

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. Basic knowledge of this history is not just a prerequisite for comprehending the Gospel of Matthew; it also holds the key to a better understanding of what God is communicating to us in the New Testament.

The 'Historical Backbone of the Bible' is not just a project but a journey designed specifically for you to delve into God's 'Story.' It will equip you to find your bearings and direction in life and grow toward spiritual maturity.

Below, I recommend portions of the Old Testament that follow the historical framework in Matthew 1. You will note that the Old Testament documents do not relate much of the history between the Exile and the birth of Jesus (approximately 400 B.C. to 4 B.C.). Nevertheless, this history was well-known to the readers of Matthew's Gospel and is well-attested in other historical records. This era is often called the 'Inter-Testamental' period because it is between the Old and New Testaments. During this time, there was the conquest of Israel 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.

When reading the Bible, it's beneficial to cover larger portions. Instead of just reading a few verses here and there, try to read whole chapters and sections. This approach allows you to grasp the 'storyline' of God's 'Story' more effectively.

Remember, the pace of your reading is in your hands. 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 'storyline.' 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 regularly getting together for coffee or a meal or talking on the telephone. This way, you can share 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 about 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.'

I have also provided a reading log in Word format. [Click here for a copy of the log.](#) Use it to record the sections you read and your observations, insights, and questions. The acrostic, S.P.E.C.K. stands for:

- A **S**in to avoid,
- A **P**romise to claim,
- An **E**xample to follow,
- A **C**ommand to obey,
- K**nowledge to remember and use.

As the backbone is not all there is to the human body, **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 Bible’s historical narrative, 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 will find some ideas for continuing in this online resource.

Let’s begin.

Here are the recommended chapters to read. The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of chapters to be read in each book of the Bible.

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 daily, 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; in about a week, you will have completed 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, please contact me at jmacdonald@outreach.ca or by using the “Contact” tab at www.johnbmacdonald.com.

Every blessing,

Dr. John B. MacDonald