

KNOWING GOD THROUGH THE WHOLE BIBLE

The Bible is more than a book about morality, a chosen nation, miracle rescues, and a big fish that swallowed a rebellious prophet. It's a book of laws, wars, people, and places—each of which is meant to give us life-changing insights about God and about ourselves. It's a book that helps us to see that nothing is more important than learning to know God and His strength in the emotions, pains, and joys of life.

In this revision of an earlier booklet by RBC author David Egener, I think you will see God, and yourself, in some surprising places. *Martin R. De Haan II*

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PROBLEMS WITH GOD

One way to understand the Bible is to see that from beginning to end, it is a book about people who have a problem with God. On the earliest pages of the Bible we read about people who are enough like God to reason with Him, and yet enough unlike Him that they don't think the way He does. Early in our history we begin to hear:

“God is holding out on us.” First, the problem was over the fruit of a tree. Later, the people of the Bible

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, “Where are you?” So he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.” And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?” Then the man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate” (Gen. 3:8-12).

had a problem with God's regulations about adultery, land use, and behavior in conflict.

“God isn't being fair.” This objection even came from Job, a man said to be the most righteous on earth.

“God is going to ruin us.” This was the argument of a frightened people shortly after their rescue from 400 years of slavery.

“God's provisions are boring.” This is how the people of Israel began to feel after eating manna day after day and week after week. God had sent terrible plagues against the Pharaoh of Egypt to rescue

cue His people. And He was personally leading them through a wilderness toward a land He had promised to give them. But they had a problem with His provision. They wanted to go back to Egypt for the leeks, onions, and garlic.

“God isn’t going to help us.” Over and over the Bible tells us of people who, in spite of God’s past provisions, become convinced that there’s no point in waiting on God.

“God ruins His own reputation by judging His people.” God’s servants have argued that God gives His enemies reason to laugh when He judges His own people. He gives pagans reason to believe that He is not able to take care of His chosen people.

“God asks the impossible.” Even Moses argued that he couldn’t do what God wanted him to do. Later, Jonah couldn’t bring himself to help the Ninevites, a terrible and heartless enemy of his people, to avoid the well-deserved judgment of God. Later still, God asked all of His people to love their enemies and to do good to those who harmed them.

“God doesn’t act as though He loves us. If He loved us, He wouldn’t let us suffer. He wouldn’t let our enemies rule over us. He would spare us the consequences of our own choices. He wouldn’t let us wait in the dark for the light of His answer.”

My soul loathes my life; I will give free course to my complaint, I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God, “Do not condemn me; show me why You contend with me. Does it seem good to You that You should oppress, that You should despise the work of Your hands, and smile on the counsel of the wicked? . . . Your hands have made me and fashioned me, an intricate unity; yet You would destroy me (Job 10:1-3,8).

OUR PROBLEMS IN CONTEXT

The first two chapters of Genesis show that we owe our existence to the God who created our first parents in His own likeness. Chapters 3–11 tell us that envy, murder, drunkenness, incest, and disaster followed on the heels of their decision to disobey God by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

In Genesis 12, God revealed Himself to a man named Abram and told him that He was going to make him the father of a nation that would bless all nations. This chosen nation, later to be known as Israel, would be the means by which God revealed Himself to the whole world. The rest of the Old Testament tells the story of Israel's glory and failure.

God gave this nation a miraculous birth out of the slave-yards of Egypt. He met all of her needs in a barren wilderness, gave her a promised land, and sent one prophet after another to warn her when she fell into sin. God gave Himself to Israel. He gave her laws, covenants, wisdom, military victory, prophets, kings, and the promise of a coming Messiah. Israel, however, habitually adopted the moral and spiritual practices of the nations around her. Eventually God let Assyria and Babylon defeat and occupy her.

After 70 years of Babylonian rule, there was a century of partial return and rebuilding in Jerusalem. But still, the Lord's people were cold to Him. After speaking once more through the prophet Malachi, God was silent for 400 long, dark, violent years.

Finally, a new day dawned. A miracle worker and teacher of righteousness came out of Galilee. Jesus of Nazareth had the marks of the promised Messiah.

He healed the sick, raised the dead, gave hope to the poor, and confronted the hypocrisy of Israel's spiritual leaders. In His early thirties, however, Jesus began talking about the necessity of His own death. Before His followers could understand what was happening, He went up to Jerusalem for the Jewish feast of Passover and ended up dying on an executioner's cross. His disciples scattered like frightened sheep.

The Bible reveals a God who patiently deals with people who repeatedly have a problem with Him.

Three days after Jesus' burial, witnesses began saying that Jesus was not dead but alive. Fearful men became filled with courage. Risking their own lives, they proclaimed a gospel of hope for all the world. They said that God had won a great victory through Jesus' death and resurrection. They said that Jesus died for our sins as a perfect sacrifice, putting an end to all the animal sacrifices that had preceded Him. They said that God would forgive and adopt into His own family all who would repent of their sin and put their trust in Jesus. They said that Jew and Gentile alike could now become part of a new community called the church.

The Bible shows that the church was not God's final answer for the world. Like Israel before her, the church began adopting the values and immorality of the world. God would have to continually correct His people to get their attention. The Bible ends promising the return of Christ and saying, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

THE NEED FOR PERSPECTIVE

Even though Old and New Testaments combine to form one book, that one book is a library of 66 books written by some 40 human authors over a period of about 1,600 years. The 66 books have since been broken down into 1,189 chapters and 31,173 verse divisions. In one translation someone has computed 773,692 words and 3,566,480 letters.

It's easy to get lost in the details of Bible study. For that reason, we continually need to remind ourselves that the purpose of the Bible is not to make us experts in Mideast culture or in Christian doctrine (as important as both are). The purpose of the Bible is to enable us to know God, to know ourselves, and to equip us not only with a knowledge of the past but with the ability to live life today.

1. It's a book about God. From cover to cover, this book tells us about God. It reveals Him as:

Creator (Gen. 1:1)	Self-sufficient (Ex. 3)
Sustainer (Col. 1:17)	Spirit (Jn. 4:24)
Holy (Ex. 15:11)	Unchanging (Ps. 102:27)
Loving (1 Jn. 4:8)	Ever-present (Ps. 139)
Truth (Jn. 14:6)	All-knowing (Heb. 4:13)
One (Dt. 6:4)	All-powerful (Job 42:2)
Eternal (Ps. 90:2)	Just (Ps. 18:24-26).

Most important, the Bible shows us a God who came to us in the person of One who told us that to know Him was to know the Father; to love Him was to love the Father; to believe Him was to believe the Father; to trust Him was to trust the Father; and to receive Him was to receive the Father.

2. It's a book about us. In a very real sense, the Bible is a book about every one of us. As we get to know its characters, we keep coming face to face with ourselves. In their fear we see our fear, in their anger our anger, in their temptations our temptations, in their joys our joys. The people of the Bible may have ridden on donkeys and camels rather than in Toyotas and Buicks, but in every important way they can tell us a great deal about ourselves.

3. It's a book about today. It's a book that is still a bestseller, not because of its lofty literary style or breathtaking plot, but because its message from God meets the deepest needs of the human heart.

Although times may change, people do not. We are still facing the same basic problems, frustrations, and guilt as our ancestors did. We must still recognize the frailty of human life, the reality of sin, the problem of pain and injustice, the debates of origin and destiny, and the nagging questions of the meaning of life.

In the midst of a world that is constantly changing, what hasn't changed is our need for:

- Direction
- Personal Identity
- Wise Counsel
- A Sense Of Destiny
- Understanding
- Life Principles
- Motivation
- Inspiration
- A Sense Of Belonging
- Love
- Faith
- Comfort
- Standards
- Encouragement

What the Bible shows us is that these needs are met for the men and women who learn to know and walk with their God. For that reason, we will turn our attention now to some of the most basic yet commonly ignored truths about God.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TELL US ABOUT GOD?

Many years ago, the prophet Daniel wrote, “The people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits” (Dan. 11:32). That principle is still true today. People who know God find Him to be sufficient for the needs of life.

As we look at knowing God from the perspective of the whole Bible, let’s get right to the basics. Let’s work only with some of the most fundamental aspects of the message of God’s Word. Let’s look at four truths that are foundational to the rest of what the Bible tells us about God and ourselves.



PERSPECTIVE 1: God Is Personal, Not A Force.

Throughout the Scriptures, God refers to Himself as “I,” “Me,” and “Us.” He responds when He is addressed as “You.” He possesses intellect, expresses emotions, and exercises will. He speaks, He sees, and He hears. He expresses grief, anger, jealousy, and compassion. Even though He makes it clear that He is Spirit (Jn. 4:24), He makes it just as clear that He is not a Force. He has all the marks of personality.

The Bible makes it clear that this God we tend to have problems with is a Person, not just a useful or opposing Force. Moses is a case in point. God re-

vealed both His power and His personality to Moses when He spoke to him out of a burning bush (Ex. 3–4). God told Moses He wanted him to lead Israel out of the slave-yards of Egypt. Moses, however, like most of the people of the Bible, had a problem with what God was asking him to do. He couldn't imagine that the powerful Pharaoh would give him a hearing. So God performed two miracles to demonstrate His power (4:1-9). But Moses said no again, this time using his poor speaking ability as an excuse. God answered immediately, promising that He Himself would be Moses' mouthpiece (4:11-12). Again Moses refused and asked God to send someone else. Finally God became angry, and in terse, sharp sentences He overcame Moses' objections (4:14-17). Moses finally got the message and consented to go—but only after a typically human struggle with a very personal God.

**“The Lord spoke to Moses face to face,
as a man speaks to his friend.”**

—Exodus 33:11

Notice that this was an intense, personal exchange—an exchange between two thinking, feeling, acting beings. It demonstrates that God is not just a power. He is a Person:

- He has a personal presence (Gen. 3:8; Ex. 19:20; Mt. 3:17; Jn. 12:28).
- He thinks with infinite intelligence (Isa. 40:13-14).
- He feels with a measureless capacity for emotion (Gen. 6:6; Dt. 29:20; Ps. 111:4).
- He loves (Jer. 31:3; Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:8).

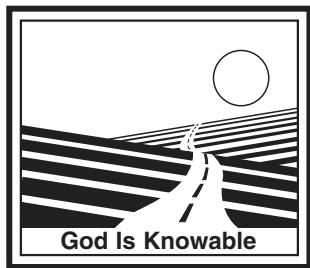
SEEING GOD

Because God is personal, we can be comforted by the following:

1. He is personally watching over us.
2. He is personally thinking about us.
3. He personally responds to what we say and think.
4. He has His own personal plans for us.

SEEING OURSELVES

1. What have you done recently to show that you have a personal relationship with God?
2. What choices have you made this week because you considered God's feelings?
3. How does knowing that God is more than an impersonal force cause you to respond to Him?
4. How are your thoughts about the future affected by your knowledge that God has planned that future?
5. What immediate steps can you take to get to know God better?



PERSPECTIVE 2: God Is Knowable, Not Just A Mystery.

It's true that the prophet Isaiah quotes God as saying, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD" (Isa. 55:8).

(That's one reason we have a problem with God.) But in Isaiah 55, the Lord's point was not that He is unknowable. The sense of what He said is that we cannot begin to know what He has not revealed to us about Himself and His point of view. Who are we,

therefore, to argue with One who has a perspective infinitely greater than our own?

It is from that infinite knowledge that God has given us all we need to know about Him. Everything we need to know about God can be known through His self-revelation.

1. We can know God because we were created to know Him. According to the account of the creation of man, God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). The next verse says, “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him” (v.27).

One reason God made us in His image was so that we could know Him and respond to Him. He built elements into our personality that correspond to His personality. We have thoughts to respond to His thoughts, emotions to respond to His emotions, and a will with which to respond to His will.

In this, we are different from animals. As far as we know, they have no capacity to know God. They have no inborn sense of right and wrong. They do not have an innate thirst for God that can only be satisfied by a personal relationship with the Creator.

It’s because of the godlike capacities our Creator has built into us, that the people of the Bible could know as much of God as they needed to know:

- Adam and Eve knew God well enough to talk with Him in the Garden (Gen. 3:8-11).
- Enoch walked with God (Gen. 5:24).
- David knew God so deeply that he was called a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22).

The reason men and women of the Bible could respond to God and come to know Him was that He made them with the ability to do so.

2. We can know God because He made Himself known. His primary means of telling us about Himself today is through the Bible. Pick up a Bible. Leaf through it. Before you have read very far, you will see that this book claims to have come from God through inspired human authors:

- The first chapter of the Bible contains the words “and God said” 10 times (Gen. 1).
- Claims that their writings were the “word of the Lord” were made by Isaiah 20 times, Ezekiel 60 times, and Jeremiah 100 times.
- God told Jeremiah, “Write in a book for yourself all the words that I have spoken to you” (30:2).
- Paul said that he spoke “not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches” (1 Cor. 2:13).
- The Thessalonian Christians welcomed Paul’s teaching “not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” (1 Th. 2:13).
- John began the book of Revelation by referring to it as “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants” (1:1).

If God had not disclosed Himself to us in His written revelation, creation would be the primary evidence for knowledge of Him. We would be able to see evidence of His power, His wisdom, His care for detail, and His own personality as reflected in ourselves, and in a lesser way in the animal kingdom. But we would have no idea what His intentions were for us. We’d have no knowledge of where history was going. We’d have no assurance of God’s desire to adopt us into His family and to care for us throughout eternity. Without God’s self-revelation, the most important questions would remain unanswered.

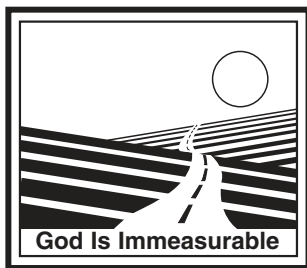
SEEING GOD

Because God is knowable:

1. We can know what He loves.
2. We can know what He hates.
3. We can know what He wants us to be.
4. We can know what He wants us to avoid.

SEEING OURSELVES

1. What decisions have you made recently on the basis of your knowledge of God?
2. What evidence can you point to in your life to show that you are growing in your knowledge of Him?
3. What have you learned about God from observing nature?
4. Why are Bible reading and prayer so important to knowing God?
5. How has knowing God helped you through the difficult times of life?



PERSPECTIVE 3: God Is Immeasurable, Not Just Knowable.

The whole Bible clearly indicates that even though God is a Person, and even though He is knowable, He is distinct from and immeasurably higher than His creation. We were created. Everything we know was created. Everything we know is to some degree measurable. Not so with God. As impossible as it is for us to understand, He existed eternally, and is in no way dependent on anything or anyone else to sustain Him. He is completely free; that is, no one

can change Him or make any demands on Him. He lives in the immeasurable span of eternity in complete self-sufficiency.

We have weaknesses and frailties. Everything we know has limits. We fall short; we miss the mark; we fail. We are imperfect and incomplete. Not God. He is beyond measure in His attributes and His ways. Although in some ways we are like God, in so many others there is absolutely no comparison.

“Is your God big enough? Is He big enough for your life, your problems, your needs, and your heartache? . . .

Our God is omnipotent. There can be no limit, boundary, or edge to His ability and His power.”

—Paris Reidhead

Moses, when he received the Law, saw the awesome majesty of God. Groping for words to describe the experience, he wrote, “The sight of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain” (Ex. 24:17).

Isaiah, when he was called to be God’s prophet, saw the Lord “high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple” (Is. 6:1). In the 40th chapter of his prophecy, he exclaimed:

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, measured heaven with a span and calculated the dust of the earth in a measure? Weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? Who has directed the Spirit of the

LORD, or as His counselor has taught Him? With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of justice? Who taught Him knowledge, and showed Him the way of understanding? (Isa. 40:12-14).

Again describing God's immeasurable superiority to men, he wrote:

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8-9).

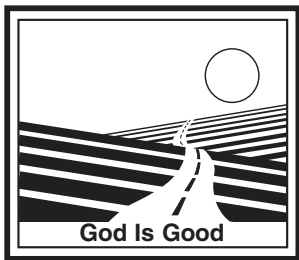
SEEING GOD

On the basis of God's immeasurable grandeur, we can conclude that:

1. God doesn't need anyone or anything.
2. God is beyond our complete comprehension.
3. God deserves our worship and praise.
4. God has the right to demand our obedience.
5. God has unlimited power to help us.

SEEING OURSELVES

1. What have you done recently to show that you believe in a God who is greater than you?
2. What have you not done because you recognize God's incomparable greatness?
3. If God were to reveal Himself to you as He did to Moses and Isaiah, how would you respond?
4. If your ideas of God are inadequate, how can you enlarge them?
5. How do you react when you think about an infinite God who loves you?



PERSPECTIVE 4: God Is Good, Not Just Powerful.

In our world, absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely. But not with God. Our all-powerful God is full of goodness. His goodness is expressed in everything

He does. Even His acts of judgment are part of His goodness. When He created our world, everything He made was good. The biblical record of His creation concludes with these words: "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good" (Gen. 1:31).

God's goodness is also evident in His kind acts toward all mankind. Consider the following verses:

The Lord is good to all (Ps. 145:9).

The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing (Ps. 145:15-16).

He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust (Mt. 5:45).

He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness (Acts 14:17).

The goodness of God is most clearly seen in His dealings with man. In the beginning, He placed our first parents in a garden paradise filled with good things. He gave Adam meaningful work and blessed

him with His own presence—walking and conversing with him in the Garden. Even so, Adam and Eve violated the one prohibition God had given them. They ate from the forbidden tree. From that point onward, our race has been marked by rebellion. We have treated one another with competitive selfishness and violence. Yet in all of our problems, God has remained a steady, personal, knowable, immeasurable mountain of goodness.

**Although absolute power tends
to corrupt absolutely, our all-powerful
God is full of goodness.**

Joseph learned about the goodness of God after being spoiled by an indulgent human father. He learned about the goodness of God after being hated by his jealous brothers, thrown into a pit, and then sold as a slave to Midianite traders. Joseph learned about the goodness of God in a foreign land where he was falsely accused by his master's wife of trying to rape her. After the embarrassment and indignities of prison, and then eventually after facing the very brothers who had sold him like an animal, Joseph could say, "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life" (Gen. 45:4-5). Then later he again said, "'Do not be afraid . . . as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore,'" he said to his brothers, "'do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little

ones.’ And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them” (Gen. 50:19-21).

These brothers and their children were the beginnings—the fathers of the nation of Israel. In spite of their ruthless selfishness and jealousy, God showed Himself good. It is the goodness of God we sense in the tender words and understanding of Joseph. It is the goodness of God we see in a man who had learned that God is good in all the circumstances of life. He is good, and He is especially good for all who are willing to trust His goodness even when our “brothers” are betraying us and “selling us off” like a piece of property. God is good even in circumstances meant by others to be for evil.

SEEING GOD

Because God is good, we conclude that:

1. We can believe what He says to us.
2. We can have confidence in waiting for His rescue.
3. We can entrust our future to His care.
4. We can rely on His wisdom and guidance.
5. We can know that what He asks us to do is always the best for us.

SEEING OURSELVES

1. What are some examples of God’s goodness to all people?
2. Is God ever against you? How do you know?
3. How is God’s goodness expressed in His justice? In His mercy? In His love? In His anger?
4. How have you responded to God’s goodness in the last week?
5. Have you personally experienced God’s goodness as it is expressed in the salvation offered in Jesus Christ?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TELL US ABOUT CHRIST?

The greatest evidence that God is personal, knowable, immeasurable, and good is the life and ministry of His Son Jesus Christ. And nothing is more important to knowing God through the whole Bible than to see the way God has come to us in the person of His eternal Son.

Those who follow and accept the storyline of the 66 books of the Bible are led to the conclusion that Jesus Christ is the Bible's central character and theme. What was written before He was born into the world looks forward to Him; what was written after His ascension to heaven looks back to Him. The Bible predicts His coming, tells the story of His life, describes the power of His message, traces His impact on His first-century followers, and promises His return.

Jesus Himself knew that He was at the heart of God's revelation, for He said to the Jewish leaders, "You search the Scriptures, . . . and these are they which testify of Me" (Jn. 5:39). After the resurrection He walked the road to Emmaus with two of His disciples. They were slow to understand Him because they were not familiar with the Scriptures; so He rebuked them, and "beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Lk. 24:27). Then a little later He said to His disciples:

These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of

Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me (Lk. 24:44).

The Law Of Moses. When Jesus spoke of “the Law of Moses,” He was speaking of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. Genesis speaks prophetically of Christ as the seed of woman (3:15), the seed of Abraham (12:3), and the descendant of Judah who would one day rule Israel (49:10). The book of Deuteronomy speaks of Christ when it foretells the coming of a Prophet who would be greater than Moses (18:15-18). And we are told that the Law, given in Exodus and explained in Leviticus, was given to show man his sinfulness and bring him to Christ (Gal. 3:23-24).

The Psalms. The poetry section of the Old Testament, which Jesus referred to as “the Psalms” (Job through Song of Solomon), contains numerous references to Christ. Some of the psalms are called messianic because they contain specific passages that the New Testament tells us refer to the Lord Jesus. The author of Hebrews, for example, quoted Psalm 8:4-6 and Psalm 110:1 to speak of Christ (Heb. 1:13; 2:6-8). And the Lord Jesus quoted from Psalm 22 while He was on the cross.

The Prophets. The prophetic books of the Old Testament are filled with specific predictions about Christ. We are told in the “former prophets” (Joshua through 2 Chronicles) about a kingdom to be established in Israel that would be fulfilled in the future reign of Jesus Christ. We know from the book of 2 Samuel, for example, that His throne will last forever (7:8-17).

The “latter prophets” (Isaiah through Malachi), also referred to as the major and minor prophets,

speak often and specifically of the coming Messiah. They give amazingly accurate details about His birth, His public ministry, His death, and His second coming. Micah, for example, predicted His birth in Bethlehem (5:2). Isaiah foretold His virgin birth (7:14), His reign on David's throne in righteousness (9:6-7), and His suffering for our sins (53:5-6).

**The whole Bible tells us about Christ,
because in addition to being Messiah
He is the God of the whole Bible.**

The story of Jesus Christ is also told in the New Testament. The first four books, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, are biographical accounts of Jesus' life written by four men who knew Him or knew someone close to Him. The book of Acts tells of the impact of His gospel on His followers and of the spread of His church throughout the world. The Epistles, letters written to churches or individuals, give instruction to the church, the body of believers of which Christ is the Head. And the book of Revelation envisions Him in heaven and gives details about His coming again.

Some students of the Scriptures have even said that Christ is on every page of the Bible. And because the New Testament shows that Christ is the Creator, Sustainer, Provider, Savior, Lord, and Judge of the universe, that is not an exaggeration (Jn. 5:21-23; 8:56-58; 1 Cor. 10:1-4; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:3).

THE BIBLE'S STORYLINE

The whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation shows how God has responded to people who have a problem with Him. The 66 books of the Bible tell one story of God's wisdom, His power, His love, His patience, and His anger. The 39 books of the Old Testament together with the 27 books of the New Testament record not only the countless expressions of God's love, but also the terrible losses of people who stubbornly refused to trust God until He finally turned them over to their enemies.

The whole Bible is one ongoing story, but it is important to see the differing timespans of Old and New Testament history. The ratio between Old and New Testament timespans is at least 40 to 1. From creation to Abraham there was a minimum of 20 centuries. From Abraham to Christ there was an additional 20 centuries. The whole New Testament was written in less than 1 century. The actual time covered in the Gospels and the book of Acts spans about 70 years.

This time comparison is important because it explains much of the difference that seems to exist between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New. Since the Old Testament seems to contain far more bloodshed and judgment than the New, it is often assumed that the God of the New Testament is more loving and peaceful than that of the Old. In fact, the New Testament doesn't cover enough time to show the ongoing trouble that comes to those who resist the grace of God.

In AD 70, just a short time after the writing of Acts,

God allowed the Romans to destroy Jerusalem and her temple. Twenty years later, the exiled apostle John received a revelation of the endtimes that makes Old Testament prophecies of judgment look mild by comparison. Although John has been known as the apostle of love, his Revelation describes a future time of violence and bloodshed worse than the world has ever known.

More important, the New Testament records the worst act of violence found anywhere in Scripture. Nowhere in the 40 plus centuries of the Old Testament is there an act of violence so terrible as the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

The main storyline of the Bible and its history can be traced through certain books of the Old and New Testaments. The history of the Old Testament is told in 12 of 39 books. The history of the New Testament time period can be read from any one of the four Gospels, plus the book of Acts. All other books, letters, and prophecies of both Old and New Testaments parallel and complement these 14 books.

The following is a brief overview of the storyline of the whole Bible taken from 12 Old Testament books, along with one of the Gospels and the book of Acts.

HISTORY OF THE O.T.

(4000+ Years)

- GENESIS** – Creation to Joseph
- EXODUS** – Deliverance to Sinai
- NUMBERS** – Life in Wilderness
- DEUTERONOMY** – Preparation
- JOSHUA** – Conquest of the land
- JUDGES** – Cycles of trouble
- 1 SAMUEL** – Saul
- 2 SAMUEL** – David
- 1 KINGS** – Solomon and division
- 2 KINGS** – Kings and decline
(Captivity To Babylon)
- EZRA** – Rebuilding of temple
- NEHEMIAH** – Rebuilding of walls

HISTORY OF THE N.T.

(70+ Years)

- THE GOSPELS** – Life of Jesus
- ACTS** – Work of the apostles

OLD TESTAMENT STRUCTURE

LAW – Genesis through Deuteronomy describe not only what God requires of His people but what He is willing to do for them.

HISTORY OF ISRAEL – Joshua through Esther describe Israel's conquest, possession, loss, and partial restoration to the Promised Land.

POETRY – Job through Song of Solomon describe in poetic form the wisdom and worship of God's people.

PROPHECY – Isaiah through Malachi describe God's pleadings with His people, His promise of blessing for those who trust Him, and His promise of judgment on all who refuse.

GENESIS 1-11

- God creates the world out of nothing.
- God creates man out of the ground.
- God creates woman out of man.
- Man disobeys God.
- Man's children disobey God.
- God judges the world with a flood.
- God starts over with Noah's family.
- God confuses the world with many languages.

GENESIS 12-50

- God calls Abram to follow Him.
- God promises to bless the world through Abram.
- God judges Sodom and Gomorrah.
- Abram fathers Ishmael and Isaac.
- Isaac fathers Jacob and Esau.
- Jacob fathers 12 sons including Joseph.
- Jacob's sons sell Joseph to Midianite traders.
- Joseph through many trials rises to power in Egypt.
- Joseph's brothers go to Egypt for food during famine.
- Joseph provides for his reunited family.

EXODUS

- Jacob's descendants fall into 400 years of bondage.
- Moses is prepared for 80 years to deliver His people.
- God delivers His people with supernatural plagues.

- God gives His people the Law.
- God judges His people for their idolatry.
- God gives His people a tabernacle of worship.

NUMBERS

- God leads His people by a cloud and pillar of fire.
- God offers His people a land of promise.
- God's people are afraid to take possession of it.
- God gives Israel's military a stunning defeat.
- God provides for 40 years in the wilderness.
- God gives Israel victory east of the Jordan.

DEUTERONOMY

- God prepares Israel for the Promised Land.
- Moses rehearses Israel's history and law.
- Moses offers a blessing and a curse.
- Moses predicts Israel's spiritual failure.
- Moses predicts Israel's judgment and scattering.
- Moses predicts Israel's restoration.
- Moses dies and is buried by God.

JOSHUA

- God gives Joshua leadership of Israel.
- God gives Israel a series of military victories.
- God gives Israel possession of the Promised Land.

JUDGES

- Israel experiences cycles of spiritual failure.
- The people of Israel become a law to themselves.
- God rescues His people when they repent.

1 SAMUEL

- Israel's priesthood becomes corrupt.
- God judges the house of Eli (the high priest).
- God's people demand a king.
- God gives them a king (Saul).
- Saul forfeits his kingdom by disobedience.
- God picks David as Saul's successor.
- Saul tries to kill David until he himself dies.

2 SAMUEL

- David is confirmed as king of Israel.
- David leads Israel in godliness.
- David sins with Bathsheba.
- David suffers many problems.

1 KINGS

- David dies.
- Solomon assumes the throne.
- Solomon experiences God's blessing.
- Solomon falls into spiritual decline.
- The kingdom is divided by Solomon's sons.
- The North (Israel) has a series of wicked kings.
- The North succumbs to the Assyrians in 722 BC.
- Elijah calls down fire from heaven.

2 KINGS

- Elijah passes his mantle to Elisha.
- The South (Judah) has a series of good and bad kings.
- Judah succumbs to Babylon in 606 and 586 BC.
- Babylon destroys the temple and deports the Jews.
- The people of God languish in exile for 70 years.

EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

- Teams of Jews return to Jerusalem to rebuild temple.
- Teams of Jews rebuild Jerusalem.
- God allows Jews to return to their city.

Through spiritual failure and unfaithfulness, Israel lost sovereignty over her own land. Jerusalem was conquered by one invading army after another. After the book of Malachi, God was silent for 400 long, violent years. Israel longed for her Messiah.

NEW TESTAMENT STRUCTURE

GOSPELS – Matthew through John describe four separate accounts of the public life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God.

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH – The Acts of the Apostles describes the beginnings of the church.

EPISTLES – Romans through Jude are a collection of 21 letters (13 by Paul) providing doctrinal instruction and encouragement to individuals or churches.

PROPHECY – Revelation, the last book of the Bible, provides an early critique of seven churches and then a prediction of the future of Israel and the nations. This prophecy describes the ultimate revelation and triumph of Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords.

THE GOSPELS

- John the Baptist announces the coming of Messiah.
- Jesus of Nazareth develops large following.
- Jesus is distinguished from the other rabbis.
- Jesus becomes known as a miracle worker.
- Jewish leaders envy Jesus' influence.
- After 3 years, Jesus goes to Jerusalem for the Passover.
- Jesus is arrested for blasphemy and political sedition.
- Jesus' followers

abandon Him and one denies Him.

- Jesus is mocked, beaten, whipped, and crucified.
- Jesus is buried in a borrowed tomb.
- Three days later, Jesus' tomb is empty.
- Witnesses confirm that Jesus is alive.
- Jesus promises His return.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

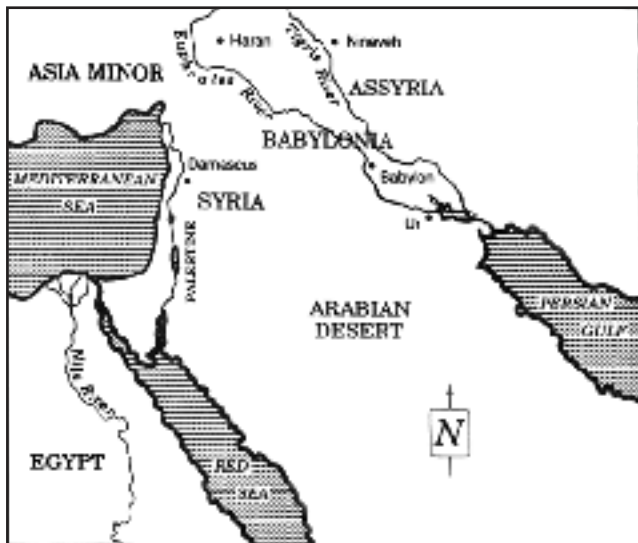
- At the Jewish feast of Pentecost the church is born.
- God accepts and unites into one body people of every nation who accept the gospel of Christ.
- Saul of Tarsus is transformed from a persecutor of the church into the church's chief advocate.
- Paul joins fellow apostles in writing letters of encouragement and instruction which become guidelines for a new community in Christ.

THE LAND OF THE BIBLE

Most of the events of the Bible took place in the Middle East, that part of the world that continues to be so much in the news today. The Garden of Eden was located near the Euphrates River. The land promised by God to Israel, the land of Palestine, is positioned at the juncture of three continents—Europe, Asia, and Africa. Trade routes between those areas went through Palestine, giving it great strategic importance and causing it to be the battleground for numerous wars. The major Old Testament civilizations were located in Mesopotamia (modern Iran and Iraq), Egypt, and Asia Minor (Turkey).

One small piece of land symbolizes all that God is to Israel and the world.

Palestine, the site of most of the events of the Bible, is a good land—a land described as “flowing with milk and honey” (Ex. 3:8). It is bounded by the Mediterranean Sea on the west, the Arabian Desert on the east, the Sinai Peninsula on the south, and Syria on the north. Palestine may be divided north to south into four natural regions: (1) a flat coastal plain along the Mediterranean, (2) the central highlands, (3) the Jordan River valley, including the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, and (4) the high ground east of the Jordan.



THE TIMES OF THE BIBLE

No one can pinpoint the date of creation, and we can only guess about any dates before Abraham. So here are some approximate dates of a few important biblical people and events from Abraham onward.

DATE	PERSON OR EVENT
2000 BC	Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, slavery in Egypt
1500 BC	Moses, exodus from Egypt, wilderness wanderings, giving of Ten Commandments, Joshua, entrance into Promised Land, Gideon, Ruth, Samson, Samuel
1000 BC	Saul, David, Solomon, the Kingdom divided, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Hosea, Isaiah, the Kingdoms captured and exiled, Daniel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah
500 BC	Jews return from exile, the temple built, Zechariah, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, Malachi
5 BC	Birth of Jesus Christ
AD 27-30	Public ministry of Christ
AD 30	Crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ; the birth of the church and coming of the Holy Spirit
AD 33	Conversion of Paul
AD 47-56	Paul's missionary journeys
AD 64	Burning of Rome; Nero's persecution
AD 67	Paul's execution
AD 70	Destruction of Jerusalem
AD 95	Revelation written and N.T. complete
AD 100	John's death

WHO CAN SEE GOD IN THE BIBLE?

We began saying that the Bible is a book about people who have a problem with God. The whole Bible is a book about people who have a hard time seeing eye to eye with a God who says, “‘My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isa. 55:8-9).

We have also seen that it is just as true that the Bible is also about a God who has a problem with people. The whole Bible is about a God who will not always protect those who refuse to trust Him. When God barred Adam and Eve from their garden home, when He sent a flood to destroy all but Noah and his family, when He allowed the Assyrians to defeat the Northern Tribes and the Babylonians to defeat Judah, God made it clear that there is a limit to His patience.

God’s promises are not given to all, but to everyone who is willing to seek and trust Him. Isaiah reminds us that God is willing to be found by those who are willing to seek Him on His terms. Just before saying, “My thoughts are not your thoughts,” Isaiah quoted God as saying, “Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Isa. 55:6-7).

The whole Bible makes it clear that God promises

to be found only by those who are willing to surrender to Him.

This important condition of surrender is what Jesus taught when He said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Mt. 5:8). He said this immediately after saying, “Blessed are the poor in spirit Blessed are those who mourn Blessed are the meek Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness Blessed are the merciful” (vv.3-7).

Each of these conditions reflects the need for a surrendered heart as a condition to receive the blessing of God.

God cannot be found by just anyone. Because He is Spirit, He is seen only by those to whom He chooses to reveal Himself. This is also true of the Bible. While the Scriptures have been given to lead us to God, they remain a closed book to those who are trying to find God on their own terms. God will be found in the pages of His book by those who desire to obey Him, or He will not be found at all.

Jesus said of God and of Himself, “If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority” (Jn. 7:17).

Salvation itself is a gift. Forgiveness and eternal life come to us only by grace and through faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8-9). But seeing God in the Bible requires a willingness to do the will of God. Only in surrender do we have the assurance that God will let us see the truth about Christ in our present circumstances. Only in submission can we see the Father and His Son on every page of Scripture.

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