

Introducing the *Historical Backbone of the Bible*

How well do you know God's 'Story'?

The first words of the New Testament (Matthew 1:1-17) trace the biblical history from Abraham (Genesis 12) to David (1-2 Samuel) to the Exile (2 Kings) and on to the birth of Jesus the Christ. A basic knowledge of this history is presumed for comprehending the Gospel of Matthew, and necessary for an informed understanding of what God is communicating to us in the New Testament.

The “Historical Backbone of the Bible” is a project to get you into God’s ‘Story’ so you can find your bearings and direction for life, and grow toward spiritual maturity.

Below I suggest portions of the Old Testament which follow the historical framework in Matthew 1. You will note that much of the history between the Exile and the birth of Jesus (approximately 400 B.C. to 4 B.C.) is not related in the Old Testament documents. Nevertheless, this history was well-known to the readers of Matthew's Gospel, and is well attested in other historical records. This period is often called the 'Inter-Testamental' period because it is between the Old and New Testaments. During this time, there was the conquest of Palestine by the Greeks (initially under Alexander the Great) followed by the Romans who were politically and militarily dominant during the history of the New Testament.

The recommended reading of the Bible covers 370 chapters. Be a “big” reader – don't just read a few verses here and there; read whole chapters and sections. Get to know God's 'Story'.

Don't read too much at once, otherwise you will tire and give up. Don't read too little at once, otherwise you won't get the 'story-line'. If, for example, you read 4 chapters/day, 6 days/week, this will take about 15 weeks; if you read more it will take less time. Choose your own pace with a view to comprehension and sustainability.

It will be helpful to read a translation of the Bible that is in the 'language of your heart' meaning either a version in modern English, or a version in your own 'native' language, if that is not English.

I strongly encourage you to **read in partnership with others**. You can do this by getting together for coffee or a meal, or talking on the telephone, regularly. In this way, you can share some of your observations and questions, and encourage one another.

If you are reading the Bible for the first time, your primary goal is to learn something of the relationship of major biblical characters with significant historical events, and to get a sense that this is God's 'Story' as he continues to act through history for the recovery of the earth and its inhabitants. Don't get bogged down or side-tracked. If you have difficulties or questions, write them down for later. Read to get a working knowledge of the larger 'Story'.

There is a resource to accompany your reading at johnbmacdonald.com/Resources called “[Historical Backbone of the Bible: a guided journey of the historical narrative of the Bible](#).” This is available to subscribers of *living theology*.

You will want to start with the first post that refers to *The Lord of the Rings*, and some research that links Bible literacy with spiritual maturity.

I've also provided a reading log in Word format. Once you have entered the password, scroll down the page to "Available files to download," and follow the directions. You can copy and expand that template. Use it to record the sections you read, as well as your observations, insights, and questions. The acrostic, S.P.E.C.K., is explained in the post: "Five Questions for Reading Impact."

As the backbone is not all there is to the human body, so **the historical 'backbone' is not all there is to the Bible**. Once you get some comprehension of the main characters, events, and institutions of the historical narrative of the Bible, you will probably want to learn more about God's 'Story' by reading the prophets, the psalms and wisdom literature, and the New Testament letters. You'll find some ideas for continuing in this on-line resource.

Let's begin.

Here are the recommended chapters to read. The numbers in parenthesis are the number of chapters to be read in each of the books of the Bible set out.

Genesis (50)	1 Kings (22)
Exodus 1-24, 32-34, 40 (28)	2 Kings (25)
Numbers (36)	Ezra (10)
Deuteronomy 1-6, 29-34 (12)	Nehemiah (13)
Joshua (24)	Luke (24)
Judges (21)	Acts (28)
1 Samuel* (31)	Revelation (22)
2 Samuel (24)	

* Think of 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings and 2 Kings as a sequential history of what could be referred to as '1, 2, 3 and 4 Kings'.

If you read four chapters a day, you begin with Genesis 1-4 on day one. At that rate, you will complete Genesis in about two weeks. Then read the post "A 10 Minute Tour of Genesis." On the next reading day, read Exodus 1-4, and in about a week you'll complete Exodus 24. Then skip to chapters 32-34, and so forth.

If you have any questions, concerns, or recommendations for expanding and improving this project, feel free to contact me at jmacdonald@outreach.ca, or by using the "Contact" tab at www.johnbmacdonald.com.

Every blessing,

Dr. John B. MacDonald (revised 200110)