

An Adventure through the Bible

Reading through the Bible in a Year – but with a difference

Rather than begin with Genesis and go ‘straight through’, which makes no historical or theological sense, this reading plan tries to offer a little chronological perspective. Prophets, for example, ‘speak’ into their actual historical context. Sometimes a book will be in its familiar place (eg Leviticus) but with a note that it was written or compiled later; sometimes a book will appear to be missing (eg Ruth), but you will find it later on. In the New Testament, the (whole) Gospels do not come first, even though they tell the beginning of the ‘Jesus story’.

However, although there is broad agreement among the experts about dates, some are still disputed and will probably remain a mystery.

This plan aims to reflect the current majority opinion but notes briefly where the major differences lie.

- ‘**Info boxes**’ supply a bit of relevant background information.
- **Shaded boxes** give a snippet of information about OT prophets.
- ‘**Cloud**’ formations show the dominant superpower of the time.

Selected passages are longer than devotional readings are, often by several chapters; the aim is to get a better sense of the big story and therefore you can skim-read lists of names. Such lists were important at the time of writing, and there is often something we can learn from them, but here you can skip through them (and perhaps other boring bits too!) quickly without feeling guilty.

- Each **week** is numbered rather than dated. It’s a simple matter then if you miss a week, want to go over a week again, take longer over each ‘week’, or just take a break.
- Each **section** is given a title to make it easier to follow or find something.
- In Leviticus you can read it right through if you want to say you’ve read the whole Bible, but you can read just a selection of passages which demonstrate the main ideas. Or do both!

On Sunday

Each week starts with several psalms. Some link to the readings of the following week relatively obviously, but - be warned - others don't!

N.B. The Hebrew word 'of' (as in 'Psalm of David') can mean either 'belonging to' or 'for'.

On Monday – Saturday you have options:

- 1 **Simply read the set passages and the 'info boxes'.**
- 2 **If you have time each day you can do a little bit more thinking:**
 - What sort of literature is it? (eg, story, law, liturgy, poetry, wisdom writing, letter) That helps us read it more appropriately.
 - What does it say about God – and about God and human beings?
 - Is the central character of the story behaving well - or not? Why? (The 'hero' of the Bible is God, never human beings.)
 - Do any places in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) ring any particular bells for Christians? For example, are there any echoes here of familiar language or practices - how we worship, etc?
 - Sometimes it's profitable to note how people are moving from country to country or town to town. You could follow with a map.
 - One good way of clarifying your thoughts is to give each day a heading or two.
 - FINALLY (after doing your own work) read notes in a commentary if you have access to a good one. A good commentary will explain various options or opinions before telling you theirs and won't be dogmatic. Ask for advice if unsure. Beware of dates of publishing. Matthew Henry's commentary, for example, which is easily accessible online, may have been republished more recently, but he died in 1714! His devotional comments may stand the test of time, but his scholarly understanding is necessarily limited to what was available to him.
- 3 **Take two weeks over each 'set' week**, just reading the passages one day and doing some thinking, as above, about the same passages the next....
- 4 **... or however suits you best.** There is no time limit.

And so to begin

INFO BOX

This may seem a strange place to start, but **THE EXODUS** is **THE** foundation event for the people of Israel.

- It celebrates their creation as a people.
- They begin to understand God's nature as liberator and saviour, long before understanding God as Creator.
- The event always 'accompanies' them; notice as you continue reading how often the language of Exodus appears.
- The Exodus is celebrated annually in worship as the Passover Festival: the past event becomes present and the people participate in it. It is still central for Jews today.
- It makes it possible to keep faith in hard times: if God has freed us before, God can do so again.

Week 1 The Exodus

Sun	Psalms 114, 78
Mon	Exodus 12.1 – 13.16
Tues	Exodus 13.17 – 14.31
Wed	Exodus 15.1-21

The Abraham Story

Thurs	Genesis 11.10 – 13.18
Fri	Genesis 14 - 16
Sat	Genesis 17 - 20

Week 2

Sun	Psalms 11, 24, 101
Mon	Genesis 21 - 23
Tues	Genesis 24 – 25.18

The Isaac & Jacob Story

Wed	Genesis 25.19 – 28.9
Thurs	Genesis 28.10 – 30.43
Fri	Genesis 31 - 33
Sat	Genesis 34.1 – 37.2a

INFO BOX

Exodus 12 – 15.21 is thought to be a liturgical text for corporate worship.

INFO BOX


The long **background to the Exodus** and to the creation of the people of Israel begins with the story of Abraham, first of the patriarchs. Scribes began to write their story (beginning with the Exodus) in the time of King Solomon - a period of calm and peace and literary activity.

NB Time was measured differently in these early days, and a good age was often ascribed to those who were – for example - especially wise. Also, a given number of years often has symbolic meaning. We need not therefore understand years or ages literally.

Week 3 The Joseph Story

Sun	Psalms 7, 138, 147
Mon	Genesis 37, 38
Tues	Genesis 39 – 40
Wed	Genesis 41 – 42
Thurs	Genesis 43 - 45
Fri	Genesis 46 - 48
Sat	Genesis 49 - 50

38 is an insert into the Joseph story



The Hebrew people come under the domination of the **EGYPTIAN EMPIRE.**

Week 4 The Moses Story

Sun	Psalms 33, 50, 106
Mon	Exodus 1 – 2
Tues	Exodus 3 – 6.27
Wed	Exodus 6.28 - 11
Thurs	Exodus 12.1 – 15.21
Fri	Exodus 15.22 - 18
Sat	Exodus 19 – 20

a deliberate re-read in its context

Week 5 Wilderness Years

Sun	Psalms 3, 20, 103
Mon	Exodus 21 – 24.11
Tues	Exodus 24.12 - 27
Wed	Exodus 28 - 31
Thurs	Exodus 32
Fri	Exodus 33 - 34
Sat	Exodus 35 – 40

INFO BOX

Christians call the first 5 books of the OT the **Pentateuch**; in the Hebrew Bible they are called the **Torah**, which means teaching or instruction. 'Law' is not a good translation; although the Torah contains laws, it is considerably more than that. NB. It was not written by Moses!

Week 6 The Books of Laws

Sun	Psalm 119.1-88
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INFO BOX

LEVITICUS is included here, in its place within the Pentateuch, even though it was not put together at this time. **The Holiness Code** (chapters 17–26) was composed in Jerusalem before the Exile, by priests of the Southern Kingdom. (About the same time Deuteronomy was being edited in the North.) **The law of sacrifice**, Lev 1-7 **the law of purity**, Lev 11-16, (and the **law of festivals** in **Numbers** 28-29) were edited after the Exile. NB The notions of purity and impurity very rarely have a moral content, but refer invariably to 'ritual' purity – rather too complex to explain here. Read A or B below; if you read B, you can use the headings of A to help you.

A - Key passages to give main ideas**B - Whole book**

Mon	Leviticus 19.1-18 God's holiness is the source of all life in home and society.	Mon	Leviticus 1 - 4
Tues	Leviticus 23 Time is sanctified by the Sabbath and the great festivals.	Tues	Leviticus 5 - 7
Wed	Leviticus 16 The great day of forgiveness, Yom Kippur.	Wed	Leviticus 8 - 12
Thurs	Leviticus 1 – 3	Thurs	Leviticus 13 - 16
Fri	Leviticus 4 - 5	Fri	Leviticus 17 - 22
Sat	Leviticus 6 - 7	Sat	Leviticus 23 – 27

Week 7 More of the Wilderness

Sun	Psalms 34, 108, 124
Mon	Numbers 1 - 6
Tues	Numbers 7 – 12
Wed	Numbers 13 - 18
Thurs	Numbers 19 - 25
Fri	Numbers 26 – 30
Sat	Numbers 31 – 36

Week 8 The 'Second Law'

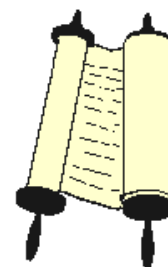
Sun Psalm 119.89-176

INFO BOX

Deuteronomy is a book which is edited and completed much later than its order in the Bible suggests. Note the different reason for keeping the Sabbath given in ch 5 and compare with Ex 20.

In **622 BC**, during the reign of King Josiah of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) the high priest finds a scroll in the Temple. (**2 Kings 22.8; 23.2-3**) This contains laws which Levites from the North had brought with them after the fall of the Northern Kingdom 100 years previously. These laws, appropriate for a nomadic lifestyle, are now interpreted for the new social situation. Their editing is influenced by the preaching of Elijah, Amos and Hosea, and they realise that God's law is not like any ordinary contract, but is a **covenant** – a bond of love between God and God's people, which demands, not mere obedience, but a response of love. When completed, this 'book of the law' becomes Deuteronomy (Greek deuterios nomos = 'second law') and is presented as a series of speeches by Moses.

Mon Deuteronomy 1 – 4
 Tues Deuteronomy 5 – 9
 Wed Deuteronomy 10 – 15
 Thurs Deuteronomy 16 – 26 skim read!
 Fri Deuteronomy 27 – 31.29
 Sat Deuteronomy 31.30 – 34



Week 9 Conquest and Settlement

INFO BOX

We move on to the stories of **Joshua and Judges**, which are two of the six books called, in the Jewish tradition, **'The Former Prophets'**. This means they are not regarded as straightforward 'history'. The writers are thought of as prophets - who try to discern the meaning of events and what God wants to say through those events now.

Sun Psalms 21, 107, 144
 Mon Joshua 1 – 5.12
 Tues Joshua 5.13 - 8
 Wed Joshua 8 - 11
 Thurs Joshua 12 – 16
 Fri Joshua 17 - 21
 Sat Joshua 22 - 24

Week 10 The Judges (1200 – 1000 BC)

Sun Psalms 54, 56, 94
 Mon Joshua 24.25; Judges 1 – 2
 Tues Judges 3 – 5.31a
 Wed Judges 5.31b – 8
 Thurs Judges 9 – 12
 Fri Judges 13 – 16
 Sat Judges 17 – 21

INFO BOX

Although set in the period of the Judges, the story of **Ruth** appears later (week 31). Most scholars believe Ruth to have been finally written down shortly after the end of the Babylonian Exile, a time of much profound theological reflection, to give voice to a radically new understanding of God (see notes in weeks 23 – 28) – an alternative to what became the prevailing theological emphasis of the time (eg Ezra and Nehemiah).

Week 11 The United Kingdom (1005 – 933 BC)

Sun Psalms 2, 93, 99

INFO BOX

1 & 2 Samuel and **1 & 2 Kings** are also regarded as **'Former Prophets'** and tell the stories of **Samuel, Saul, David and Solomon**. The United Kingdom lasts only 72 years

Mon 1 Samuel 1.1 – 4.1a
 Tues 1 Samuel 4.1b –
 Wed 1 Samuel 9 – 12
 Thurs 1 Samuel 13 – 15
 Fri 1 Samuel 16 - 19
 Sat 1 Samuel 20 – 25.1

Week 12

Sun Psalms 51, 60, 132
 Mon 1 Samuel 25 - 27
 Tues 1 Samuel 28 - 31
 Wed 2 Samuel 1 - 3
 Thurs 2 Samuel 4 - 6
 Fri 2 Samuel 7 - 10
 Sat 2 Samuel 11 - 14

PROPHET INFO

After Samuel, **Nathan** is the only prophet of the United Kingdom; he speaks into the life of David.

Week 13

Sun Psalms 87, 95, 122
 Mon 2 Samuel 15 - 19
 Tues 2 Samuel 20 - 24
 Wed 1 Kings 1 - 4
 Thurs 1 Kings 5 - 8
 Fri 1 Kings 9 – 11

INFO BOX

A key text written at this time of peace is the 'second' creation story, which gives a picture of human beings as earthly yet with the breath of divine life within them. Be careful not to read into the text things which are not there! (eg 'Satan', 'original sin', the 'apple' the 'Fall', how death came into the world, woman as the temptress.) All these are later doctrines of the Church, which we now automatically read into this story, partly because of Paul's interpretation in Romans 5, but also because of Augustine of Hippo's perspective (early fifth century) and his elaboration of that doctrine, which was deeply influenced by his personal experience of (sexual) sin.

Sat Genesis 2.4b – 3.24

Week 14 The Divided Kingdom (933 – 721 BC)**INFO BOX**

In **933** the United Kingdom ceased to exist. From now on there are **two kingdoms**:

- The **south** (called **Judah, capital Jerusalem**), where all the kings are descended from David and benefit from the promise handed on by Nathan; good or bad, they are 'sons of God'.
- In the **north (Israel, capital Samaria)** the kings are not descended from David and are not held responsible for the salvation of the people before God. The histories of north and south are mixed here, and a simple way to distinguish for yourself what happens where, is to mark (carefully!) in the margin, in different colours, what happens and who are the important people in each kingdom as you read to the end of 2 Kings.

Sun Psalms 59, 61, 83
 Mon 1 Kings 12 - 15
 Tues 1 Kings 16 - 20
 Wed 1 Kings 21 - 22
 Thurs 2 Kings 1 - 2
 Fri 2 Kings 3 - 5
 Sat 2 Kings 6 - 9

PROPHET INFO**Elijah and Elisha**

are prophets to the **Northern Kingdom** and appear in 1 and 2 Kings.

Week 15

Sun Psalms 72, 85, 88
 Mon 2 Kings 10 - 12
 Tues 2 Kings 13 - 15

INFO BOX

The Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–26 – week 6) is composed towards the end of this time (possibly even later, just before the Exile) in Jerusalem by priests of the Southern Kingdom. **Deuteronomy (week 8)** is being edited in the North.

Wed 2 Kings 16 - 17
 Thurs 2 Kings 18 - 20
 Fri 2 Kings 21 - 23
 Sat 2 Kings 24 - 25

Week 16 Prophets of the Northern Kingdom of Israel

Sun Psalms 37, 58, 77

INFO BOX

Prophetic literature

1 The prophet's task is not to foretell the future, but to speak God's word into the current situation. He speaks to his own time, but what he says is, of course, relevant to other similar or parallel circumstances. Everything from a boiling pot to married life speaks to them of God.

2 Much prophetic material is written in poetry – as are the psalms of course. Modern Bibles help us by setting out the text differently from prose.

Hebrew poetry does not have rhyme or rhythm as we know them, but often repeats itself, line by line or verse by verse, in different words and phrases but with the same meaning. This is called '**parallelism**'. Look for example at Amos 1.2 and 5.22.

Mon Amos 1 – 5
 Tues Amos 6 – 9
 Wed Hosea 1 – 3
 Thurs Hosea 4 – 8
 Fri Hosea 9 – 13
 Sat Hosea 14

PROPHET INFO

Amos and Hosea are 8th century prophets to Israel.

Amos is from the south, but is sent to speak to the north (imagine how that went down!) in a time of prosperity, and his words are not good news! He reminds the people that the covenant involves a responsibility to act justly.

Hosea too mourns the sinfulness of the people and through his own experience comes to appreciate the tenderness of the love of God which is like that of a husband or father.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel is conquered in **721**, becomes a **province of the ASSYRIAN EMPIRE** and is heard of no more. It becomes known as the **province of Samaria**.

INFO BOX

The Assyrians imported non-Jewish people into this province and they were named after the capital – **Samaritans**. The rivalry and hostility between the two groups, which is still evident in the New Testament, begins here.

Week 17 Prophets of the Southern Kingdom of Judah

INFO BOX

The **8th century prophets to Judah are Isaiah of Jerusalem (chs 1 – 39) & Micah.**

Sun Psalms 4, 15, 139
 Mon Isaiah 1 – 4.1
 Tues Isaiah 4.2 – 6
 Wed Isaiah 7 – 10
 Thurs Isaiah 11 – 14
 Fri Isaiah 15 – 19
 Sat Isaiah 20 – 24

PROPHET INFO

The book of Isaiah is recognised by main-line scholars to be addressing at least 2, and probably 3 different times and contexts. Very few still argue for only one author, but all recognise that the final shape of the book (as we now have it) gives it a literary and theological unity.

Isaiah of Jerusalem is an aristocrat and preached between 740 and 700 BC. He sees Jerusalem under judgement for the pride of the wealthy, neglect of the poor and lack of social and economic justice. He preaches a humble faith and believed that Jerusalem would never fall but be renewed by a faithful remnant.

Week 18

Sun	Psalms 14, 17, 102
Mon	Isaiah 25 – 29
Tues	Isaiah 30 – 34
Wed	Isaiah 35 – 39
Thurs	Micah 1 – 3
Fri	Micah 4 – 5
Sat	Micah 6 - 7

PROPHET INFO

Micah is a peasant who suffered personally through the policies which led to war and the injustice of the rich.
Key verse: 6.8

INFO BOX

The **7th century prophets** to Judah are:
Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk and Jeremiah.

Week 19

Sun	Psalms 73, 82, 142
Mon	Nahum 1 – 3
Tues	Zephaniah 1 – 3
Wed	Habakkuk 1 – 3
Thurs	Jeremiah 1 – 6
Fri	Jeremiah 7 – 11
Sat	Jeremiah 12 – 17

PROPHET INFO

Nahum - a pronouncement against Nineveh, both a historical city and a symbol of an oppressive political structure which was totally destroyed.
Zephaniah – a thoroughly radical prophetic book; a charter for the ‘little people’ of all corrupt societies.
Habakkuk – Asks questions: Why? How long? but has learnt how to live without an answer. Key theme: Faith in trials. Key verses: 2.4; 3.17-19

Week 20

Sun	Psalms 74, 80, 81
Mon	Jeremiah 18 – 23
Tues	Jeremiah 24 – 29
Wed	Jeremiah 30 - 36
Thurs	Jeremiah 37 – 42
Fri	Jeremiah 43 – 45
Sat	Jeremiah 46 – 52

PROPHET INFO

Jeremiah is a priest as well as a prophet and guides his people for 40 years. He is a key witness to the last years of Judah and grapples with the theological problems raised by the destruction of the nation and Temple. In the course of his preaching he tells us more about himself than any other prophet.

PROPHET INFO

All the prophets so far are referred to as **the Pre-Exilic Prophets.**

Israel comes under the domination of the **BABYLONIAN EMPIRE.**

INFO BOX

In **597 BC**, Jerusalem, capital of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, is captured by **Nebuchadnezzar**; the king and some leaders are deported to Babylon. In **587** he destroys Jerusalem completely, including the Temple; most people are deported, but a small number remain in Jerusalem. The Exile is **THE** defining experience for the composition of the Hebrew Bible.

Week 21 The Exile (587 – 538 BC)

Sun Psalms 13, 64, 137

INFO BOX

Lamentations is a lament composed by Jews who remained in Jerusalem (and is unlikely to be Jeremiah).

Mon Lamentations 1 – 3

Tues Lamentations 4 – 5

INFO BOX

*The prophets of this period are **Ezekiel and Second Isaiah (chapters 40 – 55).***

Prophets of the Exile

Wed Ezekiel 1 - 2

Thurs Ezekiel 3 - 7

Fri Ezekiel 8 - 11

Sat Ezekiel 12 - 16

Week 22

Sun Psalms 42, 43, 136

Mon Ezekiel 17 - 20

Tues Ezekiel 21 - 24

Wed Ezekiel 25 - 28

Thurs Ezekiel 29 - 32

Fri Ezekiel 33 - 36

Sat Ezekiel 37 - 39

PROPHET INFO

*Like Jeremiah, **Ezekiel** is a priest and a prophet; he too lives through invasion, destruction and Exile, and wrestles with the problems posed by the experience. He was one of the first group to be deported and argues it was divine punishment for sin; he points to God's mercy in the future restoration. Some of his visions are obscure to say the least and his symbolic actions sometimes bizarre! Others (eg ch 37) are very well-known.*

Week 23

Sun Psalms 8, 30, 52

Mon Ezekiel 40 - 44

Tues Ezekiel 45 - 48

Wed Isaiah 40 – 44.23

Thurs Isaiah 44.24 – 45.13

PROPHET INFO

*Jerusalem is addressed in Babylon by **Second Isaiah** – towards the end of Exile. The Exiles are despondent and need encouragement and hope, so he speaks powerfully of liberation using the Exodus theme: the God of Israel is still powerful and will bring redemption. Uniquely in the Hebrew Bible, the prophet uses feminine as well as masculine imagery for God.*

Theological Reflection in Exile

INFO BOX

Up to now the prophet's focus has been on God - God's power, incomparability and faithfulness; now he focuses on a human agent through whom God will work. It is a breath-taking passage. God promises deliverance from Exile and return to Jerusalem, but through a Gentile - Cyrus, King of Persia. An outsider to the faith is God's shepherd and 'the anointed one' – 'Messiah'. This is part of the profound theological reflection which occurs in Exile, as people begin to see God is not always as they had previously thought:

** God is not bound by conventional categories of faith!*

** God invites faith from non-Jews!*

** God can use non-Jews to do God's work!*

** God is inclusive!*

At the time this was new and astonishing, and it enlarged many people's understanding of God. Read Thursday's passage again – perhaps with new eyes.

Fri Isaiah 45.14 - 50
Sat Isaiah 51 - 55

Week 24

Sun Psalms 39, 55, 71
Mon Jonah 1 - 4

PROPHET INFO

*The story of **Jonah** is set at the height of Assyrian power, but probably written down in this period to illustrate a developing understanding of God's desire for all nations, even the very wicked ones, to turn to God.*

INFO BOX

In Exile, the people of Israel realised their captors' gods were very different from their own God. They wanted to proclaim from the rooftops that God is greater than any idol, greater than sun and moon, etc; that human beings are not the plaything of warring gods or ruled by the stars. God took great delight in creating sun, moon and stars – and light - and it was all good. So some of Israel's theologians took a Babylonian creation story (called the Enuma Elish) and re-worked it into a sophisticated piece of Hebrew poetry which portrays Israel's God as the universal God and which completely puts the Babylonian gods in their place!

Then they put together the rest of Genesis 1 – 11, which contains ancient stories with a universal truth and application. For that reason they are put first in the sacred literature, before the creation of Israel as a people. NB Science and faith are not in conflict. This story (like the other creation story), does not address how things happened, but is POETRY which addresses the much more important theological issue - how things are.

Tues Genesis 1 – 2.4a
Wed Genesis 2.4b – 3 a deliberate re-read; compare the two stories
Thurs Genesis 4 - 5
Fri Genesis 6 – 9.17
Sat Genesis 9.18 – 11

Week 25 'Wisdom Literature' – Proverbs, Job & Ecclesiastes

Sun Psalms 1, 32, 53

INFO BOX

Theological thinkers – 'wise men' – also reflected about the theology which had sustained them up to now - if we live rightly and obey the law, a righteous and uncompromising God will reward us and everything will be all right. In the light of events, that seemed one-dimensional and naïve and was simply not adequate for their present situation. Are there other ways of thinking about God? Where is God when it hurts? What about those who suffer for doing right? Is God's concern wider than just us? Scribes brought together oral traditions, earlier writings, some psalms and assembled them as 'wisdom literature', which addresses these problems of suffering and how to live as a believer when life is tough – individually or corporately.

Mon Proverbs 1 – 3
Tues Proverbs 4 – 7
Wed Proverbs 8 - 9
Thurs Proverbs 10 - 14
Fri Proverbs 15 - 19
Sat Proverbs 20 - 24

INFO BOX

Proverbs: a miscellany of sayings from 'wise men' (not Solomon) who offer down-to-earth, everyday, practical advice for moral and social 'success' in life. You might like to think about whether these are always true in your own experience, or the experience of people you know – or know about, say through the News.

Week 26

Sun Psalms 25, 96, 120
Mon Proverbs 25 - 29
Tues Proverbs 30 - 31
Wed Ecclesiastes 1 - 3
Thurs Ecclesiastes 4 - 6
Fri Ecclesiastes 7 - 9
Sat Ecclesiastes 10 – 12

INFO BOX

Ecclesiastes: The writer asks just that: are the generalities of Proverbs always true in experience? He is sceptical and has a questioning mind. He doesn't say that life is not worth living, but that there are no convincing answers to some of life's big questions. Date: around the 3rd century BC.

Week 27

Sun Psalms 9, 10, 26
 Mon Job 1 - 3
 Tues Job 4 - 7
 Wed Job 8 - 10
 Thurs Job 11 - 14
 Fri Job 15 - 19
 Sat Job 20 - 25

Week 28

Sun Psalms 6, 12, 125
 Mon Job 26 - 31
 Tues Job 32 - 37
 Wed Job 38 - 41

INFO BOX

Job: Set in the time of the patriarchs, the story of Job, the suffering of a good and righteous man, is either composed or edited soon after the Exile as a reflection on the whole experience.

The theology of Job's friends and Proverbs – you always get what you deserve in life – is echoed by some in the New Testament (see John 9.2), and still by some people today (the so-called 'prosperity gospel' teaching).

The Chronicler re-tells Israel's story**INFO BOX**

The Chronicler is generally understood to be the writer of history as it should have been. Get the 'feel' of how he idealises David and Solomon; David increases in importance (eg compare 1 Chron 17.13 with 2 Sam 7.14). The northern kingdom is completely ignored.

NB Chronicles comes last in the Hebrew Bible. Why do you think our Christian Old Testament is organised – and finishes - differently?

Thurs 1 Chronicles 1 – 9 Skim-read!
 Fri 1 Chronicles 10 - 14
 Sat 1 Chronicles 15 - 19

Week 29

Sun Psalms 65, 75, 149
 Mon 1 Chronicles 20 – 23.1
 Tues 1 Chronicles 23.2 – 29 Skim-read!
 Wed 2 Chronicles 1 - 9
 Thurs 2 Chronicles 10 - 16
 Fri 2 Chronicles 17 – 21.1
 Sat 2 Chronicles 21 - 25

Week 30

Sun Psalms 68, 130, 146
 Mon 2 Chronicles 26 - 28
 Tues 2 Chronicles 29 - 32
 Wed 2 Chronicles 33 - 36



The Return to Jerusalem

The Babylonian Empire is conquered by the **PERSIAN EMPIRE** in **538 BC** and under King Cyrus, the return begins.

INFO BOX

Ezra-Nehemiah is considered one unified work in the Hebrew Bible and is a continuation of Chronicles, written by the same author. It tells the story of the gradual return to Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the city wall and the Temple (more modest than Solomon's and commonly called the Second Temple). In Exile they had to learn to worship without the Temple, sacrifice being no longer possible, but Ezra 8-10 is generally regarded as the birth of synagogue worship. These men desire above all things to please God by getting it right this time, and go the route of religious apartheid. Notice too the role of the Samaritans in Ezra 4.

Thurs Ezra 1 - 5
 Fri Ezra 6 – 10
 Sat Nehemiah 1 - 4

Week 31

Sun Psalms 45, 47, 70
 Mon Nehemiah 5 - 9
 Tues Nehemiah 10 – 13

INFO BOX

The story of **Ruth** is set back in the time of the Judges (re-read notes for week 10). The writer makes the point forcibly in 4.17 – a shocking discovery for many - that great King David had a Gentile (a Moabitess, no less!) in his family tree only 3 generations back. Whether you take the 'alternative voice' view or not, it is nevertheless true that under Ezra and Nehemiah's rules, David's family would not have been allowed back to Jerusalem.

Wed Ruth 1 – 4

Prophets of the Return

INFO BOX

The prophets to Israel after the return from Exile are:

Haggai, Zechariah (chs 1 – 8), Joel, Obadiah, Malachi and Third Isaiah (chs 56 – 66)

Thurs Haggai 1 - 2
 Fri Zechariah 1 - 6
 Sat Zechariah 7 - 8

Week 32

Sun Psalms 29, 84, 98
 Mon Joel 1 - 3
 Tues Obadiah
 Wed Malachi 1 - 4

Thurs Isaiah 56 - 59
 Fri Isaiah 60 - 63
 Sat Isaiah 64 - 66

PROPHET INFO

Haggai - 520 AD. A scathing address to those who have rebuilt houses for themselves while the house of the Lord is still in ruins.

First Zechariah - much visionary material; institutional subject matter which could be open to the accusation of seeming rather complacent.

Joel: date uncertain; pollution everywhere (locusts) is a sign of the coming 'Day of the Lord', a devastating event, but with promise of renewed blessings.

Obadiah: possibly a commentary on Amos 9.11-12

Malachi: The Temple is rebuilt but people are again being unjust and unfaithful.

PROPHET INFO

Third Isaiah imagines Jerusalem healed, restored, ransomed and forgiven. There is some disappointment that earlier visions have not happened, and evidence (56 – 59) of some disputes which will shape the emerging Judaism; inclusiveness and neighbourliness are required.

Deep conflict and great hope.

Week 33

Sun Psalms 76, 92, 134

INFO BOX

Dated somewhere around the same time as the return from Exile, **Song of Songs** (or Song of Solomon) is a passionate and erotic love poem which affirms and celebrates the goodness of sexuality as part of creation. It only just made it into the Bible; it possibly only succeeded because traditionally it has been interpreted as an allegory of the love between God and God's people (by both Israel and the Church).

Mon Song of Songs 1 - 4

Tues Song of Songs 5 – 8

INFO BOX

Not everyone wants to return to Jerusalem; some choose to stay. **Esther** was written in Babylon after some had returned to Jerusalem, towards the end of the Persian period. The return is never fully accomplished, and Judaism is still today a community scattered all over the world - a permanent 'diaspora'.

Wed Esther 1 - 5

Thurs Esther 6 – 10

INFO BOX

The '**second**' **Zechariah** (chapters 9 – 14) is written for a different context - by a different author at a later date - at a time when the community required challenging rather than consoling.

Fri Zechariah 9 - 11

Sat Zechariah 12 - 14

PROPHET INFO

Second Zechariah - Leadership is criticised, and the tone is anti-establishment, dissatisfied with the restoration.

The Persian Empire is defeated by Alexander the Great and in **333 BC** Israel comes under the domination of the **GREEK EMPIRE**.

INFO BOX

Alexander the Great was only 33 when he died in 323 BC. In 10 years he had won victories during a march of over 11,000 miles, founded more than 70 cities (many of which were called Alexandria), spread Greek culture with its art, baths and stadiums, and provided a common language as means of unity. Greek was then spoken throughout the Mediterranean for 800 years - to about 500 AD when it was replaced by Latin. This 'common Greek' is the language into which the Hebrew Bible was translated (it took about 100 years starting around 250 BC) and is the version called the Septuagint (or LXX). It is also the language of the New Testament.

Week 34

Sun Psalms 28, 38, 97

Mon Daniel 1 – 3

Tues Daniel 4 – 6

Wed Daniel 7 – 9

Thurs Daniel 10 - 12

INFO BOX

This is an example of something written about a past event in order to reflect on a current situation and encourage those struggling in the present.

The book of **Daniel** is written at the end of the three years of Maccabean persecution (**167 – 164 BC**). Although the writer is telling the stories of Daniel in the past (Exile and post-return in Babylon) he is using them to reflect on the present. 'Nebuchadnezzar' - for this purpose - represents Antiochus Epiphanes, who wanted to impose the Greek religion by force, and whom it was very dangerous to oppose. The story of the many Jews who were martyred in this period because they stood firm, is told in the Apocrypha and is well worth reading for background – 1 & 2 Maccabees.

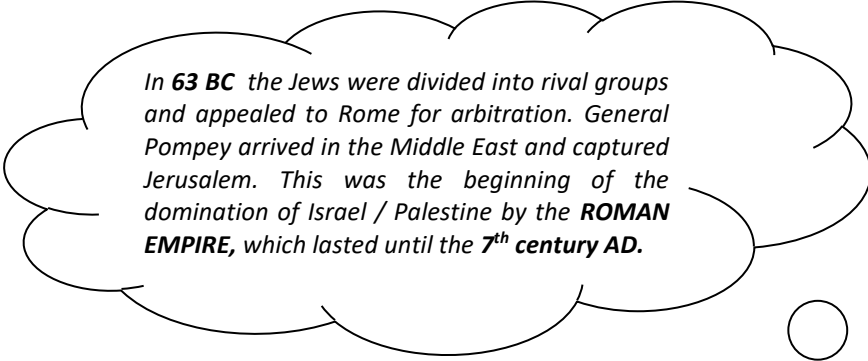
Daniel chapters 1 - 6 encourage faithfulness in adversity. Daniel 7 – 12 is full of (to us) weird symbols and imagery, but we should not try to apply details to now, as the purpose of apocalyptic literature is to offer hope in terrible circumstances - because God is faithful and in the end will be victorious.

Friday and Saturday: Read straight through all the info boxes and cloud formations from the beginning. Make a note of any questions you have.

Interlude

The Protestant Bible breaks the story here, and about 400 years pass between now and the birth of Jesus. The Roman Catholic Bible includes the Apocrypha.

The story of the persecution of Jews during this time is told in the books of Maccabees in the Apocrypha. The Maccabean Revolt takes place between **167 & 164 BC** (see note above on Daniel).



*In **63 BC** the Jews were divided into rival groups and appealed to Rome for arbitration. General Pompey arrived in the Middle East and captured Jerusalem. This was the beginning of the domination of Israel / Palestine by the **ROMAN EMPIRE**, which lasted until the **7th century AD**.*

and so
to the New Testament

Week 35 The Resurrection

INFO BOX

Just as we began reading through the Hebrew Bible with **THE** foundation event for the Hebrews which influenced the way they thought about everything, so we begin the New Testament with **THE** foundation event for Christians which influences the way we think about everything, and without which we would not exist - **The RESURRECTION of Jesus Christ (about 29 AD)**. All four accounts are read in this first week, not because the gospels are the first things written down (they are not), but to demonstrate how the whole NT is shaped by this unique event and the subsequent amazing experience of meeting the risen Christ.

Sun Psalms 36, 48, 67
 Mon Mark 16.1-8 →
 Tues Luke 24
 Wed Matt 28
 Thurs John 20 – 21

INFO BOX

The ending of Mark

The oldest manuscripts that we know about end at 16.8; verses 9 to the end have been added later, and modern translations of the Bible will have a footnote about this. It was once thought there was an original ending which had been lost, but most scholars now believe that Mark ended it this way deliberately, to encourage his readers in a very difficult situation to live by faith in the promise, rather than an experience of the risen Christ. Now read to the end.

Friday and Saturday:

Use these two days to reflect on what each gospel writer includes (and doesn't), what the resurrection meant to the first followers of Jesus and what it means for us today – and for you personally.

For the whole of the New Testament period, Israel and many of the surrounding countries were under the domination of the **ROMAN EMPIRE**.

Week 36 The Holy Spirit 'at work' - creating 'churches'

INFO BOX

The Acts of the Apostles, although it was not written at this stage, comes here in order to provide a little understanding about how the early church came into being, based on these word-of-mouth stories of Jesus, disciples' experience of the risen Christ, and the Holy Spirit. There are no written gospels as yet. We also get a glimpse of the destinations of many of the NT letters. It's important to notice that there never was one, one-dimensional 'early church'; just like today, different congregations worship differently and organise themselves differently. You will also notice that it's sometimes difficult to completely reconcile Acts with the letters, as there are gaps in time – and in theology. You might find it helpful to

- 1 trace the journeys on a map – there could be one in your Bible.
- 2 highlight place-names, especially those to which a letter is later addressed.
- 3 make a note of people, new groups of people, institutions, customs, etc.

Sun Psalms 105, 109, 140
 Mon Acts 1 – 2 →
 Tues Acts 3 – 5
 Wed Acts 6 – 8.1a
 Thurs Acts 8.1b – 9.31

INFO BOX

Just look at where faithful Jews come from for the great festival of Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2.5-11). Most cities of the ancient world are listed here. No wonder that within twenty years of the Resurrection every major centre of Roman civilisation had at least one group of Jesus' followers.

Fri Acts 9.32 – 12
 Sat Acts 13 – 15.35



Week 37

Sun Psalms 16, 62, 111
 Mon Acts 15.36 – 17
 Tues Acts 18 – 19.20
 Wed Acts 19.21 – 21.14
 Thurs Acts 21.15 – 23
 Fri Acts 24 – 26
 Sat Acts 27 – 28

INFO BOX

HOW TO READ AN EPISTLE or NT LETTER

- 1 *Just as in the OT, any book, including letters, may not be by the person to whom it is attributed. Scholars point to 'internal evidence' (that is, within the letters themselves) which suggests a date later than (say) Paul, who died in 64AD. At the time it was a way of acknowledging the authority of the person named, and shows humility on the part of his disciple who is actually writing. They're not being dishonest.*
- 2 *Dating is often 'probably' or 'possibly' and either this or that. Options are put briefly here to give a 'taste' of some of the difficulties.*
- 3 *In the first century letters followed a pattern, to which the NT letters mostly (but not always) conform:*
 - Salutation: names of writer & recipient; greeting*
 - Thanksgiving*
 - Opening of body of letter*
 - Body of letter, usually in two parts, theoretical and practical*
 - Closing of body of letter, often with promise of visit*
 - Ethical instruction*
 - Closing: greetings, doxology, benediction*
- 4 *Some letters are addressed to an individual, but most are to a whole congregation. Where this is so, it's important to read 'you' as plural. eg Read 1 Cor 3.16-17 (plural 'you') and see what difference it makes.*
- 5 *Try to put yourself in the shoes of a first recipient of the letter. How might you feel as a congregation as you listen to this being read aloud? What individual responsibility might you have as a result?*
- 6 *Some letters are obviously written in response to a question, a need or a problem; we therefore hear only one side of a conversation. Where this is so, try to be aware of what the other side might be saying or asking.*
- 7 *Because of 6 above, most letters do not contain a theology which is systematic or universally applicable, but pastoral and contextual, that is, it is a spontaneous, pastoral response to a particular context where Paul particularly does what's been called 'theology on the hoof'. See 1 Cor 8 for an example. We do this today of course, when new questions arise; we reflect on the breadth and depth of what we do know and apply it to the new context.*

Week 38 Early letters

Sun Psalms 79, 89, 143

And now to the earliest existing Christian document - of any kind ...

INFO BOX

1 Thessalonians: *written by Paul from Corinth 50 – 51 AD to a church in a Gentile setting, a few months after it was founded by Paul, Silas and Timothy. A tiny community, most of whom are converts from sophisticated pagan religions, in a vast cosmopolitan, multicultural city, capital of Macedonia.*

Mon 1 Thess 1 – 3
 Tues 1 Thess 4 – 5

INFO BOX

Paul's authorship of **2 Thessalonians** is debated; therefore the **date is uncertain**. If he wrote it, it has to be within a few months of the first. That is problematic however because there are obvious differences in thought, especially with regard to the 'Day of the Lord'. Most therefore believe it was written by an associate of Paul, interpreting Paul's first letter and following its pattern and subject matter closely for a later situation.

Wed 2 Thess 1 – 3

INFO BOX

Galatians: a circular letter from Paul to a group of churches in Galatia; date could be anywhere between **49 and 58 AD**.

Thurs Gal 1 – 2

Fri Gal 3 – 5.1 →

Sat Gal 5 – 6

INFO BOX

Gal 3.27-28 is an early baptismal affirmation - of the unity of the church in Christ.

Week 39

Sun Psalms 5, 131, 141

INFO BOX

1 Corinthians: Corinth was a cosmopolitan city and a Roman colony. Paul founded the church there, and wrote to them from Ephesus a few years later – **between 52 and 55 AD** – to deal with the problems connected with a church with a broad social spectrum and to address the spiritual pride of the leaders.

Mon *If you can, read through the whole of 1 Corinthians in one sitting*

Tues 1 Cor 1 – 4

Wed 1 Cor 5 – 8

Thurs 1 Cor 9 – 11

Fri 1 Cor 12 – 14

Sat 1 Cor 15 – 16

INFO BOX

1 Corinthians contains:

- the earliest account we have of the Lord's Supper (11.17-34)
- the well-known hymn of love (ch 13) which is the middle of a 'sandwich' (chs 12–14).
- a very early Christian creed (15.1-11)

Week 40

Sun Psalms 63, 116, 128

INFO BOX

2 Corinthians, written by Paul, **date uncertain** but perhaps not long after 1 Cor. There are definitely 2, but perhaps as many as 5 or 6 separate letters within this one that we now have. The identity and content of his opponents' teaching is difficult to determine.

Mon *If you can, read through the whole of 2 Corinthians in one sitting*

Tues 2 Cor 1 – 3

Wed 2 Cor 4 – 7

Thurs 2 Cor 8 – 9

Fri 2 Cor 10 – 11

Sat 2 Cor 12 – 13

Week 41

Sun Psalms 19, 44, 126

INFO BOX

Romans: Written from Corinth about **56 AD**. Placed first in the collection of letters a) because of its length and b) because it shows Paul's theology in one extended argument; it is not responding to a particular pastoral situation.

NB If you usually read the NIV, and have a version published before 2011, please read at least 3.21-26 in the NRSV, as the NIV gives some words a different meaning from the Greek. Paul's basic argument is about the righteousness (ie faithfulness) of God in keeping covenant with Israel and not about the righteousness that God imputes to us.

Mon *Try to read through the whole of Romans in one or two sittings*

Tues Rom 1 – 4

Wed Rom 5 – 8
 Thurs Rom 9 – 11
 Fri Rom 12 – 16

INFO BOX

Colossians tackles a philosophical heresy which has serious consequences. Authorship is hotly debated, but most seem to agree that, although some language and theology is different, Paul is indeed the author. If so, date is **mid 50s**, written in prison probably in Ephesus. If not by Paul, by a student of his **a generation later**, still from Asia Minor.

Sat Col 1 – 4

Week 42

Sun Psalms 104, 123, 135

INFO BOX

Philemon By Paul from prison; some argue for Ephesus in the **mid 50s**, others for Rome in the **early 60s**.

Mon Philemon

INFO BOX

Philippians was written by Paul from prison – most probably under house arrest in Rome, **early 60s AD** (see Acts 28.30).

Tues Phil 1 – 4

INFO BOX

ALL four gospels are anonymous; the ascriptions to an apostle were attached by the early church to affirm their theological authority and authenticity.

Mark

INFO BOX

MARK is the first gospel to be written – most likely around **70 AD**, although a few still argue for a date around 60-62AD. 'Mark' writes in a rough Greek style, but he is a skilled story-teller. The structure is in 3 sections:

- 1 1.1 – 8.26 in Galilee and Gentile territory; very fast pace
- 2 8.27 – 10.52 on the way to Jerusalem; pace slows down
- 3 11 – 16.8 in Jerusalem; pace very slow

Wed *If you can manage it, read quickly through the whole of Mark's gospel in a sitting or two. What is Mark's 'picture' of Jesus like?*

Thurs Mark 1 – 3
 Fri Mark 4 – 8.26
 Sat Mark 8.27 – 10



Week 43

Sun Psalms 22, 69, 133
 Mon Mark 11 – 14.9
 Tues Mark 14.10 – 16.8 (+9 – end)

During the day take time to reflect on the gospel as a whole. Did you notice anything you hadn't before? What do you particularly like about it? Is there anything about it you find difficult?

Another letter

INFO BOX

The very different language, vocabulary and style of **Ephesians** together with a theological perspective which has moved beyond his early letters, means it was probably not written by Paul, but by someone close to him, possibly as a reinterpretation of Colossians for a new situation. Sometime in the **70s or 80s**.

Wed Read through Ephesians in one sitting
 Thurs Eph 1 – 3
 Fri Eph 4 – 6
 Sat Take some time for personal reflection

Week 44 Luke

Sun Psalms 91, 100, 117

INFO BOX

LUKE was probably written about **80 – 90 AD**. He uses some of Mark's material, but adapts and expands it. Many very familiar stories are found only in Luke (eg shepherds at the manger, John's birth, the Good Samaritan, Zacchaeus). A few still assume he was a Gentile, but it's unlikely as his understanding of Judaism is profound and it contains many allusions to and uses of the OT. Structure:

- 1 1.1 – 4 Prologue
- 2 1.5 – 2.52 Birth and infancy
- 3 3,1 – 4.13 Preparation for Jesus' ministry
- 4 4.14 – 9.50 Ministry in Galilee
- 5 9.51 – 19.27 Journey to Jerusalem
- 6 19.28 – 21.38 Ministry in Jerusalem
- 7 22 – 24 Passion and Resurrection

Notice Luke's special interests: the Holy Spirit, the poor, the sick, the disadvantaged, the outsider, the outcast, women; and meals – 'table fellowship' is highly significant for Luke.

Mon If you can manage it, read the whole of Luke's gospel in one or two sittings. What is Luke's 'picture' of Jesus like?
 Tues Luke 1 – 2
 Wed Luke 3 – 4.13
 Thurs Luke 4.14 – 6
 Fri Luke 7 – 9.50
 Sat Luke 9.51 – 11



Week 45

Sun Psalms 27, 31, 66
 Mon Luke 12 – 14
 Tues Luke 15 – 17
 Wed Luke 18 – 19.27
 Thurs Luke 19.28 – 21
 Fri Luke 22 – 24
 Sat Take time to reflect on the gospel as a whole. Did you notice anything you hadn't before? What do you particularly like about it? Is there anything about it you find difficult?

INFO BOX

Luke is unique among the four gospel writers in that he wrote a 'Part 2' – the story of the early churches in the **ACTS OF THE APOSTLES**. (weeks 35-37)

Week 46 **Matthew**

Sun Psalms 40, 49, 127

INFO BOX

MATTHEW also uses some of Mark's material, has a complex, multi-layer, literary structure, and includes 5 major 'speeches'.

- Matthew is the only gospel writer to use the word '**church**' (Gk ecclesia) – and then only twice. 16.18 refers to the universal Church, 18.17 to the local church.

- **Great care is needed** in interpreting the seeming anti-Jewishness of the gospels. At the time of Jesus the Pharisees were enthusiastic reformers, drawing people back to God, but by a strict interpretation of the Torah – like Ezra and Nehemiah. Following the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, the surviving Jewish leadership, mainly Pharisees, restructured Judaism, to which all Jewish groups, including Jewish Christians, were expected to conform. By the time Matthew was written in about **90 AD**, these groups had either been thrown out of the synagogue or had voluntarily, but with some animosity, separated from them, although not from their own Jewishness or from many of their Jewish traditions and festivals. Family splits were inevitable and agonising. The bitter language of the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leaders reflects this later situation. Luther, who was notoriously anti-Semitic, was mainly responsible for our viewing these 'conflict stories' simplistically – and wrongly - as 'law' versus 'grace' – which can lead to the heretical notion that the NT God is different from the OT God. Paul, himself a Pharisee (Acts 23.6; 26.5), never denigrates the Torah.

Mon If you can manage it, read part 1 of Matthew (up to 12.21) in one sitting. What is Matthew's 'picture' of Jesus like so far?

Tues Matt 1 – 2

Wed Matt 3 – 4

Thurs Matt 5 – 7

Fri Matt 8- 9

Sat Matt 10 – 12.21

**Week 47**

Sun Psalms 86, 113, 118

Mon Matt 12.22 – 16.12

Tues Matt 16.13 – 18

Wed Matt 19 – 20

Thurs Matt 21 – 25

Fri Matt 26 – 28

Sat Take time to reflect on the gospel as a whole. Did you notice anything you hadn't before? What do you particularly like about it? Is there anything about it you find difficult?

Week 48 **More letters**

Sun Psalms 110, 112, 129

INFO BOX

The author of **Hebrews** assumes a detailed knowledge of the Levitical priesthood; it is probably a sermon, with explanation of scripture woven together with exhortation, to a faith community in crisis. Clement of Rome quoted from it in 95-96 AD; written any time between **60 and 90 AD**.

Mon Heb 1 – 4.13

Tues Heb 4.14 – 7

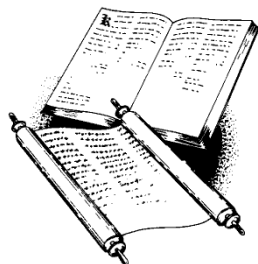
Wed Heb 8 – 10

Thurs Heb 11 – 13

INFO BOX

*James is thought by some to be the brother of Jesus and that the letter bears unmistakable signs of first generation Christianity. Others however quote internal evidence suggesting he could not be, among other things the very elegant Greek used. Authorship and date are therefore debated; **possibly mid first century (50s AD) but possibly a lot later.** It resembles other wisdom literature, conveys traditional moral instruction and is God-centred rather than Christ-centred.*

Fri James 1 – 2
Sat James 3 – 5



INFO BOX

*It was not until about the end of the first century AD that the Hebrew Bible canon was fixed.
(Greek kanna means rule or yardstick)*

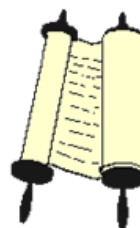
Week 49 John

Sun Psalms 18, 35, 145

INFO BOX

***JOHN's** gospel was probably written around **95 – 100 AD**, and is significantly different from the others. It is only from John that we hear of a three year ministry – he records three Passover meals – and Jesus' ministry goes back and forth from Galilee to Jerusalem. The literary style is also different: fewer but longer stories interspersed with long discourses and theological interpretations. As with Matthew, the intensity of the anti-Jewish language arises from conflicts between the new 'Christian Jews' and the 'synagogue Jews' which were happening at the time of writing.*

Mon *If you can manage it, read the whole of John's gospel in one or two sittings. What is John's 'picture' of Jesus like?*
Tues John 1.1 – 18
Wed John 1.19 – 2
Thurs John 3
Fri John 4
Sat John 5 – 7.9

**Week 50**

Sun Psalms 41, 148, 150
Mon John 7.10 – 8
Tues John 9 – 10
Wed John 11 – 12
Thurs John 13 – 17
Fri John 18 – 21
Sat *Take time to reflect on the gospel as a whole. Did you notice anything you hadn't before? What do you particularly like about it? Is there anything about it you find difficult?*

Week 51 The later letters

Sun Psalms 46, 115, 90

INFO BOX

1 & 2 Timothy and Titus – commonly called the Pastoral Letters. No one ascribes these to Paul today; there are too many difficulties: they don't fit with his life as we know it; the church has become more institutionalised (compare with 1 Cor 10-14); the false teaching described doesn't fit Paul's time; there are significant theological differences; Timothy and Titus are seasoned missionaries (see Acts) not young and inexperienced – and so on. Probably therefore in the Pauline tradition for the church a couple of generations after Paul's death (64AD) Date: any time between **90 & 150 AD**.

Mon 1 Tim 1 – 6

Tues 2 Tim 1 – 4

Wed Titus 1 – 3

INFO BOX

1 Peter - One of the 'catholic' or general epistles, addressed to a group of churches in Asia Minor who were facing a difficult social situation – verbal abuse and mockery; from 2.13-17 we know there is no government persecution as yet. The author raises no questions about the existing order, but commands they live in submission to it and therefore as good citizens in that particular historical context. The Christians seem to be new to the faith. For several reasons, including style of Greek, reference to the Greek (not Heb) OT, and conditions that are later than 64 AD when the apostle Peter died, it is unlikely to be by him. A date of around **90 AD** would seem to be the best fit.

Thurs 1 Pet 1 – 2.10

Fri 1 Pet 2.11 – 5

INFO BOX

Jude – if by the brother of James (ie the brother of Jesus) or someone of the same period, written **possibly** as early as **mid first century**. It was deemed authoritative enough to be quoted and used in 2 Peter, where the theology is toned down a little. He writes to counteract the infiltration of a group of false teachers who were corrupting the church by saying Christians were above the law (ie it was not necessary to live a moral life). Again, it **could be much later** if by a disciple of Jude.

INFO BOX

2 Peter – another 'catholic' letter, in the form of a farewell address, in order to combat false teaching and ethical behaviour from within the membership.

Date: Paul's letters have already been collected and are read as scripture (3.15-16); that and other internal evidence suggests, as with 1 Peter, this was by a Christian leader of a **later generation** who honoured the name and message of Peter. This letter was viewed with suspicion by the early church and did not appear in the first lists of authoritative writings.

Sat Jude; 2 Peter

Week 52 And finally

Sun Psalms 23, 57, 121

INFO BOX

1, 2 & 3 John, written about **100 AD**, author unknown, but who refers to himself as 'the Elder'. There are similarities of ideas and language to the 4th gospel which is also anonymous; thought by some to be the same author, but most now think there was a circle of communities which shared a common Johannine tradition.

Mon 1 John

Tues 2 & 3 John

INFO BOX

Revelation is unique in the NT – a type of literature (apocalyptic) which is notoriously difficult for us to understand and has been badly interpreted throughout its history. Intended to convey comfort and hope to its original readers, it sounds to us more like impending doom. It's full of symbolism, code language and bizarre imagery, written for Christians suffering under a severely oppressive and unjust regime – probably towards the end of Domitian's reign in about **95 AD** - to encourage them to stand firm; God will triumph in the end. Notably it's particularly appreciated by Christians under similarly harsh regimes – slaves in the southern states of the USA, USSR under Communism, Bonhoeffer in Nazi Germany to name but a few. Unlikely to be written by John the apostle.

Wed Rev 1 – 5
 Thurs Rev 6 – 10
 Fri Rev 11 – 16
 Sat Rev 17 – 22

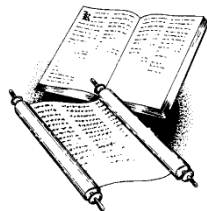
INFO BOX

The final stage in the formation of the New Testament

With a host of other dubious writings and heresies doing the rounds, it became vital to have a definitive authority so that it was clear what was authentically Christian and what wasn't. This led to the formation of **the New Testament canon**, a process of inclusion and exclusion which took three hundred years. It was a matter of recognising that particular works already possessed authority rather than imposing authority upon them.

By 200 AD, seven books were still being questioned: Hebrews, James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John and Revelation. Origen (around 250 AD) made efforts to find out what books were already being used in the church liturgy, and used this experiential evidence as a basis for putting together the scriptures.

It was not **until 367 AD** that Athanasius defined the canon of 27 NT books.



And so we have the Bible,
 still in the original Hebrew and Greek, with a smattering of Aramaic.
 The journey from there to the language of 21st century English is another story.

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