



## **Appendix: Audit Track of the Bible in 50 weeks**

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The Bible is God’s relevant word to every person. Never has a more important book ever been composed. Its words are essential for every person who hopes to experience a genuine spiritual life with the one true God of the universe.

But reading the Bible can be a daunting experience for the person who is not deeply familiar with it. Until we learn how each section of the Bible relates to every other section, and until we can learn the context of each writing within it, reading the Bible can lead to unwarranted confusion and painful misunderstanding.

This appendix has been adapted from a 300-page study through the scriptures, cover-to-cover, designed to be studied over 50 weeks. Called *Revealing the Relevant Word*, it was published in 2010 by CrossCurrent Ministries and Christian Fellowship Church in Ashburn, Virginia. It is currently out-of-print.

The sections provided here are from the “*Audit Track*”, which was a tool created to guide the reader through a survey of the Bible in 150 scripture readings. The *Audit Track* can be successfully used in just 30 minutes a day, three times a week.

Beyond the 150 readings that capture the most essential stories of the Bible, the *Audit Track* provides a quick summary of what you have skimmed and skipped over, allowing the reader to comprehend the 150 readings in the fuller context of that biblical book.

The *Audit Track* also alternates between Old and New Testaments—rather than going entirely sequential through the Bible—to allow for variety in a year-long reading plan.

Week	Text
1	Genesis 1-25
2	Genesis 26-50
3	Matthew 1-28
4	Exodus 1-20
5	Exodus 21-40
6	Leviticus 1-27
7	Numbers 1-24
8	Numbers 25-36 / Deuteronomy 1-11
9	Deuteronomy 12-34
10	Mark 1-14
11	Joshua 1-24
12	Judges 1-21 / Ruth
13	Luke 1-24
14	John 1-21
15	1 Samuel 1-31
16	2 Samuel 1-24
17	1 Kings 1-22
18	2 Kings 1-24
19	1 Chronicles 1-29
20	2 Chronicles 1-17
21	2 Chronicles 18-36
22	Ezra / Nehemiah / Esther
23	Acts 1-28
24	Job 1-21
25	Job 1-22
26	Psalms 1-27
27	Psalms 28-53
28	Psalms 54-78
29	Psalms 79-104
30	Psalms 105-119
31	Romans 1-16
32	Psalms 120-150
33	Proverbs 1-31
34	Ecclesiastes 1-12 / Song of Songs 1-8
35	Isaiah 1-22
36	Isaiah 23-45
37	Isaiah 46-66
38	1 Corinthians 1-16 / 2 Corinthians 1-13
39	Galatians 1-6 / Ephesians 1-6 / Philippians 1-4 / Colossians 1-4
40	Jeremiah 1-28
41	Jeremiah 29-52 / Lamentations 1-5
42	1 Thessalonians 1-5 / 2 Thessalonians 1-3 / 1 Timothy 1-6 / 2 Timothy 1-4 / Titus 1-3 / Philemon 1
43	Hebrews 1-13
44	Ezekiel 1-24
45	Ezekiel 25-48
46	James 1-5 / 1 Peter 1-5 / 2 Peter 1-3 / 1 John 1-5 / 2 John 1 / 3 John 1 / Jude 1
47	Daniel 1-12 / Hosea 1-14
48	Joel 1-3 / Amos 1-9 / Obadiah 1 / Jonah 1-4 / Micah 1-7
49	Nahum 1-3 / Habakkuk 1-3 / Zephaniah 1-3 / Haggai 1-2 / Zechariah 1-14 / Malachi 1-4
50	Revelation 1-22

## Week One – Genesis 1 – 25:

As God began to unfold the revelation of Himself to mankind, He established a direct relationship with individuals and families. First with Adam and Eve, God connected with humanity in the most intimate spaces of creation, guidance, and conversation. Wounded by sin, humans wandered far from God in the coming centuries, but He pursued them through a relationship with the families of Noah and Abraham. Establishing a grand covenant with Abraham and his descendants, God set the stage for a direct relationship with a nation of people—the people of Israel—who would go on to become the forefathers of all who would believe in Christ.

- ❑ **Read Genesis 2:4 – 3:24:** *After God created man and woman in perfect harmony with himself, they sinned. By disobeying God’s instructions to them, trusting instead their own ability to determine right from wrong, they were left to deal with the harsh realities of life separated from God.*
- ❑ **Read Genesis 12:1-9 & 15:1-21:** *God began a very intimate self-disclosure and partnership with one man and his family—Abraham. He made a promise to Abraham that his life would be significant and would change the world as he raised this family to become a great nation of God’s chosen people.*
- ❑ **Read Genesis 21:1-21 & 22:1-24:** *Abraham received the beginning of God’s promise through the birth of his son Isaac. But his trust in God was soon tested by an incredible command to sacrifice his son. God knew the plan would work out in the end for the good of the boy, but first Abraham had to decide how deeply he trusted God.*

**Skim & Skip:** Two chapters in this section of scripture are “genealogies” that list names and families. This is recorded history to be used for reference and can be easily skimmed over. The **Flood of Noah** (Gen. 6-8) showed how God was trying to give faithfulness a fresh start. Abraham **took things into his own hands** to try to fulfill God’s promise, damaging part of his family in the process (Gen. 16 & 21). Abraham struggled over another grand judgment from God coming upon sin in the cities of **Sodom and Gomorrah** (Gen. 13, 14 & 18-19). Other stories we skim over include: **Cain** murdered Abel (Gen. 4); God confused human **language** (Gen. 11); **Abraham lied** about his wife (Gen. 12 & 20); angels visited Abraham (Gen. 18); Isaac married **Rebekah** (Gen. 24); Sarah and Abraham died (Gen 23 & 25); **Jacob and Esau** were born struggling (Gen. 25).

## Week Two – Genesis 26-50:

Building on God’s promise to use Abraham’s family lineage to forge a personal relationship with humanity, Abraham’s children began their long journey to know and understand God’s workings. First through Abraham’s miraculously conceived son Isaac, and then through Isaac’s children Jacob and Esau, the activity and blessing of God in their lives stood in stark contrast to sin and selfishness. Jacob manipulated his way to the head of the family, and yet was given the name Israel, honoring him as the start of this new nation. Jacob’s 12 sons also fought with one another, and ultimately dragged the second youngest son, Joseph, into a life great suffering.

❑ **Read Genesis 25:21-34, 27:1-46 & 28:10-22:** *Isaac’s two sons Jacob and Esau, the grandchildren of Abraham, lived their life in a constant struggle for control. Wrestling over the prized “birthright” which would give one of them predominance, Jacob manipulated his way to the top. In spite of this, God still blessed him with great promise.*

❑ **Read Genesis 32:22-32 & 37:1-36:** *Jacob wrestled with God and received a new name, “Israel”, that established him as the foundation of this great nation. His youngest son, Joseph, had a dream in which he saw himself taking preeminence over his older brothers. Angered, they sold him into slavery to serve a high official of Egypt.*

❑ **Read Genesis 39:1-23 & 41:1-57:** *Joseph suffered unfair treatment as a slave, even though he maintained his integrity and honesty. After years in prison, eventually God provided a miraculous opportunity for him to become valuable to the Pharaoh of Egypt. Joseph was elevated from prisoner to the second-in-command of all Egypt.*

**Skim & Skip:** Many stories of Abraham’s family are covered in this section. Genesis 26 details Isaac’s efforts to find a place in the **land to settle**. His son **Jacob** also set out to establish a home, **marrying two sisters** though he only loved one (Gen.29). Over time, **Jacob had 12 sons** from these two women who were competing for his love (Gen. 30). Jacob fled from his father-in-law, who was taking advantage of him (Gen 31), faced a difficult meeting with his **estranged brother, Esau** (Gen.32-33), dealt with the **rape of his daughter** and the revenge his sons took on the man (Gen. 34), and buried his two wives (Gen. 35). **Genealogies** detail the family tree (Gen. 36). The struggles of Jacob’s son, **Joseph**, and his brothers take up the rest of the book of Genesis. **Incest** hit the family (Gen. 38), while Joseph struggled through years of **unjust slavery** (Gen. 39-41). Finally **gaining power**, he met his brothers again as they come to him in great need (Gen. 42-45). The entire **family eventually moved to Egypt** (Gen 46-47), where Jacob blessed his sons and died. The family lived in Egypt until the Exodus (Gen. 48-50).

## Week Three – Matthew 1-28

Taking a week away from the Old Testament, we look forward into the New Covenant that came much later in God's revelation. We jump centuries ahead to the life of Jesus, who was the Jewish Messiah, come to save the Israelites and the rest of the world from our sins. Through his life and teachings, Jesus demonstrated that following God's Law was a matter of the motives of the heart, rather than just obeying God in human strength. He performed many miracles to demonstrate God's love for suffering people and his own identity as the Son of God. Ultimately, he would die on the cross, exchanging our sins for his life in a supernatural transaction. Rising from the dead three days later, he confirmed his identity as God in the flesh.

❑ **Read Matthew 3:1 – 4:25:** *Approximately 30 years into Jesus' life, his public ministry was launched when he was baptized by his cousin, John the Baptist. God manifested Himself by speaking audibly of Jesus' identity, after which Jesus faced intense temptation from Satan. Returning home, he began to preach and perform many miracles.*

❑ **Read Matthew 5:1 – 7:29:** *Jesus opened up for us a much greater understanding of what it means to follow God's Law. Beyond simply adhering to the most straightforward "letter of the law", Jesus demonstrated that what really matters most is our heart, motives, and desires, and that none of us can be righteous in our own effort.*

❑ **Read Matthew 22:34-40 & 24:36 – 25:46:** *Jesus summarized the entire Law into two commands: to love God, and to love others. Jesus told his followers to live as if the end was near, and he told three parables to illustrate that we will all face God in eternity. In that day, we will be held accountable for how we served God and served other people.*

**Skim & Skip:** Matthew provided many details from the life of Jesus. Generally laid out in chronological order, we are shown his **birth** and **early years** (Matt. 1-2) and the beginning of his ministry (Matt. 3-7). He performed many **miracles**, chose **students** to follow him, began to teach, and sent his disciples out to minister (Matt. 8-12). He also taught many **parables** to explain spiritual concepts in simple terms (Matt 13). Key events included Jesus miraculously **walking on water** (Matt. 14), Peter **confessing** his faith in Christ (Matt. 16), and Jesus' **eternal identity** being supernaturally demonstrated (Matt. 17). He taught about humility, forgiveness, marriage, surrender, and faithfulness (Matt. 18-20). Entering Jerusalem for his last time (Matt. 21), he challenged the Jewish leadership, taught frequently (Matt. 21-25), and ultimately faced **arrest** and **execution** (Matt. 26-27) before his miraculous **resurrection** (Matt. 28).

## Week Four – Exodus 1-20

God further revealed Himself by leading His people through a stunning display of His presence and activity. Having been enslaved by the Egyptians for over 400 years, the Israelites were delivered out of their bondage under the leadership of Moses, and led to the Promised Land, the territory of Canaan that we call Israel today. Plagues poured out by God eventually convinced the Egyptian Pharaoh to release the Israelites, who fled into the desert. God protected them again from Pharaoh's pursuit. Once settled safely in the desert, God put His will into words by calling Moses to meet with Him face to face, where God gave him the 10 Commandments and the Law of God that would guide the Israelites for centuries to come.

❑ **Read Exodus 2:11 – 4:17:** *Moses grew up in the home of the Egyptian Pharaoh, and yet murdered an Egyptian who was mistreating an Israelite slave. After years on the run, God called Moses to return to Pharaoh and lead the Jews out of slavery and back to the Promised Land. Moses at first resisted, but God used miracles to convince him.*

❑ **Read Exodus 11:1 – 12:42:** *After a series of miraculous plagues had worn down Pharaoh's resistance to letting the Jews go, God brought His final plague, killing all the firstborn in Egypt. The death angel passed over the Jewish firstborn, however, a mercy that was to be celebrated as a symbol of God's grace for the rest of Jewish history.*

❑ **Read Exodus 19:1 – 20:21:** *Three months into the exodus from Egypt, God brought the people to Mount Sinai, where He met Moses in person and gave him the Law of God. The Law began with 10 key commandments that have come to be the most well-known portion of the Law.*

**Skim & Skip:** Exodus described the horrible **oppression** brought upon the Jews in Egypt (Exod. 1), including how the infant Moses had to be secretly **rescued by Pharaoh's daughter** to avoid slaughter (Exod. 2). As Moses was called to lead the Jews out of slavery, **oppression increased** (Exod. 5). Moses and Aaron spoke to Pharaoh through a series of warnings and **plagues** (Exod. 6-7). Water turned to **blood** (Exod. 7), **frogs, gnats, and flies** overwhelmed the land (Exod. 8), **livestock** died, people faced painful **boils**, **hail** destroyed crops (Exod. 9), swarms of **locusts** and **darkness** covered the land (Exod. 10). Finally releasing the Jews, Pharaoh later changed his mind and chased them into the desert, where God parted the **Red Sea** to allow Israel to escape (Exod. 14-15). God provided **food and water**, and victory over enemies (Exod. 16-17). Moses established a leadership structure (Exod. 18) God began to give Moses the **Law** (Exod. 19-20).

## Week Five – Exodus 21-40

God began to provide all the details of the Law—hundreds of commandments designed to give a formal understanding of how He wanted His people to live. These laws described personal holiness, worship practices, covenants to be made with God, and even basic community health standards. This Law would form the foundation for the entire Jewish religion, even setting the stage for the Messiah, who would come centuries later and teach us how to fulfill the purpose of the Law within our hearts.

**Read Exodus 24:1-18:** *Moses explained all the words of the Law to the people of Israel. Through ritual offerings and worship, the people committed themselves to obey God's Law. Moses, Aaron and his sons went up on Mt. Sinai and met with God face-to-face, while God gave Moses stone tablets with the Law inscribed on them.*

**Read Exodus 32:1 – 33:23:** *Growing weary of their experience at Mt. Sinai and Moses' lengthy time alone with God on the mountain, the people asked Aaron to make a golden idol of a calf for them to worship. This angered God, and Moses broke the stone tablets God had given him. Moses went back to the mountain and saw God in person.*

**Read Exodus 34:1-35:** *As Moses met God, he was given new stone tablets with the Law written on them. Moses prayed for God's presence to be with the Israelites. God responded with a covenant, and when Moses returned from the mountain all the people saw his face shining with glory.*

**Skim & Skip:** Beginning His Law with the familiar 10 Commandments (Exod. 20), God went on to give many specific and meticulous laws governing the treatment of **servants**, interpersonal **violence**, protection of **property**, behavior towards others, **money**, **Sabbath** and worship **festivals** (Exod. 21-23). With exacting detail, God laid out the blueprints for the “**Tabernacle**”, a portable temple where God would be worshipped, its furniture, and the priests who would minister within it (Exod. 25-31). A particularly important component of the Tabernacle was the “**Ark of the Covenant**” which would symbolize the specific seat of God's presence with the people (Exod. 25 & 37). The instructions for the Tabernacle and its arrangements were described again in greater detail (Exod. 35-39), and then commissioned into service with a great display of **God's glory** (Exod. 40).

## Week Six – Leviticus 1-27

The Law details more of the worship practices and standards God asked of His people. Much of these laws were symbolic of His desire to forgive and heal us of the spiritual consequence of our wrongdoing. God established an annual ritual called “The Day of Atonement”, where the sins of the people were covered over by the sacrifice of unblemished animals. He also established offerings of worship to be brought to Him throughout the year to give thanks for various blessings. Specific sins were spelled out in fine detail, providing clear instruction on important aspects of life such as health, sexuality, and personal holiness.

❑ **Read Leviticus 16:1-34:** *One of the most important worship festivals and offerings in the Jewish faith is the Day of Atonement, commanded by God to annually atone for everyone’s sin. The blood of sacrificed animals was used to ritually cleanse the Tabernacle and figuratively cover over the sins of the people, while a scapegoat is sent into the wilderness to symbolize the removal of their sins.*

❑ **Read Leviticus 25:1-55:** *God commanded that all property would revert to its original owner or family every 50<sup>th</sup> year. Called the “Year of Jubilee,” this celebration demonstrated that God considered all land as His own, loaned as a temporary gift to those who would occupy that land. This radical practice also ensured that poor families could regain the inheritance that was once given equally to all Israelites.*

❑ **Read Leviticus 26:3-46:** *God promised blessing and provision for those who obeyed His Law, and progressively worsening curses and punishment to those who did not.*

**Skim & Skip:** The first seven chapters of Leviticus describe **five essential offerings** that are to be brought by the Israelites to the Lord throughout the course of the year. Animals or crops were to be brought to the **Tabernacle** and **sacrificed** by priests to express commitment, devotion, and thanksgiving to God, and to **atone** for sins and ceremonial uncleanness. The **priests** were ordained to represent God at the Tabernacle and began their ministry (Lev. 8-9). When **Aaron’s sons** disrespected the laws regarding worship, they were killed (Lev. 10). More laws were given that described the use of **foods** for health and ritual worship, offerings to be made around **childbirth**, and the treatment of **infectious disease** and **bodily discharge** (Lev. 11-15). Various other laws related to **eating, sexuality, treatment of others** and associated **punishments** for disobedience were also prescribed (Lev. 17-20), along with details regarding priests, offerings, and worship festivals (Lev. 21-24, 27). A **blasphemous** man was executed (Lev. 24).

## Week Seven – Numbers 1-24

We return to the narrative of God guiding His people through the desert after the Exodus. As they arrived at the borders of the Promised Land, they became afraid to trust God's leadership to possess the land He had promised to them, and they rebelled against Him. Therefore, God sent them back into the desert to wander for 40 years, so that after every living Israelite had died, their children could try again to obey God and take possession of the land given to Israel. During this time, God established the role of the priest and the tabernacle—a portable place of worship—to fulfill instructions given in Exodus and Leviticus for its design.

❑ **Read Numbers 11:1 – 12:16:** *Although they had been traveling from Egypt to the Promised Land for only a few months, the people became uncomfortable and complained frequently. God responded by killing some, while miraculously providing quail for the others to eat. Aaron and his sister opposed Moses, which resulted in God afflicting them with leprosy.*

❑ **Read Numbers 13:1 – 14:45:** *Upon arriving at the borders of Canaan, Moses sent spies into the Promised Land to prepare for invasion. The men were fearful of what they found and persuaded the people to reject God's promise and not take possession of the land. God banished Israel to wander in the desert for 40 years.*

❑ **Read Numbers 22:1 – 24:14:** *Balaam, a pagan fortune-teller, was sought by Israel's enemies to curse them. He was confronted by God through his donkey, and then proceeded to pronounce many blessings over Israel.*

**Skim & Skip:** Deriving its name from a **census** of Israel, the book of Numbers records the tribes and descendants of the people of Israel (Num. 1-4). Laws were decreed to keep the Israelite camp pure of **wrongdoing** and **adultery** (Num. 5). A “**Nazirite**” **vow** was created for those who wanted to live especially devoted to God (Num. 6). The **Tabernacle** was dedicated and placed into service with many special offerings and ceremonies (Num. 7-8). The people celebrated their first **Passover** festival, while God hovered over the Tabernacle in a **cloud** (Num. 9). Their **portable** lifestyle was enacted as they packed up and moved towards Canaan (Num. 10). After their rebellion and ensuing **banishment** to the wilderness, more laws regarding offerings and the duties of priests were imposed (Num. 15, 17-19). The people **grumbled** against their leadership often and faced great difficulty as a result (Num. 16, 20-21).

## Week Eight – Numbers 25-36 / Deuteronomy 1-11

Moses had been God’s chosen man to lead His people through the most important transition in Israel’s history—moving beyond a family lineage to become a sovereign nation. Leading them out of slavery in Egypt, he was supposed to guide them into the possession of the entire territory of Canaan. The people’s inability to trust God’s leadership kept them wandering in the desert, and Moses himself would not be allowed to take them into the Promised Land. As Moses planned his succession, he penned the book of Deuteronomy to reinforce the covenant between Israel and the Lord, reiterating the Law and commandments given by God to His chosen people.

- ❑ **Read Deuteronomy 5:1 – 6:25:** *Considered one of the most central texts in all the Old Testament, the 10 Commandments were reviewed along with the essential command to love the Lord. Called “the Shema”, which means, “hear,” Israel was called to hear that God is one, and that He is to be both loved and feared.*
- ❑ **Read Deuteronomy 7:1-26 & 9:1-6:** *Israel was commanded to invade the land of Canaan, and to destroy those who lived there. God clearly explained that giving Israel this land through destructive war was not because Israel deserved it, but rather because God’s hand of decisive judgment was upon the wickedness of the inhabitants of Canaan.*
- ❑ **Read Deuteronomy 11:1-32:** *The central teaching of the Law to love and obey the Lord was reiterated, bound with the promise of blessing for obedience, and cursing for disobedience.*

**Skim & Skip:** The book of Numbers concluded with stories and instructions at the end of the 40 years of Israel’s wandering in the desert. God plagued Israel for **worshipping other gods** (Num. 25). A second **census** was taken (Num. 26) and **Joshua** was appointed to succeed Moses (Num. 27). Instructions on vows, celebrations, and offerings were reiterated (Num. 28-30). **War** was commanded against the Midianites (Num. 31), and some tribes of Israel made plans to settle to the east of Canaan (Num. 32). The entire history of Israel’s journey to Canaan was detailed (Num. 33), as **boundaries, cities, and inheritances** were established for the people (Num. 34-36). Deuteronomy begins with a **recounting** of key events along the journey to Canaan (Deut. 1-2). As the conquest faced **preliminary battles** (Deut. 2-3), the people were reminded to be **obedient** (Deut. 4), and to **not forget** the Lord (Deut. 8) as they had when they worshipped a **golden calf** in the desert (Deut. 9-10).

## Week Nine – Deuteronomy 12-34

The book of Deuteronomy is a retelling of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers that served as a formal covenant between God and Israel. Summarizing and reemphasizing the revelation of God's Law, Moses prepared the people of Israel to move beyond his leadership, and to commit themselves to following the Lord. As Moses died, his succession was handed to Joshua, who was one of the only men who had trusted God to take possession of the Promised Land. In recapping God's Law, strong blessings and curses were presented, as the people bound themselves in covenant to follow His will.

❑ **Read Deuteronomy 14:22 – 15:18:** *In the midst of laws related to worship and holiness, God laid out an assertive plan to provide for the needs of everyone in society. From giving 10% of one's income, to the forgiveness of debt and freeing of indentured servants, God asked His people to live radically generous, allowing no one to be poor.*

❑ **Read Deuteronomy 27:1 – 28:68:** *Ancient covenants often contained benefits and penalties for keeping or breaking the covenant. Moses led the assembly of the Israelites through pronouncing blessings and curses upon themselves for their role in keeping or breaking their covenant with God.*

❑ **Read Deuteronomy 29:1 – 30:20:** *The people renewed their commitment to the covenant with God. As a result, God set before them a promise of life and prosperity. He spoke of the condition of the heart as the truest measurement of devotion to the Law, reinforcing His desire for Israel to not just obey Him, but also to love Him.*

**Skim & Skip:** The Israelites were instructed to **worship God exclusively**, and to not be drawn into the religions of the land they were to conquer (Deut. 12-13). As a demonstration of their unique holiness before God, the Israelites were to only **eat certain foods** considered ceremonially clean (Deut. 14). The worship festivals were reviewed once again (Deut. 16), punishment was decreed for those who **worship other gods**, and the **governmental system** for Israel was discussed (Deut. 17). Rules were detailed for the treatment of **priests** and **prophets** (Deut. 18), the handling of **criminals** and **prosecution** (Deut. 19), execution of **war** (Deut. 20), unsolved **crimes, marriage** to conquered people, and preferential treatment of **troublesome sons** (Deut. 21). An assortment of law addressed a **wide variety of situations**, from the minutest details, like planting seeds, to the most intense of circumstances, like divorce (Deut. 22-26). **Curses** and **blessings** were pronounced as the covenant was renewed (Deut. 27-30). Joshua was appointed to succeed Moses (Deut. 31). Moses worshipped, blessed the people, and died (Deut. 32-34).

## Week Ten – Mark 1-14

Jesus Christ is the most central figure of the Bible—the person to whom all scripture points, as God ultimately revealed Himself in the person of Jesus. We take a second look at the life of Jesus from another author’s perspective. Mark was a young follower of Jesus who recorded Jesus’ activity in simple terms, focusing often on his miracles and the healings he performed. We also learn some of Jesus’ personal habits of prayer and see very clear demonstrations of his compassion for hurting and outcast people. Once again, we watch the crucifixion and resurrection, seeing how deeply Jesus suffered and how greatly he overcame.

❑ **Read Mark 1:14 – 3:18:** *Jesus began his ministry with a dramatic demonstration of power, healing many people, including a leper, a paralytic, and those who had demonic oppression. Captivated by his teaching, a few men who would come to be known as his disciples left their livelihoods and began to follow Jesus and his ministry.*

❑ **Read Mark 5:1 – 6:56:** *Jesus’ healing ministry was powerful. He cast out demons, raised a young girl from the dead, and healed a woman who had bled for years. In spite of skepticism from those in his hometown, he fed thousands with just a handful of food and miraculously walked on water in the middle of the night.*

❑ **Read Mark 14:12 – 15:47:** *The most important series of events in the entire Bible occurred in the last days of Jesus’ life. He shared a final meal with his disciples, instituting the sacrament of communion. He was betrayed, arrested, and crucified. His death, we will later learn, was the ultimate sacrifice for our sins, completing the Old Testament drama of sacrifice for the atonement of sins with his own life.*

**Skim & Skip:** Mark’s gospel tells many of the same stories as Matthew and Luke. After his baptism and temptation (Mark 1), Jesus confronted **opposition** (Mark 3), told **parables**, miraculously **calmed a storm** (Mark 4), and **rebuked** the Jewish authorities, all while **healing** and **ministering** to others (Mark 7-10). Mark told many of the important events in Jesus’ life, including Peter’s **confession** of faith and the **transfiguration** where Jesus was seen in his eternal identity (Mark 9). The remainder of the gospel detailed his **final week** in Jerusalem (Mark 11-16), where he taught and prophesied before his **crucifixion** and **resurrection**. Mark recorded a unique promise to believers who would follow Jesus: miraculous power available to them as they **spread the gospel** (Mark 16).

## Week Eleven – Joshua 1-24

God chose to reveal Himself to humanity through the establishment of Abraham’s family line that would blossom into an entire nation of God-followers. A central part of the covenant He made with Abraham was to give his descendants the physical boundaries of what we now call the nation of Israel. The book of Joshua tells the story of the Israelite’s conquest to possess the land that God had promised them. The process was difficult, fraught with war and conflict. God inflicted judgment upon the wicked practices of the people who lived in Canaan through the warfare that Israel engaged. At the same time, He continued to refine the obedience and faithfulness of the Israelites in their relationship with God.

❑ **Read Joshua 1:1 – 3:17:** *After the death of Moses, Joshua led the Israelites to take possession of the Promised Land. God told Joshua to be strong and courageous, and to trust His presence with them. A prostitute living in the city of Jericho served as an aid to Jewish spies, earning her family safety in the coming invasion. The people crossed the Jordan River and began to take the land.*

❑ **Read Joshua 5:13 – 6:27:** *The first city the Israelites conquered was Jericho. Warned by an angel that this invasion was not a matter of God “picking sides”, they followed the Lord’s instructions, and the city was given to their hands. They were told to destroy everything as an act of devotion to God, rather than taking spoils for themselves.*

❑ **Read Joshua 7:1-26:** *God took the people’s devotion to Him very seriously. One man’s sin brought the entire nation into defeat until it was singled out and addressed.*

**Skim & Skip:** The book of Joshua essentially describes the process of the Israelites **invading** and **conquering** the land of Canaan. As they crossed into Canaan, they built a monument, and consecrated themselves to God in the rituals of **circumcision** and the **Passover** feast (Josh. 4-5). After **Jericho** fell into their hands (Josh. 6), they proceeded to move throughout the land, taking city after city (Josh. 8-12). They were often instructed to **destroy everything** in these conquered territories as an **act of worship** to God, rather than to enjoy the spoils of war for themselves. Once most of the land had been conquered, **territories were divided** among the people, and Joshua records these assignments in detail (Josh. 13-21). Two tribes chose to live east of Canaan and returned there (Josh. 22), and Joshua gave his final words to the Israelites (Josh 23). At the conclusion of their conquest of Canaan, the people once again renewed their covenant with God and pledged ongoing obedience to God (Josh 24).

## Week Twelve – Judges 1-21 / Ruth 1-4

As Israel settled into their new nationhood, God desired to establish a governing structure that would emphasize that relationship with Him is more important than simply following His Law. Based on the spiritual relationships of priests and individuals who would serve as judges, the people were to create a society that loved and followed God. But as often happens among people, Israel and their leaders wandered frequently into sin. As they abandoned any commitment to God, they once again faced war and struggle with their neighbors in the land of Canaan. While the people wandered through ongoing cycles of sin and repentance, great leaders like Gideon and Samson led them to return to God. The book of Ruth is a story from this period that portrayed a man and woman from very different backgrounds ultimately trusting in God.

❑ **Read Judges 6:1 – 7:25:** *God chose a young farmer to deliver His people from the oppression of the neighboring Midianites. Gideon destroyed the pagan altar where the Jews had been sinfully worshipping and assembled a small army to fight the Midianites. God asked Gideon to entrust the battle to Him, and to thin down his troops from tens of thousands to just 300 men. The battle was supernaturally won with God's help.*

❑ **Read Judges 14:1 – 16:30:** *Samson was used by God to bring war upon the Philistines who had oppressed Israel for 40 years. His heart was broken when his wife was given to be with one of his groomsmen, and he struck out to make war. Given miraculous strength by God, he later squandered that gift while being seduced by Delilah.*

❑ **Read Ruth 1:1 – 4:22:** *This short book tells the personal story of a Moabite woman who married into Israel. Upon her husband's death, she chose to remain loyal to her new family. Boaz, a righteous kinsman to her deceased husband, fulfilled a duty prescribed by the Law to marry her, which lovingly provided for her needs.*

**Skim & Skip:** There were a few **remaining territories** the Israelites had to conquer in taking the Promised Land (Jdgs. 1). However, as the Israelites were **unfaithful to God**, judgment was raised against them and they were **defeated** and **enslaved** by the surrounding Canaanites (Jdgs. 2-3). When they repented, the Lord used **judges** to free His people (Jdgs. 3-4). This cycle continued over and over, their stories recorded throughout this period. **Deborah** demonstrated God's anointing on women (Jdgs. 5-6), which was very unique to the cultures of that era. **Gideon's** son **Abimelech** tried to set himself up as a king and was destroyed (Jdgs. 9), **Jephthah** defeated an Ammonite assault (Jdgs. 10-11), and **Samson** fought the Philistines (Jdgs. 13-16). A **twisted story** of idolatry, rape, murder, and civil war concluded the book with the telling phrase, **"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit"** (Jdgs. 17-21).

## Week Thirteen – Luke 1-24

We once again step away from the Old Testament to look at the life of Jesus, some 1,500 years after Israel's conquest of Canaan. Just as possessing the Promised Land was symbolic of God's provision for His people, the life of Jesus was the ultimate revelation that God cares and provides for us. Luke composed a detailed and systematic account of Jesus' life, teaching, death, burial and resurrection. Jesus taught about the heart of God in dozens of parables, many of them showing how much God wants to be with everyone in close relationship.

❑ **Read Luke 9:1 – 10:24:** *Some of the most important events in the life of Jesus were detailed in this portion of Luke's gospel. Jesus sent his disciples to minister, fed 5,000 people, and taught about the costs of following him. Peter confessed his faith, and the miracle of the Transfiguration demonstrated Jesus' divine identity.*

❑ **Read Luke 8:1-15, 10:25-37 & 15:1-32:** *Much of Jesus' teaching was done in parables, capturing deep truths in simple ways. Luke recorded parables that describe how spirituality takes root within us, what love for others really looks like, and how desperately God wants to be in relationship with us.*

❑ **Read Luke 24:1-53:** *Three days after Jesus was crucified and buried, the greatest miracle of the Bible occurred when he rose from the dead. Jesus met with his followers for many days, teaching them about his resurrection and their call to spread the Gospel. Afterwards, he ascended to heaven as the disciples worshipped him.*

**Skim & Skip:** Luke composed his gospel as a **well-researched** discourse on the life of Jesus. Drawing from many of the same sources as Matthew and Mark, he also provided **new information** about the life of Jesus. Greater detail was given into Jesus' **genealogy, birth, and early years**, and the ministry of his cousin, **John the Baptist** (Luke 1-3). Many similar stories of his temptation, healings, miracles, and teachings match the other gospels (Luke 4-8). Scattered among these familiar stories are some **parables** that are told only by Luke, as well as **unique wording** to some of the teachings of Jesus (Luke 11-19). His final week was presented in depth (Luke 19-23), culminating in the **crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension**.

## Week Fourteen – John 1-21

The ultimate revelation of God’s identity to humankind came in the person of Jesus Christ, who was God manifested in flesh. A close friend to Jesus, John wrote this very intimate look into the heart and teachings of Jesus. We see in this gospel unique descriptions of the deepest and most personal things that Jesus discussed, showing more clearly than any other place in the New Testament how Jesus understood himself to be one with God. We are given very precious promises and instructions on how to live intimately connected to God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and we are shown how authentic spirituality is formed in relationship with God.

❑ **Read John 1:1-34 & 3:1-21:** *John began his gospel with a description of Jesus as the “Word,” a Greek concept capturing all the wisdom and identity of God. He showed that Jesus was God’s identity become flesh, who would ultimately become the final sacrificial lamb in the grand drama of atonement for sin. Talking with a Jewish leader, Jesus described the process of spiritual rebirth that comes through faith in him.*

❑ **Read John 11:1 – 12:50:** *One of the greatest miracles Jesus performed was raising his friend Lazarus from death. He taught how it modeled the ultimate resurrection that we will all experience through our faith in Christ. This demonstration of power pushed the Jewish leaders to their limits, and they began to plot Jesus’ death.*

❑ **Read John 14:1 – 16:33:** *John provided a unique description of Jesus’ teaching to his disciples on the night of his arrest. Telling them that he was about to go away, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would come and live within them, guide them, speak to them, and provide them power from God—a promise that extends to all believers today.*

**Skim & Skip:** The Gospel of John tells a **different set of stories** than the other gospels. His **first miracle** is recorded (John 2), as well as **intimate conversations** with a Jewish leader (John 3) and a **Samaritan** woman (John 4). Jesus taught and **defended of his ministry** when challenged by Jewish authorities (John 5-10), while healing and ministering to individual people. He showed great **mercy** to a woman caught in adultery (John 8) and **healed** a blind man (John 9). His final week in Jerusalem was recorded with more **personal accounts** of his interaction with his disciples, which included **washing their feet** (John 13), and **praying** for them (John 17). John gave a more detailed account of Jesus’ trial before **Pontius Pilate**, and a simple account of the crucifixion (John 18-19). After his resurrection, Jesus had many **personal conversations** with his disciples (John 20-21), which included **restoring Peter** after his denial of Jesus (John 21).

## Week Fifteen – 1 Samuel 1-31

Samuel was the last leader of Israel in the time of the judges, as the people eventually rejected God's desire for a spiritually governed nation. They wanted to be like other nations with a king and all the associated politics. God reluctantly chose Saul to be Israel's king, even though Saul would eventually turn his heart away from God. God was forced to reject Saul and choose a young shepherd—David—to become the next king. Most of 1 Samuel describes the struggle of Saul growing darker while young David rose to become one of the most central figures of Israel's history, described by God as a "man after My own heart."

❑ **Read 1 Samuel 8:1 – 9:2 & 10:9-27:** *Although God did not want Israel to live under the political reign of a king, He chose Saul to rule over Israel when they insisted on selecting for themselves a king. Warning that a king would bring hardship upon them, God selected Saul, a man of great stature, but whose heart would prove unfaithful.*

❑ **Read 1 Samuel 13:7-14 & 15:1 – 16:13:** *Saul sinned when he acted outside of his qualifications and took upon himself the role of a priest. He further angered God when he failed to execute an enemy king as God had commanded. Because of his important role as the leader of Israel, these sins could not go unnoticed. God rejected Saul as king, vowing to replace him with David, whose heart was more pure.*

❑ **Read 1 Samuel 17:1 – 18:11:** *A young shepherd boy was chosen by God to replace King Saul. This soon threatened Saul, and David found himself trapped in an awful struggle for his own survival as the deranged King Saul sought to kill him.*

**Skim & Skip:** The prophet **Samuel** was born (1 Sam. 1), **dedicated** to a life of ministry, and was given to a priest who had evil sons (1 Sam. 2). God called Samuel to be the spiritual **leader** of His people (1 Sam. 3). Israel fell in battle to the neighboring **Philistines**, who captured the **Ark of the Covenant** from Israel (1 Sam. 4). God afflicted the Philistines, they returned the Ark (1 Sam. 5-6), and Samuel led a victory over them (1 Sam. 7). **Saul** was made **king** of Israel (1 Sam. 8-12), but his reign was short lived, as egocentrism led him to violate the priest's role (1 Sam. 13), nearly kill his son (1 Sam. 14), and disobey God (1 Sam. 15). Saul sought to kill young **David**, who had been chosen by God to replace him (1 Sam. 18-19), but Saul's son **Jonathan** took to David's defense (1 Sam. 20). David **fled** throughout the region, while Saul pursued (1 Sam. 21-26). David spared Saul's life more than once (1 Sam. 24, 26), took a wife (1 Sam. 25), and settled in Philistia (1 Sam. 27). Saul sought **witchcraft** for help (1 Sam. 28) and David defended his home (1 Sam. 29-30). Saul ultimately committed **suicide** (1 Sam. 31).

## Week Sixteen – 2 Samuel 1-24

David became Israel's second king, and one of the most central figures of God's chosen people. In spite of many flaws and sins made evident in this narrative of David's life, his heart for God was so strong that God promised to establish David's leadership forever. This promise would be fulfilled through the coming Messiah, who would descend from David's lineage. The book of 2 Samuel details the life and leadership of David and his very personal failures and successes. We learn how God can live even through a tremendously flawed person who loves God with all his heart.

❑ **Read 2 Samuel 7:1-29:** *As David settled into his new role as King of Israel, he desired to build a temple for the Lord in Jerusalem. God promised David a lasting dynasty but said that since David had been a man of war and his hands were unclean, his son would have to be the one to build the temple.*

❑ **Read 2 Samuel 11:1 – 12:25:** *David found himself embroiled in sin when he chose to take Bathsheba in adultery. Hoping to cover up the scandal, he had her husband secretly killed on the battlefield so that he could marry her before the resulting pregnancy was discovered. God knew his sin however, and used the prophet Nathan to expose him, which brought about David's tearful repentance.*

❑ **Read 2 Samuel 13:1-39 & 15:1-37:** *Because of his sin with Bathsheba, God warned David that he would suffer much calamity from within his own household. One of David's sons raped his sister, while another rose up in rebellion, attempting to seize his throne. David fled until God once again delivered him, but it cost him the life of his sons.*

**Skim & Skip:** The book begins with David mourning the **death of King Saul**, and then being anointed king in his place (2 Sam. 1-2). There was a struggle between **Saul's heirs** and David (2 Sam. 2-4), but ultimately **David was crowned king** over all Israel (2 Sam. 5). He brought the **Ark of the Covenant** to Jerusalem, but a man died as it was mishandled (2 Sam. 6). David subdued the **Philistines** and **Ammonites** who had troubled Israel for decades (2 Sam. 8, 10), while he continued to show **mercy to Saul's family** (2 Sam. 9). **David's troubles** with his own family plagued him for the rest of his days, being separated from his son **Absalom** (2 Sam. 14), fleeing for a time while he **rebelled** (2 Sam. 16-17), and ultimately watching him die (2 Sam. 18-19). More rebellion threatened his throne, and **famine** was over the land (2 Sam. 20-21). David praised the Lord in his final days (2 Sam. 22-23), and yet he sinned once again by taking a **census** against God's will (2 Sam. 24).

## Week Seventeen – 1 Kings 1-22

As we return to the Old Testament narrative of God revealing Himself through the people of Israel, we study the life of Solomon, David's son and the third king of Israel. God gave Solomon tremendous wisdom and honored him with the resources to build a temple for God in Jerusalem. This temple would become the centerpiece of Jewish worship, where sacrifices and offerings were made to the Lord. Solomon had a serious problem with sin, however, and as his son took over the kingdom, the resulting consequences split Israel into civil war. The nation was divided into two halves, north and south, called Israel and Judah respectively. These two newly fractured nations once again plummeted into disobedience and rejection of God, giving rise to the ministry of Elijah, one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament.

❑ **Read 1 Kings 3:1-28 & 4:29-34:** *Though Solomon's life would be plagued by sin, he was also a man who loved the Lord. God gave him unparalleled wisdom, displayed in both his governance of Israel and his authorship of many proverbs and psalms.*

❑ **Read 1 Kings 11:41 – 12:33:** *To properly understand the narrative of God's unique relationship with Israel, it is essential to grasp this pivotal event of Israel's history, when Solomon's son Rehoboam and his aide Jeroboam split the nation of Israel in civil war. Ten northern tribes followed Jeroboam and kept the name Israel, while two southern tribes stayed with the Davidic line under Rehoboam and became the nation of Judah.*

❑ **Read 1 Kings 16:29 – 17:1 & 18:1-46:** *When Ahab came to power as king of Israel, his unprecedented evil-doing led God to raise up the prophet Elijah. Standing alone against 400 prophets of Baalism, Elijah led a great contest on Mt. Carmel, calling upon God, who answered by miraculously bringing fire upon an altar at which he prayed.*

**Skim & Skip:** After describing the appointment of King **Solomon** (1 Ki. 1-2), his gift of great **wisdom** (1 Ki. 3-4), the building of the **temple** (1 Ki. 5-8), and his great **wealth** (1 Ki. 9-10), the balance of the book of 1 Kings detailed a tragically repetitive **cycle of sin** that slowly led Israel and Judah towards judgment. After Solomon's heart was **led astray** to worship other gods (1 Ki. 11), the Lord began to tear the kingdom of Israel apart. The seven successive **kings of Israel** all walked in **disobedience** to God (1 Ki. 15-22). The phrase "he committed **all the sins of his father**" was repeated over and over as the writer chronicled the kings of Israel and Judah. This cycle of sin was contrasted with scattered references to **kings of Judah** who "did what **was right in the eyes of the Lord**", and **reforms** they made to cleanse the land of their idolatry and worship of other gods (1 Ki. 15, 22). The prophet Elijah confronted and condemned the **worship of false gods** (1 Ki. 17-19). Continuing **civil war** between the Israel and Judah and conflicts with neighboring **Aram** flared often throughout these administrations (1 Ki. 15-16, 20-22).

## Week Eighteen – 2 Kings 1-24

God's people had been permanently fractured into two separate nations—Israel and Judah—that continued to cycle in and out of sin and repentance. 2 Kings recorded the stories of the various kings that led these two nations, their cycles of sin and reform, and the prophets who warned of God's impending judgment. Eventually both nations faced destruction as the Assyrians and Babylonians were used by God to bring judgment on the Jewish people. In two cataclysmic events separated by several decades, both Israel and Judah were carried into captivity and slavery once again and suffered under the consequences of abandoning their love for God.

❑ **Read 2 Kings 1:1 – 2:18:** *The prophet Elijah had a powerful ministry opposing the wicked kings of Israel. His ministry concluded with a rebuke to Ahab's son for consulting false gods. Elijah's student Elisha followed him closely and was given a "double portion" of his anointing as Elijah was carried away to heaven in a whirlwind.*

❑ **Read 2 Kings 4:1-44:** *Unlike other Old Testament prophets who wrote lengthy prophetic warnings such as Isaiah or Hosea, the prophetic ministries of Elijah and Elisha centered on the use of miracles to establish their very direct words of rebuke. Several stories of Elisha's small but obvious miracles were told during this dark time.*

❑ **Read 2 Kings 17:1-41:** *Judgment finally came upon the house of Israel, the northern ten tribes of God's people. Attacked by Assyria, the Israelites were deported to Assyria to live in bondage. The writer of Kings described the reason, saying that, "the Israelites had sinned against the Lord...they worshipped other gods and followed the practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before them" (2 Kings 17:7-8).*

**Skim & Skip:** Two great prophets, **Elijah** and **Elisha**, ministered to the nation of Israel decades before her demise, performing **miracles** and **warning** of judgment (2 Ki. 1-8). The activities of **12 kings of Israel** and **16 kings of Judah** were recorded in this book (2 Ki. 8-25), chronologically detailed in relation to their simultaneous reigns. Only a few of the kings of **Judah** lived righteously, most notably **Hezekiah** (2 Ki. 18-20) and **Josiah** (2 Ki. 22-23), who led significant spiritual **reforms** during their reigns. None of the kings of **Israel** walked in obedience to the Lord. Both kingdoms declined slowly towards the next **pivotal event** in Jewish history, as God led the northern nation of Israel to destruction at the hands of **Assyria** (2 Ki. 17), and 150 years later the southern nation of Judah into captivity to **Babylon** (2 Ki. 23-25).

## Week Nineteen – 1 Chronicles 1-29

In the two books of Chronicles, we are given a second look at the period of Israel under the kingdom of David and his successors. As the name of the book implies, its writer purposed to chronicle a critical phase in the history of Israel. It served not only to record key events, but it also functioned as an official record of the genealogies and histories of Israel's political leadership. Recorded by a different author than the writer of 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 Chronicles gives us more details of David's life, his successes, and his failures. We see many flaws in this great man of God, who was perhaps Israel's most important leader, showing us that even the most godly people struggle with the heartache of sinfulness.

❑ **Read 1 Chronicles 13:1-14 & 15:1-6:** *What might seem to the casual reader as a simple move of the Ark of the Covenant from one city to another was actually one of the more pivotal events in Israel's journey. The Ark represented the center of Israel's worship in a portable tabernacle. David's move to bring the Ark to Jerusalem brought the tabernacle to its final home, where a temple would eventually be built. This location became the most sacred physical place in Jewish history, not coincidentally the same place Abraham offered up his son Isaac on an altar to the Lord (see Genesis 22).*

❑ **Read 1 Chronicles 17:1-27:** *David was commended by the Lord for his desire to build a temple for Him. God promised to establish David's kingdom forever, a promise ultimately fulfilled through David's most important descendant—Jesus of Nazareth.*

❑ **Read 1 Chronicles 21:1-30:** *Satan tempted David to trust in the strength of his army rather than in the Lord. The resulting census David took angered God and brought a plague upon Israel until David repented and made sacrificial offerings to the Lord.*

**Skim & Skip:** The book opens with detailed **genealogies** and commentary about the most important individuals in Israel's history from the time of **Adam** up through the reign of king **David** (1 Chron. 1-9). After David's predecessor **King Saul** took his own life (1 Chron. 10), David was installed as king and took the city of **Jerusalem** to be Israel's capital (1 Chron. 11). The **warriors** and **mighty men** who joined David were recorded (1 Chron. 11-12). He defeated the **Philistines** and many other enemies (1 Chron. 14, 18-20) and brought the **Ark of the Covenant** to Jerusalem (1 Chron. 13, 15-16). **Chronicling** Israel's leadership lineage again, the families of the Levites, priests, singers, gatekeepers, treasurers, military commanders and other officials were enumerated (1 Chron. 23-27). In his final days, David laid plans for his son to build a **temple**, and established **Solomon** as king (1 Chron. 28-29).

## Week Twenty – 2 Chronicles 1-16

The writer of the Chronicles give us a second perspective of the storyline of the kings of Judah, the southern half of the divided nation of Israel, with greater detail and deeper insights than the shorter records of 1 & 2 Kings. We are given another look into Solomon, the building of the temple in Jerusalem, how his son split the nation in civil war, and how various kings led Judah in cycles of sin and reform. Judah was the southern portion of the Jewish nation after Israel was split apart. While the northern country Israel never again had a king faithful to God, while Judah's kings alternated between faithfulness and disobedience, sin and reform.

- ❑ **Read 2 Chronicles 5:1 – 6:11:** *Since the establishment of the Law given to Moses, Israel had worshipped the Lord in a portable sanctuary called “The Tent of Meeting.” Solomon established the first temple in Jerusalem, providing a fixed location for God’s concentrated presence that replaced the portable tabernacle with a permanent home.*
- ❑ **Read 2 Chronicles 7:1-22:** *As the new temple in Jerusalem was being dedicated, a supernatural manifestation of God’s presence filled the temple with fire and smoke, a glory so strong that the priests had to withdraw from their worship. The Lord appeared to Solomon in a vision, promising judgment for disobedience and mercy for repentance.*
- ❑ **Read 2 Chronicles 14:1-6 & 15:1-19:** *Leading one of three major reforms that swept the nation of Judah, King Asa destroyed pagan worship and mandated that every person of Judah seek the Lord. The people responded with wholehearted devotion.*

**Skim & Skip:** Chronicles recounts Solomon’s pursuit of **wisdom** (2 Chron. 1) and the building of the **temple** (2 Chron. 2-4). He fortified Israel, worshipped the Lord (2 Chron. 8), and displayed his great **wealth** to the nations (2 Chron. 9). After Solomon’s death, his son **Rehoboam** lost the northern ten tribes of Israel to **civil war** (2 Chron. 10-11) and faced attack from **Egypt** (2 Chron. 12). The newly formed southern nation of **Judah** faced war with Israel and Egypt through the reigns of **Abijah** and **Asa** (2 Chron. 13-14). In spite of his deep spiritual reform and calling all Judah to seek the Lord, King Asa died alienated from God because he was rebuked for trusting the king of Aram rather than the Lord when attacked by Israel (2 Chron. 16).

## Week Twenty-One – 2 Chronicles 17-36

We finish our second look into the southern nation of Judah as they wandered farther and farther from God. Unlike their sister nation Israel to the north, Judah had kings who were faithful to the Lord interspersed among their many kings who were unfaithful to God. Judgment on Judah was stayed for over a century longer than Israel, as each period of reform held back the tide of God's anger for a time. Despite three major spiritual reforms led by the kings Asa, Hezekiah, and Josiah, Judah ultimately fell to a similar judgment as their northern brothers, being carried into exile by the Babylonians.

- ❑ **Read 2 Chronicles 18:1 – 19:3:** *Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, allied himself with Ahab, the evil king of Israel. The two decided to go to war against neighboring Aram. Jehoshaphat wanted to seek God's counsel but found himself unwittingly part of a plan the Lord had crafted to allow Ahab to be deceived into waging war to his own death.*
- ❑ **Read 2 Chronicles 29:1-11 & 30:1-27:** *King Hezekiah reversed the evil his father had done in closing the temple. Consecrating it for worship once again, the Passover was celebrated, and Hezekiah called for both Israel and Judah to return to the Lord.*
- ❑ **Read 2 Chronicles 34:1 – 35:6, 18:** *Having been neglected perhaps for decades, the Book of the Law—known to us as the Pentateuch, our first five books of the Bible—was found during repairs to the temple. Judah's longstanding disobedience to the Law was exposed, prompting King Josiah to call for massive repentance, and to celebrate the Passover with a passion and intensity unheralded for over 300 years.*

**Skim & Skip:** Several of Judah's kings “did what was **right in the eyes of the Lord**, but **not wholeheartedly**”, like **Jehoshaphat** who walked with God in his early years (2 Chron. 17-20), **Joash**, who repaired the temple, but later worshipped idols (2 Chron. 24), **Amaziah** who turned to other gods (2 Chron. 25), and **Uzziah** who disrespected God in pride (2 Chron. 26). God delivered Judah from a battle as they trusted Him and worshipped in song (2 Chron. 20). Several of the kings of Judah “did **evil in the eyes of the Lord**”: **Jehoram** who built pagan “high places” and died under God's judgment (2 Chron. 21), **Ahaziah** and his evil mother Athaliah who attempted to murder all the descendants of David (2 Chron. 22-23), **Ahaz**, who even sacrificed his sons in the fire as an act of pagan worship (2 Chron. 28), **Manasseh** who reversed his father Hezekiah's reforms, and **Amon** (2 Chron. 33). Few were **wholeheartedly righteous**: **Jotham** (2 Chron. 27), **Hezekiah** (2 Chron. 29-32), and **Josiah** (2 Chron. 34-35). Four unrighteous kings ruled over the final years of Judah before **invasion and captivity** at the hands of **Babylon** (2 Chron. 36). The book concludes with a note from the end of the **70-year captivity in Babylon**, as **Persian King Cyrus** called for a return of the Jews to Jerusalem.

## Week Twenty-Two – Ezra / Nehemiah / Esther

As we return to the Old Testament, we look in upon the Israelites after 70 years of captivity in Babylon, hundreds of miles from their homeland. With political change underway in the land of their captivity—their oppressors themselves conquered by Persia—the Jews were allowed to slowly return to the land of Israel. Ezra was commissioned by the Persian government to provide spiritual leadership and to rebuild the temple and worship systems; Nehemiah was sent to oversee reconstruction of the city of Jerusalem and its walls. The book of Esther tells the story of a Jewish woman who found unique favor with the king of Persia and rescued the Jewish captives from annihilation. The only book in the Bible to never mention God, Esther demonstrates that God is still mysteriously at work even in the darkest of times.

❑ **Read Ezra 1:1-4 & 6:13 – 7:28:** *Fulfilling the promise God gave Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 29:10), the Babylonian captivity came to an end with an incredible edict from the Persian king for Ezra to return the Jews to Jerusalem and re-establish God's Law.*

❑ **Read Nehemiah 4:1-23 & 6:5-16:** *Facing threatening opposition, Nehemiah led the Jewish people to defend themselves and to rebuild the walls and city of Jerusalem.*

❑ **Read Esther 4:1 – 5:7 & 7:1-10:** *When news of an edict to annihilate all the Jews in Persia reached Mordecai, he persuaded his cousin, Queen Esther, to plead with the king to reverse the edict. Risking her own life to do so, Esther convinced the king to spare the Jews, and Haman, who had devised the plot against them, was hanged.*

**Skim & Skip:** Groups of **exiles** were allowed to **return** to Jerusalem (Ezra 1-2) to construct a new **temple** (Ezra 3), which they built in the face of severe **opposition** (Ezra 4-6). As the captives returned (Ezra 8), **Ezra** led the people through great **repentance** for their sins (Ezra 9-10). **Nehemiah** prayed for the chance to rebuild Jerusalem (Neh. 1) and was granted leave to do so by the Persian king (Neh. 2). He assembled builders (Neh. 3), governed the people (Neh. 5), and organized the returning exiles (Neh. 7). Ezra read the **Law**; the people confessed and committed themselves to it (Neh. 8-10). Residents and priests were enumerated, the **wall dedicated**, and **reforms** set in place (Neh. 11-13). After Persian **King Xerxes** dethroned his wife (Est. 1), the young Jewish girl **Esther** was chosen to become the Queen (Est. 2). One of Xerxes' officials, **Haman**, sought to have the Jews annihilated (Est.3). In a twist of divine irony, while Haman plotted to have Esther's cousin **Mordecai** hanged, King Xerxes ordered him to honor Mordecai publicly (Est. 5-6). The Jews were allowed to defend themselves (Est. 8) and began an annual celebration of their deliverance known as the **Feast of Purim** (Est. 9-10).

## Week Twenty-Three – Acts 1-28

We take another break from the Old Testament to look at how the earliest followers of Jesus established the Church, God's ultimate plan for experiencing community. Just as the establishment of Israel in the Old Testament was a revelation of what societies could be like when living for God, now the early church demonstrated a fulfillment of God's design for life together on the earth. Moving beyond the Jewish people, God began to welcome Gentiles into personal relationship with Him. These early believers lived lives of love and passion for one another and for God, spreading the good news that Jesus had come to reconcile us to God and to each other.

❑ **Read Acts 1:1 – 2:47:** *As Jesus ascended into heaven, he gave a final set of instructions to his disciples, that they should wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came upon them. The New Covenant was being sealed; a new relationship was opened between God and man as God's Spirit began to live within the new believer. Power came upon them, and they ministered the Word of God to multitudes, giving birth to the early church.*

❑ **Read Acts 9:1 – 10:48:** *The fledgling church took bold steps forward as one of their greatest adversaries, Saul, was confronted by the eternal Jesus and gave his life to Christ. He would come to be called the Apostle Paul, a key leader in the church. Peter had a vision that confirmed that Christ was come to save not only Jews, but Gentiles also.*

❑ **Read Acts 15:1 – 16:40:** *It was vitally important for the leadership of the early church to establish that in Christ, salvation comes by faith, and not by adherence to the Old Testament Law. Gentiles could be saved without conforming to Jewish rituals of consecration if they put their faith in Christ. Paul and his companions suffered much at the hands of both Jews and Gentiles as they spread the gospel, leading many to Christ.*

**Skim & Skip:** Acts told the story of the birth and spread of God's new community of faith called the church. After the **Holy Spirit** filled the early believers (Acts 2), they went about in power, **healing** many (Acts 3), and facing great **persecution** (Acts 4). As they struggled to define their community's values and practices (Acts 5-6), **Stephen** became the first of many **martyrs** to give his life in defense of the faith (Acts 7). The Holy Spirit continued to be poured out on new believers (Acts 8). As Peter affirmed that **Gentiles** could believe in Jesus, **Barnabas** and **Paul** began to travel throughout the region preaching the gospel (Acts 11). Persecution continued as Peter was jailed and **James** was beheaded (Acts 12). **Paul's travels** and teachings were documented throughout the rest of Acts (Acts 13-28), leading ultimately to his **arrest** (Acts 21), **trial** before Roman authorities (Acts 24-26), and his final days before **martyrdom**.

## Week Twenty-Four – Job 1-21

Job marks the beginning of a section of scripture often called the “Wisdom Books”. Written at various times throughout the narrative of the Bible, these books are stories, songs, poems and proverbs describing spiritual and emotional struggle, wisdom gained from God, and commitments to follow Him. Job was likely written before any other book in the Bible and told the story of a man who was caught up in a cosmic conflict between God and Satan. He suffered a tremendous loss of his entire family and fortune and was left in crushing despair. He articulated his pain in series of discourses, while his friends questioned his integrity and whether his suffering was the result of sin. Job maintained his innocence and accused God of injustice.

❑ **Read Job 1:1 – 2:10:** *God considered the wealthy and fortunate Job to be the most blameless and upright man alive at his time. Satan desired to test the authenticity of Job’s righteousness by assaulting him with great loss and suffering. In an exchange unlike any other we see in scripture, God allowed Satan to smite Job’s family and health. Job’s response was righteous, and he did not charge God with fault in his painful plight.*

❑ **Read Job 2:11 – 4:11:** *Job began to speak to his three friends who had gathered to comfort him. After cursing the day he was born and the suffering he felt, his friend Eliphaz also spoke. He subtly called into question Job’s integrity, wondering aloud if this hardship Job faced was the result of some wrongdoing.*

❑ **Read Job 18:1-4 & 19:1-29:** *Job had argued his innocence before his friends, resisting their questions and concerns. His friend Bildad expressed resentment over Job’s response to them, to which Job replied with his own resentment towards their judgmentalism. Job asked for their pity, and placed his trust in God, even though he perceived God to have unfairly brought these ailments upon him.*

**Skim & Skip:** After describing the discussion between **God** and **Satan** over Job’s character and the ensuing trial that would come to Job (Job 1-2), the balance of the book tells the story of Job’s back and forth **dialogue** with his **friends**. Rather than offering simple words of comfort, his friends approached their conversation with Job by giving **advice** and **counsel**, much of it **accusatory** and judgmental. Job reacted by claiming his **innocence** of sin and arguing that God had brought this calamity upon him for reasons he could not understand (Job 4-21). He cried out for God’s response to him, while his friends used **God’s silence** as evidence of **judgment** upon Job’s sin.

## Week Twenty-Five – Job 22-42

Job and his friends continued to wrestle with the meaning and cause of his great suffering. His friends accused him of sinning and thus reaping some kind of punishment from God. Job accused God of unfair treatment, defending his own righteousness. A fourth friend joined the argument, declaring with some authority God's intentions in the matter. After 38 chapters of silence, God finally spoke. When He did, God did not provide answers, but only rebuked Job's friends for their presumptions. He then asked Job a series of rhetorical questions, demonstrating that none of us can understand the mysteries of how God works. Job humbly received the challenge, and honored God's integrity. In the end, Job was healed, and God replaced all that he had lost.

❑ **Read Job 32:1 – 33:33:** *A fourth friend spoke up to defend God. Elihu rebuked Job's other three friends for not helping Job overcome his anger at God. He spoke of God's integrity, demonstrating that God is greater than man, and that God is, in fact, active among us all, answering as He chooses.*

❑ **Read Job 38:1-41 & 40:1-24:** *When God finally spoke to Job's ceaseless complaint, He responded not with direction, insight, or answers, but rather by asking Job questions in response. He questioned Job's ability to understand or guide the course of nature. God challenged Job's accusations against Him. Job responded with great humility and promised to listen and not speak.*

❑ **Read Job 42:1-17:** *Job readily acknowledged that he had spoken of things he did not understand and expressed his trust in God's activity and plans. As Job repented and yielded to God, the Lord rebuked Job's friends for their shortsighted counsel. Job prayed for God's mercy on his well-meaning yet misguided friends. God then blessed Job with prosperity and family that exceeded all he had lost.*

**Skim & Skip:** Job's friends persisted in their suggestion that his **suffering** was directly related to his **sin**. Eliphaz gave specific **examples**, citing Job's behavior as a rich man and his neglect of those in need, and promising that God would answer him if he would **repent** (Job 22). Job grieved the **silence** of God and how human suffering goes unchecked (Job 23-24) and offered his friends his own impressions of how God works in the world (Job 25-31). The young man **Elihu** spoke in defense of **God's integrity** (Job 32-37) before **God responded** to Job in a strong reproof of Job's questioning (Job 38-42).

## Week Twenty-Six – Psalm 1-27

The book of Psalms is the longest book in the Bible, comprised of 150 different songs, poems, and exhortations. It is a collection of writings from over a nearly 700-year period, written by many different authors. Each Psalm provides an emotionally charged look into authentic spirituality, hope and trust in God, emotional and spiritual struggle, and passionate worship of the Lord. We are taught by the Psalms to love God in any circumstance, to plead with Him in our most difficult times, to repent of our sins, and to celebrate His goodness in all things. The first 21 Psalms are almost exclusively songs written by David, the second king of Israel, offering praise, pleas for help, expressions of grief, and celebration of deliverance.

❑ **Read Psalm 1:1 – 4:8:** *An unknown author—perhaps David—penned the first two psalms, contrasting the blessings of the righteous with God’s judgment on the wicked. In the following two, David celebrated God’s protection even in the midst of a rebellion led by his own son, prayed for God’s mercy, and expressed the peace and joy he had in God.*

❑ **Read Psalm 7:1-17 & 12:1 – 13:6:** *When David was anointed by the prophet Samuel to become king of Israel, King Saul was deeply threatened, and sought to kill David. For several years David fled in the wilderness, during which he wrote many of the psalms. These psalms show David’s plea for God’s refuge and help.*

❑ **Read Psalm 23:1-6 & 27:1-14:** *Two very well-known psalms presented beautiful poetry to describe God’s peaceful provision, comfort, protection, and goodness. David promised to seek the Lord, and to wait upon Him and His salvation to come.*

**Skim & Skip:** The early psalms of David give us great insight into his heart of **trust** in God, as well as his deep emotions of **fear** and **distress**. He often contrasted how God acts towards the **righteous** and the **unrighteous**, making **God’s character** the basis of his appeal for help (Ps. 5). He sang of great **sorrow** (Ps. 6). He worshipped God for the majesty of His **creation** (Ps. 8) and for how David’s **enemies** had been thwarted (Ps. 9). He cried to God over His **silence** (Ps. 10) yet spoke of God’s righteousness (Ps. 11). He described the **foolishness** of denying God (Ps. 14) and the **stability** of blameless living (Ps. 15). He asked for God’s protection on the basis of his own **pure heart** (Ps. 16-17) and praised God when He did (Ps. 18). He celebrated the **Law** of God (Ps. 19), prayed for God to **answer** the needs of others (Ps. 20), and praised God for the **victories** He gave to David as **king** (Ps. 21). Psalm 22 is considered by some scholars to be a **Messianic Psalm** that described the suffering of Jesus on the **cross**. David explained the **holiness** of God’s presence (Ps. 24), while seeking God’s **forgiveness** and mercy (Ps. 25) and **vindication** (Ps. 26).

## Week Twenty-Seven – Psalm 28-53

The collection of psalms continued with historically important poetry and worship. Psalms 32 and 51 detailed David’s confession and repentance after committing adultery and murder. Other psalms in this selection are songs of praise and prayers for deliverance written by David, who spent many years running from enemies and oppressors—most notably from the pursuit of his predecessor, King Saul. Psalm 42 and 43 mark the beginning of a new set of psalms written by others, powerfully describing how we can discipline our souls to hope in God even in the midst of deep despair. Psalm 45 was a song for use at a royal wedding with unique Messianic meaning.

❑ **Read Psalm 32:1-11 & 38:1-22:** *Many of David’s psalms confessed great sin and told of the deep suffering he incurred as a result. Perhaps written as he dealt with the aftermath of committing adultery and murder, these two psalms show us the profound impact sin has upon us and call us towards vulnerable confession.*

❑ **Read Psalm 42:1 – 43:5:** *It is believed these two psalms were at one time a single prayer, pleading for God to rescue while the author struggled in despair and depression. In this prayer we see a beautiful example of how a believer can command his soul to put his hope in God, even though his soul is severely downcast within him.*

❑ **Read Psalm 51:1-19 & 53:1-6:** *When King David was confronted with his great sin of adultery and murder, he penned a psalm of repentance, begging God for mercy, and to restore his heart. Repeating words from Psalm 14, he described the corrupt hearts of those who would turn away from God, and he called for the salvation of Israel.*

**Skim & Skip:** David called for the **wicked** to be repaid for their evil deeds (Ps, 28). He credited strength to the **voice** of God governing the earth (Ps. 29), and **exalted** God’s mercy and help (Ps. 30). He prayed for **deliverance** in the midst of great anguish (Ps. 31). He sang **joyfully** of God’s character (Ps. 33). He retold the story of how God helped him against his enemies (Ps. 34), and asked God to **fight** on his behalf (Ps. 35). He mused about the nature of the **wicked** (Ps. 36), and yet showed how **trust** in the Lord overcame their evil plots (Ps. 37). He confessed his sin and asked for **salvation** (Ps. 38-39) and sang of God’s **rescue** (Ps. 40-41). The “Sons of Korah” were a worship choir assembled to serve in the tabernacle. They recounted great **acts of God** while calling for His **help** (Ps. 44). They wrote a **wedding song** for one of David’s descendants, with words that would later be used in the New Testament to describe the **Messiah** (Ps. 45). They provided instruction to not seek **wealth** (Ps. 49). **Asaph**, one of these choir leaders, shared God’s own word to His people, asking them not for **sacrifices**, but rather for hearts of **obedience** (Ps. 50). David wrote a song **rebuking** one of his enemies (Ps. 52).

## Week Twenty-Eight – Psalm 54-78

In this next section of the Psalms, we see songs of praise for God’s deliverance in past victories, declarations of God’s good works, expressions of wisdom, cries for vindication, help, and deliverance, complaints over enemies, and thanks and trust in God. Nearly the full range of human emotion is found in this selection, giving us tremendous insight into the authentic emotions and desires of godly people who still wrestled with common struggles and sins.

- ❑ **Read Psalm 57:1-11 & 61:1 – 62:12:** *As David faced trial and oppression—first from his predecessor King Saul, and later from enemies he faced once he became king—he called out to God to be his refuge. He implored his own soul to rest in God and purposed to be steadfast in his commitment to God.*
  
- ❑ **Read Psalm 66:1 – 67:7:** *Recalling God’s deliverance of His people from their slavery in Egypt, the psalmist called worshippers to recognize God’s activity and to shout with joy. He promised his own faithfulness in worship while calling all people to praise.*
  
- ❑ **Read Psalm 73:1-28:** *The worship leader Asaph revealed his personal struggle with jealousy and doubt that arose when he compared his life to the relative ease with which the wicked seemed to live. Nearly faltering in his faith, he held his pain inside himself, not wanting to share it with the congregation he ministered to. Once he was able to meet with God in worship, however, he saw things for what they were, and he was encouraged.*

**Skim & Skip:** David wrote several songs that prayed for God to **vindicate** and **rescue** him (Ps. 54-56), called for God to judge **corrupt** rulers (Ps. 58), and prayed for **deliverance** from Saul’s oppression (Ps. 59). He complained that God had **rejected** His people when they suffered a military defeat (Ps. 60). He affirmed his **trust** in God (Ps. 63), **complained** some more about his enemies (Ps. 64), and **praised** God for answering His people (Ps. 65). David used the story of the **Exodus** to describe God’s nature and to call for praise (Ps. 68). More prayer for **deliverance** came from the aged king who affirmed his steadfast **hope** in the Lord (Ps. 71). A psalm of prayer over King **Solomon’s** reign was likely composed for his coronation (Ps. 72). A descendent of Asaph complained of God’s perceived **rejection** (Ps. 74), declared His **judgment** of the wicked (Ps. 75), described His **majesty** (Ps. 76), and **remembered** His great deeds (Ps. 77). God’s activity in **Israel’s history** was recounted to **teach** faithfulness (Ps. 78).

## Week Twenty-Nine – Psalm 79-104

Psalms written by the descendants of Asaph and Korah appealed to God for deliverance from the Babylonian exile. Praise and worship followed, with songs designed to inspire believers to shout for joy and sing about God's identity. These exhortations to praise included prayer for salvation from enemies, pain, and distress. Moses wrote centuries before of God's goodness in the Exodus, and other writers challenged readers to sing to the Lord. David penned songs that extolled God for His nature, expressing words of glowing celebration for God's good activity on behalf of His people.

- ❑ **Read Psalm 91:1 – 93:5:** *These psalms described the shelter, security, and peace of those who trust in the Lord. They taught that in spite of all that may come against the believer, God's angels would keep him from true harm. Therefore, the psalmist expressed his praise, he sang for joy, and proclaimed God's character.*
- ❑ **Read Psalm 100:1-5 & 103:1-22:** *God's love and faithfulness led the psalmist to worship and to praise with great thankfulness. Describing the Lord's compassion and forgiveness, he remembered many of the benefits of God's gifts to mankind—redemption, satisfaction, strength, justice, and healing.*
- ❑ **Read Psalm 104:1-35:** *The psalmist praised the Lord with a recitation of all the many activities of God within creation. His control over nature and His provision for animals led the psalmist to sing and meditate, and to rejoice in the Lord.*

**Skim & Skip:** Two psalms were composed during Judah's **exile** in Babylon asking God to **restore** them to the land of Israel (Ps. 79-80). A song of **praise** for deliverance (Ps. 81) was placed before more **appeals** for restoration (Ps. 82-83, 85), expressed in a longing for the **temple** (Ps. 84), a personal appeal for help (Ps. 86), and a prophecy of Jerusalem's **renewal** (Ps. 87). Crying out of some grave condition that had the psalmist **scorned** and near **death**, he called to God whom he felt had **abandoned** him (Ps. 88). Appealing to God's power over **creation**, another psalmist pleaded with God to **restore** the kingdom after **exile** (Ps. 89). **Moses** wrote a psalm decrying difficult days of life under God's **wrath** (Ps. 90). The **justice** of God was called upon to **avenge** the righteous (Ps. 94). **Singing, music, praise, and worship** was inspired by His acts over **creation** and among the **nations** (Ps. 95-99). David committed himself to worship and **faithfulness** (Ps. 101), and an **afflicted** man poured out his grievances (Ps. 102).

## Week Thirty – Psalm 105-134

Songs of praise declared God’s majesty and His protection over those He loves. We are taught to sing for joy, to sing new songs, and to be glad. These psalms remind of us the marvelous things God has done—some miraculous, others in character and love. And yet, even in the midst of this joy, affliction was once again expressed—a common reality for any believer, no matter how worshipful we may be. A series of psalms began with a strong call to “praise the Lord” and to give thanks. Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible, describing the value of the Word of God.

- ❑ **Read Psalm 119:1-40:** *Eight Hebrew terms praising the value of God’s Word were repeated over and over through a poetic acrostic, teaching of the law, statutes, precepts, commands, laws, decrees, word, and promise of God—calling all these concepts blessed.*
  
- ❑ **Read Psalm 119:65-80 & 119:105-136:** *The affliction and struggles of the psalmist were eased through his trust and obedience to the Word of God. With the Word as his guide, he found direction, sustenance, mercy, and redemption.*
  
- ❑ **Read Psalm 120:1 – 124:8:** *Worshippers were guided in calling to the Lord as they ascended to the temple to worship. They rejoiced at God’s presence and focused their attention and gaze upon Him.*

**Skim & Skip:** Praising the Lord for His splendor, the psalmist recounted many aspects of God’s work in the history of Israel’s **exodus** (Ps. 105-106) and the **restoration** of God’s people after their **exile** in Babylon (Ps. 107). Once again David expressed his **trust** in God while calling for help (Ps. 108), the **demise** of the wicked (Ps. 109), and the **judgment** of the nations (Ps. 110). The nature and **love** of the Lord was worshipped (Ps. 111-118). Psalm 120-134 began another collection called “**Songs of Ascent**”. Some of these psalms were written for use as worshippers journeyed to the **temple** in Jerusalem. Others told the story of the Lord bringing **captives** back to Israel. As a collection, they were used by the **exiled Jews** to express a longing for God to **restore** them to Israel. Filled with **hope**, these songs turned from distress to look towards God, and to **celebrate** His deliverance.

## Week Thirty-One – Romans 1-16

The entire Bible—from Genesis to Revelation—is essentially a detailed narrative of how God has established a relationship with individual humans. It could be said that one of the most important books of the Bible is the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans. Standing as one of the central books of the New Testament, Romans unveiled for the first time a systematic and linear description of the entire narrative of the Bible: God has chosen a relationship with us. He gave us a Law that we have been unable to live by. He has made us right with Him through the death of Jesus, which took away our sin. He has given us a new way to live in Him, empowered by His Holy Spirit.

❑ **Read Romans 1:16 – 3:26:** *In the early days of Christianity, it was vital to establish that both Jews and Gentiles could be saved—a concept the Jews did not readily receive. Paul began by demonstrating that everyone has the same problem with God. We have all sinned, both Jew and Gentile, regardless of how righteous we have tried to live.*

❑ **Read Romans 3:21 – 5:21:** *True righteousness does not come through observing the law, but rather by receiving God’s righteousness as our own through faith. Paul explained how it is only the gift of God’s grace that saves us from the consequences and bondage of our sin nature, using the example that Abraham’s faith made him righteous.*

❑ **Read Romans 6:1-11 & 7:15 – 8:38:** *With grace firmly established as the means by which we are made right with God, Paul turned to the outcome this should produce in our lives. Grace not only removes our need to follow the Law, but it also empowers us to live perfectly obedient to God, as the Holy Spirit overcomes our sin nature.*

**Skim & Skip:** Romans 1-8 systematically guides us through authentic Christian spirituality. After Paul laid out his case that **righteousness** comes solely through **grace** received by **faith**, he then turned to address the greatest questions Jewish believers would have raised in argument to the theology presented here. Jews understood themselves to be God’s **chosen people**, and therefore needed to understand what had changed from the first Covenant with the advent of the New Covenant. Paul explained that understanding faith as the essential pathway to God violated nothing in the Old Covenant. **Israel’s unbelief** opened the door for **Gentiles** to join the faith (Rom. 9-11). He then instructed all believers to present themselves to God to be **transformed** and empowered (Rom. 12), to **submit** to authorities and to **love** others (Rom. 13), to not be concerned with **rituals** (Rom. 14), and to live in **unity** (Rom. 15). He concluded the letter with personal greetings and instructions to individuals in the Roman church (Rom. 16).

## Week Thirty-Two – Psalm 135-150

The mood at the end of the Psalms turned noticeably joyful. Even with a few remaining passages written by David in his times of trouble and despair, the joy of Israel’s redemption became the dominant theme of this final collection of songs. Many of them were written by post-exilic authors who recounted and celebrated the return of Israel to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. They called for praise, thanksgiving, singing, and joy.

- ❑ **Read Psalm 136:1 – 137:9:** *Following the return of the Jews to Israel after the Babylonian exile came to an end, these psalms were composed, one as a liturgical reading between priest and people, and the other as a recollection of the sorrow they had faced while living in Babylon.*
  
- ❑ **Read Psalm 139:1-24:** *In one of David’s most vulnerable psalms, he sought the Lord for insight into the innermost places of his soul. Celebrating how intimately the Lord had made him, he asked God to search his thoughts and actions to see if anything within him was offensive or wrong.*
  
- ❑ **Read Psalm 147:1-20 & 149:1 – 150:6:** *Musing about the Lord’s restoration of Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile, the psalmist called the people to sing and praise the Lord with thanksgiving. Song, dance, joy, and music were called upon to express God’s goodness, while vengeance towards the enemies of Israel was enjoined—a theme very common to many Old Testament authors.*

**Skim & Skip:** The **sovereignty** of God was celebrated by recalling His acts in the **exodus** from Egypt, written centuries later when Israel was freed from her second **captivity** in Babylon (Psalm 135). David called all the **kings** of the earth to recognize God as he acknowledged the fulfillment of God’s **promises** to him (Psalm 138). He called for God to **rescue** him in a time of great distress (Psalm 140-141), which included a specific song written while hiding in a **cave** from King Saul’s pursuit (Psalm 142). He also praised God for being his **rock** and equipping him for battle (Psalm 144). David’s final psalm exalted God for His **love** and **closeness** (Psalm 145). “**Hallelujah**”—the Hebrew phrase for “praise the Lord”—framed the final five psalms, written after the Babylonian exile, calling all believers to **praise** (Psalm 146-150).

## Week Thirty-Three – Proverbs 1-31

King Solomon—the third king of Israel and David’s son—was considered to be the wisest man to have ever lived. In spite of his many difficulties with sin, God had blessed him with tremendous insight and wisdom into the condition of man. Alongside unknown authors and other wise men, Solomon wrote a majority of the Proverbs, sharing profound instructions for living in short, pithy statements. They plead with us to pursue wisdom, to guard ourselves against immorality, and to live honorably with everyone we know. The Proverbs are a vast collection of wise sayings for those who would follow God, addressing almost every aspect of human life.

- ❑ **Read Proverbs 1:1-7 & 3:1 – 4:27:** *The pursuit of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding is the key point of the Proverbs. These attributes were often personified as they were taught. Pursuing wisdom and trusting God promised life and blessing, while choosing wickedness promised a life of ruin.*
- ❑ **Read Proverbs 10:1 – 11:31:** *In a somewhat random arrangement, 325 proverbs written by Solomon were placed through chapters 10 to 22. They addressed many ideas and circumstances, providing practical wisdom, demonstrating consequences to actions, and teaching God’s heart in a variety of situations.*
- ❑ **Read Proverbs 31:1-31:** *Sayings by King Lemuel, whom we know little about, spoke to issues of wise leadership. The book concluded with an acrostic poem in Hebrew praising the attributes of a wife of noble character.*

**Skim & Skip:** In the beginning chapters of Proverbs **wisdom** was **personified**, calling out to any who would listen to gain wisdom and **understanding** (Prov. 1-2). Much of the early discussion about wisdom centered on avoiding the destructive path of **adultery** and providing warnings about things that bring **ruin** and that God **detests** (Prov. 5-7). The personified wisdom continued to call out (Prov. 8), contrasted to the “**woman Folly**”, another personification of wisdom’s opposite (Prov. 9). A **diverse assortment** of proverbs often **contrasted** a **wise** man and a **fool** in all kinds of scenarios, including integrity, handling of conflict, discipline, reckless words, hope and sorrow, marriage, temper, greed, leadership, and discernment (Prov. 12-22). More sayings of the wise were offered (Prov. 22-24), as well as additional proverbs from Solomon (Prov. 25-29), before the book was concluded with sayings from two others (Prov. 30-31), all conveying similar discussions about **wise and foolish actions**.

## Week Thirty-Four – Ecclesiastes / Song of Songs

The last two “Wisdom Books” of the Old Testament are essentially journals from the life of King Solomon. Ecclesiastes is considered to be a memoir of sorts, where Solomon shared the overarching insights he gained in life by seeking God’s wisdom even while gaining great wealth and trying every activity he could—including great sin. At the end of life, he reflected on what is really most important: to enjoy all that life has to offer while loving God, and to live your life with an eye on God’s ultimate judgment. The Song of Songs, sometimes called The Song of Solomon, is believed to be a wedding poem composed for his first wedding, describing a passionate interplay between his fiancé and he, leading up to their wedding ceremony.

❑ **Read Ecclesiastes 1:1 – 2:26:** *Solomon embarked a search for the meaning of life, denying himself no pleasure or acquisition. Observing how both the righteous and unrighteous end up with the same ultimate fate, he languished in the sorrow that all activity in life is meaningless except that which God allows us to enjoy.*

❑ **Read Ecclesiastes 9:1-10 & 11:7 – 12:14:** *After experiencing all that life could offer him, Solomon determined that life is to be enjoyed while we have it, but with an eye on how God will judge our actions. He concluded that life’s entire purpose is summed up in fearing God and keeping His commands while we find happiness in all that we have.*

❑ **Read Song of Songs 4:1-15 & 7:10 – 8:14:** *The Lover (groom) used poetic descriptions common to his day to describe the beauty of his bride (the Beloved) and his longing for intimate union with her. As the song concluded, we see the two entering the “vineyard” of their passionate love.*

**Skim & Skip:** Solomon’s journey to understand life recognized that there is a **time** for every activity and experience to occur, including **judgment** (Eccl. 3). He grieved over the heartache of those living **alone** or in **oppression** (Eccl. 4), empty **words** and pursuit of **riches** (Eccl. 5), and the inability to fully **enjoy** what life achieves (Eccl. 6). He celebrated **wisdom** (Eccl. 7), grieved **unfair treatment** among men (Eccl. 8), and contrasted **wise** and **foolish** people (Eccl. 10). Calling his readers to **remember God**, he explained that God’s activities are beyond our comprehension (Eccl. 11). In Solomon’s wedding poem, the **Song of Songs**, three primary characters—the bride, the groom, and their friends—all expressed the building anticipation of the couple’s consummated **marriage** with glowing and poetic words.

## Week Thirty-Five – Isaiah 1-22

Isaiah marks the beginning of a section of scripture that we call the “Major Prophets.” Prophets spoke direct words from God. Four Major Prophets (*Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel*), and twelve “Minor Prophets” (*named for the size of their books, not the importance*) brought stern warnings of judgment and promises of future redemption, marking a tumultuous era in the history of God’s people. Prophesying during the last centuries of the kings of Israel and Judah, these prophets set the stage for God’s discipline of His people, which would come in the form of invasions and captivity at the hand of the Assyrians and Babylonians. The first section of Isaiah detailed his calling, key stories that defined the purpose of God’s judgment, and a clear message that even though God would use godless nations such as Assyria and Babylon to bring judgment on the Jewish people, His punishment would soon fall on those unholy peoples as well. Isaiah shows us that when God disciplines His people, He always does so with the promise of redemption, restoration, and healing close at hand.

❑ **Read Isaiah 1:1-31 & 6:1-13:** *God’s passionate heartbreak over His people was demonstrated as Isaiah poured out warnings of judgment and promise of restoration. Receiving his calling in a vision before the throne of God, the Lord commissioned Isaiah to close the ears of unrepentant Israel with words that would harden their hearts.*

❑ **Read Isaiah 7:1 – 8:10:** *Isaiah was sent to the king of Judah to instruct him to trust the Lord during one of the many outbreaks of civil war between Judah and Israel (called “Ephraim” in this passage). A sign given to King Ahaz—the birth of a child in his court—was also a prophetic foreshadowing of the Christ-child. The defeat of Israel at the hands of the Assyrians was promised.*

❑ **Read Isaiah 9:1-7 & 10:20 – 11:16:** *As the northern nation of Israel neared the judgment coming to them from Assyria, Isaiah reassured Judah that Assyria itself would fall, and a Messiah would eventually come from the remnant of God’s people.*

**Skim & Skip:** In the face of impending judgment, it was essential for God to display the **future** plans He had for Israel. He that promised Jerusalem’s temple would be **restored** (Isa. 2), though the impending “**Day of the Lord**” would take away Jerusalem for a time (Isa. 2-3) and leave only a **remnant** (Isa. 4). Isaiah pronounced **woes** on those who would face judgment (Isa. 5) and praised God for the **remnant** that would be preserved (Isa. 12). The various **nations** that threatened Israel and Judah were warned that they also would face judgment (Isa. 13-22), an essential message for the Jews to hear as they faced their own immediate destruction. God made clear that Israel and Judah’s judgment would be **temporary**, and at the hands of nations no less in danger of God’s hand of **discipline**.

## Week Thirty-Six – Isaiah 23-45

As God warned of impending judgment on His people, He also demonstrated that judgment is coming to the rest of the earth. “Woes” were pronounced over the people who would have to endure the wrath of God coming to their societies. He warned against relying on human strength, symbolized by trusting in other nations, such as Egypt. In the midst of this horrible tale of destruction, the prophet worshiped with praise for the promise of deliverance that always accompanies God’s acts of discipline and declared God’s coming comfort. This section also detailed the storyline of Isaiah’s interaction with Hezekiah, one of the righteous kings of Judah, as he faced one of the many incursions against Israel and Judah by Assyria.

❑ **Read Isaiah 30:15 – 31:9:** *Isaiah prophesied the Lord’s rebuke on those who would trust in Egypt for help against the coming judgment. Even in the midst of this rebuke, however, Isaiah was quick to describe how God longs to be gracious to them, and to be their source of hope and trust. But since they would refuse, only terror was before them.*

❑ **Read Isaiah 37:1 – 38:22:** *When confronted by an invasion from Assyria, Judah’s King Hezekiah turned to the Lord. Isaiah encouraged him to trust in God’s deliverance, which he did, and the Lord smote the Assyrians. Later, when Hezekiah faced natural death in his agedness, he turned again to the Lord. Isaiah ministered to him a promise of a few more years of life because Hezekiah had sought the Lord.*

❑ **Read Isaiah 40:1-31, 42:1-4 & 43:1-13:** *Written many years after the first half of the book of Isaiah, chapter 40 began a whole new tone—one of redemption, provision, and comfort. Isaiah spoke as if the Babylonian captivity that was yet to come was nearing its end, to encourage God’s people that healing and restoration was indeed in their future. Many of these passages described the coming Messianic age, when the fullest restoration of God’s people would occur.*

**Skim & Skip:** Concluding a series of **warnings** to various nations and regions (Isa. 23), the Lord promised devastation to the **entire earth** in the end times (Isa. 24). Isaiah **praised** the Lord for the ultimate establishment of Jerusalem in that **Day**, a day seen as **deliverance** for Israel (Isa. 25-27). In the meantime, though, **woes** were still pronounced over both Israel (called “**Ephraim**”) and **Jerusalem** (Isa. 28-29), and for those who would trust in **Egypt** instead of God (Isa. 30). Promises of **joy** and **security** in God’s Kingdom were mixed among descriptions of distress and wrath coming to the nations (Isa. 32-35). An account of Isaiah’s interaction with Judah’s King **Hezekiah** was retold from 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles (Isa. 36-39). With **new tones** of hope, God laid out His promise for the **Messiah** and complete **restoration** of Jerusalem (Isa. 40-45).

## Week Thirty-Seven – Isaiah 46-66

Some call the last section of Isaiah (chapters 40-66) “The Book of Comfort” because it declared the promises of God for the ultimate redemption, restoration, and healing of His people. Through the prophet, God promised that His “servant” would come to restore Israel—understood by the Jews to be the Messiah. But this servant would also face suffering on the road to his glory, providing the clearest Old Testament prophecy to the sufferings of Jesus. Even though much of Isaiah’s prophecies in this section of scripture are yet to be fulfilled in the end times, it is clear that the establishment of God’s perfect kingdom is the purpose to which everything is building. This section was written much later in Isaiah’s life, after the northern nation of Israel had been carried into exile in Assyria, but before the southern Judah was taken captive by Babylon.

❑ **Read Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12:** *In what is perhaps the clearest Old Testament prophecy concerning Jesus Christ, healing and forgiveness would come from the suffering of the Messiah. This prophecy was essential to distinguish the true purpose of Messiah from the mere political deliverance the Jews of Isaiah’s time would have simply hoped for.*

❑ **Read Isaiah 56:1-8 & 58:1-14:** *As God promised restoration to Israel, He also called for that restoration to be marked by social justice. Acceptance of foreigners, keeping the Sabbath as a day of worship to God, and serving the needs of the oppressed and poor were expected of the remnant being restored.*

❑ **Read Isaiah 55:1-13 & 61:11:** *God called to the thirsty, poor, and brokenhearted, inviting them to draw life and healing from Him. Spoken prophetically to the future captives, these passages described the supernatural work the Word of God would do, and the liberty He would bring. Jesus taught from Isaiah 61:1-3 to open his public ministry.*

**Skim & Skip:** As Judah neared her own judgment and exile at the hands of the **Babylonians**, Isaiah turned his prophecy against Babylon itself. God would use them to judge Judah, but they faced their own **destruction** as well (Isa. 46-47). Pleading for Judah to **listen** to Him (Isa. 48), God promised **restoration** (Isa. 49-52, 54). **Justice** was a key theme throughout Isaiah—Israel’s injustice offered as **rationale** for God’s judgment, and a **return** to justice as the mark of restoration (Isa. 57-59). Isaiah concluded his prophecy with words from God describing the **glory** of a renewed **Zion** (Isa. 60-62), His vengeance against the enemies of Israel (Isa. 63), Isaiah **praising** God and calling for Him to come with deliverance (Isa. 63-64), and final descriptions of both **judgment** and **hope** (Isa. 65-66).

## Week Thirty-Eight – 1 Corinthians 1-16 / 2 Corinthians 1-13

Returning to the New Testament, we read two letters from the Apostle Paul to local churches that provide very practical instructions on Christian living, church life, and essential doctrine. Writing to the church in the very cosmopolitan and secular Greek city of Corinth, Paul addressed serious problems in the church. From division and strife to sexual sin, these early Christians were having trouble adapting their pagan lives to Christ-centered living. Paul laid out clear instructions on unity, sexual purity, marriage, worship practices, and hope in the return of Christ. In his second letter, he answered criticism about his own leadership, and called for an understanding of authentic spiritual living.

❑ **Read 1 Corinthians 12:1 – 14:40:** *The Corinthians had asked Paul for an explanation of spiritual gifts, apparently because they were having difficulty knowing how to manage these supernatural manifestations of God’s Spirit. In response, Paul explained what spiritual gifts are, how they should be used, and the love that must accompany them.*

❑ **Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-58:** *Addressing concerns about what happens when we die, Paul laid out a compelling description of how all believers will be raised to eternal life. It is central to the Christian faith to believe in both the resurrection of Jesus, and our own eternal life. Without such hope we have no real Christian spirituality.*

❑ **Read 2 Corinthians 11:1 – 12:21:** *As Paul defended the authority of his ministry against critics who questioned his authenticity, he appealed to his sufferings as a measurement of God’s presence with him. He also described how he was given a supernatural vision, and yet, it was his weakness that really demonstrated God’s power.*

**Skim & Skip:** 1 Corinthians gives us an excellent glimpse into some of the patterns of the early church. By far an imperfect community, the church in Corinth was struggling with problems of **division** (1 Cor. 1). **Wisdom** was described as coming from God’s **Spirit** (1 Cor. 2), and believers were instructed to approach life together in the Spirit, rather than in a **worldly** manner (1 Cor. 3). Paul **defended** his authority (1 Cor. 4), while calling for the expulsion of **immorality** (1 Cor. 5-6). **Marriage, idolatry**, support of ministers, freedom, and **propriety** in worship were all discussed (1 Cor. 7-11). In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul further defended his ministry (2 Cor. 1-2) while describing the nature of **ministry** that God has given everyone (2 Cor. 3-6). He called for personal **holiness** and **generosity** (2 Cor. 7-9) before defending his credentials in contrast to **false prophets** (2 Cor. 10-13).

## Week Thirty-Nine – Galatians / Ephesians / Philippians / Colossians

In a series of New Testament letters to four churches that the Apostle Paul had helped start or oversee, he wrote intensely of important Christian theology. In his letter to the Galatian church, he sharply contrasted living by the Old Testament law to living by the grace of Jesus. In Ephesians, he described how we have been chosen uniquely by God, allowing all of us the chance to participate in the original covenant established with Abraham in Genesis. In Philippians and Colossians, he challenged the believers to understand what it means to have Christ within us, to follow him joyfully, and to live in unity with one another.

❑ **Read Galatians 5:1 – 6:18:** *Paul explained that those who would seek to be right with God by observing the Law will not experience the grace and freedom of Christ, and in fact, will not belong to Christ. If, however, we seek to live by faith in Jesus and be directed by God's Spirit, we will actually be able to bear the fruit of genuine righteousness in our lives.*

❑ **Read Ephesians 1:3 – 2:22:** *The essential message of Christianity was spelled out: that it is not our own works that save us. It is by God's grace, through Jesus, that we access a relationship with God by faith. Even the faith we have is a gift from God, who has specifically chosen each of us to be adopted as His sons and daughters.*

❑ **Read Philippians 2:1 – 3:14 & Colossians 2:6 – 3:17:** *Paul described his own desire to be like Jesus, who humbled himself to the point of dying for us all. Placing no confidence in his own flesh or good deeds, Paul recognized that the ability to put off bad behavior and put on righteousness was not based on keeping laws or following ritual.*

**Skim & Skip:** Paul was concerned that the Christians in Galatia had succumbed to a **false gospel** based on observance of the **Law**, rather than simple **faith** in Christ. Defending how he had come to know the truth (Gal. 1-2), he instructed them that attempting spirituality by **human effort** would fail to attain the **promise** of life in God (Gal. 3-4). His letter to the Ephesians continued this theme, demonstrating the great mystery of how Jesus lives in us, his Church, which is also called the **Body of Christ** (Eph. 3-5). Spiritual strength is attained when we wear the **“armor”** of God's truth (Eph. 6). We are then able to live in a manner **worthy of Christ** (Phil. 1), filled with **joy** and generous unity with others (Phil 4). Jesus is the visible **image** of our invisible God (Col. 1), and when we live in him, we can find true **holiness** in our lives (Col. 2-3).

## Week Forty – Jeremiah 1-28

Jeremiah has often been called “the weeping prophet” because of the depth of insight we are given into his personal life, his struggles, his self-doubts, and his anguishing discouragement—an insight that is unparalleled in any other biblical author except David or Job. Prophesying in Jerusalem during the final decades before its fall to destruction by the Babylonians, Jeremiah warned the people to submit to the hand of God’s discipline, rather than fight against it. This unpopular message of surrender was seen as traitorous, and Jeremiah had to struggle against both political leaders and false prophets to proclaim God’s Word.

- ❑ **Read Jeremiah 1:1-19 & 3:6 – 4:2:** *Jeremiah was called by God to proclaim a coming invasion from Babylon that would bring judgment and eventual exile. It was still God’s hope to avert this disaster by Judah returning to the Lord. God called Himself Israel’s husband and asked for her unfaithfulness to end.*
- ❑ **Read Jeremiah 11:18 – 12:6, 15:10-21 & 20:7-18:** *Jeremiah faced many threats for the work of his ministry. In the midst of prophesying the coming judgment on Judah, Jeremiah often turned to the Lord and complained of his own pain and suffering.*
- ❑ **Read Jeremiah 23:1-40:** *There was a serious problem with false prophets and ministers proclaiming peace and victory for Judah when God had not spoken such hope. God condemned the false prophets who were misleading His people and promised that one day He would raise up a righteous shepherd—the Messiah.*

**Skim & Skip:** In language of **passion**, God spoke of His people’s **unfaithfulness** (Jer. 2-3). **Disaster** was promised (Jer. 4) because the entire land was found to be **unfaithful** (Jer. 5). Jeremiah warned of a **siege** against Jerusalem (Jer. 6), exposed Judah’s **empty words** of worship (Jer 7), described coming **punishment** (Jer. 8-9), and addressed their **idolatry** (Jer. 10). God reminded them of the original **terms** of the Mosaic **covenant**, that **destruction** would come to those who **disobeyed** the Law (Jer. 11). Jeremiah used various **illustrations** to speak warnings (Jer. 13). **Famine** was promised (Jer 14) and a day of great **disaster** (Jer. 16-17). He used rejected pottery to illustrate God’s choice to abandon Israel (Jer 18-19). The last king of Judah, Zedekiah, asked Jeremiah to perform a **miracle** by rescuing them from Babylon, which Jeremiah refused and proclaimed judgment on the king (Jer. 21-22). God promised goodness to **faithful** Jews who were in exile (Jer. 24) and set the length of captivity to **70 years** (Jer. 25). Jeremiah was threatened with **death** (Jer. 26) for telling the Jews to **serve** the Babylonian king (Jer. 27). The prophet **Hananiah** falsely predicted Judah’s immediate victory over Babylon (Jer. 28).

## Week Forty-One – Jeremiah 29-52 / Lamentations

All the prophets who spoke of judgment and destruction also expressed God’s plan for restoration. Jeremiah is no different. God’s wrath has very specific limits to bring forth only the level of discipline needed to fulfill God’s purposes. In the case of the impending destruction of Jerusalem, God intended only 70 years of captivity, giving Jeremiah the ability to speak of hope and of God’s good plans to prosper and not harm. Jeremiah also penned the book of Lamentations as Jerusalem was falling to the Babylonian armies. Even in the midst of this forewarned tragedy, there was hope for the future, however clouded by present circumstances.

- ❑ **Read Jeremiah 29:1-23, 30:1-3 & 30:17-21:** *As the Babylonian captivity unfolded, Jeremiah wrote to the elders and leaders of Judah in exile. His message was unpopular and seen as capitulation—they should settle in for the duration of a 70-year captivity. But in that message was also profound promise—the restoration of Israel in 70 years.*
- ❑ **Read Jeremiah 37:1 – 38:28:** *Jeremiah’s message confirming God’s hand in the exile to Babylon was seen as treason. He was imprisoned and interrogated.*
- ❑ **Read Lamentations 3:1-40 & 5:1-22:** *As Jeremiah watched Jerusalem fall to the Babylonians, he penned this series of laments. Suffering his own pain, Jeremiah also called to remembrance the hope that still existed—that God’s mercies are always present, always new. He prayed for the Lord to remember and restore Israel.*

**Skim & Skip:** The Lord described His **love** and **closeness** that would come when He would **restore** Israel (Jer. 31). While Babylon besieged Jerusalem, Jeremiah bought **land** to symbolize the day when Israel would once again be **settled** by the Jews (Jer. 32) and promised **restoration** (Jer. 33). He warned Judah’s last king, **Zedekiah**, that the end had come (Jer. 34), and ate with a righteous family (Jer. 35). Placed out of order chronologically, Jeremiah retold the **rejection** of his message by a previous king (Jer. 36). As **Jerusalem fell** (Jer. 39), Jeremiah was freed and fled to **Egypt** (Jer. 40-43), still prophesying disaster (Jer. 44-45). He finished his prophecy by addressing the judgment to come on all the surrounding **enemies** of Israel and Judah—Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Syria, and Babylon (Jer. 46-51). The book ended with a description of the **fall of Jerusalem** (Jer. 52). **Lamentations** was a series of poetic descriptions of the bitterness of Jerusalem’s fall and the nature of her sins (Lam. 1), God’s **anger** (Lam. 2), and the **cry** of His people in their pain (Lam. 4).

## Week Forty-Two – 1 Thessalonians / 2 Thessalonians / 1 Timothy / 2 Timothy / Titus / Philemon

The Apostle Paul concluded his contribution to the New Testament with five letters that warned about the end times, called for personal holiness, and gave instructions to church leaders. His letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon were written to individual people rather than to an entire church. Timothy and Titus were pastors that Paul was mentoring. He gave them strong direction about how to protect doctrine, teach the scriptures, and lead the church—instructions invaluable for us to discover what a disciplined and faithful life in Christ looks like for us today. Philemon was written to a friend of Paul's, encouraging him to receive home an escaped slave whom Paul had led to Christ, and to do so without punishing him.

❑ **Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1 – 5:28:** *Both letters to the Thessalonians have some of the strongest biblical language related to the end times, exhorting holiness in light of Jesus' promised second coming. Paul warned the Thessalonians to be alert and self-controlled, while also encouraging them that they would soon be taken to be with Jesus.*

❑ **Read 2 Timothy 2:1 – 4:8:** *Paul instructed Timothy to be focused and strong in his walk with the Lord, to endure hardship, and to diligently do the work God had given him. He explained how people in the last days would turn away from truth and sound doctrine, and that Timothy should focus himself on the scriptures and teach them without fear.*

❑ **Read Titus 1:5 – 3:11:** *Titus was commissioned to establish church leadership on the island of Crete, known for its deplorable moral condition. The qualifications for leadership were explained, with a call for all to live godly in Christ. He emphasized how it is only the grace of God and His mercy that can compel us to live righteously.*

**Skim & Skip:** Paul gave thanks for the Thessalonians' **faithfulness** in spite of severe **suffering** (1 Thess. 1) and reviewed the ministry he had shared with them (1 Thess. 2-3). His second letter to Thessalonica emphasized the **second coming of Christ**, encouraging them to stand firm in the face of trouble, knowing that God would repay those who mistreated them (2 Thess. 1-2). He warned them to stay committed and active (2 Thess. 3). He gave Timothy instructions on handling **false teachers**, propriety in **worship**, and **qualifications** for church leaders (1 Tim. 1-3), while challenging him to be diligent in ministry (1 Tim. 4). He wrote about support of **widows** and handling of **finances** (1 Tim. 5-6), and celebrated Timothy's **heritage** (2 Tim 1). Paul's letter to **Philemon** shows how deep our Christianity should go: when Paul led an escaped slave to Christ, he asked Philemon to love this brother and allow him to return without harm.

## Week Forty-Three – Hebrews 1-13

The book of Hebrews is a New Testament letter written by an unknown author to explain how the Old Testament systems of worship were all created to point to our salvation in Jesus Christ. Written to Jewish believers as the name implies, Hebrews was complementary to the book of Romans, completing the Old Testament / New Testament narrative of how God was presenting a global revelation of His desire to be in relationship with us. We learn how the temple and sacrificial system of the Old Covenant was ultimately fulfilled in the sacrifice of Jesus, and we are called to a life of holiness as a result of receiving a New Covenant through faith in Jesus.

- ❑ **Read Hebrews 1:1 – 2:18:** *It was important for Jewish Christians to connect the Jesus they saw on earth with God in heaven. The writer of Hebrews explained the divinity of Jesus, confirming it with Old Testament scripture. He also showed that this divine Jesus was our very approachable brother, familiar with human suffering and temptation.*
- ❑ **Read Hebrews 9:1 – 10:23:** *When God began revealing Himself through the people of Israel, much of it centered on worship at the temple in Jerusalem, where sin was atoned through annual sacrifices. This was all created to foreshadow Jesus Christ who was the ultimate sacrifice that would once for all cleanse us of our sins.*
- ❑ **Read Hebrews 11:1 – 12:28:** *Christian spirituality is fundamentally about faith. The writer walked through the history of God's people, showing how faith was the source of God's activity in them. He challenged the Hebrews to focus their attention on Jesus who had given them faith, to endure hardship, and to live righteously through that faith.*

**Skim & Skip:** The writer of Hebrews demonstrated how Jesus was interwoven into the entire revelation of the **Old Covenant**. He showed how the gift of the **Promised Land** was ultimately about foreshadowing the **rest** that is found in trusting Jesus (Heb. 3-4), and how the system of the **priesthood** was completely fulfilled in Jesus (Heb. 4-5). The Hebrews were warned against **falling away** and assured of the certainty of God's **promise** to them (Heb. 6). An example was brought from the life of the priest **Melchizedek**, whom Abraham knew, to show that Jesus fulfilled all the various roles of the priesthood (Heb. 7-8). Once faith in Jesus was firmly established, instructions for **holy living** could finally make sense (Heb. 13).

## Week Forty-Four – Ezekiel 1-24

Before the cataclysmic event of Babylon’s destruction of Jerusalem carried Judah away into exile, a series of smaller invasions took groups of Jews into captivity in Babylon. Among those carried into exile prior to the rest of his countrymen was Ezekiel, who ministered as a prophet while held captive in Babylon. Ezekiel was given visions and messages that he often acted out in a kind of “role-playing” exercise with the people of Israel. The first half of his book bears the news that Jerusalem would be destroyed, and that captivity would be lengthy—similar to the unpopular message Jeremiah was preaching at the same time back home in Judah. He taught that God would abandon His temple, something the Jews assumed that God would never let happen.

❑ **Read Ezekiel 2:1 – 3:27:** *Ezekiel was called by God to be a “watchman”—like those who stood guard on the city walls of his day. He was to pronounce warnings to individuals, paving the way for personal repentance. His calling was a difficult one; God made clear that few would listen, for the hearts of Israel were hard and obstinate.*

❑ **Read Ezekiel 4:1 – 5:17:** *God often had Ezekiel act out his prophecies through dramatic role-playing exercises. He demonstrated the coming fall of Jerusalem by building a model of it and acted out the role of the captive in great detail, all the way down to being forced to eat food cooked over a fire fueled by excrement.*

❑ **Read Ezekiel 16:1-63:** *God spoke of Israel with the very dramatic imagery of a father raising a daughter who grew up to be a prostitute, showing the extreme passion and heartache of God like very few other passages of scripture do.*

**Skim & Skip:** Ezekiel saw directly into the **spiritual realm** and described the **heavenly creatures** he saw with fantastical language (Eze. 1). He prophesied the destruction of pagan worship at the “**high places**” (Eze. 6) and warned that the end for Jerusalem had come (Eze. 7). In a very detailed vision, Ezekiel saw examples of Judah’s **idolatry** (Eze. 8), judgment being exacted on her **leaders** (Eze. 9, 11), and the **glory** of God departing the **temple** (Eze. 10). He dramatically reenacted the coming **exile** (Eze. 12), rebuked **false prophets** who promised peace (Eze. 13) and challenged the **elders** of Israel (Eze. 14). He used a parable of a dying vine (Eze. 17), stressing **individual responsibility** for sin (Eze. 18). Poetry was used to describe the coming judgment (Eze. 19). God recounted the history of Israel’s rebellion all the way back to the Exodus (Eze. 20). **Babylon** would serve to bring Jerusalem’s fall (Eze. 21), and her specific sins were enumerated (Eze. 22). Israel’s sins were compared with **prostitution** in another dramatic parable (Eze. 23). Ezekiel’s **wife** died on the exact day Jerusalem was besieged (Eze. 24).

## Week Forty-Five – Ezekiel 25-48

As Ezekiel continued, he began to paint an image of the future restoration of Jerusalem, the temple, and God's people. Central to his message of healing was the restoration of the human heart. God promised to restore not only the physical borders of Israel, but to replace their hardened hearts with soft hearts of flesh, and to place a new spirit within them. Ezekiel's prophecies were laden with teachings about the end times, as much of the ultimate fulfillment of these promises of restoration is yet to occur at the end of human history.

- ❑ **Read Ezekiel 34:1-31:** *Using the imagery of shepherds to describe the spiritual leaders of Israel, God rebuked them for not caring for His sheep. He promised to take the role of shepherd upon Himself, to protect His people and provide for them.*
  
- ❑ **Read Ezekiel 36:1-38:** *The message of Ezekiel began to turn towards a restoration that God would bring to Israel. Some of these promises would be fulfilled at the end of 70 years of captivity in Babylon; others spoke of the redemption that would come with Christ; still others speak of "end-times" restoration yet to occur. God promised to restore not just the physical land of Israel, but also the hardened hearts of His people.*
  
- ❑ **Read Ezekiel 37:1-27:** *The Lord gave Ezekiel a vision of a valley filled with dry bones. The bones were reassembled, and life was breathed into them in the same way that the Holy Spirit breathes life into the believer. He promised to reunite the two divided nations of Israel and Judah under a new ruler bearing the name of King David—a clear Messianic prophecy, as Jesus would be a descendant of David.*

**Skim & Skip:** Ezekiel ministered in a time of great **international volatility**, as **Babylon** was flexing its power at all the nations surrounding Israel. He warned these nations that Israel's demise did not mean they weren't facing their own **judgment** from God (Eze. 25-26), using poetic **laments** and prophecies for the fall of these nations (Eze. 27-32). Ezekiel's call as a **watchman** was affirmed, and news of **Jerusalem's** destruction reached him in exile (Eze. 33). He rebuked Israel's neighbor, **Edom**, for reveling in her destruction (Eze. 35). The remainder of Ezekiel focused on visions of an ultimate restoration of the **temple** and Jerusalem within the end times, either in the natural realm or as an imagery of the spiritual realm (Eze. 40-48), including another major conflict commonly understood to refer to the battle of **Armageddon** (Eze. 38-39).

## Week Forty-Six – The General Letters

*James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1,2 & 3 John, Jude*

Four writers, who were perhaps Jesus' closest friends and companions, composed these seven letters to be circulated among the early churches as a strong admonition to live out the Christian life with intensity, integrity, and carefulness. James and Jude were the physical brothers of Jesus, Peter and John two of his closest disciples. In these letters, they gave a very intense call to holy living. They warned about the impact of careless and sinful living on both our present and our eternal lives. They gave very precious promises about God's mercy and grace, clarity on our security in Him, and how He has chosen believers to be a very special people.

❑ **Read James 1:1-27 & 2:14-26:** *Our actual behavior is a demonstration of what we really believe about God. How we handle trials and temptations, how we live out God's Word, and how we treat others demonstrates our commitment to Him and just how real our spirituality is. Faith that doesn't produce action is not really faith at all!*

❑ **Read 1 Peter 2:1-12 & 4:1-19 & 2 Peter 1:3-11:** *We have been chosen by God to be a special people, unique in relationship to Him, and in how we live. We learn to be self-controlled, to handle our difficulties for the sake of Jesus, and to add to our faith an ever-increasing amount of growth, becoming effective and productive in our spiritual lives.*

❑ **Read 1 John 1:1 – 2:17 & 4:7-21:** *We all sin. But when we do sin, Jesus stands in our defense. In return, we are asked to obey his commands, to receive his forgiveness and cleansing, and to live a life of love. How well we are able to obey him and live in love is a strong indicator of how deeply we have received Jesus into our lives.*

**Skim & Skip:** There are many practical and specific instructions about life given in these seven letters. Beyond the ones we will read in the assignments above, the rest of these letters teach us to not show **favoritism**, to control our **speech**, to pursue **wisdom**, to **submit** ourselves to God, to not cling to **money**, and to be patient and prayerful in **suffering** (James 2-5). We also learn about **submission** to rulers, masters, our families, and our elders (1 Peter 2-3, 5), how to handle **persecution** (1 Peter 3), the danger of **false teachers** misleading us (2 Peter 2 / Jude), what will happen in the **end times** (2 Peter 3), and how to **discern** if someone is a false teacher (1 John 2 & 4). There is much discussion about **loving one another** (1 John 3-4), and how we can **know with certainty** how secure our relationship with God has become (1 John 5). Throughout these letters, we are constantly told to **persevere**, for perseverance produces character and a right relationship with God.

## Week Forty-Seven – Daniel 1-12 / Hosea 1-14

Daniel was the last of the “Major Prophets,” a title signifying the length of their works, not their significance. He led and taught the Jewish people during the Babylonian captivity. As the Babylonians carried the people of Judah into exile, God put favor on this young Jewish man to be elevated into political leadership within the Babylonian empire. While Daniel and his friends made their way through the ranks of those closest to King Nebuchadnezzar and his successors, Daniel’s prophecies ranged from words of warning for the Babylonian king to visions of the end times. Hosea is the first of the “Minor Prophets” and ministered nearly two centuries before Daniel. He warned of the Assyrian invasion of Israel that was to come. God used Hosea’s heart-wrenching marriage to a prostitute to illustrate His own broken heart over the people of Israel.

❑ **Read Daniel 3:1-30:** *Daniel’s friends had been elevated with him to a place of authority in the Babylonian government and faced a tremendous test of their faithfulness to God. Refusing to worship the king’s idol, they were thrown into a blazing furnace. Committed to God even if He would not deliver them, they were miraculously saved by a fourth figure that walked with them in the fire—perhaps a foreshadowed vision of Jesus.*

❑ **Read Daniel 9:1-27:** *One of the most significant prophetic events in the Bible occurred when Jeremiah prophesied that the Babylonian exile would last exactly 70 years. Reading that prophecy 70 years later, Daniel realized that God would soon restore Jerusalem. As he prayed for this, God gave Daniel a vision, using images of weeks, to predict the precise time of the Messiah’s ministry—483 years later—which was precisely fulfilled by Jesus.*

❑ **Read Hosea 1:1 – 3:5:** *The prophet Hosea’s tumultuous marriage to a prostitute was used to demonstrate God’s broken heart for His people, and His desperate desire to them back towards Him.*

**Skim & Skip:** Daniel and his friends were able to stay **faithful** to God’s Law while **serving** the Babylonian king and earned great respect (Dan. 1). Daniel was summoned to interpret the king’s **troubling dreams**, his impressive answer leading him to **high position** (Dan. 2). The king recounted Daniel’s wisdom to his entire empire in a **letter** (Dan. 4). His successor faced yet more troubling **dreams** that Daniel interpreted, predicting the new king’s **demise** (Dan. 5). A third king also distinguished Daniel, yet a decree forbidding prayer caused Daniel to be sentenced to death in a **lion’s den** (Dan. 6). God delivered Daniel and gave him visions of **four empires** that would rule the next 500 years (Dan. 7-8, 10-11) and of the **end times** (Dan. 9, 12). **Hosea** prophesied decades before Daniel, speaking of the coming **captivity** (Hos. 4-10), while promising **restoration**, as God **contrasted** His love to Israel’s unfaithfulness (Hos. 11-14).

## Week Forty-Eight – The Minor Prophets

*Joel – Amos – Obadiah – Jonah – Micah*

This cluster of Minor Prophets focused on several points in the final decades before the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions of Israel. Joel spoke to the people of Israel about a plague of locusts, a smaller judgment preceding “the Day of the Lord.” The Day of the Lord was a common theme among the prophets that referred to both God’s act of judgment and the fulfillment of His promise of restoration. Amos and Micah ministered in different decades, but both warned of impending captivity. Obadiah rebuked Israel’s hostile neighbor Edom, warning that they, too, would experience judgement. Jonah was called to preach repentance to the Assyrian capital, Nineveh, a call he resisted to his own regret.

❑ **Read Joel 2:1-32:** *A great plague of locusts was called an “army” by Joel, who saw this difficulty as an act of judgment coming from God. The Lord called his people to return to Him with all their hearts. God promised to restore the land and heal them from the locust plague and to pour out His Holy Spirit into their lives—a prophecy ultimately fulfilled in Acts 2:1-4 when the Holy Spirit filled the followers of Jesus.*

❑ **Read Jonah 1:1-17 & 3:1 – 4:10:** *Jonah was called to preach to the Assyrian capital, Nineveh. He resented this call because the Assyrians were both an enemy to Israel and a significant military threat. Preferring Nineveh to be destroyed, Jonah feared God’s mercy would spare the city and allow Israel’s enemy to thrive. The people of Nineveh did, in fact, repent and find God’s mercy, for which Jonah was resentful.*

❑ **Read Micah 4:1 – 5:5 & 6:6-8:** *Micah spoke of the “Last Days” when Messiah would be revealed. The mighty restoration of Jerusalem described is considered a prophetic vision of both a present restoration of Israel after the Babylonian exile and the future end times, when God will prepare a New Heaven and a New Earth for believers to enjoy for eternity. The birth of the Messiah was prophesied to occur in Bethlehem.*

**Skim & Skip:** A plague of **locusts** was afflicting Israel when Joel called for repentance and warned of a coming **Day of the Lord**, where both judgment and blessing would come (Joel 1-3). The **neighbors** of Israel were not immune to facing God’s judgment (Amos 1), but so also Israel would face the **consequences** of her sins, which were specifically named (Amos 2-6). Amos shared **visions** that revealed God’s plans to longer withhold punishment (Amos 7-9), and yet also promised **restoration** (Amos 9). For centuries, Israel’s neighbor **Edom** has assaulted her and gloated over her judgments. Obadiah promised that Edom, too, would face God’s hand. Jonah’s **prayer** from within a great fish expressed his faith (Jonah 2). Micah predicted destruction (Micah 1), identified **corruption** (Micah 2), condemned **leadership** (Micah 3), and promised the **Messiah** (Micah 5). He named Israel’s sin (Micah 6), and yet spoke of her **restoration** (Micah 7).

## Week Forty-Nine – The Minor Prophets

*Nahum – Habakkuk – Zephaniah – Haggai – Zechariah – Malachi*

The last six Minor Prophets take us through the conclusion of judgment upon Israel and Judah. Nahum promised God would bring down Israel’s enemy, the Assyrian empire, which He did through Babylon. Habakkuk expressed an emotional dialogue between faithful believers and God, trying to make sense of how God could use an evil empire to bring discipline on His own people. Zephaniah expanded on the theme that not only was judgment coming to Judah, but also to the other nations. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi prophesied after the Babylonian exile as the Jews returned to Jerusalem. Their message was a challenge to be faithful now that God had given them a fresh beginning and warn against the spiritual apathy that had already begun to set in.

❑ **Read Habakkuk 1:1 – 2:20:** *The prophet Habakkuk offered two complaints to God: that Judah’s sins were going unpunished, and that God would use the even more sinful Babylonians to bring judgment to Judah. God answered him with the promise of judgment to come to Judah at the hands of the Babylonians and judgment to come to the Babylonians at the hands of other nations.*

❑ **Read Haggai 1:1 – 2:9:** *As the Jews returned to Israel from 70 years of captivity in Babylon, they faced opposition and discouragement that delayed the building of a temple for the Lord. God rebuked them for building their own homes while neglecting the Lord’s house. He promised that His glory would dwell with this new temple even though it would be much smaller than the temple that had been destroyed decades earlier.*

❑ **Read Malachi 2:10 – 3:18:** *Written as the exiles settled back into their homeland in Israel, Malachi challenged the spiritual apathy that had already begun to set in again. Unfaithfulness in the priesthood, in marriage, in holiness, and in giving all brought God’s stern rebuke.*

**Skim & Skip:** The promise of **Nineveh’s demise** was an important message of hope for Israel to learn that her wicked enemy—whom God would use to judge her—would also fall (Nahum 1-3). Wrestling to **trust** the Lord, Habakkuk composed a psalm of prayer and recollection of God’s activity (Habakkuk 3). Zephaniah named the **many nations** who were facing destruction at the hands of the **Babylonians**, which God was also using to bring Judah under judgment (Zephaniah 1-3). Zechariah had a series of visions that painted an image of **Israel’s restoration**: towns overflowing with **prosperity** (Zechariah 1), **Jerusalem** rebuilt (Zechariah 2), sins **cleansed** (Zechariah 3, 5, 13), the **Spirit** empowering (Zechariah 4), and the **Messiah’s** reign (Zechariah 6, 11, 14). The Lord promised to bless Jerusalem (Zechariah 7-8, 10) and judge her **enemies** (Zechariah 9). Malachi addressed many issues of **unfaithfulness**, including the offering of blemished **sacrifices** to God (Malachi 1), and **priests** whose hearts were not set upon the Lord (Malachi 2). He also spoke of the coming **“Day of the Lord”** (Malachi 4).

## Week Fifty – Revelation 1-22

Fantastical and mystical language fills this unique and final book of the Bible. It describes the eternal realities found in heaven and in the spiritual realms. It is essentially the diary of an experience by the Apostle John who was taken into heaven in a vision. Seeing all of time at once from an eternal perspective, he described critical events occurring around God's throne, as well as events that lead up to the end of all things. The book begins with words that Jesus asked John to write down for seven key churches in the first century, and then concludes with a description of how everything will end as we enter eternity, judgment, heaven or hell.

❑ **Read Revelation 1:1 – 2:19:** *The eternal and heavenly form of Jesus was revealed to John while he was praying in exile. Jesus asked John to record letters to seven key churches that formed the backbone of the early church, giving them encouragement and rebuke, and calling them to overcome through their commitment to Him.*

❑ **Read Revelation 4:1 – 5:14:** *John was taken to the throne of God in heaven where he saw angels worshipping and proclaiming God's holiness. No one was found worthy to open a scroll that would present all the fantastic features and indescribable realities of the Revelation, except the slain Lamb we know to be the crucified Jesus.*

❑ **Read Revelation 19:11-21 & 20:11 – 22:21:** *John saw the world and all humanity come to an end with a final grand battle and the judgment of all people. Those whose names belonged to Jesus were taken into heaven, called the "New Jerusalem." No pain or disorder existed, as the Lord was the center of this new reality.*

**Skim & Skip:** After recording letters to seven churches (Rev. 2-3), John began to see the unfolding of God's eternal plans, many of which describe events yet to come. A **scroll** containing God's plan was opened, revealing **seven phases of judgment** in the end times (Rev. 6-8). Seven **trumpets** were blown, revealing more events that brought great **torment** to the earth (Rev. 8-9). Much was kept **secret** and unable to be spoken (Rev. 10), as **two witnesses** prophesied in the end times (Rev. 11). A **woman** and a **dragon** symbolized the cosmic battle between Jesus and Satan, as the dragon tried to devour her **child** (Rev. 12) and a **beast** made war against the saints (Rev. 13). The earth was prepared for its end (Rev. 14) as **seven plagues** and **bowls of wrath** were poured out (Rev. 15-16). A woman symbolized the wicked culture of **Babylon** (Rev. 17-18) that fell as the end of all things finally came (Rev. 19-22).