

## Introduction

### Importance of the Word as a means of growth

#### A. ESSENTIAL FOR SPIRITUAL HEALTH

(1 Pet. 2:2\* like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,)

##### Attitude

Newborn babies "drink for their lives." You need to be in the Word as though your life depends on it—because it does!

This passage is not just about new Christians. Peter says that this attitude should characterize *all* Christians.

##### Appetite

Appetite is normally cultivated—it doesn't just happen magically.

Most people don't start drinking beer or coffee because they like the taste. They drink them because they like the effect—then they *develop* a taste.

This is the way it usually is with the Word. It can be difficult, and it is not always super-exciting. But the effect is great, so this helps us cultivate an appetite for it (EXAMPLE: PEOPLE WHO HAVE COMPLETED UNITS 1&2).

Ask God to give you an insatiable hunger for his Word. Then by faith, expose yourself to it—and watch God answer!

##### Aim

Peter says the goal is not merely that we may "know," but that we may "grow."

This is the clearest passage that the Word is a means of growth ("salvation" here is a synonym for sanctification).

See also Psalm 1; Matt. 7:24-27; Jn. 8:31,32; 17:17; 2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2; 1 Tim. 4:6. There is no growth apart from God's Word! No amount of intake from other means of growth can make up for intake of the Word!

#### How often do we need Word intake?

Acts 2:42 And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

- The early church received apostolic teaching "daily."

MANNA (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4) - They had to gather it daily—they could not store it up. It didn't taste exciting, but it kept them from disease.

Deut. 8:3- "And He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD

Ps. 1:2; 119:97 - The psalmist meditated on the Word "day and night."

#### B. ESSENTIAL FOR SPIRITUAL MATURITY

(Heb. 5:11-14\*\*)11 Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

These people were in a state of arrested spiritual development because they were relatively ignorant of God's Word. We can conclude that *spiritual maturity is dependent upon in-depth understanding of God's Word*. The author holds high standards of biblical understanding for the average Christian (to whom this is addressed). He paints a 4-fold profile of spiritually mature people:

1. **We should be familiar with the content of scripture** (Heb. 5:13 - "accustomed to the word of righteousness"). This means we should know all of the major doctrines of the Bible (sin, salvation, nature of Christ and man, etc.), and be familiar enough that we could find where they are taught.
2. **We should be able to digest solid food**. This means that they should be able not only to understand and apply to their own lives the simpler "milk" truths (Old Testament BASICS [Heb 6:1,2]; LOGIC OF SALVATION) . . .

. . . they should also be able to do this with more advanced spiritual truths (Jesus and Melchizedek >> RELATIONSHIP OF OLD COVENANT TO NEW COVENANT; BLESSINGS INVOLVED IN BEING "IN CHRIST"). Although we start by depending on being taught and continue to need teaching, we should all get to the point where we can feed ourselves from the Word. This is why we teach you Bible study methods.

3. **We should be able to teach others.** The gifted teacher is able to explain and apply "solid food" to groups of people. But even if we don't have this gift, we should at least be able to explain and apply biblical truths to other Christians. This is different from the spiritual gift of teaching, which not all Christians have (1 Cor. 12:29).

4. **We should be able to discern good and evil** (1 Cor. 2:15 - "able to appraise all things"). .

This refers to the developed ("who through *practice* have *trained* their senses") ability to appraise every major area of life from the perspective of God's Word, and reach a verdict about whether it is true or false, of God or not, spiritually helpful or harmful (CRITICAL THINKING ABOUT TEACHING >> 1 Cor. 14:29, BOOKS, MOVIES, LECTURES, DISCUSSIONS, RELATIONSHIPS, PARENTING, DECISIONS, etc.)

Again, this is different from the spiritual gift of discernment (1 Cor. 12:10) which is evidently the ability to detect demonic activity in ways that most other Christians cannot

### "How quickly should we be able to attain this level of understanding?"

We know these folks are behind schedule, but it's not clear how long they had been Christians. Another passage gives us a better idea.

Read 1 Cor. 2:13-3:2\*\* ...which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. 15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. 16 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE SHOULD INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ. 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. 2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able,

This was about two to four years after Paul planted this church. So we can look forward to a substantial level of maturity within a few years—if we get into the Word seriously and are willing to be "doers" as well as "hearers!"

In-depth knowledge of God's Word has been a core value in Xenos over the years. We have a reputation for many things (some good and some not so good), but one good thing is the reputation for, "knowing their Bible." Much of our fruit can be traced to our conviction that all Christians can and should learn the Bible *to this level*. We hope this remains a core value, but it won't happen automatically. ***What would be some signs that we may be going soft in this area?***

- ***Viewing Biblical knowledge is a gift.*** If we hear an increasing number of people referring to this level of scriptural knowledge as a "gift" which most do not have. There are certain gifts which involve special ability to assimilate and communicate God's Word, and we must be careful not to expect everyone to possess these abilities. But if we begin to view any of the abilities listed above as gifts, we are compromising what God says all should develop, and even our gifts won't be as effective as they could.
- ***Emphasizing emotional experience opposed to truth.*** If we hear an increasing number of people who speak of spiritual maturity or spirituality more in terms of having emotional experiences with God than in terms of knowing God's Word. "I don't want to learn more of the Bible; I want to experience God." Having emotional experiences with God is NOT wrong or unimportant; we can expect that this will happen as we grow. Bible knowledge alone does not equal spiritual maturity. But our emotions and experiences are simply not reliable guides. Unless our lives are firmly anchored in

God's Word, our emotions and experiences will lead us away from God into all kinds of trouble

- *Emphasizing love opposed to truth.*

Loving people is important; Paul says it is the key fruit of the Spirit. And there is such a thing as knowledge without love that is prideful and ugly. But love must be tempered and informed by the truth, or it degenerates into sentimentality (Phil. 1:9; 1 Jn. 3:18). It is not by merely loving one another that we grow and mature; it is by speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:14,15).

### **ESSENTIAL FOR EFFECTIVE MINISTRY (2 Tim. 3:16-4:4)**

(2 Tim. 3:16-17\*): All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

"Teaching": instructing people in biblical doctrine

"Reproof/rebuke": confronting people about personal disobedience

"Correction": illuminating areas of ignorance and replacing them with correct attitudes and actions

"Training in righteousness": showing people what godliness looks like and how to attain it

4:1 I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.

- **We learn the Word for ourselves, and to give to others!** Learning AND using the Word in our serving of others is essential for several reasons; our ability to benefit from the Word will diminish past a certain point, unless we are willing to use it to serve others. Like the Dead Sea, we will be filled with all kinds of nutrients but void of life because there is no outflow.
- Using the Word in ministry also **aids retention** ("Use it or lose it.").  
EXAMPLES: Sharing in home group what you've been learning here; reaching out to younger Christians individually to help them with what you've learned; praying for opportunities to share what you are learning.
- **Competence** in the Word **is required for effective ministry**. Unless our ministries are Word-oriented, they will be feelings/experience-centered, vulnerable to deception, etc.
- **Without the Word you will rely on human wisdom** (yours and others), manipulation, personality, opinions, etc. If we believe that it is the Word that changes people's lives, we will make communicating it to others in ministry the very center of what we do! We need to emphasize using the word in communication in witnessing and counseling ministry.

(Heb. 4:12\*) For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

### **Relationship With Other Means Of Growth**

#### **PRAYER**

In our prayer life, the Bible provides the proper basis for knowing God by telling us what he is like. According to Jesus, effective prayer is based on the Word (John 15:7). John promises that "if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him" (1 John 5:14). This is a powerful promise, but it is conditional. We have to ask "according to His will." But how do we know what God's will is apart from Scripture?

#### **MINISTRY**

Serving love is a means of growth, but effective service involves "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). No ministry will have the power God wants it to have unless the one ministering is powerful in the Word of God. Even task-oriented ministers who may not teach or preach need the wisdom available in God's Word. We will not be effective at ministry or in our personal growth if we cannot fend off the attacks of Satan, and this is not possible unless we are able to cite our authority from Scripture.

#### **BODY-LIFE**

The basis for Christian fellowship is not only love but truth. The Body of Christ is a community of truth, and these two can never be separated. In Philippians 1:9-10 Paul prays, "that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ." Truth is the framework that makes real love possible. This is why we are called on to "speak the truth in love" to one another (Ephesians 4:15).

**DISCIPLINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

The discipline of the Holy Spirit is a means of growth, but it won't be effective unless we respond appropriately. We need Scripture, like that in Hebrews 12, to teach us how to respond to discipline in a way that promotes growth, as we shall see.

**Overview of the Bible**

Teacher's note: Orient students to the "Overview of the Bible" chart in their notes. The left column lists key dates on the biblical timeline. The middle column describes major themes and events. The column on the right notes relevant passages.

**We need the big picture**

When we study a passage in isolation without knowing the main events and themes in the Bible, we are more prone to misunderstand what we are reading. Students of the Bible need to appreciate the broader context in order to accurately interpret individual passages. What follows is an overview of the Bible. In it we will briefly look at key events in biblical history and the themes that tie them together.

**A single story**

What would you expect if you read a book that was written by dozens of people from a variety of cultures spread out over 1500 years and four different languages? The end result would no doubt be a mishmash of unconnected stories, ideas, and sayings.

Instead, what we find when we read the Bible is a well crafted story, complete with main characters, a developing plot line, a climax and conclusion. Despite the authors being separated by time, culture, geography and language, the books they wrote reveal a single author, God himself, behind the scenes crafting an amazing story.

Dates	Events	Scriptures
?	Creation > Intimacy with God and dominion, conditioned on obedience (the forbidden fruit symbolizes the choice to obey or disobey God)	Genesis 1, 2
<p><b>Creation</b>            God created humans in his own image, his own likeness. Because they bore God's image, Adam and Eve were able to enjoy close, <i>personal interaction with him</i>. God also gave mankind <i>the authority to rule</i> over his creation and over every creature that moves on the ground (Gen. 1:26). God gave Adam and Eve a choice, represented by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, to trust or to disobey him. He told them not to eat from the fruit of this tree. If they obeyed God and trusted him, they could enjoy his presence and share his dominion over creation. But if they ate the fruit, this act of disobedience would be a rejection of God's authority the forfeiture of God's blessings.</p>		

?	The Fall and its effects: > <b>#1 SEPARATION FROM GOD</b> > <b>#2 LOST DOMINION</b> God's Rescue Plan (Genesis 3:15)	Genesis 3-11
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The serpent (Satan) persuaded Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. Theologians call their act of disobedience "the Fall" because it marks the introduction of sin into the human race. Two main consequences resulted from the Fall:

### **Separation from God**

Think of how painful it would have been, after being in regular close contact with God, to be driven out of the Garden. To ensure they would never return and to keep them from finding the tree of life, God posted an angel to guard the entrance to the garden. They were not allowed to return to God's presence.

### **Lost dominion**

When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they rejected his offer to rule with him over creation, and chose instead to live under the rule of God's enemy, Satan. As a result, the whole world, according to John, "lies in the power of the evil one." In Ephesians 2 we're described as Satan's subjects: before we knew Christ we walked "according to the Prince of the Power of the Air."

### **God's recovery plan**

Any good story starts out with a problem that needs to be resolved. The Bible is no different: separation from God and lost dominion - these are the problems that frame the rest of the biblical story. They are deep problems that mankind will not be able to fix without outside help. God will need to intervene with a rescue plan.

Our first hint at God's response to these problems comes immediately after the Fall. After the serpent deceives Eve, God curses him (read Genesis 3:15). Just as a good story teller uses foreshadowing to give readers clues about what lies ahead, in Genesis 3:15 we see a hint of how God will begin to address the problems caused by the Fall. Eve's seed will crush the serpent on the head (pointing to the decisive death blow that Christ would deal Satan on the cross) and the serpent will bruise Eve's seed on the heel (referring to the horrible cost Christ incurred in dealing that death blow - crucifixion).

From the very beginning, God has a rescue plan, but as the plot continues, things go from bad to worse. In Genesis 4 we read that Adam and Eve's son Cain kills his brother Abel. By Genesis 6, the author notes that "Every intent of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually."

Things were so bad that God wiped out the human race in a flood and started fresh with Noah. But more problems develop. Noah's descendants become so prideful and audacious that they build a tower to reach the heavens in order to make a name for themselves - a direct affront to God. And so, as Genesis unfolds, we're exposed to the tenacious problem of human rebellion and it's destructive effects. The problems that began the story have only deepened.

2100 BC	The Abrahamic Covenant > Land > Nation > Blessing to the World	Genesis 12:1-3
<p>In the midst of this darkness, God initiates his rescue plan, which he progressively reveals to individuals in the Bible in the form of covenants or agreements. Genesis 12 records one of these covenants - an agreement that God made with Abraham. Read Genesis 12:1-3.</p> <p>Theologians call this the Abrahamic covenant, and in this covenant, God provides a more detailed outline of his plan to rescue humans. The covenant consists of three promises:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Abraham's family will grow into a nation of people.</li> <li>2. this nation will occupy the land of Canaan</li> <li>3. all the nations of the world will be blessed through one of Abraham's descendants</li> </ol> <p>Note that the Hebrew word for "nations" is "mishpaha." The word doesn't refer to nation states like France and Germany. Mishpaha refers to a "cultural group" or what missiologists call a "people group." God is telling Abraham, "one of your male descendants is going to do something that will bless every cultural group of people in the world."</p>		
2100-1800 BC	The Lives of the Patriarchs and the Egyptian Sojourn	Genesis 12-50

Abraham was a patriarch, the father-ruler of his extended family - the Jewish people. He passed the role of father-ruler on to his son Isaac, and Isaac to his son Jacob. God expressed his commitment to honor his original covenant with Abraham to each successive patriarch, despite their moral failings and their barren wives.

Toward the end of Genesis, we see a familiar cycle of moral decline (recall the decline leading up to the flood, and leading up to the tower of Babel) repeated in the lives of the Patriarchs. At one point, 11 of Jacob's 12 sons actually sell their brother Joseph to slave traders. As a result, he is carted off to Egypt.

While in Egypt (show map), Joseph rose to a powerful position in the court of Pharaoh and became his right-hand man. He was a skillful administrator and with God's help, was able to prepare the Egyptians for the coming of a 7-year famine. During the famine, inhabitants of the ancient near east, including Jacob and his 11 remaining sons, had to turn to the Egyptians to obtain the grain they needed to avoid starvation. While in Egypt, Jacob and his sons were reunited with Joseph. He used his influence to help them and they never returned to Canaan. Instead, they and their descendants remained in Egypt for 400 years. During this prolonged stay, the Jews fell out of favor with the Pharaohs and were forced into slave labor.

God used all of these events to honor his covenant with Abraham. It was in Egypt that the small band of people descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob multiplied and grew into "a great nation." When the Jews left Egypt to escape slavery under Pharaoh and cross the Red Sea, there were 600,000 men on foot (see Exodus 12:37). With women and children, that's over a million people!

1440 BC	Exodus from Egypt	Exodus 1-18
<p>In the book of Exodus, we read how God appointed Moses to lead the Jewish nation out of Egypt and back to the land of Canaan. With his brother Aaron at his side, Moses confronted Pharaoh, called down a series of 10 plagues on the Egyptians, and eventually led the Jews out of slavery. Pharaoh pursued the Jews, but God miraculously parted the Red Sea, allowing his people to escape, and engulfing Pharaoh's pursuing army. Safe at last, Moses led them south into the wilderness of the Sinai peninsula (see map).</p>		
1400 BC	The Mosaic Covenant (a.k.a. "Old Covenant") > National Identity and the terms	Exodus 19- Deuteronomy 34



	of staying in the land > Atonement blessing via sacrificial system (addresses problem #1 from the Fall: SEPARATION FROM GOD)	
<p>The logistical challenge of leading more than a million people through a barren wilderness must have been daunting. In order to function as a nation, the Jews needed a way to govern themselves - a system of law to guide their social and spiritual lives.</p> <p>On Mount Sinai, God dictated the terms of his law to Moses in the form of a covenant between himself and the people - the Mosaic Covenant. This agreement obligated the Jews to obey an elaborate system of laws. It included not just the ten commandments, but over 600 laws explaining how the Jews were to live and interact with God.</p> <p>The law made it clear that the Jews were not able to directly approach God because of their sin. The law also hinted at how God might one day remove the barrier of sin between himself and his people. Once a year the Jewish high priest would place his hands on a goat and confess the sins of the people, symbolically transferring their sins to the goat. Then he would shoot the goat into the wilderness - away from the Israelite's camp - a vivid symbol of sin being removed from the people. Then the high priest would take another goat, kill it, and spatter its blood over the top of a box (the ark). God's anger towards the people because of their sin was satisfied when he saw the blood and recognized that an innocent, spotless substitute had died in their place. This "<b>atonement blessing</b>" symbolically paid for human sin by the sacrifice of an innocent substitute.</p> <p>In the law, God was foreshadowing his ultimate plan to address problem 1 - our separation from God caused by sin.</p>		
1375-1050 BC	The Conquest of the Land and Subsequent Struggles	Joshua-Judges-Ruth

God wanted the Jews to enter the land that he had promised them. But the people were afraid. Their fear of the inhabitants was greater than their faith in God. Instead of taking possession of what God wanted to give them, they wandered in the wilderness aimlessly for 40 years. After Moses died, God selected Joshua to lead a new generation of Jews into Canaan. Under his leadership, God's people finally entered the promised land. Theologians call this period of Israel's history "The Conquest" - a time when the Jews went into the land, destroyed many of the inhabitants, and occupied it. You can read about the military campaigns involved in this conquest in the book of Joshua. Once the Jews entered the land, they were unable to govern or defend themselves effectively. It says repeatedly in Judges that there "was no king in Israel" and that instead, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." The people didn't submit to God's rule, and when he delegated his rule to charismatic leaders called "Judges", the Judges often failed to represent his interests.

1050 BC	The Monarchy begins with Saul	1 Sam. 1-2 Kings
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Having rejected God's provision for leadership, the 12 tribes of Israel demanded a king to rule them. God agreed to delegate his authority as the true king of Israel to a line of human kings, starting with Saul. This period of Israel's history is called the time of "Monarchy." Saul was man's ideal king - tall, good looking, a great warrior. But he had a fatal flaw: he was not able to submit to God's leadership. Instead of expressing God's rule to the people, he disobeyed God. As a result, God removed him as king. God then selected David to be king in Saul's place. Instead of choosing a tall, strong man like Saul, God selected a boy, the youngest son of Jesse. Instead of choosing a wealthy, powerful political figure, God selected a shepherd. Like Saul, David's life was checkered by sin - he did some terrible things. But confronted with his sin, David showed a willingness to submit to God. That's why he's called a man after God's own heart. David's real strength, and what distinguished him from Saul, was his confidence in God's ability to overcome any obstacle (e.g. Goliath), and his willingness to admit his sin and turn to God (e.g. Psalm 51).

1000 BC	The Davidic Covenant ==> King & kingdom blessing (addresses problem #2 from the	2 Sam. 7:12-16
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	fall: LOST DOMINION)	
<p>During his reign, God initiates a third great covenant with David. In the Abrahamic covenant, God hinted that one of Abraham's descendants would bless the whole world. The Mosaic covenant provided a picture of how God would deal with the problem of sin separating man from God. In this covenant with David, we get the first hint of how God will deal with the second problem caused by the Fall, loss of dominion.</p> <p>2 Samuel 7:12-14 (read)</p> <p>God is talking about Solomon, David's son. We know this because he says "he will build my house." But God goes on to say that he will establish his throne <i>forever</i> through one of David's descendants, clearly moving beyond Solomon and into future. By promising to establish an eternal kingdom through one of Solomon's descendants, God is holding out the hope of restoring the dominion that Adam and Eve lost in the garden. The Bible uses the title "Messiah" or "anointed/chosen one" to describe this promised king.</p>		
931 BC	Divided Monarchy	
<p>The 12 tribes of Israel were united under Saul, David and Solomon. But after Solomon, the kingdom divided into two separate countries: Israel (10 tribes in the north) and Judah (2 tribes in the south). This period of Jewish history is called the "Divided Monarchy."</p>		
750-570 BC	The Prophets & their two Portraits of the Messiah ==> Servant (Isaiah 53) ==> King (Isaiah 9, 11)	Isaiah, Ezekiel, Micah, Jeremiah

During the Divided Monarchy, men called the "prophets" were empowered by God to speak to the Jews (in either kingdom) about their compliance with the Mosaic law, and what the future held for Israel and Judah. The prophets spoke directly with the kings of the northern and southern tribes about their failure to keep God's law, how they were being corrupted by the influence of surrounding nations, and how if they failed to comply to God's law, God would move in judgment against them.

The Prophets also kept reiterating the covenants that God made with Abraham and David. They kept alive the hope that one day, God would solve the problem of separation from God due to sin and lost dominion.

Separation from God  
Isaiah 53:5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. 6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.

Isaiah describes the life of a man identified as "God's servant, God's chosen one." Here we pick up the concept of substitution again, only this time it's not the blood of an animal sacrifice being presented to God, but the blood of a human - a human sacrifice to pay for human sin.

This man, this suffering servant, is called God's chosen one or "messiah." But instead of being depicted here as a coming king, he serves as a human sacrifice to atone for the sin of the people. Through his sacrifice, all of the people of the world are blessed (see 52:15). The first problem caused by the Fall, sin causing separation from God, isn't ultimately dealt with by animal sacrifice, but instead by the death of this man.

Lost dominion

Isaiah 9:6 "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. 7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this."

This child who is born is described as a human, but Isaiah says that he is also God. This human son will sit on "the throne of David." Isaiah is clearly tying this promise to the Davidic Covenant. He is describing a descendant of David and Solomon who will restore God's dominion forever.

The Prophets keep affirming God's covenant with Abraham and David and they provide more information about how God will address the problems that arose at the beginning of our story.

722 BC	Destruction of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) by Assyria	
<p>The kings of Israel, without exception, failed to keep God's law. God punished Israel by allowing Assyria to attack and destroy them. The 10 northern tribes were wiped off the face of the earth.</p>		
600 BC	Exile of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) to Babylon > Daniel's vision of the Kingdom of God	Daniel 2, 7, 8, 9
<p>The kingdom of Judah lasted over a century longer Israel, but also went south spiritually. The southern tribes were conquered and taken into captivity by the Babylonians. Unlike the northern kingdom, however, the people of Judah managed to maintain their national identity despite losing their homeland.</p> <p>What a dark time this was for the Jewish people! God promised to make them a nation, but now they had lost their sovereignty; God promised them land to live in, but now they were torn away from it; instead of being a blessing to the world, they were being kicked around like dogs. They must have wondered if all the covenants and promises would ever come true. Yet even in this darkest hour, God affirms his promises to Abraham and David through the prophets.</p> <p>The prophet Daniel, a Jew living in exile in Babylon, predicted the rise and fall of several kingdoms (Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome). After all these, he says, God's kingdom will destroy them all and be established in their place(Daniel 2:44 read). This is a bold claim to make while God's people are in captivity in a foreign country.</p>		
550 BC	The New Covenant Foretold	Jer. 31:31-33

The Jews were exiled to Babylon because they couldn't keep the terms of the Law, the Mosaic covenant. The Law foreshadowed how God would remove the separation between man and God caused by sin, but the Jews utterly failed to obey it. If they couldn't relate to God through his law, what would they do?

During the life of Jeremiah, God revealed that he would work through his people under a new arrangement called the "New Covenant." (Jeremiah 31:31-34 read)

In the new covenant, we see God continues to affirm his desire to be with his people. He wants to be their God, to forgive their sins, write his law on their heart, and to know and live inside them. Today, through the Spirit living inside of us, we enjoy this new way of relating to God that Jeremiah predicted. We don't have to interact with God through the terms of the law of Moses anymore.

538 BC	Return from Exile	Ezra-Nehemiah
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During the southern kingdom's exile in Babylon, the Medes and Persians conquered the Babylonians and adopted a more tolerant policy toward the Jews. After 70 years of exile, the Persian king Artaxerxes I began allowing the Jews to trickle back to their homeland. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah narrate their return. Maybe God hadn't forgotten his promises after all.

After the Jews return and are reestablished in the land, there is a 400 year period of silence - no prophets, no voice from God, no new books of the Bible. Scholars call this the "intertestamental period" - the time between the writing of the Old and New Testaments.

4 BC-33 AD	Jesus Christ's Coming #1 (Servant) > Atonement blessing fulfilled (addresses problem #1 from the Fall: SEPARATION FROM GOD)	Jn. 1:29, Mk. 10:45, Lk. 22:19, 20
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At the end of all that silence, instead of sending another prophetic spokesman, God comes down to earth himself in the form of Jesus Christ and confronts humanity face to face. Consider how John the baptist introduces him:

John 1:29 "The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'"

Is it not possible to appreciate the power and importance of this statement without understanding some of the themes and events in the Bible that we have covered so far.

Recall that God told Abraham, "through one of your descendants, all the peoples of the world would be blessed." God told the Israelites that sin must be paid for by the blood offering of an spotless, innocent substitute. God told Isaiah a human, my chosen one, will have to die and atone for human sin. And here, in John 1:29, when John sees Christ coming to be baptized, he tells us, "behold the lamb of God who takes a way the sin of the world."

This is such a rich passage! So many of the images and symbols - the foreshadowing we've studied so far - are called to mind in this verse.

Jesus was the sacrificial lamb symbolized in the ceremonial law, he was the chosen one who would come and die for the people, he was the descendant of Abraham through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed, he was the solution to man's first problem: separation from God caused by our sin.

Jesus was not just a religious innovator who put a new spin on Judaism. He was standing on the shoulders of centuries of prophecy, of symbols, and promises that all pointed to him - all describing why he was coming and what he would do.

33 AD-?	The Church Age ==> The atonement blessing expounded (Epistles) and expanded (Acts)	Mt. 24:14; 28:18-20; Acts 1:8
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After his death and resurrection, Jesus commissioned the disciples to tell the world about God's rescue plan - the gospel. (Matthew 28:18-20 read) Notice in verse 19 he says "make disciples of all the *nations*." The word for nations in Greek is "ethnoi", which is synonymous with the Hebrew term, "mishpaha," that we encountered in Genesis 12. As the church responds to Jesus' commission to take the gospel to all the nations (cultural groups), we are witnessing the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham to bless the peoples of the earth through one of his descendants.

During the church age, the blessing of the atonement expands to more and more people. (Acts 1:8 read). The gospel moves out like a shockwave from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and even "to the remotest parts of the Earth."

70 AD	Destruction of Jerusalem and Scattering of the Jews Worldwide spread of the gospel	
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In 70 AD, after the church had established a foothold in cities all over the Roman world, the Romans attacked Jerusalem. They burned the city and deported its population. During his ministry, Jesus actually predicted that this would occur (Luke 21:24 read). This verse also suggests that the removal of the Jews from their homeland wouldn't be permanent. By saying "Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles *until* the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled", Jesus is implying that at a later date, Jerusalem will once again be under Jewish control.

During "the time of the Gentiles", the church is to carry out Christ's command to "make disciples of all the nations." Is the church today succeeding in this mission? 3,500 of the world's 13,000 cultural groups are "unreached." In other words, there is no church within those cultures actively sharing the gospel. Worldwide, the number of evangelical Christians is increasing three times faster than global population growth. The church in nonwestern countries is growing the fastest - 35% of the population is Christian in Korea, 50% in Africa. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were only 250,000 evangelical Christians in Latin America. Now there are 60 million. 8 out of 10 people on the earth have a Bible written in their own language and 94% have a New Testament. Encouraging numbers, but there's still more work to do.\*

\* Information in the paragraph was taken from Patrick Johnstone, *The Church is Bigger than You Think* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1998), p. 110-114 and "Status of A Church for Every People and the Gospel for Every Person" - [www.ad2000.org/status.htm](http://www.ad2000.org/status.htm), as of 5/17/01.

1948, 1967	Regathering of Israel	
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For two millennia, Jews have been living all over the world without a homeland. In the late 1800s, however, they began trickling back into Palestine. In 1947, the British ceded control of Palestine to the United Nations, who in turn, designated part of it to become a Jewish state. On May 14, 1948, the modern nation of Israel came into existence under the leadership of David Ben-Gurion.

From the beginning, surrounding Arab countries opposed Israel's existence, but Israel defended herself and remained in the land. In 1967, after the "Six-Day War" against Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, Israel also gained full control of Jerusalem.

Never in human history has a widely distributed group of ancient peoples like the Jews reconstituted themselves as political entity, back in their homeland. Where are the ancient Hittites or the Jebusites? Gone! But the Jews, against all odds, were able to reconvene in their land. And this was predicted well in advance, not just by Christ, but the Old Testament prophets as well.

?	Jesus Christ's Coming #2 (King) The Tribulation Period	Rev. 4-22
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As we move toward the end of the Bible's story, we've seen the answer to problem 1 - separation from God caused by sin. But what about the problem of lost dominion? What about God's promise to David that one of his descendants, a God-king, would come and sit on his throne? The reemergence of Israel as a nation in her land is an encouraging sign, but we still haven't seen the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant or the final solution to our second problem.

The problem of lost dominion won't be resolved until Christ ("messiah") returns. When Jesus comes for the second time, it won't be to die for sin, but instead to set up his throne as messiah-king and reestablish his rule. Of course, we need a climactic end to any good story, and the Bible delivers. Before God's kingdom can be established, one more obstacle needs to be removed... the kingdom of Satan.

Just prior to the return of Christ, the Bible describes a seven year period of political turmoil, war, and conflict, a time dominated by a dynamic, Satanically-empowered leader called the "Antichrist." Acting as Satan's agent, the antichrist will set up a government and rule the world for a while. This period of time is called the "Tribulation."

Recall Daniel's prediction (see Dan. 2:44) that God's kingdom would arrive at the end of history to smash all of the kingdoms that came before it. This is how it will be when Christ comes back: he will defeat Satan and the Antichrist; he will vanquish all of his enemies and set up his kingdom on Earth. For more on this period of history and these events, check out unit 1, week 9.

?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; The Nations are blessed as per the Abrahamic Covenant</li> <li>&gt; King &amp; kingdom blessing fulfilled: restored to co-rulership (addresses problem #2 from the Fall: LOST DOMINION)</li> </ul>	Rev. 5:9,10 Rev. 7:9
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The apostle John describes what it will be like after Jesus returns in Revelation 5:5,9,10.

(vs. 5 read) Notice that this passage is about the messiah, the "root" or descendant of David, the promised king in 2 Samuel 7 and Isaiah 9 - Jesus Christ.

(vs. 9 read) Jesus is described as...

... a sacrifice for human sin - "slain", "purchased with your blood."

... someone who blesses all the world - - "every tribe, tongue, people, and nation" - every "mishpaha," every "ethnoi," every people group as God once promised Abraham!

Problem 1 is resolved. Jesus absorbs God's wrath for the sin of humanity. There's no more separation. God is together again with his people.

(vs. 10 read) Notice how lost dominion is restored not just to God, but to us. John says, "they will reign upon the Earth."

Problem 2 is resolved. Lost dominion is restored.

In Christ, through his death on the cross and his return as reigning king, God's promises to Abraham and David are fulfilled. The solution to lost dominion and separation from God are tied together in Revelation 7:9:

Rev 7:9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing **before the throne** and **before the Lamb**, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands...

?	> The New Heavens and the New Earth (eternal Life)	Rev. 22:1-3
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Revelation 22 provides a picture of our final state with God in the new heavens and new earth. As you read this, think of all of the loose ends in the overall story of the Bible that John is tying together:

(vs. 1 read)

"The throne of God" - the reigning God who has dominion

"and of the lamb" - the atoning sacrifice for our sin

(vs. 2 read)

"... the healing of the nations" - the 'ethnoi', the people groups

"on either side of the river was the tree of life" - This was one of the trees Adam and Eve were allowed to eat. It was also the specific tree that they were banished from when God expelled them from the garden.

Now their access to the tree of life is restored.

(vs. 3 read)

"...no longer be any curse" - the original curse that resulted from the fall is removed

"...the throne of God and of the lamb" - the messiah-king who restores dominion and the lamb who dies for sin and removes our separation from God!

When you read a story like this, and you think of the complex themes, the imagery, the foreshadowing - all of this developing as the story unfolds and all of it so neatly tied together at the end - you have to wonder, who wrote this book? If God didn't oversee the recording of this story, how did this happen? How could a book with so many authors who are so different from each other ever achieve this?

So that's an overview of the Bible - a single story written by God through many authors. Having the big picture (the broader context) will help you better understand the individual passages that we study.

## **The function of the books of the Bible**

### **Old Testament (39 books)**

Old Testament books focus primarily on the nation of Israel.

**Narrative Books: THINGS THAT HAPPENED THAT WERE IMPORTANT TO GOD'S PLAN:**

Multiplying descendants of Abraham, forming them into a nation with their own land, and ruling them through a king whose heart was after God's.

- Key narrative books: Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, 1 & 2 Samuel
- The narrative books are selective in what they record, focusing on people and events that relate to the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants.

**Books of the Prophets: GOD'S VIEW OF WHERE HIS PLAN IS AT AND WHERE IT'S GOING IN THE FUTURE**

- The prophets serve as "covenant prosecutors." They expose Israel's (the defendant's) failure to keep the terms of the Mosaic covenant and warn of the consequences.
- The prophets also serve as God's spokespersons. They give increasingly clearer pictures of how God is being faithful to his covenant promises (above) to Abraham and David.
- Key prophetic books: Isaiah & Daniel

Wisdom Books: HOW TO ORIENT YOUR LIFE AROUND GOD'S PLAN

- Key wisdom books: Psalms & Proverbs

### **New Testament (27 books)**

New Testament books focus on the body of Christ & the nations of the world.

Narrative Books: WHAT JESUS DID AND IS DOING IN THE CHURCH: Jesus announced the arrival of his kingdom and paid for the sins of the world on the cross. Within these narratives are "parables" that illustrate Jesus' theology in vivid, pictorial ways. Jesus also works through the church, the body of Christ, to spread his message in the world.

- Key Narrative books: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, & Acts

Letters (epistles): WHAT JESUS DID AND IS DOING IN OUR LIVES: Urging believers to come more fully under His rule by responding to the Cross. This involves taking His message to the world as we follow Him personally and live in close fellowship with one another

- Key Letters: Romans, Galatians & Ephesians

Prophecy: WHAT JESUS WILL DO: Bring about an end to this present phase of history and establish his rule on the earth.

- The Book of Revelation

The New Testament is the final unfolding of God's plan through Jesus Christ, the promised descendant of Abraham and David (Matt. 1:1; Rev. 7:9).

### **Memory Verses**

1 Pet. 2:2\* - We will always be dependent on God's Word for spiritual growth.

1 Cor. 2:13-3:2\*\* & Heb. 5:11-14\*\* - Our perspective, world view, and ability to discern what is good is dependent on God's Word. An in-depth understanding of the Word is necessary for spiritual maturity.

Heb. 4:12\* - The Bible is applicable in a living way to our daily lives.