

How It All Fits Together

Although the books of the Bible tell a story, they are not ordered chronologically. For the person who is new to the Bible this not only creates confusion, but can cause considerable discouragement. In “How It All Fits Together,” the story of the Bible is told with a clear indication of where each book speaks into the larger story. This short manuscript was crafted by John Hopper, but it is heavily adapted from “The Bible Story,” Rod Smith, www.rodsgarden.50megs.com/Bible.htm, November 2009.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

covering the time from the creation of the world to the time of Christ

GENESIS. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. He created day and night, oceans and sky, dry land and plants, the sun, moon and stars, fish and birds, and land animals. He also created a man he called Adam and a woman called Eve. God looked at all that He had made and declared it very good.

God gave the Garden of Eden as a wonderful place for Adam and Eve to live. In it, God planted every tree that was good for food and pleasant to the eye. God told them they could eat fruit from all the trees except from the Tree of the Knowledge of God and Evil. If they ate from that tree, they would die.

One day, a serpent (whom the Bible later tells us was Satan) fooled Eve. He lied to her and told her that not only would she not die but she would be like God if she ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Eve trusted the serpent instead of God and ate some fruit. Then she persuaded Adam to eat some. As soon as they ate they realized that they had done something wrong. When they heard God approaching, they were ashamed and afraid and tried to hide. God found them and exposed their lack of trust and disobedience, which the Bible calls sin.

As a consequence of their sin, God placed a curse on Adam & Eve, which essentially insured that life would forever be hard for them and their descendants, which is all humanity. In the midst of handing out these consequences, however, God also made a promise that someday one of Eve's descendants would crush Satan and his wicked ways.

After Adam and Eve left the garden, humanity became increasingly evil. There were a few like **JOB** who followed God's ways even when undergoing terrible suffering, but eventually nearly all refused to trust and obey God. As Noah and his family were the only who remained righteous, God decided to destroy all of humanity except Noah and his family. He told Noah to build a large boat called an ark to save his family and the animals from the flood. Noah obeyed God and built the ark. Then God brought two of every kind of animal to the ark. When they were safely inside, God sent a flood that covered the earth even to the tallest mountaintops. Every creature died, except for those that were on the ark.

After the flood, the children of Noah began to fill the earth again, but eventually humanity turned from God again. Their sin came to a head at the Tower of Babel, and God, as with the flood, dealt with this sin through a global judgment. Instead of a flood, this time God divided up humanity by giving people different languages.

A number of generations later, God chose one man named Abraham to start a nation that would worship Him and tell other nations about God. In choosing Abraham, God called him and his wife Sarah to leave their home and travel to the land of Canaan, which is modern day Israel. God promised Abraham that the land of Canaan would belong to his descendants. He also said that his descendants would become a large nation and that through his offspring all nations would be blessed. This was quite a promise since Abraham was an old man and had no children. But Abraham believed God, and God considered him righteous because of his belief.

After waiting for a while for God to fulfill his promise, Abraham decided to help God

out in regards to having a child. He slept with his wife's servant, Hagar, and had a son named Ishmael. God told Abraham his was not the child of the promise and even though Sarah was well beyond the childbearing years, she would give birth to a son. That child came to pass, and she named the child Isaac. Isaac grew up and gave birth to Jacob, whom God later renamed Israel. Jacob had twelve sons who would have families. These families would be called the twelve tribes of Israel.

One of Jacob's sons was named Joseph. His brothers did not like him and sold him into Egyptian slavery. God watched over Joseph, however, and eventually Joseph found himself second in command over all of Egypt. This was all part of God's plan, because eventually Joseph's brothers came to Egypt and he was able to save them and their families from a terrible famine.

EXODUS. The twelve tribes of Israel, known also as the Israelites and later the Jews, lost favor with the Egyptians when Joseph died and they became Egyptian slaves. This slavery lasted some 400 years. Then, God called a man named Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery. Although reluctant, Moses followed God's leading and went to speak to the Egyptian Pharaoh. When Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites leave, God sent ten plagues that devastated the Egyptians but did not touch the Israelites. The last plague killed every firstborn child and animal in all of Egypt. The plague of death passed over the Israelites, which is why every year since then the Jews have celebrated what is called Passover.

In response to the plague of death, Pharaoh let the Israelites leave Egypt. But on their way out, Pharaoh changed his mind and came after the Jews. It was then that God opened the Red Sea for the Israelites to escape. When the Egyptians tried to follow, the Red Sea closed and the Egyptian army was destroyed.

Once out of Egypt, God led the Israelites through the desert to Mt. Sinai. He provided manna (a special kind of bread) and quail to eat as well as a stream of water from a rock. Once at Mt. Sinai, He gave them the Ten Commandments and many other commands. Of all the commands God gave, however, the greatest commands were, "Love God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength," and, "Love your neighbor as yourself." All of the other commands are based on these two.

In addition to commands on how to live, God had the Israelites build a tabernacle (sort of like a portable church) and gave them instructions on how to worship and offer sacrifices for sins. These sacrifices always involved an unblemished animal and the shedding of blood. Many of these worship instructions are found in the book of **LEVITICUS**, a book so named because the tribe of Levi (one of the original twelve tribes) was designated by God to be in charge of worship.

After a year at Mt. Sinai, God led the Israelites to the land promised to Abraham's descendants, which is located roughly within modern-day Israel. After getting a peek of the land, the Israelites were afraid to conquer its inhabitants and so refused to enter despite God's command. God's anger at their disobedience resulted in the Israelites wandering in the desert for forty years until all of the unbelieving adults had died. In addition to an account of these events, a census of the Israelites at this time in history is found in the book of **NUMBERS**.

At the end of the forty years, just before the people would finally enter the Promised Land, Moses reminded the people of what God had done for them and the commandments he had given them. He also described the blessings they would re-

ceive if they obeyed God and the curses if they disobeyed. Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo and saw the Promised Land before he died. All of this is found in the book of **DEUTERONOMY**.

Upon his death, Moses' protégé **JOSHUA** led the Israelites into the Promised Land. God commanded them to completely destroy all of the people since they had long worshipped idols instead of the true God. Whenever they followed God's plan, they found the victory God promised, but whenever they devised their own plan, they were defeated. Eventually they conquered most of the land and lived in it.

After Joshua, many of the Israelites rejected God's ways. As a result, God let the surrounding nations attack and place them in bondage. Whenever they became weary of foreign control, the Israelites cried out to God and in His mercy He raised up rulers known as **JUDGES** to lead them to freedom. For three hundred years, the pattern of sin, defeat, crying out to God, and deliverance by way of a judge repeated itself over and over. Apart from the judges, few men and women were found to honor God in these days. One exception was **RUTH**, who helped a Jewish widow, although she herself was a Moabite.

The last of the judges was a man named Samuel whose life is recorded in **1 SAMUEL**. The Israelites asked Samuel to let them have a king like the other nations. God chose Saul as the first king, but he didn't obey God. So God chose David as king, because David had a heart that followed God. David was no perfect man as seen in **2 SAMUEL**, but his heart was never far from God. So much so that God promised David that one of his descendant's would establish a kingdom that would last forever. David's heart for God is found in his songs. Others like David, who loved the Lord also added their songs to form the collection of **PSALMS**.

The stories of the many kings after David are found in **1 & 2 KINGS** and **1 & 2 CHRONICLES**. The king immediately following David was his son Solomon. He was a very powerful and wealthy king and a prolific writer. He wrote many **PROVERBS** to give instruction in wise living. He wrote **SONG OF SONGS** as a tribute to a new wife. And he wrote **ECCLESIASTES** to say that all of his wisdom and riches were meaningless compared with knowing and obeying God. At God's instruction, Solomon built a beautiful temple in Jerusalem to worship God. But as a result of marrying hundreds of idol-worshipping wives, he began to worship their idols as well. Therefore when Solomon's son became king, God took the ten northern tribes of Israel away from Solomon's descendants and made them a separate kingdom. These ten tribes retained the name of Israel, while the remaining southern tribes took on the name of Judah.

The northern tribes of Israel had evil kings who led the people to worship idols and a host of immoral practices. God sent prophets such as **HOSEA**, **JOEL**, **AMOS** and **MICAH** to warn the northern tribes to turn back to Him, but they did not listen. So, God sent the Assyrians to conquer Israel and take the people away to foreign lands.

While much of the Old Testament is focused on the Israelites, God was concerned about other nations as well. For example, God sent **JONAH** to Nineveh (the capital of Assyria) to warn the Assyrians that God would destroy their city because of all the evil things they did. The Ninevites heeded the warnings and asked God to forgive them, which He did. Soon after, however, Nineveh fell back into wickedness and was eventually destroyed, just as prophesied by **NAHUM**.

The southern tribe of Judah had some good kings who led the Jews to worship God, but they had many bad kings who led them to worship idols. God sent prophets such as **ISAIAH**, **JEREMIAH**, **HABAKKUK** and **ZEPHANIAH** to warn them to turn away from idols, but the people didn't listen. Finally, in judgment God sent the Babylonians to conquer Judah and take most of the people to Babylon. In defeat, the prophet **OBADIAH** spoke out against the Edomites who helped the Babylonians in Judah's destruction. In addition, the Israelites lamented their losses as recorded in the book called **LAMENTATIONS**.

Despite their defeat, God did not abandon the Jews in Babylon. He raised up **EZEKIEL** to tell the Jews that God was still in control even though Jerusalem and its temple would be destroyed. He also raised up a Jewish man named **DANIEL** to such a place of influence in Babylon that soon Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar worshipped the true God. Nebuchadnezzar's descendants did not fear God, however, and in time God gave the Babylon kingdom over to the Persians.

Once under Persian control, the Persian King Cyrus became sympathetic to the Jews and let them return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple in the days of **EZRA**. But despite royal permission, it was not until encouraged by **HAGGAI** and **ZECHARIAH** that the Jews actually completed the task. Not long after the completion of the temple, Ezra returned to be its priest.

Not all were pleased at the Jews' return to Jerusalem, including a man named Haman. He convinced one of the Persian kings after Cyrus to destroy the Jews. But God raised up a young Jewish woman named **ESTHER** to be queen and thwart Haman's plan.

Although the Jews had rebuilt their temple and averted extermination, their capital city Jerusalem was still in shambles from the days when Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed it. This bothered **NEHEMIAH** greatly, who led the charge in seeing the city's wall rebuilt and city life renewed. Civic renewal was not all that was needed; moral and spiritual renewal was needed as well. **MALACHI** spoke to this point and reminded the people, as did the other prophets, that eventually God would send a Messiah to save them from their enemies.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

covering the life of Christ and days of the early followers of Christ

Following Malachi, there were no prophets or messages from God for 400 or so years. The Persians were conquered by the Greeks, then the Greeks by the Romans, which meant the Jews had to continually adjust to the rulers of the day. All the while they waited for the Messiah. This was about 2,000 years ago.

At the end of the 400 years, a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of Abraham and of King David, pledged himself to be married to a virgin named Mary. Before their marriage, however, an angel approached them both and told them that Mary was to have a child before their marriage. This child was to be the result of God's miraculous hand and was to have the name Jesus, which means "God saves." Yes, Jesus was the long awaited Messiah and his life on earth was recorded by four of his followers, **MATTHEW**, **MARK**, **LUKE**, and **JOHN**.

Not much is told about Jesus' childhood, other than that at a young age people recognized that he had great wisdom and understanding. Like many men of his time he worked with his hands; he was a carpenter. At about thirty years old, Jesus left his craft and began his public ministry. A prophet named John helped get him started, as he not only baptized Jesus but declared him to be "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." In saying this, John let others know that Jesus would be the ultimate unblemished blood sacrifice for sins as foreshadowed by all the sacrificial practices God set up in the time of Moses.

After his baptism, Jesus traveled around Israel and called on twelve men to be his disciples. He healed the sick, raised the dead, and cast out demons. He walked on water and at times controlled the winds and the waves. He also taught people about true and genuine righteousness. He himself lived a life of humility, purity, and compassion, and he reached out to those that others had rejected. But most stunning about Jesus was his insistence that he was the only way to eternal life. He went so far as to say, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me," and many other similar words.

Seeing that Jesus was not just a man of words, but of action and power, many people followed Jesus and listened to his every word. But most of the religious leaders grew to hate Jesus because he did not follow their traditions and regarded them as the source of spiritual truth. What irked them more than anything was his claim to be God, the Messiah, and the one on whom everyone's destiny turns. So great became their disdain that they sought out ways to kill him.

Through a series of incredible but not unforeseen events (the Old Testament prophets had predicted them), the religious leaders were afforded the opportunity to arrest Jesus in the middle of the night. They tried him in secret with the only charge against him his claim to be God. Convincing the Roman ruler Pilate to go along with their sentence of death, he was nailed to a cross where he hung until he died. Shortly thereafter he was buried in a tomb guarded by Roman soldiers.

Death, however, could not keep its hold on Jesus. Three days after his death he rose from the dead and came out of the tomb just as he had promised his disciples. For forty days after his resurrection, he appeared to them at different times and places. He told them to go into all of the world and spread the good news that he had paid the penalty for sin and had conquered death. Jesus then ascended into Heaven, but not before he had reminded his disciples that they would not be left alone. God's Holy Spirit would come to live in them.

ACTS. Ten days after Jesus ascended into Heaven, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, who then became known as apostles or "sent ones." Boldly, they began to tell others that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah (or Christ) and that through his death and resurrection he had provided a way of salvation from the sin of humanity. Peter became the main voice of the church and told people to turn away from their sins and call on Christ for forgiveness. His message was taken to heart by many and in short time thousands became followers of Christ to form the early church.

Not surprisingly, the Jewish religious leaders opposed and persecuted the church. The apostles were threatened and beaten, but nonetheless kept talking about Jesus. When forced to leave Jerusalem to spare their lives, the apostles went throughout the surrounding regions and talked about Jesus there. Persecution followed

them, however, as a zealous Jew named Saul was given charge to stamp out Christians wherever they might be.

Although perhaps the most unlikely candidate, God had plans to change Saul's heart. While on his way to the city of Damascus to persecute more Christians, Jesus appeared to Saul and temporarily blinded him. Saul had no doubts that his encounter with Jesus was real, and to the great confusion of both the Jewish religious leaders and the young Christian church, Saul not only quit persecuting the church, but began to tell everyone that Jesus is in indeed the only source of righteousness and eternal life.

At first, the early church was made up of Jews who recognized that Jesus was the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies regarding a Messiah. Then God sent Peter to preach at the house of a Gentile named Cornelius. When Cornelius trusted Christ and the Holy Spirit's work in his life became evident, the church understood that God's grace had been extended to the Gentiles and effectively to the whole world.

With this understanding, Saul, who was also called Paul, was called upon to travel through both Jewish and Gentile territory and tell people the Good News (or *gospel*) of Christ. Paul's traveling companions included Barnabas, Mark, Silas, Luke, Timothy and Titus, and together they saw many people believe and many churches started. Some of these churches were in cities like Rome, Corinth, Philippi, Ephesus, Thessalonica, and Colossae, or in regions like Galatia. After visiting these places, Paul wrote letters to the young believers with whom he had shared the story of Christ. Some of these letters are included in the New Testament and carry the names: **ROMANS, 1 & 2 CORINTHIANS, GALATIANS, EPHESIANS, PHILIPPIANS, COLOSSIANS, and 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS**. Once he wrote a letter to **PHILEMON** encouraging him to forgive and embrace a runaway slave who had turned his life to Christ. He also wrote letters to his young travelling companions when separated from them, as recorded in **1 & 2 TIMOTHY** and **TITUS**.

Paul was not the only one who wrote letters to the early followers of Christ. Some of Jesus' original twelve disciples did as well and their letters carry their names—**JAMES, 1 & 2 PETER**, and **1, 2, and 3 JOHN**. Other early Christian leaders wrote the book of **HEBREWS** and **JUDE**. Regardless of the author, however, the message of the New Testament letters is the same: Trust in Christ and Christ alone, walk in a way worthy of the name of Christ, beware of false teachers, and be ready for Christ's return.

As more and more people came to Christ through the teaching of Peter and Paul, persecution also increased. Many early Christian leaders were beaten, imprisoned, and murdered for their beliefs. Paul himself endured much of this persecution and was eventually put on trial and placed under house arrest. The apostle John appears to have been the last of the twelve disciples and spent his final days in exile on the island of Patmos. There he received **REVELATION** from God telling of the events leading up to the return of Jesus Christ. In these visions, the message is clear: For those who do not trust Christ, a horrible eternity awaits apart from God and alongside Satan and his demons. For those who trust Christ, there will be no more death, sorrow, tears or anything evil. They will live forever in the presence of Jesus—who is the blessed offspring of Abraham that would bless all nations, the great priest who offered himself as a once-for-all sacrifice, the everlasting king promised to David, and the risen Messiah foretold by the prophets.

TIMELINE OF BIBLE EVENTS with BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

All dates are approximate

Adam & Eve		GENESIS
Flood		JOB
Tower of Babel		
Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph	2000 BC	
Egyptian Captivity		
Moses & the Exodus	1400 BC	EXODUS, LEVITICUS, NUMBERS, DEUTERONOMY
Joshua & the Promised Land		JOSHUA
The Period of the Judges		JUDGES, RUTH
Saul, David, Solomon	1000 BC	1 & 2 SAMUEL, 1 KINGS, 1 CHRONICLES, PROVERBS, ECCLESIASTES, SONG OF SONGS, PSALMS
Kingdoms of Judah & Israel divide	931 BC	
Israel destroyed by Assyria	722 BC	2 KINGS, 2 CHRONICLES, JONAH, HOSEA, JOEL, AMOS, MICAH, NAHUM, ISAIAH, HABAKKUK, ZEPHANIAH, EZEKIEL, JEREMIAH, LAMENTATIONS, DANIEL, OBADIAH
Judah destroyed by Babylonians	586 BC	
Temple rebuilt in Jerusalem	515 BC	EZRA, HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH
Jews avoid extermination	479 BC	ESTHER
Wall rebuilt around Jerusalem	445 BC	NEHEMIAH, MALACHI
400 years of silence		
Jesus is born	5 BC	
Jesus is crucified and resurrected	30 AD	MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE, JOHN
Church grows under leadership of apostles	30-90 AD	ACTS, ROMANS, 1 & 2 CORINTHIANS, GALATIANS, EPHESIANS, PHILIPPIANS, COLOSSIANS, 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS, 1 & 2 TIMOTHY, TITUS, PHILEMON, HEBREWS, JAMES, 1 & 2 PETER, 1, 2 & 3 JOHN, JUDE, REVELATION