

The

Bible

Guidebook



The Bible Guidebook

The Gospel Life Guidebook Series

Joshua Caleb Hutchens



GOSPEL LIFE PRESS



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The Bible Guidebook

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Published by

Gospel Life Press

An Imprint of

Gospel Life

PO Box 19, Hardin, KY 42048 USA

contact@gospellife.org | gospellife.org

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN-13: 979-8-9873104-0-3 (Hardback)

ISBN-13: 979-8-9873104-1-0 (Ebook)

To
my parents
who taught me the Bible

Contents

About the Gospel Life Guidebook Series	1
Abbreviations	3
To Teachers	5
 <i>Meet the Bible</i>	
Meet the Bible	9
Experience the Bible	11
The Bible's Story	15
 <i>How to Study the Bible</i>	
How to Study the Bible	21
How to Read Old Testament Stories	27
How to Read Old Testament Law	33
How to Read Old Testament Wisdom and Poetry	39
How to Read the Prophets	43
How to Read the Gospels	49
How to Read Acts	53
How to Read New Testament Letters	57
How to Read Revelation	63
How Not To Read the Bible	69
 <i>Ancient World History</i>	
The Sumerians	77

The Egyptians	81
The Canaanites	85
The Assyrians	89
The Babylonians	93
The Persians	97
The Greeks	101
The Romans	105

The Old Testament

About the Old Testament	111
Genesis	117
Exodus	125
About the Tabernacle and Temple	131
Leviticus	143
Numbers	147
Deuteronomy	151
Joshua	155
Judges	159
Ruth	163
1–2 Samuel	167
1–2 Kings	171
1–2 Chronicles	177
Ezra-Nehemiah	181
Esther	185
Job	187

Psalms	191
Proverbs	195
Ecclesiastes	197
Song of Songs	199
About the Prophets	203
Isaiah	205
Jeremiah	209
Lamentations	213
Ezekiel	217
Daniel	221
The Twelve (The Minor Prophets)	225
Hosea	227
Joel	229
Amos	233
Obadiah	235
Jonah	237
Micah	241
Nahum	243
Habakkuk	245
Zephaniah	249
Haggai	251
Zechariah	253
Malachi	255
About the Apocrypha and Other Books	257

The New Testament

The Time between the Old and New Testaments	267
About the New Testament	275
Matthew	279
Mark	283
Luke	287
John	291
Acts	295
About Paul and His Letters	298
Romans	304
1 Corinthians	308
2 Corinthians	312
Galatians	316
Ephesians	320
Philippians	324
Colossians	328
1 Thessalonians	332
2 Thessalonians	336
1 Timothy	338
2 Timothy	342
Titus	344
Philemon	346
Hebrews	348
James	352

1 Peter	356
2 Peter	360
1 John	362
2 John	364
3 John	366
Jude	368
Revelation	370

Extras

Bible Reading Plan	376
Biblical Measurements	380
Maps	381
Picture Credits	399
Notes	401

About the Gospel Life Guidebook Series

The Gospel Life Guidebook Series is written for global pastors. Most pastors around the world have very limited access to biblical training. Many do not have a clear understanding of the gospel and are easy prey for the wolves of heretical movements like the prosperity gospel. Their biblical and theological knowledge is limited to what they may have heard at a conference or on the radio and television.

We intend this series to give global pastors the basic knowledge they need to faithfully serve the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. This series is not meant to be exhaustive. Many others have explained the concepts found here more fully elsewhere. The goal is to communicate basic truths simply and clearly, as well as to avoid discussions and illustrations that only make sense in a North American or European context.

The Gospel Life Guidebook Series comes from our specific theological identity at Gospel Life. We are orthodox Christian, Protestant, Evangelical, and Baptist.

- **Orthodox Christian.** We hold to the orthodox Christian faith concerning the Trinity and the person of Christ as summarized in the Apostles', Nicene, and Chalcedonian Creeds.
- **Protestant.** We hold to the Protestant distinctives of justification by faith alone, the sufficiency of Scripture, and radical corruption.
- **Evangelical.** We hold to the Evangelical distinctives of biblical inerrancy, the exclusivity of the gospel, and the necessity of gospel proclamation.
- **Baptist.** We hold to the Baptist distinctives of regenerate church membership, believer's baptism, autonomy of the local church, religious liberty, and perseverance of the saints.

Within this theological identity and with careful attention to the text of Scripture, we hope to produce a series of books that communicates the essentials to the pastors of the world. Of course, by doing this, we hope that this series will also be found useful by Christians everywhere, whether in a Sunday School class in the United States, a jungle village in Papua-New Guinea, or our training centers in Malawi.

Dr. Joshua Caleb Hutchens, Ph.D.
President, Gospel Life
Zomba, Malawi

Abbreviations

Old Testament Books

Gen	2 Chr	Dan
Exod	Ezra	Hos
Lev	Neh	Joel
Num	Esth	Amos
Deut	Job	Obad
Josh	Ps/Pss	Jonah
Judg	Prov	Mic
Ruth	Eccl	Nah
1 Sam	Song	Hab
2 Sam	Isa	Zeph
1 Kgs	Jer	Hag
2 Kgs	Lam	Zech
1 Chr	Ezek	Mal

New Testament Books

Matt	Eph	Jas
Mark	Phil	1 Pet
Luke	Col	2 Pet
John	1 Thess	1 John
Acts	2 Thess	2 John
Rom	1 Tim	3 John
1 Cor	2 Tim	Jude
2 Cor	Phlm	Rev
Gal	Heb	

To Teachers

To Teachers

The material in *The Bible Guidebook* can be divided and taught in various ways. Even in our own program at Gospel Life, we cover the material in this book differently in our separate programs. In our 5-year program for pastors who meet 3 weeks/year, we cover this material through five different courses:

1. Bible 1 (Genesis–Esther)
2. Bible 2 (Job–Malachi)
3. Bible 3 (Matthew–Acts)
4. Bible 4 (Romans–Revelation)
5. How to Study the Bible (Hermeneutics)
6. Ancient World History

In our 2-year (4 six-week semesters) program for young men who are called to the ministry, the material is covered through four courses:

1. Bible 1 (Old Testament)
2. Bible 2 (New Testament)
3. How to Study the Bible (Hermeneutics)
4. Ancient World History

I hope that you can see from the above examples that you can take the material here and shape it to fit the needs of your ministry, whether it is a pastor training course or a Sunday school class.

In this guidebook, after the introduction called “Meet the Bible,” the material is divided into four units: How to Study the Bible, Ancient World History, Old Testament, and New Testament. There is so much more that can be said and has been said about the Bible, but I believe that the information contained in these pages are the basics that anyone needs to understand the Bible well. My goal in writing this material and in teaching it to my own students is to help them become more faithful preachers of God’s word. I think the material here gives global pastors a starting place to understand the Bible and start teaching it to their churches.

Finally, if you are using this material to teach in another language, you have in advance our joyful permission to translate and use this material in your own setting with attribution. We only ask that you contact us by going to gospellife.org/books to inform us of your work. We are happy to share our resources (files, graphics, etc.) with you in your translation work.

I hope that the contents of this guidebook will help us all to testify like Paul: “Therefore I declare to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, because I did not avoid declaring to you the whole plan of God” (Acts 20:26–27).

Meet the Bible

Meet the Bible

Meet the Bible

The Bible is God's word.

This is the most important truth to understand before attempting to read and understand the Bible. It is a book like other books, but it is also unlike any other book in the world because it is God's word.

Paul explained this to Timothy, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16–17).

The Bible is also a book that contains books. The Bible contains 66 books written by over forty prophets and apostles in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) over a period 1,500 years across three continents (Africa, Asia, and Europe). But it is the word of one, unchanging God who speaks to all people everywhere, calling them to faith in his only Son, Jesus Christ.

Today, most people are able to carry the Bible with them in a book of one- or two-thousand pages, but originally the books of the Bible were written on scrolls. Scrolls were long sheets of paper or animal skins that could be rolled up. Why were these 69 books collected and recognized as God's word? Why were other ancient books like the books of the Apocrypha in Catholic Bibles left out? The

answer is that the people of God recognized these books as containing the authoritative and true word of God revealed through the prophets and apostles.

As God's word, the Bible is authoritative, true, clear, and sufficient. Since the Bible is God's speech, it is authoritative. It must be believed and obeyed because God must be believed and obeyed (Jas 1:22). It is true and without error because God cannot lie and his word is perfect (Num 23:19; Ps 19:7). God's word is clear. It is meant to be understood. God doesn't try to hide the meaning from us. Since he is all-powerful and all-wise, he is able to communicate clearly for us to understand (Ps 19:7). Finally, God's word is sufficient. The Bible tells us everything we need in order to know and love God (Deut 8:3; 2 Tim 3:14–17). We don't need prophets or apostles today to tell us new things that aren't in God's word. God has already told us everything we need in the Bible. We just need to open it up and begin to read.

Experience the Bible

When God inspired the prophets and apostles to write the Bible, he intended the Bible to be at the center of his people's lives. The blessed man in Psalm 1 has a fruitful and happy life because "he meditates on it day and night" (Ps 1:2). Moses told parents to talk about God's command with their children both at home and on the way, both in the morning and in the evening (Deut 6:7). The Bible should be a constant part of our lives, and so to experience the Bible fully we must engage with it in multiple ways. We must hear the Bible, read the Bible, pray the Bible, memorize the Bible, and study the Bible.

Hear the Bible.

Most of us first encountered the Bible through preaching. At church, we heard the Bible read and explained. Paul commanded his coworker Timothy, "Until I come, give your attention to the public reading, exhortation, and teaching" (1 Tim 4:13). God's plan is for the Bible to be read aloud weekly in churches for everyone to hear — especially for those who cannot read like children and the uneducated.

Paul also commanded Timothy, "Preach the word" (2 Tim 4:2)! True preaching is simply explaining the Bible clearly and helping people to understand what God expects of us. While hearing the Bible in worship is

probably the first way you experienced the Bible, you will never outgrow your need to hear the Bible publicly read and preached.

Read the Bible.

For those who are able to read and have access to their own copy of the Bible, it is important to read the Bible daily. What a privilege it is to be able to read the Bible for ourselves! Men and women throughout history, and even around the world today, have given their lives so that others can read God's word for themselves.

The Bible is a big book, and it can be intimidating to just pick it up and start reading. That's why a reading plan like the one in the appendix of this book can help you get started. Our plan gives you readings in the Old Testament, New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs each day so you can read different parts of the Bible at the same time.

Pray the Bible.

In the Bible, God gives us words that he wants us to speak back to him. Most obviously are the words of the Lord's prayer. Jesus said, "Whenever you pray, say ..." (Luke 11:2; Matt 6:9-13). The book of Psalms contains 150 prayers that God wants us to make our own and pray back to him. Paul fills his letters with many prayers that can teach us how to pray (see Rom 15:5-6; 1 Cor 1:4-9; Eph 1:15-23).

When we begin to pray, we often don't know what to say or even how to start. We know that when we pray the prayers of the Bible as our own we are praying according to God's will since he inspired the very words we are praying.

Memorize the Bible.

The psalmist says, "I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you" (Ps 119:11). We want God's word to become part of us so that it guides us in our daily lives. This requires memorizing God's word. When we

memorize something, we think about it repeatedly and carefully. We are able to meditate on the meaning of each phrase or word in a way that we aren't able to when reading quickly. By memorizing, we treasure God's word.

Study the Bible.

Most of this book is dedicated to helping you study the Bible. When we are reading large portions of the Bible (like when we follow a reading plan), we aren't able to notice the specific details of each passage or book. Reading large portions is important because it helps us become better acquainted with the Bible as a whole, but studying smaller portions is also important so we can know God's word deeply.

Studying the Bible isn't something reserved for preachers. It is good for every believer, and studying the Bible shouldn't be too difficult. Bible study is simply reading a portion of the Bible slowly and repeatedly so that we think carefully about its meaning. Through Bible study, we can experience more of what God wants us to know about him from his word.

Meet the Bible

The Bible's Story

Have you ever flipped to the back of a book to find out how a story ends? For most books, skipping to the end would ruin the story, but with the Bible, it is actually helpful to know the end to understand the entire story. The Bible ends with God's eternal and perfect kingdom being established on earth. The Apostle John writes, "Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God" (Rev 21:3).

This voice from the throne summarizes God's goal for his creation. He wants a people who will bear his image as his own unique people. He wants a people to live with and love, as they also love and worship him. God's goal is for God's people to dwell in God's presence under God's covenant.

The way God is accomplishing this goal is through the victory and rule of his chosen king, his own Son — Jesus, the seed of Abraham and the heir of David. So God is rescuing a people for himself through the establishment of his kingdom. Jesus has inaugurated God's kingdom by his victory over sin and death through his crucifixion and resurrection.

This establishment of God's kingdom through Jesus is the main story of the Bible. What is God's kingdom?

God's kingdom is God's people in God's presence under God's covenant.¹

God wants to possess a people for his own, and to dwell with them as their God in his own holy place. He wants to enjoy an everlasting, unbreakable relationship with his people that is established through a covenant.

What is a covenant? A covenant is a formalized and binding agreement between two parties that establishes a relationship between them. This relationship is formed through the giving of promises and the acceptance of obligations. Throughout the Bible, God makes covenants with his people. He makes covenants with Noah, Abraham, Israel, David, and ultimately he makes a new covenant through Jesus Christ.

By making covenants between himself and his people, God is establishing a relationship with them that will ultimately bring about his kingdom. The vision of John in Revelation will come true. God will dwell forever with his people in his kingdom, because he has made them his people by giving them his unbreakable promises. God's people will dwell with God forever as his obedient and loving children through faith in what Jesus has done for them.

This kingdom story is split into four main parts:

1. **Creation.** God created his kingdom by putting his people (Adam and Eve) in his presence (in the garden of Eden) under his covenant.
2. **Fall.** Adam and Eve, however, broke God's covenant through disobedience and were removed from God's presence, being exiled from the garden. All of humanity has inherited their rebellion and separation from God.
3. **Salvation.** God began to reestablish his kingdom by making a covenant with Abraham. God reaffirmed his promises to Abraham by making a covenant with his descendants, the nation of Israel, at Sinai. He then began to fulfill his covenant promises by establishing his people in the promised land where he would dwell with them. Israel, however, broke God's covenant through disobedience, and like Adam and Eve, they were exiled from God's presence. Despite Israel's disobedience, God gave the prophets a promise of a new covenant that would finally

accomplish God's goal. Finally, he would dwell with his people. God sent his own Son, Jesus, to establish the new covenant and inaugurate his kingdom. Jesus cleansed God's people through his sacrifice on the cross. Now, by faith in Jesus, we become part of God's new covenant kingdom as it expands to include all the nations of the world.

- 4. Restoration.** When Jesus returns, God will bring about his perfect kingdom forever. God's people (everyone who places their faith in Jesus) will live in God's presence in the new creation under God's new covenant.

While the Bible contains many different stories, all the stories make up this big story of creation, fall, salvation, and restoration. All the stories of the Bible find their fulfillment in what Jesus has done to save God's people, establish God's covenant, and inaugurate God's kingdom to bring God's people into God's presence forever.

The Bible's Story

<i>God's Kingdom is</i>	<i>God's People</i>	<i>in God's Presence</i>	<i>under God's Covenant</i>
Creation	Adam and Eve	Eden	God's commands God's provision God's presence
Fall	No One	Exile from Eden	Rebellion against God Struggle in a broken creation Removal from God's presence
Salvation <i>God chose Israel.</i>	Israel	Promised land	God's law God's king Sacrifices and God's presence
Salvation <i>Israel fell.</i>	Idolaters	Exile from the promised land	Rebellion against God Removal of the kings Removal from God's presence Destruction of the temple
Salvation <i>God foretold his kingdom.</i>	Redeemed, Born Again, International People	New creation	New covenant New king God's presence
Disappointment: <i>The return of the exiles did not bring God's perfect kingdom.</i>			
Salvation <i>God began his kingdom.</i>	Jesus	Jesus	Jesus
Salvation <i>God expands his kingdom.</i>	The church	The church	The church
Restoration	Redeemed, Resurrected, International People	New creation	No sin, no death God's king God's presence

How to Study the Bible

How to Study the Bible

How to Study the Bible

Understanding any book that was written thousands of years ago can be a challenge, but when the task before us is not only to understand the book as testimony to history, but also to understand and obey it as the word of God to us today, then the task becomes doubly difficult. Studying the Bible is not an exact science. You can't simply follow steps 1-3 and produce the understanding that you need.

Studying the Bible is an active conversation with the Living God. Through the words of the Bible, God himself speaks to us today just as clearly and forcefully as he spoke to the prophets and apostles through whom he revealed his word. Even so, people often miss what God is saying because they do not pay careful attention to God's word. Often, in our pride, we make God's word say what we want it to say instead of humbly listening to how God is confronting our brokenness and sinful desires.

Paul exhorted Timothy to handle the Bible carefully: "Be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). He warned Timothy that people would seek teachers who told them what they wanted to hear rather than what the Bible actually says: "For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply

teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear what they want to hear. They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths” (2 Tim 3:3–4).

The Basic Method of Studying the Bible

In one sense, studying the Bible is simple. Studying the Bible is simply reading portions of the Bible *slowly* and *repeatedly*. But to do this well, we need to follow a basic method that will guide us to clear understanding.

The basic method of studying the Bible is actually common sense. Imagine that you are walking down a road and a large truck weighed down by a heavy load is driving full speed toward you. What will you do in such a situation? First, you will see. You will look down the road and gather the facts of the situation: (1) There is a truck driving down the road. (2) It is a large truck with a heavy load. (3) It is coming quickly. (4) It is driving straight toward me. Then you will begin to process the information and understand the meaning of what you have seen: If I stay where I am, and if this truck continues to drive quickly toward me, it will hit me, and I will die. Finally, you will use this understanding to make a choice: RUN! Get out of the road!

When we study the Bible, we follow these same three steps from real life. First, we *read*, carefully seeing what the Bible actually says. Second, we seek to *understand* the meaning of the Bible, and third, we must *obey* the Bible.

Read. What does the Bible say?

The most important step of studying the Bible is learning to read it carefully. This step is the most important because if we mess up in this step then we cannot succeed in the other steps. So, we must begin with the question: “What does the Bible say?”

To answer this question, first we need God’s help. God is not dead. He is speaking to us through his word, but because we are imperfect, we need the help of his Spirit to understand what he is saying to us. If you read and enjoyed a

book, wouldn't you be excited to get to meet the author and ask him about everything you didn't understand completely? We don't only have the opportunity to meet the author of the Bible. We have the author dwelling within us as the Holy Spirit. We should pray like the songwriter of Psalm 119, "Help me to understand your instruction, and I will obey it and follow it with all my heart" (Ps 119:34).

But to know what the Bible says, we must also know some of the background about the particular book or section of the Bible we are studying. I hope this guidebook will help you in this area. In this book, you will find basic facts about each book of the Bible. For example, if you are trying to understand Philippians 4, you first need to know who was writing Philippians, who he was writing to, and what was the main idea that he was communicating.

Finally, the way to really answer the question "What does the Bible say?" Is to read *slowly* and to read *repeatedly*. During your daily Bible reading, it is okay to read through large portions of Scripture quickly, but when you are sitting down to understand the Bible deeply, you cannot expect to read the passage you are studying once and to understand it fully. Read the section you are studying slowly. But then read it over and over again. Read it until you almost have it memorized. You don't have to understand it yet. You just need to see it. You want to see every detail as clearly as you can so that you can start to understand.

Understand. What did the Bible mean?

Once you have read the section slowly and repeatedly, you can begin to seek to understand the meaning. As you seek to understand the meaning, there are three essential rules to remember:

1. *A passage will never mean what it never meant.* God never changes. Therefore, his word is trustworthy and unchanging. The words that God spoke to Moses still mean what they meant when God spoke them 3,400 years ago. New ideas and current events cannot alter the meaning of the Bible. Notice that the question we are asking in this step is "What *did* the