

Chronology of the Bible

Approximate Date of Events

Creation –
1700 BC

1700 BC –
1450 BC

1450 BC –
1000 BC

1000 BC –
538 BC

538 BC –
445 BC

1 AD – 33 AD

33 AD – 62 AD

95 AD (date of
writing)

- A. **Genesis** - God creates everything that exists. God creates humans (Adam and Eve) in His image. Adam and Eve disobey God, and sin and death enter the world. God graciously promises to undo the effects of sin and death on His creation. As part of that promise, God chooses a man named Abraham and makes a covenant with him. God promises to make Abraham's descendants into a great nation. At the end of Genesis, 70 of Abraham's descendants go to Egypt to live.
- B. **Exodus - Deuteronomy** - About 400 years after Genesis, Abraham's descendants now number approximately 2 million people. Pharaoh makes them slaves in Egypt. God rescues them from Egypt under the leadership of Moses and gives His law to them to govern them as a nation.
- C. **Joshua - 2 Samuel** - Under the leadership of Joshua, the Israelites (named after Abraham's grandson Jacob/Israel) take possession of the land that eventually becomes Israel. God sends judges and priests to help lead His people, but they want a king. God chooses David to be king, because he was a "man after God's own heart." David worships God and follows Him faithfully, and Israel becomes a strong nation under God's blessing.
- D. **1-2 Kings (1-2 Chronicles)** - When David dies, his son, Solomon, becomes king. Solomon leads well for a while, but he eventually turns to idolatry and worships false gods. God's judgment for Solomon's idolatry is that the northern half of the kingdom will be torn away. However, God doesn't want to disgrace David by taking the kingdom from his son, so He promises to wait until Solomon's son, Rehoboam, becomes king. When Rehoboam is king, the nation splits in two, with the north (Israel) following Jeroboam as king, and the south (Judah) staying loyal to Rehoboam. The north rebels against God and starts worshipping false gods. God sends many prophets to warn the north and call them to repent, but they refuse. In 722 BC, God sends the nation of Assyria to defeat the north and carry them into exile. The south follows suit. They also ignore God's prophets, and God sends Babylon to defeat the south and carry them into exile in 586 BC.
- E. **Ezra - Nehemiah** - God allows a group of Israelites to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the city walls under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah. The Old Testament story ends around 445 BC, with the Israelites awaiting God's Messiah to restore the nation to its past greatness.
- F. **Matthew - John** - Jesus comes. He is God's promised Messiah, and not just for Israel, but for the whole world. He doesn't come to rebuild just the nation of Israel as the people of God, but to build the church as the true, spiritual people of God, made up of people from all nations (just as God had promised Abraham). Jesus dies a sacrificial death on the cross for the forgiveness of sins, so that anyone who trusts Him and follows Him can become part of God's people and have a relationship with God. He is resurrected by the power of God's Spirit three days later. He appears to over 500 eyewitnesses and teaches them for 40 days.
- G. **Acts** - Jesus ascends back into heaven. He sends the Holy Spirit to guide and empower His people. The church is formed in Jerusalem, and then expands to all of Israel, on to Africa, Asia, and Europe. (After the New Testament was written, the church continued to expand to North and South America, Australia, and all over the world.)
- H. **Revelation** - Describes Jesus' return to earth, when He will usher in God's kingdom completely and eternally.

OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE - SESSION ONE

Creation - Abraham

1. Introductory Matters

A. My story

B. Time and Questions

- 6:30-8:00. Want to respect your time by not going later. A LOT to cover in 4 weeks! Feel free to get up, stretch your legs, get snacks or drinks any time you want.
- We'll try to leave time for questions at the end. The sessions are intended to be helpful for someone who has never studied the Bible at all, so feel free to ask anything. If you have questions that we don't have time to answer this week, write them down on a note card, and we'll try to answer them next week.

2. Why the Bible?

A. Spiritual - God's revelation of Himself to us

B. Popular - Bestselling book of all time (estimated over 8 billion copies in nearly 2600 languages as of 2011)

C. Scholarly - Most reliable ancient book in the world, based on two scholarly tests for accuracy and reliability (Josh McDowell's *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*):

- Number of handwritten copies - The more handwritten copies we have, the more confidence we have that our copies accurately reflect the original manuscript, because we can compare copies to one another over time and see if there are changes. Here's how the New Testament compares to some other famous ancient works of literature:
 - Plato's *Tetralogies*: 7 copies
 - Works of Julius Caesar: 10 copies
 - Works of Aristotle: 49 copies
 - Homer's *Iliad*: 643 copies (this is the most of any ancient manuscript other than the Bible)
 - New Testament: 24,000+ copies
- Time between original and earliest copy we possess - The closer our oldest copy is to the original, the more confidence we have that it accurately reflects the original. Here's how the New Testament compares to some other famous ancient works of literature:
 - Plato's *Tetralogies*: 1200 years between original and our earliest copy
 - Works of Julius Caesar: 1000 years between original and our earliest copy
 - Works of Aristotle: 1400 years between original and our earliest copy
 - Homer's *Iliad*: 500 years between original and our earliest copy
 - New Testament: 25 years between original and our earliest copy

From a scholarly standpoint, the manuscript evidence to support the reliability of the New Testament is thousands of times stronger than the manuscript evidence to support the reliability of any other ancient document. If we accept our copies of Plato, Aristotle, Homer, and Caesar as being accurate (and we do), then we must accept the New Testament as being immensely more so, based on scholarly and academic standards.

D. Archaeology

- Over 25,000 sites have been discovered that are connected to the Old Testament period.
- These discoveries have confirmed hundreds of Scripture's assertions and details about people, places, and cultural traditions.
- No archaeological discovery to date has ever disproved Scripture in what it says.
- Perhaps the most famous archaeological discovery is the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Dead Sea Scrolls are 1100 ancient manuscripts and 100,000 fragments found in 1947 by a shepherd boy in Qumran. The scrolls contain copies of every Old Testament book except Esther. The copies date back to the 3rd century BC. They allow us to compare today's Old Testament with ancient Hebrew texts, and the wording is virtually identical. They provide a record of prophecies that were copied in the 3rd century BC and then fulfilled during the life of Jesus.

E. Prophecy

- The Old Testament contains over 2000 predictive prophecies.
- The truthfulness of these prophecies is one of the main arguments in favor of the divine origin of Scripture (Isaiah 46:9-11).
- Of the Old Testament prophecies, 456 are written about the Messiah (or Christ), and all of them were written at least 300 years before Jesus' birth.
- Jesus fulfilled all 456 prophecies.
- Peter Stoner, Professor Emeritus of Science at Westmont College, calculated the odds that any one person would fulfill just 48 of these prophecies as 1 in 10^{157} . That's a 1 with 157 zeroes after it!
- If you covered the state of Texas two feet deep in quarters and painted one of them red, a blindfolded person would be more likely to grab the red quarter on his first try than someone would be to coincidentally fulfill these 48 prophecies.
- Mathematically speaking, it is impossible for anything with odds above 1 in 10^{50} to occur by chance.
- Thus, the fact that Jesus fulfills these prophecies confirms His identity as the Messiah and supports the claim that the Bible comes from God Himself.

3. The Structure of the Bible

- A. 66 books - 39 books in the Old Testament, written mostly in Hebrew; 27 books in the New Testament, written in Greek. (The Roman Catholic Bible contains 46 Old Testament books, although the extra 7 are not found in the original Hebrew Bible.)
 - The books are not all in chronological order. For example, the events of Job probably took place during the time of *Genesis*. Most of the prophets prophesied during the time of 1-2 Kings/1-2 Chronicles.
 - Chapter and verse divisions were later added to the Bible to make it easier to locate specific texts. Texts are called by the name of the book, chapter number within that book, and verse number within that chapter. For example, John 3:16 refers to the Gospel of John, chapter 3, verse 16.
- B. Old and New Testament - Testament is another word for covenant. The Bible records God's covenants with humans.
 - In the Old Testament, God makes a covenant with Noah that He will never again destroy the world by flood (*Genesis* 9:9-11). God makes a covenant with Abraham to make his descendants into a great nation and bless the whole world through him (*Genesis* 12:2-3; *Genesis* 15). God makes a covenant with Israel to make them His holy nation if they will obey Him (*Exodus* 19:5-6). God makes a covenant with David that he will always have a descendant ruling as king (*2 Samuel* 7:11-13).
 - Near the end of the Old Testament, God's prophets predict that God will establish a "new" covenant with His people (*Jeremiah* 31:31-34). It will be a covenant of forgiveness and grace.
 - In the New Testament, Jesus teaches that His death and resurrection establishes God's new covenant with His people (*Luke* 22:20).

4. The Overarching Storyline of the Bible

The Bible is about God. It is God's revelation of Himself to humankind. The humans in the biblical story change frequently, but God is constantly involved in the entire story. Four main "scenes" in the story:

- A. Creation - God creates everything that exists (*Genesis* 1-2)
- B. Fall - Humans disobey God and sin enters the world (*Genesis* 3)
- C. Redemption - God graciously works on behalf of His creation to undo the deadly effects of sin (*Genesis* 3:15-Revelation 20)
- D. Glorification - God restores all of creation to its perfect state, and our relationship with God is perfectly restored (*Revelation* 21-22).

More specifically, the Bible is about God revealing Himself to us through Jesus. Jesus is the centerpiece that connects all parts of the biblical story together. The Old Testament promises that God will send His Messiah to save the world, and the promises of the Old Testament point forward to Jesus (*Luke* 24:27). The New Testament tells the story of Jesus coming as God's Messiah in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (the four gospels - semi-biographies about Jesus). Next, the New Testament tells how the church grew and spread after Jesus' crucifixion and

resurrection (Acts). Third, the New Testament contains letters written by Jesus' apostles (people chosen by Jesus to lead the church) to churches and individuals to help them follow Jesus (Romans-Jude). Finally, the New Testament tells about Jesus' future return when He will complete God's work of glorification (Revelation). Hebrews 1:1-3 tells us that God has spoken to us and revealed Himself to us by His Son, Jesus, who "is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being."

So the best place to start with the one "big story" of the Bible is at the beginning...

Genesis 1:1 - "In the beginning, God..."

The Bible begins with God, because God is the beginning of everything. God is the only eternally existent, uncreated, self-sustaining, independent being who exists. Everything else exists because God speaks it into being. In the very first chapter, the Bible tells us God is a creative being with phenomenal power.

We have to be brief on this point right now, but it's worth acknowledging that some of us may have differing views on how we were formed - creation or evolution. It won't surprise you that my biblical background leads me to believe in creation. However, my math/science background also leads me to believe in creation. I have never heard a satisfying logical, rational, or scientific explanation for where we or the universe come from, if we deny the activity of a Creator God. If we deny a Creator, where did matter come from? What basis is there for claiming matter is eternally existent? (It makes sense that if God is GOD, He would be eternally existent.) If matter isn't eternally existent, how does something come from nothing? Or even more, how does *everything* come from nothing? (It makes sense that a Creator God could be the source of everything. It doesn't make sense that nothing could be the source of everything.) Even if matter is eternally existent, how can you explain order arising out of chaos? In our universe, order never "accidentally" arises out of chaos. Order is always the work of a rational mind. Even more, if the irrational forces of time and random chance accidentally produced everything that exists, how did our rational mind develop out of that? Irrationality cannot produce rationality. If you have an irrational source, the product is also irrational. Thus, if a rational being did not create us, we cannot even trust our own thinking as being rational, and every argument we make against creation must be dismissed as irrational!

The order and structure of the universe suggests a rational mind is behind it, designing and creating it. If you would like to study more of the scientific and logical reasons supporting creation, *The Case For a Creator* by Lee Strobel is a good resource. The documentary *Expelled* by Ben Stein also does a great job of calling into question why so many of our so-called scientists and science teachers ignore the scientific evidence in favor of a creator.

Genesis 1:26 - "Let us make man"

Interesting that God refers to Himself in the plural (us). A hint toward God's three-fold nature (the Trinity). God exists as three persons within Himself. Don't get hung up on this. It makes sense that God would be more complex in His existence than we are... He's God! Three persons within one being suggests that God is relational by nature. He has always been in relationship within His own persons. Later, the Bible teaches us to think of the relationship between these three persons as Father, Son, and Spirit. All three persons are fully God, but they are distinct in the way they relate to one another within the Godhead.

Genesis 1:26-27 - God makes man and woman "in His image."

God created humans to reflect His nature. We are personal creatures. We are created to be in relationship with God and with one another. We are created to rule over creation as God's personal representatives.

Genesis 3 - The Fall

God places the first man and woman in a garden. Two trees in the garden are mentioned by name (The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and The Tree of Life). God forbids them to eat from The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. He is giving them a choice. It seems that God desires for His relationship with us to be one in which we have a choice. He wants us to choose Him, to choose to love Him, to choose to obey Him.

Adam and Eve disobey. They eat from the tree, hide from God, and refuse to take responsibility for their actions. God responds in two ways: with judgment and grace. This becomes a very important theme throughout the rest of the biblical story. God responds to human sin with judgment and grace.

Judgment: God kicks them out of the garden, man's work will now be hard and unproductive, childbirth will be painful for women, etc.

Grace: God promises that a descendant of the woman will eventually triumph over the serpent who tempted them (Satan) (3:15).

Genesis 4 - Adam and Eve's sons, Cain and Abel, offer sacrifices to God. We later learn that this is part of God's gracious way to forgive sin and restore our relationship with Him. The punishment for sin is death, but that punishment can be covered by a substitutionary sacrifice.

Abel offers an animal sacrifice, which God accepts favorably. Cain brings a fruit sacrifice, which God does not accept. Hebrews 9:22 tells us, "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." Abel brought God what God required. Cain chose to do it his own way, and God would not accept it.

People still try to do this today. We try to come to God on our terms. You can't come to God on your terms. You can only come to God on God's terms. God's terms are that the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the only way you can be forgiven and in right relationship with God. You can only come to God through faith in Jesus.

God warns Cain that "sin is crouching at his door." The word for sin literally means "missing the mark." Based on the attitude of Cain's heart, he was missing the mark of God's standard. Cain is jealous that God approved of Abel's sacrifice and not his, so he kills Abel.

Adam and Eve have another son, Seth.

Genesis 6 - The Flood

Several generations later, Noah is one of Seth's descendants. Many humans now on earth. God sees the wickedness of their hearts (this is an important concept - God always looks at the heart!).

Judgment: God decides to destroy the earth by flood.

Grace: God turns His favor on Noah and spares him. Noah and his family survive in the ark. God makes a covenant with Noah that He will never again destroy the world by flood.

Note: The ark was 450 feet long (that's one and a half football fields), 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. It would have held 522 railroad cars of volume. One railroad car can hold 200 sheep, so the ark was more than big enough to hold the 3500 species that would have been present on earth at that time.

Genesis 11 - The Tower of Babel

Humans begin to build a gigantic tower "to make a name for themselves." They are seeking to glorify themselves instead of glorifying God.

Judgment: God confuses their language and scatters them all over the earth. In other words, God makes them into many nations that can't communicate with one another.

Grace: God calls one man, Abraham, and promises to make him into a great nation. The purpose of this nation will be to bless all other nations through him. God intends to use Abraham and his descendants to help all the nations in the world know Him.

Genesis 12-15 - God makes a covenant with Abraham. He promises to give Abraham a son, to give his descendants the land of Canaan, and to make them into a great nation.

In Abraham's day, people made a covenant with one another by cutting an animal in half and walking between the pieces. You were symbolically saying, "May this happen to me if I break the covenant." In other words, "If I break the covenant, I'm dead meat!"

In this instance, only God passes through the animal halves. The covenant is not based on Abraham at all. It is based completely on God. Genesis 15:6 is a huge verse in the Bible, "Abraham believed God and it was credited to Him as righteousness." Abraham just trusts God, and God does all the work.

Genesis 16 - Abraham is 85 and Sarah is 75, and they still don't have a son. Sarah convinces Abraham to sleep with her maidservant Hagar to try to have a son. He does, and Ishmael is born.

Genesis 17 - God appears to Abraham again when Abraham is 99. He basically tells Abraham, "I didn't need you to give me a son. I'm going to give you a son." Abraham and Sarah laugh at God, because Sarah has never been able to have children, and they think they're too old to have children now. But a year later, when Abraham is 100 and Sarah is 90, Sarah gives birth to a son. They name him Isaac, which means "he laughs."

Isaac eventually has twins, and God chooses to keep His promise to Abraham through the younger twin, Jacob. God changes Jacob's name to Israel, and Israel has 12 sons. The descendants of these 12 sons eventually become the 12 tribes of Israel. God's promise to give Abraham many descendants is coming true.

This reminds us that the whole story of the Bible is about God. It's about what God has done in history to fulfill His promises.

Questions - Comments