HOME CHURCH LESSON SERIES

How to Study the Bible

Tools for Reading Well

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, rightly handling the word of truth."

2 Timothy 2:15

A Home Church Resources Lesson Series

homechurchresources.org

Who We Are

We are a Christian ministry that helps people start home churches through providing support to potential and current home church leaders. You don't have to spend years on a church staff and have college degrees in ministry (although they are welcome to help!) to be qualified. You can be a mechanic and start a home church…a teacher and start a home church…retired and start a home church.

We are here to help you get the support you or others you know need to get started!

How We Help

We provide the resources needed to help you get started. This includes:

- An online community for encouragement
- Online training that combines our best resources in one streamlined pathway
- Dozens of PDF tools to equip you to succeed
- Coaching to tackle the specific issues you face.
- Training for your home church members so they have ministry skills and disciplines

You can join a community where people interact, encourage and pray for each other as they live out the home church planting life together.

All of this is done through an online learning community where you can quickly and easily connect with all of the resources we have developed that are helping home church leaders around the world.

How to Start

Anyone can start, no cost, to start a home church. Our Prepwork will help you lay a biblical foundation for a home church and assembly the building blocks you need for a solid foundation to start a home church. You will also learn a few things to help you prayerfull consider if starting a home church is right for you in this season. This Prepwork comes with a Field Guide, which is a fillable PDF, so that when you are done you will have a guidebook in your hand that you have created, specific to the vision you are finding in scripture and through prayer.

Take the Prepwork Here

Why Study the Bible?

The first thing we have to identify in how to study the Bible is answering the question, "What is our purpose in studying the Bible?"

- We don't study just for information. Atheists study the Bible for information as well.
- We study the Bible for transformation.

Becoming and Investigator

Because we come to the text not yet knowing all the answers we have to come as an investigator. There are a few things about the investigative process that will help us in our approach to studying the Bible:

1 - Investigators know how to ask good questions. That is because an investigator does not yet have all the answers.

- If you think you have all the answers to the Bible then you won't feel like asking questions is important.
- We must be humble enough to recognize that we still have many questions and that scripture is where we turn for answers

So we must learn to ask good questions and then we must learn how to read in a way that leads us as close to the correct answer as possible…admitting that to some things we may never get the full answer.

2 - Investigators know how to listen. When you read the Bible are you really listening for God to tell you something or do you figure you already have it all pegged down nice and neat?

- "listen" or "hear" is used in scripture over 1500 times!
- From McKnight, Blue Parakeet, 98 - Klyne Snodgrass once said "the biggest complaint in scripture is that people do not listen to God. Theirs is a freely chosen deafness." Choosing not to listen contradicts the Shema: "Hear O Israel…Love the Lord your God" (Deut 6:4-5). Klyne then reached this insightful conclusion: "The greatest command is to love God; the prior command [to loving God] is the command to hear." Love of God and love of others can happen only when we have ears to listen to God speak."

3 - Three levels of listening (McKnight, Blue Parakeet, 99):
Each successively deeper. You can't get to the next one until you have accomplished the ones before.

1. Attention – just gets the ears open (1 Cor 14:2)

2. Absorption – “when our ears let God’s voice in so that it fills our being (1 Kings 3:9). God gave him a “heart that was fully absorbed what God was saying.” (McKnight)
3. Action – Listening to find out how God desires us to respond to what we have heard (Mtt 7:24 & 17:5)

Before you can study the Bible you have to be ready to listen.

You have to know what you are listening to/for:

- Listen to - The Bible is God’s revealed Word to us. It is the story of his relationship with mankind
- Listen for - We listen for transformation

The main thing we are listening for is what each author was really trying to communicate in any given verse or chapter.

The Danger of Prooftexting

Because we are really interested in what the Bible actually means we have to avoid prooftexting.

“Prooftexting” = pulling a verse out of context and using it in a way that it was never intended to be used.

If you isolate a verse you can make it mean all sorts of things the author never intended. Since we are trying to investigate back to the authors’ original intent and meaning, prooftexting is to be avoided. Also, if you string together a bunch of unrelated verses you can construct all kinds of meaning from scripture that aren’t really there.

- Some people use this example – a man seeking guidance randomly opens his Bible and it falls to Matthew27:5b – “Then Judas went away and hanged himself.” Not satisfied he tried it again. This time he opened to Luke 10:37b – “Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise.’” See the problem?

The most frequent cause of prooftexting is when we are interested in how a particular word or subject is used in scripture and so we open up a concordance to find all the instances of that word. It is tempting to just read each verse by itself but we must remember that the context of those words and verses has to be examined as well because we are on a search for what the Bible really says, not what verses and words out of context appear to say.

Choosing A Good Translation

(summarized from Gordon Fee’s – How to Read the Bible for All It’s Worth)

We are so blessed to have good English translations at our disposal for study. This has not always been the case but today it is and we should take advantage of it. Obviously, the Bible was not written in English, so in order to understand it in English someone has to do the work of translation.

Good translations will be the work of a committee, not an individual. This covers just about any translation you could ever come up with, so we are in good shape here.
All translation requires interpretation. Because of that it is beneficial to study from several translations.

Here is one example (from Fee) that shows how different translations can be, **1 Cor 7:36:**

KJV – "But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin,
NASB – "But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter…"
NIV – "If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to…"
NEB – "If a man has a partner in celibacy and feels that he is not behaving properly towards her…"

Only one of these can be right. Which one of the four options is it? Literally, the KJV hits the nail on the heard. The problem is it is very non-specific and requires some interpretation (which the other three translations apply in three different ways). They are different because each reflects a different interpretation of the text that plays into how this was translated. The NIV is probably the best because it fits the context of 1 Cor 7.If you only read 1 translation on this passage you might have a 1-in-4 shot of getting on the right page.

Why are the four so different? There are different theories on translation. Some translations try to be as literal as possible (the left column below). Other translations do more interpretation in the text when it is needed to make things clearer (the middle column below). Other translations are way more loose and some times don't very well represent the literal meaning of the text as well (the column to the far right below)

Formal equivalence (word-for-word)	**Balanced**	**Dynamic-Equivalence (thought-for-thought)**
New American Standard	NIV	New Living Translation
King James Version	TNIV	Message
New King James Version		Living Bible
English Standard Version		Jerusalem Bible
Revised Standard Version		
New Revised Standard Version		

I recommend studying from 2 translations, one from the literal left column and one from the balanced middle column. The only translation in the right column I would recommend for daily Bible reading, not real deep Bible study, is the New Living Translation.

What makes a good translation?

- Most modern translations will get the job done
- Readable/understandable for you
- One from good texts that benefits from more recent discoveries (Dead Sea Scrolls, papyri, etc)

All translations have their weaknesses. There is no perfect translation and that is why it is important to read more than one. For me, it is the NIV + NRSV (thought-for-thought/balanced + more literal)

Understanding Genre

You don't read a science textbook the same way as you read a fiction novel or the same way as you read a road map or a weather report. When you see things laid out a certain way you expect to read it a certain way. Same is true with scripture. You don't listen to everything in scripture the same.

For example, compare **Psalm 51:5** and **Exodus 20:13**

- Psalm 51:5 – "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me
- Exodus 20:13 – "You shall not murder."

One of those verses is to be read literally and the other figuratively. If you read the whole Bible like a literal rule book it will appear to contradict itself at times and cause you many problems. That is because different books of the Bible were written in different forms/genres. You don't read poetry the same as you read narrative/story or laws.

An example from English literature – Tennyson poetically wrote, "Sunset and evening star and one clear call for me, and may there be no moaning of the bar, when I put out to sea." That has the same meaning as, "I am getting old and am going to die one of these days, and I do not want any of you crying when I am gone." They factually say the same thing but "the two are miles apart in their beauty and in their emotional impact. One is poetry and the other is prose."

- Jack P. Lewis, Hebrew Wisdom & Poetry, p.6

One clue the translators have given us is how different parts of the Bible are laid out.
Narrative – paragraphs and dialogue
Poetry – usually couplets
Proverbs – One liners

Also, realize that not all the poetry is in the psalms. Poetry is found all over the Bible and you will notice it is indented in and formatted in verse pairs/couplets.

The following is Summarized from How to Read the Bible as Literature by Leland Ryken

1 - Narrative
The most common genre in the Bible. Once you understand how ancient writers wrote their stories it will make you a better student of the Bible and cover the majority of the Bible.

- They invite us to share in the experience (Ryken, 34)
- Personal involvement = imagine it, put yourself there and think what it would be like.
- **Rule #1 – "Look upon biblical stories as an invitation to share an experience, as vividly and concretely as possible, with the characters in the story" (Ryken, 34-35)**

Three ingredients of narrative

1. Setting
2. Characters

3. Plot (action)

These three things are found in ancient story and are still around today. Any good movie, book or television show follows many of these rules. Can you remember a show you watched on TV that didn't have any conflict or tension? Stories are built around a plot of building tension and resolution.

Setting:

- **Rule #2 – Pay close attention to every detail of setting that a storyteller puts into a story and if setting has an important role, analyze how it contributes to the story.**
    - They didn't have PC's…they were writing on parchment. Most details there for a reason. They didn't just put a bunch of stuff down haphazardly.
- Setting can set the tone (Acts 12 – prison, gates, chains, etc) = danger
- Setting can have symbolic meaning – revelations often on mountain tops. Jerusalem – big events take place there
- Temporal setting – world history has an impact. Jonah goes to Ninevah when they are BIG and POWERFUL. Ninevah was not always that way
- Cultural setting – Ruth and kinsman redeemer

Characters:

- Learn about them through author's description (Esther 2:7)
- Learn about them through the narrative of their actions, words and thoughts
- Learn about them through what others say about them (Dan 6:5)
- Protagonist – main character. Every story has one and it is VERY important to watch them closely. Make sure you identify this person in the story and watch them very closely
- **Rule #3 – Use every detail in a story to get to know the characters as fully as possible**

Plot:

- Plot is just the arrangement of events
- Narrative have to be selective. We don't get everything. Only that which advances the story being told and point being made. Order and content are packed with meaning.
- **Move – conflict/tension to resolution.**
    - That is the heart of all narrative from the movies we watch to the Bible
    - Missy gets frustrated with me because I identify the components of the initial tension, call it out and how it will be resolved.
    - You can learn a lot about Bible study by understanding how a good story is told.
- Conflict:
    - Physical – war, escape, danger
    - Character conflict – many stories are built on conflicts with other characters (Cain and Abel)
    - Moral/spiritual – occurring within the heart of the character
- **Rule #4 – identify the exact nature of the plot conflicts in a story, noting how they develop and are finally resolved.**

Narrative Effects on the reader

We said we are to participate in the story. What effects do narrative have on the reader?

- Suspense – waiting to see how the conflict/tension will be resolved. Often we have heard the story before and it no longer holds us in suspense. Easy to miss the point.
- Curiosity – Stories that keep you reading – how will this turn out? Will they fail spiritually, morally or maintain their integrity?
- Questions to ask:
    - "What makes this story so interesting to me?"
    - "How does this story invite me to participate in the action?"

The difference between Bible as history and Bible as literature:

- History – what **happened**
- Literature – what **happens**
- The difference - literature invites us to see what happens when characters make certain decisions and wants us to reflect on our own lives and realize those truths are still true! So the Bible is history but it is more than that. It calls on us and places demands on us more than what an ordinary history book would do.

2 – Poetry (See handouts at back):

The second most used genre in the Bible. Including all or parts of: Psalms, Song of Solomon, Proverbs, Lamentation, Job, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Hosea, Joel, and many more

Majority of the psalms are lament psalms (around 60% of the psalms – see handouts at back)

Poetic tools and devices found in scripture:

- They didn't use rhyme – no point in trying to get an English translation to rhyme.
- **Figurative over literal** (Psalm 1 – you don't really have a guy who is a tree or lives by a stream)
- **Use of imagery**
- **Hyperbole/poetic license** (Psalm 1 – no one can actually meditate all day and all night)
    - "Exaggeration for the sake of effect" and "it does not pretend to be factual" (99)
    - Ps 42:318:29, 42
    - Usually expressing something intense
- **Comparison** – evil and righteous man of Psalm 1
- **Simile** – Ps 1:3 – "he is like a tree…"
- **Metaphor** – Ps 23 – The Lord is my shepherd. Ps 119:105 – God's Word is a lamp to my feet.
    - You have to catch the corresponding parts that make the simile or metaphor work.
- **Personification** – Judg 5:17, Ps 73:9 – this is used to make a very vivid image
- **Anthropomorphism** – portraying God like a man (Exod 15:6 – God's right hand)
- **Parallelism – may be one of the biggest things used in the psalms**
    - Most common = synonymous parallelism where the two lines say the same thing (Ps 1:5, 18:5)

- **Synthetic** - Some times more meaning will be added the second time (Ps 29:1, 103:2)
- **Antithetic parallelism** – states the same truth the second time in the negative (Ps 1:6, 34:10)
- **Chiasm** - Chiasm was one way Greeks and Hebrews structured things to make a point. It would typically follow the pattern of a,b,b,a where the a's are similar in thought as are the b's. One example is Psalm 91:14 – "Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name."
  - A – "because he loves me"
    - B – "I will rescue him"
    - B - "I will protect him"
  - A – "for he acknowledges my name"

- **Acrostic**
  - (22 letters in Hebrew alephbet – alphabet comes from 1st 2 letters in Hebrew…show them psalm 119)
  - Wholeness or completion
  - 8 lines Ps 119
  - 1 line Ps 111, 112, 145
  - 2 lines Ps 25, 34, 37
  - Half and half – Ps 9 & 10 – may have been just one psalm at some point.
- Refrains – these were songs (Ps 46:7,11; 49:12, 20)

Types of Psalms – See handout

Headings in the psalms – we don't know where they came from, who did it, etc. Not original as far as can be told. Don't make too much of them. Probably based on tradition.

- "Of David" – Hebrew preposition can mean "to" David or "for" David as well
- Heb 4:7 quotes Ps 95:7-8 as of David but heading doesn't give us that
- Acts 4:25-26 quotes Psalm 2 as from David but heading doesn't tell us that.
- Could be early believers just considered Psalms as the book of David.

Proverbs/Wisdom literature

"A proverb is a concise, memorable statement of truth" (Ryken 121)

Proverbs as a literary type are found in: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Matthew (11:30, Galatians (6:7), James (3:6) and many other places.

Characteristics/tools of the trade:

- Very disconnected, non-narrative. Easy to read bits and pieces without huge concern for context in Proverbs (Ecc a bit different animal)
- **Simple and profound**
- **Memorable**
- **Specific and general**
- **Sometimes poetic**

    - **metaphors – Prov 10:15**
    - **parallels like in psalms – Prov 9:10, 12:15, 10:27**
- **From real experience**
- **Imagery (woman from Prov 8)**
- **Figures of speech**
- **Paradox – Prov 20:17**
- **Acrostic – Psalm 31:10-31 (22 verses – perfect woman from A-Z)**

How to do a Word Study

See Handouts at back on how to do a word study.
Word study is one of the most popular ways of studying the Bible. It can have the appearance of being "deep" but that doesn't mean it is always done well. Some of the following information is from D.A. Carson's book "Exegetical Fallacies"

Language is not stuck in time. Words change in their meaning, some more than others. That is true in English as well as Greek and Hebrew.

- English examples:
    - "nice" comes from Latin nescius = "ignorant"
    - "good-bye" comes from Anglo-Saxon "God be with you"
    - If 2000 years from now someone does a word study of these words in English literature from the years 1500-2000 they might end up thinking nice people were ignorant.
- Greek examples:
    - **1 Cor 4:1 –** servants
    - Υπηρετης (huperetes)
        - Hypo – under
        - Eresso – rower (from Homer 8th century BC Classical Greek)
        - Some have said this word for servant, in their minds, was like someone who was on the bottom rung of oar rowers in their boats.
        - Can you imagine saying all the English from 600 years ago means the same thing it means today?
        - We can't assume that Greek words didn't change over time either.
        - KJV English examples to show us that language can change a lot over time – **See appendix**

Words are not necessarily connected in meaning with their component parts:

- English examples:
    - Butter fly does not equal Butter + fly in meaning
    - Automobile is not thought of as anything that is self moving
- Greek examples **John 3:16**:
    - Monogenes – "only begotten"
        - Monos – only
        - Gennao – to beget
        - Or genos – kind

- Is it Monos + gennao (only begotten) or monos + genos (only kind/one of a kind/special)?
- **Hebrews 11:17** – Isaac was Abraham's monogenes but he had other children. Isaac was his unique, special son
- People get all bent out of shape that the NIV doesn't have "only begotten son" but there is good reason for that as we see from how other writers in the NT used the same Greek word.

This is an example where word study would make a difference in how we understand John 3:16 based on other times in the New Testament where the same word was used.

Steps for a word study:

1. Select the word you wish to study
2. Pick up a concordance for the version you are using and look it up in English
3. Find the number of the word to the right of each word. That is the Strongs number that you can look it up in Hebrew (OT) or Greek (NT) in the back of your concordance
4. You will notice that for each English word there are probably several numbers represented. That means that there are different words in Hebrew and Greek that end up being translated by the same English word.
5. Make sure you are comparing the same word number and not just the same words in English as listed by the concordance. That way you are studying the same word in the original language.
6. You can do the same thing through websites like www.biblegateway.com
7. Rules of interpretation with word study:
    a. Give it more credence/connection if the word is used several times by the same author. John talks about "signs" a lot in his gospel. That is more significant than comparing the word between John and Paul's epistles.
    b. Give it slightly less credence/connection than "a" with occurrences in the NT or OT as a whole
    c. Give it slightly less credence/connection than "b" with occurrences in the OT if you are studying the NT and NT if you are studying the OT.

Word Study Example – "Dwelling" in New Testament

- Look it up in the concordance and your New Testament examples include:
    - John 1:14 - #5012
    - Acts 7:46 - #5013
    - 2 Cor 5:2,4 - #3863 & NIG
    - Eph 2:22 - #2999
    - Rev 13:6 - #5008
    - Rev 21:3 - #5008
- This shows that is comes from 5 different Greek words in the NT. NIG means "not in Greek" and that means in 2 Cor 5:4 the NIV translators supplied it so the translation would make sense.

- Turn to the Greek-English section at the back of the concordance. Notice in the back of the concordance there are sections for Hebrew, then Aramaic and last Greek. Make sure you are in the right section – Hebrew and Aramaic for the OT and Greek for the NT. Here is what you see in the Greek-English section:
    - #5012 – verb (tiny v and also starts with "to…") to live, dwell, spread a tent, make a dwelling (related but have to be careful, notice that the word comes from the same word as "tent" #5011, 5013)
    - #5013 – noun for tent
    - #3863 – a dwelling or home (not necessarily associated with tent) – from oikos – house
    - #2999 – dwelling place/home (from oikos – house)
    - #5008 – tabernacle, tent, shelter, etc
- Look back at John 1:14 – Jesus tabernacled, made his dwelling, spread his tent among us…now this has OT parallels with the Exodus that you wouldn't have caught just with the English.

Cautions:

- Word study can be fascinating and can unlock some really interesting bits and pieces of scripture. You do have to be very careful in this. Remember, the people who translated the Bible were careful and have reasons for choosing the words they included. So to go out on some extreme limb based on a word study that no one else is taking (check a good commentary and see if the view you are coming to is supported by anyone educated) can be dangerous.
- Chances are if you make a connection no one else is making it is for a good reason. It doesn't really exist. So be careful with this.
- You don't want to make any fine tuned theological points out of jumping through all kinds of word study hoops. So avoid that from the start.
- Word study is just one more tool that helps us learn and appreciate what is in scripture.

7. Appendix - Difficult KJV English Words Quiz (From Jack Lewis, Questions You've Asked About Bible Translations):

KJV Word	Modern meaning	Verse
Concourse	assembly	Prov 1:21
Leasing	lies or deceit	Ps 4:2; 5:6
Straightened	restricted	2 Cor 6:12
Bowels	affections	2 Cor 6:12
Vain jangling	vain speech	1 Tim 1:6
Upward	forward	Hag 2:15
Forward	to desire	2 Cor 8:10
Honest	excellent	Rom 12:17
Mean	ordinary	Prov 22:29
Doctor	teacher	Lk 2:46
By and by	immediately	Mt 13:21

Let	hindered	Rom 1:13 (opposite meaning today)
Passengers	passers-by	Pro 9:15
Imagine	plot evil	Ps 62:3
Virtue	power	Mk 5:30
Very naughty figs	rotten figs	Jer 24:2
Mansion	dwelling place	John 14:2

8. Online Bible Study Resources

Word study helps:

1. Online concordance – www.biblegateway.com
2. Interlinear Hebrew Old Testament – http://www.scripture4all.org/OnlineInterlinear/Hebrew_Index.htm
3. Interlinear Greek New Testament - http://www.scripture4all.org/OnlineInterlinear/Greek_Index.htm

Other Bible study helps online:
See links here - http://mattdabbs.wordpress.com/tools-resources/study-tools/

Bible Study Helps – Old Testament

By
Matt Dabbs

This information was compiled based on my own study, House and Walton's Old and New Testament Books of Charts, and the Bare Bones Bible Handbook by Jim George.

The Old Testament is divided up into sections that help us understand what we are reading. Just like when you read the newspaper that has a sports section, a financial section, the front page stories, and all the rest; the Bible is divided up into helpful sections. Here are the four sections that divide the Old Testament:

1 - The Law (Torah):
Includes Genesis through Deuteronomy.
Mostly stories/narratives that run in chronological order

2 - Historical Books:
Includes Joshua-Esther and Lamentations

3 - Wisdom Writings:
Includes Job-Song of Songs

4 - Prophets:
Divided into two sections based on length (Major=longer, Minor = shorter):

- Major Prophets: Isaiah-Daniel
- Minor Prophets: Hosea-Malachi

1. <u>The Law (Torah)</u>

Genesis

Date written – 1350 B.C.
Author - Moses
Summary – "In the beginning…" (Gen 1:1). This book is about beginnings. Early history of God's people from the creation through the patriarchs (Jewish fathers like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). Genesis contains two covenants (promises) that God made to mankind. The first is to Noah in Genesis 8:21 not to destroy the earth by water. The second is to Abraham in Genesis 15 that sets the stage for much of the rest of the Bible. God promises to make Abraham a great nation with numerous descendants. He promises him the land of Canaan (15:7). The story of gaining that land will be a major part of the story from Genesis through Joshua (where you read about many battles as the people take the land God had promised them. Genesis ends with the story of Joseph and tells how God's people ended up in Egypt due to famine and Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery.

Exodus

Date written – 1350 B.C.
Author - Moses
Summary – Exodus picks up 400 years after Joseph's time in Egypt and the respect the Egyptians had for Joshua had been forgotten. As a result the Egyptians enslaved the Hebrews. The word "exodus" refers to the events of God providentially delivering his people from slavery in Egypt to freedom (Exodus 1-14) and travelling with God through the wilderness to Mt. Sinai in Exodus 15-19. This is one of the most significant events in the history of God's people as it formed the basis for the Hebrews to form a relationship with God while in the wilderness. At Sinai God made a covenant with his people that they would follow him and obey his rules (to be holy). The most familiar part of this is the 10 commandments found in Exodus 20. After the 10 commandments and further laws God had for his people we find the people confirm their willingness to obey the covenant and laws of God in Exodus 24. The rest of the book (chapters 25-40) regards the priests, further instructions and laws that lead us to the book of Leviticus.

Leviticus

Date written – 1350 B.C.
Author - Moses
Summary – This is one of the hardest books of the Bible to read because it seems really hard to relate to and make application to our lives. This book contains a huge list of very specific rules and regulations for how to conduct sacrifices and make atonement for sins. There are a couple of interesting points that help us read this book. First, we learn that God is dwelling among his people in the tabernacle. Second, we learn that God did forgive sins under the old covenant. There are many passages that say this in Leviticus (see 4:20, 25 for an example). The second point is that we see in Leviticus just how important holiness is to God. The point is, we have to approach God on his terms. We don't just waltz into a relationship with him any way we want. We respect his conditions and terms and do our best to abide by them. The word "holy" occurs over 60 times in less than 30 chapters. One key verse is Leviticus 20:26 – "You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own."

It is helpful to see Leviticus broken down into smaller chunks (Jim George's book The Barebones Bible Handbook):

Chapters 1-7	Laws of Acceptable Worship
Chapters 8-10	Laws Pertaining to the Priesthood
Chapters 11-16	Laws for Uncleanness
Chapters 17-27	Laws of Acceptable Living

Numbers

Date written – 1350 B.C.
Author - Moses
Summary – We find even more laws in Numbers. By now it is clear that it was important to God to let his people know what he expected of them. Remember, they had lived in Egypt for several hundred years. Egypt was a pagan society that worshipped several false-gods. It would be

important for God to reconnect with his people and lay down specific regulations about how he was to be worshipped and how to make atonement for sin through sacrifice. We also find more detailed stories about God's people in the wilderness with God.

Let's recap. When God's people left Egypt they went into the wilderness and were on their way to the promised land with God as their guide and provider. They came to Sinai and God established the ground rules and a covenant with his people, which they accepted to obey. They left Sinai for the promised land, which picks up in the book of Numbers.

In Numbers 13 the Hebrews are right on the edge of the promised land. They send spies in to find out more about what they are up against. Instead of trusting God, who promised them the land (remember the promise to Abraham?) they were afraid and decided not to invade the land (the land is currently the country of Israel today). Because they disobeyed God they would die in the wilderness as God would not allow them in the land for 40 years (See Numbers 14:34). The rest of Numbers deals with more laws and a few stories of their time in the wilderness.

Deuteronomy

Date written – 1350 B.C.
Author - Moses
Summary – The word Deuteronomy means "Second law." This is a speech given by Moses reminding them of the laws God has given to them. The reason for this is because they are at the end of the 40 years and most of the people who rebelled in Numbers 14 had died. God promised that none of those who rebelled would make it to the promised land alive (Num 14:20-25). Now their children were about to go into the promised land and Moses wants them to remember all the things God had commanded their fathers. What is interesting is that as Moses talks about all the events of the past he says "you did this" and "you did that" but it was their parents who had done all those things. Moses is identifying the children with their parents and warning them not to make the same mistakes their parents made, which resulted in their death in the wilderness. Deuteronomy ends with the death of Moses and the stage has been set for the Hebrews to enter the promised land in the next book, Joshua.

2. <u>Historical Books</u>

Joshua

Date written – 1250 B.C.
Author - Joshua
Summary – Here the people finally get to be in the promised land! The book of Joshua tells the story of the invasion and the many battles that God's people fought to take over the land. One of the things that stands out in Joshua is that when the people were doing their best to obey God,

God gave them success. But if the people were disobedient, they faced defeat in battle. One problem in Joshua is that they didn't fully obey God and they left some people in the land. That would come back to haunt them over and over again (See the book of Judges).

Judges

Date written – 1150 B.C.
Author – Samuel
Summary – In Judges 2:8-9 we read about the death of Joshua. Remember that Joshua was Moses successor in leading the people into the promised land. In the very next verse you read about how it all fell apart in the leadership vacuum that followed –

"After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They provoked the LORD to anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. In his anger against Israel the LORD handed them over to raiders who plundered them. He sold them to their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the LORD was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress. Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders."

We see how quickly things fell apart and how God's people did exactly what God warned them not to do – idol worship and acting like the surrounding nations. The rest of Judges deals with the leaders God raised up to deliver God's people from other nations. You see this pattern repeated over and over in the book.

1. Things are good
2. People get comfortable
3. They fall into sin
4. Invaders come in and defeat them
5. People cry out to God for deliverance
6. God raises up a judge
7. People get comfortable again…repeat!

We learn from judges that we need to rely on God in good times and bad times. We should never think we have it made or that we can do things without God's help.

Ruth

Date written – 1125 B.C.
Author – Samuel
Summary – Ruth is basically a bridge book that gets us from Judges to 1 Samuel. Who would have thought? Look at the first words – "in the days when the judges ruled." Now look at the last word in the book – "David." David is the prime person in the next few books of the Bible (1

Samuel-1 Kings 2). Ruth is a love story that helps us understand the genealogy of David. You will also notice that Ruth is one of the few women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). Ruth also teaches us a lot about redemption and care of the needy.

1 Samuel

Date written – 930-722 B.C.
Author – Samuel
Summary – Samuel was a prophet of God whose name means "God hears." That refers to the prayers of his mother Hannah who prayed for a son even though she was barren (1:5). God saw her faithfulness and answered her prayer. She dedicated her son Samuel to the Lord and left him in the temple to grow up there in service to God. Samuel becomes God's spokesman through the appointing of Saul as the first king of Israel (1 Sam 9) and ushers in David as king (1 Sam 16). Samuel contains many stories of God's people and their continued battle of people who still remain in the promised land.

2 Samuel

Date written – 930-722 B.C.
Author – Samuel
Summary – The first half of 2 Samuel deals with the life of David. In chapter 7 God makes a promise to David that he will establish David's throne forever (7:16). But a few chapters later, David's affair with Bathsheba derails much of what God was trying to do (chapter 11). Much of the rest of 2 Samuel deals with Nathan's prophesy in 2 Sam 12:11 that calamity is going to fall on the house of David.

1 Kings

Date written – 560-540 B.C.
Author - Unknown
Summary – 1 Kings' two most prominent figures are Solomon and Elijah. 1 Kings is about God's promises to Solomon, the building of the temple and the start of other successors to the throne. 2 Kings will go into a more lengthy list of kings of Israel and whether or not they followed God. Solomon started strong but in the end he did exactly what God warned him about – he began to worship false gods because of all the marriages he had with women from other countries. His politics got him in trouble with God.

2 Kings

Date written – 560-530 B.C.
Author - Unknown
Summary - On the religious side, 2 Kings tells us a lot about Elisha the prophet. On the political side we get a laundry list of kings and whether or not they served the Lord. One major turning points in 2 Kings is king Josiah's discovery of the Book of the Law (which was probably a scroll of the book of Deuteronomy). Based on that discovery, Josiah instituted a bunch of

reforms to get the nation turned around. 2 Kings ends with the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonian armies.

1 Chronicles

Date written – 1350 B.C.
Author - Ezra
Summary – For 8 chapters you have a long list of names. It isn't until 9:1 that you see the connection back to the end of 2 Kings – "The people of Judah were taken captive to Babylon because of their unfaithfulness." The reason for this list of names is that people are looking back at their history. They are remembering where they came from. They are recounting how God has worked in the past to bring them to where they are now – in captivity in Babylon. When you look at the past, it gives you hope for a brighter future. This isn't a list of names for the sake of giving you a hard time to finish reading Chronicles. These names were meaningful to them. These are their forefathers, their patriarchs.

After listing all these generations of past Israelites, the writer goes back to Saul and works from Saul to David to Solomon, echoing much of what we read in 1 Kings. However, in Chronicles we get much more of a religious feel to what we read as more space is given to the Levites (the tribe the priests were to come from) and preparation for the temple. 1 Chronicles ends with David's death.

2 Chronicles

Date written – 450-430 B.C.
Author - Ezra
Summary – 2 Chronicles is similar to 2 Kings. It starts with Solomon and the temple and then goes to his successors and whether or not they were faithful to God. Like 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles ends with the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. The mention of Cyrus, king of Persia in 2 Chronicles 36:23 ties us in to Ezra (See Ezra 1:1).

Ezra

Date written – 457-444 B.C.
Author - Ezra
Summary – Ezra the scribe doesn't come on the scene until Ezra 7. What we see in the first 6 chapters is Cyrus, the king of Persia, sending Jews back to their homeland. Remember the end of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles? The Babylonians defeated Jerusalem and took many people away into captivity. In the Bible this is called "the exile." The Persians defeated the Babylonians and their leader Cyrus was a smart guy. He reasoned that his empire would be more secure if he let prisoners (those exiled) go back to their homes and worship their own "gods." In the process he let many Jews go back to their homeland and even helped them in rebuilding their temple.

One interesting thing you get here that is not mentioned in Ezra are the Samaritans you read about 500 years later in the New Testament. The Samaritan culture are basically the people who stayed behind and didn't go into exile. They stayed back and many intermarried with other

cultures (See Ezra 9). When the Jews came back home from Babylon/Persia they found people settled on their lands (the Samaritans). That is why there was so much bitterness toward them. They were not "pure" Jews by lineage and some moved in on land that wasn't theirs.

Ezra 1-6 is about the rebuilding of the temple. Ezra 7-10 is about restoring its worship.
In Ezra 7, Ezra comes to Jerusalem in order to restore the law and temple worship in its proper form. What is interesting is that originally Ezra and Nehemiah were one book. They were separated many years later so if you want the whole story you have to read them together. Ezra ends with the confrontation of sin and confession on the part of the people.

Nehemiah

Date written – 424-400 B.C.
Author - Nehemiah
Summary –Ezra spent time bringing spiritual restoration to the people in war-torn Jerusalem. Now, Nehemiah comes as a leader to rebuild the city wall. There are many things we can learn from Nehemiah. Many people come to it to learn about leadership. Nehemiah exhibits some outstanding leadership skills when he comes to rebuild the wall. There is also a great element of trust in this book. The people have to put trust in Nehemiah to lead them as Nehemiah puts his trust in God. Ultimately he leads the people to trust in God as well through his example.

Nehemiah came from Persia to rebuild the wall. That is the link between Nehemiah and Esther.

Esther

Date written – 450-430
Author - Unknown
Summary – A Jewish woman who through a contest becomes queen of Persia (the greatest empire in the world at the time). If that isn't enough, the central theme of the book is how that providential situation led her to a position of influence to save the Jewish people from extermination. Esther is used most in teaching about providential circumstances (Esther 4:14). It is also an explanation of where the Jewish feast of Purim came from.

Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther deal with the time after God's people came out of Babylonian captivity. While, Ezra and Nehemiah deal with those who came back to Israel/Jerusalem; Esther deals with people who decided not to come home and to stay in the land of their captivity.

Genesis-Esther is pretty much chronological. Once you get to Job things start getting more out of order in history.

3. <u>Wisdom/Poetic Books</u>

Job

Date written – 1800 BC?
Author - Unknown

Summary – The book of Job might be the oldest book of the Bible. It starts with a debate between God and Satan over whether or not mankind serves God just because God blesses them so much. In order to prove that man will serve God just because he is God and not just "to get a bunch of stuff" God allows Satan to put Job through a lot of suffering to see if Job will be faithful (Job 1-2). In the middle of the book you find Job having discussions with three of his friends over the nature of his suffering (Job 4-37). They believe he must have done something wrong or evil to deserve to suffer this badly. Job declares himself innocent and calls a court case against God to prove it. God shows up and humbles Job (Job 38-42). Ultimately Job was found faithful even though he had some doubts and made accusations against God and God blessed him abundantly (Job 42).

Psalms

Date written – 1300-450 BC
Authors – David, Sons of Korah, Asaph, Solomon, Moses, Heman, Ethan, Jeduthun
Summary – The book of psalms is not narrative (story). It is poetry and so there are few connections between the psalms. The book is divided up into 5 sections:
Part 1: 1-41
Part 2: 42-72
Part 3: 73-89
Part 4: 90-106
Part 5: 107-150

The psalms reflect everything it means to be human. There is victory and defeat. There is anger, compassion, love, humility, bitterness, rage, sadness, and joy. There is a psalm for every occasion in life. The psalms show us how to live in total openness to God with our feelings. We learn how to deal with sin (Psalm 51). We learn how to rejoice in God (Psalm 68) and so many other good and practical things.

Proverbs

Date written – 970 BC
Author – Solomon
Summary – Solomon was favored by God and was asked for anything he wanted. He choose wisdom (1 Kings 4). The proverbs are the result of that wisdom, writing down as a good teacher and king things for others to listen to and follow in order to follow the ways of the wise. Proverbs usually are not very connected with each other. The chapters and verses read more like a list of short, wise sayings.

Ecclesiastes

Date written – 950 BC
Author – Solomon
Summary – In this book Solomon portrays himself as the "Teacher". This is a very serious and hard hitting book that doesn't hold much back. Solomon is intent to save other grief by giving

practical advice on how to avoid poor decisions and how to have the right priorities in life. The most important thing in life is a passionate pursuit of God. Everything else pales in comparison.

Song of Songs

Date written – 970 BC
Author – Solomon
Summary – Song of Songs is about passionate romance. This is written like a love letter in very graphic language, so much so, that young Jewish boys were forbidden to read this book. This book shows us that sexuality is not a dirty thing but is a blessing. It demonstrates the beauty of the human body, the passion one should have for their spouse, and the importance of romance.

4. <u>The Prophets</u>

Isaiah

Date written – 700 BC
Author – Isaiah
Summary – Isaiah was a prophet who spoke out against compromise among God's people. This made him less than popular. But in doing so he reveals so much to us today about God's holiness, righteousness, and much about Jesus Christ as God's suffering servant (Isa 53). God often used Isaiah as a visual aid to demonstrate what he was trying to get them to understand. In Isaiah 20:2-6 he is told to preach naked to show the people that they too would be shamed if they followed earthly rulers over God. Isaiah teaches us that God does act as judge but he does so in order to teach us and redeem us.

Jeremiah

Date written – 600 BC
Author – Jeremiah
Summary – Jeremiah went through a lot as a prophet for the Lord. He had his share of beatings and persecution at the hands of his own people. This was all because he was sent to them with the unpopular message of repentance and of the defeat of the nation. Jeremiah is one of the prophets that warned the people of their exile or banishment from the land with the coming of the Assyrian army and the destruction of Jerusalem. Not quite the most popular message! We admire Jeremiah's willingness to be bold and speak the truth even when it wasn't popular or got him into trouble.

Lamentations

Date written – 587 BC
Author – Jeremiah
Summary – Jerusalem was destroyed in 587 BC. Lamentations contains Jeremiah's reflections on those devastating events. Jeremiah is often called the "Weeping prophet" and lamentations certainly carries that tone. Even though the people had been sinful, it is still difficult watching

them come to ruin. Even so, there is still hope for God's people to return to their former glory but the process is hard – exile from the land only to have their children later come and reclaim it.

Ezekiel

Date written – 600 BC
Author – Ezekiel
Summary – Ezekiel was a prophet to the exiles in Babylon at the same time Jeremiah was back home prophesying in Jerusalem. When the Babylonians and Assyrians took the people of Israel and Judah into captivity they normally took the rich and powerful first. That is how Ezekiel is in exile while Jeremiah was still back home preaching to those left behind. Ezekiel is in Babylonia trying to get the newly exiled Israelites to finally get their hearts right.

Daniel

Date written – 530 BC
Author – Daniel
Summary – Like Ezekiel, Daniel is also in Babylon. We normally think of the word prophesy or prophet being about predicting the future. Prophesy is actually about revealing things from God to mankind. Sometimes those are future events and other times it is a message from God about right here and now. Daniel is the prophetic book in the Old Testament that is mostly about events that are to come. It was to show the people in Babylon through the exile that God was still concerned for them and had a plan for their future. We learn this through Daniel's recording of several visions God gave him about future events (now long past).

Hosea

Date written – 750 BC
Author – Hosea
Summary – Hosea was called by God to be a prophet who was to speak out about the spiritual adultery of idolatry. God used Hosea as an object lesson by having him go and marry a prostitute. She would cheat on him time and time again, just like God's people had cheated on God through worshipping idols. We learn from Hosea how great God's love is for us, how much he puts up with and how badly he wants us to be pure and make things right.

Joel

Date written – 800 BC
Author – Joel
Summary – Joel was writing in order to warn the people of an upcoming disaster. The land was going to be invaded by a mighty army. He uses the analogy or image of an invasion of locusts that come in and ravage the land, devouring everything in their path. He urges the people to repent or perish. Joel tells the people the Day of the Lord is coming…this is a day of judgment and wrath. In this case the day of the Lord is a dreadful thing to be feared for those who were unrepentant. We learn from Joel that sin does matter, that God is watching, and that there is a price to be paid for rebellion against the Lord.

Amos

Date written – 800 BC
Author – Amos
Summary – Amos preached judgment on the northern tribes of Israel due to their sin and rebellion. Amos is made up of a series of sermons and judgments preached against God's people with the hope of their repentance. They didn't listen. The last chapter of Amos prophesies Israel will be destroyed and later be restored.

Obadiah

Date written – 850 BC
Author – Obadiah
Summary – This prophesy is about Edom and Jerusalem. Edom was a nation made up of relatives to the Jews (through Esau – See Obadiah 1:6 and Genesis 25-27). When Jerusalem was attacked, Edom should have helped them. Instead they mocked Israel and incurred the wrath and judgment of God. Edom is the shortest book in the Old Testament, only 1 chapter long. In this book we see how passionate God is for his people and will eventually bring judgment on those who stand opposed to God's people.

Jonah

Date written – 750 BC
Author – Jonah
Summary – Jonah is really a book about God's mercy. It is one of the few times in the Old Testament that God offers a nation, other than Israel, opportunity to repent. It shows that God is interested in the hearts of all people, everywhere. Jonah failed to recognize God's goodness and mercy. First he flees from God's call and last he pouts and complains about God's mercy. God is good in spite of our misunderstanding.

Micah

Date written – 700 BC
Author – Micah
Summary – Like the rest, Micah is concerned with God's judgment against Israel's sin. Micah also speaks out against false hope that things will go well because they are "God's people" even if they aren't acting like it. We often think of sin as something between us and God but it can be more than that. Micah emphasizes how they have acted evilly against even their own people and how God will bring judgment on them for it.

Nahum

Date written – 650 BC
Author – Nahum

Summary – Like Jonah Nahum also prophesies against Ninevah. This time God is fed up with their sin and will bring destruction. Ninevah was the capital of Assyria and was viewed as a great and powerful nation. But no one can stand up to the judgment of God. God made good on his word and destroyed them.

Habakkuk

Date written – 600 BC
Author – Habakkuk
Summary – Habakkuk stats out with Habakkuk questioning the integrity of his own people, Israel. He calls for God's judgment to come upon them for their wickedness. When God declares he will answer Habakkuk's plea by bringing the Assyrian's to destroy them Habakkuk is left with the question of why God would let someone even more wicked have victory over God's people. God doesn't answer his question directly. Habakkuk is left with his question but with a new realization that even though he doesn't "Get it" that God does and that he just has to live by faith (Hab 2:4)

Zephaniah

Date written – 625 BC
Author – Zephaniah
Summary – Like many of the books before Zephaniah is a book about God's judgment on Israel for their sin but the promise and hope of restoration to follow.

Haggai

Date written – 520 BC
Author – Haggai
Summary – Haggai kicks off the last three prophets, who were preaching to those who were now back home from exile. The message of Haggai is to keep first things first. The people had come back home and built nice homes for themselves but God's temple had not be rebuilt properly. He called on them to make this right.

Zechariah

Date written – 500 BC
Author – Zechariah
Summary – Zephaniah happens just after Haggai, once the people have started rebuilding the temple. Much of Zechariah is very difficult to understand so don't feel too bad if this is a difficult book to read. Zechariah looks forward to the coming of the Messiah.

Malachi

Date written – 450 BC
Author – Malachi

Summary – The last book of the Old Testament picks up where Haggai and Zechariah left off. The people still have much to do to get their priorities in line. Even though they had gone through a rough exile and were finally back home it shows people can still very easily become complacent.

Bible Study Helps – New Testament

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament is also divided into sections that help keep similar writings together. Here are the four sections that divide the Old Testament:

1 - Gospels

- Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
- The Gospels are ordered by the date some people believed they were written. You don't have to put a name on a Gospel until there are more than one and only Luke is the only one of the four to identify himself. A few hundred years after these were written false teachings entered the church that forced the church to decide which writings were inspired/from God and which were not. It was during this process that the New Testament was laid out in its current form.

2 - Historical

- Acts of the Apostles
- Acts is the history that all of Paul's letters fit into. You read about Paul visiting the churches he wrote letters to in the book of Acts (the cities of Ephesus, Galatia, Corinth, etc)

3 – Paul's Letters

- Romans – Philemon
- These are ordered from longest to shortest with Romans being the longest and Philemon the shortest of Paul's letters
- These are some of the earliest writings in the New Testament with Galatians being the earliest book written (48 AD)

4 – General Letters

- Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John, and Jude
- These are all the letters written by people other than Paul

5 - Apocalypse

- Revelation
- This is the last book of the New Testament to be written, nearly 60 years after Jesus' ministry

1. <u>Gospels</u>

Matthew

Date written – 60s
Author - Matthew
Summary – All four gospels tell about the life of Jesus from the time before his birth to the time after his death and resurrection. Yet each Gospel has a distinct emphasis. It is like hearing the same story from four different points of view. Each writer is remembering and focusing on different aspects of who Jesus is and what he came to do.

Matthew's emphasis – Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophesy. Matthew also emphasizes Jesus as King as prophesied Messiah and descendent from David's throne.

Mark

Date written – 50s
Author – Mark
Summary – Mark is about who Jesus is. At first Jesus is more secretive about who he is because he doesn't want to fulfill the wrongly directed hopes of who the Messiah was supposed to be and what he was supposed to do. In the first half of Mark (1-8) It is not uncommon in Mark for Jesus to tell people to keep who he is a secret. Once Peter confesses Christ in Mark 8 Jesus speaks much more freely about who he is and what he came to do. Like Matthew, Mark ends with Jesus commissioning his disciples to spread the Gospel all over the world.

Mark's emphasis – Jesus as Redeemer

Luke

Date written – 60s
Author - Luke
Summary – Luke and Acts are both written by Luke and tell the story of Christianity from the birth of Jesus through the growth of the early church. There are many teachings and miracles in Luke that points us right to the heart of God and just how compassionate he is toward mankind.

Luke's emphasis – Jesus as compassionate and uplifter of the oppressed

John

Date written – 80s
Author - John
Summary – The Gospel of John tells the story of the life and ministry of Jesus through an insider point of view. Matthew was a disciple of Jesus but not in his "inner circle" like Peter, James and John were. Luke and John were not part of Jesus' 12 disciples. So John holds a special place in teaching us about God and Christ as an "insider." One things you will notice in John are a lot of double meanings that often leave people confused (being born again is one example from John 3). Like the other three Gospels, John shows Jesus on his way to a cross. Like the other Gospels Jesus defeats death through his resurrection and shows us that there is hope beyond the grave.

John's emphasis – Jesus as the Son of God and his unique relationship with His Father.

1. History

Acts of the Apostles

Date written – 62
Author - Luke
Summary – Luke wrote the book of Acts to tell the rest of the story. Acts covers the first thirty years of the church and tells how the Gospel went from being believed by just a few disciples waiting in Jerusalem to the Holy Spirit inspiring them to convert thousands and take the message all over the world. In the book of Acts we see missionaries including Paul, Barnabas, Mark and Luke (who both wrote the Gospels) travelling around the world, spreading the message of Christ to Jews and Gentiles. They travel to many of the cities Paul later writes the letters that follow.

One major dividing line in the book is Acts 10 where God allows the message of Christ to be preached to the Gentiles for the first time. This had been God's plan all the way back to Abraham when he promised Abraham he would be the "father of many nations" (Genesis 17:5).

2. Paul's Letters

Romans

Date written – 55
Author - Paul
Summary – Romans was written to a racially divided church. The Jew and Gentile Christians were struggling to find unity. Paul writes Romans to reconcile their relationships and to understand that the message of Christ should act as a common bond across all nations just as God planned for it to do from the beginning.

1 Corinthians

Date written – 54
Author - Paul
Summary – Corinth is a town in Greece where Paul visited in Acts 18. The Corinthian church was also very divided (1:10-17). Paul sets them straight by talking about how true leaders should bring unity and not division but that ultimately our leader is Christ and not any earthly leaders. Paul also deals with many of their specific concerns as a congregation including marriage (chapter 7), the eating of food sacrificed to idols (chapters 8-11) and issues in worship (chapters 11-14).

2 Corinthians

Date written – 55
Author - Paul
Summary – 2 Corinthians seems to be about Paul's defense of his ministry to those hostile toward him at Corinth. He upholds his integrity and commission from God and defends many of his travel plans in this letter.

Galatians

Date written – 48
Author - Paul
Summary – Galatians was written to address a specific concern among the Christians in the region of Galatia. It seems those who were Jewish Christians were beginning to enforce various aspects of Judaism (circumcision for one) on the Gentile Christians. Paul writes this letter to assure them of the sufficiency of Christ apart from the Law of Moses (Genesis-Deuteronomy) and to help mend the broken relationships left behind between the Christians in the Galatian churches.

Ephesians

Date written – 60
Author - Paul
Summary – One of four letters Paul wrote from prison. Normally Paul's letters have a specific occasion that prompted him to write these churches. Ephesians is the hardest to pin down. What stands out in Ephesians is the connection between knowing God and what he has done for us (Chapters 1-3) and the resulting actions that should be in our lives in response to all God has done for us (Chapters 4-6).

Philippians

Date written – 61
Author - Paul
Summary – Paul invites the Philippian Christians to live their lives for Christ even if it includes suffering (Phil 1). He encourages them to imitate Christ's humility (Phil 2) and to keep in mind the importance of Christ (Phil 3). Even though in jail, Paul has found contentment (Phil 4:11-12).

Colossians

Date written – 60
Author - Paul
Summary – One of four letters Paul wrote from prison. Colossians was written to help combat some false teachings that were taking place in the house churches of Colossae. It seems some believed that it was necessary to appease angels by doing certain religious ceremonies in order to gain entrance to the presence of God (see especially Col 2). Paul assures them, as he did the Galatians, that we don't need anything more than Jesus Christ to be in the proper relationship with God.

1 Thessalonians

Date written – 50
Author - Paul
Summary – 1 Thessalonians may have been written to Christians in Thessalonica who struggled with understanding the second coming of Christ and what that meant for Christians who died before his return. Some believed in the early church that Christ would come back within a generation due to some of Jesus' teachings (like John 21:22). Paul encourages them toward purity, love and responsibility.

2 Thessalonians

Date written – 51
Author - Paul
Summary – Paul wrote this letter to alleviate even more concerns they had about the return of Christ. It seems some had taught Christ has already come back (2 Thess 2:1-2) and that there were false teachers in their midst (2:3-15). Paul writes this letter to inform and encourage them toward faithfulness so that they will not be led away from God through false teaching.

1 Timothy

Date written – 62
Author - Paul
Summary – 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus are called the "Pastoral epistles". They were written by Paul to help equip these men of God toward a more productive ministry. They were also written to help these ministers of the Gospel (Timothy and Titus) to effectively lead in the congregations they were a part of. These three letters are very practical covering everything from how to dress to qualifications of elders and deacons and how to treat others in the church.

2 Timothy

Date written – 63
Author - Paul

Summary – Written as Paul nears the end of his life in Roman prison. He writes this to ensure the faithfulness of Timothy and to encourage him to finish strong just as Paul is doing himself. The most famous verse in this book is found in 2 Timothy 3:14-17 where Paul encourages him to study the scriptures and explains the extent of their usefulness.

Titus

Date written – 62
Author - Paul
Summary – The last of Paul's pastoral letters, this letter is written to give instruction to Titus on how Christians are to live and what should be taught to those in the church. Another very practical letter.

Philemon

Date written – 60
Author - Paul
Summary – One of four letters Paul wrote from prison. This letter was written to reconcile the relationship between a slave and a slave master who were both Christians in the church in Colossae. The slave, Onesimus, came to Paul so he could help him make things right again with his master, Philemon. Paul put the pressure on Philemon to make things right, even if it wasn't easy.

3. <u>General Letters</u>

Hebrews

Date written – between 60 & 70
Author - Unknown
Summary – Hebrews reads more like a sermon than a letter and that may have been how the book of Hebrews started out. Hebrews is about the sufficiency of Christ and his exaltation above all others in all creation. The book proves that by showing his fulfillment of many things found in the Old Testament including the priesthood, sacrificial system, and many other things. This letter was undoubtedly written to a Jewish audience, who would have readily seen the connections the writer of Hebrews makes with the Old Testament.

James

Date written – 44
Author - James
Summary – James was the half brother of Jesus, sharing the same mother, Mary. James is often thought of as the Proverbs of the New Testament. It is very practical and easy to understand. This is a great place to start studying the Bible if you are looking for something practical and easily applicable.

1 Peter

Date written – 65
Author - Peter
Summary – 1 & 2 Peter were written to remind Christians of their special status with God so that they could endure some pretty intense persecution. Peter speaks to unjust suffering and living as a Christian in a hostile world.

2 Peter

Date written – 65
Author - Peter
Summary – 2 Peter was written near the end of Peter's life and he is calling them to the truth and reminding them of the legitimacy of the Gospel, that what Christ had done for them was real. As an eyewitness who is about to die defending his faith, he wants to make sure those he is leaving behind will hold true to the Gospel because Christ will return and Christians are called to live with that in mind.

1 John

Date written – 90
Author - John
Summary – If Timothy and Titus are pastoral letters to individuals, 1-3 John read like pastoral letters written in love to help them grow closer to God and to other Christians. In 1 John, John tells us what it means to walk in the light and just how connected our love of God is with our love for others (1 John 3). We also get more "insider" facts about who Jesus is and what he has done for us.

2 John

Date written – 90
Author - John
Summary – This letter is addressed probably to a local congregation in order to help them combat false teaching. That false teaching had to do with whether or not Jesus really came in the flesh. John, who knew Jesus first hand, assures them that he did.

3 John

Date written – 90
Author - John

Summary – 3 John is written toward a specific problem in a specific church. A man named Diotrephes was causing a problem in the church and John writes to Gaius, a leader in the church, in order to help him deal with this issue.

Jude

Date written – 70
Author - Jude
Summary – Jude is very much like 2 Peter and is written to combat wickedness in the church. Jude uses several examples from scripture and Jewish tradition who did the same things and were punished by God.

4. <u>Apocalyptic</u>

Revelation

Date written – 90s
Author - John
Summary – Revelation is an often misunderstood book. It was written to Christians who were undergoing some severe persecution in order for them to have the courage to hold to their faith, even if it meant they would die for Christ. Much of what is found in the book has already taken place but a few things still have not. The book concludes the New Testament with a beautiful picture of how this world will end up. Everything will be made right and whole again and there will be no more pain, tears or death as we live in perfect relationship with God.

Who We Are

We are a Christian ministry that helps people start home churches through providing support to potential and current home church leaders. You don't have to spend years on a church staff and have college degrees in ministry (although they are welcome to help!) to be qualified. You can be a mechanic and start a home church…a teacher and start a home church…retired and start a home church.

We are here to help you get the support you or others you know need to get started!

How We Help

We provide the resources needed to help you get started. This includes:

- An online community for encouragement
- Online training that combines our best resources in one streamlined pathway
- Dozens of PDF tools to equip you to succeed
- Coaching to tackle the specific issues you face.
- Training for your home church members so they have ministry skills and disciplines

You can join a community where people interact, encourage and pray for each other as they live out the home church planting life together.

All of this is done through an online learning community where you can quickly and easily connect with all of the resources we have developed that are helping home church leaders around the world.

How to Start

Anyone can start, no cost, to start a home church. Our Prepwork will help you lay a biblical foundation for a home church and assembly the building blocks you need for a solid foundation to start a home church. You will also learn a few things to help you prayerfull consider if starting a home church is right for you in this season. This Prepwork comes with a Field Guide, which is a fillable PDF, so that when you are done you will have a guidebook in your hand that you have created, specific to the vision you are finding in scripture and through prayer.

Take the Prepwork Here