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1. Genesis

Theme: Beginnings

Author: Moses

Verse: *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.* Genesis 1:1

Date: About 1450 B.C.

The Bible is the history of God's dealing with humanity. The history begins in the logical place - with creation. From the start, humans could see God's power, authority, creativity and personality. God created men and women in a state of innocent dependence on Him. But because humans are created in the image of God, we also have free will. Adam and Eve exercised that free will, with the encouragement of Satan, to disobey God and sin. Since God is perfect, He cannot tolerate sin. God's justice requires that sin separates us from Him, and since He is life, separation from Him means death. Sin was passed on from Adam to every human who has ever lived.

But God's love and grace can also be seen early in Genesis. God did not punish Adam and Eve with instant death. Instead, He promised a redeemer, the first prophecy of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in Scripture (3:15).

Humanity's sin was soon evident. Cain killed Abel and things went from bad to worse until God said of man ... *the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually* (6:5). Things had gotten so bad that God could only find one righteous man, Noah. He provided refuge for Noah and his family on the ark and destroyed the rest of the world with a flood.

It was obvious that individual humans were incapable of obeying God, so God instituted human government to prevent evil from getting out of control. He wanted men to spread out over the world, but instead they built a huge city and a tower to show how great they were. This time, God punished man by confusing their languages.

Unable to understand one another, people were forced to do what God had wanted them to do by choice - scatter around the world and fill it.

Not long after Babel, God spoke to a man named Abram (later Abraham) and promised him that he would have so many descendants that they couldn't be counted and that the entire world would be blessed through his seed. (This promise was fulfilled in part by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but there is a further fulfillment yet to come when the nations are blessed through Israel during the millennium.)

The remainder of Genesis is a history of Abraham's descendants, beginning with his son, Isaac, his son, Jacob, and his sons who became the 12 tribes of Israel.

2. Exodus

Theme: Redemption from bondage

Author: Moses

Verse: *I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.* Exodus 20:2

Date: 15th century B.C.

Exodus opens with the descendants of Jacob having multiplied from 70 at the time of Joseph's death to a nation of more than two million. The nation of Israel was enslaved by Egypt for many years, but God called Moses, who was raised in the pharaoh's palace, to lead his fellow Israelites out of Egypt. God brought 10 plagues on the Egyptians to pave the way for the Israelites' release. Through the miraculous parting of the Red Sea, the Israelites escaped from the Egyptian army. God showed His presence to His people with pillars of cloud and fire, but they soon began to grumble and complain against God.

Through Moses, God revealed another portion of His plan - the law and the tabernacle. When we think of the law, we tend to think of the Ten Commandments (Chapter 20), but that was only the beginning.

Did God really expect that Israel would be able to obey His laws? No, He was making a point. God knows that we

need to be wholly dependent on Him, but we don't know that. So He gave the law to show us what we would have to do in order to be saved by our own efforts. None of us can keep the law, and that's the point. And that's why God included the sacrifices and ceremonies in the law. They can't rid people of sin, but they did cover the sins of the Jews until Christ's perfect sacrifice on the cross.

When Moses told the people about the law, they promised to keep it. Of course, they didn't. While Moses was on Mount Sinai talking with God, the people gave up on him and began worshiping a gold calf, as the Egyptians did.

3. Leviticus

Theme: Holiness

Author: Moses

Verse: *Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the Lord your God. And you shall keep My statutes, and perform them: I am the Lord who sanctifies you.*
Leviticus 20:7-8

Date: 15th century B.C.

One of the 12 tribes of Israel, the tribe of Levi, was set aside to be priests in God's tabernacle. Holiness is the theme and key word of this book - it appears 87 times. Major topics include offerings, consecration and cleansing, atonement, relationships of God's people, instructions and warnings. In addition to the Ten Commandments, there were more than 600 other laws, governing almost every aspect of life. Many of these laws are revealed in Leviticus, including instructions on food, social relations, feasts, purity, the Sabbath and blasphemy. Near the end of the book, in Chapter 26, the Lord reminds the Israelites about the blessings they will receive if they obey and the punishments they will suffer if they don't. But, again, God knew the outcome and reminded them of His unconditional promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

4. Numbers

Theme: God's corrective discipline and continuing love

Author: Moses

Verse: *The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.* Numbers 6:24-26

Date: 15th century B.C.

Numbers is a sequel to Exodus. (The book is called Numbers because of two censuses, or numberings of the people, that are recorded.) It recounts the Israelites' journey from Mount Sinai to the land of Canaan, which God had promised them. It wasn't a smooth journey. The people complained almost constantly. When they reached the border of the land, 12 spies were chosen (one from each tribe) and sent to report on the land God had told them to possess. Ten of the spies reported that the people who lived in the land were too powerful. Once again, the Israelites refused to rely on God - they panicked and nearly stoned the other two spies, Caleb and Joshua, who trusted God and recommended that the Israelites enter the land.

As punishment, God would not allow them to enter because of their disobedience and lack of faith. The Israelites had to wander in the wilderness 40 years until the disobedient generation died out. A whole generation missed the blessings God had planned for them in the land. Everybody who was an adult on the day of the spies' report died in the wilderness except Caleb and Joshua. During the time in the wilderness, the people grumbled against God some more. God responded by sending poisonous snakes. Many Israelites died. On God's instruction, Moses set up a bronze serpent on a pole. Those who looked on the serpent in faith were healed. This serpent was a picture of the death of Christ on the cross.

5. Deuteronomy

Theme: The second giving of the law

Author: Moses

Verse: *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.*
Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Date: 1450-1410 B.C.

Deuteronomy is composed almost entirely of Moses' addresses to the children of Israel before they enter Canaan. (Because of Moses' disobedience at Kadesh when he struck the rock twice, God did not permit him to enter Canaan.) Moses continues the review of Israel's history begun in Numbers and then enlarges upon some of the basic laws previously given. Deuteronomy contains prophecies made concerning Israel's future - blessings if Israel is obedient to God, curses if disobedient. Closing with the final words of Moses, the book gives a description of his death on Mount Nebo.

6. Joshua

Theme: Conquest of Canaan

Author: Joshua

Verse: *Have I not commanded you? "Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."* Joshua 1:9

Date: 14th century B.C.

This book bears the name of its author, Joshua, who led the Israelites into Canaan. The first five chapters show how Joshua prepared the people spiritually and strategically to enter the Promised Land. God demonstrated His continued care for His people by miraculously parting the Jordan River. Chapters 6 through 12 give the history of the conquest, including the defeat of Jericho and the faith of Rahab, the pagan woman who believed in God and was saved. Rahab is a great example of the truth that it isn't the strength of a person's faith that saves, but the object. Joshua also records the history of the battle against a group of enemies during which God stopped the sun to give Israel time to win.

The rest of Joshua tells about the division of the land to the 12 tribes and the conditions the Israelites would need to keep to be successful. In his final address to the people, Joshua makes his famous declaration: ... *choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ... as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD (24:15).*

7. Judges

Theme: Consequences of sin

Author: Unknown

Verse: *In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.* Judges 17:6

Date: 11th century B.C.

Judges covers the chaotic time in Israel's history between Joshua's death and the beginning of an organized government under King Saul, a period of about 340 years. God intended the nation to be governed by Him alone, with priests as administrators. He promised the people great blessings if they would only trust and obey Him. He also warned them that if they turned away from Him and worshiped false gods, He would ... *bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flies ... (Deuteronomy 28:49).* That's exactly what happened when Israel repeatedly turned to false idols. Other

nations invaded - just as God had promised. This was intended as discipline, to teach the Israelites to trust God alone, but the people sank deeper and deeper into sin. God is just and will punish sin, but He is also a God of grace and mercy. The 12 judges were actually military leaders whom God raised up to deliver His people from their enemies. Among them were Samson and Gideon, two of the Bible's best-known heroic figures. This cycle of sin-punishment-repentance-deliverance occurred seven times. The deliverance was always temporary, and even some of the judges were sinful. The lesson to be learned is that whenever people attempt to go their own way without God's guidance, disaster will follow.

8. Ruth

Theme: Beginning of the messianic family of David

Author: Unknown

Verse: *But Ruth said: "Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God."* Ruth 1:16

Date: 11th century B.C.

After the Jewish man, Elimelech, died in the land of Moab, his wife, Naomi, wanted to return to her home-land in Bethlehem. Her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth, chose to return with her to live with and be part of God's people, no matter what the cost (1:16-17). She presented herself to Boaz, a relative of Naomi, and he righteously accepted his role as her kinsman-redeemer, which included the duties of redeeming the ancestral lands of a deceased relative and marrying his widow. Because of Ruth's choice and her marriage to Boaz, she became one of the ancestors of King David, whose lineage eventually leads to the Messiah Himself. Boaz, Ruth's kinsman-redeemer, is a type (a real event that is also an illustration of a deeper truth) of Christ, the great Kinsman-Redeemer, who will redeem the nation of Israel and its land and bring the people into rest in the kingdom.

9. 1 Samuel

Theme: History of Israel

Author: Unknown

Verse: *and said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations."* 1 Samuel 8:5

Date: 12th-11th century B.C.

First and Second Samuel, originally considered one book, cover approximately 150 years. First Samuel begins with the birth and childhood of Samuel and records his ministry as the last of the Israelite judges. Also included is Israel's demand for a king, the anointing of Saul to the throne as Israel's first king and David's life prior to becoming king.

10. 2 Samuel

Theme: History of Israel (continued)

Author: Unknown

Verse: *And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.* 2 Samuel 7:16

Date: 11th century B.C.

Second Samuel recounts the strife and struggle leading to the establishment of King David as ruler of Israel in Jerusalem. It also records David's military victories, his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Absalom's revolt and David's disobedience in numbering the people. (The full account of David's life extends from 1 Samuel 16:12 through 1 Kings 2:11.)

11. 1 Kings

Theme: Division and decay of the kingdom

Author: Unknown

Verse: *Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant."* 1 Kings 11:11

Date: Sixth century B.C.

Major topics included in the book of 1 Kings are King Solomon's reign, the building of the temple, the division of Israel into the northern kingdom (Israel) under King Jeroboam and the southern kingdom (Judah) under King Rehoboam, the ministry of Elijah, and the reign of King Ahab and his evil wife, Jezebel. Originally, the books of 1 and 2 Kings were one book.

12. 2 Kings

Theme: The divided kingdom and captivity

Author: Unknown

Verse: *And the Lord said, "I will also remove Judah from My sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this*

city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, 'My Name shall be there.'" 2 Kings 23:27

Date: Sixth century B.C.

The book of 2 Kings covers a total of 250 years, including the reigns of the last 12 kings of Israel and the last 16 kings of Judah. It records God's punishment upon Israel and Judah because of their backsliding away from God and disobedience to His commands. The northern kingdom, Israel, fell to the Assyrians in 721 B.C. Also recorded is Elijah's translation to heaven without dying. Elisha, his successor, was given a double portion of God's Spirit, enabling him to perform many miracles.

13. 1 Chronicles

Theme: Genealogy and history

Author: Unknown

Verse: *Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted as head over all.* 1 Chronicles 29:11

Date: Fifth century B.C.

The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles repeat much of the history of 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. The first nine chapters contain an extensive genealogy of the patriarchs and the 12 sons of Jacob (Israel). Chapter 10 relates details about Saul's last days and his death. The rest of the book describes King David's reign over the nation of Israel.

14. 2 Chronicles

Theme: Reign of King Solomon and history of Judah

Author: Unknown

Verse: *If My people who are called by My Name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.* 2 Chronicles 7:14

Date: Probably written during the Babylonian captivity

The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles formed one book in the old Hebrew canon. The first nine chapters of 2 Chronicles relate events during King Solomon's reign with a detailed description of the building and dedication of the temple. The remainder of the book continues the history of Judah (the southern kingdom), the reign of King Rehoboam, the revival under King Hezekiah, the destruction of the

capital city, Jerusalem, and the nation's captivity under Nebuchadnezzar.

15. Ezra

Theme: Return of the remnant

Author: Ezra

Verse: *And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord: "For He is good, for His mercy endures forever toward Israel." Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.* Ezra 3:11

Date: 536-457 B.C.

The two major events recorded by Ezra are the return of the Jewish remnant from Babylon to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel and the rebuilding of the temple. Ezra, a priest, returned to Jerusalem following the return of the faithful remnant. Ezra is the first of six books (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi) written after Israel's captivity.

After the Israelites returned to their homes, the people started marrying wives from pagan nations. Ezra was upset because this was the same sin that had resulted in the captivity in Babylon. Ezra prayed before the people, thanking God for what He'd done and for His kindness toward Israel. He confessed the nation's sins. The gathered crowd made a covenant to rid the nation of the wives and children who worshiped other gods. Three days later, the entire nation gathered and came to an almost-unanimous decision - they would rid themselves of the sinful influence. It's just as true today as it was in Ezra's time - if another person is influencing you to focus on things other than the Lord, the relationship is wrong.

16. Nehemiah

Theme: Rebuilding Jerusalem's walls

Author: Nehemiah

Verse: *Then I said to them, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach."* Nehemiah 2:17

Date: 446-434 B.C.

In 538 B.C., a small group of Jews was allowed to return to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel from their captivity in Babylon. The temple was rebuilt in 515 B.C. and Ezra

called the people to spiritual restoration in 457 B.C. But in 444 B.C., almost 100 years after the first Jews had returned, much of the destruction done by the Babylonian army hadn't been repaired. Israel was surrounded by enemies and in danger.

Nehemiah, a court official under King Artaxerxes, heard about the condition of the city and asked permission to return to his homeland and rebuild the walls. His enemies did everything they could think of to discourage him. After a nighttime inspection, Nehemiah called the Jewish officials together and encouraged them to rebuild the city's defenses.

Finally, in spite of discouragement and threats, the work was finished. Nehemiah ends his work with an account of the nation's spiritual revival and the dedication of the walls. In this book, Nehemiah prays 11 times. This book records the last historical events of the Old Testament, although Malachi was probably written some 60 years later.

17. Esther

Theme: God's care for His people

Author: Unknown

Verse: *For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"* Esther 4:14

Date: Fifth century B.C.

The events in the book of Esther took place during the reign of Xerxes, king of Persia, sometime between the returns of Zerubbabel and Ezra to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. Xerxes was a conceited man. When his wife, Vashti, refused to display her beauty at a banquet, he banished her and set out to find a new queen. A Jewish man named Mordecai lived near the palace with his cousin, Esther. This beautiful young woman was chosen as the new queen.

Meanwhile, Haman, a nobleman, vowed to destroy all the Jews because Mordecai refused to bow to him. Esther, as queen, was in the perfect position to defeat Haman's plans - her cousin told her that she was likely in her place for just such a time. Esther asked the king to attend two banquets. Before the second one, the king decided to honor Mordecai for saving his life on an earlier occasion when two officials tried to assassinate him. Haman, thinking he was the one to be honored, suggested a robe, a position of nobility and a parade for the honoree. When

Mordecai was brought forth, Haman was forced to honor him. Esther revealed Haman's plot to kill the Jews, and the king ordered Haman hung on the very gallows he had built to hang Mordecai. The plot against the Jews was defeated and Mordecai was given a powerful position in the kingdom. The name of God is never mentioned in the book of Esther, but God's care for His people is undeniably demonstrated throughout the book.

18. Job

Theme: The problem of suffering

Author: Unknown

Verse: *For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth.* Job 19:25

Date: Unknown, probably the first book of the Bible written

Job, a righteous man who was probably a contemporary of Abraham, lived in the land of Uz before the nation of Israel came into existence. He had flocks and a huge household and was ... *the greatest of all the people of the east (1:3)*. He wasn't outstanding only for his wealth, but also for his righteousness because he took God at His word and did what God said was necessary to demonstrate his faith. Regularly and consistently Job offered sacrifices for his sins and the sins of his family, and so his sins were covered and he was *blameless and upright (1:1)*.

With God's permission, Job was severely afflicted by Satan. He lost his possessions, family and health. His life, however, was preserved because Satan could not proceed beyond the boundary God had set for him. Three of Job's friends came to commiserate with him, but their advice wasn't very good - they told Job that his misfortunes were a result of sin. (We know they were wrong because God said so in Job 42:7.) Job became angry and depressed, but he never turned his back on God. A fourth friend, Elihu, told Job that God sometimes instructs men through rough circumstances and that He has a purpose — to show men that they have no reason for pride but should rely on God's grace and love. Through his experiences, Job was brought to utter subjection and dependence on God, as well as a new understanding of God's holiness and power.

19. Psalms

Theme: Rejoicing and praise

Author: David and others

Verse: *Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.* Psalms 100:4

Date: 10th century B.C. to approximately sixth century B.C.

The Psalms, Israel's prayer and praise book written by David, Hezekiah, Ezra and others, consist of five books, each ending in a doxology. Hebrew poets didn't use rhyme, and their meter doesn't usually translate into modern language because it counted accents, not syllables. The primary concept was parallelism in which two or three lines align in one of several ways. The Psalms have been categorized by theme.

Messianic - The author points to Jesus Christ in some way, either through specific prophecies or with a reference to the kings of Israel that will see their ultimate realization when Christ rules over the millennial kingdom.

Lament - The author speaks of his distress in trying circumstances, but then states that he trusts God and, finally, that he knows God will see him through eventually.

Praise and Thanksgiving - The author praises the Lord and thanks Him for who He is and what He has done for the individual or for the nation of Israel.

Royal - The author sings about the king and how he is God's representative through whom God will accomplish His plans.

Wisdom - The author describes life and how his relationship with God is central to it.

Penitential - The author is sorry for his sin and begs God for forgiveness.

Imprecatory - The author asks God to judge his enemies or the enemies of Israel.

Pilgrimage - These Psalms were sung by Israelites as they traveled to Jerusalem for the annual feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles.

The Psalms are often very personal, but it's important to remember that they aren't just poems - they're poems inspired by the Holy Spirit.

20. Proverbs

Theme: Wisdom

Author: Solomon and others

Verse: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.* Proverbs 3:5-6

Date: 10th century B.C.

God offered Solomon anything he asked for, and Solomon asked for wisdom. God was pleased with this and made Solomon the wisest man alive. Wisdom is the ability to take God's truth and use that knowledge to improve your life and the lives of others according to God's will. Eight hundred of Solomon's wisest sayings - inspired by the Holy Spirit - have been gathered in the collection we know as Proverbs. In addition, he collected wise sayings from other sources. King Hezekiah collected Solomon's proverbs and added some from other writers. The first nine chapters are Solomon's advice to his son. The next 20 are a loose collection of wise sayings on godly living. Proverbs makes it very clear that wisdom comes from God (1:7) and leads to God (2:5). The final two chapters of the book include wisdom from Agur and King Lemuel.

21. Ecclesiastes

Theme: Man's wisdom

Author: Solomon

Verse: *For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.* Ecclesiastes 7:20

Date: 10th century B.C.

Solomon had, by the world's standards, an amazing life. God made him the wisest man alive. He had wealth, power and fame. And then we come to Ecclesiastes. Solomon probably wrote this book as an old man looking back at his life - and he doesn't seem to be very happy. *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity (1:2b).*

Solomon's point is that the things of this world, when pursued for their own value or in expectation of achieving satisfaction, are worthless. Everything is temporary and without lasting value. He shows the pointlessness of pursuing satisfaction through fame, wisdom, pleasure, physical indulgence, work, government, wealth, nostalgia, the praise of others and justice. His conclusion is that nobody has any control over what happens in life and that nobody understands

it either. But Solomon doesn't leave us there. He recommends that we enjoy the things God has given us - food and drink, friends, our spouses, our labor - but not to expect them to satisfy us on our own. *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil (12:13-14).*

22. Song of Solomon

Theme: Human and divine love

Author: Solomon

Verse: *He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love.* Song of Solomon 2:4

Date: 11th century B.C.

Picture in your mind any music video you've seen. Chances are that you noticed a few things. The lead singer switched wardrobes several times, often returning to one or two main outfits again and again. A backup chorus danced on and off the screen a few times. The activity that was going on sometimes had very little to do with the words that were being sung.

The Song of Solomon is very like a music video - 900 B.C.-style. There are two main leads, one male and one female, who sing about their pasts, their hopes, their dreams and their feelings. There is a backup group known as the Daughters of Jerusalem. And there is a lot of symbolic, poetic language that doesn't mean exactly what it appears to say - for example, the poet compares his love's hair to a flock of goats.

The main characters include the Shulamite bride and the king. The book demonstrates that physical desire between a man and woman who are married to each other is a good thing in God's sight. We were created with our desires. Yes, sin has perverted them as it has perverted everything else in this world. But as long as we stick to God's guidelines, the physical desires He gave us are good.

23. Isaiah

Theme: Israel and the coming Messiah

Author: Isaiah

Verse: *He shall see the labor of His Soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My Righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.* Isaiah 53:11

Date: Eighth century B.C.

This book of prophecy was written by one of the greatest Hebrew prophets. Isaiah was called by God to prophesy to Judah during the reign of kings Uzziah, Jothan, Ahaz and Hezekiah. He urged the people to turn back to God and stop worshiping idols, and he warned them what would happen if they didn't. But even while he was saying this, he knew the people wouldn't respond. *Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered: "Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, the houses are without a man, the land is utterly desolate, the LORD has removed men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land" (6:11-12).*

Isaiah's prophecies foretold the fate of Judah and the nations who stood against God's people. In many cases, these prophecies have a dual fulfillment - referring to the Babylonian and Assyrian captivities, and to the future judgment of the world upon Christ's second coming at the end of the tribulation.

After proclaiming the holiness and justice of God and His judgments on those who don't obey Him in the first 39 chapters, Isaiah turns to a message of hope. He prophesies a day when the Messiah would come and suffer and then come again to reign over the nation in glory. In order to understand Isaiah, we must understand that all his predictions revolve around Christ's two comings. Christ came the first time as the suffering, rejected Messiah to die for the sins of the people (Isaiah 53). At His second coming to earth, when Christ will set up His kingdom, Israel will be regathered to Palestine from its worldwide dispersion and will see fulfillment of the promised messianic kingdom.

24. Jeremiah

Theme: Warnings and predictions to Judah

Author: Jeremiah

Verse: *Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.*
Jeremiah 33:3

Date: Seventh century B.C.

Jeremiah began his ministry as a young man, during the reign of Josiah, the last good king of Judah. (Those that followed him were evil.) When Josiah died, Jeremiah lamented, and with good reason - the people quickly slipped back into idolatry. God sent warnings to the nation through the prophet that, if they didn't repent and stop sinning, Jerusalem would be destroyed and they would be

carried into captivity in Babylon. But the people didn't listen. Throughout his ministry as a prophet to Judah, the Lord commanded Jeremiah to demonstrate his message with symbolic actions. He was told to walk up and down the streets of Jerusalem searching for one honest man. He was told to buy a belt and hide it in the rocks. He was forbidden to marry. He was told to visit a potter and watch him work and buy a jar from him. He was told to wear a yoke like an ox. He was told to buy a field. All of these instructions were intended as illustrations of God's message.

Jeremiah also predicted that the 12 tribes of Israel would return to their land in the end times and that Christ would be Israel's king during the millennium (Jeremiah 23:5-8). Because of his unpopular message, Jeremiah was persecuted and imprisoned by his own people.

25. Lamentations

Theme: Jeremiah's lament for all Israel

Author: Jeremiah

Verse: *Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.*
Lamentations 3:22-23

Date: Sixth century B.C.

The people of Israel refused to listen to Jeremiah's warnings. As a result, God allowed the army of Babylon to conquer the land and destroy Jerusalem. The prophet mourned for his land and wrote a series of acrostic poems about Israel's sin and God's wrath. These poems make up the book of Lamentations. But even in the midst of sorrow, Jeremiah looked to God for hope. *Through the LORD'S mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness (3:22-23).* Each of the five chapters is a separate poem of mourning and sorrow. Each poem in the original writings, except Chapter 3, has 22 verses. Each verse begins with one of the 22 different letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

26. Ezekiel

Theme: Judgment and glory

Author: Ezekiel

Verse: *My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. The nations also will know that I, the Lord, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.*
Ezekiel 37:27-28

Date: Sixth century B.C.

Ezekiel was both a priest and a prophet. His ministry took place while he was one of the Jewish exiles during the

Babylonian captivity of Judah, around 580 B.C., overlapping Jeremiah at the beginning and Daniel at the end. The prophet told the people why God had punished them and promised His future faithful-ness and blessing. A recurring message throughout the book is for God's people to ... *know that I am the LORD* (Ezekiel 6:7, and more than 30 other places in the book). Ezekiel points forward to the coming of the Messiah when ... *I [Jesus Christ] Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them ... (34:11-12).*

Some of his prophecies, written in terms of symbols and visions, extend into the book of Revelation and resemble the prophecies of Daniel and the apostle John.

27. Daniel

Theme: Rise and fall of kingdoms

Author: Daniel

Verse: *And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding.* Daniel 2:21

Date: Sixth century B.C.

Daniel, taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar into Babylon, lived during the reign of four kings: Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius and Cyrus. The first six chapters of his book contain the familiar accounts of his refusal to eat the king's food, the fiery furnace and the lions' den, while Chapters 7 through 12 contain prophecies revealed to Daniel in the form of dreams and visions. Those prophecies that have already been fulfilled (such as those in Daniel 8 and 11) have had a literal fulfillment. Because of this, we can know for sure that the prophecies that haven't yet been fulfilled will also be fulfilled literally.

One of Daniel's prophecies, that of the 70 weeks in Daniel 9, was God's revelation that Israel's punishment would last for 70 sevens (the actual meaning of the Hebrew word translated *weeks* - and here referring to 70 periods of seven years, or 490 years in total). The angel Gabriel indicated that the 490 years would be divided. The first 483 years began when Artaxerxes issued a decree to Nehemiah allowing him to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and ended on the day that Jesus Christ rode

into Jerusalem on a donkey. The remaining seven years will take place during the still-future tribulation when God's wrath will be poured out on earth and only a remnant of Israel will be saved. Those who are alive on earth during the tribulation will recognize the working of God because of Daniel's vision.

Other prophecies concern the evil Gentile nations, Alexander the Great and the wars between nations in the years between Daniel's life and the birth of Jesus Christ. Near the end of the book, God tells Daniel: *Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand (12:10).*

28. Hosea

Theme: Apostasy of Israel

Author: Hosea

Verse: *I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy.* Hosea 2:19

Date: Eighth century B.C.

Hosea prophesied in Israel at about the same time as Amos did, beginning in the reign of Jeroboam II and continuing through the period of the last six kings. The book covers about 40 years. God instructed this prophet to marry Gomer, a prostitute who continued her ways after their marriage. Hosea likened her unfaithfulness to Israel's unfaithfulness to God and warned them of God's wrath. He even gave his children names that symbolized the coming judgment. But although people are unfaithful, God never is. Hosea demonstrated this by purchasing Gomer back after she had left him to pursue her profession - God will one day do the same for Israel.

29. Joel

Theme: Predictions of the day of the Lord

Author: Joel

Verse: *Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as destruction from the Almighty.* Joel 1:15

Date: Ninth or eighth century B.C.

Joel probably made his prophecy around 835 B.C., when Joash was king. A huge swarm of locusts had just scoured the nation of Judah. *Be ashamed, you farmers, wail, you vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley;*

because the harvest of the field has perished (1:11). The prophet compares the destruction by the insects to the destruction that will be visited on the earth during the coming day of the Lord (the great tribulation) with its judgments on the Gentiles and the final restoration of Israel. But he also offers hope: ... *whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved ... (2:32).* The apostle Peter quotes from Chapter 1 of the book of Joel in his sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

30. Amos

Theme: Ultimate universal rule of David

Author: Amos

Verse: *But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream. Amos 5:24*

Date: Eighth century B.C.

Amos was a farmer from the country south of Jerusalem during the reign of King Uzziah, about 755 B.C. He raised sheep and grew figs until he was called by God as a prophet. Although he was from Judah, his message was for the kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam II. The nation was enjoying prosperity and was, for the moment, at peace. But Amos warned the people: ... *I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: afflicting the just and taking bribes; diverting the poor from justice at the gate (5:12).* He warned of coming destruction (which took place about 30 years later when the inhabitants were carried into the Assyrian captivity). But he also ended with hope, looking forward to a still-future time when Jesus Christ will reign over Israel in the land God gave them.

31. Obadiah

Theme: Doom of Edom

Author: Obadiah

Verse: *For the day of the Lord upon all the nations is near; as you have done, it shall be done to you; your reprisal shall return upon your own head. Obadiah 1:15*

Date: Ninth century B.C.

Obadiah, known as the doom song, is the smallest Old Testament book. Way back in Genesis, we read about Isaac's twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Jacob's name was changed to Israel and his offspring became the 12 tribes of Israel. Esau's descendants became the Edomites, a nation located to the south of Israel. During the reign of Jehoram, around 850 B.C., the Philistines and Arabians invaded Judah. Edom joined up with Judah's enemies.

Obadiah, about whom we know very little, prophesied Edom's approaching destruction: *For violence against your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever (1:10).*

In 1812, the unique ruins of this ancient nation were discovered. They stand as a silent witness to the fulfillment of Obadiah's prophecy.

32. Jonah

Theme: God's mercy

Author: Unknown (possibly Jonah)

Verse: *Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it. Jonah 3:10*

Date: Ninth century B.C.

Although at first he disobeyed God, Jonah occupies a unique place in his nation's history as the first foreign missionary. Jonah prophesied during the reign of King Jeroboam II. God instructed him to give a message of warning to the people of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire. The people of that nation were known for being wicked and for torturing their captives. Jonah didn't want to go to the Gentiles, and he didn't want to be tortured. Jonah made other plans and attempted to run away. God brought on a storm that threatened to destroy the ship on which Jonah was fleeing. The prophet told the sailors that it was his God who caused the storm. Reluctantly, they threw him overboard and he was swallowed by a fish. He got the point. He prayed inside the fish and after he was vomited out on the beach, God spoke to him again. This time Jonah obeyed. Because of his preaching, the people of Nineveh, Israel's avowed enemies, repented of their sins, and God's judgment upon them was postponed. Instead of being gratified, this upset Jonah - who thought the Ninevites should be punished. God sent a vine and a scorching wind to make His point - that His purpose is for people to turn to Him and that He takes no pleasure in anyone's death.

33. Micah

Theme: Judgments

Author: Micah

Verse: *He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8*

Date: Eighth century B.C.

Micah ministered for approximately 25 years (at the same time as Isaiah), spanning the time when Israel was conquered by Assyria. He mentions the sins of both Israel and Judah and implores the people *to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God (6:8b)*. He closes with a courtroom scene in which God brings His people to trial and finds them guilty. Micah also condemned wealthy landowners and merchants for taking advantage of the poor. Although Micah was a prophet of doom, he offered words of hope, predicting that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. The name Micah means “Who is like the Lord?”

34. Nahum

Theme: Nineveh’s doom

Author: Nahum

Verse: *The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him.* Nahum 1:7

Date: Seventh century B.C.

The book of Nahum was written around 660 B.C. Little is known about its author except that he lived in a Galilean village. Nahum is the sequel to the book of Jonah. The people of Nineveh had repented when Jonah preached to them, and God’s judgment was delayed for more than 100 years. In the book of Nahum, however, the Ninevites were again disobeying God. They had invaded and conquered the northern kingdom of Israel and were throwing their weight around. Nineveh was a huge fortress with walls 100 feet (30.5 m) high, thick enough for three chariots to ride side-by-side on the top. It seemed impregnable. Nahum relayed a message: *“Behold, I am against you,” says the LORD of hosts (3:5a)*. He warned that God’s judgment was approaching in the form of a flood and fire. In 612 B.C., the Tigris River overflowed and destroyed part of the wall. The Babylonian army entered through the gap and destroyed the city so thoroughly that for centuries (until 1842), nobody knew where it had stood.

35. Habakkuk

Theme: Impending judgment - the Babylonian invasion

Author: Habakkuk

Verse: *Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.* Habakkuk 2:4

Date: Seventh century B.C.

Nothing is known about the prophet Habakkuk except

what his book reveals. Habakkuk was confused - how long could God put off punishing sinners? When God explained that Babylon was about to bring the punishment (which places Habakkuk some-where around 600 B.C.), the prophet is even more confused - Babylon was even more wicked than Judah! God give him encouragement: *The just shall live by his faith (2:4b)*. The name *Habakkuk* means “one who embraces.” This is appropriate because, at the very end of the book, the prophet embraces God in the midst of calamity. *Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls — yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation (3:17-18)*.

36. Zephaniah

Theme: The day of the Lord

Author: Zephaniah

Verse: *Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord’s anger.* Zephaniah 2:3

Date: Seventh century B.C.

This prophet ministered during the reign of King Josiah, sometime around 630 B.C., before that king put a temporary end to idol worship in Judah. His message may have even helped bring about the nation’s return to worshiping God. Unfortunately, as soon as Josiah died, the people returned to idolatry. Zephaniah’s prophecies foretell the wrath of God that resulted in the Babylonian captivity just a few years later. His prophecies also refer to the day of the Lord (also known as the tribulation), a greater day of wrath still to come. But like so many of the prophets, he ends with a promise of a still-future day when Israel will be restored: *At that time I will bring you back, even at the time I gather you; for I will give you fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I return your captives before your eyes ... (3:20)*.

37. Haggai

Theme: Encouragement to rebuild the temple

Author: Haggai

Verse: *Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified,” says the Lord.* Haggai 1:8

Date: Sixth century B.C.

Haggai's two chapters contain five messages. Cyrus, king of Persia, allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem. They got off to a good start worshipping God, but after 16 years, the temple still wasn't completed. In 520 B.C., Haggai stepped forward to encourage everyone to get to work. Twenty-three days later, the people resumed constructing the temple. ... *"Consider your ways! Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the LORD (Haggai 1:7-8).* Note: Eighty years later, the Jews still hadn't rebuilt the wall around Jerusalem. It was Nehemiah who finally accomplished that task and brought about a spiritual revival in the nation.

38. Zechariah

Theme: The coming Messiah

Author: Zechariah

Verse: *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey. Zechariah 9:9*

Date: Sixth century B.C.

Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai and he made his prophecy just a few months later. His message was one of hope - the Messiah was coming and the nation would be restored. Many of Zechariah's prophecies have a two-fold fulfillment; one when Jesus Christ first came to earth and another when He will come again to reign on the throne in Jerusalem and judge the Gentile nations who tried to destroy the Jewish people. When Christ was on earth, most Jews failed to grasp the two-fold nature of these prophecies. As a result, they expected Him to defeat Rome and restore Israel at that time.

39. Malachi

Theme: Rebukes and prediction

Author: Malachi

Verse: *Yet from the days of your fathers you have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the Lord of hosts. "But you said, 'in what way shall we return?'" Malachi 3:7*

Date: Fifth century B.C.

The prophet Malachi wrote this book after the Israelites had returned from captivity in Babylon. The temple and city of Jerusalem had been rebuilt and was once again the center of worship for the people. But God wasn't happy about the way the people were worshipping. Malachi

rebukes both the priests and the Jewish people for their sins. He does this with a six-part message delivered in a series of questions:

1. How has God loved Israel?
2. How have the priests honored God?
3. How were the people breaking faith with each other?
4. How had God been patient with Israel?
5. How had the people robbed God?
6. How would God remember those who were faithful to Him?

Malachi's many predictions include the judgment of the tribulation, the establishment of Messiah's kingdom (the millennium), and the first and second comings of Christ to earth. God, through Malachi, summed up His message (4:4-6) with a final call to remember His law and a reminder that the Judge was coming. Israel didn't get the message, and they didn't hear from God again for the next 400 years.

Bible Reading Checklist

Disciples

JOURNEY™

GENESIS

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50

DEUTERONOMY

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PROVERBS

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ECCLESIASTES

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11	12								

EZEKIEL

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ZEPHANIAH

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ZACHARIAH

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11	12	13	14						

Bible Reading Checklist

Advocates

JOURNEY™

JOSHUA

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24						

1 KINGS

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11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22								

2 KINGS

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1 CHRONICLES

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2 CHRONICLES

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ESTHER

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JOB

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41	42								

PSALMS

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131	132	133	134	135	136	137	138	139	140
141	142	143	144	145	146	147	148	149	150

JEREMIAH

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51	52								

LAMENTATIONS

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JOEL

1	2	3
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JONAH

1	2	3	4
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Bible Reading Checklist

Witnesses

JOURNEY™

LEVITICUS

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27			

RUTH

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ISAIAH

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31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
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61	62	63	64	65	66				

DANIEL

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11	12								

HOSEA

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AMOS

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NAHUM

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HABAKKUK

1	2	3
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MALACHI

1	2	3	4
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Bible Reading Checklist

Leaders

JOURNEY™

EXODUS

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40

NUMBERS

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21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36				

JUDGES

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21									

1 SAMUEL

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21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31									

2 SAMUEL

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EZRA

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NEHEMIAH

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11	12	13							

SONG OF SONGS

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OBADIAH

1

MICAH

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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HAGGAI

1	2
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