



BIBLE READING QUESTIONS

VERSION 1.0

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to The Bible OverBrew! The Bible OverBrew is a friendly virtual book group, aiming to help Christians read the whole Bible in big chunks, preferably with a mug of tea!

For each chunk there are two things:

- some prep questions
- a podcast episode

In the podcast episode (of roughly 35 minutes) Rachel Redeemed and Matt Searles chat through the assigned chapters, setting them in the context of the whole story, and pulling out some key ideas and themes. Before you listen to each podcast episode (available on the website and on all good podcast players), we suggest you read through the assigned chapters, using the prep questions to help you.

PREP QUESTIONS

The questions are to help you read actively rather than passively, and to direct your attention to some of the key passages and themes in that part of Scripture, or important links to other scriptures.

There are also brief notes to help you get into that section of Scripture. We don't want to try to explain everything, rather just give you enough so you can engage meaningfully. And don't worry if you don't understand or can't answer everything—the aim of reading big chunks like this is to notice the big picture, and not get lost in the detail.

Each section has a few additional features:

- key chapters
- questions for reflection
- a 'star' moment to fill in with some way this text points to Jesus

In some cases, I've put the star near a particular section of text that I think points to Jesus, but at times I've put it at the end as part of the Reflection box, so just look over the whole section to try to see some way it points to Jesus. At times you may be pointed to him by negative example, i.e. 'We need a king who is not like king x'. Or you may be shown human sin and hence the need of his salvation.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

You can join in on your own, but it works really well to do this kind of 'big read' in a group, and there are suggestions for how to do this on the website. Though there are 52 sections, and you could do the whole Bible in a year, this isn't the only way. Just choose an amount of scripture, and a pace that suits you. There are ideas for different reading plans on the website.

Each section is roughly one and a half to two hours reading, though you may go more slowly if you want to spend more time on the questions, or if you are having a busy week, you could just read the key chapters, and skim the rest.

We'd suggest getting a Bible that you're happy to write in, so that you can underline things and make your own annotations – this will all help you to read actively, and not let your eyes glaze over as you read.

THE PLAN

The plan follows the order of the Hebrew Bible for the Old Testament, as this would be the order that Jesus read the Scriptures, and also because it splits nicely into manageable chunks that way. For the New Testament I've tried to keep books by the same author together, and also interspersed the gospels and the letters to give variety. Of course, you're very welcome to take these chunks in a different order if that suits you best, and remember that you don't need to commit to the whole Bible – we have 'the story so far' section at the start of each podcast episode, so feel free to jump in wherever you like!

There is great joy and delight and blessing in reading God's word, and here at The Bible OverBrew we don't want these questions or the podcast to be a source of guilt or 'another brick in the backpack'! Rather, we want to be friends alongside who encourage you to grow in your confidence and desire to meditate on God's word, so that we might know and love him better. A helpful phrase that we repeat to ourselves often is this:

'Reading the Bible isn't something I've *got* to do, it's something I *get* to do!'

So what are you waiting for...? Grab a Bible, grab a brew, and let's go!

WEEK		BOOK
1	LAW	Genesis 1-24
2		Genesis 25-50
3		Exodus 1-18
4		Exodus 19-40
5		Leviticus
6		Numbers 1-20
7		Numbers 21-36
8		Deuteronomy 1-16
9		Deuteronomy 17-34
10	PROPHETS	Joshua
11		Judges
12		1 Samuel
13		2 Samuel
14		1 Kings 1-16
15		1 Kings 17 - 2 Kings 11
16		2 Kings 12-25
17		Isaiah 1-23
18		Isaiah 24-48
19		Isaiah 49-66
20		Jeremiah 1-29
21		Jeremiah 30-52
22		Ezekiel 1-23
23		Ezekiel 24-48
24		Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah
25		Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah
26		Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

WEEK		BOOK	
27	WRITINGS	Psalms - book 1	
28		Psalms - book 2	
29		Psalms - books 3 & 4	
30		Psalms - book 5	
31		Proverbs	
32		Job	
33		Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes	
34		Esther, Daniel	
35		Ezra, Nehemiah	
36		1 Chronicles	
37		2 Chronicles 1-16	
38		2 Chronicles 17-36	
39		NEW TESTAMENT	Matthew 1-16
40			Matthew 17-28
41	Romans		
42	Luke 1-11		
43	Luke 12-24		
44	Acts 1-9		
45	Acts 10-28		
46	Gal, Eph, Phil, Col, 1&2 Thess, Philemon		
47	1&2 Timothy, Titus, James, 1&2 Peter		
48	Mark		
49	1&2 Corinthians		
50	John		
51	Hebrews, 1,2,3 John, Jude		
52	Revelation		

Note: This is still a first draft (version 1.0) of these notes. If you notice a mistake or have feedback, please email Matt Searles at thebibleoverbrew@gmail.com I hope in time I might persuade a publisher to publish these notes formally, but until then I hope to keep updating these notes in response to feedback, to make them as helpful as possible. All notes are copyright © Matt Searles 2023 though pdf versions can be freely downloaded from the website.

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Genesis 1-24



Week 1

It is hard to overstate the importance of Genesis for understanding the Bible as a whole, in particular the chapters about creation (1-2), sin (3) and God's promises to Abraham (12, along with 15 and 17). It's worth spending more time in these chapters, as themes and ideas from these chapters will continue to recur throughout the Bible story. God's salvation plan in Christ is not some 'plan B' – rather it is the fulfilment of his original good creation purposes.

Gen 1-2 Creation

What seem to be the major emphases about creation in these chapters?



The negative command 'do not eat' is perhaps better known than the positive commands given to Adam in Gen 1-2.

- What are the positive commands?
- Keep an eye out for these being repeated in the rest of Genesis / the Bible

Gen 3 The Fall

How does what the serpent says to Eve compare to what God has previously said in Gen 1-2?

What is the result of sin for Adam and Eve?

Gen 3:15 is a key promise:

So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. ¹⁵ And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring^o and hers; he will crush^o your head, and you will strike his heel." (Gen 3:14-15 NIV)



Gen 6-9 How are Adam and Noah similar figures

- In what they do?
- In what God says to them?

Gen 12-25 Abraham

Gen 12:1-3 How do the promises to Abraham relate to

- God's original creation?
- the curses given in Genesis 3?

Ch 12 onwards: look for references to offspring, as well as threats to the possibility of offspring - esp. in light of God's words to the serpent and to Abraham:

"I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring] and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel." (Gen 3:15 ESV)

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Gen 12:1-3 ESV)

Gen 15 & 17

What do these chapters add to the promises God gave to Abraham in chapter 12?

(Look particularly at 17:6-8)

Gen 22 How does this incident relate to God's previous dealings with Abraham? (esp. Ch 12:1-3; Ch 15; Ch 17)

For Reflection:

Has this section shown you anything new or fresh about:

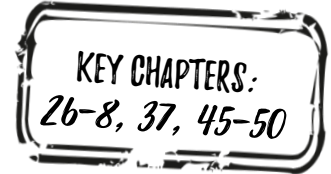
- God's creation?
- God's grace?

Genesis 25-50



Week 2

One of the reasons there is so much focus on genealogies and family trees in Genesis is that we are looking for the fulfilment of Genesis 3:15 – we are looking for an ‘offspring’ who will crush the head of the serpent and defeat evil and sin. Since Gen 12:1-3 we are expecting this offspring to come from the family of Abraham, and that through this offspring all the families of the earth will be blessed. So, with every birth, we should be thinking: is this the one to put things right? Or will this offspring fail through sin, just like Adam did in the beginning.



Gen 25-36 Isaac and Jacob

Though we have already met Isaac in the narrative: his birth (ch21); the account of Abraham taking him as a ‘sacrifice’ (ch22) and his finding a wife at the well (Ch 24), from chapter 25 onwards the focus shifts from Abraham to Isaac and Jacob.

As you read this whole section, look for similarities between the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob)?

Gen 26 How does God’s promise to Isaac relate to his previous dealings with Abraham?

Gen 28 What echoes of previous parts of Genesis can you see in this chapter?

Gen 35:1-13 What does this add to God’s previous promise to Jacob?

For Reflection:

Iain Duguid has a book about Isaac and Jacob entitled ‘Living in the grip of relentless grace.’ What in the narrative makes such a title appropriate?

Gen 37-50 Joseph and the descent to Egypt

Rather than having questions on particular sections of this narrative, most of the following questions are ones to bear in mind as you read the whole of Ch 37-50.

How do these chapters read differently to the rest of Genesis so far?

What previous promises in Genesis are being focussed on in these stories?

What do we learn of Joseph in these chapters? Is he a pattern of Christ in any way?

What do we learn of Judah in these chapters? Is he a pattern of Christ in any way?
(have a look in particular at ch44 and at 49:8-12)



Questions and notes on particular chapters:

Ch 45 What is Joseph's explanation of why everything has happened?

46:2 'And God spoke...' Note that this is the first time that God has spoken since chapter 35!

47:27 This is the first time we have seen this phrase 'fruitful and multiply' not as a command or promise, but a fulfilled reality!

50:20 How do Joseph's words here sum up the whole Joseph story?

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. (Gen 50:20 ESV)

For Reflection:

As the book ends, which creation purposes (to Adam) / redemption promises (to Abraham) are being fulfilled, and which look unfulfilled?

Having read all of Genesis, what have you learned about:

- God?
- Humanity?



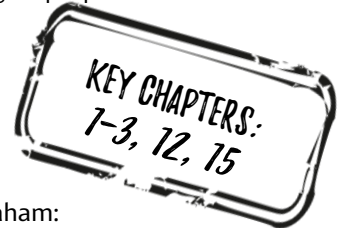
Like Genesis, Exodus is a pivotal book for the Bible story. Later Scriptures will refer back to Exodus repeatedly, as the Exodus sets a pattern for all of the Lord's deliverances of his people. Jesus is described as the 'Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' (John 1:29), he dies at Passover time, and the salvation he achieves is described as redemption and being delivered from cruel slavery; all of these terms get their meaning from the events of the book of Exodus. Therefore to understand Jesus and his salvation, the book of Exodus is vital.

Exodus breaks into three sections

Ch1-18 The Exodus itself, where God rescues his people from slavery in Egypt

Ch 19-24 – The giving of the law at Mount Sinai

Ch 25-40 – Instructions for and the building of the tabernacle where God would dwell among his people. This account is 'interrupted' by the incident with the Golden Calf in Ex 32-34.



Ex 1-2 Slavery in Egypt

What do we see in Exodus 1 of the progress of God's creation plans and his promises to Abraham:

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Gen 1:28)

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

"I will make you into a great nation,

and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,

and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,

and whoever curses you I will curse;

and all peoples on earth

will be blessed through you." (Gen 12:1-3)

How is Pharaoh contrasted with God, and presented as a 'serpent' figure (c.f. Gen 3:15)?

	What do we learn of his power?	What do we learn of his character?
God		
Pharaoh		

Ex 3 The Burning Bush

What does God reveal about:

- Who he is?
- What he will do?

When Moses asks God who he is, God describes himself as 'I AM WHO I AM', 'I AM' and 'THE LORD'. The word rendered in English 'THE LORD' is the Hebrew word 'Yahweh', which is very closely related to the word 'I AM'. In English

translations when you see 'THE LORD' (in small capitals) this is the divine name 'Yahweh', as explained here, and further expanded in 6:2-8.

5:2 'Who is the LORD?' – this is the key question that the narrative in Ex 1-12 is answering.

6:2-8 This passage is 'bookended' by the phrase 'I am the LORD' What aspects of the Lord and his character are here associated with the name Yahweh/the LORD?

Ex 7-12 The plagues on Egypt

As you read, see how many different reasons you can see that the Lord sends the plagues.

Why do you think there are 10 plagues? Why doesn't God just free the people immediately?

Ex 12-15 Passover

Ch 12 This is an important chapter. Can you summarise what happens?

Ch 15 How does this song related to the narrative that has come previously? What does it add?



Ex 16-18 Beginning the wilderness journey

These chapters record events in the wilderness as the people travel to Mount Sinai where they will meet with God.

Ch 16 What is the manna? How should this have taught the people to trust God?

How does this passage give extra meaning to Jesus teaching his disciples to pray 'give us today our daily bread'?

For Reflection:

From this section, what do we learn about the importance of remembering rightly / passing on what God has done?

What do these chapters reveal to us about who God is and what he is like?



Dramatic and important as they are, the Exodus events are not the high point of the book of Exodus. Remember the great promises of Exodus, which show that just rescuing the people is not the end of the story:

Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son,'²³ and I told you, "Let my son go, **so he may worship me.**" (Ex 4:22-23, emphasis added)

'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. **I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.** Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. **And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham,** to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord.'" (Ex 6:6-8, emphasis added)

Chapters 19-24 at mount Sinai are where God makes his covenant with the people, to constitute them as his people. The description of the tabernacle points to the great promise of Exodus that God will dwell among his people (25:8) Key chapters of Ex 19-40 are chapters 19-20 and 32-34.

Ex 19-24 The Covenant at Sinai

Ch 19 Picture the scene. How does this set the scene for the lawgiving in ch20ff?

19:4-6 are an important framing for the laws that follow:

'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶ you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

What history is first recounted?

What future is in view? i.e. the purpose for which God saved his people?

Now compare this with 1 Peter 2:9-10.

19v5 'if you obey me fully...'

Although some people see this as demanding perfection, I'm more persuaded that this refers to an orientation of life: following God's commands, and finding forgiveness through the sacrificial system when they sin. Even though the language at Sinai is that of law-keeping, I'm still persuaded that the key thing God wants from his people is faith.

Ch 20 The 10 commandments (lit: the 10 'words') – i.e. the absolute commands

Before you read, see how many of the 10 commandments you can list, in order.

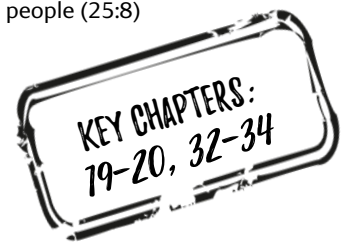
Do you find it surprising what comes immediately before the 10 commandments? (20:2)

Why do you think this is significant?

How does each of the commandments reflect something of the character of God?

Ex 21:1 These are the laws (lit: the 'judgments') – i.e. Ch 21-23 are 'case law' – the 10 commandments applied to particular contexts

Note down some of the areas governed by these laws in ch21-23.



Ch 24 Who is allowed where? What do they do?

Ex 25-31 Instructions for the Tabernacle

These chapters can be hard to read, as we struggle to make sense of all the architectural descriptions. Don't worry about the detail for the moment – let the questions and notes below guide you to some of the most important points, even if you skim some sections more briefly.

note 25:8 and 29:45-46 – THE great promise of Exodus

As you read, note down any Eden imagery in the description of the tabernacle – don't worry if you don't get everything here, and have to skim these chapters more briefly.

Ex 32-34 The golden calf

Try to summarise what happens in this chapter. Why do you think the people made the golden calf?

How is this like the sin in the Garden? How different?

Why did the Lord not destroy the people for their sin?

What does the Lord reveal of his character in 33:12-34:9?

Note Ex 34:6-7 – this is a key description of God that will recur often in Scripture.



Ex 36-40 The construction of the tabernacle

There is much here that repeats from earlier in the book where God gave the instructions for the tabernacle. Feel free to skim these chapters and not get lost in the details – but look out for the key phrase: 'just as the LORD commanded'. Also remind yourself of why the tabernacle is being made – see Ex 29:45-46; c.f. Ex 25:8

For Reflection

Ex 40:34-38 is the climax of the book, recounting the Glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle
What is positive and what is negative Ex 40:34-38?

What do you make of this end to the book? How does it relate to the main promises of Exodus?

If you had to summarize what the book of Exodus was about in one or two sentences, what would you say?

Exodus ended on a tension: God had come to dwell amongst his people in the tabernacle, but Moses (and the rest of the sinful people) were not able to enter. God's people had been freed from slavery in Egypt, but they had not been fully brought home to God. The tabernacle was a new 'Eden' but still sin prevented the people from entering.

God's creation purposes, and his redemption purposes are the same: that humanity might enjoy his presence in his dwelling place. Leviticus shows us how this is possible: through God-given sacrifices (Lev 1-7) and a God-given priest (Lev 8). The key chapter in the book is chapter 16, focussing on the Day of Atonement.

KEY CHAPTERS:
9, 10, 16

Lev 1-7 Rules for Sacrifices

Leviticus 1-7 describes 5 main sacrifices. Chapter 9 shows the order of these sacrifices, pointing to the astonishingly gracious purpose of the sacrificial system: to cleanse God's people so they could enter his presence and feast with him. For an overview of sacrifices and what they signify, see Matt Searles, *God's Story: The Bible Explained* chapter on Leviticus.

As you read Lev 1-7, try to get a sense of what it would have been like to experience this sacrificial system week after week, year after year. What message would you learn from it?

What were the requirements for the sacrificial animals (e.g. 1:3)?

Gordon Wenham explains sacrifices like this:

'In sacrifice it appears that the worshipper identifies himself with the animal he offers. What he does to the animal, he does symbolically to himself. The death of the animal portrays the death of himself.' (The Book of Leviticus, 111)

Lev 8-9 The Priests and Worship

Underline references to 'as the Lord commanded' in this section. Where have we seen this before so far in Scripture?

Ch 9 This is the first tabernacle worship service after the consecration of the Priests. Note how it ends in v22-24. How is this different to Ex 40:34-38?

Lev 10 The Death of Nadab and Abihu

So far, the emphasis has been that the people have been approaching God 'as the Lord commanded them' and the result has been that they have been able to see the glory of God. The story of Nadab and Abihu shows what happens if people try to approach God in ways he has not commanded them.

What happens? (10:1-3)

Lev 11-15 Uncleaness and its treatments

You may wish to skim the details of these chapters. But look at 15:31. What is the purpose of these laws about uncleaness?



Lev 16 The Day of Atonement

This is the central and most important chapter of Leviticus (and the structural centre of the whole of Genesis-Deuteronomy). There are a number of sacrifices in this chapter, but the most important are the two goats introduced in v7-10.

	What happens to it?	Where does it go?
First goat (v15-19) Sin offering		
Second goat (v20-22) Scapegoat		

Note that when the high priest enters the most holy place, he does so as a representative of the people, and so in some sense takes the people with him. The central truth of Leviticus is that through God's gracious provision of sacrifice, humanity can re-enter the paradise presence of God!

Lev 17-26 The 'Holiness code'

These chapters may seem very unfamiliar to us, and hard to understand. The big picture is that God is holy, and dwells in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle. If anything or anyone unclean comes into contact with God and his holiness, the result is death. There are two ways to become unclean: sin, and contact with death (and things associated with it like blood.) There is one way to become clean: sacrifice. The laws of Leviticus about cleanness and holiness are graciously given by God to **protect** the people – as well as to point to the inability of people to dwell with God without a cleansing sacrifice, that we as Christians know to be fulfilled in Christ.

As you read Lev 17-26, underline references to 'be holy because I the LORD your God am Holy' or its shorter equivalent 'I am the LORD your God'

26:1-13 Which previous parts of Scripture does this remind you of (especially v11-13)?

For Reflection:

What is the gospel according to Leviticus? (i.e., how does Leviticus describe the problem and solution?)

How is this different to the gospel in Exodus?

How we might we let Leviticus shape our understanding of salvation, and how we evangelize?

Numbers 7-20



Week 6

After the pause in the narrative for the book of Leviticus, Numbers picks up the story from Exodus. The first 10 chapters are quite similar to Leviticus, giving regulations for how the people can live with a holy God in their midst. Then the stage is set for the people to be led from Sinai into the promised land.

But—as we used to say at family Bible time—Numbers is full of grumblers. The people fail to trust and obey God, which leads to an entire generation dying in the wilderness (chapters 11-25).

There are a few repeated phrases and ideas that point us to some of the central message of Numbers. As you read through the book, you might wish to underline all references to:

- 'The LORD said'
- 'Tabernacle' (used 32 times)
- 'tent of meeting' (used 54 times)
- 'As the Lord commanded' / 'according to the command of the Lord'
- Fire (symbolising the presence of God)



Num 7-10 Organisation of the camp

Just like the laws of Leviticus about cleanness and holiness, the arrangement of the camp that has the priests dwelling between God in the centre and the rest of people round the outside, is to protect the people – to prevent an unclean people being consumed by coming in to the presence of a holy God.

Why do you think so long is taken to explain how the camp is to be organised?

Read chapter 4, then read 2 Sam 6:1-15

6:22-27 How must it have felt to hear the priests say these words (perhaps daily)?

Ch 9 Underline all references to 'at the command of the Lord' (esp. v23)

Ch 10 note especially v33-36. What is positive about the scene here?

Num 11-12 Rebellion foreshadowed

What different things do the people complain about?

Why?

Were the complaints valid?

Num 13-14 Refusing to enter the land

Ch 13 How is the land described?

How is the rebellion like that in Genesis 3?

14:13-19 What does this remind you of?

How would you sum up the disobedience here?

Read also 1 Cor 10:1-12; Heb 3:7-4:13. How do these passages look back on this part of Numbers?

Num 15-20 Continued Rebellion

Note God's grace in chapter 15: 'When you enter the land...' (v2) Despite the people's sin, God is still determined to bring his people into his blessing.

Ch 16 How is Korah's rebellion similar to Aaron and Miriam's in ch12?

Ch 20 What is the rebellion here?

For Reflection:

What are the different things that make entry into the land hard?

Is it a positive or negative thing to have God dwelling in the midst of the people?

What is the emphasis of Numbers so far?



Numbers 21-36



Week 7

'The last section of Numbers (Ch 21-36) reveals that a corner has been turned. A new day in which Israel would enter the land is coming.' Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 76.

Num 21 The Bronze Serpent

Read Num 21:4-9 and try to answer

- What the people do
- How God responds
- How God then provides a solution



What do you think the original readers would have made of this event?

Now read John 3:14-17

Num 22-24 Balaam's oracles

Balaam is a 'prophet for hire' who is employed by Israel's enemies (Balak from Moab) to pronounce curses on Israel. He's not a 'goodie' in the story – far from it. But the Lord actually causes him to pronounce blessings. These oracles of Balaam contain some of the richest theology in the book of Numbers.

As you read (particularly in the oracles the Lord causes Balaam to speak), note down all references to:

- blessing and curse
- Eden-language
- Kingly rule
- Triumph over evil
- The Lord's sovereignty

Num 26 The second census

Why is this here do you think? Why is counting numbers important?

This marks the point where the disobedient generation have died out in the wilderness, and a new generation is now poised to enter the promised land. After this second census, no Israelite deaths are recorded in the book of Numbers.

Num 27 Joshua to succeed Moses

Note 27:15-17

Moses said to the Lord, ¹⁶“May the Lord, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community ¹⁷to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.”

From what you’ve read in Exodus-Numbers, what has Moses’s ‘shepherd’ role been so far?

How does this enrich our understanding of Jesus using language of ‘sheep without a shepherd’ in Matt 9:36 and Mark 6:34, and describing himself as the ‘good shepherd’?

Num 28-29 Calendar of festivals

Why do you think these are here? How would it feel to be told all this, as the Israelites in the desert?

Num 30-36 Preparing to enter the Land

Ch 35 What are these ‘cities of refuge’? Why are they given? (35:34)

Ch 36 What is the last word in the book? How does this point us ahead to what is to come?

For Reflection:

How does Numbers advance the story of redemption?

What are the lessons for us from this generation of Israelites?
(also see 1 Cor 10:1-13; Heb 3:7-4:13)

How does the book of Numbers point to Jesus?

God has freed his people from cruel slavery in Egypt, and brought them to himself at Mount Sinai, where he entered into covenant with them and made them formally his people. He gave the tabernacle so that his Eden-like, Mount Sinai-like presence could go with them on their journey through the wilderness to the promised land. Now the people stand on the threshold of the promised land, on the plains of Moab just across the Jordan. Before they enter (in the book of Joshua), Moses gives a second telling of the law (this is what 'Deuteronomy' means). This is looking ahead to life in the land. The purpose of God giving his people his laws is life. The laws are not meant to be burdensome, but rather expressions of his good character. So, as you read Deuteronomy, underline all references to:

- 'so that you may live long'
- 'that it may go well with you'

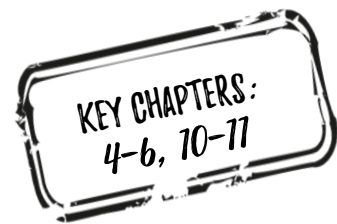
Deuteronomy recounts the past (God's Exodus deliverance and the covenant at Sinai) but very much for the present: for the 'today' of decision. And Deuteronomy was to be read every seven years in Israel, meaning later generations (including Christians today) were given the same challenge: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts' (Psalm 95:7-8 ESV)

Deu 1-3 Review of Israel's history since Exodus

What does this teach us about God?

What does this teach us about the people?

Why do you think this history is re-told just before the people enter the land?
(3:21-22 will give you one reason, but there are more)



Deu 4 Motivation to keep the law

Chapter 4 is a key chapter. Yahweh's nearness is experienced through torah (law)

What are the motivations to obey the law? (v1-40, but esp. v1-14)

Why are images prohibited? (v15-20)

What future (sequence of events) does God predict for the people? (v25-31)

For Reflection:

'It would be difficult to imagine a more compelling case for love-driven law keeping than the one made by Moses in Deuteronomy 4.' (Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 122)

Do you resonate with this?

Is there anything in Deuteronomy 4 that changes how you think about God's law?

Deu 5-6 The Commandments

Ch 5 The 10 commandments re-told. Do you notice anything different from when they were given in Exodus?

Ch 6 Note again the importance of love. (esp. v4-6)
How is love linked to commandments?

How is it linked to who God is?

Deu 7-11 History of disobedience

Ch 7-9 How should the people think of themselves?

(use the following references if you want, but if not just read through noting anything you spot - different people like to read differently)

- 7:7-8
- 7:17-19
- 8:2-5
- 8:10-11
- 8:17-18
- 9:4-8 (and rest of chapter)

10:12-22 How should we view God?

How should we view God's commandments? (e.g. 10:13)

Deu 12-16 The specific requirements of the covenant

note: this section actually goes from chapters 12 to 26, but for this week, we are stopping at chapter 16.

Ch 16 The different festivals

Would it have been a burden to observe these festivals? Why/why not?

For Reflection:

What is Deuteronomy's view of the law?

Why are the people reminded of their disobedient history?

How does Deuteronomy point to God's grace?



Deuteronomy 17-34



Week 9

Deuteronomy is something of a turning point. With this second giving of the law, the worldview for the rest of the Old Testament is complete. God has shown his people who he is (through his acts of redemption) and he has shown them how to live as his people. All that happens in later narratives will be measured by this standard. Also, Moses dies at the end of Deuteronomy. He has been the great leader of the people, so his death marks the end of an era.

You may wish to continue to underline all references to:

- 'so that you may live long'
- 'that it may go well with you'



Deu 17-26 *The specific requirements of the covenant (continued)*

17:14-20 Law concerning the king. What are the requirements for the king? Does anything surprise you?

18:15-12 The prophet like Moses

This passage set up the expectation for a great prophet to come. What do we learn about this figure?

The central law section of Deuteronomy may be seen as an exposition of the 10 commandments in chapter 5. As you read chapters 17-26, try to fill in gaps in the table below. Are you persuaded by this as a rough structure?

note: there are some items that don't fit this overall structure - just focus on what does seem to fit. Also there is sometime some overlap between sections

Commandment	Ch. in Deu	Laws that are expositions of the commandment
1. No other gods	6-11	Love and worship Yahweh
2. No idols	12-13	Central sanctuary and false gods
3. Name	13-14:21	Laws about holiness to Yahweh
4. Sabbath	14:22-16	Festivals, periodic duties
5. Parents	17-18	Authority; judge, king, priest and prophet
6. Murder	19-22	
7. Adultery	22-23	
8. Theft	23-25	Ch. 24 who are the repeated 'trio' of people who deserve special care?
9. False testimony	25	
10. Coveting	25-26	

(table based on Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment*, 128)

Deu 27-28 Blessings and curses

These are meant to motivate obedience.

Deu 29-30 Covenant renewal

'After all that was said to motivate obedience in Deuteronomy 4-11, and after the gracious giving of the Torah in Deuteronomy 12-26, obedience would seem to be a reasonable consequence. Reason alone however, does not govern the human heart. Sin never makes sense. In order to obey, one must have a circumcised heart. Circumcision of the heart, however, is not something one does to oneself. One must be given what one needs by Yahweh himself, and Moses declares to Israel that Yahweh has not given them the kind of heart they need (Deu 29:4).' Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 129.

Ch 29 is a covenant renewal ceremony. Moses reminds the people of God's faithfulness to them in the past, and warns them that disobedience to him will lead to them being cast out of the land (v27-28)

But trace what God promises in 30:1-10, after this exile for the people's disobedience.

In 30:3ff God promises to gather the people from the nations where they have been scattered. This is a sort of 'new Exodus' (a theme which will become prominent in the rest of the OT). But what will be different about the promised New Exodus is that it will not simply be a geographical return; it will also be a spiritual return to God, enabled by the new heart God will give.

Deu 31-34 The last words of Moses

Ch 31 Joshua to succeed Moses. Pick out any commands / charges given to Joshua and to the people.

Ch 32 What is the overall tone of Moses's song?

For Reflection:

Is Deuteronomy a positive or negative book? Why?

How can Deu 29:29 shape how we respond to our reading in Deuteronomy?

Deu 34:10-12 explains how there has been no prophet like Moses in Israel. How does the description of Moses here point us to Jesus Christ, and enrich our view of him?



Joshua recounts the entry of the people into the promised land. This is a direct fulfilment of God's promises to Abraham in Gen 12:1-3.

More than this, the land is described as being very much a new Eden: it is a paradise land, and most importantly a place where God will dwell with his people and they will worship and serve him. As Hamilton puts it, 'It is almost as though Israel has another chance at Eden.' (GGISTJ, 152)

But alongside this positive outlook, be on the lookout for negative notes, foreshadowing the book of Judges which is very negative.

Joshua breaks down into four sections, each of which contains a repeated key word in relation to the land: crossing over, taking, dividing, serving/worshipping.

Josh 1-5 Crossing into the land

1:5-9 God's commission to Joshua. Why is this important?

Ch 2 Rahab. Why does she hide the spies?

Ch 3-4 Crossing over. What happens?

What story are the Israelites to tell (4:19-24)? Why?

5:13-15 What happens? How is this similar to what happened to Moses?

There is also possibly a link back to Eden. When Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden, an angel with a flaming sword was placed to guard the way back. Now Joshua meets an angel with a sword guarding the Eden-like land, but here the angel is allowing the people to enter.

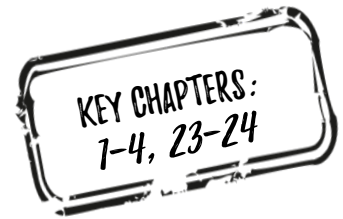
Josh 6-12 Taking the land

Ch 6 Jericho. Why such a bizarre military strategy? How does 6:2 help answer this?

Ch 7 Achan

- What was his sin?
- What was the result?
- What was this to teach Israel?

What are key emphases of Ch 6-12? (See especially 11:16-23)



Note: the destruction of the Canaanites.

The book of Joshua recounts the destruction of the Canaanites, as God had commanded through Moses (Deu 20:16-18). This is a hard subject, and no full answer can be given here. But here are some helpful cross-references to set this in context:

- This was a punishment for the Canaanites' sin. The Canaanites were a horrific people, practising child sacrifice as part of their worship. In Gen 15 when God promised the land to Abraham, he said there would be a 400 year delay (Gen 15:16), because the sin of the Amorites (Canaanites) had not yet reached the point where he needed to judge them in this way.
- God was protecting his people, through whom he would bring salvation to the world. If the Canaanites were not removed, then God's people would be led astray into sin (Deu 20:18), and God's salvation plans through a godly people (Gen 12:1-3) would not be fulfilled.
- There was the opportunity to change sides. The Canaanites had heard of what God had done – and some like Rahab (Josh 2) changed sides and received mercy.

Josh 13-21 Dividing the land

Not the most interesting read for us today! But note:

- Every gift of land is hugely significant and positive! Imagine you were one of the people being given your inheritance in the new Eden, the kingdom of God!
- Increasing negative notes of peoples not driven out. 'If Adam was undone by one unclean serpent, the presence of so many unclean seed of the serpent bodes ill for the seed of the woman.' Hamilton, 142

Josh 18:1 'the land was subdued before them' Can you think how this links back to God's commission to Adam and Eve.

Josh 21:43-45 are key verses for the book of Joshua. What do you notice as significant here?

Josh 22-24 Serving in the land (worship)

Ch 23 What does Joshua tell the next generation of leaders?

Ch 24:1-13 Joshua's 'Bible overview'. How is this similar / different to how we might tell the story so far?

v14-18 What lessons does Joshua draw from this history?

v19 What is the surprise here? How is this similar to the end of Deuteronomy?

For Reflection:

'Joshua' is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek name 'Jesus' – both meaning 'God Saves'. How does Joshua foreshadow Jesus?

By the end of Joshua, where have we got to in relation to the promises to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3)?

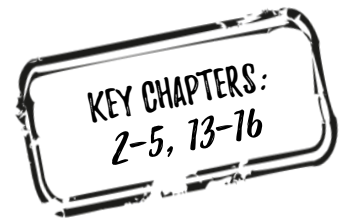


In Joshua, the people entered into the Eden-like land of promise. But just like Adam in the garden, they would fail to serve and worship God. Judges is a dark book, recounting the misery of what happened when there was no king. Rather than any one chapter being most important, Judges rather presents an overall picture of progressive deterioration, with the key message being in the refrain 'In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.' (Judges 21:25). As we look for our 'STAR' moments about Jesus, this may often be by negative example: we need a leader who is not like many of those in judges.

- Ch 1-2 Failure to complete the conquest
- Ch 3-16 Cycles of judges (God appointed deliverers). The first judges are generally good, but things spiral downwards as later judges are worse and worse.
- Ch 17-21 The horror of what life is like if not lived God's way

For each judge, look out for:

- What makes them an unusual choice for a deliverer?
- What in the account highlights that the LORD is the true deliverer?



Judg 1:1-3:6 Failure to complete the conquest

1:1-2:5 Failure from a *military* perspective. What is the cause of the failure according to 2:1-3?

Do you detect any allusions to previous scripture in these verses?

2:6-3:6 Failure from a *religious* perspective

2:6-10 What will be the cause of faithlessness among the people?
(compare with Deu 6:4-9)

2:11-3:6 The pattern of what will follow

Judg 3:7-5:31 Generally good judges

Note how in this section, judges are described as saviours/deliverers (Othniel and Ehud)

Look at Othniel (3:7-11) as an example of the cycle that takes place

1. The people.....
2. The LORD.....
3. The people.....
4. The LORD.....
5. The land.....
6. The judge.....
7. The cycle begins again

Ch 4-5 Deborah. Deborah's song (Ch 5) is the most positive note in the book. What are the theological emphases of her song?

Judg 6-8 Gideon

Is Gideon presented as a good model to follow? Why / why not?

Bonus question: how do we know this?

(no questions for Judg 9-12, which continue to tell of generally bad judges)

Judg 13-16 Samson

Samson was a Nazirite, which meant

1. No razor was allowed to be used on his hair - it must be left long
2. He was not allowed alcohol
3. He was not allowed contact with the dead

As you read the story, look for how Samson broke all of these vows (sometimes very explicit in the text, sometimes more implicit ('feast' in 14:10 indicates a drinking feast, and look at how often Samson finds himself in a vineyard!))

Note in Ch 14 Samson's wife was 'right in his eyes' (14:3, 7) What does this remind you of?

Notice Samson's deceit in not telling his parents what he has done (14:6, 9)

Judg 17-21 The depths of Israel's sin and faithlessness

Fill in the blanks below for how you would describe the corruption in these chapters:

Ch 17-18 corruption

17:1-6 corruption of a household

17:7-13 corruption of a Levite

18:1-31 corruption of a tribe

Ch 19-21 corruption

For Reflection:

What prevents the people from knowing rest and blessing in the book of Judges?

What hopes or longings might any faithful people have towards the end of the time of the Judges?

What does the book teach us about God?





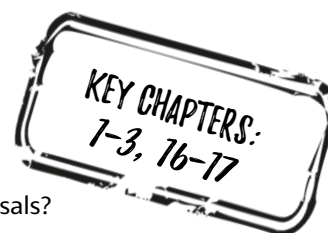
By way of introduction to the books of Samuel, remember God's promises to Abraham in Gen 12:1-3:

- A numerous people
- In the land God will give them
- Blessed by God and being a blessing to the nations

By the end of the book of Judges, which of these promises have been / are being fulfilled?

The book of judges has pointed to the need for a **king**: someone who will restrain the hearts of the people so that they don't sin (and so risk being cast out of the land, just as Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden).

We have been looking for a serpent-crusher (Gen 3:15) who will defeat evil forever, but no-one has quite fulfilled that role yet. We have been looking to Abraham and his descendants (Gen 12:1-3) as the ones through whom God will bless the world. With the institution of kingship, the focus narrows further: will one of the kings be the promised serpent-crusher, and the offspring of Abraham who brings blessing to the world?



1 Sam 1-3 Hannah's song

What are the major themes of Hannah's song? Can you see themes of reversals?

This will be the theology that is played out in the rest of the book.

Notice 2:10 – the king/anointed will be the one who God uses to bring about such reversals, to bring salvation!

How are these themes previewed in Ch 1-3?

1 Sam 4-7 The 'defeat' of the ark.

Hamilton writes of the event in Ch 5 'If Yahweh is defeated when the ark is captured, it is a defeat like the one that will happen at Golgotha' (163)

What in the story suggests this?

1 Sam 8-15 Saul

We have seen how the book of Judges sets up the need for a king. There have been other suggestions in the narrative that God's plan was always to give kings to bring about his good purposes:

Genesis 1:27-28	Adam had a kingly role
Genesis 17:6	Sarah was told kings would come from her line
Genesis 49:8, 10	Judah was promised that his tribe was the one from whom kings would come
Deut 17:14-20	The law contained instructions on how the king was to live. This law was radical in the ancient world, presenting the king as someone who was to be one of the people and <i>serve</i> the people, not be served by them. The king was to read the law and rule under God's authority.

8:4-9 Why do the people ask for a king? What *sort* of king do you think they want?

As you read the stories of Saul, ponder:

- Is Saul presented as starting out good, then getting bad?
- Or is he portrayed as negative throughout?

Key verses: **9:15-18**. What is the role of the king according to Samuel?

Ch 13 Saul's unlawful sacrifice and ch14 Saul's rash vow. What is wrong with how Saul acts here?

Ch 15 What is the Lord's verdict on Saul. (Note the sevenfold repetition of 'voice' emphasising the important of keeping God's word.

1 Sam 16-31 David

In 1 Sam 16:13 David is anointed king. Anointing involved pouring oil over a person to set them apart for some task, usually to be a priest or prophet, or to be the king. Anointing with oil symbolised the empowering of God's Spirit (as seen in 1 Sam 16:13). The Hebrew word for 'anointed' is 'Messiah' and the Greek word is 'Christ'. Thus, to call Jesus Messiah or Christ points to him as a spirit-empowered king in the line of David.

As you read the stories of David, look for the following features of his life, which point forward typologically to Jesus, David's greater Son. (list adapted from Jim Hamilton)

- He saves his people (c.f. 9:16)
- He restrains his people from doing evil (c.f. 9:17)
- He is an unexpected king
- He is opposed by the establishment
- He wanders in deserts, caves and mountains
- He is betrayed by those he serves
- He entrusts himself to God
- He battles with the seed of the serpent (e.g. Goliath as 'serpent' figure in Ch 17)



How does David treat Saul? Why?

For Reflection:

How has 1 Samuel presented authority and how it should be used? How does this point us forward to Jesus?

Are there other ways that Jesus is pointed to in the book

- either by negative example? (e.g. we need a saviour who is not like....)
- or by positive example?

2 Samuel continues the story right from the end of 1 Samuel, as they were originally one book. 2 Samuel ends with a song of David, which together with Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2, give the theological framework for the whole of 1-2 Sam. In David, we see both a pointer to what sort of king Jesus will be, but in David's failures we are also driven to look for a king who will not sin in this way. 2 Samuel 7 is a key chapter, where God promises a dynasty for David, in particular a 'son' who will reign forever.

There are a number of different stories in this book that intertwine, with lots of characters (many of whom have either the same or similar names) so one of my main goals here is to help you read and understand the story, as without this any consideration of theology will be fruitless. Here is a list of the main characters, that you can refer back to - most other characters either only occur once (e.g. Uzzah and the ark in ch6) or are less important in the narrative.

DAVID AND HIS MEN

The three sons of Zeruiah (2:18):

- **Joab** - commander of David's army
- **Abishai** - another warrior
- **Asahel** - swift as a gazelle

Hushai - David's friend, who pretends to be loyal to Absalom and acts as a spy, trying to work against the good counsel of Ahitophel (15:32ff)

Ittai the Gittite - another of David's warriors

Abiathar and **Zadok** the priests who were loyal to David

Jonathan and **Ahimaaz** their sons, who spied for David

SAUL'S MEN

Ish-bosheth - Saul's son who is made king (2:8)

Abner - commander of Saul's army, who later joins David (2:8)

Mephibosheth - son of Jonathan (and grandson of Saul) who was lame (4:4). Later is loyal to David. Sometimes known as 'Saul's son' to emphasise he is Saul's legal heir now Jonathan is dead.

Ziba - Mephibosheth's servant

ABSALOM AND THOSE ASSOCIATED WITH HIM

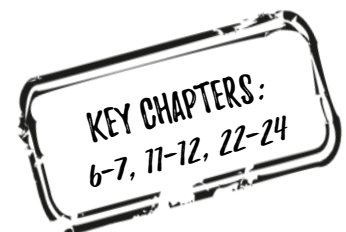
Absalom - David's son (born to Maakah)

Tamar - Absalom's sister and Amnon's half-sister

Amnon - David's eldest son (born to Ahinoam) - killed by Absalom for raping Tamar

Ahitophel - wise counsellor who had served David, but now advises Absalom (15:31)

Shimei - cursed David in 16:5



2 Sam 7-6 David becomes King

Ch 1 Lament for Saul and Jonathan

This is at the centre of 1-2 Samuel (originally one book) and together with the songs at start and end gives a theological framework for the book of 1-2 Samuel.

What themes are picked up here that are similar to Hannah's song (1 Sam 2)?

2 Sam 2:4. David is anointed king of Judah, and then in **ch5** he is anointed king over all Israel. (c.f. 1 Sam 16:13). Anointing involved pouring oil over a person to set them apart for some task, usually to be a priest or prophet, or to be the king. Anointing with oil symbolised the empowering of God's Spirit (as seen in 1 Sam 16:13). The Hebrew word for 'anointed' is 'Messiah' and the Greek word is 'Christ'. Thus, to call Jesus Messiah or Christ points to him as a spirit-empowered king in the line of David.

2 Sam 6 The failed bringing of ark to Jerusalem
What happens? Why?

2 Sam 7-10 David as a new Adam

Ch 7 - key chapter! What does God promise to David?

Note v1 'rest' - Edenic description

Ch 8-10 David's victories

c.f. Adamic task of expanding the boundaries of Eden and subjugating nations to Yahweh (c.f. Ps 2:8)



2 Sam 11-20 David's sin and its consequences

Ch 11-12 What is David's sin? Are there ways in which this is similar to Adam's sin?

Ch 13-20 David's struggles with Absalom his son

(you may wish to use the list of characters to keep track of who is who and what's going on)

2 Sam 21-24 Epilogue

What are the theological emphases of David's song and last words?

For Reflection:

What do you make of the ending of the book (Ch24)?

- Does it fit the rest of the book?
- Is it satisfying?
- What thoughts/questions does it leave?

Are there ways that Jesus is pointed to in the book

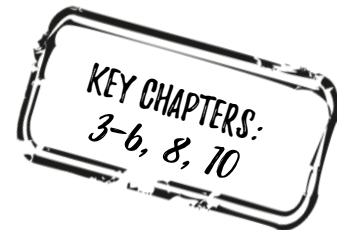
- negative example? (e.g. we need a saviour who is not like....)
- by positive example?

Note: 1&2 Kings were originally 1 book. We'll read 1-2 Kings in 3 sections, with the first section focussing mainly on Solomon. It's worth spending extra time in chapters 8 and 10, as they represent the high points for the temple, and for the kingdom as a whole.

As 1&2 Kings opens, reflect on where we have got to in relation to God's promises to

- Adam
- Abraham
- David

What are we expecting as 1 Kings opens?



1 Kings 1-10 A new Adam in a new Eden

As you read chapters 1-10, look for ways in which Solomon is presented as a new Adam figure. - some references given, but there are more

- 4:20-25
- 4:33
- ch6-7

Ch 2 David's final words to Solomon 2:2-4. Which other scriptures do these remind you of? (some ideas in footnote)¹

These verses also contain the standard by which all future kings will be judged: faithfulness to Yahweh.

2:23-25 Solomon has Adonijah put to death, who tried to usurp the kingship (and thereby oppose God himself). Hamilton sees the link to what Adam should have done in Eden: 'Solomon purges the land of serpents'. (176)

Ch 3 - Solomon's request for wisdom. What does this wisdom look like, according to the following chapters?

Ch 4-6 – see question about Solomon as a new Adam above

Ch 8 Solomon's prayer of dedication of the temple. How is God presented here?

Note the references to the Exodus from Egypt in verses 16, 21, 53. The temple is being presented here as the fulfilment and goal of the Exodus!

Notice that the temple (built on a mountain) is a reversal of Babel (Gen 11):

- v20 it is built for the name of the Lord (not to make a name for sinful humanity)
- v41-43 the nations will come there to worship (c.f. the scattering of nations at Babel)

This gathering of foreign nations is what God describes in Isaiah 56:5-7:

these I will bring to my holy mountain
and give them joy in my house of prayer (...)
for my house will be called
a house of prayer for all nations.

¹ Deu 17:14-20; Josh 1:6-9; 2 Sam 7:12-16; Ps 1.

Ch 10 - The high point of the kingdom. This is as good as things ever get in Israel. This is the best expression of the 'kingdom of God' that we see in the OT.

- Imagine yourself in Jerusalem under Solomon, and think what you would have experienced in your five senses.
- How is it like Eden?
- How has the Adamic commission been (partially) fulfilled?



Notice that in the coming of the Queen of Sheba, we see a partial fulfilment of the nations coming to worship at God's house, as Solomon has just prayed for in 8:41-43, and also a fulfilment of God's promise through Abraham to bring blessing to the world (Gen 12:1-3)

I Kings 11-16 The kingdom divided

Ch 11 What is Solomon's sin? How is this similar to sins of those who have gone before?

Note: often in narrative, the Torah is assumed, so the narrator does not often say that a particular action is sinful, he expects the readers to know this from their reading of previous books, esp. Deuteronomy. In particular, Solomon breaks all the laws for the king in Deu 18 (amassing horse, wives, excessive silver, disregard for the law).

11:26-40 - Promise of a divided kingdom.

Jeroboam ends up ruling the northern 10 tribes (known as Israel). Rehoboam (Solomon's son) ends up ruling the tribe of Judah in the south.

12:25-33 How does Jeroboam sin?

Jeroboam will become a benchmark for later kings of Israel - many of whom are said to sin 'after the manner of Jeroboam'

Ch 14 From this point on the narrative splits, sometimes following the northern kingdom (Israel), sometimes following the southern kingdom (Judah.) In general, the kings in the north are worse, and many reign for a short time due to assassinations and conspiracies. Also, only in the southern kingdom of Judah are the kings from David's line.

Look for the repeated phrase 'x provoked Yahweh God of Israel' in these and later chapters.

For Reflection:

What do most people in your context think when they hear 'king'?

What does the picture of life under Solomon (before his sin) look like? Why would the people of Israel have loved living under Solomon (and later readers of Kings long for such a kingship again)?

- e.g. 4:20, 25
- e.g. Ch 8

How do these passages enrich our view of Christ's kingship, and how the announcement of Christ as king is 'good news'?



The narrative has been moving very quickly in 1 Kings 14-16, covering the reigns of 10 different kings. Even though some reigned for long periods, they do not get much coverage in the narrative: their reigns are summed up briefly and tragically, highlighting mainly their sin. But from 1 Kings 16:29 the narrative slows down, focussing on the reign of Ahab in the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and his confrontations with the prophet Elijah, then the similar ministry of Elisha. This whole section is testament to God's grace and patience. Ahab 'did more to provoke the LORD the God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him.' This makes Yahweh's patience with him - expressed in the ministry of Elijah and Elisha - all the more astonishing! The Elijah and Elisha narratives also form an important backdrop for the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus.

1 Kings 17-2 Kings 11 Elijah narratives

As you read the Elijah stories, there are certain things to keep an eye out for (many of which will be repeated in the Elisha stories)

- What miracles occur?
- Look for the repeated emphasis on the word of God

1 Kings 17 Baal was a Canaanite 'god' – a storm god of fertility. As you read chapter 17 (and beyond) notice how God is directly opposing Baal.

1 Kings 18 Elijah and the prophets of Baal

- Can you summarise the story?
- How is God contrasted with Baal?
- How is worship of God contrasted with worship of Baal?



1 Kings 19 How is God's grace seen here?

Notice that Elijah goes to Sinai. Schreiner comments 'Elijah is virtually a new Moses in the story, reaffirming Israel's covenant with Yahweh at Sinai.' (180)

1 Kings 21 Does this story of Naboth remind you of any other Scriptures?

21:25-27 What happens? What is your response to this passage?

22:1-12 How does this passage show Ahab's attitude to the word of the Lord?

22:29-40 God has decreed that Ahab will die (19:17 and more explicitly 22:28). Notice the irony in the account of Ahab being killed, as despite all his best efforts, he cannot escape what God has decreed.

2 Kings 1 Notice references to God's word (and refusing to hear God's word) in this narrative

2 Kings 2-8 Elisha narratives

Note in the Elisha stories how Elisha is repeatedly presented as a new Elijah - doing similar things to what Elijah did. Also continue to look out for references to God's word

Ch 2 How is Elisha as presented as being in continuity with Elijah?

Ch 4 What miracles happen? Why are they recorded, and what do you think the point of these is?

Ch 5 Naaman and Gehazi. Look for references to high/low and going up and down. Note the word 'Jordan' means 'going down'.

What is this narrative supposed to teach us?

2 Kings 9-11 The offspring of the woman and offspring of the serpent

God's curse on the serpent is a key background for these chapters (and indeed so much of Scripture):

And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel." (Gen 3:15)

Ch 9-10 Jehu is anointed by God to get rid of Baal worship – crushing the head of the serpent.

Ch 11, Athaliah (a daughter of Jezebel) tried to wipe out the Davidic dynasty – the ones through whom God would bring blessing to the world (2 Sam 7). This is an attack on God, his king, and his promises—the offspring of the serpent seeking to wipe out the offspring of the woman.

Does this remind you of other moments in scripture?

For Reflection:

Can you see the miracles of Jesus foreshadowed in the miracles of Elijah and Elisha?

What do you make of the following comment by Schreiner?

All these miracles of Elisha demonstrate that he is a prophet of the Lord, that life and sustenance come from the Lord not Baal, and herald the coming of a new creation, a new heaven and a new earth, where there is life, fulness and joy.' (184)

These stories are incredibly vivid and full of imagery that would stick in the imagination. What do you think the purpose is of all these images?



2 Kings 12-25



Week 16

The ministries of Elijah and Elisha were brighter moments in what has otherwise been a progressive deterioration in 1 and 2 Kings. As Kings draws to a close, 'The Eden-like paradise under Solomon was now a distant memory.' (Schreiner, 190) Stories of different kings come thick and fast in this final section of the books of Kings, both in the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah). Look for the repeated phrases that describe the sin of these kings:

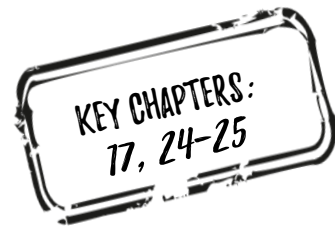
- In the Northern Kingdom: sinning like Jeroboam (golden calves)
- In the Southern Kingdom: not removing the high places

2 Kings 12-16 Mostly evil kings of Israel and Judah

As you read, note the characteristic sins of these kings as noted above.

2 Kings 16 Ahaz king of Judah. The king of Syria threatens Judah. What is Ahaz's response?

What other sin does this alliance then lead to? (v10ff)



2 Kings 17 Fall of Israel

Who attacks Israel (the northern kingdom)?

v7-23 Why did Israel get taken into exile?

v24ff the resettlement of Samaria (capital of Northern Kingdom) This led to those in Samaria becoming ethnically and religiously compromised. This helps us understand the relationship between Jews and Samaritans in the gospels.

2 Kings 18-20 Hezekiah and the attack on Jerusalem

These chapters describe Sennacherib's attack on Judah and Jerusalem. Sennacherib was the powerful king of Assyria, and the Rabshakeh was his army commander. They besieged Jerusalem with over 185000 troops! (19:35)

As you read these chapters, note what is said about Hezekiah (one of Judah's best kings) and, in particular, how he demonstrates his *trust* in God. (Who to trust is a key question in this section: e.g. 18v19, 20, 22, 30)

2 Kings 21-23 Manasseh and Josiah

Manasseh was probably the worst king of Judah, Josiah was one of the best. As you read, note what their reigns were like, in particular for their people.

1 Kings 24-25 Fall of Judah to Babylon

24:1 Babylon had conquered Assyria and was looking to conquer Egypt next, so Jehoiakim turns his allegiance away from Egypt to Babylon. Three years later, Babylon failed to capture Egypt, which is when Jehoiakim rebelled against Babylon and again looked to Egypt for help. (Remember that Judah was on the route between these two great powers - stuck between them.)

24:1-3 Why does this happen?

24:10-17 First attack on Jerusalem (597 BC). What happens?

24:20 How is exile described?

24:20 Zedekiah rebels, leading to second attack on Jerusalem, culminating in its fall in 586 BC.

Ch 25 How is this capture of Jerusalem different?

Kings could end with 25:21. What do the last couple of paragraphs after this add?

For Reflection:

How is the story of God's people in the land like the story of Adam and Eve in the garden?

'Israel joins the nations in exile simply because God's people had already joined them in their hearts, straying after their false gods and plunging into their sinful ways of life.' (Morales, Exodus, 113)
How well do you think this statement summarises the story of Kings?

As Kings closes, how are the promises to Abraham progressing? (People, land, blessing)

What is the story of the Deuteronomistic history (Joshua-Kings)? What does it teach?



Right from the early church, Isaiah has been known as 'the fifth gospel' for the way it testifies so clearly to the coming Messiah. This is true throughout the prophecy, but especially in prophecies of hope from ch40 onwards. Isaiah breaks into three main sections, each of which has a distinct audience and message.

- Ch 1-39. Addressing the people of Isaiah's day, warning them of judgment to come (the exile)
- Ch 40-55. Looking ahead and promising comfort and salvation *after* the exile.
- Ch 56-66. Looking even further to the future, calling Israel to live in light of God's salvation.

Even though Ch 1-39 chapters are largely focussed on judgment, they still contain still glittering prophecies of hope, though the context shows that these will only be fulfilled *after* judgment has fallen.

[note: the division of Isaiah across the three weeks in these notes does not reflect the structure of Isaiah noted above, it is more about giving an equal amount of reading each week]

Isa 7-5 Introduction: Present sin and future hope

1:2-2:5 form a microcosm of whole book

- What is Judah condemned for?
- What is the hope?
- What is the picture painted in 2:1-5? What are the theological emphases?



In the rest of ch2-5, note the references to the proud and lofty being humbled and brought low.

Isa 6 Call of Isaiah

Isaiah's call matches with what the nation as a whole needs, and the rest of the prophecy will develop. As you read Isaiah 6, note the following features (chapter numbers in brackets note where the book as a whole focusses on this theme)

- A higher view of God (Ch 40-48)
- A deeper view of sin (Ch 1-39)
- Cleansing from God (Ch 49-55 – especially Ch 53)
- A new commissioning (Ch 56-66)

But notice Isaiah's strange commission (8-13)

Isa 7-12 The book of Immanuel. Who should Judah trust?

7:1-3 the situation: Syria and Israel attacking Jerusalem. This introduces a key set of questions in Isaiah:

- Who should we trust?
- Who should we fear?

Ahaz feared the Syrian army (not God) and so he trusted in human alliances (not God). The book of Isaiah will paint a huge view of God, to wean God's people off trusting in idols, and causing them to trust in him.



Ch 7 and Ch 9 contain two key prophecies of Christ:

- 7:14 'the virgin will bear a son'
- 9:1-7 'to us a child is born'

How is the coming king in 9:1-7 described?

9:8ff notice that before the blessings of the coming king, judgment must first fall

Isa 11-12 The righteous branch from the stump of Jesse

How is the king here described?

How is his reign described? What does this description remind us of?

Note that this king is described as leading a new exodus (11:16)

Ch 12 Like the first exodus, this new exodus is followed by a song of praise

How does this song pick up the themes of ch1-11?

How does this song link back to previous scripture?

Isa 13-23 Oracles against the nations

There are many messages of judgment against the nations in the prophets. As you read, bear in mind three different (and sometimes overlapping) ways these might function for God's people:

- Show them the seriousness of sin
- Give them hope that nations that oppress them will be judged
- Show the folly of trusting in these nations rather than trusting the Lord

What are the aspects of hope expressed even in these chapters of judgment?

For Reflection:

What prophecies of Christ have you seen so far in Isaiah?

How do they enrich your view of him?



Isaiah 24-35 continue the first main section of Isaiah warning of coming judgment: in particular the exile to Babylon. Ch 36-39 are a historical section (mirroring 2 Kings 18-20) that also serves to look ahead to the coming exile to Babylon. Then in chapter 40 the second main section of Isaiah begins, now imagining the exile has already happened, and telling those in exile (200 years after Isaiah's day) that God will now act in comfort, in salvation and will bring the exiles home. Isaiah 40 onwards is one of the most densely packed sections of hope in the Old Testament, pointing not just to the blessings that would be experienced when the exiles returned home, but also looking forward to the greater Exodus and salvation achieved by Jesus.



Isa 24-27 The Isaiah Apocalypse

This is the culmination of the previous chapters of judgment, with the whole world now in view (ch24)
Note alternating themes of judgment, and of praise and worship from God's people.

Look for themes of the city of earth and the city of God

Look for echoes of Gen 1-3 in these chapters

Isa 28-35 More judgment on nations. Woe to those who refuse to trust the Lord

Look for failure of human leadership / the Lord's leadership (e.g. 33:17a)

Look out for any verses you know to be quoted in the New Testament

Ch 34-35 2 final outcomes: judgment or salvation

Look for Edenic language in Ch 35

Isa 36-39 Historical transition

In Ch 7-12, king Ahaz faced enemy threats, but didn't turn to the Lord, rather he looked to the nations around him for support. How does Hezekiah respond differently to Ahaz? (37:1-20)

Ch 38-39 Hezekiah's frailty and folly

Hezekiah's folly leads to the Babylonian exile. The hope of Israel is not in any human king. We wait for a more-than-human son of David - thus setting the scene for ch40-66.

Isa 40:1 'Comfort my people'

We now arrive at the great turning point in the book of Isaiah. Reading Isaiah 40-66 is like Moses climbing Mount Nebo to be able to see into the promised land and see the glories to come. No-where else in the Old Testament testifies so poetically and majestically to the sovereignty and greatness of God. Isaiah takes themes from previous scripture and magnifies and transforms them into glorious promises of hope: new Eden, new Exodus, new Jerusalem, new creation. More than that, these chapters testify beautifully to Christ. The primary Old Testament background to the New Testament word 'gospel' is Isaiah 40-66. When Jesus and the New Testament authors announced a 'gospel', their listeners would have immediately thought of the promises of salvation contained in Isaiah 40 onwards.

Isa 40-48 Behold your God!

These chapters are incredibly rich and worth reading slowly, so here we can only get an overview. As you read, fill in the table below, looking for the hope and comfort that God promises his people, how God is described, and in particular how he is contrasted to idols.



What is the hope God promises? (also note any uses of words 'gospel' or 'good news')	Descriptions of Yahweh	Descriptions of idols

Note: **42:1-9** is the first servant song. We'll look at this in more detail along with the other servant songs in the next section.

45:22-23 No-where in the OT is more monotheistic, nor is there a higher view of Yahweh presented. Paul takes a quote from here and applies it to Jesus in Phil 2!!

48:20 End of exile!

For Reflection:

Isaiah teaches theology, but largely using imagery rather than abstract concepts. What impact does this have?

What picture is painted here of

- What God is like?
- What it means to be one of his people?

What is the 'good news' according to this section of Isaiah?

Isaiah 40-48 gave glorious promises of God’s comfort and salvation he offered his people, but all against the backdrop of the people’s continued failure. In Ch 40-48 Israel is described as God’s *servant*—someone called by God to carry out his purposes—but Israel fails in this task due to their sin. In chapters 49-55 (and 42:1-9) a different servant comes in to view: one person who will be all that Israel should have been. This servant is described in terms similar to Moses—the great servant of God in the Old Testament so far—and comes into view in 4 servant songs. In the work of this servant, one of the conundrums of Isaiah so far will be solved: how can God promise all the comfort and salvation to the people (ch40 onwards) if they are still sinful? The answer will be in the surprising work of the servant, especially as seen in the final servant song in Isaiah 53.

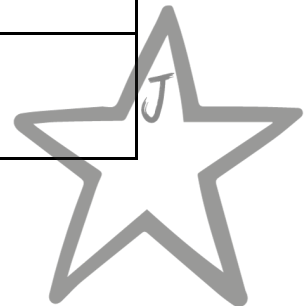
**KEY CHAPTERS:
SERVANT SONGS,
CH 61**

Isa 49-55 *The suffering servant*

As you read look for references to God acting for his own glory, and for references to hope to the nations.

Fill in the table showing what we learn from the four servant songs:

Servant song	Character of servant	What the servant will do
1. 42:1-9		
2. 49:1-12		
3. 50:4-9		
4. 52:13-53:12		



Is 51:1-3 See how the work of the servant and the return from exile are described:

- As fulfilment of Abrahamic covenant
- As fulfilment of original creation purposes, return to/expansion of Eden

51:9-11 See how the work of the servant and return from exile are described in Exodus language

52:7-10 What is the gospel/good news of this passage?

52:13 The servant is described as ‘High and lifted up’ c.f. Isaiah 6:1-6. What do you make of this connection?

The fourth servant song (52:13-53:12) is the centre of Ch40-55, showing that the means by which all this blessing will happen is through the sacrificial death of the servant.

Ch 55 What is the response of the people to be?

Isa 56-66 Future deliverance

The final main section of Isaiah considers what the people's response should be to such a great salvation as has been set out in the servant songs.

Ch 56-59 What behaviour is required of God's people / what sort of people will receive the blessings spoken of in Is 40-55? (e.g. 59:20)

Ch 60 This is the key background to the story of Jesus' birth in Matthew 2. What links can you spot?

61:1-4 Central climax of this section. The Spirit-filled Messiah. Jesus announces his ministry using these words in Luke 4:18-19

Ch 63-66 Future judgment and salvation

65:17-18 Note how Jerusalem is paralleled with the new heavens and the new earth. This is one of those moments in the Old Testament where the prophets point to something more than a return to and renewal of *earthly* Jerusalem. The ultimate hope of God's people is a new heavens and a new earth—all of which is a temple for God.

65:17-25 Note the Edenic description

Ch 66 True worship

How is God presented here?

What are God's people to be like?

For Reflection:

How does this section of Isaiah enrich your view of Jesus?

If you had to summarise the 'good news' according to Isaiah 40-66, what would you say?

Are there passages or themes in Isaiah that you want to turn to again and spend time praising God for?

Jeremiah was a prophet in the latter days of the kingdom of Judah, just before the exile. Like the rest of the prophets, Jeremiah warns of coming judgment due to the people's sin. In Jeremiah, sin is defined very relationally and in terms of covenant. Relationship with God is a central subject of the prophecy, and the people are frequently described as 'forsaking' the Lord. Over 100 times the people are called to 'repent' or 'turn around' (this is the sense of the 'repent' word in the Old Testament). There is something of a tension in Jeremiah: the people are repeatedly called to repent, yet it also becomes clear that judgment is inevitable, and Jeremiah will tell the people to surrender to Babylon! Yet in the middle of Jeremiah occur glorious promises of hope beyond exile, Jeremiah's 'book of consolation' in Ch 30-33. Unsurprisingly, given the relational way sin has been described, the solution is described in similar terms: a new covenant!

Note: Jeremiah is not structured chronologically! A good study bible can help you get the chronology if you're struggling. My favourite for Jeremiah is the NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible, with excellent notes by Iain Duguid—whose outline of Jeremiah I broadly follow below.

Jer 1 Call of Jeremiah

Key verse: **1:10** Judgment and salvation – but in that order.



Jer 2-6 Israel's covenant unfaithfulness

Ch 2 many ideas are introduced that will recur throughout the book. Israel is described in 2:2 as having been a devoted bride. But as you read Ch 2-3, what has she become like?

Ch 3 note the repeated calls for the people to 'return'. Despite their spiritual adultery, God is graciously calling his people back to relationship with him!

4:23-26 note how judgment is described in terms of de-creation

6:14 – this will be a common theme in Jeremiah

Jer 7-10 False religion

Ch 7 – Jeremiah's temple sermon. See ch26 for a summary of this sermon and people's response. Note how the people trusted in their religious heritage to save them. (c.f. 6:14; 8:11; 23:17)

'If the Israelites are to be saved they need to reform their ways and their actions, not merely offer the required sacrifices. This is not because OT believers were saved by works, but because their actions exposed the true commitments of their hearts.' (Iain Duguid)

9:23-24 Wisdom, might and riches are all sources of human confidence. But they will not deliver from God's wrath. Note also how God's character is a reason for hope, but should lead to good deeds – doing the things he delights in.

Jer 11-15 The broken covenant and its consequences

Note the covenant formula in 11:4-5

What does covenant breaking look like in chapter 11?

Jer 16-20 Opposition to Jeremiah's messages of judgment

Jeremiah was greatly opposed by his own people for his messages of judgment (as seen in Ch 7-10 the message people wanted to hear was 'peace peace!') These chapters detail this opposition, but also contain glorious promises of hope.

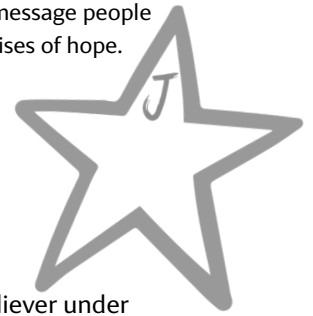
16:14-21 Promise of new exodus (return from exile)

- v16 fishers to gather people from exile – background to disciples as 'fishers of men'?
- v21 all this is (like Exodus) so 'they will know that my name is the Lord.'

17:9 Famous verse. But...

'This strongly negative assessment of the human heart is not intended as a description of a believer under the new covenant where God promises to write his law on people's hearts.' (ESV study bible notes)

Ch18 image of potter and clay, that Paul will pick up on in Rom 9-11



Jer 21-29 Jeremiah's confrontation with kings

Ch 21 Jerusalem will fall. God's might now used against his people (contrast exodus) – v5, 10. Only way to life is by accepting the exile – v9.

Ch 21-22 repeated refrain to 'do justice and righteousness' – the living that was required by the covenant. This is not salvation by works in the Old Testament, but rather how the people were to express and live out their faith.

23:1-8 Key promises! What is being promised here?

Ch 23-29 How do we see opposition to the true word of God in these chapters?

Note **25:11-12** Prophecy that the exile in Babylon will last 70 years—i.e. a complete generation.

Ch 29 – Jeremiah's letter to the exiles

- v7 seek the good (shalom) of this city—i.e. Babylon where they are in exile!
- v11 I know the plans I have for you...

Do you think these two messages to the exiles apply to us today or not? Why / why not?

For Reflection:

What is sin, according to Jeremiah? Ponder if this reflects how you think of sin, or if Jeremiah adds something to the picture.

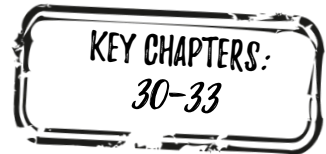
The people trusted in their temple and religious heritage, and wanted a message of 'peace peace'. Are there ways in which reading this speaks to your situation today?

'The prophetic task of destruction constitutes the main theme of Jeremiah's activity. It was a wrecking ministry... [But] even the destruction is positive, since it clears the way for a new building to be constructed from the rubble of the old.' Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 160

Does this fit Jeremiah so far? What needed to be cleared away? What needs to be rebuilt?



The first 29 chapters of Jeremiah have largely focussed on judgment, but in 30:1-3 the focus turns to comfort and hope. Chapters 30-33 (Jeremiah's 'book of consolation') are well worth reading slowly, even if you move more quickly through the rest of the prophecy, as Ch 30-33 showcase the glories of the new covenant. God is a God of relationship, and he wants relationship with his people, which is what all the covenants are about. A covenant is a formalised relationship, much like a marriage. But the first half of Jeremiah has shown that the people have been unfaithful: they have forsaken God and broken his covenant. Rather than casting them off forever, God promises a *new covenant*. The Old Covenant was a good and gracious covenant, but the problem was the people's *hearts*. The new covenant, therefore, will need to go deeper than the Old Covenant, and give the people a new heart.



Jer 30-33 The New Covenant

Jer 30:3 'Days are coming' / 'In the latter days' – this is a term the prophets use to speak of the future when God will restore all things.

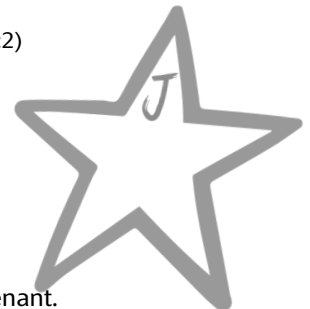
Ch 30 – What is the main promise of hope here? (e.g. v3, 10, 18)

Note also the key covenant formula in v22:

So you will be my people,
and I will be your God.

If you have time, you may wish to remind yourself of similar covenant passages in Scripture, and maybe underline them in the same colour in your Bible, to help you spot this important theme as you read.

(e.g. Gen 17:6-8; Ex 20:2, 29:45-6; Lev 11:45; Jer 32:38; Ezk 11:20, 34:30-3, 36:28; 2 Cor. 6:16-18; Rev. 21:2)



31:3 What is the ultimate reason for these promises of hope?

31:14 What is the ultimate blessing of the covenant?

31:31-34 Most important passage in Jeremiah (quoted in Heb 9&10): The promise of new covenant.

What are its key distinctives?

(there is a summary table below, but have a look on your own first)

32:36-44 – promise of the everlasting covenant. How is this similar to previous covenant passages in scripture?

Ch 33 What extra features does this chapter add to the glorious promises of hope?

Summary of new covenant promises in Jeremiah 31 (table from *God's Story*)

A new heart	God will make obedient faith a possibility. This is the obedient faith that the covenants with Abraham and Moses required, and which the people in Jeremiah failed to have.
A new relationship	Priests and prophets will no longer be necessary: <i>all</i> believers will have personal knowledge of God.
A new forgiveness	Though there was forgiveness in the sacrificial system, under the new covenant there would be a full and final dealing with sin.

Jer 34-38 Last days of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah

As you read these chapters, look for different ways God's word is rejected

Ch 38 Jeremiah thrown into a well. Note how a faithful prophet is treated. Why?

Jer 39-45 Jerusalem's destruction and its aftermath

Ch 39 Fall of Jerusalem (longest account of this in OT). Vindication of Jeremiah's prophecies

These chapters can be hard to understand if we don't know the history. Even though most of Jerusalem has been taken into exile in Babylon, some people remained, and continued to resist the Babylonians. They murder Gedaliah, the governor the Babylonians appointed (Ch 41). Then, fearing the Babylonian reprisal, they seek refuge in Egypt, despite God's telling them not to (Ch 42) and they drag Jeremiah with them (Ch 43). This is a sort of reverse Exodus, showing the stubborn and rebellious hearts of the people.

Jer 46-51 Oracles against the nations

As you read these, remember that the intended audience was God's people. As you read, note two purposes of these prophecies:

- To reassure God's people that their enemies will be defeated (e.g. 46:27-28)
- To show the folly of looking to these nations for help, rather than turning to God

Also look for promises of restoration even for these nations that fall under God's judgment

Jer 52 Fall of Jerusalem and its aftermath

This is a postscript showing Jeremiah's prophecies to have come true (and thus vindicating him as a prophet, Deu 18:12-22). These historical events are drawn from 2 Kings 24-25. Some have already been recorded in Ch 40-41. Note how Jeremiah, like the book of Kings, ends on a hopeful note (52:31-34)

For Reflection:

'The prophetic commentary adds a new dimension to the story of Israel. (...) The audience reading the Text has read about the historical ups and downs, but now it gets a glimpse of the inner heart of God to experience his 'emotional' life as revealed through the voice of the prophet. In the prophets, God bears his heart, and it is often a broken one. The covenant was not simply a legal, contractual matter, but one that was intensely personal, alive with love, in which the relationship was primary.' (Dempster, 162.)

How does what you've read in Jeremiah support this statement?

J. I. Packer gives the illustration of looking on a globe for a small Polynesian island, and not noticing the large letters 'Pacific Ocean' – the setting in which these islands are found. He says in a similar way we can miss the Bible's focus on covenant because it is almost too big a theme. Do you resonate with this?

What has Jeremiah shown you about the new covenant and its importance?

1v1 Ezekiel is in exile in Babylon. The first group of exiles has been taken, but Jerusalem is still standing and has not fallen to the Babylonians. So the Jews in Jerusalem think they are better off than the exiles - but Ezekiel has a different message. Ezekiel was a priest, and the temple is a major focus of Ezekiel's message. Ezekiel prophesies the glory of the Lord departing from the temple—a reversal of the great promise of Exodus that God would dwell among his people. But the final chapters of Ezekiel prophesy a new temple, and a new city whose name is 'The Lord is there' (48:35)

KEY CHAPTERS:
1-3, 10-11

Eze 1 Ezekiel's vision of God

Ezekiel sees the Lord's throne chariot, riding like a warrior in the storm to attack his people. This is dramatic language to picture the 'likeness of the glory of the Lord' (v28) Note: 'eyes' represent the Lord's wisdom and all-seeing knowledge. Wheels (though hard to picture them here) signify movement.

Spend some time reflecting on the imagery, and the picture that is painted.

What is Ezekiel's response to this vision?

Hamilton: 'The major reality of the prophecy of Ezekiel is Yahweh in his indescribable glory.'
68 times in Ezekiel 'you/they shall know that I am Yahweh.'

Eze 2-3 Call of Ezekiel

Note **2v2** the Spirit lifting Ezekiel to his feet and enabling him to speak.

What response is Ezekiel to expect from the people he speaks to?

3:16-27 How is Ezekiel's role like that of a watchman?

v26 Ezekiel will be 'mute and unable to reprove them' (ESV).

This clearly doesn't mean he won't say anything. Perhaps the better translation is that Ezekiel will be mute and unable to 'mediate' for the people, i.e. pray for them. Ezekiel is unable to pray for the people, he can only deliver the message God gives: judgment. In Ch 33 Ezekiel's mouth will be opened and he will no longer be mute - and what follows is the oracles of good news (Ch 33-48).

Eze 4-7 Prophecies against Jerusalem and the land

Note the widening scope of judgment in these chapters

Ch 4 what is symbolised by Ezekiel's actions?

Ch 6 Note the repeated refrain 'you shall know that I am the Lord' (also in Ch 7)

Ch 7 Not 'the end is nigh' - which indicates it's time to repent. Message here is 'the end has come' - it is too late to repent.

Note the emphasis on the *Lord* doing this: 'I' and 'my' are repeated in 7:1-9

Eze 8-11 Vision of the temple

Ch 8 idolatry in the temple

Ch 9 idolaters killed

Remember that this is a vision - so it depicts reality, but not like a DVD of it. Ezekiel is seeing the theological reality of what will take place, even if in history it would have looked more like Babylonians with swords and spears. (We see that with David in the psalms - e.g. Ps 18 depicting in theological terms what would have looked like fairly normal war scenes)

Note that judgment begins at the house of God. (c.f. 1 Pet 4:17)

Ch 10 The glory of the Lord leaves the temple (begins here, but completed in ch11)

This is hugely significant. God's dwelling among his people is a key concern of Ezekiel

11:16 The Lord is a sanctuary for the exiles. This is remarkable! The Lord leaves Jerusalem in judgment, BUT he moves to Babylon and the exiles, to be with them there.

11:17 Hope - new exodus

11:19-20 Key verses - which will be picked up and developed in later chapters, esp. Ch 36-37.

Eze 12-23 Further oracles of judgment

Ch12 What does Ezekiel have to do? How are the people of Jerusalem responding to God's words?

Ch 13 What are the failings of the false prophets? Are there warnings here for Christian ministers today?

Ch 16 Judah as a faithless bride. Trace the stages of this 'rags to riches and then back to rags again' tale

How does v59-63 point to Judah's ultimate need?

Ch 18 'The soul who sins will die'- important chapter.

What is the main point expressed?

Note v 31-32. Is this good news?

Ch 20:1-32 - The LORD tells the history of Israel. How is this similar and different to how we do a Bible overview?

v33-49 What is the hope? (note language of new exodus) Why will the LORD do this?

Ch 23 Oholah and Oholibah - c.f. Ch 16

For Reflection:

What is the overall message given so far in Ezekiel?

What picture of God has been painted?



Ezekiel Ch 24-48



Week 23

After prophecies largely of judgment, the turning point in Ezekiel is chapter 33 when Jerusalem falls, after which Ezekiel's mouth is opened to speak prophecies of hope.

Eze 24 The siege of Jerusalem

- What happens in Jerusalem?
- What happens to Ezekiel?
- How are these related do you think?



v27 Ezekiel is promised that his mouth will be opened (to speak prophecies of hope) when a fugitive comes and reports the fall of Jerusalem (c.f. 3:36-37 when his mouth was shut). This fugitive arrives in 33:22

Eze 25-32 Oracles against the nations

As you read, think what the purpose of these oracles might be

- For Ezekiel's original hearers
- For the readers of the book of Ezekiel

27-28 Lament over Tyre

In 28:11-19 Tyre is described in Adamic/Edenic terms. So we can use this passage to learn more of Adam and Eden.

- How does this passage expand on the description of Eden given in Gen 1-2?
- What more do we learn of Adam?

Eze 33 Turning point: Jerusalem falls

Ch 33 Ezekiel is described as a watchman. When did this happen before?
(look for a deliberate link between these chapters)

What news does Ezekiel receive? (v21)

What happens immediately after this news is received? (v22, c.f. 3:26; 24:27)

As you read from here, look for how Ezekiel's ministry is different from this point on.

Eze 34-39 Oracles of good news

This section contains three vital prophecies: the promise of a new shepherd, the promise of the Spirit, and the vision of dry bones.

Ch 34 A new shepherd

What were the shepherds (leaders) of Israel criticised for?

What does the Lord promise in response? Who will shepherd the people? (e.g. 34:35, 23)

v30 'and they shall know that I am the LORD their God with them' - what is it here that leads the people to know this?



Ch 36:22-28 The promise of the Spirit

Read this passage slowly. What is the hope expressed here?

Can you see any links with the new covenant promise in Jeremiah 31?

Ch 37 Valley of dry bones

This is a well-known passage. How is it particularly appropriate for the book of Ezekiel, at the start of the 'good news' section?

37v15-28 What is the hope? What other scriptures are echoed here? Key theological message of the book

39:25-29 Why do you think the promise of the Spirit is so important in the book of Ezekiel?

Eze 40-48 The New Temple

Ch 40-42 Note: this is a description, not a command to build. Like many OT prophecies, it uses the language of its day to communicate theological realities – in this case, the future dwelling of God amongst his people.

Ch 43 The glory of the LORD fills the temple

Why is this such an important moment in the book of Ezekiel? Can you think of an event earlier in the book to which this is the counterpart?

Ch 45-46 Note the dedicated instructions for the 'Prince' (or leader - another name for the king). So far in the book, Israel's leaders have been part of the problem. But the hope Ezekiel presents is God dwelling amongst his people, with a good king over them (c.f. Ch 34). It is starting to look very much like a new Eden with a new Adam.

Ch 47 water flowing from the temple

- Where does the water come from?
- Where does it go?
- What does it do?

Can you think of a similar picture anywhere in the New Testament?

Ch 47-48 Division of the land. The geography may baffle us. But what is the overall point being made here?

How does the last sentence of the book sum up its message?

For Reflection:

What are the particular things we learn in Ezekiel about

- God
- Our problem
- The future hope



The books of Hosea-Malachi are often known as the minor prophets, not because they are less important, but because they are shorter than Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. But they are also known as 'The Twelve' because they were often read together and would be written on one scroll. As you read, you may notice that often the beginning of one book picks up words and themes from the end of the previous one. Across all twelve books there may be something of a development as a whole:

- **Hosea-Micah:** focus more on **sin**
- **Nahum, Hab and Zeph:** focus more on **punishment**
- **Hagg, Zech, Malachi:** focus more on **restoration**

In the notes that follow we will focus on one main theme that unites many of the books: 'the day of the Lord'—a coming day of judgment—and also notice prophecies that are important for the New Testament.

HOSEA

Hos 1-3 Analogy between Israel's unfaithfulness and Hosea's marriage

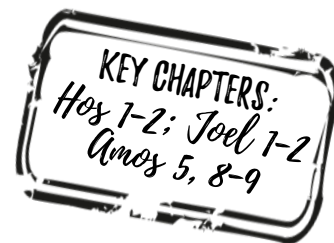
God's covenant with Israel at Sinai was like a marriage covenant, and Jeremiah has already picked up on imagery of marital unfaithfulness to describe Israel's sin. Here in Hosea, Hosea's own marriage becomes an illustration of this.

Ch 1 - Summary.

- What is the bad news here? (See names of children in v6 and v8)
- What is the good news?

Ch 2 Israel's unfaithfulness in more detail

- How does Israel describe here lovers (v5)? Why is this an offence to God?
- What is the purpose of God's judgment (v7)
- What will happen after judgment? (14-23)



Hos 4-14 Focus on the behaviour of Israel

How is Israel's sin described? Look for sins against God, and sins in society.

5:14-15. What will God's response be? How long will this judgment last?

6:1-3 Probably the words of Hosea (that at this stage they don't listen to)

- How is God's judgment of exile described here?
- What is the hope?

Note that here God promises that the nation will be resurrected on the third day!

Ch 11 Why do you think the people are to remember the Exodus?

For Reflection:

What is the gospel according to Hosea?

JOEL

Joel describes a locust plague (ch1) and uses this to speak of God's coming judgment (Ch2:1-11). Note Deu 28:38 where locusts are part of covenant curse for disobedience. So whilst Israel's sin is not catalogued in Joel, the Biblical context speaks of God's judgment, and points beyond the present situation (locusts) to the future day of God's wrath.

Ch 1 The Locust plague What is the result of the locust plague?

Ch 2:1-11 The day of the Lord. How is this described?

2:18-3:21 The glorious future salvation

- How is the future salvation described?
- How does it reverse the judgment of ch1?

Note 2:28-32. This is quoted in Acts 2, as this prophecy is fulfilled at Pentecost.

Ch 3 - judgment on the nations. Why is this in the 'salvation' section of Joel?

AMOS

1:1-2:3 Who is in view in God's judgments here?

How do you think God's people might have been feeling after hearing this?

How does the rest of ch2 add to the picture?

God's people expected judgment on their enemies, but they were complacent about themselves. They longed for the 'day of the Lord' judgment (5:18) but did not realise that it would also be a day of punishment for their own sin.

Ch5 the repeated call is 'seek me and live!'

Look at 5:21-24 for a picture of how seeking the Lord will be worked out in the people's behaviour.

Ch 7-9 These chapters contain warnings of the future judgment: the 'day of the Lord' (even though this phrase is not used here, there are repeated references to 'that day' (e.g. 8:9-13)

Note **8:9** speaking of the day of the Lord. Can you think how is this fulfilled?

Note the hope in **9:11-15**. What picture is painted here?

OBADIAH

This concerns judgment on Edom (neighbours to Israel, descendants of Esau.) They are particularly condemned for not helping Israel when she was under attack (v10-14)

For Reflection:

What have Joel and Amos said about the 'day of the Lord'?

How does this help us to understand the work of Christ at the cross?



JONAH

Note: we see this Jonah in 2 Kings 14:15-27. He is a prophet in Israel before the exile. This short book is a great story, so try to read it in one go, then ponder the questions below:

- How do you respond emotionally to the prophet Jonah?
- How are 'the nations' described and viewed in this book?
- What is the hope for God's people?



The experience of Jonah is 'a microcosm of the whole history of Israel' (Hamilton). Do you agree?

MICAH

Micah has 3 sections, each introduced by 'hear' and each moving from judgment to salvation. 'The way to salvation is through the earthquake and fire of judgment. The city must become a heap of rubble before it can be splendidly rebuilt.' (Anderson and Freeman, *Micah*, 28-29) Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah, and you may spot links between their prophecies.

Mic 1:1-2:13 First prophecy

How is judgment described here?

2:12-13 The hope

Mic 3:1-5:15 Second prophecy

Ch 3 Does this remind you of language elsewhere in the prophets?

4:1-4:15 The hope. C.f. Isaiah 2

Ch 5 The coming ruler to be born in Bethlehem (quoted in Matt 2). Note: Judah is to be given up 'until' the ruler is born. i.e. the prophecies of hope in Micah won't be fulfilled until this ruler from Bethlehem is born.

Mic 6:1-7:20 Third prophecy

6:6-8 What sort of behaviour did God want from his people? Did they do this?

7:8-20 Salvation. How is this described in terms of previous scripture? Look in particular for references to Adam, Abraham and Moses.

For Reflection:

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem in fulfilment of Mic 5:2, what hopes would this have raised for those who knew Micah's prophecy? (i.e. the fulfilment of all the good news in the book)

NAHUM

Nahum is an 'oracle' (ESV) [prophecy in NIV] This word is used 5 times in minor prophets, each time concerning destruction of the enemies of God. In Habakkuk the judgment is on Nineveh (capital of Assyria) known for their 'endless cruelty' (3:19). A century before Nahum, the Ninevites had repented at the preaching of Jonah and received mercy. But this repentance did not last, and now they face judgment for all the cruelty they have inflicted on God's people.

What is the good news for Jerusalem? (1:12-15)

How does the book of Nahum comfort God's people?

HABAKKUK

Habakkuk is unusual in that it consists of Habakkuk's questions to God, along with God's answers. Much of the message of Habakkuk is that God's righteous people often have to *wait*—to trust in God. They have to live by *faith* (2:2-3, c.f. 3:17-19)

1:1-4 What is Habakkuk's question to God?

1:5-11 What is the Lord's answer? Is this what you expect?

God's answer is that he will deal with Habakkuk's problem (wickedness in the land) by sending the even more wicked Babylonians (also known as Chaldeans) to punish Israel

1:12-2:1 How does Habakkuk respond to the Lord's answer?

2:1-20 What does the Lord say about the righteous?

What does he say about the wicked? What does this tell us about what God hates?

Ch 3 Habakkuk's psalm - look how past, present and future relate

ZEPHANIAH

This is one of the strongest messages of judgment in all the prophets (and something of a turning point in the book of the 12, after which the focus is more on hope and salvation).

Look for how judgment is described as 'de-creation' in this book. Why do you think this is?

How is the 'day of the Lord' described in ch1?

What is the hope

- for the nations (3:9-13)
- for Israel (3:14-20)

For Reflection:

What do these prophets teach us about judgment and salvation?

What is your response to reading these prophecies? How did they make you feel?



The final three books of the 12 were written after the exile, and the very existence of these prophecies show that the return from exile was not the complete fulfilment of all God's promises. The people were still sinful and needed cleansing. They needed to return to God spiritually, and God still needed to come personally to his people to dwell amongst them—as the temple references in these final prophets point to. These books close the prophets (and close the whole Old Testament in our English Bible order) but they are not a conclusion, rather they are pointing ahead to a future yet to come.

HAGGAI

1:1 When is Haggai speaking? What is the historical situation?

Darius was on the throne after Cyrus. Cyrus is the one who told the people to go back home from exile (recounted in Ezra 1—see notes there in week 36). The people have returned home from exile, but they need to rebuild the temple.

1:1-15 What does Haggai call the people to do? How does this relate to the Bible story so far?

2:1-9 Look for references/allusions to the Exodus and following events. Why is this history being retold?



ZECHARIAH

Zech 1:1-6 Return to me and I will return to you

Look for references to 'return', 'turn' and 'repent' (all same word in Hebrew).

This word 'return' (also translated 'turn' or 'repent') is a key one in Zech. God's people have returned to the land, but they need to return to God. They are geographically back in the land, but spiritually they are still far from God, still in exile. God's promise is that he will 'return' to them—the glorious return of God to dwell with his people again, promised in Isaiah 40:1-11.

Zech 1:7-6:15 Eight night visions

There is much that may be perplexing in these visions, so as you read just try to get a sense of the whole. The questions below will direct your attention to a few key points.

3:1-5 Joshua the high priest.

- What is Joshua's problem?
- What is the Lord's solution?
- How is this a picture of what has happened to all God's people?

Ch 4. The context here seems to be the people feeling small and inadequate as they seek to build the temple. What is the Lord's encouragement (e.g. 4:6, 10)

6:12-13 A figure called 'the branch' will ultimately build God's temple. What do we learn about this figure in

- Is 11:1ff
- Jer 23:5-6; Jer 33:14-18

Zech 7-8 From fasting to feasting

How does the Lord feel about Zion? How should the people respond?

Zech 9-14 The Lord will return to Zion.

As you read these complex chapters, pay particular attention to verses that are quoted in the NT regarding Jesus and his ministry, but try to do so in context of the whole book, and see how that gives a richer perspective on them.

	Summary of Content	New Testament passages
Zech 9:9-10	The king comes to Jerusalem riding on a donkey	Matt 21:5; John 12:15
Zech 11:12-13	God / a faithful shepherd insultingly paid off for 30 pieces of silver	Matt 27:9-10
Zech 12:10	Mourning for the one they have pierced. (in context, this could be God or the shepherd who is pierced)	John 19:37
Zech 13:7	The shepherd struck, the sheep scattered	Matt 26:31; Mark 14:27

Table adapted from NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible

Ch 12 Note the repeated 'on that day' in Ch 12-14, pointing to the future. Also the many David references

Ch 14 Is this chapter a surprise after what has happened so far in the book? How is the hope presented?

How does temple imagery feature in this final chapter?

MALACHI

Malachi is written after the people have returned from exile, and rebuilt the temple. Yet the great and glorious promises of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel have not all come to pass. This seems to be what prompts the question in 1:2 'How have you loved us?'

1:6-2:16 Israel's pollution. How are God's people presented here?

How could Mal 1:11 be a summary of the whole Bible story? In light of this, how should people live?

2:17-3:5 What will the messenger do? What will happen after that?

How might this help explain John's questioning of whether Jesus is the Christ, or should they expect someone else? (Matt 11:3)

How is Mal 4 a fitting end to the OT (in our English order)?

For Reflection:

'Although they have returned to the land, they are still in exile.' (Dempster, 187)

What have you seen in the 12 (especially Hag-Mal) to support this statement?

As the prophets close their commentary on the Old Testament history, what are we still waiting to happen?

What in these prophets have you seen to enrich your view of Christ and his salvation?

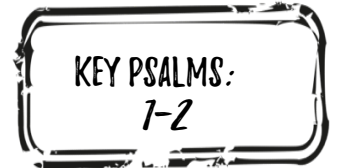




The Psalms are songs and prayers of God's people, covering the full range of human emotion and circumstance. I'm persuaded that we can approach the Psalms in 2 complementary ways:

- Taking them on our lips as our own prayers. I've given some help on how to do this here [add link]
- Reading the psalms as a book, telling on overall story of the Davidic king.

Personally, I think most of the time the first approach is the most fruitful – finding words that we can pray in all situations. But as we are reading big chunks as part of this plan, the following questions will focus more on the 'big picture' approach. But if this feels unfamiliar (and especially if you don't know the psalms well) please don't overly worry about getting this big picture. Most of the time when I read the psalms I just choose one and think how it teaches me to pray – so you may wish to take that approach if you prefer.



Ps 1 and 2

Psalms 1 and 2 form an introduction to the Psalter - and so we'll spend disproportionate time on them. They will introduce key themes for the rest of the book of psalms.

Can you see any similar words/themes in the two psalms?

What is the main idea of Psalm 1? Can you think of other scriptures that this reminds you of?

What is the main idea of Psalm 2? Can you think of other scriptures that this reminds you of?

Try to give headings for the sections of Ps 2:

- v1-3
- v4-6
- v7-9
- v10-12



What expectations do Psalms 1&2 set as they introduce the Psalms?

Nearly every psalm in book 1 is a 'David' psalm. So as you read the rest of book one, read each psalm asking what we learn of David and how he matches up (or not) to the promised Psalm 2 king.

Ps 3-14

What are the repeated themes in these psalms?

What is the dominant problem that David faces in these psalms?

Psalm 13 is a model 'lament' where the Psalmist pours out his heart to God. See if you can give headings to the three different parts of the psalm.

- v1-2
- v3-4
- v5-6

Ps 15-24

These psalms form a chiasm (concentric structure). Try to give a heading for each pair of psalms.

Ps 15 and 24

Ps 16 and 23

Ps 17 and 22

Ps 18 and 20-21

Ps 19

How do the most important points of the chiasm (the outside and the middle) relate to each other, and link to Ps 1 and 2?

Ps 25-41

Ps 34. How does David view that his experience (the anointed king) will be like/unlike the experience of the people?

How does this shape how we should approach reading the psalms?

For Reflection:

In what ways does David look like the king of Psalm 2?

In what ways does David look unlike the king of Psalm 2?

What do the Psalms in book 1 teach us about the life of faith?

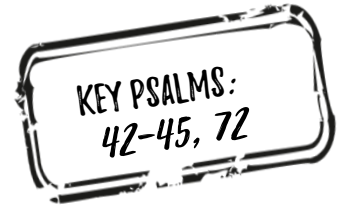
What can we learn from lament psalms (e.g. Psalm 13) about how to pray?

Psalms 42-72 (Book 2)



Week 28

Book 2 of the Psalms continues very much in the same vein as book 1, with a large number of laments. David faces threats and suffering of various kinds.



Psalms 42-44 Intro to book 2

What are the problems lamented in Ps 42-43 (originally one psalm) and Ps 44?

Ps 42-43	
Ps 44	

Ps 45-50

How does Ps 45 restore hope after Ps 42-44?

What picture of the king is presented in Ps 45? How does this point forward to Jesus?

How do Ps 46-48 restore hope after Ps 42-44?

Ps 51-65 a David collection

As you read, scan the Psalm superscriptions ('To the Choirmaster' etc). What is David's general situation in these psalms? Note: Distinguish between the headings added in our English translations, and the Psalm superscriptions which are in the original Hebrew text and are part of scripture.

Ps 52 Can you see links between this Psalm and Psalm 1?

Ps 66-68

What do these psalms say about 'the nations'?

Bonus: What previous scriptures do these remind you of?

Ps 69-71 Mini 'David' collection

What stage of David's life is described in Ps 71?

Ps 72

Note: I am persuaded that the title 'Of Solomon' means 'About Solomon' and Ps 72 is a prayer of David for his son Solomon - c.f. 72:20 which suggests David wrote Ps 72.

How is Psalm 72 the solution to the problem of Ps 71?

The main part of book 2 is bracketed by two psalms about Solomon: Ps 45 and Ps 72.

What do we learn of the king in each of these psalms? Which other scriptures are echoed here? (esp. Ps 72:17)

Ps 45	
Ps 72	

How does the doxology (praise) at end of book 2 (Ps 72:18-19) add to that at the end of book 1 (Ps 41:13)?

For Reflection:

How does book 2 present both:

- A wider gap between the reality of kingship in Israel and the hopes of Ps 2?
- A deepening and increasing of the hopes of Ps 2?





Book 1 was focussed on David. In book 2, attention moved to Solomon as the focus of the hopes of Psalm 2. Book 3 is the bleakest part of the psalms, as the exile becomes a dominant focus. God's people were cast out of the land of promise and taken to the land of Babylon. Not every psalm in book 3 has an exile background, but it's worth asking the question.

The beginning of Ps 73 calls into question Psalm 1, the end of Ps 89 calls into question Psalm 2. Within these 'brackets' the next two psalms (74 and 88) are some of the bleakest in the whole psalter.

Ps 73

How does the first half of Ps 73 call into question Psalm 1?

What is the turning point in Ps 73?



Ps 74

What is described in Ps 74?

Why is this so significant? (What previous scriptures might be important?)

Ps 75-87

As you read these psalms, look for references to the exile.

Why has all this happened?

Are there any glimmers of light?

How is Ps 87 a surprise in the midst of all the other psalms in this book?

Ps 88

Ps 88 may be read as the prayer of an individual going through intense and chronic suffering. Any canonical reading is (in my view) not to rule out this use of the psalms. But how might Ps 88 be read in context of book 3 as the experience of the nation of Israel?

Ps 89

V1-37 are very positive. Which previous scriptures are being referred/alluded to?

There is then a 180 degree shift. In v38-51, which promises of God is the psalmist saying God has forgotten?

For Reflection:

As book 3 ends, where have we got to with the hopes of Psalms 1 and 2?

Psalms 90-106 (Book 4)

Week 29 part 2

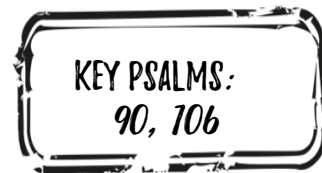
Book 3 of the Psalms had the exile in view. The flourishing of Psalms 1 seemed a distant memory, and despite the promise of Psalm 2, the Davidic kingship seemed in tatters (Ps 89:38-51). Book 4 gives gospel hope in this darkness looking back to God's promises of old (many references to Moses in book 4) and celebrating God's kingship. As you read, look for verbal links between neighbouring psalms. Also look for references to Moses.

Ps 90

What is the main issue addressed in Ps 90?

What previous scriptures are being alluded to in v2 and v3?

Moses' prayer 'return O Lord' in 90:13 is almost identical to Ex 32:12. Look back to the context of this prayer in Exodus to see why this might give hope.



Ps 91-92

As you read these Psalms, look for themes from Psalm 90. In particular, note how these psalms answer the problem of the brevity of life that Psalm 90 lamented.

Ps 93-99

Notice the dominant emphasis 'The Lord reigns' in these psalms.

Why might it be important to celebrate this theme given the situation at the end of Psalm 89?

Ps 105-106

These two psalms tell the history of Israel. What are the different emphases of the two retellings?

Psalm 106 details the people's sin in the past, and how God punished them for it. But what is the hope in v44-48? How does this encourage the people in exile (the problem of book 3 of the Psalms)?

For Reflection:

Book 3 ended with the problem of a people in exile, and the seeming failure of the Davidic covenant. What is the gospel hope presented in book 4?



As you read, look for two common refrains in the book:

- Praise the LORD
- Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, His love endures forever (NIV)

[the Hebrew word for 'love' here is 'hesed' which means 'covenant love', sometimes translated 'lovingkindness' or 'mercy' in older translations. Sometimes just the last part of this refrain is used]

Ps 107

How does Psalm 107 compare to Ps 106? In particular:

- Compare the beginning of Ps 107 to the beginning of Ps 106
- Compare the beginning of Ps 107 to the end of Ps 106



Bonus: Try to identify the repeated pattern in Ps 107. (The situations of distress here could all be read as poetic descriptions of exile)

Ps 108-110 A 'David' collection

How are the psalms in this collection similar and different to David psalms we have seen previously?

Ps 109

It is probably best not to see this as a direct prophecy of the betrayal of Jesus, but rather about David and his accusers in the first instance. But Peter quotes v8 in Acts 1:20 as referring to Judas. This is an example of 'typology' (the word 'type' just means 'pattern'). In other words, the things that happened to David were intended as patterns to foreshadow and point to what would happen to Jesus.

Ps 110 - the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament

This is one of the few psalms that seems to be direct Messianic prophecy. David is speaking about the future Messiah - i.e. in David's day they would not have known who the psalm was speaking about, other than the future king.

How does Jesus use this Psalm in Matt 22:41-45

How does this picture fit with the king of Ps 2? Are there significant differences?

Ps 113-118 The Egyptian Hallel

These psalms came to be used to celebrate the deliverance from Egypt in Passover celebrations. ['Hallel' means 'praise' - hence 'Hallelujah' meaning 'Praise Yah(weh)'] These were almost certainly the psalms that Jesus sang with his disciples at the last supper (e.g. Mk 14:26)

How prominent is the exodus in these psalms?

Ps 118 is the climax of these praise Psalms. What is it about?

Ps 119

What do we learn of God and his word?

What do we learn of the psalmist?

Ps 120-136 Psalms of ascents

These are most likely pilgrim psalms, sung on the journeys up to Jerusalem for the annual feasts (hence 'ascents'). I am persuaded by Alec Motyer's view that these psalms are in groups of three. I think this gives a helpful perspective on how to read and understand the psalms, but have a ponder yourself. (Psalms 135 and 136 don't have the title 'song of ascents' but are often added to the end of this group.)

Far from home	On the way	In Jerusalem
Ps 120	Ps 121	Ps 122
Ps 123	Ps 124	Ps 125
Ps 126	Ps 127	Ps 128
Ps 129	Ps 130	Ps 131
Ps 132	Ps 133	Ps 134-136

Bonus: how might this observation help us understand how we can read these psalms?

Ps 137-145 David psalms again

At this stage of the Psalter as a whole, these 'David' psalms are probably meant to point forward to the future coming Messiah in the line of David, rather than referring back to David the historical king.

What picture here is given of David? Is the David here

- more or less victorious than in books 1-2?
- more or less of a sufferer than in books 1-2?

Ps 146-150 Final Hallelujah

How is God described in these psalms?

How are these psalms a fitting conclusion to the book of Psalms?



For Reflection:

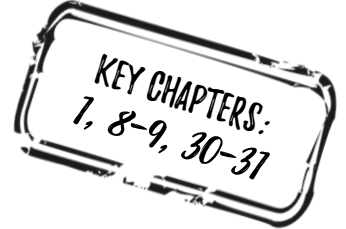
What is the overall tone of the Psalms in book 5 compared to the other books?

How does book 5 of the psalms point forward to the future?

How persuaded are you of the fruitfulness of reading the Psalms as a book, telling the story of the Psalm 2 king?



Like the Psalms, this is a book that ordinarily I would suggest reading in smaller sections. The very nature of a proverbs is that it is short and pithy, designed that we take time to mull it over. One very fruitful reading strategy for Proverbs would be to scan a chapter (for example the chapter that corresponds to the day of the month) and then ponder just one or two proverbs from that chapter. But like the Psalms, there is also a bigger story: Proverbs may be seen as the words of King Solomon to his son, teaching him the wisdom that he will need to rule well (1:1, 8)



Prov 1:1-7 Prologue

What is the purpose of the teaching in proverbs? How does this affect how we read it?

Note the 'bookends' of the first section (1:7 and 9:10). How do these help with the understanding of the rest of the teaching?

Prov 1:8-9:18 Instructions

Who is being spoken to?

Fill in the table (there may be more than one thing in each box)

What is to be pursued/valued?	Why?
What is to be avoided?	Why?

Ch 8 - Wisdom's great speech.

Is wisdom personified here meant to be a foreshadowing of Christ? Why/why not?

Prov 10:1-22:16 First Solomon Collection

How is the teaching here different to what has gone before?

What areas of life and conduct get particular focus in these proverbs?
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Are there particular sections that remind you of Solomon - either how he lived like this, or how he didn't live like this?

Pick one proverb that reflects an 'ideal' situation - i.e. how life ought to be

Pick one proverb that reflects a more complex situation - how life actually is

Prov 22:17-24:34 Sayings of the wise

Is there a discernible difference in focus between these proverbs and the proverbs of Solomon?

Prov 25:1-29:27 Second Solomon collection

What does 25:1 tell us about the dating of Proverbs as a book?

Are there any new features of this collection?

Prov 30:1-33 Agur

How is this section different to what we have seen so far?

Prov 31:1-31 Lemuel

Why do you think the book ends with the description of the wife of noble character? How is that related to things already seen in the book?

For Reflection:

What does proverbs teach us about wisdom?

Are there areas of your own life that Proverbs has encouraged you to pay attention to?

What do you think the purpose(s) of the book of Proverbs is/are?

Does Proverbs focus more on the ideal (what life should be like) or on the real (what life is actually like)?
(we will ask the same question of other wisdom literature)



In the book of Psalms, we have already seen that God's people sometimes wrestle with great suffering and deep questions. Both these receive extended treatment in Job. The book of Job is unusual in the Bible, in that much of what is said (in particular the words of Job's friends) is actually *incorrect* – as the Lord's words at the end of the book will make clear. Their words may sound pious, but they come from a *wrong* view of God, and a *wrong* view of how God works. Job doesn't receive answers to all his questions and suffering, but what he receives is an encounter with God himself.

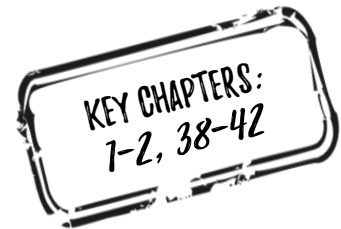
Job 1-2 Prologue

What do we learn of Job in 1:1-5?

What is Satan's role in the suffering of Job? What is the LORD's role?

What is the initial response of both Job and his friends?

Note: we are given an insight into what God is doing, but Job is never given this perspective. The point is to teach us that whilst God always has good purposes, often we cannot see exactly what he is doing, and like Job we need to live by faith.



Job 3-25 Cycles of speeches

The central section of Job is very repetitive, which can make it a hard read. Try to keep an eye on the big picture by making notes under the headings in the table below. Note: the verdict on what is said (i.e. whether the friends are right or wrong!) will come later when the Lord speaks, so for now just try to notice some of the details and distinctives of what is said.

What the friends say about God	What the friends say about Job	What Job says about his friends	What Job says about himself

Job 26-31 Summary of Job's arguments

Ch 26-27 How does Job view God?

How does he view himself?

Ch 28 What does this chapter teach about wisdom?

Ch 30-31 How does Job view himself?

Job 32-37 Elihu

Elihu is an enigmatic character. Unlike the other friends, he is not rebuked by the Lord at the end. Some commentators see him therefore as essentially right in what he says. Others see him as ending up sharing the same wrong view of the other friends. The book of Job just doesn't tell us!

Job 38-42 The Lord answers out of the whirlwind

What is the function of all the Lord's questions (over 50!) in Ch 38-39?

What aspects of his character is the Lord drawing attention to?

How does Job respond?

Job 40-41 The Lord's second speech

Behemoth (40v15ff) is described in animal terms, but is most likely a representation of death ('moth' in Hebrew). How is Behemoth described? Why?

What is the Lord's relationship to Behemoth?

Leviathan (41:1ff) is similarly described like an animal, but is most likely a representation of evil, even Satan.

How is Leviathan described? Why?

What is the Lord's relationship to Leviathan?

Job 42:7-6 Job's final words

Note: there is a translation issue in 42:6b, which could read:

'I repent in dust and ashes' (so NIV and ESV)

OR

'I am comforted in dust and ashes' (ESV footnote)

Do you think Job repents or not? If so, what for?

How does Job's answer respond to what the Lord has said?

Job 42:7-9 The Lord's final verdict

What is the Lord's verdict on the friends?

What is the Lord's verdict on Job?

How does this relate to what has gone before?

For Reflection:

What do you think the message of Job is for us today?

Does Job focus more on the ideal (what life should be like) or on the real (what life is actually like)?
(we will ask the same question of other wisdom literature)



Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations and Ecclesiastes are found in the Hebrew Bible along with Esther as part of the 'small scrolls' in the writings. As these books are all fairly short, I haven't given key chapters, rather they are best read in an overview way, getting a sense of the overall picture that is being painted.

SONG OF SONGS

This song celebrates the love between the king and his bride, in language that echoes the paradise of Eden. It is a beautiful story of love that triumphs even over times of separation and alienation. Though in recent times it has been more common to see this song as a celebration of human love and marriage (albeit with applications then to God and his people), for the purposes of this reading, try reading it as first and foremost an allegory about the love between Christ the king and his bride the church. The way God will bring his people back to Eden paradise is by bringing them back to himself.

Here is one possible outline that may help with your reading

Ch 1-2	Declarations of love. (Note: 2:10-17 may be Solomon's proposal)
3:1-5	Bride's dream
3:6-4:16	Solomon arrives for the wedding
4:16-5:1	Consummation
5:2-8:7	Married life
8:8-14	Final words

As you read:

- Look for references to Eden
- What are the barriers to love?
- How does the king feel about his bride?
- How does the bride feel about the king?



RUTH

In our English Bibles Ruth occurs after Judges (where it fits chronologically). But in the Hebrew order, having it after the Song of Songs gives an extra focus on love and marriage. In particular, in the character of Boaz, who marries the foreigner Ruth (despite how this will endanger his own inheritance), we have a beautiful picture of Christ our bridegroom.

As you read, consider

- What do you make of Naomi's decision to go to Moab?
- What do we learn of Boaz?
- How is God's grace seen in the book?
- What does the final verse add?

For Reflection:

How do the books of Song of Songs and Ruth enrich our view of Christ?

LAMENTATIONS

Lamentations bewails the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians – in many ways it is the poetic response to the destruction recorded in 2 Kings 25 and Jeremiah 52. The city is personified as a ruined princess, as a widowed bride (1:1).

Try to read the book in one sitting, not getting lost in the details, but trying to get an overview both of what is being said, but also the emotion with which it is said. What overall picture emerges?

For Reflection:

What is the effect of reading this story of the ruined bride Jerusalem in the context of the previous books of Song of Songs and Ruth?

In many ways, Lamentations is as dark a book as we find in Scripture. How does this make the placement of 3:21-26 encouraging?

ECCLESIASTES

The main teaching of Ecclesiastes is that life is fleeting and hard to understand. This is captured in a Hebrew word used 37 times into the book: 'Hebel'. This word is usually translated 'meaningless' or 'vanity' but its literal meaning is 'breath'. Life is 'breath', the teacher says, so don't try to understand everything, and don't try to control everything – because we can't. But once this has been said, the ground is clear for the positive message of the book: receive and enjoy life as a *gift* (5:19).

As you read, note (and perhaps underline in different colours)

- Cautions against trying to understand everything about the world
- Cautions against placing ultimate hope in worldly things
- Encouragements to enjoy life as a gift from God
- Advice on how to live as a *creature* (i.e. finite, time bound etc)

For Reflection:

How does the book of Ecclesiastes complement the wisdom of Proverbs. What would be lacking if we only had one or other of these two books?

'God is sovereign. He rules over all. But he has not disclosed, and will not disclose, his plan to human beings. (...) Human beings are to live one day at a time, enjoying good days as they come, while also recognizing that many things in life are beyond their understanding. They are called upon to trust God as King, and must not attempt to rule the world for him, nor tell him how to run it.' (Schreiner, 321)

Do you agree with this as a conclusion from Ecclesiastes (and Job)?



KEY CHAPTERS:
DAN 1-7

ESTHER

Esther is set *after* the exile, and so is the latest book of the OT. It is set in Persia, which had become the dominant power, having taken over from Babylon. Esther is a Jew, and there are still Jews scattered through the region, even though the return from exile happened years earlier. So, Esther's situation is very much that of an exile, like Daniel 100 years earlier. Though the subject matter is serious, I'm persuaded there is humour in how the book is narrated (to make important theological points) – keep an eye out for this. Some questions are given below to guide your reading, but as it is such a great story, you may prefer just to enjoy the narrative (read in one sitting!) and then come back to the reflection questions.

God is famously not mentioned by the narrator of Esther. As you read, ask yourself why you think this is. Is God present in the book?

Ch 1-2 In the court of an abusive king

What do you make of Xerxes (also known as Ahasuerus)?

How does Xerxes function as a complete opposite model of kingship to that of Jesus?

Ch 3-5 The plot against the Jews

Remind yourself of Genesis 3:15. How does this give a theological explanation of what happens in 3:6?

Note the dramatic tension in Ch 5 as the gallows is erected by Haman

Ch 6-10 Reversals

What is the turning point at the beginning of Ch6?

What is the fate for:

- The Jewish people
- Their enemies

Some have been uncomfortable with the harshness of the retaliation in Ch 8-10, but these chapters should again be read in light of Gen 3:15. God is preserving the line through which salvation will come to the world!

For Reflection:

Is God present in the book of Esther?

Why do you think Esther was written? What is its message?

DANIEL

Daniel is set during the exile: Daniel was one of the first small group of exiles taken from Jerusalem.

Ch 1 How are Daniel and others treated? Why?

How does Daniel respond?

Ch 2-7 are in Aramaic (the international language of the day) unlike the rest of the book which is in Hebrew. They form a concentric structure. Fill in a rough summary of the events in each chapter, and then see if you can give a brief heading for each pair of chapters (i.e. same heading for Ch 2&7, same for 3&6 etc). Some have been done for you as examples (full table is given in Matt Searles, *Gods Story*)

	Summary of events in chapter	Heading
Ch 2	Four kingdoms. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a four-part statue, broken in pieces by a rock.	Four mighty kingdoms defeated by the kingdom of God
Ch 3	Fiery Furnace. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refuse to worship a statue and are thrown into a fiery furnace, but God protects them.	
Ch 4	Dream of a tree. Nebuchadnezzar dreams of a mighty tree that is chopped down. This represents him, and he is humbled and becomes like a beast of the field.	
4:34-37		Theological message at centre
Ch 5		
Ch 6		
Ch 7		Four mighty kingdoms defeated by the kingdom of God

n.b. The kingdoms described in Ch 2 and 7 are most likely Babylon, Persia, Greece and then Rome

Can you summarise Dan 7 in more detail?

What is the message of Daniel 1-7?

Dan 8-12 are apocalyptic literature, and can be hard to understand.

- Ch 8-9 probably continue the vision of chapter 7.
- Ch 10-12 look forward to the ultimate end of the exile – possibly even looking to the end of time.

Even if the precise details (and dates!) are hard to understand, Hamilton's comment is apt:

'The main function of these visions is to comfort the people of God with the knowledge that God is in sovereign control of what takes place: indeed he is directing events to their intended outcome.' (331)

The main focus of the prophecies in Daniel is on the arrival of Jesus Christ and his kingdom:

- The stone that appears during the time of the iron kingdom (Rome) and becomes a mountain that fills the whole earth (2:31-45)
- The Son of Man who appears in the time of the beast with iron teeth (Rome) and who receives the kingdom and all authority from the ancient of Days (Ch 7)

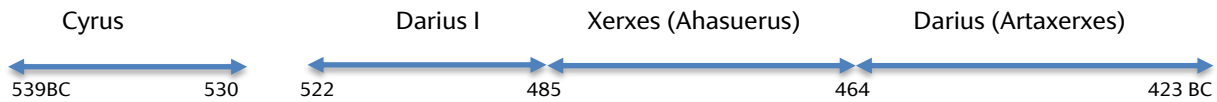
For Reflection:

What is the main message of the book of Daniel?

How does the book of Daniel point to Jesus Christ?



Ezra and Nehemiah recount the return from exile, and continue the narrative from the end of Kings, which ended with the people in exile in Babylon. But Babylon itself was conquered by Persia in 539BC (recorded in Dan 5:30), so by the end of the exile, the people are living under Persian rule. Ezra 1-6 recounts the first return from the exile in Babylon, led by Zerubbabel, 70 years prior to Ezra himself returning. Ezra 7-10 and Nehemiah occur in the reign of Darius (Artaxerxes) and recount Ezra's return to teach the law, and then Nehemiah's return to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.



For Reflection:

Before reading Ezra-Nehemiah, remind yourself of why the exile was so significant for God's people. They had not just lost their land: think what else they had lost.

Also think back to the prophets and what they promised about the return from exile.

Ezra 1-3 The first return and rebuilding of the temple

Ch 1 Why did Cyrus let the exiles go?

Note: with the references to bringing gold and silver, and also the reference to coming 'up', this is portrayed in similar language to the Exodus.

Ch 3 What happens?

Notice there are two different responses of the people. Why is this?

Ezra 4-6 Opposition to the rebuilding

The first 4 verses of ch4 recount opposition in the time of Zerubbabel. Then there is an interruption (4:6-23) recounting 2 later examples of hostility from peoples of the land. Then in 4:24 we return to the main story in the time of Zerubbabel.

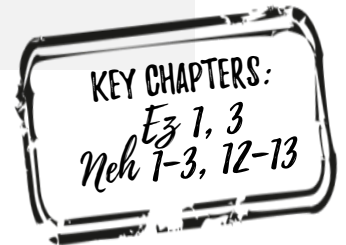
Ezra 7-10 The return of Ezra under king Artaxerxes

Ch 7 Narrative now moves nearly 60 years later to the time of Ezra.

Notice the repeated phrase in Ch 7 & 8: 'the hand of God on him'

Ch 8-10 Why do think there is the focus on genealogy, priests and intermarriage? How does knowing Israel's previous history help understand this?

Note: Ezra has an abrupt ending because it was originally joined to the book of Nehemiah, and the narrative continues straight on.



Nehemiah 1-3 Rebuilding the walls of the city

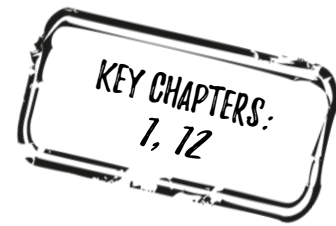
Neh 1 What did Nehemiah hear?

What is his response?

Neh 2 What does Nehemiah ask of the king?

Neh 3 What does Nehemiah organise?

Don't get lost in the detail - but do think why this was such an important task.



Neh 4 How does Nehemiah respond to the opposition (esp. v9)

Neh 4-7 Opposition from within and without

What obstacles do the people face to rebuilding the wall

- In chapter 4
- In chapter 5 (think also which New Testament passages are similar to this)
- In chapter 6

Neh 8-13 Rebuilding the walls of Torah (the law)

Ezra's teaching of the law may be seen as building another kind of 'wall'. The walls of the city would defend from external enemies, but they also needed the law to ensure their moral purity as God's people.

Neh 8 Try to summarise what happens here. Try to follow the emotions that occur.

Neh 9 - a mini Bible overview. What is the function of this overview?

Neh 12:27-47 What happens?

For Reflection:

'Ezra is no mere chronicle but powerfully presents a theology that has emerged from the fires of exile. The chastened group of exiles who return after the punishment of the exile need to remember that while the covenant is unbreakable, they will enjoy its blessings only when they love and obey God.'

(Bob Fyall, NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible, 828)

Does this summarise the book well?

By the end of Nehemiah, is the exile really over? What might be missing:

- Compared to the best days of the kingdom? (e.g. David, Solomon)
- Compared to what the prophets promised after exile?



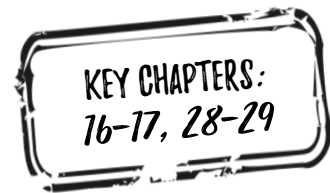
1-2 Chronicles are actually one book, covering the same general time period as the books of Kings. But whereas the books of Kings were probably written for an audience in exile (explaining how they got there—hence a focus on human sin) the books of Chronicles were written for the returned exiles. The focus was not so much what went *wrong* in the past, but letting the past—in particular the promises and faithfulness of God—provide hope for the future.

1 Chron 1-9 Genealogy (feel free to skim)

The purpose of this is to show continuity with the past: in particular, to show that the kingly and priestly lines are still intact, so there is hope for a renewed kingdom and priesthood after exile. Also, we are still looking for the promised 'offspring of the woman' (Gen 3:15) and offspring of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3; 17:4-8) through whom God will defeat evil and bless the world.

1 Chron 10 - Saul

Note how brief the account of Saul is compared to that in 1-2 Samuel. How did Saul die according to this chapter? (see v4, v19)



1 Chron 11-29 David

There is much in this narrative that is common with the narratives of Samuel. The questions below aim to guide you to some of the most significant parts of the narrative.

1 Chron 13 and 15 The bringing of the ark to Jerusalem

In Ch 13, David organised the ark to be carried on a cart—which is how the Philistines carried it in 1 Sam 6-12! But God had already given instructions: it was to be carried on poles by the Levites, with no-one allowed to touch it. (Remember the long instructions in Numbers 4, in particular Num 4:15)

What are the returned exiles to learn from the two carryings of the ark to Jerusalem?

1 Chron 16 Institution of temple singers and musicians

This is where temple singer and musicians were instituted. Until David, Israelite worship was pretty much without music and song.

What are the emphases of this song? What is significant about how it ends?

For Reflection:

Why do you think singing begins in earnest at this point in Israel's history?

1 Chron 17 The covenant with David.

Remind yourselves of the key things David is promised (c.f. 2 Sam 7)

1 Chron 18-20 David's victories

20:1 Notice that this is where in the narrative David's sin with Bathsheba would fit.

1 Chron 21-29 Preparations for building the temple

Ch 21 Even though Chronicles focusses far more on David's success than his sin, this sinful census is still narrated.

Ch 23-27 are mostly organising the priests and others who will serve in the temple.

Why is this important? (in particular think why this might be important for returned exiles to know)

1 Chron 28-29 David's final words

Ch 28 David's charge to Israel and Solomon.
What are key emphases of what he says?

Ch 29. What is the tone of this chapter?
How should this description make the returned exiles feel? What has 1 Chronicles said to them?

For Reflection:

'1 Chronicles recounts the past in order to look to the future with hope.'
Do you think this is a good summary of the book? Why / why not?



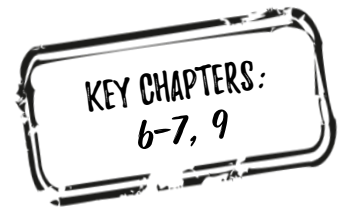


Remember that Chronicles is re-telling the history of Israel for the sake of the returned exiles, to give them hope for the future. They don't need to be constantly reminded of sin and its consequences, rather the Chronicler focuses more on the positive aspects of the history, in particular ones that point forward to the future. This is no-where more true than with Solomon. His sin is almost entirely absent. The focus instead is on how good things were when there was a good king, to give the people an aching hope of a king who would restore this kind of blessing to the people and land.

2 Chr 1-8 Solomon builds the temple

The focus on these chapters is on Solomon as a temple builder. The dwelling of God with his people has been a central feature of the entire story so far, and so a vital part of the king's job was to build and maintain the temple (just as Moses set up the tabernacle in the wilderness). The presence of God is the central reality for God's people.

Ch 3-4 The building of the temple.
Where is the temple built? (3:1)



The only other mention of this place in the Old Testament is in Gen 22:2. What is the significance of the temple being built here?

What materials and decorations are used? Don't get lost in the detail - try to get the overall picture.

Note 3:14 the cherubim woven into the curtain separating off the holy of holies. Where have we seen cherubim guarding the way into God's presence before?

Ch 5 The ark brought to the temple. (It has previously been in Jerusalem in David's tent)

What happens in 5:13-14 (and similarly in 7:1-3)? Why is this significant?

Ch 6 What are some of the features of Solomon's prayer? In particular, what is here that might give hope to the returned exiles?

Ch 7 What happens as soon as Solomon has finished dedicating the temple? (c.f. similar event in 5:13-14)

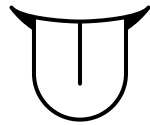
Why is this significant?

How is this similar and different to the dedication of the tabernacle in Ex 40:34-38?

2 Chr 9 The high point of the Messiahi's kingdom

There are clearly aspects of Solomon's reign that were imperfect. But they're not in focus here (no mention of foreign wives and idolatry). The presentation here is of life at its best under a good king.

What would it have been like to be in Jerusalem at this time? Make notes of what you would experience through your five senses:



How was this picture of life under Solomon meant to make the original readers of the book feel?

How does this look like a fulfilment of (even expansion of):

- Eden
- God's promises to Abraham in Gen 12:1-3



Which aspects of life under Solomon point ahead to the kingship of Christ?

2 Chr 10-16 Other kings of Judah

Unlike Kings, Chronicles doesn't recount the kings of Israel after the split of the kingdom into Israel and Judah. The focus is entirely on Judah, the southern kingdom. This is a selective history, told to make a theological point:

'Whatever difficulties the audience of Chronicles may be facing, from the Chronicler they learn that Yahweh is able to save by many or by few (1 Sam 14:6). Even if his people are vastly outnumbered, Yahweh can deliver them by judging their enemies in battle. He will do this if his people cry out to him for help, relying on him rather than other nations.' (Hamilton 345)

Ch 10-12 The kingdom splits - Jeroboam king in Israel, Rehoboam king in Judah

What does Rehoboam do that is commendable? Is there a lesson for the readers of the book?

What does Rehoboam do that is wrong? Is there a lesson for the readers of the book?

Ch 13-16 Notice any times the Lord delivers his people against overwhelming odds.

For Reflection:

Imagine you were a Jew just before the birth of Jesus, trying to explain to a foreigner why you were excited that the Messiah would one day come. How would 2 Chron 9 impact what you said?



This section continues the history of Judah right up to the exile. Much of it is similar to the narratives in Kings (though without the parts focussing on the Northern kingdom of Israel). Jehoshaphat (ch17-20) gets much more detail than in Kings, so my suggestion is to read this section slowly and carefully, even if you then skim read the rest more briefly—and the questions below are geared in this way.

2 Chron 17-20 Jehoshaphat

Unlike some kings who can be summarised rather simply as 'good' or 'bad', Jehoshaphat is much more mixed, and interesting. Jehoshaphat reigned in Judah at the same time as Ahab and his wife Jezebel in Israel. You may wish to remind yourself about Ahab and Jezebel from in 1 Kings 18 onwards, in their confrontations with the prophet Elijah.

Ch 17 - How is Jehoshaphat described?

Ch 18 – What does Jehoshaphat do?

19:1-3 How does the Lord (through the prophet Jehu) give his verdict on this alliance that Jehoshaphat made with Ahab?

**KEY CHAPTERS:
17-20**

For Reflection:

What might the lesson be for the later generations of God's people who read this account? What about for us today?

Ch 20 How does Jehoshaphat respond to the enemy attack?

What are the different parts of Jehoshaphat's prayer? How long is given to each?

How does Jehoshaphat fight the battle? What is the result?

2 Chron 21-23 Jehoram, Ahaziah and Athaliah

As we saw, Jehoshaphat made an alliance with evil king Ahab. His son, Jehoram, married Ahab's daughter, Athaliah. They then had a son, Ahaziah. As you read of the reigns of Jehoram (Ch 21) and Ahaziah and Athaliah (Ch 22) notice how they each follow in the footsteps of Ahab and Jezebel.

How does Athaliah act like a 'serpent' figure (Gen 3:15)?

What happens to her?

2 Chron 24-35 From Joash to Josiah

There are lots of kings and people in these chapters (most of whose names sound quite similar) so it can be hard to keep track. But as you read, even if you miss details, keep an eye out for:

POSITIVES

What reforms happen in this time?

NEGATIVES

How do kings sin and why?

2 Chron 36 Final kings of Judah

Notice that ending of Chronicles (last paragraph in most English translations) is virtually identical to the opening verses of Ezra. Why do you think the book ends like this?

For Reflection:

Stephen Dempster argues that the final verses of Chronicles (the decree for exiles to return) show that 'Israel is still in exile even though it has returned.' In other words, by the end of the Old Testament the people have returned to the land, but spiritually they are not where they should be, they are still far from God. 'A long exile still awaits before the Messiah comes and restores all things.' (Dominion and Dynasty, 224-225)

Pause at this point in the story and ponder what promises still look unfulfilled. Find as many as you can—this will help set a right expectation as we come to the New Testament. The following headings may help:

- Creation
- Abraham
- Kingship
- Temple

'Chronicles is fundamentally a book of hope.' (Schreiner, 207) Do you agree?





There are three parts to Matthew's gospel, with parts 2 and 3 introduced by the same phrase 'from that time on'. Look up the verses to complete the phrase and see what the main focus of each section of Jesus' ministry is.

1:1-4:11	Preparation for Jesus' public ministry	
4:12-16:20	Major phase of Jesus' public ministry (can you give it a heading?)	4:17 From that time on Jesus began to...
16:21-28:20	Second part of Jesus' ministry (can you give it a heading?)	16:21 From that time on Jesus began to...

I've not given key chapters for this week, so if time is short, perhaps just take one of the sections below and spend extra time reading and reflecting on it.

Matt 1:1-4:11 Preparation for J's public ministry

Ch 1. Why do you think Matthew begins with a genealogy? What do you notice about who is mentioned and what is focussed on?

As you read **Ch 1-2** look for references to fulfilment of the prophets

What point is being made by all the references to prophetic fulfilment?

Ch 3-4 What OT passages and events might be being alluded to in these chapters?

Look particularly for references to Jesus bringing a true end to exile.

See 4:17 - key turning point (c.f. 16:21 'From that time'). What was Jesus' message?

Matt 5-9 Kingdom teaching

Ch 5-9 are bookended by the same phrase (4:23 and 9:35). What is this phrase? How does it inform our reading of ch5-9?

Ch 5 Where does this teaching take place? Who is Jesus speaking to?

How do these facts shape how we interpret the sermon?

Can you summarise Jesus' teaching in chapter 5? Are there key emphases?

Ch 6 How is God referred to in this chapter? Why?

Ch 7 What is the main point of ch7?

Can you try to summarise the main points and emphases of the sermon on the mount (ch5-7)?

Ch 8-9 Healings and miracles. Why are these here?

With 4:23 and 9:35 bracketing this section, I'm persuaded that the kingdom of heaven is the focus of these chapters:

- 5-7 The character of the kingdom (and those who belong to it)
- 8-9 The restoration that the kingdom will bring (i.e. miracles point to the new creation)

Matt 9:35-10:42 Missionary discourse

Bonus: Where does the phrase 'like sheep without a shepherd' come from?

What is the message of this section?

Matt 11-12 Gentle and lowly

Ch 11 Why do you think John questions whether Jesus is the Messiah? (What expectations might John have had, and how might the story of Jesus so far not be matching up to them?)

How does Jesus answer him?

What is Jesus criticised for in Ch 11?

What do ch11 and 12 reveal about what sort of Messiah Jesus will be?

Matt 13-16 Division

Ch 13 - parables of the kingdom. Taken together, what is the main point of these parables?

What can we learn from these parables today?

Why is Jesus rejected (13:53-58)?

Ch 14 What are the OT backgrounds to each story?

What do these show about the identity of Jesus?

15:21 Note Jesus is now outside of Jewish areas, among gentiles.

How does this help our interpretation of what happens in the rest of the chapter (including the repetition of some miracles like miraculous feedings)?

Ch 16 How do the pharisees respond to Jesus?

How do the disciples respond? How is this the climax of the gospel so far?

For Reflection:

How has reading Matt 1-16 enriched your view of Jesus? Why not turn that to prayer now.



Matthew 16:21-28:20



Week 40

16:21 is the main turning point in the gospel, marking where Jesus' main ministry ends, and he now focusses on his road to the cross.

Matt 16:21-18:35 Teaching on discipleship

Ch 16 How does Jesus call to discipleship (16:24-28) link with what has just come previously?

Ch 17 Transfiguration. What OT events are alluded to? (there are quite a few!)

Bonus: Why do you think the transfiguration happens? Why now?

Ch 18 What are the disciples to learn about sin in the teaching in this chapter?



Matt 19-25 The road to the temple

Ch 19. As you read these stories, ask why you think they have been grouped together?

Ch 20 Labourers in the vineyard. How do you respond to this parable?

Bonus: How does this parable relate to the conversation Jesus has just had with Peter?

Ch 21 What is signified by Jesus' entry into Jerusalem?

Why are the stories of Jesus' anger in the temple and the fig tree put next to each other?

How do the two parables at the end of ch21 apply to the Jews of Jesus' day?

Ch 22 - is there any common theme to the stories and parables here?

Ch 23 'seven woes'

As you read, think about:

- What the religious leaders are condemned for
- How Jesus is the opposite of these things

Ch 24-25 - known as the 'Olivet discourse' (5th teaching block in Matthew)

These are tricky and debated verses. I'll set out my reading of it below (mainly following Dick France). The disciples' question can be broken into two parts:

1. Tell us, when will these things be? (i.e. the destruction of the temple he has just spoken of)
2. what will be the sign of your coming (parousia) and of the end of the age?

I think that (after first warning against thinking the end is imminent) Jesus takes these questions separately, and in turn.

- **v3-14 Events that are *not* signs of the end**

warning the disciples not to be misled by premature expectation of the end. Persecution and church decline are not the signs that the end is imminent.

- **v15-28 Siege of Jerusalem** (answering 'when will these things be?')

Tribulation when the Roman armies attack and besiege Jerusalem AD68-70. The abomination of desolation is some Roman idolatry in the temple during the Jewish war (c.f. the pagan statue Antiochus Epiphanes set up in 167BC)

- **v29-35 Destruction of the temple in AD 70** (answering 'when will these things be?')

This happens 'immediately after the tribulation of those days' (29:1). The language sounds like final judgment (which is what some people think it refers to). But I'm persuaded it is language of cosmic upheaval drawn from the prophets to refer to judgment - the temple destruction (Is 13:10, 34:4; Ezek 32:7)

- **36-51 J's return to judge.** (answering 'what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?')

Change of focus. Jesus now moves to the second half of the disciples' question. He now starts speaking of 'that day' and his 'coming (parousia) - i.e. his return to judge at the end of time.

Even if some of the details are hard to understand, we can still hear Jesus' main application:

- Don't be led astray. i.e. frightening and 'earth shattering' events are not a reason to turn to a different gospel.
- Be ready for his return. It will be a long time coming, but that shouldn't lead to complacency.

Ch 25 What do these three parables teach about final judgment?

Matt 26-28 Conclusion

Ch 26 What is the effect of setting the story of Jesus' anointing at Bethany next to the story of his betrayal?

Gethsemane - What emotions of Jesus do we see here? Why?

Ch 27 Fill in the following table, looking for the significance of four key events when Jesus dies. In some cases there is an old testament background, so look up the verses and try to summarise this

EVENT	OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND	MEANING OF EVENT
Darkness over the land (27:45)	Joel 2:31; Amos 8:9-10; Isa 13:9-11	
Jesus's cry (27:46)	Ps 22	
Temple curtain torn in two (27:51)	(no one reference, but think of what this curtain symbolised in the OT)	
People came back to life (27:52-53)	Ezek 37:11-14 (and others)	

Ch 28

What is the link between the resurrection and the great commission?



For Reflection:

How has Matthew enriched your view of Jesus?

Matthew presents Jesus as the fulfilment of the Old Testament. But in what particular ways?

Paul's letter to the Romans is the closest thing he ever wrote to a systematic theology, and is a letter that has been treasured by Christians through the centuries. For Martin Luther, it opened his eyes to the glorious doctrine of justification by faith, and in so doing, kick started the Reformation. Romans is a deep and complex letter, but even though some parts may be hard, the overall shape of the letter is very straightforward (as shown by the headings below) and tells the simple beautiful story of humanity's problem, God's solution, and then how to live in light of it.

KEY TERMS: JUST / JUSTIFIED / JUSTIFICATION / RIGHTEOUS / RIGHTEOUSNESS.

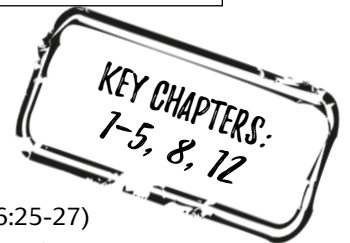
All of these English words translate the same family of Greek words. They are words that relate to someone's moral standing. God is righteous, which simply means he always does what is right. When the words "Just" and "righteous" are used of humanity, they mean to be acceptable in God's sight. To be justified is to be declared acceptable to God. The glorious truth of Romans is that we are justified not by any good works that we do, but by simply trusting in Jesus, i.e. *justification by faith alone*. More than that, God's righteousness (his 'always-doing-what-is-right-ness') involves him saving his people!

Rom 1:1-17 Introduction: The Gospel

1:1-15 What do we learn about the gospel? About Paul's ministry?

What themes are repeated in the intro 1:1-5 and the doxology at the end of the book? (16:25-27)
(Often with Paul's letters, the opening and closing verses contain the main thing he wants to emphasise)

1:16-17 - theme of the letter. Can you try to put this in your own words?



Rom 1:18-3:20 The problem: God's righteous wrath against sinners

1:18-32 What is the main point here?

Chapter 2 is tricky, but the overall point is clear. Paul has said in Ch 1 that God's wrath is poured out on humanity's unrighteousness. In Ch 2 he speaks to two possible 'objections': groups who might think that the verdict of ch1 does not apply to them. How would you characterise the two groups?

- 2:1-11
- 2:12-3:8

3:9-20 Conclusion. What is the main point Paul has made so far?

Rom 3:21-4:25 The Solution: Justification by faith

3:21-26 - the 'Cathedral' of the New Testament. Worth reading and digesting slowly.

- How are we justified?
- Why is not true to say that 'God just decides to ignore our sins'?

Note two key old Testament words:

- redemption (refers to being freed from slavery like at the Exodus)
- Propitiation/atonement: refers to the turning aside of anger through sacrifice (as pictured in Leviticus)

Ch 4 What do we learn from Abraham about faith?

Rom 5-8 Implications of being justified by faith

Ch 5 What is the result of being justified by faith?

5:12-21 Adam and Christ are presented as two representative figures. Every single person is either 'in Adam' or 'in Christ', sharing their fates.

- What did Adam do? With what result?
- What did Christ do? With what result?

Ch 6-7 These chapters can be seen to be answering some possible wrong conclusions from what Paul has just taught:

- If we're saved by grace does that mean we can sin freely?
- Does this mean that the law is bad?

Ch 8 Try to characterise the life of someone who has been justified by faith

Rom 9-11 'Digression' - Jews and Gentiles

These chapters are complex, but a large part of their purpose is found in 9:9. The unbelief of many Jews in Paul's day (which breaks his heart) is not a sign that God's word has failed.

How does Paul end this 'digression'? (11:33-36) Why?

Rom 12-16 Response to God's mercy

Try to summarise the main teaching points of each chapter - and ask how each flows from the 'gospel' that has been explained in the rest of the letter

- Ch 12
- Ch 13
- Ch 14
- Ch 15



For Reflection:

What do you think Paul's purpose was in writing Romans?

Is there anything you have seen in Romans that makes you want to echo Paul's words 'Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God... to him be glory forever!' (Rom 11:33-36)



'The Gospel according to Luke bears a striking resemblance to the narratives in Samuel (...) Like Samuel, Luke-Acts is a story of reversals, with the small and weak exalted while the proud and strong are brought low.' (Hamilton, 392) Just as Hannah's song introduced the main themes of Samuel, so also Mary's song will introduce the similar main themes of Luke.

One other distinctive of Luke is the emphasis on the Spirit empowering Jesus' ministry (which will be matched in Acts by the Spirit now being poured out on the disciples as they continue his ministry.)

Luke 1-2 Infancy narratives

1:1-4 Prologue. What does Luke tell us about his method and purpose?

1:5-25 What do we learn of John's mission?

How does Mal 4:5-6 inform how we are to view John and his mission?

As you read the rest of chapters 1-2, note down all that is said about who Jesus is and what he will do (there of course may be overlap between these two)



WHO JESUS IS	WHAT JESUS CAME TO DO

1:46-56 Mary's song. (c.f. Hannah's song in 1 Sam) What are the main emphases of Mary's song?

2:25-26 Simeon is longing for the 'consolation' of Israel, which is the same word as the Greek version of Isaiah 40:1 'comfort'. I'm persuaded that Simeon is longing for Isaiah's prophecies of hope to come true. If you have time, flick back to Isaiah 40-55 and remind yourself of some of these glorious promises.

Luke 3:1-4:15 Preparation for Jesus' ministry

What Old Testament people/promises get attention in these chapters?

Luke 4:16-9:50 Jesus' ministry in Galilee

4:16-19 Jesus introduces his narrative with a quotation from Isaiah.

- What are the emphases of this prophecy?
- As you read the rest of Luke, look for how this characterises Jesus' ministry. (Note that the word for 'poor' refers to all who are afflicted and downtrodden, not just those in financial poverty.)

Ch 5 How does Jesus bring 'good news to the poor' in this chapter?

6:17-49 Sermon on the plain

- What are the emphases of this sermon?
- How does this sermon fit with the themes of Mary's song in ch1?
- Flick across to the sermon on the mount in Matt 5-7. What are the similarities and differences? What do you make of these?

Ch 7-8 Keep thinking about how Jesus brings 'good news to the poor' in these chapters

Ch 9 This is the first mention of Jesus' death in Luke.

What are the emphases of this chapter?

9:31. Note that at Jesus's transfiguration, Jesus describes his death as his departure—or literally 'exodus'. Why do you think this is?

9:51-11:54 On the way to Jerusalem

9:51-19:27 portray Jesus on the way to Jerusalem (we will look at chapters 12-19 next time).

9:51 Jesus 'resolutely set out for Jerusalem'. How does what has happened already in ch9 show that this statement is about more than just geography?

Ch 10 The sending out of the 72

The 72 (or 70) probably represents the number of nations in the world in Gen 10. Also c.f. Num 11:16.

Are there any other OT allusions in this section? What do the OT references contribute?

Ch 11 What is Jesus criticised for?

What does he criticise the people for?

For Reflection:

What have been some of the distinctive emphases of Luke so far?

In Luke 1:66; 2:19 and 2:51 Luke records people treasuring and pondering the message in their hearts—something he hopes his readers to do also. Is there anything from Luke 1-9 you want to ponder and pray about?





Luke 12-19:44 *On the way to Jerusalem (cont.)*

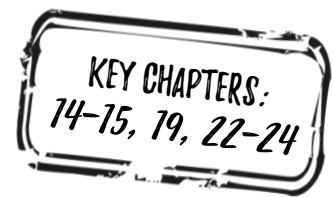
Remember that in 9:51 Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem. In this section look for continued references to Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (e.g. 9:51, 53; 13:22, 33; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11, 28 and others). There are many different events and sections of teaching in this section, but the questions below will just focus in a few places.

13:10-14:35 Look for *reversals* in this section (also a good question to ask for all of Luke) - c.f. Mary's song

What does this section teach about the kingdom of God?

Ch 15 - Lost sheep, coin, son

- Who is Jesus speaking these parables to?
- How does that affect how we are to understand their main point?
- What is the application for us today?



16:1-18:30 I've yet to work out if there is any particular theme or arrangement to this section. Can you see any? What strikes you most from this section?

18:31-19:44 Final approach to Jerusalem.

- Look for references to glory/praise in this section (also all of Luke)
- What strikes you about Jesus in this section?

19:10 Could be a theme verse for the whole gospel.

Luke 19:45-21:38 *Ministry in Jerusalem*

19:45 He entered the temple. As you read this section, look for what is said about the temple.

20:9-18 How does this parable tell the story of God's Old Testament people?

Ch 21 End of the temple / end of the world? Interpreters differ on what is in view here. (c.f. Matt 24)

1. This is about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple only

ESV Study Bible suggests Jesus is only speaking of the destruction of the temple here (and events leading up to it) rather than about final judgment. The 'end of the world' language is poetic/prophetic language to describe the theological significance of the temple destruction. Though the destruction of Jerusalem is a pattern/type of the final judgment.

2. About end of the temple AND end of the world

NIV Biblical Theological study Bible notes think Jesus alternates between speaking of destruction of the temple and of the end times/final judgment.

- v5-6 destruction of Jerusalem and temple
- 7-11 signs of the end times
- 12-19 before all this the disciples will be persecuted
- 20-24 returns to speak of destruction of the temple
- 25-28 more about signs of the end times
- 29-36 living in light of the return of Christ

Which view do you find most persuasive? Why?

Luke 22:1-23:56 The crucifixion

The events of the crucifixion will be familiar, but as you read ask yourself if there are particular emphases in Luke's account, or things you haven't noticed before.

Bonus: It has been argued that Luke has no real theology of the cross. Are you persuaded by this? What might be added by Luke's repeated references to Isaiah, in particular his portrayal of Jesus as the servant of the Lord?

Luke 24:1-53 The resurrection and ascension

What reversals do we see in this chapter?

What are the emphases as Luke's gospel closes?

Bonus: read the first chapter of Acts and see how the story continues. Does Acts pick up exactly where Luke left off?

For Reflection:

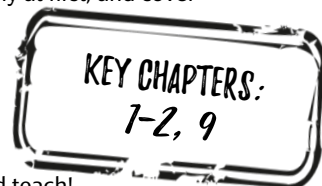
How has Luke's gospel enriched your view of Jesus?

Luke began with angels announcing good news of great joy, and ends with the disciples returning to Jerusalem with great joy. What is there to rejoice about from your reading in Luke's gospel?





Acts continues not just the story, but also the main themes of Luke. Luke presented the ministry of Jesus, culminating in the cross and resurrection, Jesus' coronation. Acts presents the continued ministry of Jesus, now enthroned and reigning, ministry done through his apostles. The characteristic of Jesus' ministry in Luke is that it was done in the power of the Holy Spirit, and the same will be true for the apostles in Acts, with the Spirit being poured out on them at Pentecost. Because of the significance of some of the events in the early chapters of Acts, we'll move more slowly at first, and cover a larger section next time.



Acts 1 Introduction

Note 1:1 – Luke is what Jesus began to do and teach, so Acts must be what Jesus continues to do and teach! In 1:6 the disciples ask Jesus a question. Jesus's response in v8 corrects 4 different misconceptions, and is a programmatic statement for the book as a whole. Try to complete the table below.

Question	Jesus's response	Explanation
'Lord, are you...'	'You will receive power'	Jesus will continue his mission, but he will do it <i>through his disciples</i> , as he will be taken up to heaven imminently.
'at this time'		
'restore the kingdom' (perhaps expecting a military solution)	You will be my witnesses	
'to Israel'		

How is Matthias chosen as an apostle? What criteria must he meet?

Acts 2 Pentecost

This is a crucial moment in the book, and in the history of redemption. In the experience of God's people, this is probably THE great turning point.

Can you summarise what happens?

What do you think the significance of these events is?

There is temple symbolism in Acts 2, pointing to the church as the new dwelling place of God.

- 'house' (v2) This might be the temple itself, or even if it is a private house, it is a word used in the Old Testament to refer to the temple, so makes readers think of the temple
- Fire coming and resting on them (v3). In the Old Testament, at the consecration the temple, fire came symbolising the presence of God (2 Chron 7:1-3) But this didn't happen in the rebuilt temple (Ezra 6:13-18), suggesting that the people had to wait until God would dwell with them again. Here in Acts 2, fire falls not on the temple building, but on the *people*. God will no longer dwell be in a building, but among his people, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (v4).

How do you see Joel's words (Acts 2:17-21) being fulfilled according to the rest of the chapter?

Acts 3-7 Gospel going out in Jerusalem

Acts records the growth of the church and the spread of the good news about Jesus, according to the pattern set out in 1:8: Jerusalem (Ch 3-7), then Judea and Samaria (Ch 8-9), then the ends of the earth (Ch 10-28). The disciples face opposition and obstacles, but each section ends with progress reports, e.g. 'the word of God increased and multiplied' (12:24 ESV, see also 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 16:5; 19:20). The language used is intentionally echoing the very first command to Adam and Eve: 'be fruitful and multiply' (Gen 1:28)

How do the Apostles speak of Christ to the people in Jerusalem? (Ch 3-4)

4:32-5:11 Generosity and greed

- How do the believers treat one another? What does this teach us for today?
- What is wrong with what Ananias and Sapphira do?
- Bonus: How are the threats the early church faced (Ch 3-5) similar to the threats faced when the people first entered the promised land?

Ch 6:1-7 What is the problem here? What is the solution, and then the result?

Ch 7 What are the emphases of Stephen's speech?

Ch 8:1-8 What is the outcome of the persecution of the church?

Acts 8-9 Gospel going out in Judea and Samaria

Look for all the references to the apostles preaching in these chapters. What do they preach?

Ch 9 the conversion of Saul. What happens?

If you were making a film of this chapter, what would you focus on? (i.e. most dramatic parts of narrative)

Note: **9:15** second programmatic statement in Acts (after 1:8).

For Reflection:

What have the main emphases of the book of Acts been so far?

What do you think the purpose is of the 'progress reports' (noted above). How does the link to Gen 1:28 add to this picture?





Acts 1-9 focussed on the gospel going out in Jerusalem (Ch 3-7) and in Judea and Samaria (Ch 8-9). From chapter 10-28, the focus moves to the gospel going out to the ends of the earth, kick started by Peter's vision in Ch 10.

To ponder: Have any Gentiles (non-Jews) been converted up to this point in the story?

Acts 10-12 Peter's vision and the gospel coming to Gentiles

Ch 10. What is Peter shown? What is the significance?

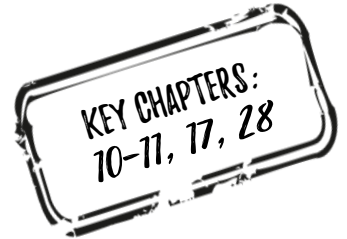
What does Peter preach (v34ff) What then happens (v44ff)?

Ch 11 Why is Peter's vision recorded a second time?

What is significant about the church in Antioch? (11:26)

Ch 12 Do you see any humour in these stories?

Bonus: Like Luke's gospel, the narratives are very intentionally arranged, with a regular focus on reversals. What effect is achieved by putting the death of Herod straight after the rescue of Peter? (c.f. Lk 2:1-7)



Acts 13-14 Paul's first missionary journey

Note how the church in Antioch is a base from which Barnabas and Paul are set apart and sent off on mission.

In what sort of venue does Paul begin his preaching? (13:5, 14; 14:1)

What message does Paul preach? (Ch 13)

Note 13:47 – the words of Isaiah's 2nd servant song here applied not to Jesus but to the apostles.

Acts 15 The Jerusalem council

What is the issue? (v1)

What is the decision?

Note: The council does not require Gentiles to keep the Jewish law, but they are given some prohibitions from it (15:20). These have caused some debate; most likely is that these are things that would make table-fellowship with Jews impossible, so whilst the first three are not moral requirements, for the sake of Jews, they should be adhered to by Gentiles.

Acts 15:36-18:22 Paul's second missionary journey

17:16-34 Paul in Athens

How does Paul's evangelistic approach in Athens differ from his approach in Jewish areas?

18:22 Paul returns to Antioch, which was his 'sending church'

Acts 18:23-21:16 Paul's third missionary journey (mainly Ephesus)

Ch 19 What are some of the reasons Paul is opposed?

20:5-6 Another section of the book begins where Luke speaks of 'we', indicating he was now part of the group (also briefly in ch16). Presumably from this point on Luke remains with Paul until the end of the book.

Acts 21:17-23:35 Paul arrested in Jerusalem

21:17 to the end of Acts is sometimes called Paul's 4th missionary journey, because although this is different - including his arrest, time in prison in Caesarea, then transport to Rome for his trial, he still uses every opportunity to preach the gospel, fulfilling the programmatic statement of 1:8 of the gospel going to the ends of the earth, represented by Rome—the centre of the empire and the known world.

Why is Paul arrested?

How would you characterise Paul's defence? (22:1-21)

Ch23 Why was Paul sent to Caesarea?

(Caesarea was where the Roman governor of Judea, Felix, was stationed. Caesarea was a town on the coast, north of Jerusalem.)

Acts 24:1-26:32 Paul in prison in Caesarea

Ch 24 Paul's trial before Felix

Ch 25 Felix is succeeded as governor by Festus. Festus suggests taking Paul to Jerusalem for trial. Paul instead appeals for trial before Caesar (which was Paul's right as a Roman citizen). Why do you think Paul did this?

25:13 Agrippa the king - son of Herod Agrippa (see ch12) and great grandson of Herod the great (Luke 1:5).

Ch 26 How does Paul defend himself before Agrippa?

26:24-29 These verses are worth careful reading. What is amazing about what Paul says?

Acts 27-28 Witness in Rome

What is the main point of the voyage story in ch27 do you think?

How does Acts end? Is this a satisfying conclusion literarily? What about theologically?

For Reflection:

Though Jesus has not been present on earth through most of Acts, is it fair to say that Acts has been the record of what he continued to do and teach? Why/why not?

What do you think the purpose of Acts is? Why is it in Scripture?





We've already looked at Romans, which probably contains Paul's most systematic setting out of the gospel and his theology. But even Romans is a letter, not a textbook, written to particular people in a particular situation. This becomes even more clear in Paul's other letters. He writes to different churches, with different presenting issues, so what he says is different—not contradictory, but different emphases.

As a very general rule, the first part of Paul's letters often deals with theology: setting out the gospel and the glorious truths about Christ. The second part of his letters turns more to application: how to live in light of the gospel truths he has just explained. Even though this is a simplification, it is a helpful overall structure for 2 reasons:

- It reminds us of the shape of salvation. Just like the law was given to a people who had already been redeemed, so the ethical teaching of Paul's letters comes *after* the truth about the finished work of Christ. The very shape of Paul's letters reminds us that we are not saved by our good works, but by Christ. Our good works flow out of what Christ has already done for us.
- Often the 'shape' of the ethical teaching matches the shape of the way Paul explains the gospel. This can help us be better pastors of ourselves (and others). Different lifestyle issues need different parts of the gospel emphasised. Paul's letters will model this beautifully.

GALATIANS

Galatians was written to a church where they thought that salvation depended believing in Christ but also on doing 'works of the law'. With Galatians emphasis on justification by faith (not works of law) there is some overlap with this letter and the message of Romans.

Ch1 How is the beginning of Galatians different to other letters (e.g. Eph, Col, Phil)?

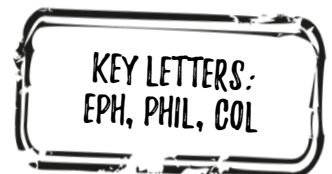
What is Paul so upset about?

Note: this is the only letter where Paul begins in such a negative way. He is able to positive about every church (despite some huge failings) so long as they haven't abandoned the gospel!

Ch 2 Why did Paul oppose Peter?

Ch 3-4 What does the Old Testament teach about how to be saved?

Ch 5-6 What is Christian living to look like according to Paul?



EPHESIANS

This is one of the 'biggest picture' views of Christ and his salvation in the New Testament. A key verse is 1:9-10—all things in heaven and on earth will be united/brought under one head – Christ.

How are Christ and his work presented in Ephesians?

Where and how does the letter move from mainly theology to mainly ethics?

What are the emphases of the ethical teaching?

How is the ethical teaching related to the gospel/theology?

Can you summarise the gospel according to Ephesians?

PHILIPPIANS

Though Paul was writing this letter from prison, it is full of joy! This may be a surprise, but it reflects the central presentation of Christ in Philippians, and the overall theme in the letter of reversals: that what we value now we are Christians will be very different to what it was before.

How are Christ and his work presented in Philippians?

What is the main ethical teaching? How is this related to the presentation of Christ?

What is the gospel according to Philippians?

COLOSSIANS

The church in Colossae were being made to feel that they did not have enough: that there was a greater level of spirituality beyond mere trust in Christ that they should aspire to (2:8, 16, 20)

How are Christ and his work presented in Colossians?

How does the presentation of Christ answer the pressures that the Colossians were facing?

Where and how does the letter move from mainly theology to mainly ethics?

What are the emphases of the ethical teaching?

How is the ethical teaching related to the gospel/theology?

What is the gospel according to Colossians?

1&2 THESSALONIANS

Paul's letters to the Thessalonians are wonderfully warm, as he writes to a church he loves dearly. One particular issue that the church was facing was regarding the future: they seemed to be living somewhat as if this life were all there is, so Paul reminds them repeatedly of the future hope they have.

What do we learn of Paul's relationship with the Thessalonians?

What are the emphases of each letter?

PHILEMON

What's the letter about? Why do you think it is in the New Testament?

For Reflection:

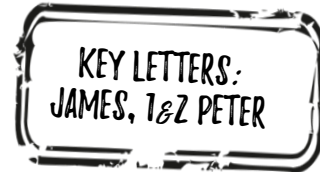
Pick one letter and reflect on how it expands and enriches your view of Christ and his salvation.





1&2 Timothy and Titus are also letters of Paul, but are known as the 'pastoral epistles' as they are written to church pastors, not churches. Even though the primary person addressed in each of the pastoral epistles is a church pastor (Timothy or Titus) there are nevertheless important things for all Christians to learn from these letters. Not least, these letters emphasise:

- The serious and destructive nature of false teaching
- The importance of godliness for those in church leadership (whether formal or informal)
- How the truths of the gospel lead to godliness



As this is an overview, we will not spend long discussing men's and women's roles in church, as these are important and emotive issues, and deserve more detailed attention than we can give here. Among those who affirm the truthfulness of Scripture, and also the equality of men and women (any reading of Paul that justified under-valuing or minimising women would contradict the teaching of the rest of Scripture and the example of Jesus) there are a range of views on exactly how Paul's teaching here is to be applied today, and I'd encourage you to read and think further on these issues.

1 & 2 TIMOTHY

Why is Paul writing to Timothy? (esp. 1 Tim 1:3-7; 2 Tim 4:1-4)

As you read these letters, fill in the table below, not what we learn about:

GODLINESS AND ITS BENEFITS	FALSE TEACHING AND ITS DANGERS

TITUS

What does the letter to Titus teach about godliness?

Look at Paul's two 'gospel summaries' in 2:11-14 and 3:3-7

- What is he saying in each?
- How do these motivate and empower godly living?

JAMES

James's letter to the churches is full of ethical teaching. Some have suggested that he contradicts Paul's message of justification by faith alone. But it is better to see Paul and James answering different questions:

- Paul: On what basis are we justified—faith, or good works? (answer: faith)
- James: What does this saving faith look like? (answer: it is worked out in obedience)

James was Jesus's half-brother, and he shares Jesus' pithy, blunt style. As you read

- look for any of James's teaching that reminds you of Jesus's teaching
- note down which areas of life and conduct are addressed by James.

2:14-26 What is the point James is making here?

What questions does this section leave you with?

1 PETER

Peter's first letter is written to scattered and suffering Christians. Peter draws on Ps34 repeatedly in this letter, which is a Psalm of David speaking to suffering believers in his day (1 Sam 22:1-2). As you read 1 Peter, keep asking 'how does this help suffering Christians?'

Ch 1 What time is it according to Peter? (i.e. what is past, what is present, what is future)

Ch 2:1-11 What OT ideas are being used?

2:13-3:22 How is Christ an example in these verses?

Ch 4-5 How should Christian believers think of themselves?

2 PETER

1:3-15 How should Christians view progress in the Christian life?

1:16-21 What does Peter teach about Old Testament prophecy?

Ch 2-3 What are the warnings here?

For Reflection:

What have these books taught about godly living?

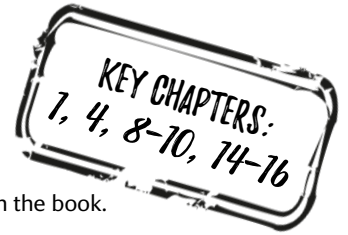
What picture of the Christian life has been painted?



Mark



Week 48



One very simple and helpful way to read Mark is to ask 3 questions:

1. Who is Jesus?
2. Why did he come?
3. What does it mean to follow him?

These questions are drawn from the central section of Mark (8:27-38) which forms the turning point in the book.

Mark 1:1-13 Introduction

1:2 The quotation here is from Malachi and Isaiah, but only Isaiah is mentioned. I'm persuaded that this is because Mark wants to emphasise from the start of his gospel that Jesus is fulfilling the gospel promises of Isaiah 40-66, bringing the second Exodus that Isaiah promised.

Bonus: read Is 40:3-11 Who is 'the way' being prepared for? What is the 'good news' in v9ff? How does this enrich our understanding of what is happening in Mark 1?

What other Old Testament allusions do you detect in Mark 1:1-13?

Mark 1:14-3:6 Early ministry

1:14-15 Key verses introducing Mark's gospel

In what areas does Jesus show his authority (key word in Mark) in this section?

What do we learn of Jesus's priorities?

How does the section end?

Mark 3:7-6:6 Later ministry in Galilee

Note 3:7 Jesus's fame has spread to surrounding nations by now (c.f. Is 42:6)

4:1-34 What do the parables teach about the nature of the kingdom of God?

4:35-5:43 Four miracles. What do these teach about

- Jesus's identity?
- The nature of the kingdom?

6:1-6 How does the section end?

Mark 6:7-8:26 Ministry beyond Galilee

Ch 6 What Old Testament allusions do you detect in the story of the feeding of the five thousand?

The feeding of the 5000 is one of many Moses/Exodus allusions in Mark's gospel, pointing to Jesus as the one who will bring about the new Exodus, as prophesied in Isaiah.

7:24 Jesus travels into Gentile areas for the first time. What is significant about what Jesus does in the Gentile areas? (7:24-8:10)

Mark 8:27-10:52 Jesus' identity, mission and call to discipleship

8:27-38 - central theological section of Mark (and Jesus' first prediction of his death)

1. Who is Jesus?
2. Why has he come? (i.e. what *sort* of Messiah is he?)
3. What does it mean to follow him?

Question 1 sums up Mark 1-8. Questions 2 and 3 will be the main focus of Mark 9-16.

9:30-32 Jesus' second passion prediction. How does what follows (up to end of chapter) show that the disciples have not yet understood what sort of Messiah Jesus will be?

Ch 10 Why do you think Mark puts the story of the children next to the story of the rich young man?

10:32-45 Third passion prediction. How is the disciples' response still wrong? Why?

For Reflection:

Note the healing of blindness at the beginning and end of this section. It takes God opening eyes for us to see what sort of Messiah Jesus will be, and what discipleship will be like.

- What sort of God / Messiah do we naturally want?
- What sort of discipleship do we naturally want?

Mark 11:1-13:37 The Lord returns to his temple

You may wish to skim Malachi 3-4 for some Old Testament background to this section

11:12-25 Why does Mark 'sandwich' the cleansing of the temple between the stories about the fig tree?

12:1-12 How does the parable of the tenants tell the story of God's people?

12:28-34 Jesus is asked what the greatest commandment is.

- What does he say first? (v29)
- What two commandments does he then give?

How do these three things summarise the law in the Old Testament?

Ch 13 Destruction of the temple. See notes on Matthew/Luke for more discussion of different views.

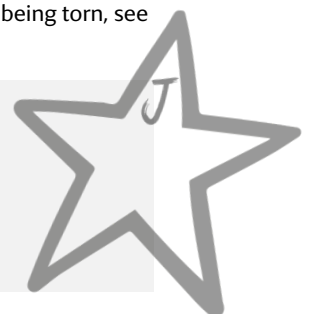
Mark 14-16 Death and resurrection

The events of these chapters may be familiar, but read them slowly and reverently. What strikes you about Jesus from this section?

(For Old Testament background to events at the crucifixion: darkness, Jesus's cry, and the temple curtain being torn, see the table in the notes on Matthew)

For Reflection:

Many people in Mark's gospel were *amazed* by Jesus. Even if you have been a Christian for many years, what is there in Mark that can amaze you about Jesus afresh?



Corinth was a flourishing and important sea port in Greece, which was also a Roman Colony. It was strategically placed, on two trade routes, and thought highly of itself. It was known for great orators (wisdom), for its riches and strength, and for its sexually immorality and idolatry.

Note: Paul wrote 4 letters to the Corinthians:

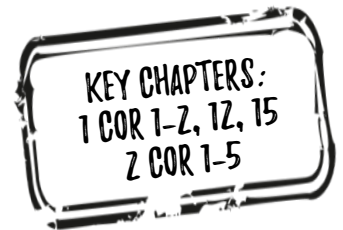
1. The letter referred to as 'my previous letter' in 1 Cor 5:9
2. The letter we have as 1 Corinthians
3. The 'severe' letter Paul refers to in 2 Cor 2:3-4 urging them to repent - which many but not all did
4. The letter we have as 2 Corinthians

1 CORINTHIANS

Note 1:2 'to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people'. The Corinthians are to ensure that their behaviour (holy lives) matches their status (sanctified.)

Look for references to:

- rich/poor
- wise/foolish
- strong/weak
- spiritual/of the flesh (3:1 - NIV 'worldly')
- Arrogance and boasting



1 Cor 1-5 Cross-shaped wisdom not worldly wisdom

Look for the terms listed above (rich/poor etc). How do these chapters show the way of Christ contrasting with the Corinthian way??

How is Christ presented?

1 Cor 5-7 Sexual morality

As you read these chapters, look for the importance of sexual purity:

- For the sake of the individual
- For the sake of the church

Note: in 7:1 Paul begins a section where he speaks of different issues raised by the Corinthians in a letter to him. Each time he addresses a new issue he says 'now concerning...' (ESV) 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12

Ch 7 I once heard a sermon on this chapter which said the summary was 'The grass isn't greener on the other side—be content with where you are.' Is this a helpful summary?

1 Cor 8-10 Idolatry and the glory of God

Ch 8-9 What is Paul's principle that drives his actions here?

Ch 10 What does this chapter tell us about the Old Testament?

How does the end of chapter 10 summarise the heart of Paul's ethical teaching?

1 Cor 11-14 Worship and Spiritual gifts

Ch 12 Why are Spiritual gifts given? What is the main point of the body metaphor?

Ch 13 How does the context of discussion of spiritual gifts shape our understanding of this chapter?

Ch 14 How and why should gifts be exercised?

1 Cor 15-16 Resurrection life

Ch 15 How does Paul summarise and describe the gospel?

What does Paul say about the resurrection?

2 CORINTHIANS

2 Cor 1-7 Strength in Weakness

As you read Ch 1-7, jot down in the table below what you learn about human weakness and God's grace and strength in the midst of it.

STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE	STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS IN TRUE GOSPEL MINISTRY

Ch 3 What Old Testament allusions can you see here?

Note 3:18 Gazing on Christ is transformative. This is vital for understanding how we grow as Christians!

2 Cor 8-9 Cheerful giving

In Ch 8-9, notice how Paul motivates the Corinthians to give by showcasing the grace of Christ.

2 Cor 10-13 True and false gospel ministry

What are the marks of Paul's true gospel ministry?

What are the marks of the false apostles?

For Reflection:

In what ways do you think you are most likely to be 'Corinthian'?

How do 1&2 Corinthians (in particular their presentation of Christ) help with this?



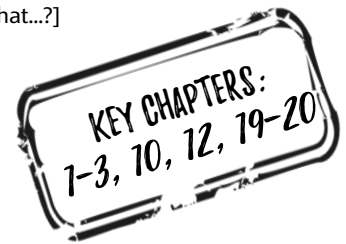
Unlike Matthew, Mark and Luke which have a similar approach (hence called the 'synoptic' or 'seen together' gospels), John feels quite different. There is much less focus on the kingdom of God, and instead John's gospel speaks of eternal life. In the synoptics Jesus is presented primarily as the Messiah/Christ (king in David's line) whereas John spotlights Jesus's divinity, in particular him being the Son of the Father. (These are differences in emphasis only – not absolute differences) John also spends far more time discussion passion week (the week of Jesus' death).

John tells us why he is writing in John 20:30-31. Have a look and bear this in mind as you read. Also, as you read, look out for

- Jesus' signs (probably 7) - and what they say about Jesus' identity
- Jesus' 'I AM' statements (probably 7) - and what they say about Jesus' identity

[yes, of course you can look up these things really quickly. But what would be the point in that...?]

- References to the relationship between the Father and the Son
- What true belief looks like
- What the life Jesus offers looks like
- Symbolism like light and darkness



John 1:1-18 Prologue

Matthew and Luke begin with genealogies and Jesus in the manger. Where does John begin?

Which Old Testament passages might be being echoed?

How is Jesus presented in the prologue?

John 1:10-12:50 The book of signs

As you read **1:10 to the end of chapter 4**, as well as looking out for the features noted above, here are a few moments where you may wish to remind yourself of some Old Testament context:

1:29-34 Remember the Passover lamb (Ex 12)

2:1-12 Remember the prophecies in Isaiah 25:6-8, Joel 3:18, Amos 9:13.

3:1-14 Remember Ezek 36:25-27 (water and Spirit)

7:37-39 Remember the river of living water flowing in Eden, and from the temple in Ezek 40-48.

8:12 Remember Isaiah 49:6 (second servant song)

John 12 The hour has come

Chapter 12 forms something of a turning point. Up until now Jesus has been saying that his hour has not come, but in 10:23 he says that the hour has come for him to be glorified. He makes clear that he will be glorified by being 'lifted up' on the cross.

Look back to Isaiah 53:1 and Isaiah 6:10, both quoted in this passage. Who is 'lifted up' in these two Isaiah passages? What does that tell us about Jesus?

John 13-21 The book of glory / book of the passion

Now the time/hour has come, Jesus speaks about his 'going' or 'departure' by which he means his death. Notice the many references to 'glory' in this section. God's glory is most clearly displayed, not in kingly majesty, but in the humility of a suffering servant.

(for a more detailed worksheet for John 14-16, see the diagram on thebibleoverbrew.com)

Ch 14 Jesus is going. What is the comfort for his disciples?

Ch 15 What will life be like when he is gone?

Ch 16 What more is said about the Holy Spirit here?

Ch 17 In the first half of his prayer, Jesus prays for his 12 apostles. But in the second half he prays for all believers. Take a moment now to ponder the enormity that Jesus is praying these things for you right now.

Note how eternal life is defined in 17:3. This is the John 10:10 'life to the full' that begins *now*, as the age to come has broken into the present through Jesus' death, resurrection and pouring out of the Spirit.

John 18-21 Death and Resurrection

As you read these chapters, look for how John presents Jesus's death as the fulfilment of the Old Testament – either by saying this explicitly, or just by the way he presents events.

For Reflection:

How has John presented Jesus?

Have you seen anything to enrich your view of Jesus and the salvation he brings?

What does life in Christ look like according to John?



1, 2, 3 John



Week 51

Jude, Hebrews

Apart from the book of Hebrews and the brief letter of Jude, the rest of our time will be in material written by the apostle John: his three letters which we'll look at this week, then the book of revelation next time. I've grouped John's writings together so that we can look for common themes between them – which will be especially noticeable with John's letters and his gospel.

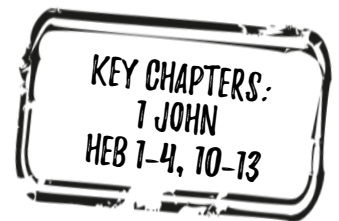
1 JOHN

1 John has sometimes unsettled Christians with tender consciences, as it appears to present 'tests' to work out if we are truly believers or not—and some feel that they may not have the love, faith or obedience to pass. A key verse is 5:13— John writes so that his readers may know they have eternal life. He is not writing with an impossibly high standard meant to unsettle genuine believers, rather he writes about some marks of being a Christian, to encourage his readers that they *are* indeed Christians. So bear in mind John's desire to assure and encourage believers as you read.

As you read 1 John look for similarities with his gospel.

John gives several purposes in his letter - what are they?

What are the marks of being a genuine Christian according to John?



2 & 3 JOHN

Don't read any secondary material on these letters. Just see if you can work out what is the main point or the main emphases of each.

JUDE

Whilst Jude may be a somewhat unfamiliar letter, the doxology at the end of Jude is more well-known and is worth dwelling on regularly, to celebrate the certain hope we have as Christians:

To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (Jude 24-25)

HEBREWS

Hebrews is a rich and complex letter, written to Christians who were tempted to go back to Judaism due to the pressure they were under. So the (unknown) author to the Hebrews (i.e. Jewish Christians) writes a letter/sermon to them that showcases how Christ is better than all that they are tempted to revert back to in Judaism: priests, sacrifices, temple etc. For those Christians today who are not Jewish, Hebrews may be a harder book to get into, as reverting to Judaism is not something that is likely a pressing issue. Nonetheless, even though initially unfamiliar, the book of Hebrews presents a vast and rich picture of Christ and his 'great salvation' that is vital for all Christians, whether ethnically Jewish or not.

Even though there are more tricky details, try to get an overview of Hebrews using the table below. In the left-hand column, try to give reasons why Jesus is better (or explain how he is the reality to which the OT was the shadow).

1:1-2:18 Jesus is better than...	therefore... (2:1-4)
3:1-4:13 Jesus is better than...	therefore... (3:7-4:13)
4:14-7:28 Jesus is better than...	therefore...(5:11-6:12)
8:1-10:18 Jesus is better than...	therefore... (10:19-12:13)
12:14-12:29 Jesus brought us to a better...	therefore... (12:25-13:25)

For Reflection:

How has the book of Hebrews presented Jesus?

What main application do you take from Hebrews?





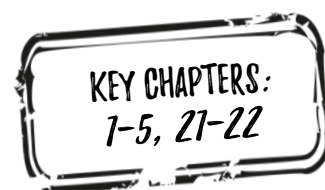
The book of Revelation is an unveiling. The apostle John is shown heavenly and future realities (1:1). Although some of the language and symbolism may seem strange, some key points will help us:

- The language and imagery is drawn from the Old Testament. The better we know the Old Testament, the better we will be able to understand Revelation rightly.
- The book is to encourage faithful Christians who are suffering (1:9). It won't answer every question we have about the future, but it should encourage us with a picture of spiritual realities.
- Christ is at the centre! Perhaps the key verse is a central one:
The kingdom of the world has become
the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah,
and he will reign for ever and ever. (Rev 11:15)
- Rev 21-22 beautifully match Gen 1-2. God's creation plans have been fulfilled. The Bible began with Adam in a garden with his bride, it ends with the New Adam (Jesus) in a garden-city with his bride, the church.

Rev 1-3 The Son of Man and the Churches

How does ch1:1-3 set up the book?

How is Jesus portrayed in chapter 1?



Rev 2-3 Jesus' letters to the churches.

	Ephesus	Smyrna	Pergamum	Thyatira	Sardis	Philadelphia	Laodicea
How is Jesus described?							
What is the church commended for?							
What is held against them?							
What is promised to the one who overcomes?							
Can you see an OT background to this promise?							

Rev 4-5 The Throne Room

Summarise in 2-3 sentences

Note: opening the scroll is probably about having authority over history.

What is God praised for?

Rev 6-16 Judgments: Seals, Trumpets, Bowls

Ch 6-16 contain three series of sevens: 7 seals, 7 trumpets and 7 bowls. I'm persuaded that these are parallel cycles of judgment (i.e. the same thing told in three different ways) rather than a linear timeline. Note also that there is often an interlude between the 6th and 7th in the sequence, giving a glimpse of God's people during this time.

Whilst we won't get all the details, note the similarities with the plagues on Egypt. Jesus is the slain Passover lamb (5:6). The Egypt-like plague judgments of Rev 6-16 are God's means of rescuing his people in a new Exodus, bringing about the full and final return to Eden!

	What is the overall picture?	What do we learn of God's people in this time?
Seven seals 6:1-8:5		7:1-17
Seven trumpets 8:6-11:19		Ch 10-11
Seven bowls 16:1-21		(note: there is no interlude between the 6 th and 7 th in this sequence, but we get a similar focus on God's people just before this vision in Ch 12-15 which we'll consider below)

Ch 12 The Dragon

Note: the woman here represents the church What is 12:1-6 all about?

Where have we seen a dragon/serpent figure trying to kill a woman's offspring before in Scripture?

After Satan was thrown down (12v7-12) – probably at the cross of Christ, notice how he now seeks to attack the church (12v13-17). In Ch 13 this attack is continued by the two beasts, but in Ch 14, just like at the Exodus, God delivers his people from all this evil persecution and brings them to his holy mountain!

Rev 17-20 Judgment of Babylon

Babylon (the prostitute) here represents the world opposed to God – Satan's city/kingdom.

Rev 21-22

What is the picture?

What Old Testament fulfilments do you notice?

In particular look for creation plans fulfilled, and Eden perfected.

For Reflection:

How has the book of Revelation presented Jesus?

Chose one detail from Rev 21-22 to meditate on and to lead you to worship.





References and Further Reading

There are a number of books that have greatly helped me as I've prepared these questions, and when I've referenced them in the notes, I've usually just given the author's surname and the page reference. These are quite heavyweight books, more aimed at pastors, but all very readable:

James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology*.

Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in his Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*.

Stephen Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*.

L. Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption*.

My own Bible Overview book follows a similar approach and structure to these notes, and is much briefer than the book listed above, though borrows lots of ideas from them.

Matt Searles, *God's Story: The Bible Explained*.

Note: *God's Story* comes in two versions: a fully illustrated hardback, and as a paperback that doesn't have the colour photos.