THE BAKER ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO THE BIBLE

A BOOK-BY-BOOK COMPANION

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What Is the Bible About?

Everyone has a story to live by. For Christians, two questions arise regarding this story: “Which story tells the true story about God, our world, and life?” and “Does my story line up with the true story?” What constitutes a basic story line is much the same in novels, TV shows, movies, and plays. Typically, the story opens with things going well. The characters are introduced, and we are given essential background information. Everything is good (or at least stable) at the start, but then a problem or crisis threatens the characters and their future. Much of the story is taken up with solving this problem (conflict resolution). Usually, during this period of resolution, the tension builds to a critical point (the climax), and the heart of the problem is solved. Finally (though this may take awhile), the resolution is worked out so that things are not just good but great. When there is no happy ending, the story is called a tragedy. The phases of a grand story are summarized as follows:

- Opening—setting provided and characters introduced
- Problem—conflict threatens the well-being of the characters
- Resolution—solving the problem
- Climax within resolution phase—most intense conflict followed by solution to heart of problem
- Closing—resolution worked out for the characters

The Bible claims to be God’s story for the whole world. In the Bible we find the one grand story that best explains reality:

- Opening—Genesis 1–2
- Problem—Genesis 3–11
- Resolution—Genesis 12–Revelation 18
- Climax within resolution phase—life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ
- Closing—Revelation 19–22

To put the grand story of the Bible into a memorable format, consider the outline below, which uses the k sound:

**Creation**—The story begins with the creation of the world and human beings (Gen. 1–2).

**Crisis**—When tempted by Satan, humans choose to satisfy self and rebel (or sin) against God. Sin brings disastrous and
deadly consequences: pain, suffering, death, and separation from God (Gen. 3–11).

**Covenant**—God begins to solve the sin problem by choosing Abraham and establishing a covenant with him so that he might become the father of a people who will worship God. God wants to make Abraham into a great nation and use this one nation to bring the rest of the world into a relationship with himself (Gen. 12, 15, 17).

**Calling out**—Genesis tells the story of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), and Joseph. Through a series of events the patriarchs move to Egypt, and their small group grows into a nation, but they become enslaved. God uses Moses to deliver his people from slavery through the exodus event. God’s miraculous deliverance of his people from bondage in Egypt becomes a pattern that foreshadows God’s ultimate deliverance of his people from spiritual slavery.

**Commandments**—After God rescues his people, God enters into a covenant with them (the Mosaic covenant). He gives them the law (summed up in the Ten Commandments) and calls his people to holiness. God’s expectations for his covenant people are spelled out in the book of Deuteronomy.

**Conquest**—God uses Joshua to help his people take the promised land (Canaan).

**Kingdom**—God’s people acquire a king. Samuel becomes the link between the judges and the kings of Israel. The first king is Saul, followed by David and Solomon.

**Kingdom divided**—After Solomon, a civil war leads to the division of the kingdom: Israel = northern kingdom, Judah = southern kingdom. There are many kings; some are good but most are bad.

**Captivity**—Because God’s people have failed to worship him alone, they face terrible judgment, including the loss of the promised land. Their enemies take them captive. Israel is conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC, while Judah is conquered and taken captive by the Babylonians around 586 BC.

**Coming home**—The people finally return from exile under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah (538–430 BC).

**Christ (climax to the story)**—About four hundred years later God sends his Son, Jesus the Christ, to save his people from their sins. Jesus announces the coming of God’s kingdom through his teachings and miracles. His death and resurrection form the climax to the biblical story.

**Church**—Those who accept Jesus become part of the church—the people of God—comprised of both Jews and Gentiles. God continues to use his people to extend his offer of salvation to a sinful world.

**Consummation**—God closes history with a final victory over evil. Those who have rejected God will suffer judgment while those who have accepted him will live with him in a new heaven and new earth. God’s promises are now fulfilled (see Rev. 19–22 and esp. 21:1–4).

The Bible is a collection of sixty-six books, but it also functions like a single book. The Bible’s great story answers the basic questions of life better than any other story because it’s true. We can count on it. When a person comes to faith in Christ, he or she is basically saying, “I want God’s story to become my story.” That’s what conversion is—embracing the great story of Scripture as our personal story.
How Is the Bible Organized?

The English word “bible” comes from the Greek word for books or scrolls: *biblia* (plural). In 2 Timothy 4:13, Paul asks Timothy to bring his “books” (*biblia*) when he comes to visit him in prison. Our word “Bible” is singular because it refers to the entire collection of sixty-six books: thirty-nine in the Old Testament (books about God’s relationship with Israel) and twenty-seven in the New Testament (books about Jesus and the early church). Grouping the books as follows helps understand how they are arranged and what they contain.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Pentateuch</th>
<th>Historical Books</th>
<th>Psalms</th>
<th>Wisdom Books</th>
<th>Prophets</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genesis</td>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>Job</td>
<td>Isaiah</td>
<td>Minor Prophets:</td>
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<td>Leviticus</td>
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<td>Numbers</td>
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<td>Deuteronomy</td>
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<td>1–2 Chronicles</td>
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<td>Malachi</td>
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The word “testament” comes from the word *testamentum*, the Latin translation of the Hebrew and Greek words for “covenant.” The English word “testament” refers to a covenant. Christians accept both the Old Testament and the New Testament, while Jews who reject Jesus as Messiah reject the new covenant or testament. In the biblical sense, a covenant refers to what God has done to establish a relationship with human beings. Over time, the term “testament” came to refer to the writings that describe the covenant.
The Old Testament is divided into five parts: the Pentateuch, the Historical books, the Psalms, the Wisdom books, and the Prophets.

**The Pentateuch**

The first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) are often referred to as the “Pentateuch” (the “five scrolls” or five-scroll collection). In the Hebrew Scriptures, these books are referred to as the “Torah,” meaning the “teaching” or “instruction.” These books tell the story of God’s creation of the world, of human sin and rebellion against God, of God’s covenant with Abraham, of God’s deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt, of God’s covenant with Moses, of God’s laws for his people, and of his peoples’ journey to the promised land. The last book, Deuteronomy, spells out the blessings and penalties for keeping or rejecting the Mosaic covenant.

**The Historical Books**

The Old Testament books from Joshua through Esther are known as the “Historical books.” The first group of books (Joshua through 2 Kings) is closely connected to the book of Deuteronomy and continues the story of the Pentateuch. In essence, Deuteronomy closes by posing an important question, “Will Israel be faithful to the Lord and his laws (the Mosaic covenant)?” The tragic answer is no, they will not remain faithful, and 2 Kings ends with the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of Israel from the promised land. The second group of Historical books (1 Chronicles through Esther) is written from a different perspective. These books focus on those who have returned to the land after the exile, encouraging them to remain faithful to the Lord.
The Psalms

The book of Psalms is unique and cannot be placed in any of the other Old Testament categories. It stands alone as a book of songs of praise, testimony, and lament. The Psalms were (and are) used both in public worship and private meditation.

The Wisdom Books

The Wisdom books (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs) remind God’s people of the importance of listening, thinking, considering, and reflecting. Their purpose is to encourage the development of both godly character and the ability to make wise decisions in a variety of circumstances. Proverbs presents basic principles of life—things that are normally or usually true—while the other three books treat exceptions to these rules: Job (when the righteous suffer), Ecclesiastes (when a rational approach to life doesn’t provide all the answers), and Song of Songs (concerning the “irrationality” of romantic love).

The Prophets

After entering the promised land, Israel turns a deaf ear to God’s instructions and follows other gods. As the nation spirals downward, God sends the prophets with a final message for his people: (1) you have broken the Mosaic covenant through idolatry, social injustice, and religious ritualism, and you need to turn back to a true worship of God; (2) if you fail to repent, then you will face judgment; and (3) there is still hope beyond judgment for you—a glorious, future restoration for God’s people and for the nations. This standard prophetic message is repeated throughout the Prophets. But people continue to rebel and face judgment, which comes in the form of two invasions: the Assyrians in 722 BC to destroy the northern kingdom of Israel and the Babylonians in 587/586 BC to destroy the southern kingdom of Judah and the city of Jerusalem. The prophets also promise a time of future restoration, including a new covenant that will involve all the nations of the world. This fulfills God’s original promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3.

The exact location of Mount Sinai is unknown. There are numerous mountain peaks in the Sinai desert that could be the mountain on which God appeared to Moses and Israel. Shown in this picture is a peak called Jebel Musa ("mountain of Moses"), which some believe is Mount Sinai.
### Old Testament Time Line

<table>
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<th>Key People</th>
<th>Key Events</th>
<th>Key People/Events from Ancient Near Eastern World</th>
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<tr>
<td>Abraham</td>
<td>Covenant with Abraham 2091 BC</td>
<td>Egypt’s Old Kingdom period Begins 2700 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>2066–1886 BC</td>
<td>Akkadian Empire begins under Sargon 2334 BC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Egypt’s Old Kingdom period**: Begins 2700 BC
- **Pyramid building at Giza**: 2589–2504 BC
- **Xia Dynasty begins in China**: 2070 BC

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KEY PEOPLE

- Isaac (Late date for patriarchs 1950–1650 BC)
- Jacob (Israel) 2006–1859 BC
- Joseph 1915–1805 BC
- Moses 1526–1406 BC

KEY EVENTS

- Jacob's family to Egypt 1876 BC
- Jacob in Paddan Aram 1929–1909 BC
- Joseph to power in Egypt 1885 BC
- Oppression in Egypt begins 1570 BC

KEY PEOPLE/EVENTS FROM ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN WORLD

- Law code of Hammurabi 1775 BC
- Shang dynasty begins in China 1600 BC
- Stonehenge in England 2000 BC
- Old Assyrian kingdom rises 2000 BC
- Old Assyrian falls 1750 BC
- Sesostris II 1897–1878 BC (Egyptian high chronology used)
- Sesostris III 1878–1843 BC
- Ammenemes III 1842–1797 BC
- Start of the New Kingdom in Egypt 1570 BC
- Ahmose I 1570–1546 BC
- Amenhotep I 1546–1526 BC
- Thutmose I 1526–1512 BC
- Thutmose II 1512–1504 BC
- Hatshepsut 1503–1483 BC

(Late date for patriarchs 1950–1650 BC)
Old Testament Maps

The Travels of Abraham
The promised land was divided into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah.
The Old Testament
Book by Book
Genesis

Creation, Sin, and Covenant

Central Teaching

God creates the world, banishes Adam and Eve from the garden due to their rebellion and sin, and then begins restoring people to relationship with him through his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Memory Verse

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Gen. 1:1)*

Setting

The opening chapter of Genesis takes place at the beginning of time. While we do not know exactly where the Garden of Eden was located, it was probably in Mesopotamia. The story of Abraham (Gen. 12) begins in Mesopotamia. Suggested dates for Abraham vary from around 2000 BC to around 1800 BC. Abraham migrates to Canaan, spends a short time in Egypt, and then returns to Canaan. Later, Jacob (Abraham’s grandson) moves to Egypt, and Genesis ends with the family of Jacob living in Egypt.

Message

God brings people into existence, blessing them with life and giving them a chance to know him personally. But we mess it up, sinning against God and rejecting him and his blessings. This action separates us from God and ultimately results in death. God, however, works to restore our relationship with him—a relationship that provides life.

This is the story of Genesis and, indeed, the story of the Bible. It is also your story and my story.

In Genesis 1–2, the story begins with God’s creation. God creates a wonderful garden and places humankind into the garden where they can have close fellowship with him. How does humankind react to this wonderful blessing? Genesis 3–11 narrates a series of tragic events illustrating how people sin and rebel repeatedly against God, which separates them from God and leads to death. By Genesis 11 the situation of the world is grim. What will happen? How will humankind ever be saved and restored again to close fellowship with God?

Genesis 12 introduces the answer and begins the exciting story of redemption. God makes a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12, 15, and 17. It is this Abrahamic covenant that provides the framework for God’s unfolding plan of salvation for everyone in the world who will believe.
fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant drives the story throughout the Old Testament and even the New Testament.

The promises of this covenant are passed down from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob throughout the remaining chapters of Genesis. Yet Genesis closes with Jacob and his twelve sons residing in Egypt, with the Abrahamic promises largely unfulfilled.

Outline

- Creation of the world, people, and the garden (1:1–2:25)
- Paradise lost: sin, death, and separation from God (3:1–11:32)
- God’s response to human sin: deliverance through the Abrahamic covenant (12:1–50:26)
  - Abraham: the promise and the obedience of faith (12:1–22:24)
  - Isaac: continuing the patriarchal promise (23:1–25:18)
  - Jacob: struggle and the beginning of the twelve tribes of Israel (25:19–36:43)
  - Joseph: faithfulness and God’s sovereign deliverance (37:1–50:26)

Interesting Features

- Genesis answers the big questions of life: Why am I here? Who has brought me into being? What is life all about?
- Genesis tells the story of creation.
- God creates man and woman and institutes marriage.
- God makes a covenant with Abraham that impacts the rest of the Bible.

Connections

Genesis is the introduction not only to the Old Testament but also to the entire Bible. Thus the story of Genesis is representative for both Israel and all people. God creates a good place for people to live where they can take part in a close relationship with him. These people, however, repeatedly rebel and sin against God, which results in separation and death. This is the story of humanity. God in his great mercy provides a way of salvation, a story that starts in Genesis 12 with Abraham, climaxes in the New Testament with Jesus, and reaches its final consummation in Revelation 21–22 with the re-creation of the new heaven and earth.