THE BAKER ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO THE BIBLE

A BOOK-BY-BOOK COMPANION

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The Old Testament
An Overview

The Old Testament is divided into five parts: the Pentateuch, the Historical books, the Psalms, the Wisdom books, and the Prophets.

The Pentateuch
The first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) are often referred to as the "Pentateuch" (the "five scrolls" or five-scroll collection). In the Hebrew Scriptures, these books are referred to as the "Torah," meaning the "teaching" or "instruction." These books tell the story of God's creation of the world, of human sin and rebellion against God, of God's covenant with Abraham, of God's deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt, of God's covenant with Moses, of God's laws for his people, and of his peoples' journey to the promised land. The last book, Deuteronomy, spells out the blessings and penalties for keeping or rejecting the Mosaic covenant.

The Historical Books
The Old Testament books from Joshua through Esther are known as the "Historical books." The first group of books (Joshua through 2 Kings) is closely connected to the book of Deuteronomy and continues the story of the Pentateuch. In essence, Deuteronomy closes by posing an important question, "Will Israel be faithful to the Lord and his laws (the Mosaic covenant)?" The tragic answer is no, they will not remain faithful, and 2 Kings ends with the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of Israel from the promised land. The second group of Historical books (1 Chronicles through Esther) is written from a different perspective. These books focus on those who have returned to the land after the exile, encouraging them to remain faithful to the Lord.

A modern Hebrew Bible scroll

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The Psalms
The book of Psalms is unique and cannot be placed in any of the other Old Testament categories. It stands alone as a book of songs of praise, testimony, and lament. The Psalms were (and are) used both in public worship and private meditation.

The Wisdom Books
The Wisdom books (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs) remind God's people of the importance of listening, thinking, considering, and reflecting. Their purpose is to encourage the development of both godly character and the ability to make wise decisions in a variety of circumstances. Proverbs presents basic principles of life—things that are normally or usually true—while the other three books treat exceptions to these rules: Job (when the righteous suffer), Ecclesiastes (when a rational approach to life doesn't provide all the answers), and Song of Songs (concerning the "irrationality" of romantic love).

The Prophets
After entering the promised land, Israel turns a deaf ear to God's instructions and follows other gods. As the nation spirals downward, God sends the prophets with a final message for his people: (1) you have broken the Mosaic covenant through idolatry, social injustice, and religious ritualism, and you need to turn back to a true worship of God; (2) if you fail to repent, then you will face judgment; and (3) there is still hope beyond judgment for you—a glorious, future restoration for God's people and for the nations. This standard prophetic message is repeated throughout the Prophets. But people continue to rebel and face judgment, which comes in the form of two invasions: the Assyrians in 722 BC to destroy the northern kingdom of Israel and the Babylonians in 587/586 BC to destroy the southern kingdom of Judah and the city of Jerusalem. The prophets also promise a time of future restoration, including a new covenant that will involve all the nations of the world. This fulfills God's original promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3.
Genesis

Creation, Sin, and Covenant

Central Teaching

God creates the world, banishes Adam and Eve from the garden due to their rebellion and sin, and then begins restoring people to relationship with him through his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Memory Verse

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Gen. 1:1)

Setting

The opening chapter of Genesis takes place at the beginning of time. While we do not know exactly where the Garden of Eden was located, it was probably in Mesopotamia. The story of Abraham (Gen. 12) begins in Mesopotamia. Suggested dates for Abraham vary from around 2000 BC to around 1800 BC. Abraham migrates to Canaan, spends a short time in Egypt, and then returns to Canaan. Later, Jacob (Abraham’s grandson) moves to Egypt, and Genesis ends with the family of Jacob living in Egypt.

Message

God brings people into existence, blessing them with life and giving them a chance to know him personally. But we mess it up, sinning against God and rejecting him and his blessings. This action separates us from God and ultimately results in death. God, however, works to restore our relationship with him—a relationship that provides life. This is the story of Genesis and, indeed, the story of the Bible. It is also your story and my story.

In Genesis 1–2, the story begins with God’s creation. God creates a wonderful garden and places humankind into the garden where they can have close fellowship with him. How does humankind react to this wonderful blessing? Genesis 3–11 narrates a series of tragic events illustrating how people sin and rebel repeatedly against God, which separates them from God and leads to death. By Genesis 11 the situation of the world is grim. What will happen? How will humankind ever be saved and restored again to close fellowship with God?

Genesis 12 introduces the answer and begins the exciting story of redemption. God makes a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12, 15, and 17. It is this Abrahamic covenant that provides the framework for God’s unfolding plan of salvation for everyone in the world who will believe. The
fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant drives the story throughout the Old Testament and even the New Testament.

The promises of this covenant are passed down from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob throughout the remaining chapters of Genesis. Yet Genesis closes with Jacob and his twelve sons residing in Egypt, with the Abrahamic promises largely unfulfilled.

Outline
- Creation of the world, people, and the garden (1:1–2:25)
- Paradise lost: sin, death, and separation from God (3:1–11:32)
- God's response to human sin: deliverance through the Abrahamic covenant (12:1–50:26)
  - Abraham: the promise and the obedience of faith (12:1–22:24)
  - Isaac: continuing the patriarchal promise (23:1–25:18)
  - Jacob: struggle and the beginning of the twelve tribes of Israel (25:19–36:43)
  - Joseph: faithfulness and God's sovereign deliverance (37:1–50:26)

Interesting Features
- Genesis answers the big questions of life: Why am I here? Who has brought me into being? What is life all about?
- Genesis tells the story of creation.
- God creates man and woman and institutes marriage.
- God makes a covenant with Abraham that impacts the rest of the Bible.

Connections
Genesis is the introduction not only to the Old Testament but also to the entire Bible. Thus the story of Genesis is representative for both Israel and all people. God creates a good place for people to live where they can take part in a close relationship with him. These people, however, repeatedly rebel and sin against God, which results in separation and death. This is the story of humanity. God in his great mercy provides a way of salvation, a story that starts in Genesis 12 with Abraham, climaxes in the New Testament with Jesus, and reaches its final consummation in Revelation 21–22 with the re-creation of the new heaven and earth.
2 Corinthians

Defending a God-Given Ministry

Central Teaching
At times, we must defend our God-given ministry for the sake of the gospel and the long-term health of the church.

Memory Verses

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:9 - 10)

Setting
Paul, along with Timothy, is identified as the author of 2 Corinthians (1:1). Most contemporary scholars conclude that Paul wrote all of 2 Corinthians, although some see 2 Corinthians 1 - 9 and 10 - 13 as separate letters because of the abrupt change in tone. However, good arguments can be made for the unity of 2 Corinthians, especially since it is likely that Paul wrote the letter over a period of time in which he learned of new developments in the church.

After Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, his relationship with the church deteriorated significantly, thanks to some stubborn opponents. Paul probably made a short visit to Corinth from Ephesus (the “painful” visit of 2 Cor. 2:1) and followed up with another letter (the tearful letter of 2 Cor. 2:4; 7:8 - 9). Most likely, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia around AD 55–56. This means that 2 Corinthians is actually Paul’s fourth letter written to this difficult church (a previous letter mentioned in 1 Cor. 5:9, 1 Corinthians, the tearful letter, and 2 Corinthians).

Message
At the time when Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, some of the Corinthians who had previously questioned Paul’s apostleship appear to have repented and now support Paul (2 Cor. 2:5; 8–9; 5:12; 7:2–16). Nevertheless, a minority within the church still questions whether Paul is a legitimate apostle (perhaps addressed in 2 Cor. 10–13). In addition, a number of false apostles have arrived in Corinth, and they must be countered (11:1–15). In a deeply personal and

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emotional letter, Paul defends his authority as a genuine apostle of Jesus Christ as well as his way of life and ministry—a measure he is forced to take because the gospel and the spiritual life of the Corinthians are at stake.

Second Corinthians speaks volumes about the heart of Christian ministry and the value of seeking reconciliation. Paul suffered greatly in the cause of Christ, and he cares deeply about the Corinthians. He’s not willing to give up on them. He speaks the truth in love while keeping his heart open to the possibility of reconciliation.

Outline

- Greeting and thanksgiving (1:1–11)
- Paul’s apostolic conduct and ministry (1:12–7:16)
- The Corinthians’ generous giving (8:1–9:15)
- Paul’s apostolic authority (10:1–13:10)
- Conclusion (13:11–14)

Interesting Features

- Second Corinthians 8–9 is one of the primary New Testament passages related to financial giving.
- This letter reminds us that reconciliation can be personally painful, disruptive to ministry plans, and dependent on other people’s responses, but it’s worth pursuing.

Connections

In 2 Corinthians we are reminded that sometimes ministry doesn’t line up with our expectations. People cast doubt on our motives, misconstrue our actions, and turn other believers against us. Paul models how to struggle through this ministerial mess. He embraces weakness and suffering as legitimate badges of authentic ministry, but he is also willing to defend himself when important things—such as the gospel and the spiritual well-being of believers—are at stake. While there are times when conflict is unavoidable and even essential to long-term healthy relationships within the body of Christ, reconciliation is our goal. However, our focus should be on the integrity of our beliefs and our actions.
A CLEAR AND RELIABLE GUIDE TO EACH BOOK OF THE BIBLE

The Bible is God’s story, but its sheer size and complexity can overwhelm us. *The Baker Illustrated Guide to the Bible* is your clear and concise guide to God’s Word. This attractive resource presents the central teaching, setting, message, and interesting features of the books of the Bible. Each biblical book is placed in the context of Scripture as a whole, allowing you to see God’s unfolding plan from Genesis to Revelation.

With beautiful, full-color photos, maps, and illustrations, this book-by-book companion to the Bible provides a fascinating and carefully crafted summary of the information you need to know to grasp the big picture of the Bible.

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