

The Bible In 20 Minutes

*A very brief overview of the Bible
as a memory aid to its content*

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When God created the heavens and the earth, His climax was the creation of mankind in the form of Adam and Eve with all their needs provided for.

God had instructed Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but a problem soon arises when Eve succumbs to Satan's persuasion to disobey God's instruction, and her subsequent encouragement to Adam to do the same. They are consequently expelled from the Garden of Eden, with penalties. Things don't get any better as, in time, aided and abetted by nephilim, mankind becomes so wicked that God chooses to flood the World and start again with righteous Noah and his family as the new ancestral origin of mankind.

As the earth is replenished, problems still arise, witnessed by the Tower of Babel episode and the need for God to confound their language to force their dispersion across the earth.

It would seem that mankind's corruption and belief in false gods would need to be countered by the example of a godly people, whose existence and protection would demonstrate there is only one true God. And so we have the call of Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees to be the head of a great nation. God enters an unconditional covenant with Abraham, ensuring the future of his people and a land of their own in which to live, a covenant repeated to Isaac and Jacob. Jacob is to father the twelve tribes of Israel.

Joseph, Jacob's eleventh son, having been sold by his brothers through jealousy, then achieving a high position in Egypt through the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams, becomes God's instrument to rescue his people from a great famine and provide for them all

in Goshen.

Generations later, a new Pharaoh, who knows nothing of Joseph, fears the Israelites' increase in numbers and begins to persecute them, putting them into slavery and contriving to eliminate the survival of newborn males. Moses' mother ensures his survival by placing him in an ark and hiding him by the riverside where he is then discovered by Pharaoh's daughter, rescued and brought up as her own.

When an adult, aware of his roots, Moses intervenes and protects a fellow Hebrew from an Egyptian, killing the Egyptian in the process and having to flee Egypt. He takes refuge in Midian where he meets the priest, Jethro, tends his sheep, marries his daughter and has two sons by her. Years later, whilst tending sheep near Horeb, Moses sees a burning bush from which God instructs him to return to Egypt with his brother Aaron to deliver the Israelites out of bondage.

It takes ten plagues inflicted on the Egyptians before Pharaoh gives in and lets the Israelites leave. They travel towards Mount Sinai, miraculously passing through the divided waters of the Sea of Reeds on the way. At Mount Sinai, Moses receives the law from God, as well as instructions to build the tabernacle which is to be their centre of worship.

At one point, Moses is on the mountain for so long that the people lose hope in him and persuade Aaron to make a golden calf and altar, which they then use for worship followed by partying. When Moses comes down from the mountain and sees their behaviour, he breaks the stone tablets in anger, then administers punishment to them before returning to the mountain to make atonement for their sin and receive new tablets.

The tabernacle having been constructed, is dismantled and they

head for the Promised Land. At Kadesh, spies are sent out to explore the land but ten of them give account of the dangers they saw, specifically mentioning the nephilim, prompting the people to rebel and want to return to Egypt. For lack of faith in God, they are destined to wander around the desert for forty years before being permitted to enter the Promised Land.

When they finally reach the Promised Land, Joshua succeeds Moses as their leader and the invasion begins. However, it doesn't all go according to plan with remnants of the inhabitants remaining who, in time, have a bad influence on the Israelites.

A generation or so later, there follows a lengthy period of time throughout which the Israelites disobey God's commandments, mix with the Canaanites and turn to their gods. Each time, God raises a judge to rescue them from their plight, but the cycle of disobedience and rescue repeats itself many times.

This period ends with the raising of the prophet Samuel who leads the Israelites, ministers to them and runs a school for prophets. In his old age, Samuel makes his sons judges over Israel, but they are corrupt and the people ask for a king to judge over them. Saul is chosen and anointed by Samuel. Although successful at first, in time, Saul displeases God with unlawful acts and David is anointed in preparation to succeed him.

Following a battle in which David defeats Goliath the Philistine, he is appointed Saul's harp player and armour bearer. It becomes obvious to Saul that David is favoured by God and so treats David as an enemy. Consequently, David spends much time in exile, hiding from Saul. This is despite two occasions on which David could have killed Saul, but didn't. Saul's kingship comes to an end when he is defeated in a battle with the Philistines and takes his own life.

David becomes king, but for the first seven years his kingship is limited to Judah, then later extends to all Jerusalem following a number of battles.

David's kingship continues to involve battles and as a consequence, when he suggests he should build a temple for God, he is turned down as a man of the sword and the privilege is to be given to his son Solomon. David nevertheless makes ample provision in readiness for Solomon to take on the task.

When Solomon succeeds his father, God grants him his request for wisdom to judge his people, but also grants him riches and honour. Solomon builds the temple, undertakes many other building projects, becomes famous throughout the known world and very wealthy through trading. He has a considerable income and makes extravagant use of it to increase the magnificence of his court. His riches exceed that of all other kings of the earth. His extravagance includes his many women, who are now taken from other nations, which isn't lawful for an Israelite. He has seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, as well as princesses. Solomon's downfall is that in his old age, many of his women begin to turn his heart away from God. He worships other gods and builds places for his wives to worship their gods. For these sins, God tells Solomon his kingdom will be lost, but not until his son is king.

When his son Rehoboam succeeds him, the people ask for their taxes to be reduced. This is denied, the people rebel and return to their homes and, with the exception of Judah and Benjamin, make Jeroboam their king. Jeroboam creates a system of idolatrous worship, forbidding Levites and priests from carrying out their duties. Rehoboam's position is strengthened when Levites and priests, followed by others from all tribes seeking to worship God,

come to Jerusalem. It's by this migration of peoples that the northern ten tribes of Israel are preserved.

In the northern kingdom, most kings are sinful and succession by murder is not uncommon.

Nineteen kings reign in turn from seven families for over 200 years. It is during the reign of the sixth king, Ahab, that Elijah the prophet arrives on the scene. He performs eight major miracles, including proving Jehovah, not Baal, is the true God by having a sacrifice first soaked in water then consumed by fire from Heaven. Elijah is taken to heaven and succeeded by Elisha who performs sixteen major miracles, with most of his acts being those of healing. He mixes more with the people and becomes known as the prophet of Israel, an office he holds for around sixty years.

With all the wickedness going on in Israel, prophets begin to reprove Israel and foretell their approaching judgements, with Jonah being contemporary with Joash, Amos being contemporary with Jereboam II, and Hosea prophesying from Jereboam II onwards. Despite the warnings, and after many years of idolatry, God allows Israel to be taken into captivity by Assyria, a captivity from which they never recover because of the practice of the Assyrians in transplanting some of their captives to other parts of the empire, causing them to lose their identity. Those remaining in the old northern territories will become known as Samaritans and considered to be half-Jews.

In the southern kingdom, twenty kings reign in turn, but unlike the northern kingdom, they are all of one dynasty: the line of David. However, they are not much better than the northern kings, except there are some good kings who from time to time bring about a reformation. They are Asa, Jehoshaphat, Azariah, Jotham, Hezekiah and Josiah, Josiah being the last and greatest reformer.

Many of the major and minor prophets are active during the southern kings' reigns, which last some 100 years longer than the north. Again, the warnings are of no avail and eventually God allows the Babylonians to take them into captivity, a captivity that is prophesied by Jeremiah to last seventy years.

It is during their exile that Ezekiel prophesies to all the Israelites. Daniel and three of his companions from the southern kingdom are in training for service to the king when Daniel, wanting to abstain from the king's provisions, gains approval for him and his companions to live on water and pulse for ten days. When the ten days are up, the four young men appear in better health than those eating the king's meat and their abstinence is accepted. Following their three years training, the king judges them to be ten times more knowledgeable than all the magicians and astrologers in his realm.

Nebuchadnezzar has a dream that troubles him, but he forgets what it is about. Only Daniel is able to interpret the dream which was of a great image representing future kingdoms. It's this interpretation that gets Daniel promoted to rule over the whole province of Babylon and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.

Later, there are the episodes of the fiery furnace from which Daniel's companions miraculously escape, Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation for seven years, the handwriting on the wall announcing Belshazzar's defeat, and the Lion's den from which Daniel is preserved.

There are also Daniel's prophecies which are of great significance relating to the book of Revelation. We are given an overview followed by detail of the End Times. We are also told when the abomination of desolation will occur (a significant event in the

End Times), what the ‘abomination of desolation’ is, and who will be responsible for it.

After 70 years of exile, Cyrus makes a proclamation permitting the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Ezra is among a total of nearly 50,000 people who return on this occasion. Ezra later goes back to Babylon to encourage more Jews to go with him to Jerusalem, this time under the decree of Artaxerxes and with his financial support.

Some eleven years later, Artaxerxes gives Nehemiah, his cup bearer, permission to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and complete the walls and gates. It’s from the date of this decree that Daniel’s prophecy concerning Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem is based - the first 69 of the seventy week prophecy given to Daniel by the angel Gabriel.

Although it is generally said that the 400 year period between the Old and New Testaments are the silent years, in which God doesn’t communicate with his people, we do get some history from Daniel in the form of a prophecy.

The focus is on the period after the death of Alexandra the Great in 323 B.C. when, having no issue, his empire is divided between his four generals. Israel effectively becomes a buffer state between the regions to its north and south and is caught up in the 150 years of incessant wars between the two.

The purpose of this prophecy would seem to be identification of the event when Antiochus Epiphanes invades the temple, places an image of Jupiter Olympus on the Altar of God and sacrifices a pig on it. This is the ‘abomination of desolation’ referred to by Jesus during his Olivet Discourse, and the key event in Revelation’s tribulation week.

We now come to the New Testament and the arrival of our Lord

Jesus; the promised Messiah.

Following his baptism by John the Baptist, a forty day fast and subsequent temptations by the Devil, Jesus begins his ministry and message that “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.” It is explained in this straightforward message as a basic statement of fact. It is also verified in actions in the form of healings (as promised in Isaiah), and in exorcisms and miracles, all of which demonstrate God’s sovereignty has come.

Along with this message is the promise from Jesus that anyone who believes on him will be saved and have eternal life.

These messages and supporting actions Jesus takes throughout Galilee, then later in Judea and in and around Perea before going to Jerusalem for the last time.

According to Matthew, it is early in Jesus’ ministry when he teaches his disciples, with a great crowd listening, how they should live their lives and, in so doing, be a witness to all around them. This teaching we know as the Sermon on the Mount; a challenge to all believers in that we are taught what it means to be a true follower of Christ, and the high standard that we are all expected to live by.

As Jesus’ ministry progresses, the Pharisees and Sadducees, the Jewish leaders of the time, became more and more troubled by his teachings and what seems to be a challenge to their authority and status. After twice accusing Jesus of exorcising evil spirits in the name of the devil, he chooses to continue his teaching through parables so that only the discerning would understand, as told us in the Kingdom Parables.

As the final days of Jesus’ ministry approaches, he makes his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, as prophesied to the day by Daniel.

Whilst in Jerusalem, having cleansed the temple of the money changers and dumfounded the rulers with his response to their questioning, Jesus berates the scribes and Pharisees with seven woes spoken against them.

On leaving the temple with his disciples, he prophesies its destruction and, in response to questioning by his disciples, foretells the period we call the End Times in what we know as the Olivet Discourse.

The rulers plot to have Jesus killed and enlist the help of Judas who, after Jesus' last supper with his disciples, betrays him with a kiss. Jesus' trial and crucifixion quickly follow.

His resurrection on the third day, the subsequent appearances to his followers, then ascension to heaven, precedes the birth of the church when his followers receive the Holy Spirit.

Having received the Spirit, the apostles go on to preach daily, healing the sick, casting out demons and converting many. This angers the Jewish rulers - primarily Sadducees - who unsuccessfully attempt to silence them with imprisonment and threats.

With the growth of the church, it becomes necessary to appoint seven deacons to assist the apostles. One of these is Stephen who preaches in the synagogue with such authority that the rulers are angered and he is martyred by stoning.

A great persecution of the church follows in which Saul of Tarsus plays a major roll. With the exception of the apostles, this persecution scatters the church abroad.

Philip, another of the chosen seven, preaches in Samaria for a time, then travels towards Gaza where he preaches Jesus from the Scripture to an Ethiopian eunuch, and baptises him in nearby water. During his zealous persecution of the church, Saul, the notable

witness at Stephen's stoning, is challenged by Jesus on the way to Damascus. He loses his sight and spends three days without food or drink before his sight is restored by Ananias, who was sent by God to lay hands on him. Saul is then filled with the Holy Spirit.

Saul now preaches Christ, but his life is threatened by the Jews and he escapes and goes to Jerusalem. After initial concerns because of Saul's reputation, the disciples' minds are put to rest when Barnabas confirms his conversion. However, the Hellenistic Jews are unconvinced and plan to kill him, so he flees and returns to his home at Tarsus.

The churches, now being free from persecution, are edified, walk in fear of the Lord and multiply.

Peter takes the gospel to Lydda where he heals a man of the palsy, an act which brought about the conversion of all at Lydda and the district of Saron. Farther on at Joppa, he raises Tabitha from death, bringing about the conversion of many at Joppa.

Whilst at Joppa, Peter learns through a dream, and consequent conversion of a centurion and his household at Caesarea, that the gospel is also to be preached to the Gentiles.

Hearing that the gospel is now being preached to the Gentiles at Antioch, the Jerusalem church send Barnabas who, confirming their faith, decides to fetch Saul from Tarsus. The two spend a year together in Antioch teaching people about Christ. It is here that converts are first called Christians.

Through prayer and fasting, the Holy Spirit appoints Saul and Barnabas from among the teachers at Antioch to go and preach to the Gentiles.

This is the first of three missionary journeys that Saul undertakes. This first journey takes Paul and Barnabas through Cyprus, where

we read Saul is now to be known as Paul. From Cyprus they sail north to Perga, then travel north to Antioch of Pisidia, then east to Iconium and on to Lystra, and Derbe, all the while meeting with opposition from the Jews, including inciting the stoning of Paul at Lystra. They then retrace their steps back through Lystra, Iconium and Antioch of Pisidia, confirming the disciples and ordaining elders in every church before returning to Antioch in Syria, where they now remain for a long time.

For his second missionary journey, Paul chooses to revisit the churches planted during his first journey, this time taking Silas with him. He first travels to the churches at Derbe and Lystra, and then Iconium where Timothy, respected amongst the churches, is invited to join them. After twice wanting to divert to other areas of Asia Minor, each time being prevented by the Holy Spirit, Paul arrives at Troas where he is directed by a vision to cross the sea to Macedonia. It's at Troas that Paul is joined by Luke before making the crossing.

Churches are planted at Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea, though not without an overnight stay in prison at Philippi and opposition from the Jews who incite a mob at both Thessalonica and Berea. Paul is compelled to leave Berea and travels to Athens having left Luke at Philippi and Silas and Timothy at Berea.

Paul opposes idolatry at Athens and gains some converts before moving on to Corinth. After Silas and Timothy join him, he teaches to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ, but is opposed and so turns his attention to the Gentiles. Encouraged by God, Paul remains in Corinth for eighteen months. It is during his time at Corinth that Paul writes his epistles to the Thessalonians, and perhaps the Galatians.

From Corinth, Paul makes his way, via Ephesus, to Jerusalem for

Passover before returning to Antioch.

After spending some time back at Antioch, Paul then leaves for his third journey, travelling through Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. He arrives at Ephesus where he preaches in the synagogues for three months, but many oppose him and he leaves the synagogue, spending the next two years preaching daily in the school of one Tyrannus. From here, the news of the gospel spreads to both Jews and Gentiles throughout Asia.

It is at Ephesus that Paul writes his epistles to the Corinthians. Paul then travels through Macedonia, preaching along the way, and on to Greece where he spends three months before intending to sail to Syria. It is probably during this time in Greece that Paul writes to the Romans. Hearing that Jews would be laying in wait for him, he changes his route and returns back through Macedonia before heading for Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem, Paul is encouraged to go with four men in a purification process to show he is compliant with Moses' law, but is later accused of taking Gentiles into the temple. In the tumult that follows, Paul escapes a scourging ordered by the chief captain when he announces he is a Roman citizen.

To avoid a conspiracy to have Paul killed, the chief captain sends him to Caesarea where he is imprisoned by Felix the governor of Judea, although allowed access to his companions..

After two years, Festus replaces Felix who asks Paul if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem to be tried. He refuses and appeals to Caesar as is his right as a Roman citizen. Following later hearings before Agrippa, Festus and Agrippa agree that Paul could have been set free, but having appealed to Caesar, then to Caesar he must go.

Following a perilous voyage, Paul and his company are shipwrecked on the Isle of Melita (Malta) where Paul, having healed the governor's sick father, stays for three months. They then set off again and Paul finally arrives at Rome where he is delivered to the captain of the guard.

Paul is placed under house arrest where he remains for two years. During this time he is able to preach the Gospel unhindered to all who come to him.

From his pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus, we learn that Paul was released from prison. He was later imprisoned in far worse conditions as, by this time, Christians were subject to severe persecution. From this prison, he wrote his second and final letter to Timothy.

Having heard the last from the Bible concerning the early church, we are now in what is known as the church period. The history of mankind, as told in the Bible, from the Fall to the present day, can perhaps be described in a single phrase: God's plan of redemption. It would not be unreasonable then to want to know when and how this plan will come to fruition. The 'when' we are not told; the 'how' we are. This is what Revelation is about.

At some time in the future, there will be a period when Jesus will unleash events, announced by the seals of a seven-seal scroll, that will precede judgements and the implementation of God's wrath on mankind. This is during a tribulation period of seven years, the last half of which is referred to by Jesus during his first coming as the 'great tribulation'. During the latter part of the great tribulation, and before the execution of God's wrath on mankind, Jesus will come again to gather his saints. God's wrath will follow, including the battle of Armageddon. Jesus will then reign and bring peace to the Earth for a thousand years, during which time

Satan will be bound and his influence made ineffective. After the thousand years, Satan will be released to deceive the nations, recruiting supporters before the final battle between good and evil in which the loser will be Satan, his demons and human followers. There will then be a judgement of all of mankind with those whose name is written in the book of life receiving the gift of eternal life in a new heaven and a new earth.

The importance of Revelation is that it tells us what to expect in these end times and, consequently, how we should prepare for them in our present lives, and educate the next generation in these respects.

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