



The God Story!

*“All scripture is god-breathed
and is profitable for teaching, reproof,
correction, and training in righteousness;
so that the man of God may be adequate,
equipped for every good work!”*

- 2 Timothy 3:16,17

The Bible is God's love letter to humanity.

LISTEN TO THE [DEEPER IN THE GOD STORY VIDEO HERE](#).



God's Story and My Life!

How has God revealed Himself to you through His story?

In what ways has God's Word shielded and protected you?

In what ways do you feel that the Spirit has empowered you to understand His Word?

How has God's kind discipline impacted the strength of the Word in your life?

Record the answer that is either least true (1 & 2), or most true (3 & 4) about you...

1 2 3 4 I frequently consult God and His Word when I have a decision to make.

1 2 3 4 I am confident in my working knowledge of the Story of God (the Bible).

1 2 3 4 The years are finding me faithful to continue to search God's Word with regularity.

1 2 3 4 God's Word is honored in my heart and my home.

1 2 3 4 I share Jesus' life with others, both in community and in my work.

1 2 3 4 I am often excited about God's Word.

1 2 3 4 When I have a choice between leisure time and God's Word, I often choose to pursue a deeper understanding of God's Story.

If God's Word is not my priority can I truly say that I am focused on becoming a man or woman of God?!

Reading the God Story!

Encountering God is never boring. It is why we must see our time in the Word as a way to open our relationship with God.

Meditating on the Scriptures involves placing yourself right into the Story.

Once you have taken the time (Encounter the reference) and considered what it meant to the people involved as well as the original hearers (Expose the meaning) it is time to apply the truth of the Story to our lives (Enlighten your heart)!

ENCOUNTER the Reference

*What does the text reveal?
Take the time and have a plan.*

EXPOSE the Meaning

*What did it mean to the
principle characters?
Formulate conclusions about
God and man!*

ENLIGHTEN your Heart!

*What does it mean to me?
Pray and expect the Word to
change your heart!*

Meditating in the Scriptures is a mind, heart, and soul interaction with the Living God through His Son Jesus Christ! It is more than mere intellectual study and so much more than exposure to “right thinking.” Christ wants to be *engaged* in every part of our hearts and minds!

As we encounter the reference, expose the meaning, and enlighten our hearts - we grow in our *listening relationship* with the eternal Living God!

It is an exciting thing to understand how God thinks. Searching the story of God helps us understand the mind of God, and the person who comprehends the mind of God will understand the will of God. These paragraphs help tell His story and illustrate the spiritual principles of the big picture of the so-called Old Testament. Refer to the graph on the following page to help you to understand the big picture of God's Word to men.

THE BEGINNINGS

Note the location of the first five books on the chart. *Genesis* explains the **origins** of God's dealings with mankind. It also describes the reasons and events concerning why God chose the Hebrew people as caretakers of the God Story. There are four important persons listed who are called the four patriarchs (note them), and there are four critical events (note them) which explain foundational understandings about where we come from and why the world exists as it does. Notice how *imperfect* these first spiritual patriarchs were. The book of *Job* is very old and teaches us about the plan of God being worked through one central individual. Through the circumstances and trials of life, Job would recognize the purpose for **sovereign suffering**.

THE CHOSEN RACE

The chosen race (the Hebrew or Jewish Nation) was delivered out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh (you've probably seen the movie). This is the account of the book of *Exodus*. It was through God's power and Moses' leadership that the Jews would find their **exit** from a 420 year bondage in the land of Egypt. Someone has said that it took a short period of time to get the Jews out of Egypt, but a lot longer to get Egypt out of the Jewish people. This was the purpose of *Leviticus*, *Numbers*, and *Deuteronomy*: to help get Egypt out of the people! In *Leviticus* this newly delivered people were to learn what it meant to **worship** the Lord God. In the book of *Numbers* we see the **wanderings** of an entire nation. They chose to *grumble* and *complain* rather than to walk in truth. In fact, a journey that should have taken about *forty days* ended up taking *forty years*! And all of the people that chose to grumble and complain died before Israel ever entered the promised land...except *Joshua* and *Caleb*, two of twelve spies who forty years earlier were not afraid to enter the land. *Deuteronomy*, as with the rest of the first five books, was recorded by Moses. If these people were to experience spiritual deliverance, they would need spiritual **standards**! The *ten commandments* were given in Exodus (the tablets were broken by Moses) and once again in Deuteronomy.

THE CONQUEST

Next we enter the events which took place during the conquest and *first years* in the land. The book of *Joshua* tells us about a great general who led the Jews into a **conquest** of the Land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey which God had promised to Abraham long before the 420 years of bondage in Egypt. The book of *Judges* records the disobedience of the people in their newfound land as they chose eight **cycles** of sin rather than to obey the voice of God. Each time God would give them new opportunities to be delivered and each time they chose bondage. *Samuel* is the last judge and leads us into the period of Israel's kings. *Ruth* is the account of a bright spot during the dark time of the Judges where "every man did what was right in his own sight." God's message through this Gentile (non-Jewish) woman is one of **love's redemption**. This means God loved Ruth enough (even though she wasn't a part of the chosen nation) to give her a place in the Kingdom.

THE KINGS OF ISRAEL

The people of Israel had grumbled against *Moses*, sinned under *Joshua*, and failed miserably under the *Judges*. They felt if only they too had a king like the other nations - obedience to God could be ensured. *Samuel* reluctantly anoints Israel's first King, *Saul*. *1 Samuel* is the account of the **people's king**. *2 Samuel* is the unfolding story of **God's king**, David. *1 Kings* reviews the reign of **Solomon** and **split** in the kingdom. The *first half* of the book considers Solomon, son of David and Bathsheba; the *second half* of the book reviews the split of the united kingdom into a divided kingdom.

For a deep and significant spiritual picture, remember this simple formula: SAUL HAD NO HEART...DAVID HAD A WHOLE HEART...AND SOLOMON HAD HALF OF A HEART. This reflects one of three choices that will summarize *every person's choices* in life. The book of *2 Kings* accounts for the **exile/scatter** of God's chosen people. This came about because the people sinned and would not change their lives as a nation. Notice that the division in the kingdom occurred in 931BC into Israel (the Northern 10 tribes) and Judah (the Southern two tribes). *1 Chronicles* (**throne secured**) and *2 Chronicles* (**temple revered**) were assembled later and are a similar accounting of the kings of the united and divided period, but with a specific purpose of *bringing the people back from captivity* (see the Return below).

The writings of these prominent Kings reflect the spiritual lessons of their lives. *Psalms* speaks primarily of David's experiences of **prayer & praise**. *Proverbs* pours out Solomon's life-knowledge of **wisdom above**. *Ecclesiastes* is his reflection on the impact and futility of life apart from God or **vanity below**. *Song of Solomon* reviews his remembrances of the wife of his youth, and lifts up the virtues of godly marriage and **intimate love** (unfortunately he didn't follow his own advice).

THE CAPTIVITY

God uses *two nations* to punish the chosen people and to send them into captivity. **Judah** watches as **Israel** (the sinning sister) is taken into captivity to *Assyria* in 722 BC. In 586 BC Judah (and Jerusalem) follows her sister by being taken into captivity to *Babylon*. Through obedience or disobedience God will continue to accomplish His Word through the Jews!

THE PROPHETS

The prophets were God's instruments to attempt to bring Israel and the rest of the nations to repentance. *Isaiah* spoke to them concerning **Yahweh's Salvation**. *Jeremiah* communicated **sin's condemnation**, and wept over Jerusalem's fall in *Lamentations*, **weeping prophet**. *Ezekiel* and *Daniel* spoke specifically to the captives in Babylon. Ezekiel explained how the Exiles were **ruined and restored**. Daniel spoke of **future things** and the deliverance that God would bring. He also spoke sweepingly of the events of the end times found in Revelation. *Hosea* married a harlot to place in Israel's face the fact that **God's love** was present even in the midst of **Israel's apostasy**. *Joel* encouraged the people to **blow the trumpet** and to warn of the coming day of the Lord! *Amos* was a farmer who revealed the **roaring punishment** of God against Israel's sin. *Obadiah* explained that **Edom** would be **cut off** because of the way she had treated her brother, Israel. Edom was comprised of the descendents of Esau (remember *Jacob* and *Esau*!).

Jonah's message was reserved for the capital of Babylon: Nineveh. He was **compassion's voice** to this nation (even though he didn't like it one bit!) *Micah* spoke of God's **unchanging love** toward Israel, and *Nahum* returns to the subject of **Nineveh's doom** 100 years after the preaching of Jonah. *Habakkuk* is concerned with the **just rejoicing** before God even in these difficult times of judgment, and *Zephaniah* warns of Israel's **last chance** to repent before captivity.

THE RETURN

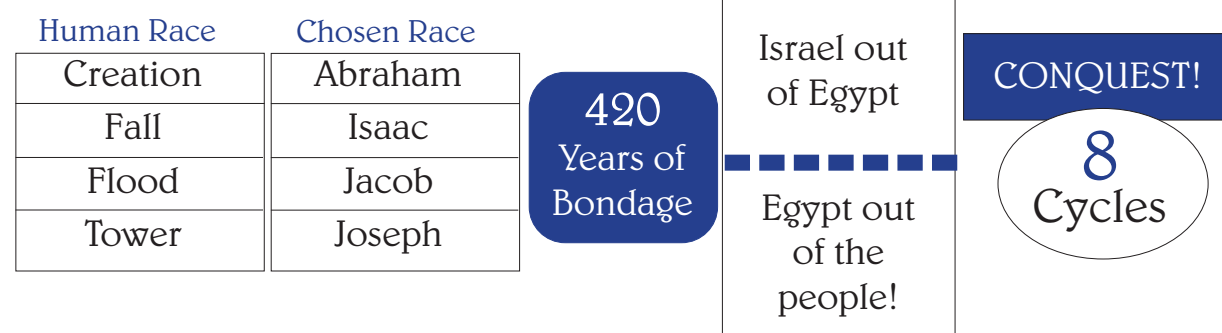
After about 70 years of captivity it was time to return to Israel. God used *Cyrus* the King of Persia to effect this return, and the book of *Ezra* calls the captive Jews to **return/reform their hearts**. The book of *Nehemiah* is the account of the rebuilding of the broken down walls of Jerusalem and encourages the people to **renew/rebuild the walls** of the spiritual community of Israel. Three prophets are given to stimulate this work: *Haggai* encourages **obedient building** and asks that the Jews rebuild the Temple and the walls as a higher priority than building their own houses and personal kingdoms. *Zechariah* focuses the people on the majestic **Lord of Hosts** and promotes worship as the basis for spiritual success. *Malachi* records **sin's dialogue** as God addresses the excuses of His people for not doing their spiritual jobs upon returning to the land. This begins *400 silent years* that will not be broken until the voice of the one crying in the wilderness, *John the Baptist*, proclaims and prepares the way for THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, *Lamb of God*, Who takes away the sin of the world! This is called "*the fullness of times*" by the prophets.

THE BIG PICTURE ON THE “OLD” TESTAMENT!

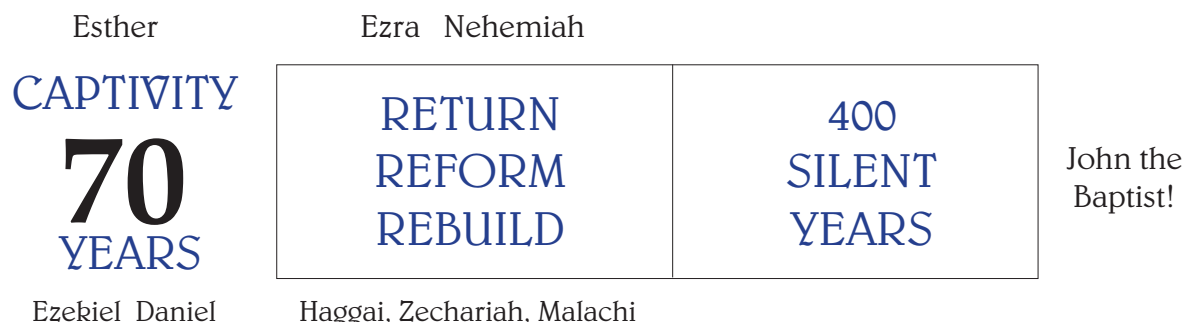
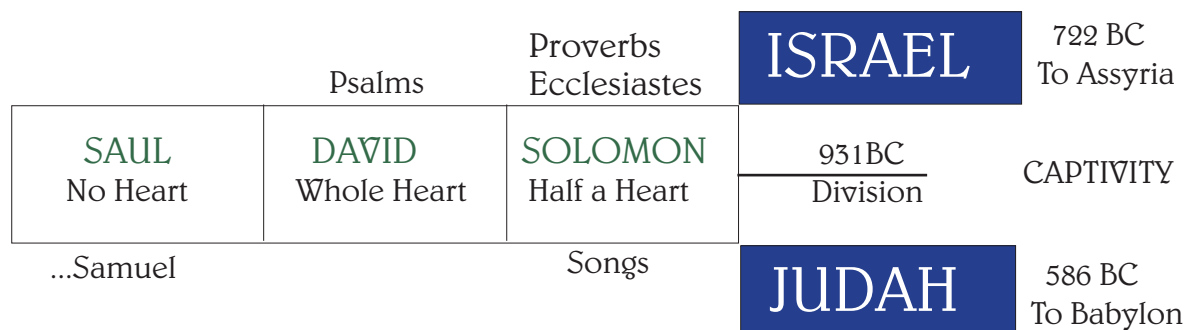
Men call the Old and New Testaments “old” and “new.” The Scriptures do not. There is only “One Testament.” Before the events of Genesis 1 the Son had always existed. The so-called “Old Testament” is a preparation for the coming of Christ. He would invade time, give Himself for the sins of the world, and bring those who believed in Him to eternal life. This is what “the Testament” is all about.

Genesis	Exodus	Leviticus	Joshua
Job		Numbers	Judges
		Deuteronomy	Ruth

2 Step Deliverance:



	1 Chronicles	2 Chronicles	
1 Samuel	2 Samuel	1 Kings	2 Kings



What do you see?

**FOURTH
STREAM**
FINDING HOPE

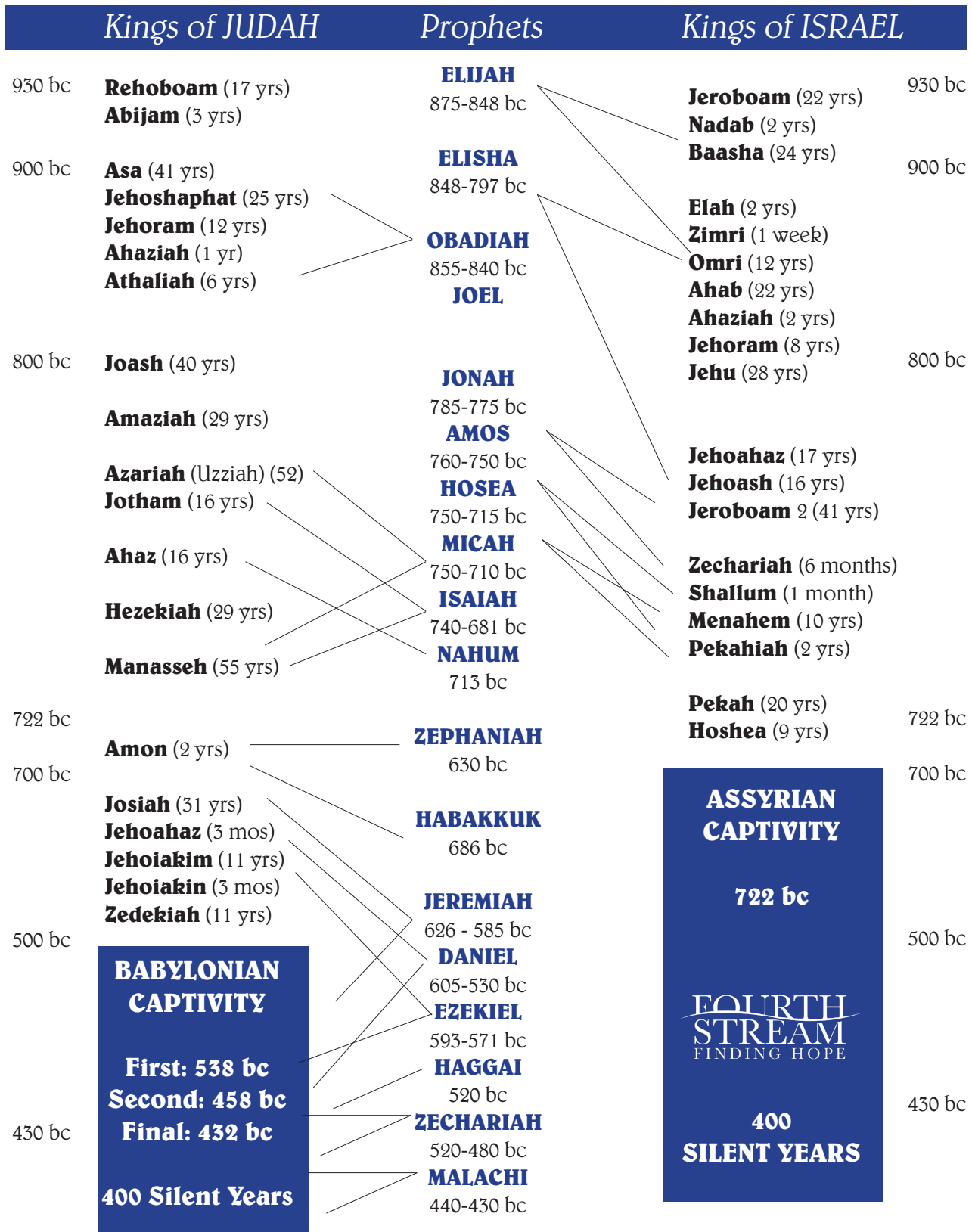
Look up the key verse for each book and highlight them in your bible! Also write the theme at the beginning of each book in your bible. You will be glad you did!

THE OLD TESTAMENT GOD-STORY at a Glance!

Book	Theme	Key Verse
5 LAW		
Genesis	Origins	12:2
Exodus	Exit	12:51
Leviticus	Worship	11:44
Numbers	Wander	33:1
Deuteronomy	Standards	10:12
12 HISTORICAL		
Joshua	Conquest	11:23
Judges	Cycles	17:6
Ruth	Love's Redemption	2:12
1 Samuel	People's King	8:6
2 Samuel	God's King	5:2
1 Kings	Solomon/Split	12:20
2 Kings	Exile/Scatter	17:7
1 Chronicles	Throne Secured	14:2
2 Chronicles	Temple Revered	6:18
Ezra	Return/Reform...the Temple	7:10
Nehemiah	Renew/Rebuild...the Walls	5:16
Esther	God Delivers	4:14
5 POETS		
Job	Sovereign Suffering	1:21-22
Psalms	Prayer/Praise	100:4
Proverbs	Wisdom Above	1:7
Ecclesiastes	Vanity Below	2:11
Song of Solomon	Intimate Love	8:6
5 MAJOR PROPHETS		
Isaiah	Christ is Salvation	53:6
Jeremiah	Sin's Condemnation	6:16
Lamentations	Weeping Prophet	1:16
Ezekiel	Exiles-Ruined/Restored	21:27
Daniel	Future Things	7:27
12 MINOR PROPHETS		
Hosea	Love/Apostasy	14:4
Joel	Blow the Trumpet	2:31,32
Amos	Roaring Punishment	1:2
Obadiah	Brother Violence	1:10
Jonah	Compassion's Voice	1:3
Micah	Unchanging Love	7:18
Nahum	Nineveh's Doom	3:19
Habakkuk	Just/Rejoice	2:4
Zephaniah	Last Chance	2:3
Haggai	Obedient Building	1:4,5
Zechariah	Lord of Hosts	4:6
Malachi	Sin's Dialogue	2:2

OLD TESTAMENT KINGS & PROPHETS

This chart is provided to help you place the Old Testament Prophets in proper relationship to the Kings of Israel (north) and Judah (south). Scholarship differs slightly on the timespan and somewhat on the order of the prophets, but the following chart will give you a more than adequate "big picture" on their placement.



For context as you read!

Between the Testaments!

Knowledge of the events **between** Malachi & Matthew can be helpful.
The "Old Testament" was completed with Malachi in about 397 bc.

THE SILENT YEARS ARE ESTABLISHED...Malachi 4:4-6

Elijah is promised...The Word is lifted up...The Blessing & the Curse are restated. Note Psalm 124:9 for a relevant teaching and/or prophecy on this time period. Here is a **summary** of the events describing the condition of the Jewish nation leading up to and during the 400 silent years/587 B.C. Babylonian exile/50 years later the Babylonian empire was overthrown by Media-Persia (Daniel's Babylonian prophecies are fulfilled)/536 B.C. Cyrus, the Persian Emperor decrees the return of the Jewish remnant/50,000 returned with Zerubbabel/21 years later the temple is completed (515 BC)/458 BC **Ezra** returns with another remnant 57 years later - it is a small remnant - but through them law & ritual are restored/446 BC **Nehemiah** returns (12 years later) and rebuilds the walls/The remnant is indeed just that, for the lion's share of the Jews choose to remain in Babylonia.

THE PERSIAN PERIOD (536-333 B.C.)

Pretty uneventful/the Jews often enjoyed favor apart from one incident of rebellion in 721 B.C. (see 2 Kings 17:24-41 the Assyrian Emperor repopulates Samaria with foreigners. These transplants were the ones who provided most of the resistance to the returned remnant. Apparently the rival worship of these peoples was established toward the end of Persian rule (John 4:19-22) by the founding of the Samaritan temple.

THE GREEK PERIOD (333-323 B.C.)

Alexander the Great rules from age 20 to 32 and politically transforms the face of the world. He is the "horn" of Daniel 8:1-7. J. S. Baxter says: "In his Syrian campaign he marched southward on Jerusalem. Josephus tells how the high priest Jaddua stepped forward to invoke the conqueror's clemency. Alexander, who is said to have recognized in Jaddua the fulfillment of a dream, not only spared Jerusalem and offered sacrifice to Yahweh but also had the prophecies of Daniel read to him (concerning the overthrow of the Persian empire by a king of Grecia); and after this he treated the Jews with marked preferment, giving them full rights of citizenship with Greeks in his new city, Alexandria, and throughout his cities. This, in turn, created decidedly pro-Greek sympathies among the Jews and along with Alexander's spreading of the Greek language and civilization, had far-reaching repercussions in the Hellenistic spirit which developed among the Jews, and greatly affected their mental outlook afterward."

THE EGYPTIAN PERIOD (323-204 BC)

The early death of Alexander resulted in the division of his kingdom between his **four generals**. These are the "notable ones" of Daniel 8:21,22. The Ptolemaic Dynasty now covered Palestine. During this period the renowned Alexandrian library and the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament into Greek was accomplished. The Jews were so numerous that this Greek translation was necessary. This made the availability of the Scriptures to the Gentiles complete. When Ptolemy Epiphanes took the throne at the age of five, **Antiochus** the Great invaded Egypt. So Judea came to be under Syrian control.

(Continued)

THE SYRIAN PERIOD (204-165 BC)

During this period Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Perea, and Trachonitis emerge as divided areas within Palestine. With the assuming of the throne by **Antiochus Epiphanes**, a reign of terror began upon the Jews. He interfered with the temple & priesthood. Baxter says "He wreaked a terrible havoc in 170 B.C. Jerusalem was plundered, the wall torn down, the temple coarsely desecrated, and the population was subjected to monstrous cruelties. Thousands were massacred. The women and children were sold into slavery. The temple sacrifices were abolished. The Holy of Holies was rifled and its costly furniture carried away. Jewish religion was banned. Circumcision was prohibited on pain of death.

A foreign governor was appointed, a traitor made high priest, and paganism was forcibly imposed on the people. A commissioner was appointed to pollute both the temple at Jerusalem and that at Samaria, and to rededicate them, respectively, to Jupiter Olympius and Jupiter Xenius. All copies of the **Law** which could be found were either burned or defaced with idolatrous pictures, and the owners executed. The first book of Maccabees says that many Jews apostatized, and that some even joined in the persecution. In 168 B.C. Antiochus caused a female pig to be offered on the Jews holy altar of sacrifice, and then, on the very altar, erected a statue to Jupiter Olympius. In this awful decade "Palestine Jewry was indeed in the valley of the shadow of death."

THE MACCABEAN PERIOD (165-63 BC)

To respond to the excesses of Antiochus, God raised up an old priest from Moden named **Mattathias**. He had five sons, and his son Judas carried on his work, and came to be known as Judas Maccabeus, from the Hebrew word for hammer. For years a faithful band resisted and defeated enemy armies from their homes in the wilderness. Their knowledge of the territory made the ensuing guerilla warfare very difficult for Antiochus and his troops. They defeated (with God's help) armies of 50, 65, and 120 thousand men. **Judea was freed** from alien troops about 142 B.C. and enjoyed independence under very orthodox leaders.

WHAT IT ALL MEANS:

*This freedom ended in 63 BC when Pompey annexed Judea, and Judean freedom was dissolved with the emergence of Herod the Great (the Jewish usurper). Hopes focused on a **new political deliverer**. At the time of Christ there were over forty persons in Jerusalem and Judea making the claim to be the promised deliverer, or **Messiah**. It was the responsibility of Israel's religious leaders (scribes, pharisees et al) to investigate the credentials of each.*

God is always at work, even when it seems He has gone silent.



THE BIG PICTURE ON THE NEW TESTAMENT!

The God -Story is all about Jesus. We must decide how we feel about this Man. Here is the big picture on how He spent His life. Note His life did not end with His death. There WAS and IS ample evidence showing that the Son has always lived and is still alive today.

MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
KING COMES	SERVANT SACRIFICED	MAN SUFFERS	GOD REVEALED
Jews	Greeks	Romans	World

The Gospels!

THE SACRIFICIAL SERVING MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST

BIRTH

BAPTIST

TRAINING THE TWELVE

JERUSALEM TEACHING

JERUSALEM KILLING

Acts of the Holy Spirit!

THE MINISTRY OF THE RISEN CHRIST
ACTS 1:8

JERUSALEM

**JUDEA &
SAMARIA**

ANTIOCH & THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

JOURNEY 1

JOURNEY 2

JOURNEY 3

ROME

**WOMEN/
DISCIPLES**
500

**JAMES
HEBREWS**

**ROMANS
1 & 2
CORINTHIANS**

**GALATIANS
EPHESIANS
PHILIPPIANS
COLOSSIANS**

**THESSALO-
NIANS
TIMOTHY
TITUS**

**PETER
JOHN
JUDE**

Yet to come!

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF JESUS CHRIST

REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

THE VISION - SEALS - TRUMPETS - BOWLS

RAPTURE - MILLENNIUM - JUDGMENT - ETERNAL LIFE

Daniel's Seventieth Week (Daniel 9:24-27)

What do you see?

**FOURTH
STREAM**
FINDING HOPE

Look up each key verse for each book and highlight them in your Bible!
 You can also write the theme at the beginning of each book in your bible. You'll be glad you did!

 LISTEN TO THE [GOD STORY TWO VIDEO HERE](#).

THE NEW TESTAMENT GOD-STORY at a Glance!

Book	Theme	Key Verse
5 HISTORICAL		
Matthew	King Comes	4:17
Mark	Servant Sacrificed	10:45
Luke	Man Suffers	19:10
John	God Revealed	20:31
Acts	Spirit Witnesses	1:8
12 CHURCH LETTERS		
Romans	Our Salvation	1:16,17
1 Corinthians	Carnality's Consequences	3:1,3
2 Corinthians	Authority's Care	2:17
Galatians	True Gospel	3:3
Ephesians	Christ's Body	4:16
Philippians	Christ's Joy	3:1
Colossians	Christ's Headship	1:17,18
1 Thessalonians	Excel More	4:1
2 Thessalonians	Day of the Lord	2:1,2
5 PASTORAL & 7 GENERAL LETTERS		
1 Timothy	Fulfilling our mission	3:15
2 Timothy	Fighting the Fight	2:15
Titus	Sound Teaching	1:9
Philemon	Forgive & Forward!	10
Hebrews	Better Covenant	8:6
James	Tested Faith	1:12
1 Peter	Trust in Trials	4:19
2 Peter	Full Knowledge	1:19
1 John	True Fellowship	1:3
2 John	Wrong Hospitality	10
3 John	Right Hospitality	6
Jude	Contend & Build	3,20
PROPHETIC		
Revelation	King Revealed	19:16

FOURTH
STREAM
FINDING HOPE
Engage!

Courageous Journeys of faith from the God-Story

The Bible is unique among historical literature and stellar in spiritual quality. If mankind were going to write a book about our history and our accomplishments, it would certainly contain little of what the Bible records. The picture is simply not that flattering. The focus of the God-Story is not upon mankind, but upon the **One** who made us. Together the scriptures paint the details of the God-story that is not already written in the stars or upon the building blocks of life, or etched upon the conscience and heart of every man and woman.

After personal investigation the **supernatural** quality of the scriptures makes it plain that even though human authors were used, the Holy Spirit's hand was upon them and their words. The argument that the Bible is "just the teachings of men" has been firmly challenged by history, modern scholarship, and the personal examination and encounter of millions.

When the Bible is allowed to **interpret itself** there is little wiggle room concerning what it says. Seriously.

Within the pages of the Bible is one account after another of men and women in different times and different places who are each struggling to find God (and ultimately meaning) during our brief years upon the earth. The Bible tells the story in the words of actual persons who have experienced God firsthand, and these people's lives have been recorded for us so we, too, may search for God and find Him, and along with Him, eternal life!

These next pages will help you to immerse yourself in the lives of some everyday men and women who have found God - men and women whose lives invite you to do the same - at great benefit to your soul.

"Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow us to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it."

- 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Men and Women of God from the Bible

These men and women of God in history can enrich your faith through their experiences!

Adam	.....Lost Heart.....	Genesis 1-5
Job	.....Tested Heart.....	Job 1-3
Noah	.....Faith Heart.....	Genesis 6-11
Abraham	.....Chosen Heart.....	Genesis 12-33
Joseph	.....Wounded Heart.....	Genesis 34-52
Moses	.....Humbled Heart.....	Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
Joshua	.....Courageous Heart.....	Joshua 1-9
Ruth	.....Following Heart.....	Ruth 1-4
Samuel	.....Listening Heart.....	1 Samuel 1-8
Saul	.....No Heart.....	1 Samuel 9-31
David	.....Whole Heart.....	2 Samuel
Solomon	.....Half Heart.....	1 Kings 1-11
Elijah	.....Flint Heart.....	2 Kings 1-2
Elisha	.....Miracle Heart.....	2 Kings 3-7
Isaiah	.....Promise Heart.....	Isaiah 1-2,36-40
Daniel	.....Future Heart.....	Daniel 1-6
Jonah	.....Running Heart.....	Jonah 1-4
Ezra	.....Penitent Heart.....	Ezra 1-6
Nehemiah	.....Builder's Heart.....	Nehemiah 1-6
The Baptist	.....Subjected Heart.....	John 1-3,6
Peter	.....Honest Heart.....	Matthew 14, John 21
John	.....Warm Heart.....	John 20,21
Paul	.....Devoted Heart.....	Philippians 3:1-17
James	.....Straight Heart.....	James 1-5
Jesus	.....True Heart.....	Hebrews 5:7-9

With whom do you most identify?

Timeless lives from the God-Story

ABRAHAM: FRIEND OF GOD HEART



Genesis 12-25

Think about the times you have felt truly special in your life. Perhaps it was that someone noticed your uniqueness or something about your special contribution to those around you. Or possibly the party planned by your friends that came out of nowhere - just to honor you or encourage you in the midst of a particularly tough time.

Abraham's life is built around the fact that he was chosen to be used by God despite his lack of suitability for God's purposes. His life is an up and down series of wrong impressions about God, as well as some pretty tacky decision-making. What made him special? That God chose him for His purposes! And through the years Abraham became what we would consider a very unconventional man of faith.

Read Hebrews 11 and note each statement made concerning Abraham or his family. What qualified him to be a man of faith? What would make Abraham any different from you regarding the start and finish of his spiritual sojourn on the earth? What were God's promises to Abraham? What are His promises to you?

Hebrews 11

Who took initiative, Abraham or God? What was Abraham's response?
What were the conditions of Abraham's life? What was he looking for?
What was the promise made to Abraham?
What appears to be the essence of faith in Abraham's life?
What was the "better country" and in what way did it belong to him?

Genesis 12-14

Why is Abraham first called Abram? What specifically was promised to Abraham? What do you learn about Abraham as a person from the events of these chapters? What was the significance of the differences between Lot and Abraham's choices? What do the wars of chapter 14 reveal about the condition of Abraham's world? Why didn't Abraham want to owe anyone anything?

Genesis 15-18

What was the significance of Abraham being promised a son? Why did God allow the conditions for Ishmael and Isaac's problems to occur? Why was the covenant of circumcision so radical? Why did Sodom need to be judged?

Genesis 19-25

In what ways is Abraham's faith growing? Is it still incomplete? How could Abraham even entertain what he is considering in chapter 22? Why the shift in focus to Isaac? Who are Abraham's blood relatives today? Who are Ishmael's blood relatives today? What does this tell you about current events?

My conclusions from the life of Abraham:

Timeless lives from the God-Story

JACOB: WRESTLING HEART



Genesis 26-35

Everything we find in the scriptures about God indicate He is intensely interested in what is happening with the souls of men. He is not aloof, He is not passive, He is not reactive. He is seeking out men and women who want to honor Him because He wants to honor them. He has designed life in such a manner that those who look for Him can find Him, just as Jacob wrestled with God we wrestle with God - and find our identity in His grace - or not.

Genesis 26

In what ways is Jacob like his father? His grandfather? What is happening to the nation of Israel as time is passing? What part do you suppose that wells of water played in this culture?

Genesis 27-28

Why were Jacob and Esau in conflict (see the end of chapter 25)? What is the big deal about stealing a pot of soup? What was the “blessing” and why did Esau regard it so lightly? Who appears superior in character, Jacob or Esau? Why was Jacob’s “ladder” dream so significant to his life of faith?

Genesis 29-31

What are your observations on Jacob’s family life? Jacob appears to be a deceptive person and ends up being deceived himself. What had Jacob learned while in the house of Laban? What kind of progress do you think Jacob is making in his life of faith?

Genesis 32-35

Jacob’s life was turbulent on many levels. Why was he afraid of his brother Esau? The account of Jacob wrestling with an angel is a curious one. Why do you think this happened? Why do you think it happened when it did? Why wouldn’t Jacob’s family intermarry with the family of Shechem? What does their response tell you about what God is doing in His chosen people? What is the significance of changing Jacob’s name to Israel? Why was this done with Jacob rather than his father Isaac or his grandfather Abraham?

Read Hebrews 11

What is the significance of the blessing being passed on in verses 20 and 21? Jacob wrestled with God and the world and prevailed. He was blessed with knowledge of God and meaning in life! How rich is your standard for evaluation of the ultimate meaning of your life?

My wrestling conclusions from Jacob’s life:

Timeless lives from the God-Story

JOSEPH: FREEDOM HEART

Genesis 37-52

Who doesn't wonder about their lives? Did I get a fair shake? Is my life counting for something? Is there more to this life than living and dying? What about bad things happening to good people? Is there any true justice in the world?

Joseph found himself asking these questions in excruciatingly painful circumstances. He is a shining example of living life with perspective and having faith in the One who exists far above our circumstances.

Genesis 37-38

What was at the root of Joseph's brothers' anger? What do you pick up in the attitude of Joseph? His father? What does the story of Judah and Tamar reveal about what was going on within this family?



Genesis 39

Joseph's experiences were really up and down. Just as it would look as though his life was turning around, the bottom would fall out! Why was Joseph successful in Egypt? Why wasn't he rewarded for the choice he made with Potiphar's wife? How would he have felt being accused of something he had not only resisted but rejected?

Genesis 40-41

Imagine Joseph's emotions during the events of these two years. What do we learn about his spirituality at this point in his life? Why do you think he chose to stay in the land of Egypt? What was the outcome of the dream he had interpreted?

Genesis 42-44

What were Joseph's reasons for continuing the process of sending his family back and forth from Egypt to Canaan? What was the purpose of holding Simeon hostage? What part of this is payback? What part is wise? A test?

Genesis 45-48

As he reveals himself to his brothers, how does the emotion of Joseph make you feel? What are the implications of the entire *family of the promise* relocating in the land of Egypt? What is the significance of being settled in the region of Goshen? Why do you think they were placed there? How many went down to Egypt? How many will come out?

Joseph gives us hope that there is a God who transcends circumstance. When you belong to God you must always consider that His ways are not our ways (Isaiah 40). There is great comfort from the events of Joseph's life - he was blessed - despite all odds and beyond all measure!

My conclusions from Joseph's life:

Timeless lives from the God-Story

MOSES: HUMBLING HEART



Exodus 1-20

Imagine having responsibility for millions of men, women, and children. And at the same time seeing wonders on a level that would occur one of only two times in all of human history! This was the 120 year saga of Moses, man of God. He led God's chosen people on an incredible journey that would ultimately result in the deliverance of the entire world from the domain of darkness.

Exodus 1-2

What do you notice has occurred since the time God's people came to Egypt 420 years earlier under Joseph's protection? What were the reasons that the Jews were prospering? What transition has taken place in their circumstances? What do you surmise about Moses at this point in his life?

Exodus 3-5

What can Moses' encounter with God tell us about our personal about this responsibility? Why was Aaron necessary as a spokesman for Moses? What specific powers were given to Moses? What was the result of going before Pharaoh and what things do you think Moses was feeling? What kinds of things were going through the people's minds? What about Pharaoh and the Egyptians?

Exodus 6-11

Why do you think each plague was necessary? These plagues were targeted at specific Egyptian gods. What are the various responses of Pharaoh as each one intensifies? In what ways was Pharaoh conflicted? Why? What would be happening in Goshen while the firstborn of Egypt were dying? Why do you think Moses' anger was so intense preceding the final plague?

Exodus 12

What was the significance of the Passover? What does it teach you about Jesus Christ and His Gospel? What was the Jew's responsibility toward their children? What made Pharaoh go after the Jews after he had let them go? What would it have felt like to be Moses at the parting of the Red Sea? Pharaoh? The people crossing on dry land? How do you think this would impact the faith of the Jewish people?

Exodus 15-18

How did God provide for the personal needs as well as leadership needs for the people after they came out of Egypt into the wilderness? What is unique about how God's people pursued military action?

Exodus 19-20

Why did God give the tablets to the Jews? What do these have to do with us?

Moses was incredibly blessed, used by God, and tested by God. His trials as God's spokesman will never be duplicated (Deuteronomy 34:9-12)!

My conclusions from Moses' example...

Timeless lives from the God-Story

JOSHUA: WARRIOR HEART

Joshua 1-9

Moses was a hard act to follow. For decades Joshua had been observing incredible events and works through Moses. But now Moses was gone, and Joshua needed to step up and walk his own journey of faith. This is the story of his encounter with God and his unique role in leading God's chosen people through the next part of their story.

Joshua 1-2

What were God's expectations for Joshua? What were His promises to him? What was the response of the people to this change of command? Why is the story of Rahab so central to the events of this book? What does this teach us about God's view of those nations which are distinct from the Jews? People who are not Jews? What is the significance of a "scarlet thread" in the window, and why do you think the spies kept their word?



Joshua 3-4

Why was it important for the people to see the Jordan river held back? Why was it important to Joshua? How do you think people from the surrounding areas responded? Why did the ark of the covenant play the role that it did in this river crossing? What is the significance of these memorial stones and what would they have meant in the years to come?

Joshua 5-6

Why was it necessary for Israel to be circumcised once again? What was the purpose of this sign? How would Israel's experience in taking the land have differed had not the waters of the Jordan dried up? What is the significance of the timing of this Passover? How does Joshua's encounter with God make you feel? What is the bottom line message the angel is giving to Joshua? What is supernatural about the conquest of Jericho and why is it so key to Israel's future in the land?

Joshua 7-8

What was the root cause of this defeat? What would be the application of "things under the ban" for the people of God today? Why was Achan's judgment so harsh? How active was God in this warring process? Why was it necessary to kill so many people and how does this fit with God being a God of compassion? Why was it necessary to build altars to mark various victories and events?

Joshua 9 What does this chapter teach us about compromise?

Joshua was a unique leader in Israel's history. Rather than live on the coat tails of Moses, he encountered God personally and lived his life of faith without looking back, but instead looking forward. If we are in a war (and we are) then the life and example of Joshua can provide insight and encouragement as we find our own "leadership faith!"

My conclusions from this consideration of Joshua's story...

Timeless lives from the God-Story

ELIJAH & ELISHA: LISTENING HEARTS



1 Kings 17-19; 2 Kings 1-7

Do you ever feel like your life is just a speck in the ocean - a drop in a bucket - a wrinkle in time? You get the idea. When humans look for meaning it can seem futile because of circumstances, our relative obscurity, and the many limitations of being human. The lives of Elijah and Elisha are cool on several levels. God used them to speak in some pretty powerful ways, and the supernatural works that they accomplished provided a clear picture of the Miracle Worker who was to come!

1 Kings 17-19

Why did God appoint prophets to speak to His people? (note: if these prophets were not accurate, they were stoned) What kinds of pressures did severe lack of rain place upon a nation? Why was raising the widow's son from the dead so significant? Why was Obadiah the prophet so freaked out by his encounter with Elijah the prophet? What happens on Mount Carmel is intense! What was God trying to show the people? Why was this showdown necessary? Why would somebody who wielded such power be afraid of a mere human like Jezebel? Why was Elijah so weary? What do we learn about God from how He spoke to Elijah on Mount Horeb?

2 Kings 1-3

What kind of relationship did Elijah have with the kings of Israel? Why do you think God gave Elijah this kind of authority and power? Why do you think he was *taken up into heaven* the way he was? Why did Elisha have to be with Elijah when God took him from the earth? What did Elisha request? What is the deal with the *bears* story? What does it teach about Israel? About Elisha? About God?

2 Kings 4

These next recorded miracles should have given the Jewish nation a very clear picture about Jesus. If John the Baptist was the Elijah that was to come (Malachi 4) then Jesus Christ certainly came in the power and presence of Elisha! What does the Widow's Oil teach us about God's providence in difficult times? Why did God hide the Shunnamite woman's pain from Elisha? What emotions are being expressed in this story? Why was the poisonous stew event recorded and what spiritual significance does it have?

2 King 5-7

Why was Naaman so angry? How did God show him grace through the words of those closest to him? Naaman was a non-Jew. How does this make this story so much more incredible? Did Jesus ever refer to this situation in His teachings? Why was Gehazi dealt with so severely? Why did it matter? What is the spiritual significance of the axe head story related to the spiritual condition of Israel?

There is absolutely no way that the Jews watching Jesus should not have recognized the works He was performing and know they were in the presence of God's Son. And yet how different are we? The Word has lived among us and we still do not believe.

My conclusions from the examples of Elijah and Elisha:

Timeless lives from the God-Story

OUT OF EGYPT: LESSONS IN GRUMBLING



Numbers 9-14

Do you find it easy or difficult to reign in your complaints? Is the issue of *fairness* an obsession with you? One thing is clear from the example of God's chosen people - it is very natural for people to complain - especially about adversity.

As Moses led the people through the wilderness (a forty day journey that took 40 years) God was in the process of *getting Egypt out of the people*. A mere change of location does not result in a change of heart, and God is in the business of changing hearts!

Numbers 9-10

Once again the Passover is significant in the life of the Jews. How did God lead them to stay put or move? What was being "clean" supposed to teach the Jews about the condition of their hearts? How

would it have impacted men, women, and children to be led the way these people were being led? Why were the silver trumpets necessary? How many people were moving and how would this have worked? What part was the Ark playing in their travels? What kinds of pictures do these passages paint in your mind?

Numbers 11

What was the source of the Israelite's complaint? What would have been the practical challenges for the situation they were in that may have been putting pressure on them? What was the main transition they were struggling with that made Egypt more appealing? Why is it necessary to give them both meat and a plague? What is God trying to accomplish? Why was greed such a severe problem?

Numbers 12-13

How would Moses have felt about the murmuring of Miriam and Aaron? What was the source of their discontent? Why was God so harsh in His response? Why is Moses' response so striking? What were the people struggling with as the spies returned? Why were their hearts so fearful? What practical reasons did they have for not putting faith in God? Why were Joshua and Caleb ready to go?

Numbers 14

Israel begins to whine in earnest. Why do they turn on their leaders? How volatile is this situation? How do you feel about Moses' response? What does God want to do? Why is Moses becoming someone who intercedes rather than someone who leads? What is the consequence of these people's unbelief?

It is acceptable to follow God when our lives are comfortable. Apparently God is interested in those who follow Him even in the middle of tough times. This is why Joshua, Caleb, and Moses stand apart from the rest of the people. They were willing to believe and follow even when circumstances were not optimal, and they rejected "easier" routes. Are you this kind of man or woman of God?

My conclusions about grumbling against God:

Timeless lives from the God-Story

DANIEL: HEART OF A LION

Daniel 1-12

Imagine the claustrophobic smells, feelings of fear, and all the other emotions of being thrown into a lion's den! Daniel's devotion (and Satan's opposition) is what got Daniel into hot water. It was God who brought him through. Daniel lived his life over the span of several kings and dynasties. He lived in a foreign land and represented God before the Jewish captives as well as other people's and their kings. He was given insight into dreams, the future, and the depths of people's souls.



Daniel 1-2

How do you see God's hand in these four young men's lives? Why was Daniel so stubborn - wouldn't it have been better to have *blended in* with the other young men? Where did Daniel derive his dream interpreting abilities? Why did he ask for Arioch to spare the other wise men of Babylon? What was Nebuchadnezzar's response? What would the impact have been?

Daniel 3

Why did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego draw a line where they did? Why was Nebuchadnezzar so enraged? Who was the fourth man in the fire? Where was Daniel during this fiery furnace situation? What do you think God is trying to accomplish in the King's life?

Daniel 4

Note the transition from verse 3 to verse 4. What is it? What do you know about Nebuchadnezzar from an historical perspective? Why is this such an amazing story? What does this king seem to learn over his years of experiences with Daniel and his God?

Daniel 5-6

How would it have felt to be Belshazzar? What emotions would he have been experiencing? Why was God so harsh with this king? What was Daniel's reputation in the kingdom? What kind of influence did he have? What was going on politically at the time? With each change of kingship there were new challenges for Daniel. What conditions led to Daniel being thrown into the lion's den? What was the immediate result? The long term result?

Daniel 7-12

These chapters record visions Daniel received and give us keys to the *end of the age* spoken of in Revelation. Just as there was a beginning there will be an end, and Daniel paints a broad-brush picture of this ending. What do you learn about Daniel's relationship with God from these visions? What other insights do you receive into what his life was like? Look for what he did, what he saw, what he felt, and how he responded!

There is a bravery based upon principle that shines from Daniel's life. His path was certainly not easy or picture perfect, but he meets change and challenges with faith toward God and grace toward others. This is the true heart of a lion!

My conclusions from Daniel's resolve:

DAVID: WHOLE HEART



1 SAMUEL 16-31

God is intensely interested in the heart conditions of humans. He knows our bodies will wear out, and He knows that each of our souls has a rendezvous with eternity.

King David was a man after God's heart. He cared about what God thought, said, and required from him as a human leader. His life was filled with ups and downs and he made many mistakes, including adultery and murder. These choices cost him dearly, but through all of his troubles and challenges he *continued to pursue God* with a whole heart! Many of the Psalms are ascribed to David, and give us further insight into his heart.

1 Samuel 16-17

Why was David chosen over his brothers? What was Samuel's role in the process? What was David's initial relationship like with King Saul? What functions did he perform for Saul and what kind of access would this have given David? Who were the Philistines? What gave David his courage to fight Goliath? What strikes you about this conflict? What are your impressions of David as a young man?

1 Samuel 18-20

What are your impressions of the relationship between Saul, David, and Jonathan? Why did Saul become so dissatisfied with David? What are the root problems here?

1 Samuel 21-24

Jesus talks about the situation with the *consecrated bread* (set apart) in Matthew 12:1-7. What does He say and how does He read this situation? How does David's feigning of madness stack up with his courage in confronting Goliath? What is happening to Saul's heart and how is it impacting his actions and relationships? How does Saul's obsession with David reflect upon his relationship with God? Why was Saul chosen as king in the first place? Why in the world didn't David kill Saul when he had the chance?

1 Samuel 25-31

What do David's experiences with Abigail tell you about where his spiritual life is headed? What has happened to David's wife, Michal? Once again David spares Saul's life. Is this restraint, cowardice, or something else? Why would Saul consult a witch? What does this tell you about his spiritual path? How would it been possible for him to call up Samuel? Saul is all form and no substance. He is tossed by the waves of circumstance.

David and Saul are an interesting contrast. David is all heart for God but still makes many mistakes. Saul appears to be more concerned with what people think over what God thinks. How do you deal with this trap? Read 1 Samuel 8 for more background on Israel's desire for and choice of a king.

My conclusions when thinking about David's life and kingdom:

Timeless lives from the God-Story

SOLOMON: HALF A HEART



1 KINGS 1-11

How can the wisest man who ever lived end up separated and alienated from his Creator? Solomon's life is an incredible story of privilege, wealth, political alliances, and ultimate idolatry. Probably the richest king to ever live, Solomon's wisdom was a marvel that brought people from kingdoms all over the earth to pay homage to his greatness.

While Solomon may have been the *wisest* man who ever lived, he fell into the trap of thinking that he did not need to rely upon God for the condition of his *heart*.

1 Kings 1-3

How does David's family history impact his heirs? What is going on here relative to the transfer of power? How does David *bless* his son Solomon? In your mind, what would be David's epitaph? What are your perceptions of Solomon as a young ruler? Why were there so many executions and how should that make us feel about God and His people? What appears to be Solomon's core desire for his reign? Why is the story of the two women and the baby so telling?

1 Kings 4-7

What are your impressions of Solomon as a leader? Solomon makes many alliances, including the one with King Hiram. Why were these alliances necessary and what do you think is their impact? Whose idea was it to build a temple? Why was it necessary? Why was it so ornate? What would have been the scope and impact of this kind of craftsmanship? Compare Solomon's house with the building of the Temple. What are the similarities? The differences?

1 Kings 8-10

What was the significance of the Ark of the Covenant's introduction into the Temple? What do you learn about Solomon's relationship with God at this point in his life? What is the significance of the extent of sacrifices made at the dedication of the Temple? What was God's response to Solomon and how does it make you feel? What were Solomon's relationships like with those around him? Why is the story of the Queen of Sheba given so much emphasis? How much was a talent of gold? What was the extent of Solomon's wealth in today's terms?

1 Kings 11

What do you feel was Solomon's vulnerability? How could he have avoided it? With what he knew, how could Solomon possibly have made this kind of spiritual error? What was the result of his choices?

David had a *whole heart* for God. Saul had *no heart*, and Solomon appears to have *half a heart* *when it came to his spiritual life*. *How can this help a Christ-follower today?*

My conclusions about king David:

Timeless lives from the God-Story
THE FAITH OF MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS



LUKE 1-2

Mary (and many other women) hold a very special place in the scriptures and in the life of Jesus. The portrayal of Mary and her Son Jesus in the movie “the Passion of the Christ” is quite moving. It shows her faith, her suffering, and her beautiful humanity.

To be privileged to see what her eyes saw and to hear what she heard - to be the human mother to the Son of God - how incredible! She stands as an example of faith among believers and followers throughout history. She treasures truth, embraces obedience, and humbly serves the One who made her.

Luke 1:26-38

Mary was probably a teen-aged woman. What emotions would she have felt? What would she have had to endure? How important is her experience with Gabriel in preparing her for what was to take place? What do you learn about her faith? Her maturity as a person?

Luke 1:39-56

What kinds of things were happening and how did they encourage her? What is her cousin’s view of Mary? What do you make of John the Baptist and Jesus’ interaction en-utero? *Mary’s song reveals her heart.* What do you learn about her experience at this point?

Luke 2:15-20

What is Mary’s response to these remarkable events? What *particulars* do you suppose occurred and what *emotions* do you think were communicated?

Matthew 12:46-50

Why do you think Jesus’ family shows up at this point? What place does Jesus’ human family play in His spiritual Kingdom? Does this appear harsh to you? How do you think His family received it? As a non-family member, how does this make you feel?

John 19:23-27

How do you think Jesus felt about His mother? What is He communicating about her as He dies? What do you think was going through her mind? Why do you think He gave this responsibility to John the apostle?

Mary is a wonderful woman of faith. The Scriptures (and the Jewish people) honored women, probably more than any other historical culture. We can look at her life a see an up-close portrait of love, devotion, motherhood, suffering, faith, and ultimate hope!

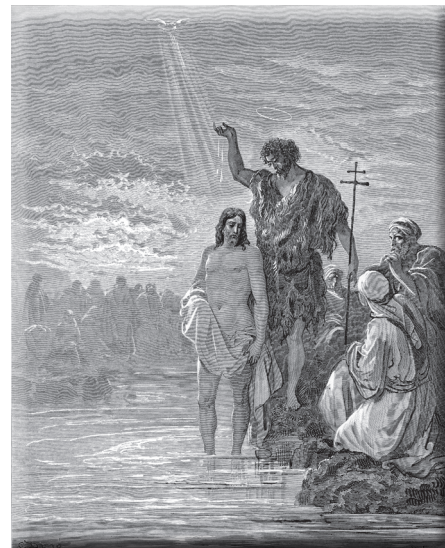
My conclusions about Mary:

Timeless lives from the God-Story

JOHN THE BAPTIST: ELIJAH HAS COME!

JOHN 1-3, 6

400 years before John the Baptist was born the last Old Testament prophet said “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.” (Malachi 4:5,6) Many years before that Isaiah the prophet spoke of a *voice* crying out in the wilderness (Isaiah 40). Jesus left little doubt that this prophet was none other than John the Baptist (Matthew 11:14; 17:12).



John 1-3

Who does John identify himself to be? What is the essence of his description of who Jesus is? What convinced John of Jesus' identity? In what ways did John prepare the way for Christ? In what ways were there similarities between Jesus' and John's missions and teachings? Why were people coming to John to be baptized? What did John see as the most important transition from himself (the voice) and Jesus (the Lamb of God)? What strikes you about this *baptizer*?

Matthew 3:1-12

How did John relate to the religious leaders of the Jews? What was the source of his conflict with them? What was he trying to tell the people? The religious leaders?

Matthew 11:1-6

What were John's challenges of faith? What passage does Jesus quote and what kind of effect do you suppose it had on John in prison?

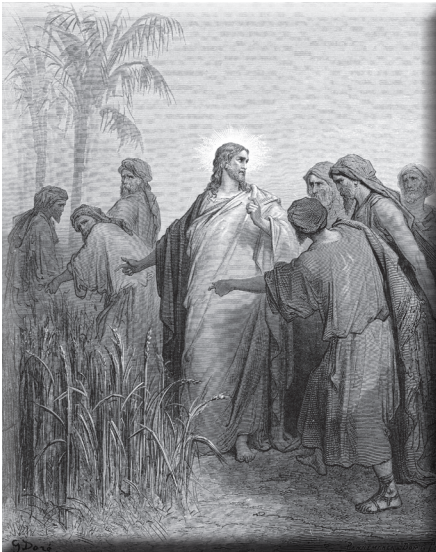
Mark 6:14-29

In what ways was John's death impacting King Herod? Why is there confusion over who John the Baptist and Jesus were? How does the story of John's death make you feel? How do you suppose it impacted his followers (many of whom were now following Jesus)?

John the Baptist knew his role was to decrease so that Jesus could increase (John 3:30). This is a huge lesson in spiritual servanthood. It is precisely our willingness to die to our own desires and personal "rights" that qualifies us for usefulness to God's purposes. While other men posture to improve their position materially or recognition, servants of the kingdom subject everything to the honor of their King!

Your conclusions as you have considered John the Baptizer:

JOHN: HEART TO HEART!



JOHN 20,21

What would it have been like to reach out and touch Jesus Christ? To lean against Him at dinner, to hear His words, and to see miracles worked right before your own eyes! There is little doubt this provided much motivation for faithfulness as the years after the resurrection unfolded. Wow.

John the apostle speaks from a vantage point only a handful of eyewitnesses enjoyed - and he gives us volumes of insight into the remarkable character, resolve, and authenticity of Jesus Christ coming near.

John 20, 21

The *other disciple whom Jesus loved* is the John who wrote this Gospel. What is his part in the drama that unfolds in this chapter? Why did he record the events of this book? What appears to be different after Jesus has risen from the dead? What would be the difference between John and Peter's personal purposes and how was it interpreted by others? Think about all that John and the rest of the disciples had seen during the time they had followed Jesus!

John 19:23-27

What was John's human relationship with Jesus? What was the level of love and trust? What kind of man was John? What unique expectations did Jesus have for him?

Revelation 1

Later in life, John the apostle is exiled to the island of Patmos for his faith, where he is in a very real sense a prisoner. Here he receives a vision that will become the book of Revelation. This is not the Revelation of John - but the Revelation of Jesus Christ given *to* John. How fitting that this disciple would be entrusted with such important understanding - and information!

How is this vision of Christ different from the previous picture we have of Him? What is John's response? What would it have been like to receive this vision? How did John pass on this vision? What does this vision teach us about the difference between the first coming of Christ and His second coming?

1 John

Read the book of 1 John and distill John's message into five or six central themes. What kind of man do you think John was? What impact do you think he had on people who knew him? On the early church? If John were writing this letter to you personally, what would he be saying to you?

John gives us deep, relational understanding into what it means to know God. His heart of love and devotion to Jesus is a huge help in forming our perceptions of what it means to pursue God!

My conclusions from thinking about John's encounter with Jesus:

PETER: PURE IN HEART



What a roller-coaster life! From this one man come insights into power, grace, and forgiveness few men and women will ever understand! If you were to graph the life of impetuous Peter throughout his years of God-contact during Jesus' life on earth, you would see an up and down experience that would make a great Netflix drama!

Peter was the kind of *rock* in whom Jesus saw deep value, and He continued to call Peter to something greater than he could have ever experienced merely by his own effort.

Matthew 14:22-36

What insights into Peter do you get from this account? What kind of long-term impact do you think this had upon Peter? What are some spiritual insights from this encounter?

Matthew 16:13-28

What is it about Peter that excites Jesus? Why do you think his faith was so pure? What is Jesus trying to tell Peter about the extent of his life-mission on the earth? Doesn't it seem cold to rebuke Peter so sharply for his comments concerning Jesus' death? What was Jesus trying to do for Peter and the other disciples?

John 13:1-20

This was a real stretch for Peter. As usual, he speaks what is on his mind! What did Jesus want Peter and the other disciples to understand? What is the significance of being *clean*?

John 18:1-27

What do you think went through the disciple's minds when everyone fell to the ground? What was Peter's response to Jesus being arrested? What does it tell you about Peter?

John 21

How do you think that Peter felt when Jesus pressed him about *feeding His sheep*?

Acts 1,4

What do you notice about Peter's demeanor after Jesus is raised from the dead?

1 and 2 Peter

Read 1 and 2 Peter for insights into how Peter applied his encounters with Jesus into the way he conducted himself for his remaining stay on earth.

Peter was an initiator. We can learn a lot about quality spiritual devotion from watching Peter respond to his circumstances as well as the expectations of his Master!

My conclusions about Peter's heart and my heart:

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-17

Of all the choices a person would make for his or her life, the road Saul of Tarsus travelled would be way down on the list. He experienced deep joy and deep pain - often beaten and abandoned - and he followed his path until its final destination!

Perhaps the fire in Paul's heart came from the fact that he had been such a zealous, feared Pharisee. He had thought nothing of chasing down, persecuting, and locking up loyal Christ-followers. In encountering Christ He had grasped Jesus' words "*He who has been forgiven much - forgives much*" (Luke 7:47).



Acts 9

What was Paul's disposition at the beginning of this chapter? What does this tell you about what is going on in his heart? Why did Saul/Paul require such an animated encounter with Jesus? Why was Ananias' situation so difficult? How long did it take Paul to follow through on his face to face with Jesus?

2 Corinthians 11:16-12:10

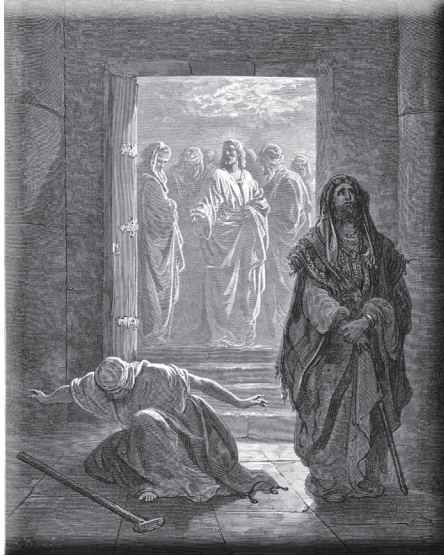
Why would anyone question Paul's legitimacy as a Christ-follower? What had Paul's life been like since he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus years earlier? What had Paul experienced in subsequent encounters with God? What helped Paul keep his ego in check? What does this teach us about how God works?

Philippians 3:1-17

As Paul writes to this early church community it is obvious he has made huge transitions in what he does or doesn't value. What do you learn about his transition from these verses? What kept him going? What were his core values? How did these values impact the choices he made for his life?

Paul experienced conviction and joy along with intense challenges. He shouldered this as the "normal" life for someone who wished to leave everything and follow Him. Do you feel you have this kind of freedom of heart!?

My conclusions from this brief consideration of Paul's spiritual walk:



LUKE 11:14-54

Jesus had an acrimonious relationship with religion and the religious leaders of His day. He was *in their face* calling them to repentance, at one point calling one group of leaders a *brood of vipers*. It appeared to bother Jesus that not only were these leaders hypocrites in how they lived, they were also unwilling to provide any true help for those who were looking to them for guidance. Their emphasis on religion had buried God's intention for compassion and freedom.

Matthew 15,16

How did Jesus feel about tradition? How direct was He with the Pharisees and scribes? What appears to be at the core of His displeasure? When His disciples are concerned about the Pharisees

being offended, how does Jesus respond? What is at the core of what He is trying to teach them? Why did the leaders ask for a sign? Why are they beginning to intensify their tests of Jesus' authority?

Matthew 23

By confronting the Pharisees in front of the people, what difficulties began to ramp up for Jesus? What were the true goals of these leaders? Why is recognition among men so powerful and why should it be avoided? Jesus intensifies the confrontation. What does He attack? What do you think He was hoping to gain from such direct communication? What could have been added to this tongue-lashing that could have made it any worse? It is no wonder they eventually found a way to have Jesus killed - legally.

John 3

Many of the religious leaders ended up believing in Jesus! John 3 is the story of one Pharisee, Nicodemus, and the turmoil Jesus was putting these men through. What astounded Jesus about Nicodemus? What didn't Nicodemus understand? What did he learn from Jesus (John 19:39)?

Look for these things if you want to recognize a modern day Pharisee:

Externals rather than issues of the heart.

Form over substance and a choice to regulate behavior rather than win the heart.

Tradition above the Word of God.

Position and recognition rather than servanthood.

Be careful, there is more Pharisee in the human heart than many religious Christ-followers wish to admit!

My conclusions about myself as a hypocrite:
