

FOREWORD

BY DR. LUDER G. WHITLOCK

To read the Bible is a good thing and a blessing. To know the Bible is far better but seldom achieved. It doesn't have to be that way and your participation in this 30-lesson overview of the Bible is a fine way to remedy that deficiency.

The Bible is God's word. It is a compilation of a collection of books into one that explains who God is and how you got here. It provides the information necessary for your redemption so that if you respond to its message in faith, you can be assured of everlasting life. As God's word, it is the final authority for what you believe and how you live, so you cannot afford to neglect its message any more than you can afford to neglect the fine print in a contract you sign.

One reason for mastering an overview of the Bible is that it enables you to understand the grand narrative and, with it, how God has developed His redemptive plan throughout human history, ultimately sending Christ into the world for your salvation. You not only know what happened and why but you have a clearer grasp of what the future holds.

As you know, there are many questions about what the Bible teaches and often disagreements occur among good Christians, not to mention the jibes and challenges from non-believers. When you have the big picture, as you should after completing this series, you will be much better equipped to know how to handle those matters. You will know where to go to find the answers and have a clearer sense of how

important those may be in comparison to the whole counsel of God. After all, it is His plan and His message that you must understand if you hope to please Him and the place to begin is through your commitment to get the big picture.

If you are diligent through this overview you will not regret it. You will be in a much better position to serve the Lord knowledgeably and faithfully.

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INTRODUCTION

GENESIS TO REVELATION

God inspires His all-time best-selling book, the Bible, explicitly to relate to His created men, women, boys and girls who bear His image. In it—from the very beginning of earth and creation—He documents the earliest history of His created world, to the Bible’s last book which gives us visions of eternity with Him.

Genesis 1 begins, “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.*” Thus began the world. But more importantly, through the Bible God draws all mankind—including you—to Himself through the Light and Word—Jesus Christ. Your Bible includes the world’s history, purpose and future.

GOD’S WORD IS A ROADMAP FOR YOUR LIFE

The whole-Bible story is best learned in its order; the themes understood in a contextual building process—from Genesis to Revelation. With this inter-denominational, inductive study, you can learn the major themes with corresponding book names and study many key scripture points that support them.

You might additionally plan to read through the whole Bible—perhaps in a summer—and personally learn the key scriptures for your discussions and memory. The more we learn about our Creator and Savior, the more we want to hear His plan for our lives.

CONSIDER what you know and think about the Bible and God. Do you wish to know more about who created you? What about the possibility of learning more about what God may have planned for you own life? Consider using this opportunity to learn about the Old Testament Father, Creator, Provider, and Sustainer of our forefathers in Christ. Consider how the Father sent His Son, God’s second “person” Jesus Christ, to visit earth as your Lord, to teach us in the four Gospels about life eternal, and to offer you salvation in Him. Consider how Jesus promised His disciples the third “person” of God—His Spirit demonstrated in Acts and the Letters—to follow after Him on earth as our Counselor and Guide in this personal salvation. And finally, consider the visions of the eternal Heaven that Christ shows you in Revelation. This adventure is the outline of your whole-Bible study.

You may want to establish personal learning goals for your journey through the Bible using these 30 key themes and corresponding study lessons. These weekly lessons include home-study questions which are the basis for your journal and small-group discussion. Pray, read and complete these questions (based on the English Standard Version), in order to be fully prepared for sharing and learning together.

Following your questions, a summary is provided that ties together the lesson's themes for that book or group of books. Together in a building process, these themes and lessons demonstrate the overall point of what God is doing in that part of history. These steps will strengthen your personal belief and growth. If you are in a class or Bible study group, you should extend your learning through active discussions and in fellowship. This 30-theme lesson Guide is designed for both personal and group studies, in class or small-group settings. It will be a basis for later in-depth studies of each book.

STUDYING THE BIBLE

From the beginning of time God has guided us to learn His words—the basic laws for all times (Deut. 11:18-25). In God's planned timing, Jesus, the Word of God incarnate, completed for us the law (Gal. 4:4) for "*a people prepared,*" (Luke 1:17).

The writer of Hebrews describes the Word as "*living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword,*" (Heb. 4:12). The Bible is the only book that contains living words, can pierce our soul and judge our thoughts, by which all men and women will be judged, and that gives us the keys to eternal life.

Luke records of Jesus, "*Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,*" (Luke 24:45).

Many of us have found the Bible to be somewhat difficult to completely understand on our own, so we depend mainly on others to "tell us about it." Paul says, however, that "*For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read and understand and I hope you will fully understand,*" (2 Cor. 1:13).

Paul thus tells us that God gave us His written word so that we can read it and understand it. In doing so, we can allow the Spirit to use that knowledge to transform our lives. And the value of knowing scripture, Paul told Timothy, is that as you learn you become convinced, receive wisdom, and are led to salvation. The words you read are all inspired by God for teaching, reproof, reform, and equipping mankind for good works (2 Tim. 3:14-17).

Interpretative Principles for Your Study

1. **Hebrew and Greek**—the Bible Old Testament origins were Hebrew. We speak English and are “Western,” like the Greek culture and language. So we tend to think “Greek,” missing much of the Eastern-written Hebrew meanings. Hebrew is and was an “Eastern” language like Asian languages today and is written and spoken using illustrations, or word-pictures (e.g., *“the early bird gets the worm”*). Greek is a Western language with concrete, literal and descriptive phrases, like English today (e.g., *“the first person to arrive will have the advantage”*).
2. **Literary Forms**—writers and early oral “tellers” of the Bible used various literary forms to tell the messages; i.e., poetry, prose, news or journalism, imagery, symbolism, illustrations, etc.
3. **Literal Interpretation in Context**—literal interpretation of the surrounding context is key to understanding what God is asking us to learn in any specific text. We should follow typical rules of grammar, context, syntax, and literary style, listening for God’s explanation and plan.
4. **Scripture Interprets Scripture**—scripture is not in conflict with scripture, but helps us understand from different perspectives. It is dangerous to attempt to interpret scripture with science, modern history, philosophy, or any other self-driven human work.
5. **Explicit Interprets the Implicit**—always use the “explained” passage to understand the “implied” passage of the same topic, using scripture for cross-references.

6. **Limitation Principle**—the Bible does not tell us everything about everything, as science (and our Greek-trained minds) would want. The Bible tells us what God wants us to know, and no more. It focuses on relationships between God, us, and others.
7. **Historical Principle**—the message should be seen in relation to its context in God’s redemptive plan. It is very dangerous to take verses out of their context. A Genesis-to-Revelation study helps us see the narrative message.
8. **Jesus Christ is the Key**—Jesus said to His followers, *“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”* Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,” Luke 24:44-45. (See also John 5:39, 46-47.)
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THE BIBLE IS A BOOK AND A LIBRARY

The Bible is both one book and a whole library—with a single narrative story. God Himself narrates this 66-book story—which is our history and future with Him. His story is our history and becomes our personal journey. He first appears as our Father in the Old Testament, directly speaking to our patriarchs and prophets who are the inspired writers (see Appendices I-IV, pages 253-255).

In the Gospels God again appears personally in His “second person” as Christ the Son of God who speaks directly and inspires the Gospel writers (see Appendices V and VI, pages 256-257). He acclaims Himself the Messiah King. At the end of the Gospels Christ promises God’s “third person” and appears as the Holy Spirit—our Counselor and Guide.

The Old Testament—the first 39 books—are His “preparation” of His earth and man to receive Him personally. The Hebrews writer says, *“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,”* (Heb. 1:1).

The New Testament's 27 books begin with the four Gospels when Christ acclaims Himself the Son of God, Savior, Messiah, King. Acts, and the 22 letters are the "completion" of God's redemptive plan for man. Heb. 1:3 continues, *"but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."*

Paul writes, *"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"* (Gal. 4:4-6).

Christ says to His apostles, *"I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. 'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you,'"* (John 16:7b-15).

The final chapter of the Bible, Revelation 22, Jesus concludes the Bible text through John's writing, saying, *"I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."* He extends his invitation in love saying, *"The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price,"* (Rev. 22:17).

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION**1. Read Deut. 11:18-25—Learning God’s Words**

From the beginning of time God has guided us to follow His Word and learn His laws for all times. Moses had the responsibility of sharing God’s Word with the people of Israel.

- a. What are some of the ways they learned His words?

- b. How in these times might you benefit from knowing His words?

2. Read 2 Cor. 1:12-14—Understanding God’s Words

Paul writes to the Corinthians that *“we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope that you will understand to the end.”*

- a. How does earthly wisdom differ from wisdom that is by the grace of God? (See also Heb. 13:7-9.)

- b. What is God’s ultimate purpose in Paul’s desire for them? What do you think “the day of our Lord Jesus” means?

3. Read 2 Tim. 3:14-17—Continuing in God’s Words

The value of knowing scripture, Paul told Timothy, is that as you learn you become convinced, receive wisdom, and are led to salvation.

- a. How do you think the Bible might make you “*wise for salvation*”?

- b. In what ways do you think knowing Scripture might be useful throughout your life? Why? (See verses 16 and 17.)
