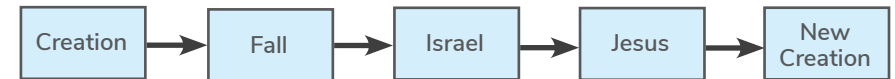
The bottom line:

Where do you appear in the story of the bible?

WEEK 2 - Grasping the big story

We ended last week with a summary of the bible by telling the 'big story'. Today, we look at how we have arrived at this story by considering different passages from the bible.

This big story can be told by understanding the 5 main sections that contribute to the overall story. These are shown below.



Creation

Read Gen 1:1-2

1. How is the world described before God begins his creation?

Read Gen 1:3-25

2. What do you learn about God from his creation?

Read Gen 1:26-28

3. What does it mean to be created in the image of God?

Conclusion

Creation shows us just how powerful God is, and that he is good. He has brought order to the world to enable all life to flourish. Humanity is the pinnacle of his creation, made to be like God and to represent him to the rest of the world.

Fall

Read Gen 3:1-5

What is the temptation that Eve is faced with?

Read Gen 3:6

How did Eve deal with the temptation?

Read Gen 3:7-10

3. What was the result of their disobedience?

Conclusion

The fall shows us how even the best of humanity often make choices that are independent of God and bring devastating consequences to us all. Because of these choices, we all now know shame, fear, hatred, and violence, and we are banished from God's presence.

Israel

Read Gen 12:1-3

How did God choose to bring his blessing to the whole world?

Read Ex 19:1-6

What does it mean to be a kingdom of priests?

Read Isa 29:13 and Jer 31:31-33

What was the problem that Israel had, and what was God's plan to deal with this?

Conclusion

The story of Israel is one of wonderful promises and great expectations, but also one of corruption and failure. However, where mankind was bound to fall short, there was still a hope that a true Israelite would one day be born who would fulfil their great calling to be a blessing to the whole world.

Jesus

Read Lk 4:16-21

How did Jesus describe himself as the fulfilment of God's plan?

Read Jn 12:31-33

2. What did Jesus say would be the impact of his death and resurrection?

Read Matt 28:16-20

3. What was Jesus' expectations of his disciples after he left them?

Conclusion

Jesus came as the fulfilment of the promises that God had made. Through his death and resurrection, he conquered the great powers that had held mankind in slavery since the time of Adam and Eve, the great powers of death, sin and the devil. Therefore, Jesus sent out his followers to share this good news and bring God's blessing to all the world.



New Creation

Read Jn 20:24-29

What was Jesus' resurrection body like?

Read 2Cor 5:17 and 1John 3:2

2. In what way have we already experienced new creation, and in what way are we still waiting for it?

Read Rev 21:1-5

3. What kind of world will we ultimately live in when Jesus returns?

Conclusion

Jesus' resurrection was the first part of the new creation, recognisable as a man, still carrying the scars of his life, and yet he was completely different. He shows us what the new creation will look like for us personally and for the whole of his creation when he returns. While we wait for him, we have already experienced his new creation at work within us and are now living this out for the world to see.

The bottom line:

Can you write a summary of the big story of the bible in your own words?

WEEK 3 - Seeing Jesus as the hero

Read Jn 5:39-40

The Pharisees of Jesus' day were dedicated students of the old testament, but what had they missed according to Jesus?

It is possible to know the scriptures off by heart, and still miss the main point, which is to find Jesus and come to him to receive life. Even the early disciples, having been brought up learning their scriptures, and then spending 3 years listening to Jesus, needed Jesus to open their minds so they could truly understand that the scriptures were written about him (See Lk 24:44-47).

Today's session is about learning to explore the scriptures and finding the signposts that God has put there to point us towards Jesus.

The bible is made up of different types of literature, so we will consider each type. Some of the signposts are obvious, while some may take a little thought. Don't give up, thinking more deeply about a passage is the only way to dig out the treasure that's there.



Example 1) - Speech taken from a story: Read Gen 3:15

Who is speaking to whom?

What has just happened?

Where do you see a signpost to Jesus?

What do you learn about Jesus from this story?

Comment - The battle between the serpent and the offspring is regularly seen in the story. See Ex 1 for Pharaoh's slaughter of the Hebrew children, and how Moses is rescued and returns to crush the Egyptian kingdom. See 1Sam 17 for how the Israelites are kept in fear by Goliath, only for a young David to strike his head and kill him.

Example 2) - The plot from a story: Read Gen 22:1-18

Retell the story in your own words.

What do you think is the main point of the story?

How does this work as a signpost to Jesus?

What do you learn about Jesus from this story?

Comment - There are a number of storylines in the scriptures which seem to reflect Jesus' life, his sufferings and his exaltation. Joseph was taken from to the prison and then to the palace. Job suffered without reason, only to be highly exalted. Indeed, the whole storyline of Israel (particularly in the prophetic books eg Dan 7, Isa 53) sees the humiliation and suffering of Israel, leading to great exaltation one day.

**Example 3) - An object or character from the story (types)
Read Ex 17:1-7**

Retell the story in your own words.

What do you think is the main part of the story?

Where do you see a sign post to Jesus?

What do you learn from Jesus from this story?

Comment - Types can be people or even objects that represent Jesus in a story. Have a look at 1Cor 10:1-5 to see a list of 'types' from the exodus story. Jesus himself uses the same ways to interpret the wilderness story when he refers to himself as the 'true bread from heaven' (Jn 6:32).

Example 4) - From the law of Moses (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) Read Lev 16

Retell the law in your own words.

Why were Israel required to perform this ceremony?

How does this present us with a signpost to Jesus?

What do you learn about Jesus from this story?

Comment - There are huge passages of scripture dealing with the law, with holy days and feasts and the practices that God required. It's easy to get lost in these. Paul calls them all shadows, with the reality being found in Christ (Col 2:16-17). Jesus himself seemed to redefine the law for his followers, so that they could only understand its fulfilment when they saw it in him (Matt 5:17).

Example 5) - From poetry: Read Ps 22

Who is the psalm written by?

Why do you think he is writing this poem?

How does this work as a signpost to Jesus?

What do you learn about Jesus from this psalm?

Comment - The psalms and other poems are rich with treasures which lead us to Jesus. Some of the most often quoted passages in the new testament are from this part of the bible. See Ps 2, Ps 8, Ps 110.

Example 6) - From prophecy: Read Ezek 47:1-12

What has happened during Ezekiel's lifetime with the temple?

What is the main point of the temple vision?

How does this work as a signpost to Jesus?

What do you learn about Jesus from this prophecy?

Comment - We can often be quick to interpret a prophecy literally. There are many Jews (and Christians) waiting for the temple that Ezekiel saw. However, read Jn 7:37-39, where Jesus spoke on the day they re-enacted this prophecy at the 'Feast of Tabernacles'. He clearly makes this prophecy about himself. Jesus is the rock of Dan 2 and the fountain of Zech 13. Indeed, whenever we read prophecy, we should be aware of the immediate context it was given, but also look to see how it is further fulfilled in Jesus.

The New Testament

The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John)

The gospel writers clearly have a good grasp of the old testament scriptures, and introduce the good news of Jesus as the one who was fulfilling all the promises. They each have their own purpose for being written, and so tell different stories or give different details.

Acts

The book of Acts gives us Luke's account of how the early disciples formed communities with Jesus at the centre, and took his message out to the known world.

The letters (Paul, Peter, James, John, Jude)

The letters from the apostles give us a glimpse at life in the early church, with the joys and the struggles of working out this good news in practice, often with very diverse groups of people and during very difficult times.

The book of Revelation is a vision full of unusual images, which can be difficult to understand. It speaks particularly to those followers of Jesus who were being persecuted, encouraging them to be faithful to the end.

The bottom line:

Why do you think it's important to see the signposts to Jesus in the scriptures that you are reading?

WEEK 4 - Launching off

Over the past 3 weeks we have been encouraging you to begin reading the bible and making your own conclusions with a little guidance. This week is your launch party. We will do an example bible study together, looking at some good questions to ask, where to go to find some answers to those questions, and what to do as a result of what you've learnt. Finally you can look at some passages on your own. Remember though, that the bible was always meant to be read together in a group. It will enrich you to hear what other people see in the bible, and encourage you to hear how each person is growing in their love and obedience, so make sure you remain in groups that read the bible together.

Before you start a new book:

So you're about to start reading a book of the bible yourself. We'll start with the gospel of John. Some immediate questions to answer before you begin your reading are;

1) Where are we in the overall story of the bible?

Hint: You can use the chart from week 1 to find the book you're looking at and see where you are up to in the overall story.

2) Who is the writer, the audience, and why has it been written?

Hint: For the gospel of John, he tells us why he has written this book (Jn 20:31). Many books of the bible will not be so clear as John is, and so we will perhaps need some help from people who have been reading the bible for a long time. One of the best sources for giving us an introduction to a book in the bible is on a website called 'Bible project'. Simply google 'Bible project' and the name of the book that you want to learn about, and you will find a fascinating 5 minute video that will explain what you need to know as an introduction to the book you are about to read.

Read John 1:1-18 - Read the passage at least twice through

When reading any passage of the bible, think through and answer the following questions:

- 1) What does this passage tell you about God?
- 2) What does this passage tell you about humanity?
- 3) What will you do this week as a result of this passage?
- 4) Who will you share this passage with?

Further reading

In normal circumstances, reading a whole book of the bible is the best way to understand it properly, and see the flow that the writer intended. However, as a newcomer, it may be that you want to cover some of the foundations of the Christian faith. If so, the following list may be helpful for you to work through.

Foundations for faith

God welcomes sinners - Luke 7:36-50

Salvation comes to a household - Luke 19:1-10

The cost and benefits of following Jesus - Luke 18:18-30

Life in the kingdom of God - Mark 12:28-34

Free indeed - John 8:31-59

The victory of the cross - John 12:23-33

Resurrection - John 11:1-44

Holy Spirit power - Acts 8:4-17

The great commission - Matt 28:16-20

The new community - Acts 2:42-47

The apostolic mission - Rom 15:14-33

The Spirit's gifts - 1Cor 12

The Spirit's fruit - Gal 5:13-26

Suffering and glory - Rom 8:18-27

NOTES



Colin Nichols is married to Pam, and they have 3 children. They are currently based in South Africa, leading training with the Issachar Alliance, a network of disciple making and church planting movements.

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