

How to Study the Bible Series

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE THROUGH STORY



*How a 20-Minute Story
Will Help You Understand
Every Book, Character and Event
in the Bible*

Gustavo M. Karakey

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EVERY BOOK, CHARACTER AND EVENT IN THE BIBLE*

BY

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PUBLISHED BY:

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my former students at the Methodist Bible Institute in Ñemby, Paraguay (2004-2008).

Their patience, insights and dynamic interaction during our classes together were indispensable in defining the principles contained in this book.

I will always be indebted to them for the things they taught me about the Lord, his word and his work.

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WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

I wrote this book because I wanted you to clear up all the confusion you might have about the Bible.

Let's face it, many of us live with an ongoing guilt trip. We know that regular Bible study is a critical element of our Christian faith (didn't Jesus say that we cannot live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the Father?) and yet, our execution very often does not match our desire

While this may be caused by a lack of time or discipline, for many folks, it just comes down to a LACK OF UNDERSTANDING!

The Bible can often be confusing and sometimes even overwhelming. When we experience it in this way, it's hard for us to stay focused and / or engaged when we read it, let alone study it.

I get it!

The Bible contains 66 books, 1,200 chapters and a dizzying array of figures, stories and events that literally come from another world. It's like when I moved from Los Angeles to Boston a while back. Talk about culture shock. Everything was soooo different, the way people talked about and interacted with sports, weather, history, current events and even religion.

I might as well have landed on Mars. I was in a new world.

The Bible is like that, but way more complex given the time and cultural distance that exists. And did I mention, it's HUGE?! (If you read four chapters a day in the Bible, it would take you a whole year to read it.)

I understand what this disorientation feels like and I understand that it can be tough to regularly sit down and chop through a study when you don't really have a clue about what's going on. It's not enjoyable to be lost (ask any child in a department store where mom has stepped away for a spell). And so the internal conflict continues. You want to study the Bible, but it is difficult to understand it.

This book aims to remedy that lack of understanding. (Personally, the lack of time and discipline for avoiding Bible study aren't very good excuses either, but

we'll leave those issues aside for the moment.)

I wrote *Understanding the Bible Through Story* as a way to help you navigate through the Bible maze and thus to help you enjoy studying the Bible.

How will I accomplish this? By teaching you a memorable story that records the Bible's main events from Genesis to Revelation.

THE STORY COMES TO LIFE IN PARAGUAY

I chanced upon this method of teaching the Bible when I was serving as a missionary in Paraguay, South America from 2004 to 2008. At the time, I was teaching an *Overview of the Bible* course at a small Bible Institute outside the capital of Asunción. Though my classroom had no doors or windows and my “chalkboard” was a green painted wall, I still had every teacher’s dream: motivated students!

Every month, for three years, these students would travel from every part of the country (at great sacrifice to them and their families) to participate in a week’s worth of intense study.

When I began teaching this course, I noticed that many of my students came in with a good deal of Bible knowledge. Like most Christians, they had learned about the Bible through personal devotions, Sunday school classes, Bible studies and sermons. But, (there’s that big but), all of that information was swimming around in their heads as a random set of stories, figures, books and events.

What was the missing piece?

...A way to organize all of that, a way to make sense of all the Bible’s elements.

And that’s when I came upon teaching the Bible through a story format, which forms the core of this book.

THIS IS NOT ORIGINAL THINKING

Understanding the Bible as a story was by no means an original concept.

Many Bible resources and commentaries readily spoke about this idea. Some may even have included a brief synopsis of the story. The main problem, however, was that the Bible as story concept was often buried among other topics or themes.

So I decided to isolate the story and make it stand-alone.

I created a story that recounted the most important events and figures of the Bible, not in an outline format, but in a chapter by chapter summary. I knew the story could not be too long, otherwise people would have trouble memorizing it.

Thus I settled on a length of 20 minutes.

Teenagers can speak non-stop for 120 minutes. Surely, 20 minutes was something the average person could handle and it would allow the story to be robust.

The final piece was making the Bible story a key element of my *Overview of the Bible* course. Remember, I was supposed to teach all 66 books of the Bible in that class, but I instinctively knew that my students needed to understand the whole Bible before they could understand its individual parts.

Within the first few weeks of teaching this “story” to my students, the transformation in their understanding of the Bible was truly amazing. First of all, I should mention that they had little problem memorizing a 20-minute story. Secondly, and most importantly, they were learning a system that allowed them to organize all of the Bible’s books, stories, figures and events in a way that was natural and made sense.

The Bible didn’t seem as confusing anymore. The story had connected up all of the disparate pieces swimming in their head.

I immediately saw how powerful the Bible as story approach was in transforming how my students understood the Bible. I could see that without a sense for the whole, even a lot of Bible knowledge wasn’t that useful. Thus, I was soon compelled to write a book to teach these principles to other Christians who were in the same confusing predicament.

The result of these efforts is the book before you today: *Understanding the Bible Through Story*. My hope is that it will inspire you to become a regular and more interested student of the Bible.

FROM APPRENTICE TO GURU

This book forms part of a larger curriculum that I have been developing for how to study the Bible. Here is a brief outline: Part 1 – Understanding the Bible Through Story

Part 2 – Basics of How to Study the Bible (in development) Part 3 – 7 Rules of Bible Interpretation EVERY Christian Should Know (this book)

PART 1 – THE BIBLE AS STORY

The first part, *Understanding the Bible Through Story* functions as a pre-Bible study guide. It is what you should read, study and understand *before* you jump into any Bible study.

Using the power of a story, this book helps you to internalize the outline, framework or big picture of the Bible. Afterward, it teaches you how the different elements of the Bible (the books, figures, events, etc.) fit into this larger narrative.

In my estimation, most Bible study resources ignore this part completely. Most of the ink is spent trying to teach you this or that method for studying individual passages of the Bible.

I believe this is a HUGE MISTAKE.

You cannot fully understand the individual parts until you understand the whole.

PART 2 – BASICS OF BIBLE STUDY

This volume, which is still in development, builds upon the Inductive Bible Study method as an entry point into studying the Bible.

It introduces you to the power of observation in your study of the Bible and the necessity of asking the right questions of your passages of study. At the same time, it helps you to maximize the use of a few Bible study resources to help you clarify different portions of the scriptures.

PART 3 – THE 7 RULES OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD KNOW

The third volume is for those who wish to take their study of the Bible to a whole new and deeper level. It is also for those who lead or facilitate Bible studies or Sunday school classes.

This book takes the principles from a seminary course on Bible Interpretation, and simplifies them into “rules” that can be easily grasped by any person and powerfully used in regular Bible study.

If you are serious about developing and mastering a unique set of Bible study skills, check out our website [Bible Study Blueprint](#) for more information.

WHO SHOULD READ THIS BOOK

This book should be read by every Christian!

I'm not just saying this to increase my sales (though making extra money is always nice). I say this because very few Christians have ever been taught the story approach to the Bible that I teach in this book.

This is understandable.

We tend to hear or read the Bible in a very piece-meal way, whether in a personal or small group study or even a sermon. In the *Overview of the Bible* course I mentioned earlier, very few of my students had ever learned this approach to understanding the Bible. Some were even long-time Christians and a few were pastors! This is why I believe that every Christians should read this book.

Again, as I mentioned earlier, this doesn't mean that most Christians don't know there is a story behind the Bible. I've even seen Sunday School classes and curriculums that incorporate Bible timelines, charts and events in chronological order. But that isn't enough.

Few resources (if any) have ever compressed the Bible story into 20 minutes and then set about teaching you to memorize that story as part of your Bible understanding. That is the central core of this book. The power of the method is in the story itself, and the transformation that occurs when you fully memorize it and internalize it.

For new Christians, reading this book will give you a foundation that you can carry with you for the rest of your Christian life. You should count yourself lucky because you actually haven't developed the scattershot approach that is so typical of today's modern Bible study. Instead, you'll be able to learn the framework that holds all of the the Bible together.

If you are a leader of a small group or Sunday School, this book would make a great Bible study. Imagine if you were to lead a group of people in acquiring a Bible study skill that would pay off for the rest of their spiritual lives.

The process I teach in *Understanding the Bible Through Story* is divided into Six

Steps. These steps can be used to facilitate an 8-week small group study allowing for an introduction to the study and extending the longest lesson for two weeks (or as long as you need to memorize the central story).

Each week, members would be able to read through one of the steps and put its principles to work in their reading or study of the Bible or in their listening of the weekly sermon. To this end, we have also provide a list of study questions for each step to further facilitate discussion.

In short, this book is for anyone who is looking for a better understanding of the Bible and for a better approach to studying its contents.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE AS STORY

Greetings my friend and thank you for taking the time to read this book to better understand the Bible. I have been teaching the principles in this book in formal seminary settings as well as small group Bible studies since 2004.

During that time, I have noticed one inescapable fact...

Most Christians approach the Bible like one giant holy jigsaw puzzle. Plagues over here, lions over there; here a David, there a Goliath, everywhere a Peter, Paul and Mary. This fractured perspective begins in our childhood where we learn individual stories of famous Bible figures in our Sunday school classes. It continues into adulthood where our bible studies teach us to read Bible passages in isolation.

We're back to my Paraguayan students again.

We may know a lot about the Bible, but it's very scattered, like a giant pot of alphabet soup swimming about in our heads. If our knowledge of the Bible is lacking, then this piece-meal approach only worsens our understanding.

However, the Bible is not a series of scattered stories and books. Rather, like a beautiful Persian rug, it is an intricately woven and unified whole. This unity is the essence of this *Understanding the Bible Through Story* book and provides the framework that vitally connects every last one of the Bible's books, events and characters.

Allow me to illustrate this point with one important example.

Genesis 12 is centered on God's covenant with Abraham in which God promises that Abraham will become a great nation and inherit the land. These promises are fulfilled later in the Book of Exodus through Moses and in the Book of Joshua through Joshua. In the book of 2 Kings, Israel is exiled from the promised land. During this exile, Jeremiah provides comfort and a challenge to Israel. In the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, Israel returns from exile and rebuilds their temple and the walls around Jerusalem.

As you can see, this small example connects the books of Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, 2 Kings, Jeremiah, Ezra and Nehemiah as part of Israel's story. It also

contains five key events in the Bible: God's covenant with Abraham, the Exodus, the conquest of the Promised Land, the exile and the return from exile. Finally, it contains six key figures in the Bible: Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Jeremiah, Ezra and Nehemiah.

This is but one small example of the type of unity that exists within the Bible. Catching a sense for this unity is at the heart of this book *Understanding the Bible Through Story*.

WHAT WILL YOU LEARN?

The central core of this book is the story of the Bible, recounted in one 20-minute monologue which I will ask you to memorize and internalize. Everything flows from the story. For this reason, this is not a book about Bible facts or a summary of its individual books.

This book seeks to provide you with a framework for the whole Bible.

This framework forms the basis for every book, story, figure and event in the Bible. When you have learned the Bible's story, you will have learned the Bible's framework and you will have positioned yourself to understand its many individual components.

SIX STEPS TO UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE THROUGH STORY

I have divided this book into six steps that build upon one another: Step #1 – *Recognize that the Bible tells one continuous and unified story* This is a huge step for it begins to change how you approach the Bible. Is it a series of scattered books, or is it one book with different characters?

Step #2 – *The Main Message of the Bible* This step teaches you the main theme or message of the Bible in one easy to remember sentence. This is the Bible's thesis statement or the Bible's story in miniature form. Every word within this sentence is packed with meaning, which we will unravel.

Step #3 – *The Story of the Bible* In this step, I will teach you the story of the Bible. This is the central part of the book. Learn the story and the Bible will make sense when you read it. In addition, you will be able to place every character, story, theme and book of the Bible into this larger story.

Step #4 – *Book Categories* In this step I will show you how to further organize all 66 books of the Bible into 8 main categories. Once again, this reduces the confusion surrounding the Bible because you will be able to see how the different books are related to one another.

Step #5 – *The Story of the Bible + Book Categories* In this step we combine the Bible story with the book categories we just learned. This is a way to reinforce Steps #3 and #4 by linking them to one another.

Step #6 – *Memorizing the Order of the Books of the Bible* I added this step to begin expanding your understanding of the Bible down to its individual books. At the same time, this step will reinforce all of the previous steps And that's it. That is *Understanding the Bible Through Story* in a nutshell.

As you can see, my contribution to your Bible IQ is to give you a framework for understanding the whole Bible.

The beauty of this framework is that anyone can learn it. Even better, once you learn it, you will be able to teach it to others. This makes the framework even more powerful.

MAKE YOURSELF A PROMISE

Finally, I'd like to ask you for a big favor before we proceed.

If you'll indulge me for a bit, I'd like for you to grab your Bible and set it before you on your bed, table or desk. (If you don't have a Bible, you need to purchase a good one before going through this book. You can check some of my recommendations [here](#) or ask your pastor or another Christian friend or relative for a good choice.)

Now hold your Bible in both hands. Look at it closely. Notice the lettering, the binding, the color, the pages.

I've got a red leather Spirit-Filled Life Study Bible. It's a bit on the bigger side. It's shiny and grainy to the touch on the outside. In addition, it has a couple of those red ribbons to mark the pages, which are really thin. I like the way the Bible feels in my hand and it's the Bible I read for devotion because it has many study aids.

Hopefully you have a go to Bible as well.

Now I want you to make a promise to the Lord that you're going to finally get a handle on his word. You don't have to promise that you'll become an expert, but rather, that you're going to apply the principles in *Understanding the Bible Through Story* and make a real breakthrough in your understanding of the Bible.

In the Old Testament, people made covenants with God or set up memorials to commemorate a special occasion with the Lord.

Make this your special occasion with him. Close your eyes, and repeat after me.

Heavenly Father, thank you for this precious word I hold in my hands, this lamp which gives light to my feet, spiritual wisdom to my mind and inspiration to my soul. I want to know you better by better knowing your word better. I promise to take the next few weeks to really pour myself into understanding this Bible. Holy Spirit, guide me to a deeper understanding of it. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

This promise is an important first step.

Learning this system requires an effort on your part. There are no shortcuts, no

five easy steps to weight loss. When you're tempted to slack off, just remember this promise.

As you know, every worthwhile endeavor requires time to master. No one learns to play the piano, speak Spanish, play a sport, juggle or cook a cheesecake overnight. Furthermore, whenever we accomplish anything that requires time to master, the feeling is like no other and we can be in a position to significantly bless others and ourselves.

You've now made a commitment to yourself and to the Lord to see this through. You now have the opportunity to really transform your study of the Bible. I am certain, that if you put in a good effort, your understanding of the Bible will skyrocket and you will position yourself for a lifetime of Bible learning.

So let's get to it!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How would you rate your Bible literacy? Can you answer the following questions?
2. Why is the Abrahamic covenant important to Christians today?
3. In what ways is Jesus connected to Israel's history and religion?
4. Why is Leviticus important for Christians?
5. Can you name the types of literature that the Bible contains?
6. What are the main themes of the Bible?
7. Can you summarize the central theme of the Bible in one complete sentence?
8. Can you name all of the letters written by the Apostle Paul?
9. Do you agree that many Christians know a lot about the Bible but lack any coherent way of organizing this knowledge? Explain. Is this how you approach the Bible?

CHAPTER 2 – UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE AS STORY (STEP #1)

Allow me to begin this section with a story about the day my life took an adventurous turn. (I will have an important point to make at the end of the story that's related to this chapter, so I am asking for your indulgence. Plus, I get to share a little something about myself!)

It was April 1995 and I was working as a banking analyst for First Interstate Bank in Los Angeles. By most measures, I was doing all right. My job was interesting. I was making good money. I was actively involved in a great charismatic church near my home. All systems were good.

And then the phone rang.

A soft-spoken gentleman with a British accent by the name of Paul was on the line peddling a banking software. Since I did not have much patience for telemarketers, I simply hung up. A few moments later he called back.

Wow! That was pretty brazen.

He was slightly pleading now. His boss was in the lobby of my building and just needed a few moments of my time. Would I see him and save Paul from explaining to his boss why he had no appointments scheduled?

I relented. I was not a ruthless person. After all, I owned a cat and I even wrote poetry on occasion.

“Send him up” I sighed.

Jim, the sales rep, was probably around 6' 5", broad-chested, with high cheek bones and blue eyes. If there were ever a need for the role of the Nordic horseman, Jim would have fit the bill. He was a bit disheveled and his suit seemed about a size too small for his protruding build. After he sat down, he pulled out a crinkly sheet of paper from his pocket, smoothed it out on the conference room table and began his presentation. It was his sales script.

I liked Jim immediately.

The whole presentation was like a blur because the minute that Jim produced the

first report on his laptop I knew we had to buy the software. What took weeks to procure by having to solicit reports through our mainframe group, Jim had produced in a matter of moments. Within a few weeks after Jim left, our bank had entered into an agreement with Jim's firm to purchase 7 licenses for a total contract price of \$55,000. We weren't just picking up a copy of Microsoft Excel.

And this is where the story took a turn.

WHIRLWIND DAYS

One day, while I was still testing out Jim's amazing software, my computer started to go wacky. I had the latest technology, a Dell 486, with 8 MBs of RAM and a 320 MB hard drive. (I purposely included this data so you could appreciate how spoiled you really are in today's high tech world.)

I immediately guessed that Jim's software was causing some kind of compatibility problem so I promptly called technical support. I was more than a little steamed given how much we were projecting to pay for the software. When they patched me through, a lovely, slightly Southern-accented female answered my call.

"Hello, can I help you?"

Gulp! I froze.

If someone were ever to make a cartoon at this point in my story, I would have my mouth open, there would be horns blaring and you would see my red cartoon heart stretching out from my chest in rhythmic beats.

Boing, boing, boing...

It was not love at first sight, but love at first sound!

"Yeah!" I blustered for a moment, "um, your software, it, um, I think it froze my machine."

I was no longer upset. This woman's voice had calmed my nerves even though I could still hear my heart beating in my ears. I felt like I was back in junior high and my crush had just stepped into the classroom. The young lady on the phone was prompt and extremely helpful. She had me back up and running in a short period of time and then we said goodbye.

When I relayed the incident to my roommate that evening he couldn't help but joke at my expense, "Dude, that's like falling in love with the MCI operator. They're supposed to be nice!"

Little did he or I realize that my future wife had answered the phone that day. Rochelle was working for Jim's company in Boston. She had moved there from Dallas in 1993, had reengaged with her faith and was enjoying life in such a

great city.

But clearly something had happened in me when I spoke to Rochelle.

I met her in person in June when I traveled to Boston and I was not disappointed. She was smart, and beautiful and also a believer. After she visited me in August, we began a long distance relationship. This wasn't a bad strategy since it allowed us to get to know one another without all of those pheromones getting in the way.

I shortly announced that I wanted to move to Boston.

My friends told me I was crazy. They warned me that this was all an elaborate ruse by the devil. Satan was tempting me, to which I replied, "You got that right! Have you seen this girl, she's gorgeous!" They were not amused, but then again, I was falling in love and they knew there was very little they could say to change my mind.

In October, I interviewed for Jim's company and in December of 1995 I sold my things, packed my bags and moved to Boston (8 months after that fateful phone call).

In May of 1996, I proposed to Rochelle and we were married in a beautiful wedding in La Jolla, California in October of that same year. In December of 1998, we had our first child, followed by our second in March of 2000 and our third in December of 2001. This year (2015), we celebrated our 19th wedding anniversary and we have had the wonderful joy of living in three separate countries as a missionary family: Costa Rica, Paraguay and Colombia.

This adventure of a lifetime began with one innocent phone call by a persistent British telemarketer who refused to take no for an answer. I am eternally grateful for his perseverance.

THE POWER OF STORIES

I began this section with a story in order to make an important point: stories have an amazing power to capture and keep our attention, engage our emotions and teach us things in a way that very few other mediums can.

I am not going to win any Pulitzer prizes with my writing, but I am fairly confident that beginning a paragraph with “allow me to share a story...” is enough to hook almost any person. There is something very powerful in the concept of a story. We are by nature attracted to them and we are interested in what happens to their main characters.

So, the first principle you must embrace is this: The Bible tells one continuous and unified story.

That is the key that will unlock every book, narrative, figure or event in the Bible.

I am convinced that most Christians either are not aware of this fact or if they have some notion of it, they have never been taught the story or they don't fully understand the relevance of this truth for understanding the Bible. Even my wonderful students, at the end of my *Overview of the Bible* classes, would almost universally exclaim, “No one ever taught us this system before!”

FROM APPRENTICE TO GURU

As I mentioned in an earlier section, this book, *Understanding the Bible Through Story*, is part of a larger curriculum to give you the necessary tools for studying the Bible.

Our lessons begin from the most basic Bible study concepts and walk you through becoming a Bible study expert (see our website [here](#)). However, our approach differs from other how-to bible study courses in that we begin with this part right here, the *Bible as story*. We feel that knowing the Bible story, in detail, is a critical step in your Bible study journey. It is your key to understanding the whole Bible AND its individual elements.

You cannot fully understand the parts until you understand the whole.

And so rather than give you a bunch of bible study tools to study individual passages in isolation, we want to first give you the overall picture. We want to give you the story that unlocks the Bible for you. Without this crucial first step many of these bible study tools cannot be fully exploited.

DEFINING THE MEANING OF “STORY”

Now when we say that the Bible tells one contiguous story, we do not mean to imply that the Bible is historically untrue or that it is similar to a fairy tale. This is not how the Bible represents itself, though many people have this conception of Scripture. Rather, in our use of the term “story”, it is simply a way to think about the Bible, which makes it much easier to study and understand.

The Bible, like a story, has a main theme or a primary message. It contains a beginning, a middle and an end. It has protagonists and antagonists and primary and secondary characters. And finally, like any good story, the Bible contains a plot and many plot twists, which provide variety and help to carry the story along.

To be certain, it isn't always clear how the findings of modern history, archeology, and science can be reconciled to the Bible's narratives. In all purported “discrepancies” between faith and modern scientific discovery, we should seek to become better interpreters of the Bible as well as better students of science. We most certainly cannot be satisfied with superficial answers in either discipline. In addition, we cannot fall into the trap of setting up an antagonistic relationship between the Bible and science.

At the very least, we should admit that we don't know everything there is to know, either about the Bible or about science. We are making new discoveries every day. It is acceptable to plead ignorance regarding the interpretation of certain biblical texts. Also, it's OK to live with a little ambiguity, mystery or paradox where clear answers to these issues are not easily forthcoming.

ADVANTAGES TO VIEWING THE BIBLE AS A STORY

There are significant advantages to approaching the Bible as one continuous and unified narrative.

#1 — Human beings are inherently drawn to stories of adventure, drama and conflict.

Everyone loves a good story! From the time we could recognize pictures in a book or the sound of our parents' voices, our hearts and spirits have always responded to stories. We are wired to love drama, to root for heroes and to fight against villains (well at least in most normal households).

I remember reading about the Tobas, a pre-Colombian indigenous group that had survived in modern Paraguay. They often retold the story of their beginnings with K'atá (the Father) who made the first man Metzgoshé. Metzgoshé did not know where he had come from so it was up to Boleh, a bird sent by K'atá to show Metzgoshé his identity. Among other things, he also showed him how to govern, how to hunt and how to avoid dangerous animals. In summary, Boleh taught Metzgoshé everything that the Tobas know today.

It is not unusual for pre-Colombian groups to have mythical narratives regarding their origins. What should amaze us is the fact of this particular pre-Colombian tribe having a story at all. Who taught them to tell a story? Or did this desire spring from deep within their humanity? I believe that no matter the time or geography, human beings are storytelling beings. It's part of our DNA.

Perhaps the reason so many people find the Bible so un-exciting is because they do not have the right perspective about it as a story. The Bible presents a sweeping and cosmic drama, which is unmatched for its intensity, colorful characters and poignant message.

#2 — Stories engage our full emotions

Good books, movies and plays simply bypass our normal logical and mental gatekeepers and head right for our souls and emotions. It is no secret why a movie like Titanic with Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslett had such unbelievable success. The tragedy of one of the greatest disasters at sea would never have tapped into the crushing emotions the way that those two star-crossed lovers did. Even the sound of the haunting flute of the title track can still cause

someone to weep.

Stories engage us at the heart level, deep in our emotions, as we identify with the characters, feel their pain, suffer their losses and celebrate their triumphs.

#3 — *In a continuous story, all of the smaller stories, books, events and themes have their proper place within the larger story.*

This is the antidote to viewing the Bible as a holy jigsaw puzzle. Adam is part of the story that talks about the creation. David is part of the story that talks about the Israelite monarchy. Jeremiah is part of the story that talks about the exile. Every Bible figure has a proper role to play within a larger narrative. Every biblical story or event fills in a section of a much longer story.

#4 — *A continuous story is much easier to memorize, recall and retell.*

One of the great advantages to viewing the Bible as one continuous story is the ability to quickly learn this narrative and be able to share it and teach it to others.

Do you know how powerful this is?

This ability to grasp a story and communicate it is something that we do instinctively without much effort whenever we recommend a good book or a movie to one of our friends.

Take for example one of my favorite movies called *Big*, with Tom Hanks. Without much thought or preparation, I can tell you that it is a story about a 13-year-old boy who gets his wish to become an adult. While he enjoys the privileges of adulthood for a short season, he finds that the responsibility of being an adult is far greater than he is prepared to accept and frankly, adulthood isn't all that it's cracked up to be. In the process, however, this man-child teaches the adults that being a kid does not depend on being young, but rather, never letting go of that childlike quality within us.

As you can see, repeating the main theme and plot of a story is something that is quite easy to do for stories that we know well. And I would have no problem recalling individual scenes or rehashing minute details of this movie if anyone were interested in knowing them.

For example, I can think of the scene in the toy store where Josh and his future boss end up playing chopsticks on the big piano on the floor. Or how about when Josh takes his "girlfriend" to his Manhattan apartment filled with free sodas,

pinball machines and a trampoline. I can still hear the beat of the song that was playing in the background as Josh and his disoriented girl are jumping around (“Forget Me Nots”). This is the beauty of a story: it lends itself to easy memorization, recall and sharing.

And it doesn’t stop with being able to easily repeat the story or its elements. With time, you will be able to teach others how to memorize and tell the story. And they in turn will be able to do the same.

RESULTS OF LEARNING THE STORY OF THE BIBLE

Once you know this story, several things will happen.

First, because it's a story, you are less likely to forget it. Sure, you may get weak on the details, but you will always be able to recall its broad contours. Secondly, you will be able to share and teach others this story in the same way that I have taught it to you and in a way that they too can become teachers of others. This manual makes that process easier, but it is really the concept of the story, which provides you with that teaching ability. Finally, by learning this story yourself, you will begin to set up a framework for the Bible that will serve you for the rest of your life.

So there you have it. That's the first secret you must get your hands (and head) around: The Bible tells one continuous and unified story.

In the next two steps I am going to teach you this central story of the Bible. And it begins by first learning the Bible's central message.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Why do you think people are drawn to a story, whether it be a good book or movie?
2. Choose a recent popular book or a movie and practice sharing the story's main message, plot line, detailed scenes. Why is it easy to retell the story even in its minute details?
3. What other advantages do you see in viewing the Bible as one continuous story or narrative?
4. Why do you suppose the Bible-as-story is not more frequently taught in our churches?

CHAPTER 3 – THE CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE BIBLE (STEP #2)

The Bible, like any book or movie, contains a major theme or central message. If we were writing a research paper, we would call this central message the Bible's thesis statement. It is now time to unwrap the Bible's main theme. In the next step, we will see how this central message supports the story of the Bible.

The main theme of the Bible can be summarized as follows:

The Bible tells the history of God's salvation, on behalf of humanity and the creation, starting with Israel and completed through Jesus Christ.

We could write an entire essay explaining every word in the above statement, but given that we want to keep things simple, I'll give you only the most important highlights.

HISTORY

We use the word *history* in the central message to differentiate between events that really happened and myths or fantasies. The Bible records historical events and the experiences of historical people. This is crucial because in today's world, the historical validity of the Bible is under serious assault.

I have met Christians who deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I have heard them say, "All we need to do is to live by the principles of Jesus' resurrection." This is hogwash. It is patently false and dangerous and reveals how critical it is to defend the historical trustworthiness of the Bible. God has acted in history. Christianity is a historical religion. Without history, many of Christianity's claims cannot be sustained.

The word *history* is also important because it demonstrates a progression over time and into the future. There is a past, a present and a future in history and its events are happening on an actual timeline. In addition, there is a time when history as we know it will come to a complete end. The Bible has much to say about how things will end.

Finally, the word *history* is important for every Christian because it makes us aware that we are living within this important Bible story. You are part of God's overarching narrative in this world. You have a role to play in the history of salvation by sharing your faith, bringing the kingdom of God to bear on your world and even going out as a missionary to help disciple the nations. This also means that all of Israel's history (what we read in the Old Testament) forms a part of your spiritual heritage and informs everything about your Christian faith.

GOD

We refer to *God* in our central message because he is the main protagonist. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the originator of history and by whose Spirit the Bible was written and everything in creation was made. God is the primary mover and the initiator of the rescue mission towards humanity. He providentially guides history and ultimately steps into it in the form of Jesus Christ to bring salvation to the world. God plays a direct or indirect role in every scene or narrative of the Bible.

SALVATION

We use the word *salvation* to encompass the primary objective of God towards humanity and the creation. Because of the corrupting nature of sin, God embarks on a rescue mission to reconcile both man and the universe to himself after the fall of Adam.

Salvation is also holistic and not simply a personal decision that saves me from eternal damnation. God's salvation redeems mind, body, soul and spirit as well as the relational, cultural, economic, environmental and societal structures that prey on humanity and creation. Salvation includes no less than the coming of God's kingdom to reign here on earth as well as the promise of eternal life in the world to come.

ON BEHALF OF HUMANITY

Salvation is undertaken on behalf of *humanity*. This is where God's radical love for us comes into play. If there were a theme within Scripture that stands out above the rest, this is it. John 3:16 is perhaps the best and most well known expression of this theme: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

The goal of salvation history as portrayed in the Bible is the calling out of a people for God from among every tribe, tongue and nation in order that they might spend the rest of eternity with the triune God. God's people represent the second most important figure or entity within the Scriptures. God is the husband; we are the wife. Jesus is the bridegroom; we are the bride.

ON BEHALF OF THE CREATION

Secondly, and just as importantly, salvation includes the redemption of all *creation*, the universe and the earth. Paul says that even the earth groans with the anticipation of the unveiling of God's children, for the earth was also subjected to the curse (Romans 8). Thus, there will be a new heavens and a new earth at the culmination of history and we will rule and experience this new creation with God into eternity.

In addition, the fact that the earth and the universe are slated for redemption implies that both have an inherent value. This means that as Christians we are to be doubly concerned about our stewardship of God's creation. It also means that we must be ever vigilant in the protection of God's environment. We are simply God's caretakers of the planet. To abuse this world or to exploit it is to falter in a fundamental mission as God's children and to be answerable to the owner of this world.

STARTING WITH ISRAEL

We say that salvation starts with *Israel* because it is through a chosen nation, whom God protects and punishes that the stage is set for the coming of a Messiah. The Israel of the Old Testament is called upon by God to be a light to the nations and an example to the world of what it means to be a people ruled by a holy God. Israel's history is recorded in the Old Testament and becomes our heritage as Christians since we too are a children of Abraham.

...AND COMPLETED THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

Salvation culminates in *Jesus Christ*.

His is the person, life, ministry and sacrifice to which all the Old Testament points, and which all the New Testament reveals. Jesus' death marked the beginning of the end of time. The next great event in human-divine history is the second coming of Jesus Christ where all of humanity and the world will finally be made right. Until then, God provides us with glimpses of a new heaven and new earth because the kingdom of God has come, the blind see, the dead are raised, the captives are set free and the Spirit of God has been poured out on all flesh!

CONCLUSION

As you can see, there is much good teaching wrapped into the central message of the Bible. All of these concepts are consistently repeated and elaborated as you work your way through the Bible.

This central message will be the guiding theme of the entire Bible story that I will ask you to memorize later on. For this reason, it is critically important that you memorize the central message and then have a clear understanding of each word in that message. This will pay back rich dividends as you continue your exploration of the Bible.

The Bible tells one continuous and unified story.

It is the history of God's salvation, on behalf of humanity and the creation, starting with Israel and completed through Jesus Christ.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Discuss each term above in greater detail. What aspects of each term capture your attention? What are some important details regarding each term?
2. Break into small groups and take some time to memorize the central message of the Bible. Give people a chance to rehearse this central message in front of others.
3. Break into small groups and memorize the expanded explanations for every statement in the Bible's central message. Give people a chance to rehearse one of the explanations in front of others.
4. What do you think of the fact that creation is also included in God's plan of redemption? How should this impact our care for the environment or our use of the earth's resources and other issues related to the creation.
5. What does it mean to say that salvation is *holistic*? How should that definition impact our working out our faith?
6. Why is it important to include the Israel of the Old Testament in the discussion of salvation and the Bible's central message?

CHAPTER 4 – MEMORIZING THE STORY OF THE BIBLE (STEP #3)

NOTE: If you are reading this book as part of a weekly Bible study or Sunday School you may consider splitting this step into two or three weeks due to its length.

We are now ready to tackle the main story of the Bible. As you progress through this section, it is a good idea to keep the central message of the Bible in mind.

The Bible tells the history of God’s salvation, on behalf of humanity and the creation, starting with Israel and completed through Jesus Christ.

As I mentioned before, memorizing this story is THE CENTRAL portion of this book. Everything flows out of it including your overall understanding of the Bible and its individual figures, stories, events and books. Don’t skimp on this part. Take your time and make sure you internalize and memorize one section before moving on to the next.

CHAPTER HEADINGS

The story in this book will be recounted in 13 chapters or time periods (It's a good thing I don't believe in superstitions).

The headings for each chapter are as follows: 1—Creation

2—Patriarchs

3—Exodus

4—Conquest

5—Period of Judges

6—United Kingdom

7—Divided Kingdom

8—Exile

9—Return from Exile

10—Silence and Transition 11—Jesus Christ

12—Christian Church

13—Return of Jesus

Your first order of business is to memorize these headings and be able to repeat them or write them down in the order that they appear. Once you have committed them to memory, your telling of the story will become much easier.

In my classes, students were required to take a quiz to make sure that they had nailed down these titles before proceeding any further. You should probably test yourself a few times so that you are confident of the order and correct title for each of these 13 headings.

A few details may be helpful in this regard: 1. Chapters 1-9 form part of the Old Testament and Chapters 11-13 form part of the New Testament. Chapter 10 falls in between the time of the two testaments.

2. The story begins in Gen 1-2 with *Creation* and proceeds through the main events of biblical history ending with Revelation 21 and *the return of Jesus* to

earth.

3. Chapters 2-9 retell all of Israel's history starting from Abraham's call in Genesis 12 to the *return from exile* recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE THROUGH STORY

Let us begin memorizing the Bible story.

It is important that you fix this narrative in your mind and that you learn to recite it, more or less, the way you are reading it now. This is the foundational piece upon which all other steps will build. Nail this down in such a way that you can repeat it to another person as it is written.

If you need some memory pointers, I have written the next chapter as a helpful guide to get your memory juices flowing.

Please remember that this is the Bible's own story. You should not get bogged down with how it may or may not fit within modern archeological, historical and scientific paradigms. That is an issue for another day.

Your main objective is to memorize this story. It contains the events, themes and characters that the Bible deems important. How do we know this? Because they take up a lot of space and because these elements are routinely repeated in the Bible.

A quick example would be the Exodus in which God liberates his people from their bondage in Egypt. This theme is repeatedly picked up in the New Testament to describe our salvation in which God liberates us from our bondage to sin. There are many other examples just like this that we could cite.

So as you are learning the story, you are also reciting a good dose of biblical theology to yourself. Don't become frustrated! This takes some effort on your part, but over time, I promise that you will be able to recite this biblical story in exactly the same way you are reading it now.

Chapter 1 — Creation

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth and human beings in his image. God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and to multiply and to have dominion over the earth. But before they could carry out God's commands, they sinned in disobedience to him. Sin entered the world through the disobedience of one man and both humanity and creation fell under God's judgment.

Transition—From this point forward, God set in motion a plan to redeem both

humanity and creation from the curse of sin. This plan is the content for the rest of the Bible's story.

Chapter 2 — Patriarchs

God chose a man, Abraham, by whom his plan to redeem humanity and creation would be fulfilled. God made a covenant with Abraham and promised him many things: God promised to make Abraham into a great nation; God promised to give Abraham a land as an inheritance; and finally God promised that all of the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham.

Transition—Abraham had a son, Isaac, Isaac had a son Jacob and Jacob had a son Joseph. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers and became part of Pharaoh's household in Egypt. Over time, he became second in command to Pharaoh. Because of Joseph, the people of God were resettled in Egypt.

Chapter 3 — Exodus

Soon after, a new Pharaoh ruled over Egypt and the people of God became slaves. They cried out to God for salvation, and the Lord raised up Moses as a leader for his people. Through Moses, God delivered his people from slavery in Egypt and brought them to the foot of Mount Sinai.

At Mount Sinai, God gave his people a set of commandments by which to live, a constitution if you will. At Mount Sinai, the people of God became the nation of God. So began to be fulfilled one of the promises, which God had made to Abraham, which was, "I will make you a great nation."

The nation of Israel traveled to the foot of the Promised Land, but because of a lack of faith, they refused to enter thinking that they were too small to confront the inhabitants of the land. "We are like grasshoppers!" they cried, but Joshua and Caleb exhorted the people saying, "God will give us this land!"

Alas, God judged the nation, which had come out of Egypt for their lack of faith, and he made them wander in the desert for forty years. He did this so that every male who was twenty years or older who had come out of Egypt would perish in the desert except for Caleb, Joshua and Moses.

Transition—After forty years, the nation of Israel came to the foot of the Promised Land once again. Because this was a new generation, they renewed their covenant with God, which he had earlier made with them at Mount Sinai.

Chapter 4 — Conquest

With Joshua as the commander of the Lord's army, Israel entered the Promised Land and defeated the kings and the peoples of Canaan.

Israel divided the land of Canaan (and portions to the East) among the twelve tribes of Israel and began to live in the land, which the Lord had given them. This then was the second promise to Abraham which the Lord fulfilled saying, "I will give you a land as your inheritance."

Transition—One generation after Joshua's death, the people of God fell into sin by committing great acts of idolatry.

Chapter 5 — Period of Judges

The book of Judges records the cycles of sin, which continually plagued the nation of Israel throughout the time of the judges.

First the nation would commit great acts of idolatry. God would send a foreign nation to punish his people. The people of God would repent and cry out for mercy. God would send a judge to liberate his people. The people of God would enjoy a time of purity, peace and prosperity until the death of the judge. After the death of their judge, Israel would once again fall into idolatry and begin the vicious cycle once more.

The Book of Judges records this repetitive cycle of sin twelve times.

Transition—Samuel the prophet was born. Samuel was the last of the judges of Israel and as such is the connecting link between the period of the judges and the period of the Israelite kingdom. It is Samuel who anoints the first king of Israel.

Chapter 6 — United Kingdom

The people of God began to clamor to the Lord for a king to be placed over them. Their desire was to be like the other nations around them. God permitted this request saying to Samuel, "They have rejected me as their king."

God chose Saul as Israel's first king to rule over them. Afterward, he chose David to rule over his people followed by Solomon who built a magnificent temple for the Lord. Saul, David and Solomon, ruled over the United Kingdom in Israel.

Transition—Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord when he took foreign wives to himself. These wives turned Solomon’s heart away from God. It has been said that a divided heart will lead to a divided nation.

Chapter 7 — Divided Kingdom

After Solomon’s death, the kingdom of Israel split into two kingdoms. In the northern kingdom, called Israel, there were ten (10) tribes. In the southern kingdom, called Judah, there were only two (2) tribes, Benjamin and Judah.

Of the twenty (20) kings who reigned in the northern kingdom, twenty (20) did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. Of the twenty 20 kings who reigned in the southern kingdom, twelve (12) did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

Transition—During the period of the divided kingdom, the prophets of God began to appear, begging the two nations to repent of their wicked ways, to return to their covenant with God and to avoid the judgment of God that was awaiting them.

Chapter 8 — Exile

Alas, neither kingdom would heed the voice of the prophets. Thus in 722 BC, God sent the Kingdom of Assyria to wipe out the northern kingdom and to take the inhabitants into exile. Because of God’s love for David, he allowed the southern kingdom to last for a while longer; however, in 586 BC the Kingdom of Babylon overran Jerusalem and took the inhabitants of the southern kingdom captive into Babylonia. Daniel, of the lion’s den fame, was one of the inhabitants who was carried away into captivity.

Transition—God had mercy on his people and placed a limit on their time in exile.

Chapter 9 — Return from Exile

After seventy (70) years of captivity, God brought his people back from exile. Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah lead different groups of captives back to Jerusalem in order to help rebuild the temple, reestablish the worship service and festivals of the nation of Israel and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. God continued to warn his people to avoid the sins and the idolatry that had previously lead to their destruction.

Chapter 10 — Silence and Transition

After the exile, the nation of Israel continued to serve God even though it eventually came under Greek rule and then Roman domination. During this period, Israel continued to write books about their history, but none of these books were accepted into the Protestant Bible as inspired by God.

Many elements of the Roman Empire paved the way for the advancement of the gospel: 1) The Pax Romana made travel relatively safe; 2) the system of roads for Rome's armies allowed for mobility 3) the Greek language allowed for the writing and widespread distribution of the New Testament.

Transition—When Jesus was finally born, the tiny state of Israel was a non-essential piece of land in a vast Roman Empire. God had not spoken to his people in 425 years. No prophets had been sent to Israel until John the Baptist appeared, announcing the coming of the Messiah.

Chapter 11 — Jesus Christ

Jesus of Nazareth was born in Bethlehem as the long awaited Jewish Messiah. He grew up in Galilee and ministered in the surrounding Galilean countryside for three years. At the age 33 he was crucified in Jerusalem, buried in a borrowed tomb, and after three days he rose again.

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ stands as the most important act of history for it means that all of humanity and creation can now be redeemed and made right with God.

By faith in Christ, all men are now invited into God's presence. Those who believe in Jesus have eternal life, but those who do not believe in Jesus are condemned forever.

Transition—After his resurrection, Jesus gave his disciples the Great Commission: Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Chapter 12 — Christian Church

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples of Jesus Christ and the Christian church was born in Jerusalem. Responding to the Great Commission, the church in Jerusalem began to preach the good news that Jesus Christ came to save first the Jews and then the Gentiles. The church also began

to spread out and plant other churches throughout the Roman Empire. The Book of Acts singles out Peter and Paul as notable missionaries to Jews and Gentiles, respectively.

It is during this period that the recollections of the life of Jesus Christ were written down into various “gospels” and that various apostles and disciples of Jesus wrote letters to churches and individuals in order to instruct them about life and faith in Jesus Christ. These were eventually gathered to become the New Testament.

Transition—Every church that exists today is the result of the mission of that first church in Jerusalem. Currently, the Christian church continues to carry out God’s mandate to make disciples of all nations. This is the task of missions. We now live in the age between the first and second coming of Jesus Christ. This means that we also play an important part in God’s salvation history.

Chapter 13 — Return of Jesus

Jesus Christ has promised to come again to gather up all those who belong to him. When he comes he will judge all of humanity, some to everlasting life, others to everlasting punishment. God will recreate the heavens and the earth and those who have placed their faith in God’s Son, will live together with God and his angels forever in a new heavens and a new earth.

The story of the Bible will have been completed from man’s fall in the garden, through the creation of the nation of Israel to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who ultimately redeems all of humanity and creation.

YOU CAN LEARN THIS STORY

And that, my friend, is the one, unified and continuous story that is told throughout the Bible.

At this point you may be shrinking back and thinking, “There’s no way I could ever recite that story! It’s way too complex!” But you will be surprised how easy it will be to learn and to remember. In a fairly short time, you will be repeating this story of the Bible yourself. In the process you will be creating a structure and a framework by which to understand the Bible, its books and its contents more deeply.

In those early *Overview of the Bible* courses, one of my favorite moments was standing before the class on that first day to recite the entire 20-minute Bible story that we just covered.

I used no cue cards or notes.

The response was always the same: wonder and amazement. These responses weren’t really directed toward me, but rather, toward the incredible story they had just heard me recite. For most, this was the first time they had ever heard the Bible recounted in this way.

The next response was almost as priceless.

After I finished and they were able to take it in, I then looked directly at my students and stated, “in two weeks, each of you will stand in front of the class and recite that story the same way I did, with no cue cards and no notes.”

Every jaw dropped and a few looked like they were about to have cardiac arrests. I could see the fear in some students’ eyes. Gulp!

Once they had sufficiently recovered, I simply asked them to trust me and, more than that, to trust the power of a story. I assured them that anyone could learn it. And boy did they prove me correct.

Every last student of every *Overview of the Bible* class I taught eventually stood in front of their classmates and repeated the story of the Bible almost word for word.

One student I taught went so far as to teach the story to his elementary Sunday

School class. And wouldn't you know those kids gamely stood in front of the whole congregation to tell the church all of the wonderful things that God had done from Genesis to Revelation in that Bible story?

So don't fret. If a fifth grader can do it, so can you!

Again, it may take some time but the satisfaction of having done it is out of this world.

REAL WORLD EXAMPLE

One of the most satisfying feelings I've had is being able to share this Bible story with other people and have them memorize it and recite it back to me. I've done this on a number of occasions now in small group studies, which I've lead.

I remember once when I lived in Yaguaron, Paraguay in 2006.

Yaguaron is a small, rural colonial town about an hour south of Asunción, the capital of Paraguay. It had a population of 7,000 people, cobblestone streets that oxen shared with buses, and a massive 200-year-old Catholic Church near its entrance.

We lived in Yaguaron for two years, in an old white stucco home, with red-tiled floors and dark beams of wood traversing our ceiling. It reminded me of an old Spanish colonial museum you'd see on some tour of the Southwest.

Soon after our arrival, a man in his 30s showed up at our home offering to landscape my lawn. His name was Inocencio (perhaps after Pope Innocent). He was cordial and a good salesperson so I promptly hired him. (Just like Paul, he somehow hit my soft spot.)

Anyway, Inocencio and I grew to be great friends and soon I was invited over to his house where I began leading a Bible study. Inocencio, was not a Christian but many in his family were. Inocencio attended the study, along with his sister and his cousin Rachel.

Rachel was a beautiful young lady of 14 with fair skin, dark eyes and dark hair. She was tall for her age and seemed older because of it. She was a committed believer and enjoyed attending her church with Inocencio's mother.

One of the first things I do whenever I lead any Bible study is to teach people the story of the Bible. I recite it for them at the beginning and then lead them methodically through the different chapters until they have memorized it. Again, I firmly believe that this Bible story is foundational for any Bible learning.

After our Bible study began, Inocencio's sister became a bit inconsistent. Inocencio was faithful to attend, but he had little interest in learning the story of the Bible. I would rehearse different parts with the group, leave them alone for a

week and come back with no progress from him. On the other hand, Rachel, his cousin took to the story like a fish to water.

She completed every homework assignment I gave her and was always prepared to recite the sections of the story we had been working on. One day, she ran through 6 or 7 chapters without skipping a beat. I was floored. She did it so effortlessly, all I could do was beam and congratulate her.

Personally, I think she surprised herself.

Like most people, when Rachel first heard the story and was then told that she would be able to recite it, she was probably more than a little skeptical. I think it seemed very difficult to envision. But, I'm sure, as time progressed, and Rachel kept at it, she figured out that this wasn't so tough after all. The story naturally progresses and once she had some success in the early stages of our study, I think she just got inspired to keep going.

This is again the power of a story which lends itself to being easily memorized and easily repeated.

In 2011, Inocencio wrote to me and told me that Rachel had been killed in a bus accident near their home. She would have been 17. Wow! It was a serious blow. What a tragedy, really, that she would be taken so early in her youth. Nevertheless, I rejoiced that she was now at peace with the Lord. In addition, I still had good memories of our study together and the dedication she showed in memorizing a big chunk of that 20-minute monologue.

I wonder if she ever finished that story in heaven!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Split out into groups and take turns memorizing the chapter headings. Give people a chance to recite them out loud in front of others.
2. Split out into groups and take turns memorizing individual chapters. Give people a chance to rehearse different chapters in front of others.
3. Write the chapter headings on the board. Ask people to name a major figure, story, event or book from each of the headings.
4. Pick several books of the Bible as a sample from different sections: Genesis, Joshua, 1 Samuel, Jeremiah, 1 Corinthians, *etc.* Ask people to identify to which chapter of the story each book belongs.
5. Pick several figures of the Bible as a sample from different sections: Adam, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, David, Joel, Peter, Cornelius, *etc.* Ask people to identify to which chapter of the story each figure belongs.
6. Make your group commit to memorizing the Bible in 13 Chapters story by a certain timeframe. Two or three weeks should be sufficient. Ask for volunteers and have them share the Bible's story in front of the group when they think they are ready.

Better yet, incentivize the group by promising a special treat for those who complete this task.

CHAPTER 5 – TIPS FOR MEMORIZING THE STORY

I've incorporated this next chapter as a way to jump start your learning of the Bible's story. Some folks find memorization a little bit more challenging than others.

What I've essentially done is simplified the story to its outline form, which should help you in committing the main events of the story to memory.

Your first order of business, however, is to memorize the chapter headings. These are like the central idea of each chapter boiled down into a word or two. Afterwards, you should memorize a few major ideas within each chapter as I've outlined below. Finally, you should take some time with the transitions since they are extremely helpful in anticipating the following chapter.

Here is the story in outline form. Don't forget, your goal is to learn the original story in the previous chapter and not this abbreviated version.

Chapter 1—Creation

- God creates universe, earth and man
- Be fruitful and multiply
- Sin and judgment

Transition—From this point forward God sets in motion a plan to redeem humanity and the creation.

Chapter 2—Patriarchs

- God makes a covenant with Abraham
- Nation, land and universal blessing

Transition—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. With Joseph, people of God settle in Egypt.

Chapter 3—Exodus

- New Pharaoh enslaves God's people
- Moses liberates God's people and leads them to Mount Sinai where they receive a constitution
- People of God become nation of God

- God's people refuse to enter the Promised Land and are judged for forty years by wandering in the desert

Transition—Israel comes to the foot of Promised Land again and renews their covenant with God.

Chapter 4—Conquest

- Joshua conquers the Promised Land and Canaan is divided among the 12 tribes of Israel.

Transition—One generation after Joshua's death, Israel enters into idolatry.

Chapter 5—Period of Judges

- Cycle of sin: idolatry, judgment, repentance, judge, liberation, and peace.
- Repeat cycle 12 times.

Transition—Samuel is transitional figure from judges to United Kingdom. He anoints Israel's first king.

Chapter 6—United Kingdom

- Saul, David and Solomon rule as kings over Israel in the United Kingdom

Transition—Solomon sins against God by taking foreign wives to himself. A divided heart leads to a divided nation.

Chapter 7—Divided Kingdom

- Kingdom splits into north (10 tribes) and south (2 tribes).
- Twenty (20) of twenty (20) kings of the north do what is evil by the Lord
- Twelve (12) of twenty (20) kings in the south do what is evil by the Lord

Transition—God sends his prophets to ask his people to repent of her sins, otherwise judgment awaits. They refuse.

Chapter 8—Exile

- In 722 BC, God uses the Assyrian Empire to carry the northern

kingdom into exile

- In 586 BC, God uses the Babylonian Empire to carry the southern kingdom into exile

Transition—God has mercy on his people and places a limit on Israel’s exile.

Chapter 9—Return from Exile

- After 70 years, God’s people return from their exile and rebuild their temple, the walls of Jerusalem and reestablish their worship of God

Chapter 10—Silence and Transition

- Israel continues to serve God while under Greek and Roman rule. Other books are written which do not appear as part of the Protestant canon of Scripture.
- The way for the gospel is prepared by certain elements of the Roman Empire.

Transition—God had not spoken to his people in 425 years until John the Baptist arrived to introduce Jesus Christ.

Chapter 11—Jesus Christ

- Jesus Christ is born as the Jewish Messiah
- He ministers for three years and then he is crucified, buried and resurrected in Jerusalem

Transition—Jesus gives the Great Commission to his disciples to make disciples of all nations.

Chapter 12—Christian Church

- Jesus Christ establishes his church with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost
- The church in Jerusalem begins to spread his message and establishes churches in the Roman Empire

Transition—We are living in the stage between the first and second coming of Christ.

Chapter 13—Return of Jesus

- Jesus Christ is coming again to judge all of humanity, some to eternal life and others to eternal separation from God
- He will also create a new heavens and a new earth and complete the story of the Bible by redeeming both man and the creation

NOW THAT YOU KNOW THE STORY

Very well then, as you can see, the story of the Bible, is one continuous narrative. This is the framework, which you must establish in your mind. Once you learn this meta-narrative, you will be astounded at how many things about the Bible simply fall into place and are more easily understood. Every narrative, character, event or individual book of the Bible contributes in some fashion to this story of salvation.

Allow me to give you a few examples on the usefulness of this story:

Example #1 – Daniel in the Lion’s Den

Everyone is familiar with the story of Daniel in the lion’s den. Can you think back to the Bible story and identify in which chapter this event appears? You may recall that Daniel is living in Babylon and that King Nebuchadnezzar is the main antagonist.

If you guessed the period of Exile, you would be correct!

The reason Daniel is thrown to the lions is because he refused to bow down to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who had taken Daniel and his friends captives during the exile of the southern kingdom. (The story of the fiery furnace in Daniel occurs under similar circumstances.)

Example #2 – The Book of Lamentations

Here’s another example of how this unified story can help you better understand the Bible. What is the Book of Lamentations about? If you don’t know, think about the title and ask yourself, “What would cause someone to lament?”

The Book of Lamentations was written by Jeremiah to capture the tragedy and the sorrow of God’s people being taken into exile. It is a poignant looking back to their life in Jerusalem while living in Babylon and the tears that are shed as a result of reflecting on that tragedy.

Example #3 – The Exodus

As you listen to a sermon in church, be aware of the different time periods that may be referenced. It is not uncommon for a passage of the New Testament to reference something in the Old Testament, particularly something as important

as the Exodus.

Your pastor may make a passing reference to that event or mention something important like the Passover. Now that you know the story, you have a firm grasp on what exactly happened in that event: liberation from slavery, the covenant at Sinai, lack of faith in entering the promised land, wandering in the desert, etc. These details help you to make better sense of something that is being shared.

At this point, you should be reading and reciting the Bible story until it is well fixed in your mind. Try repeating it to a few people for practice or maybe jot it down in outline form. Once you have mastered the story you will have established a great foundation for your study of the Bible.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Split out into groups and take turns memorizing and reciting the chapter headings again. Give people a chance to recite them out loud in front of others.
2. Split out into groups and take turns memorizing and reciting the shortened version of each chapter. Ask people to recite the barest of details for each event / chapter.

STUDY BREAK #1

At this point, it is perhaps best to take a break from the intensity of your studies. Memorization is hard work. Hopefully, you are gaining enough practice and are starting to feel more comfortable with the retelling of certain parts of the story.

Don't give up!

In this chapter, I wanted flesh out some additional benefits of knowing the Bible story. What you may not realize at first blush is that the Bible story is recounting some of the most important events, themes and figures in the entire Bible.

We can state this with certainty because:

- The Bible dedicates a ton of space to these elements (either in the first telling or subsequent ones)
- The impact of these elements can be felt throughout the rest of the Bible, sometimes in some very key places

Thus, as you memorize the story, you are memorizing a good deal of theology in the process, and that never hurts.

CRITICAL EVENTS IN THE BIBLE STORY

For starters, each of the chapters in the story touch upon the most critical moments in the biblical story.

Allow me to use Chapter 1 – Creation as a brief case study. One of the key points of this chapter has to do with Adam and Eve’s sin and the tragic and cosmic consequences of this disobedience. In one sense we can say that the rest of the Old Testament is a visual demonstration of the effects of that sin and God’s plans to undo those effects. For example, God’s calling of Abraham and the formation of the nation of Israel are all directly connected to God’s efforts to undo the disastrous consequences of Adam’s sin.

It is not until the coming of Jesus Christ, the second Adam according to Romans, that the effects of the first couple’s disobedience is completely redeemed.

Already, however, you can see how one small point in one chapter of the story (Chapter 1 – Creation (Adam’s fall) is HUGE in terms of how the rest of the Bible deals with that issue.

Another example of how our story records the Bible’s critical events comes from Chapter 4 – the Conquest.

The taking and the settling of the Promised Land is mainly recounted in the Book of Joshua. Joshua is the main character and he has inherited Moses’ mantle of leading God’s people.

If you’ll recall from Chapter 3 – The Exodus, Joshua was one of the few Israelites who was not intimidated by the inhabitants of the Promised Land. He was eager to take the land for he knew that God would provide the victory. The rest of God’s people were not so confident and therefore the whole nation suffered by wandering for 40 years in the desert.

In the taking and settling of the Promised Land, God began to complete one of his promises to Abraham, which he made to him in Genesis 12: I will give you a land as an inheritance.

That is a remarkable promise which took 430 years to complete.

In any case, the Promised Land plays a crucial part in Israel’s history for the next 1,000 years. God had promised to bless his people for obedience and to punish

them for disobedience. This up and down struggle is recorded for us through the time of the Judges, the Israelite monarchy, the Exile and finally the return from Exile.

In this way you can see that the taking of the Promised Land plays a major role in the rest of the Old Testament books starting with Joshua.

CRITICAL THEMES

Another important element of the Bible as story is that each chapter summarizes a lot of critical themes that runs across many parts of the Bible.

Take for example Chapter 1 – Creation with its transition. I have made a copy of that chapter below for your convenience:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth and human beings in his image. God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and to multiply and to have dominion over the earth. But before they could carry out God's commands, they sinned in disobedience to him. Sin entered the world through the disobedience of one man and both humanity and creation fell under God's judgment.

Transition—From this point forward, God set in motion a plan to redeem both humanity and creation from the curse of sin. This plan is the content for the rest of the Bible's story.

This chapter summarizes or expresses the following themes:

1. The creation of the universe *earth* animals
2. The creation of humanity in God's image
3. The cultural mandate to reproduce and have dominion over the earth
4. Adam and Eve's disobedience and sin
5. God's curse over humanity and creation
6. God's plan for redemption of both humanity and creation

Notice what these elements begin to tell us.

1. That God is a creator God and that he brought the universe and the earth into existence (through special or scientific means)
2. That human beings are created in God's image (they are of eternal value) and that their original mandate was to populate and govern the earth as God's representatives
3. That there is a source for the sin that we see in the world and the corruption of humanity and the created order
4. That both humanity AND creation have fallen under God's curse and that both humanity AND creation will be redeemed

When we think of Jesus' salvation, the New Testament writers tell us that:

1. Jesus is ushering in a new creation. That's why John 1:1-3 sounds like Genesis 1:1.
2. Salvation incorporates the earth and not just humanity (Romans 8:19, Revelation 21:1)
3. Adam is the source of sin (Romans 5:12)
4. Jesus' death means the end of sin, death and corruption (Matt 26:28, Acts 2:38; 1 Cor 15:57)
5. We have been restored to our original position as children of God and representatives here on earth

I am only briefly touching on some points that can be made from a quick reflection on Chapter 1 – Creation in the biblical story.

There are a lot more topics that I could cover that spring from this chapter including: the sacredness of work and marriage, the relational and creative aspects of being made in God's image, the care of the environment, the meaning of stewardship and the nature of sin just to name a few.

Suffice it to say that each of these summary chapters encapsulates many critical themes that play out in the course of reading the Bible. Once you have memorized this the story, you will begin to see these themes more and more and they will build your understanding of each chapter in ways you never would have expected.

CRITICAL FIGURES

Apart from shedding light on critical moments and themes in the Bible, each chapter should also orient you to the individual figures that underlie that part of the narrative.

For Chapter 1 – Creation, the main figures are Adam and Eve as well as God. For Chapter 2 – Patriarchs, the main characters are Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. For the Chapter 3 – Exodus, Moses is the primary figure. For Chapter 6 – United Kingdom we would be dealing with Saul, David and Solomon as the main characters.

All of these characters play a central role when they appear within their own chapter. In addition, they continue to reappear in other parts of the Bible, particularly in the New Testament with relation to Jesus.

The Gospel of Matthew, for example, portrays Jesus as the new Moses in the following ways: 1) Herod the king tried to murder him as a child; 2) he comes out of Egypt; 3) He is tempted in the desert for 40 days (think 40 years in the desert) and 4) He goes up to a mountain to teach the law. In this small example, we see that the story highlights certain Bible figures who make a regular appearance throughout.

CHAPTER 6 – CATEGORIZING THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE (STEP #4)

We should now take stock of where we have come from. Thus far you should have completely mastered the following steps: *Step #1* — You learned that the Bible tells one continuous and unified story.

Step #2 — You memorized the “central message” of the Bible and are able to explain the different terms and phrases.

Step #3 — You memorized the “Bible in 13 Chapters” story and are able to recount it to someone if needed.

Your next challenge is to break up the books of the Bible into manageable chunks. Our aim is to place all 66 books of the Bible into one of several categories. This will greatly decrease some of the confusion that surrounds them. Later on, we will integrate these categories into the Bible story you have already learned.

While these next few pages may seem very basic, it is worthwhile to assimilate the information as it will be useful to you as we go along with the rest of the book.

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

The first major division in the Bible is between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Here I think it's important that you pull out your trusty Bible and turn to the table of contents.

I mentioned before that my go to Bible was a red, grainy leather, Spirit-Filled Life Bible put out by Thomas Nelson Publishers. The General Editor is none other than Jack Hayford, a most beloved pastor and teacher in the Foursquare denomination who pastored the Church on the Way in Van Nuys, California for many years.

I actually came to faith under Pastor Hayford in 1992 (the year of the Rodney King riots in Los Angeles). Since I had not grown up in a religious household, I was like a sponge absorbing everything I could read and listen to in my early Christian days. I consider the year I spent at Church on the Way as an incredible time of growth as every Sunday I had the privilege of listening to the gifted and brilliant Dr. Jack Hayford.

But I digress.

If you open to the Table of Contents you can see that the 66 books in the Bible can be divided into 39 Old Testament books and 27 New Testament books. There is no easy device to remember these numbers, so you'll just have to establish them in your mind.

If you had to quickly summarize each Testament, it would go something like this:

The Old Testament — is primarily about the nation of Israel, God's covenant community, and the way in which God interacted with them throughout their history. Notice here that the first nine (9) chapters of the Bible's story are in view.

The New Testament — is primarily about Jesus Christ, the Christian church and the way in which the gospel of Jesus Christ was practically lived out within various Christian communities. Notice here that the last three (3) chapters of the Bible story are in view.

NOTICE THE SIZE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

You should also notice something else that's very important in these divisions: the amount of space taken up by the Old Testament. In my Bible, the Old Testament takes up 1381 pages, while the New Testament only fills 454 pages.

That is a dramatic difference.

Indeed, if you were to start reading the Old Testament on January 1, and read four chapters a day, you would not reach the New Testament until October (assuming you didn't crash and burn when you got to Leviticus in March!)

I only highlight this point to help you see that the Old Testament is an important aspect of your Christian life. You cannot easily discard it.

In addition, you cannot set up an antagonistic relationship between the two testaments, labeling the Old Testament as law and the New Testament as grace and then ignore the former. I've heard many Christians say, "The Old Testament no longer applies to Christians" or "God is only interested in people following rules in the Old Testament, whereas Jesus is all about love."

There is much error in these stereotypes.

First of all, why would God write a Bible, where 80% would be discarded after Jesus came? Second, there is only one way to please God whether in the Old or New Testaments, by faith. Israel had to live by faith. The law was not a means to earn salvation but a means to demonstrate that Israel had already been saved. Third, just because the Mosaic law went away after Jesus, does not mean that everything it stood for has now been abandoned. On the contrary, God still desires our undying devotion, holiness, right relationships and integrity, all things which the Mosaic law was meant to accomplish.

Finally we should add that both Jesus and the apostles embraced the Old Testament in their words and / or writings. Remember, the only Bible the first Christians had was the Old Testament. They used it to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, Paul's first letter was not written until 20 years after Christ (50 AD). The gospels were written anywhere from 20-40 years after that (70-90 AD) as were most of the other books of the New Testament.

CATEGORIZING THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

In order to make our job easier, we will begin with the categorization of the books of the Old Testament. As mentioned, there are 39 books in all and they fall into a very nice pattern. This is actually another one of my secrets for increasing your understanding of the Bible. Are you ready? Fix these numbers in your mind.

5 12 5 5 12

Looking at the series more closely, you can see that the first and the last two pairs of numbers are identical (5/12). The pattern breaks down in this way: 5/12 5 5/12

Now take a look at how this code allows you to categorize the books of the Old Testament:

5 books	12 books	5 books	5 books	12 books
Law	History	Poetry /Wisdom	Major Prophets	Minor Prophets

As you can see, this pattern corresponds to the number and order of books in a specific category within the Old Testament. These four basic categories are:

- *Law* — Which incorporates the books from Genesis to Deuteronomy
- *History* — Which incorporates the books from Joshua to Nehemiah
- *Poetry/Wisdom* — Which incorporates the books from Job to the Song of Solomon
- *Prophecy* — Which incorporates all of the prophetic books starting with Isaiah and ending with Malachi

It is important that you memorize the pattern of numbers and the category of literature that each number represents. You should be aware that there are other ways of referring to these categories. This is simply the way I do it.

We should also note one other important detail. While we refer to one category as *History* or another as *Poetry* or *Prophecy*, this does not mean that these categories contain only one type of literature. All of the Old Testament books

are in one sense *history* and many books contain *poetry* (not just the middle five referenced as Poetry / Wisdom.) Apart from this caveat, all of the books of the Old Testament fit neatly into these five categories.

If that doesn't cause you to stand up and cheer and send me thankful emails, then you are a hard person to impress (assuming you did not know this before you read this book).

In one simple formula, I have just helped you mentally rearrange all 39 books of the Old Testament. This is no mean feat considering how much confusion reigns regarding the Old Testament.

CATEGORIZING THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Compared to the Old Testament, categorizing the books of the New Testament will appear simpler in some ways. This is because there are fewer books overall. In addition, our knowledge of the New Testament tends to be much better than the Old Testament. (This is something that also requires attention in our churches, but that is a battle for another day.) In terms of categorizing the books of the New Testament, there is no simple secret formula to guide us so you'll just have to remember the order and number of the books in this way: 4 1 9 4 8 1

4 books	1 book	9 books	4 books	8 books	1 book
Gospels	History	Epistles			Apocalyptic
		Paul to Churches	Paul to Individuals	General Epistles	

There are four basic categories of books in the New Testament:

- *Gospels* — Matthew to John
- *History* — Acts
- *Epistles* — Romans to 3 John
- *Apocalyptic* — Revelation

Again, it is important that you fix each of these categories in your mind, as well as the number of books in each category.

The Gospels, History and Apocalyptic are fairly easy to remember since there are only four gospels, one book of history and one apocalyptic book.

The majority of the New Testament is composed of epistles. This makes sense, because after Jesus' death and resurrection what remains are a series of letters (from an apostle or church leader) to communities of faith showing them how to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ in a variety of contexts.

As an additional help, it is best to distinguish among the 21 epistles.

4 books	1 book	9 books	4 books	8 books	1 book
Gospels	History	Epistles			Apocalyptic
		Paul to Churches	Paul to Individuals	General Epistles	

Notice that 13 of the letters are credited to Paul. Within that category, 9 are directed to churches and 4 are directed to individuals. After that, the rest of the letters are categorized as General Epistles.

As we noted in our Old Testament section, you should also keep in mind that these categories do not limit the type of literature that exists in these books. All of the books in the New Testament contain *history* and even the book of Revelation is considered an *epistle* (Rev 1:4), which uses apocalyptic language to communicate its message.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Break into small groups and take some time to memorize the set of special numbers for the Old Testament books.
2. Now memorize the category of books which corresponds to the numbers for the Old Testament.
3. Break into small groups and take some time to memorize the set of special numbers for the New Testament books.
4. Now memorize the category of books which corresponds to the numbers for the New Testament.
5. Memorize the breakdown of numbers for the Epistles, taking care to identify how many books Paul wrote (to churches and individuals) and how many books are general epistles.

CHAPTER 7 – CATEGORIES AND THE STORY OF THE BIBLE (STEP #5)

Let's review what you have done so far: *Step #1* — You learned that the Bible tells one continuous and unified narrative.

Step #2 — You memorized the “central message” of the Bible and are able to explain the different terms and phrases.

Step #3 — You memorized the “Bible in 13 Chapters” story and are able to recount it to someone if needed.

Step #4 — You memorized the different categories of literature that are found in the Old and New Testaments.

After mastering Steps 1–4, your next step is to fit the different categories of literature into the Bible story. We list these categories again for your reference:

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE BIBLE'S STORY

We divided the Old Testament into four different categories of books: *Law, History, Poetry/Wisdom and Prophecy.*

The Books of the Law

The first five (5) books of the law (starting with Genesis) correspond to the first three chapters of the Bible story (Creation, Patriarchs, Exodus).

Law: 5 Books		
Creation	Patriarchs	Exodus

In other words, the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy tell us in greater detail what the Creation, Patriarch and Exodus chapters tell us in summary.

You can almost begin to piece the story together through the above mentioned books.

The story begins with creation and the story of Adam and Eve's sin (Gen 1-3), moves to God's covenant with Abraham and the rest of the patriarchs and their relocation to Egypt (Gen 12-50), slavery, Moses and the Exodus, the covenant at Sinai and the giving of the law (Exodus and Leviticus), the spying of the Promised Land, the refusal to enter and the wandering in the desert (Numbers) and the coming to the foot of the promised land once again to renew the covenant (Deuteronomy).

This rehearsal of the story will further ingrain it in your mind. In addition, there will come a time when you will begin to identify certain books with certain parts of the story. Even better, you will get to a point where you will be able to quickly summarize the content of each book based on where in the story it appears.

The Books of History

The next twelve (12) books called history correspond to chapters 4-9 of the Bible story, from the Conquest to the Return from Exile (starting with Joshua).

History: 12 Books					

Conquest	Judges	United Kingdom	Divided Kingdom	Exile	Return from Exile
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Here again, you can almost begin to piece together the story based on the chapters and the books.

Israel enters into the Promised Land (Joshua) but within one generation they have degenerated in idolatry that requires God to raise up judges to save them (Judges, Ruth). Soon after, they request a king and receive Saul, David and Solomon (1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings). But the kingdom eventually splits. God sends prophets to call the nation back but to no avail. Eventually they are sent into exile (2 Kings).

After they complete their exile, God's people return to the Promised Land to reestablish themselves (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther) **Poetry / Wisdom**

The five (5) books of poetry/wisdom are placed in the period of the United Kingdom because of their association with David and Solomon. (The odd one out is Job, which can be placed under Creation (since some of it deals with God and creation)).

Conquest	Judges	United Kingdom	Divided Kingdom	Exile	Return from Exile
			Poetry / Wisdom 5 Books		

Prophetical Books

Finally, all the books of the prophets slide into one of three time periods: Divided Kingdom, Exile or Return from Exile. Notice also that all of the major prophets spoke either within the Divided Kingdom or Exile.

Conquest	Judges	United Kingdom	Divided Kingdom	Exile	Return from Exile
			Major Prophets: 5 Books		
			Minor Prophets: 12 Books		

The fact that all of the prophets belong to only three time periods should already greatly reduce your confusion on these important books.

Do not lose sight of this important detail. Because there are so many prophetic books and because their themes overlap, we have a tendency to confuse them in our minds.

However, in the above chart, you should simply remember that all of the prophets speak only in three time periods and most speak before the period of the exile. This makes sense if God is trying to call his people back to holiness. This is God's full court press, a plea which falls on deaf ears with tragic consequences.

COMPARE TO TABLE OF CONTENTS FOR OT

At this point, you might find it useful to pull out your trusty Bible and open it to the table of contents. Notice the first division between the Old and New Testaments.

Next, as an exercise in reinforcement, count off the first five books and underline the fifth book in pencil, Deuteronomy. Write the word “Law” and a (5) next to that set. Count off the next 12 books and underline the last one, Esther and write the word “History” and a (12) next to that set. Continue in this way with the next sets of 5, 5 and 12, each time underlining the last book in each set, writing the category and then appropriate number next to that set.

Look at the list again for the Old Testament. Rehearse the divisions in your mind: Law, History, Poetry / Wisdom, Major Prophets and Minor Prophets. If you want to go deeper, memorize the first book for each set: Genesis, Joshua, Job, Isaiah, Hosea. Later on, I’ll take you through memorizing the order and name for each book so you won’t have to refer to your table of contents again. For now, simply rehearse the number of category for each set.

THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE BIBLE STORY

The Gospels correspond to the chapter on Jesus Christ in the Bible story. Acts is categorized as a book of history, and along with the 21 epistles, represent the chapter on the Christian Church. Revelation is categorized as an apocalyptic book and represents the chapter on the Return of Christ in the Bible story.

Jesus Christ	Birth and Growth of Christian Church		Return of Jesus
Gospel: 4 Books	History: 1 Book	Epistles: 21 Books	Apocalyptic: 1 Book

Compare to Table of Contents for NT

As before, you might find it useful to open up to the table of contents in your study Bible. Notice again the division between the Old and New Testaments.

Once again, mark off the numbered sets, underline the last book in each set and write down the category and number for each set: Gospels (4), History (1), Epistles (21) and Apocalyptic (1). To refine further, divide and mark off the epistles into for Paul (9 and 4) and General (8).

Look at the list again for the New Testament. Rehearse the divisions in your mind. If you want to go deeper, memorize the first book for each set down to the different types of epistles: Matthew, Acts, Romans, 1 Timothy, Hebrews and Revelation.

As a final reminder, it is important that you now begin to associate the different divisions of the Bible with their appropriate chapters in the Bible story. This means that when you think of the books of the Law, you must immediately think Creation, Patriarchs and Exodus. You should also remember that there are five (5) books of the Law.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Break into small groups and take some time to memorize the connections between the literary categories and the chapters in the Bible story in the Old Testament. Give people a chance to rehearse these sets in front of others.

- Books of the Law (5) – Creation, Patriarchs and Exodus
- History (12) – Conquest, Judges, United Kingdom, Divided Kingdom, Exile and Return from Exile
- Poetry / Wisdom (United Kingdom and Creation (for Job))
- Prophetic Books – Divided Kingdom, Exile and Return from Exile

2. Break into small groups and take some time to memorize the connections between the literary categories and the chapters in the Bible story in the New Testament. Give people a chance to rehearse these sets in front of others.

- Gospels (4) – Jesus Christ
- Epistles (21) – Christian Church
- Apocalyptic (1) – Return of Jesus

CHAPTER 8 – APPROACHING THE PROPHETICAL BOOKS

You might think it strange to carve out a section on the prophetic books. However, from my experience, this part of the Bible definitely has its “fuzzy” factor, probably more so than other parts of the Bible. I suspect this is because there are so many prophetic books (17 in all) and often it is hard to distinguish one prophet’s message from another.

Of course, books like Jonah or Daniel, which have a long history in children’s Sunday school classes, or certain favorite parts of Isaiah (chs. 9 and 53) seem to be the exception. All the other prophets, however, sort of blend into similar judgments, prophecies or promises for Israel.

In this section, I want to give you a broad framework by which you can approach your study of the prophetic books. Again, it is not my purpose to give you details of the contents of each book. You’ll have to do your own study and consult your own commentaries or dictionaries for that. However, this broad framework, which I will share, has been very useful for students in the past to help reduce confusion surrounding these important books.

Our first order of business is to review the periods of the Bible story in which the prophets spoke.

Conquest	Judges	United Kingdom	Divided Kingdom	Exile	Return from Exile
			Major Prophets: 5 Books		
			Minor Prophets: 12 Books		

As you can see, all of the prophets spoke during three periods of the history of salvation. In addition, no MAJOR prophet spoke during the Return from Exile. This fact alone should begin to remove some of the cobwebs from your mind regarding these books.

One additional detail is that most of the prophets spoke during the period of the Divided Kingdom *before* the exile. This makes logical sense. Prior to the exile, God was trying to reach his people with a message of reconciliation. He was begging them to repent and to return to the covenant which they had made with God in the desert. He was hoping his message would get through before he was

forced to take action given the nation's disobedience.

Clearly, it was to no avail.

Finally, we should note that three prophets spoke after the exile: Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

Haggai and Zechariah should be associated with the rebuilding of the temple since it was their encouragement which pushed the nation of Israel to complete the task of rebuilding.

THE MESSAGE OF THE PROPHETS

The prophetic books contain similar messages, which are summarized as follows:

1—The prophets summoned God’s people back to the covenant that they had made with God in the wilderness.

In a sense, all of the Old Testament (after the covenant) is an outworking of Israel’s faithfulness or lack of faithfulness to the covenant they made with God. When Israel obeyed, they prospered. When they didn’t, they suffered. (This fact also demonstrates just how important the covenant was and how traces of one book or chapter can be found much later in the other books of the Old Testament.)

2—The prophets warned Israel and/or Judah about their impending judgment if they failed to repent of their idolatry and injustice.

Often the prophets described these judgments as the “Day of the Lord,” when wickedness would be punished and the righteous would be liberated from their bondage.

3—The prophets called out the nation of Israel, its leaders and its people for their idolatrous, corrupt and unjust practices.

Many times, people believe that prophets are predicting the future in their messages. But predications represent a very small fraction of the prophets. Instead, a more accurate description would be that the prophets bring God’s word to bear on the situation of God’s people. More often than not, the prophets are simply pointing out the spiritual degradation of the nation and its leaders. In some sense, the modern day pastor in his / her preaching capacity would be the nearest equivalent to what the prophets of the Old Testament were doing in their day.

One of the key elements of the prophets is their call to leaders for social justice. They often pointed out not just idolatry, but injustice, unfair wages, exploitation, corruption, dishonest gain, greed and the lack of care for widows and orphans.

4—The prophets judged other nations that had been unfriendly toward Israel.

This went back to the Abrahamic covenant which stated: “I will bless those who

bless you and I will curse those who curse you.” The bottom line? If you mess with God’s people, you mess with God as well.

This is something that gets picked up in the New Testament when Jesus begins to refer to his church as his bride. Thus, when you mess with the bride, you mess with the groomsman as well.

5—The prophets encouraged God’s people during times of tragedy or difficulty.

The prophets were not all fire and brimstone. God had messages of consolation, hope and encouragement for his people during their difficult time of exile.

6—The prophets provided hope for the restoration of Israel and also promised the coming of a kingly Messiah.

After judgment, God was always waiting to restore his people. Some of that restoration came in the form of a returning to the promised land after the exile. At other times, God promised the ultimate restoration with the coming of Jesus Christ who would put all things right again.

7—The prophets reminded Israel of past judgments or reminded them of their royal heritage so as to motivate them to action and alertness.

After the exile, God’s people needed reminders of their royal identity and of their need for purity and holiness. They were not to fall into the same sinful traps as before and indeed, after the exile, Israel was never again removed from the promised land because of idolatry.

CERTAIN MESSAGES FOR CERTAIN PERIODS?

Some of the above messages naturally correlated with particular time periods (This is not to say they cannot be repeated in other periods). For example:

Prior to the exile—The prophets would more likely: call people back to their original covenant with God, call out the nation of Israel for its spiritual corruption, implore the people of God to repent from her idolatry, wickedness and disobedience to the covenant and warn people about impending judgment should they fail to repent.

During the exile—We would expect the prophets to provide more consolation and encouragement to deal with difficult times. In addition, the message of restoration would also be very prominent.

After the exile—A prophet's message would be to exhort and remind the people of past judgments. In addition, the prophets would remind God's people regarding their heritage or identity in order to motivate them to faithfulness and alertness.

Naturally, there are many more themes within the prophets than the seven I have suggested above, and it is not good to press the message of a prophet too strictly into a particular time period. Repentance, judgment, consolation, hope for restoration, promise of a Messiah and exhortation do appear in each time period. The purpose of the above division is to highlight that certain messages will at least be more prominent in certain time periods.

This stands to reason. If you want people to change their behavior, you want to sound the clarion call that judgment is coming. This is exactly what happened. The majority of the prophets spoke within the period of the divided kingdom hoping that God's people could avoid their exile.

When the people had been taken away, then comfort, exhortation and promises of restoration are in order. When the people return from exile, encouragement and reminders of their past sin and their lineage are important so that the people will rebuild and not fall into the same traps as before.

The books of Haggai and Zechariah are wonderful examples of this final type of message. Both prophets spoke after the exile. Their message was meant to counter the disinterest and discouragement that set in during reconstruction of

the temple. In Zechariah's case, however, this encouragement was rooted in visions of a day when the Messiah would rule from a restored temple in a restored city. Thus the promise of restoration was brought together with the promises about the Jewish Messiah.

TIPS FOR TELLING THE PROPHETS APART

In order to get a better handle on the prophets as a whole, it is worthwhile to memorize certain unique aspects for some of the prophetic books.

Isaiah—is the prophet who predicts the messiah’s virgin birth and the atoning death of Jesus Christ (Isa. 53). This is the passage, which the Ethiopian eunuch was reading when Phillip joined him in his carriage (Acts 8).

Jeremiah—suffered through the tragedy of the exile to Babylon and poignantly captured the feelings of loss in Lamentations.

Daniel—hardly bears highlighting, however, he too was an exile to Babylon, who managed to live a life of purity in a pagan world and who had visions regarding the future kingdoms of the world.

Hosea—is the prophet whose wife was unfaithful, a story, which God used to denounce Israel’s unfaithfulness to himself.

Joel—is known for the judgment of the plague of locusts. This judgment takes on the title of the “Day of the Lord,” which Peter interprets as the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Amos—preached mostly to the northern kingdom, Israel. Although other prophets included the northern kingdom in some of their preaching, the fact that most of the attention was directed toward Judah demonstrates God’s favor toward David and his kingdom. This is also one of the reasons God chose to extend the southern kingdom 135 years longer than the northern kingdom as we saw in Chapter 7 – the divided kingdom.

Jonah and Nahum—preached only to Nineveh, a secular city.

Obadiah—preached only to Edom, a secular nation.

Habakkuk—prophesies in the form of a dialog with God. He wonders why God does not step in to stem the evil that he sees around him. Habakkuk eventually changes his attitude toward God from doubt to faith. “The just shall live by faith,” which Paul quotes in Romans 1:17 comes from Habakkuk.

Haggai and Zechariah—were post-exilic prophets who tried to encourage the former exiles to take up the construction of God’s temple.

Malachi—is the last prophet (and the last book) of the Old Testament.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. During what time periods did the prophets speak?
2. Can you give one interesting or noteworthy fact about each of the prophetic books above?
3. Why do we divide the prophets into MAJOR and MINOR prophets?
4. Why is it important to know that Daniel was an exile in Babylon within the Book of Daniel?
5. Can you summarize the 7 main messages of the prophets?
6. Can you summarize which messages would be more likely to be spoken during which time periods?

STUDY BREAK #2

It is perhaps time to take another break to gather your thoughts. You have accomplished much in the last 5 steps.

You should take a deep breath and congratulate yourself. You are already light years ahead of most people who pick up the Bible to study it. This is not meant as a criticism. It is just part of our reality in the evangelical / Christian world.

I offer myself up as an example, which I have learned is fairly typical.

I became a Christian in 1992 and for the next 10 years I faithfully attended a Sunday church service and Sunday school classes. In addition, I was involved in some kind of small group Bible study for most of that time period. This means I listened to hundreds of sermons and completed many Bible studies over that time period.

And after all of that effort, I was still clueless about the Bible.

I was clueless about how we got our Bible, about the one unified story, about its major themes, all of that. Forget about being able to recite a 20-minute monologue that purported to explain all of the major events, figures and themes of the Bible. I had never been taught nor had I ever hear anyone recite it in my years as a Christian.

Why was that? Why didn't anyone sit me down in that 10-year period and walk me through this most basic of structures?

OUR FRAGMENTED BIBLE

I asked myself these very same questions in my Bible Institute courses and Bible studies I facilitated. How could the average Christian not be familiar with this story and at least be able to provide its basic outline? While I could not answer definitively, I had my suspicions and it had to do with the way evangelical Christians had been taught to approach the Bible.

Many of us, I'm sure, have grown up with what I would call the encyclopedia approach to the Bible. This method essentially teaches that the Bible has something to say on every topic known to man and that in order to solve whatever problem we might be experiencing, we need only to piece together what the Bible says about that topic.

We see this approach on the shelves of Christian bookstores in books dealing with prayer, fasting, keeping the Sabbath, marriage, parenting and conflict resolution. There are even Christian books that talk about running a business and planning a biblical meal plan or garden (my guess is that pork chops are not on the menu).

Thus, most people approach the Bible seeking comfort or advice in its pages, but in a very fragmented way. If you need advice on how to forgive, you do a quick search on scriptures having to do with forgiveness. In the end, we sacrifice a holistic approach to the Bible for one that is very piece-meal.

To put a finer point on this matter, many evangelical Christians believe that EVERY last word of the Bible has something important to say to us as Christians, parents, citizens, employees or students living in the 21st century.

We believe there is something like a magical quality to the Bible that no matter where we happen to land, God will always be waiting to give us guidance or advice to all of our life's situations.

Now clearly I believe that God speaks to us through his word and that he has quite a bit to say to us about different situations in life. But that is far different than saying that no matter where I land in the Bible, I can simply read what is on the page and God will have a message for me that is specific to my situation. This happens on some occasions, but that is not the norm.

And so, somewhere along the way, as we were taught to read and study the Bible, we were given this encyclopedic approach. We thus felt comfortable simply opening up to a book or passage of the Bible, in isolation, and gleaning what we thought the passage meant to us in that moment.

In Bible studies I have attended it is common to hear phrases like, “well, what I feel God is telling me in this passage is...” or “what strikes me in this passage is...” or “what this passage means to me is...” I myself used to say things exactly like that.

My purpose in this book is not to remove the Bible from its sacred location in your life or to make it seem less extraordinary than it really is. I’ve been ministering long enough to experience the supernatural claims that the Bible makes about itself. So it’s not a question of whether God’s word has power but rather how we think that power can be understood or appropriated.

Besides, I think it was pretty sad that after sitting in church for 10 years, I still had relatively little clue about the Bible’s story that would allow me to reframe every element, book, figure or event within its pages.

A PASSION IS BORN

And so, this has now become my passion.

The Bible is not an encyclopedia but rather an awesome novel with God at the center and you as a primary character in a grand cosmic drama.

I want you to learn this Bible story. I want you to recite it often. I want you to teach it to your kids (your own or those you teach in Sunday school).

If you are a pastor, I want you to teach this method from the pulpit and then encourage your associate pastors (if you are in a bigger church) to push it out to their respective circles of influence.

If you are a Bible professor, I want this to be the first thing you teach to your students. If you are a small group leader, teaching this story should be your first order of business.

I want you to get creative and use images to tell this story and then post videos about it on YouTube.

I want every Christian to memorize this story and change how we approach, read, study and teach the Bible.

CHAPTER 9 – THE ORDER AND BOOKS OF THE BIBLE (STEP #6)

Step #6 represents the final step in this method for better understanding the Scriptures. If you have been diligent to this point you will have already mastered the first five steps:

Your final step is to memorize the order of the books of the Bible. While this might seem like a tall order, it is easier than you might think.

This final step serves two main purposes. First of all, it continues to reinforce everything you have done up to this point, whether it is memorizing the Bible story, the central message of the Bible or the categories of Bible books.

Knowing the order of the books of the Bible helps in your retelling of the story. This is particularly the case with the Law and History books that you learned for the Old Testament.

Having a better grasp of the Bible story gives you a better sense for the main themes of each individual book of the Bible. When the theme of each book becomes clearer, you are able to fill in more details in the Bible story, and so on.

More importantly however, memorizing the order of the books of the Bible begins the process of expanding your understanding of the Bible down to the individual books and their related content. In time, you will not only know the names of each book, but you will intimately know each book's structure, main themes and storylines and even an outline. This final step of my method forms the basis for an even deeper knowledge of Bible.

From a practical standpoint, knowing the order of the books of the Bible can be an extremely helpful tool or resource in your Christian life. Think back to a service, Bible study or face-to-face chat with someone, where you thumbed helplessly through your Bible searching for a specific biblical citation. Are you someone that always has to look at the table of contents to find a book in the Bible?

Those days are over now!

MEMORIZING THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS

As stated earlier, there are four separate categories of books in the Old Testament. The table below lists each of those categories, the number of books within each set as well as the names of the individual books.

Law (5)	History (12)	Poetry / Wisdom (5)	Prophets (5/12)	
			Major (5)	Minor (12)
Genesis	Joshua	Job	Isaiah	Hosea
Exodus	Judges	Psalms	Jeremiah	Joel
Leviticus	Ruth	Proverbs	Lamentations	Amos
Numbers	1 Samuel	Ecclesiastes	Ezekiel	Obadiah
Deuteronomy	2 Samuel	Song of Salomon	Daniel	Jonah
	1 Kings			Micah
	2 Kings			Nahum
	1 Chronicles			Habakkuk
	2 Chronicles			Zephaniah
	Ezrea			Haggai
	Nehemiah			Zechariah
	Esther			Malachi

From my experience, the best way to complete this task is to simply commit the order of the books straight to memory. You can probably do a search on the web to find some very interesting and creative ways to get the job done. Whatever works for you is what is important. Just remember, my approach is to try to integrate every step with the others, so I don't want to get too far off track.

If you know the Bible story, the categories of literature, their place in the Bible story and the pattern of numbers, then the memorization of the order of the books becomes so much easier.

TIPS FOR MEMORIZING THE ORDER OF THE OT BOOKS

Your first order of business, however, is to keep the categories of literature firmly in your mind, and the number of books within each category. You may recall the numbered pattern we learned earlier: 5-12-5-5-12.

The first five books should be fairly easy: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

The next twelve I usually memorize in the following sets: Joshua, Judges, Ruth then 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles then Ezra, Nehemiah, Ester. Notice that a set of three books is followed by a repetitive pattern of numbered “1 and 2” books, which is followed by a set of three books. The pattern of the historical books can be written this way: 3, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2, 3

The next five books of poetry/wisdom start with Job. You can remember this by saying, “Though Job suffered, he was first in the end.” This is followed by Psalms and Proverbs. These are followed by Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon, both books attributed to Solomon. A good tip when looking for the Psalms in your Bible is to open to the halfway point. You will end up in either Psalms or Proverbs. (If you have children, teach them this trick as a sure way to impress their friends!)

The next five books of prophecy begin with Isaiah. When you think of the major prophets, you must think of Isaiah as the granddaddy of them all. Think of Isaiah 53. Next come two books attributed to Jeremiah, which are Jeremiah and Lamentations. You want to think Exile with Jeremiah. He was there when it happened and his Lamentations is a book of tears for the destruction of his beloved Jerusalem. The prophets end with Ezekiel and Daniel.

The minor prophets are probably the hardest category for people to memorize, so here’s a little memory device courtesy of a quick web search (“Hostile janitors, ambushing old jeeps, might need help zapping huge zombie menace.” The original wording was “Hostile Japanese” but I didn’t want to perpetuate any stereotypes so I changed it.)

You can also split the minor prophets into groups of three and know that Hosea is number 1 and Malachi is number 12. After that it is simply a matter of learning their order. Hosea, Joel, Amos *Obadiah*, *Jonah*, *Micah* Nahum,

Habakkuk, Zephaniah / Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. It might help to know that Haggai and Zechariah spoke after the exile to encourage God's people to rebuild the temple and their former way of life. This way, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi can be memorized as one set all falling within the period of the Return from Exile.

In whatever format you choose, memorizing the order of the books of the Bible will be surprisingly fruitful for you as you continue in your understanding of the Scriptures.

MEMORIZING THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

There are four separate categories of books in the New Testament. The table below lists each of those categories, the number of books within each set as well as the names of the individual books.

Gospels (4)	History (1)	Epistles - Pauline (9/4)		Epistles General (8)	Apocalyptic (1)
		To churches	To individuals	Hebrews	Revelation
Matthew	Acts	Romans	1 Timothy	James	
Mark		1 Corinthians	2 Timothy	1 Peter	
Luke		2 Corinthians	Titus	2 Peter	
John		Galatians	Philemon	1 John	
		Ephesians		2 John	
		Philippians		3 John	
		Colossians		Jude	
		1 Thessalonians			
		2 Thessalonians			

The gospels should be fairly easy given that they are probably the best known part of the New Testament, not to mention the Bible: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The Book of Acts, which chronicles the life of the Christian church, follows quite naturally after the chronicles of the life of Jesus.

The epistles are ordered in terms of their size. Romans is the biggest and begins the set of Pauline epistles. 1 and 2 Corinthians follow. After this, you can memorize the order of the next four books with a little memory device: **General Electric Power Company**. This corresponds to Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. Next is 1 and 2 Thessalonians. You can see here that after Romans, Paul's epistles to the churches begin and end with two numbered sets of books.

Paul's four personal letters also begin with a numbered set: 1 and 2 Timothy. Then Titus, then Philemon.

The general epistles begin with Hebrews and James. After this there are two

groups of numbered sets: 1 and 2 Peter; 1, 2 and 3 John. Finally, there is Jude.

Revelation rounds out the last group and is a single apocalyptic book.

Here again, I have found that straight memorization works best. If you need memory devices, that's no problem, but over time the order of the books should become almost second nature to you and you will not need to depend on anything else except your knowledge to recall them.

At the end of the day, it is your effort that is going to reward you. There are no shortcuts (memory devices notwithstanding). There is only you, your desire to multiply your Bible knowledge and the benefit that will rebound to your spiritual life when you master the principles I've presented to you in this book.

As a final encouragement, make the learning of the Bible books a competition between yourself and a friend, your kids, significant other or people in your church.

Play Bible drills where one person calls out a Bible verse and see who can find that verse in the quickest amount of time.

In time you will begin to separate the Bible into huge chunks and you will know more or less where the prophets or the historical books are. Of course, you'll already have a feel for the location of the books of the law or the gospels, which initiate both the Old and the New Testaments, respectively.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Discuss with people why memorizing the order of the books of the Bible might prove important. Ask people to supply their own reasons.
2. Spend some time memorizing the order of books in each category. Start with the Books of the Law and work your way through the Old Testament and the New Testament categories and books. Make sure to give people a chance to practice in front of others.
3. Seek out suggestions for easier ways to memorize the order of the books.
4. Set a timeframe for the group or the class to memorize the order of the books of the Bible. Create competitions and let people practice reciting these lists in front of others. You can break down the list by categories or simply ask a volunteer to recite the entire list of 66 books for a really big prize.

Make sure to reward people for their study and efforts.

CHAPTER 10 – PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

We have come to the end of what I hope has been an eye-opening and wonderful learning experience for you. If you have done your homework, you should:

#1 — Know that the Bible tells one continuous and unified story.

#2 — Know the central message of the Bible and how to explain the various terms.

#3 — Be able to share the Bible story in 13 chapters with others.

#4 — Know the different literary categories of the Bible and the number of books that fit into each category.

#5 — Know how the different literary categories are connected to the Bible story.

#6 — Know the name and order of the books of the Bible.

If you have put in the proper effort on the previous six (6) steps, you are now in possession of a framework for the Bible that will serve you for the rest of your life. The Bible is no longer just a mish-mash of people, books, events and stories. (Now it's an ordered mish-mash of people, books, events and stories!)

Just kidding!

Think about Adam, Moses, Joshua, Samson, David, Elijah, Daniel, Nehemiah, Jesus, Paul and John of Patmos. If you know your Bible story you should immediately recognize that these figures belong in the following chapters: Creation, Exodus, Conquest, Period of Judges, United Kingdom, Divided Kingdom, Exile, Return from Exile, Jesus Christ, Christian Church and Return of Christ.

Think of the creation account, the fall, Abraham sacrificing Isaac, Joseph being sold into slavery, the plagues of Egypt, the ten commandments, the sin of Achan, Gideon's fleece, David slaying Goliath, Nebuchadnezzar seeing the handwriting on the wall, Nehemiah building the walls of Jerusalem, Jesus walking on water, the Spirit at Pentecost, Paul's preaching in Athens, and the list could go on.

Again, with some thought, I'm quite certain you could place these events within

the larger Bible story. (The chapters would be: Creation, Patriarchs, Exodus, Conquest, Judges, United Kingdom, Exile, Return from Exile, Jesus Christ, the Christian Church.)

The next time you slog your way through Leviticus, think about the Bible story and the chapter on Exodus, and about how God led his people out of slavery in Egypt, gave them a constitution at Mount Sinai, and then provided them with a holiness code within this marvelous book. Leviticus defines a way to worship God and to serve him in holiness, right down to the type of food that Israel ate and the type of clothes that the people wore.

The next time you listen to a sermon or teaching, see if you can pick out or fill in certain parts of the Bible story or the central message of the Bible.

If you choose to go in-depth on a particular book, this only fills in the details for a particular chapter of the Bible story. If you pick up a theme in one particular book, you now have the ability to survey the Bible story and a summary of each book to see how that theme is developed in other chapters and in other books.

Different themes can be traced throughout the Bible now that you have a wider view of its contents. Creation, covenant, Exodus, shepherd-king, salvation, idolatry, *etc.* are repeatedly stressed throughout the Scriptures.

In fact, what is fascinating as you learn more and more about the Bible is the way in which the New Testament authors take over and reinterpret these same themes. Matthew presents Jesus as a new Moses who comes out of Egypt and who reinterprets the law from upon a mountain (see the Beatitudes). Paul says that in Christ we are a new creation and that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

These are just some of the avenues you can pursue by having this framework in mind. The sky is the limit for you.

GOING DEEPER

In this final section, I want to give you three additional avenues of exploration if you want to take your Bible study to another level.

The first avenue actually represents a final step in the methodology I have been teaching you to this point. I purposely chose to leave this step out because it would have significantly changed the size and scope of this book and I didn't want to discourage your progress.

However, if you want to go deeper, the final step in this method is to memorize a small summary of each book of the Bible. Perhaps the easiest way to approach this task is by searching the Internet for "Summary of Bible Books" or something along those lines. This should provide you with little snippets of each book, which you can then begin to internalize and integrate with the other six steps in this book. In the appendix, I have provided a sample of what this task would entail for the books of the Law and the books of History.

My second suggestion for you, which will pay off handsomely in the long run is to sit down with your [study Bible](#) and read through the introductions for every book. This is a long-term project, which can be done incrementally as part of an overall regimen of serious Bible study. As you read each introduction, let your mind ruminate over the previous six steps within this book and seek to make more and more connections between those steps and the individual contents of each book.

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE SERIES

My third suggestion for you is that you complete the next two lessons in my series on How to Study the Bible:

Part 2 – Basics of How to Study the Bible

Part 3 – Advanced Techniques for Going Deeper into the Bible

These two lessons assume a knowledge of this book, *Understanding the Bible Through Story* and incorporate the methodology of the Bible as story in the Bible study techniques that I teach you.

Part 3 of my curriculum is a video course I am very excited about that delves into some advanced techniques for going deeper into the Bible. The course is currently titled *The 7 Rules of Bible Interpretation EVERY Christian Should Know*. This may change in the future based on a tighter integration of all of my bible study curriculum, but the concepts will remain the same.

Readers of this book have access to that course at a special discount price of \$49.00. That's a discount of 50% from the regular price of \$95.00.

Use the link => [7 Rules for readers of this book](#).

I developed the 7 Rules course because I wanted Christian to step beyond the Inductive Bible Study method in their study of the Bible. Now I am a big fan of the Inductive Bible Study method. It's the way I first learned to read and study the Bible for personal growth. However, I believe that every Christian has the capacity to learn how to use the "professional" Bible study tools.

Up until now, students had to pay high tuition rates to take a course on Bible Interpretation or Hermeneutics (fancy seminary term). However, my course takes the concepts that one learns in that class, simplifies them and then makes them available for a wider audience.

In other words, you'll be learning what the professional ministers have already learned and you'll be able to apply that learning in the same way.

In that course you'll learn:

- 1) How to study a whole book of the Bible and why that's important.

- 2) How to use an online Bible concordance to do serious word or topical studies.
- 3) How to use a Bible dictionary to do in-depth cultural studies about things you don't understand in the Bible.
- 4) How your biases get in the way of accurately reading the Bible.
- 5) How the context of a passage (what surrounds it) is important to its understanding.

And so much more.

For Christians who are part of a small group, this course will flat out prepare you for every study, giving you insights and advice that you can share with your group. If you lead a small group Bible study or Sunday school class, this advanced Bible study techniques course will give you the confidence and the knowledge to give your group so much more than before.

That's my pitch anyway. Here's the link again if you are interested in taking that course for a discount: [7 Rules Book](#)

A FINAL PLEA

In order to maximize what you have gained to this point I am now asking you to make one additional and very important commitment.

I want you to take what you have learned in this book and I want you to teach it to one other person. It can be a friend, a relative, people within your small group or Sunday school, or whomever you wish. If you like, you can simply give them a copy of this book and offer to walk them through the different steps of the Bible as story.

If you are a pastor, I am asking you for an even greater commitment. Assuming this is not already the case, I want you to disseminate the Bible as story approach in this book throughout your church in your preaching, to your associate ministers, small group leaders, small groups and Sunday school classes. If you need multiple copies of this book, feel free to contact me (gustavok@karakey.com) for group discounts.

Remember, every penny of proceed from the sale of these books is passed on to fund the purchase of books and training for pastors and leaders of the Latin American church. As your congregation begins to reorient their Bible learning around the Bible story, students like [Argemiro Díaz](#) will be gaining valuable training in order to impact whole churches and generations for Christ.

Teaching these principles is one of the surest ways to cement this information in your mind. If this approach to the Bible has been helpful for you, you now have a responsibility to educate others regarding the things you have learned.

The power of the story is your biggest ally in this endeavor. As you have learned it, you can encourage others who might be timid or even intimidated by the prospect of this challenge.

CONCLUSION

Let me finish by saying that I hope that you have been blessed by this journey into a better understanding of the Bible. I know that your faith is important to you, otherwise, you would not have made it to the end of this book.

My ultimate prayer for you is that you would become a serious and mature student of God's word, that you would mine the depth and riches of that word, and that this knowledge would draw you closer to God, his Son, his Spirit and his will for your life.

The sky's the limit!

May you be continually blessed (and transformed) as you continue your study of the Bible.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Test people's knowledge of the Bible in 13 Chapters. You can do this through a form of competition.
2. Divide into groups and have each team create a series of index cards with the name of a bible figure. On the back, have them locate the chapter in the Bible story where this figure is found. Now, test each other by seeing if people can name the chapter.
3. Repeat this exercise with different events, narratives, stories or details in the Bible.
4. Repeat this exercise but this time with the names of each Bible book
5. Note: The creation of the index cards is also part of the learning process since people will have to connect each figure, story or book with each chapter in the Bible in 13 Chapters story.
6. Test to see if anyone can remember the titles for each of the 13 chapters
7. Test to see if anyone can remember the central message of the Bible and the deeper definition of each of the terms.

APPENDIX A – SAMPLE SUMMARY OF OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS

As I mentioned in the section “Putting It All Together,” a final step in my approach to understanding the Bible is for you to learn a small summary of each book of the Bible.

You can download several summaries from the Internet by doing a quick search on “Summary of Bible Books” or something similar. Separate out each literary category of the Bible (law, history, poetry/wisdom, etc.) and then memorize each summary in turn, using the following techniques:

SUMMARIZING THE BOOKS OF THE LAW

Your first order of business is to recall each literary category, its place within the Bible story, the number of books in each category and the order of the books.

Law: 5 Books		
Creation	Patriarchs	Exodus

Next, walk through the narrative of the history of salvation in your mind. If you need help don't be shy about using the earlier narratives in this book. After this, try to memorize a brief summary of the books of the law. I have summarized them in the following way: *Genesis*—God creates the universe, the earth and man. Man falls into sin. Both man and the universe fall under the curse of sin. God sets in motion a plan to redeem both man and the world beginning with a covenant with Abraham. The rest of *Genesis* relates the lives of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, ending with the people of God living in Egypt.

Exodus—A new pharaoh enslaves the people of God, who cry out for deliverance. God raises up Moses through whom he delivers his people and guides them to Mount Sinai. God gives his people laws, a constitution by which to live. The people of God become the nation of God. God orders the building of his tabernacle so that he can dwell amongst his people.

Leviticus—God gives laws to his people, governing their sacrifices and festivals. In addition, God gives a set of purity laws to his people, including dietary restrictions to keep them holy.

Numbers—Israel lacks faith in entering the Promised Land. God punishes Israel by making them wander in the desert for forty years until all of the adult generation that came out of Egypt has died. The book of *Numbers* takes its name from the census that is conducted at the beginning of the book to count the number of men in order to determine the size of God's army that would have conquered the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy—"Deuteronomy" means "the second law" and is basically a recounting of the laws that God previously gave to his people at Mount Sinai. The reason the laws are repeated is because the adult generation that came out of

Egypt has passed away and a new generation must renew their covenant with God.

As you can see, our summary of each of the five books of the Law is nearly a word for word retelling of the history of salvation narrative. This is one of the many wonderful benefits of learning and being able to share the Bible story. As you grow more confident regarding the content of the larger salvation narrative, you will learn the major content of many books of the Bible. Conversely, as you grow in your understanding of each of the books of the Bible, you will fill in a greater and greater amount of detail within the Bible story.

SUMMARIZING THE HISTORICAL BOOKS

Here is the same process for summarizing the books of history. Again, you must recall the first five steps that I have shown you.

There are twelve (12) books in the group called history. These trace the Bible story from the Conquest to the Return from Exile.

History: 12 Books					
Conquest	Judges	United Kingdom	Divided Kingdom	Exile	Return from Exile

Joshua—After Israel’s renewal of the covenant in Deuteronomy (at the foot of the promised land), the Book of Joshua narrates the conquest of this land and the division of the land among the twelve tribes of Israel.

Judges—After Joshua’s death, the people of God began a cycle of sin which included: idolatry, judgment of God by an invading army, the people’s repentance and clamor for deliverance, raising of a judge and the peace of God’s people. This cycle repeats itself twelve times in the Book of Judges.

Ruth—Occurring during the time of the judges, this book tells the story of a foreigner called Ruth, who becomes part of God’s people through marriage.

1 and 2 Samuel—Narrates the establishment of the ministry of the prophet Samuel who anoints Saul as the first king of Israel and is witness to the rise of the United Kingdom in Israel. These books then trace Saul’s demise and David’s ascendance and kingship.

1 and 2 Kings—Narrates Solomon’s kingship, the divided kingdom of Israel and Judah, and God’s judgment of his disobedient people into exile.

1 and 2 Chronicles—Narrates David and Solomon’s kingship as well as a selection of southern kings and Judah’s judgment into exile. First and Second Chronicles is written for the people who returned from exile as a way to encourage them in their faith. They were spiritual heirs of David and Solomon and God would not forget the promises he made to David and to his people. Thus, David and Solomon are portrayed in a more positive light, and only the southern kingdom (Judah) is highlighted.

Ezra and Nehemiah—These two books should be seen as one volume. They narrate the return of the exiles from Babylon in three different groups. One is lead by Zerubbabel, who begins to rebuild the temple. Another is lead by Nehemiah, who rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem. A third is lead by Ezra the scribe, who teaches God’s people the law and reestablishes the worship of God and Israel’s festivals.

Esther—Occurs during the exile of Israel and retells the story of Queen Esther, a Jew who saves her people from an evil plot to destroy them.

Again, you can see how the historical books trace the Bible story quite closely. With the exception of Ruth and Esther, every other book has a direct connection to this Bible story. Ruth comes after the Book of Judges, and takes place in the time of the judges (Ruth 1:1). Esther is the last of the historical books and takes place after the exile, when some Israelites still lived in the territories where they had been exiled.

It is probably best to treat 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings as one extended narrative of the Israelite monarchy, from its inception in a United Kingdom, to its division and the eventual exile of the kingdoms.

First and Second Chronicles always seems to present a mystery for people reading the Bible because it repeats, word for word, many of the narratives in 1 and 2 Kings. To understand Chronicles, it is best to think of the purpose for Chronicles.

These books were written to encourage the exiles upon their return to Jerusalem. The author’s goal for Chronicles is that the exiled community would once again recapture their identity as a kingdom of God’s chosen people. Thus, only the kingdom of Judah is highlighted, and many of the negative exploits of their kings, including those of Saul, David and Solomon are downplayed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



GUSTAVO KARAKEY was born in Durango, Mexico and grew up in Southern California. In 1992, at the age of 27, he came to faith in Christ and shortly thereafter moved to Boston to marry his future wife. They now have three children.

Gustavo has been a member of Park Street Church in Boston for 19 years.

From 2004–2008, together with his family, he served as a Park Street Church missionary to Paraguay teaching Bible and theology at the Methodist Bible Institute outside of Asunción. He was also privileged to pastor a small rural church (La Iglesia Metodista de Matachi) for two years.

From 2011-2015, Gustavo and his family relocated to beautiful Medellín, Colombia where Gustavo served as a professor of New Testament at the Biblical Seminary of Colombia (BSC).

In addition, from 2009 to the present Gustavo has served as a guest lecturer for Gordon-Conwell's Hispanic Ministries division teaching courses in the Dominican Republic and Peru to national pastors throughout Latin America.

In 2015, Gustavo and his family relocated back to Boston where Gustavo continues to serve as an off-site professor for the BSC. His roles incorporate virtual teaching and yearly visits to Medellín to conduct intensive residential courses and seminars.

Gustavo's passion is to help develop pastors and leaders for the church in Colombia and Latin America as well as to prepare missionaries from Colombia for the unfinished task of global missions.

Gustavo has an MDIV and Th.M. in New Testament from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Massachusetts. He is currently working on his doctorate in New Testament through the London School of Theology. His thesis is the Unique Contributions of the Shepherd Image in Luke, 1 Peter and John.

IMPORTANT: The proceeds from this book will be used to support seminary training for pastors and leaders in Colombia and throughout Latin America. As you may know, the need for theological education is critical as the church in Latin America continues to grow and as it becomes a missionary sending force.

To learn more about the critical ministry of theological education and leadership development and how you can further support this important work please visit Gustavo's website: www.karakey.com.

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