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## 2. Exodus

**Theme:** Redemption from bondage

**Author:** Moses

**Date:** 15th century B.C.

Exodus opens with the descendants of Jacob having multiplied from 70 at the time of Joseph's death to a nation of more than two million. The nation of Israel was enslaved by Egypt for many years, but God called Moses, who was raised in the pharaoh's palace, to lead his fellow Israelites out of Egypt. God brought 10 plagues on the Egyptians to pave the way for the Israelites' release. Through the miraculous parting of the Red Sea, the Israelites escaped from the Egyptian army. God showed His presence to His people with pillars of cloud and fire, but they soon began to grumble and complain against God.

Through Moses, God revealed another portion of His plan — the law and the tabernacle. When we think of the law, we tend to think of the Ten Commandments (Chapter 20), but that was only the beginning.

Did God really expect that Israel would be able to obey His laws? No, He was making a point. God knows that we need to be wholly dependent on Him, but we don't know that. So He gave the law to show us what we would have to do in order to be saved by our own efforts. None of us can keep the law, and that's the point. And that's why God included the sacrifices and ceremonies in the law. They can't rid people of sin, but they did cover the sins of the Jews until Christ's perfect sacrifice on the cross.

When Moses told the people about the law, they promised to keep it. Of course, they didn't. While Moses was on Mount Sinai talking with God, the people gave up on him and began worshiping a gold calf, as the Egyptians did.

## 4. Numbers

**Theme:** God's corrective discipline and continuing love

**Author:** Moses

**Date:** 15th century B.C.

Numbers is a sequel to Exodus. (The book is called Numbers because of two censuses, or numberings of the people, that are recorded.) It recounts the Israelites' journey from Mount Sinai to the land of Canaan, which God had promised them. It wasn't a smooth journey. The people complained almost constantly. When they reached the border of the land, 12 spies were chosen (one from each tribe) and sent to report on the land God had told them to possess. Ten of the spies reported that the people who lived in the land were too powerful. Once again, the Israelites refused to rely on God — they panicked and nearly stoned the other two spies, Caleb and Joshua, who trusted God and recommended that the Israelites enter the land.

As punishment, God would not allow them to enter because of their disobedience and lack of faith. The Israelites had to wander in the wilderness 40 years until the disobedient generation died out. A whole generation missed the blessings God had planned for them in the land. Everybody who was an adult on the day of the spies' report died in the wilderness except Caleb and Joshua. During the time in the wilderness, the people grumbled against God some more. God responded by sending poisonous snakes. Many Israelites died. On God's instruction, Moses set up a bronze serpent on a pole. Those who looked on the serpent in faith were healed. This serpent was a picture of the death of Christ on the cross.

## 7. Judges

**Theme:** Consequences of sin

**Author:** Unknown

**Date:** 11th century B.C.

Judges covers the chaotic time in Israel's history between Joshua's death and the beginning of an organized government under King Saul, a period of about 340 years. God intended the nation to be governed by Him alone, with priests as administrators. He promised the people great blessings if they would only trust and obey Him. He also warned them that if they turned away from Him and worshiped false gods, He would ... *bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle ... (Deuteronomy 28:49)*. That's exactly what happened when Israel repeatedly turned to false idols. Other nations invaded — just as God had promised. This was intended as discipline, to teach the Israelites to trust God alone, but the people sank deeper and deeper into sin. God is just and will punish sin, but He is also a God of grace and mercy. The 12 judges were actually military leaders whom God raised up to deliver His people from their enemies. Among them were Samson and Gideon, two of the Bible's best-known heroic figures. This cycle of sin-punishment-repentance-deliverance occurred seven times. The deliverance was always temporary, and even some of the judges were sinful. The lesson to be learned is that whenever people attempt to go their own way without God's guidance, disaster will follow.

## 9. 1 Samuel

**Theme:** History of Israel

**Author:** Unknown

**Date:** 12th-11th century B.C.

First and Second Samuel, originally considered one book, cover approximately 150 years. First Samuel begins with the birth and childhood of Samuel and records his ministry as the last of the Israelite judges. Also included is Israel's demand for a king, the anointing of Saul to the throne as Israel's first king and David's life prior to becoming king.

## 10. 2 Samuel

**Theme:** History of Israel (continued)

**Author:** Unknown

**Date:** 11th century B.C.

Second Samuel recounts the strife and struggle leading to the establishment of King David as ruler of Israel in Jerusalem. It also records David's military victories, his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Absalom's revolt and David's disobedience in numbering the people. (The full account of David's life extends from 1 Samuel 16:12 through 1 Kings 2:11.)

## 15. Ezra

**Theme:** Return of the remnant

**Author:** Ezra

**Date:** 536-457 B.C.

The two major events recorded by Ezra are the return of the Jewish remnant from Babylon to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel and the rebuilding of the temple. Ezra, a priest, returned to Jerusalem following the return of the faithful remnant. Ezra is the first of six books (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi) written after Israel's captivity.

After the Israelites returned to their homes, the people started marrying wives from pagan nations. Ezra was upset because this was the same sin that had resulted in the captivity in Babylon. Ezra prayed before the people, thanking God for what He'd done and for His kindness toward Israel. He confessed the nation's sins. The gathered crowd made a covenant to rid the nation of the wives and children who worshiped other gods. Three days later, the entire nation gathered and came to an almost-unanimous decision — they would rid themselves of the sinful influence. It's just as true today as it was in Ezra's time — if another person is influencing you to focus on things other than the Lord, the relationship is wrong.

## 16. Nehemiah

**Theme:** Rebuilding Jerusalem's walls

**Author:** Nehemiah

**Date:** 446-434 B.C.

In 538 B.C., a small group of Jews was allowed to return to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel from their captivity in Babylon. The temple was rebuilt in 515 B.C. and Ezra called the people to spiritual restoration in 457 B.C. But in 444 B.C., almost 100 years after the first Jews had returned, much of the destruction done by the Babylonian army hadn't been repaired. Israel was surrounded by enemies and in danger.

Nehemiah, a court official under King Artaxerxes, heard about the condition of the city and asked permission to return to his homeland and rebuild the walls. His enemies did everything they could think of to discourage him. After a nighttime inspection, Nehemiah called the Jewish officials together and encouraged them to rebuild the city's defenses.

Finally, in spite of discouragement and threats, the work was finished. Nehemiah ends his work with an account of the nation's spiritual revival and the dedication of the walls. In this book, Nehemiah prays 11 times. This book records the last historical events of the Old Testament, although Malachi was probably written some 60 years later.

## 22. Song of Solomon

**Theme:** Human and divine love

**Author:** Solomon

**Date:** 11th century B.C.

Picture in your mind any music video you've seen. Chances are that you noticed a few things. The lead singer switched wardrobes several times, often returning to one or two main outfits again and again. A backup chorus danced on and off the screen a few times. The activity that was going on sometimes had very little to do with the words that were being sung.

The Song of Solomon is very like a music video — 900 B.C.-style. There are two main leads, one male and one female, who sing about their pasts, their hopes, their dreams and their feelings. There is a backup group known as the Daughters of Jerusalem. And there is a lot of symbolic, poetic language that

doesn't mean exactly what it appears to say — for example, the poet compares his love's hair to a flock of goats.

The main characters include the Shulamite bride and the king. The book demonstrates that physical desire between a man and woman who are married to each other is a good thing in God's sight. We were created with our desires. Yes, sin has perverted them as it has perverted everything else in this world. But as long as we stick to God's guidelines, the physical desires He gave us are good.

## 23. Obadiah

**Theme:** Doom of Edom

**Author:** Obadiah

**Date:** Ninth century B.C.

Obadiah, known as the doom song, is the smallest Old Testament book. Way back in Genesis, we read about Isaac's twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Jacob's name was changed to Israel and his offspring became the 12 tribes of Israel. Esau's descendants became the Edomites, a nation located to the south of Israel. During the reign of Jehoram, around 850 B.C., the Philistines and Arabians invaded Judah. Edom joined up with Judah's enemies. Obadiah, about whom we know very little, prophesied Edom's approaching destruction: *Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever (1:10).*

In 1812, the unique ruins of this ancient nation were discovered. They stand as a silent witness to the fulfillment of Obadiah's prophecy.

## 24. Micah

**Theme:** Judgments

**Author:** Micah

**Date:** Eighth century B.C.

Micah ministered for approximately 25 years (at the same time as Isaiah), spanning the time when Israel was conquered by Assyria. He mentions the sins of both Israel and Judah and implores the people *to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God (6:8b)*. He closes with a courtroom scene in which God brings His people to trial and finds them guilty. Micah also condemned wealthy landowners and merchants for taking advantage of the poor. Although Micah was a prophet of doom, he offered words of hope, predicting that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. The name Micah means "Who is like the Lord?"

## 25. Haggai

**Theme:** Encouragement to rebuild the temple

**Author:** Haggai

**Date:** Sixth century B.C.

Haggai's two chapters contain five messages. Cyrus, king of Persia, allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem. They got off to a good start worshiping God, but after 16 years, the temple still wasn't completed. In 520 B.C., Haggai stepped forward to encourage everyone to get to work. Twenty-three days later, the people resumed constructing the temple. ... *Consider your ways. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the LORD (1:7-8)*. Note: Eighty years later, the Jews still hadn't rebuilt the wall around Jerusalem. It was Nehemiah who finally accomplished that task and brought about a spiritual revival in the nation.

## 26. Mark

**Theme:** Jesus the Servant

**Author:** John Mark

**Date:** A.D. 55-56

Mark is the shortest of the four Gospels. The author focuses on Jesus Christ as a servant, with particular emphasis on His ultimate service of dying on the cross. One third of the book deals with the events of the week leading up to the crucifixion. Mark's emphasis can be seen in Mark 10:45: *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many*. Mark includes many miracles that show Jesus' love for people. We read how Jesus healed many who were deaf, dumb or blind; raised a little girl to life; fed a hungry crowd of 5,000 and welcomed little children. Believers met in Mark's mother's house, and Peter visited there often. In fact, Peter was probably the source of much of Mark's information about the events of Christ's life.

## 27. Romans

**Theme:** Righteousness of God

**Author:** Paul

**Date:** A.D. 58

Romans was written during the apostle Paul's third visit to Corinth. It contains the most detailed explanation of the newly-revealed gospel of Christ. Although he had not yet visited the church in Rome, the apostle had heard of the believers' great faith in Christ, and he anticipated visiting them soon. Paul's major concern was to establish them firmly in the truth of his gospel. (Paul refers to it as "his" gospel because he was appointed by God to be the minister of this new message.) He explains it in a logical, step-by-step method.

- Humanity is sinful and separated from God. We are His enemies and deserve death.
- We are powerless and incapable of solving this problem, and we cannot obtain salvation by observing the law.
- God stepped in and offered His solution — His Son, Jesus Christ.
- We access this solution by faith — by simply believing that Christ's death is sufficient to pay for our sinfulness.
- When we do this, we are no longer slaves to sin. Christ is in us and nothing can separate us from Him.
- We still carry around our sin-corrupted bodies for now, and we still sin.
- But it's not about us anymore. *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. (8:1-2).*
- But what about the Jews? God made them many promises in the Old Testament. Those promises will still be fulfilled. In Chapter 11, Paul makes the following points: 1) A small number of Jews were still being saved as members of the Body of Christ; 2) Israel's rejection of Christ was not a surprise to God; 3) The Gentiles should realize that Israel's current situation is part of God's plan; 4) Israel has been cut off from the olive tree

(Christ) but they will be grafted back in (11:23-24); 5) All of God's promises will be fulfilled in the future and Israel will resume its place as God's chosen people.

In the final five chapters of Romans, Paul explains how we should live in the light of all he's just explained.

## 28. Philippians

**Theme:** Joy in every circumstance

**Author:** Paul

**Date:** A.D. 61

Paul visited Philippi on his second missionary journey. When he wrote this letter to the Philippians, he was under house arrest in Rome. One of his reasons for writing was to thank the believers for sending him a gift. He also wanted to encourage believers who were being persecuted. Paul wrote about his imprisonment and how he was still able to spread the gospel. Paul stated that he did not know whether he would live on for a while and continue his ministry or die and be with the Lord. Whatever was to occur, he wasn't worried. His rejoicing wasn't an act — He only wanted Christ to be glorified. He told the Philippians to follow his example, to lay aside their worries, rejoice, pray and be content with God's provision in all circumstances. Paul also urged his readers to be humble and show interest in other's needs, not just their own. By doing so, they would follow the example of Christ, who humbled Himself and came to earth as a servant to die for our sins. Paul was a man of status and achievement before he was saved, but he made it clear that his past life was worth nothing compared to knowing Christ. His goal was to know-Christ more.



## 29. Philemon

**Theme:** Paul's plea for Onesimus

**Author:** Paul

**Date:** A.D. 61

In his other letters, Paul lays out the doctrine given to him by the Holy Spirit and explains how we should live in light of that doctrine. In Philemon, we see an illustration of what that teaching and application looks like in an actual, real-life situation. Philemon, to whom the letter is addressed, was a believer living in Colossae. He was a man of considerable wealth. Onesimus, his runaway slave, had recently been led to the Lord by Paul, who was imprisoned in Rome. With this letter, Paul was sending Onesimus back to Colossae, and he begged Philemon to receive his slave as a Christian brother. "If Onesimus has done you any wrong or owes you anything," Paul wrote, "you can hold me responsible." Paul's love and concern for His friends and fellow believers is evident throughout the short letter.

## 30. James

**Theme:** Practical faith in the face of hardship

**Author:** James

**Date:** A.D. 42

Like Hebrews, the book of James was written to Jews. James, the half brother of Jesus Christ, was one of the leaders of the Jewish assembly in Jerusalem. He was writing to Jews who lived in other countries, many of them forced to leave because of persecution. The book has a very Jewish feel, with references to Abraham, the synagogue and the law. James and his audience believed in the risen Christ, of course, but there is no mention of what the cross means.

James was most likely the first New Testament book, written long before the apostle Paul wrote any of his letters explaining the gospel that was entrusted to him for the Gentiles. When we read James, we need to remember that it was written to the Jews (just as we do when we read the requirements of the law in the Old Testament). But there is a great deal of practical application in the book for the Jews and for us. For example:

- Find comfort in spiritual, not physical, things (1:9-11).
- Don't favor the rich over the poor (2:1-4).
- Control your mouth and you'll have a better chance of controlling your body (3:6).
- Avoid the world and its temptations (4:4).
- Remember that every day could be your last (4:13-17).

## 31. Jude

**Theme:** Warnings against godless teachers

**Author:** Jude

**Date:** A.D. 70-80

We don't know very much about Jude. He is described as the brother of James, which would make him a half brother of Jesus Christ. He was writing to a group of believers who were under attack by false teachers ... *who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ (1:4).*

These evil men were fellowshiping with the believers and tempting them to fall into sin. Jude reminded the believers that the apostles (Paul and Peter) had warned them in advance that this would happen. He compares the false teachers to Cain, Balaam and Korah, and, in some of the most descriptive language in the Bible, calls them ... *waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever (1:12-13).*

Jude also reminded the believers how God has dealt with the wicked in the past — the Egyptians, the fallen angels and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. He used a lot of strong words, but he ended his short book with strong words of praise in Jude 1:24 for ... *Him who is able to keep you from stumbling ... even in the face of strong opposition.*

## 32. Revelation

**Theme:** Triumph of God over Satan

**Author:** John

**Date:** Around A.D. 95

Through an angel, the Lord revealed to John a picture of events that would mark the end of the world as we know it and the manifestation of the kingdom of God. These events, while prophecies in their own right, give further details about other prophecies that appear throughout Scripture. As the end approaches, the world will become a place of unspeakable evil and misery. God will judge all sin and make things right. Satan will meet his final doom. Revelation depicts Jesus Christ in all His power and glory. It tells how He will return to conquer evil and set up His rule on the new heaven and new earth.

John opens with letters to seven churches. Each church is commended for the good it has done, counseled to clean up those things it has done wrong, and given promises for the future.

The book then describes the horrors of God's judgments on sinful man through the seven seals and the seven bowls. These are followed with a description of the Lord's second coming to earth and the final judgments of Satan and unbelievers. There are a lot of very frightening scenes in Revelation — because God is a God of justice. But He's also a God of grace and He had John write: *And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price (22:17b).*

In Chapters 21 and 22, we see how humans will finally realize the purpose for which we were created — to love, worship and enjoy the Lord in perfect fellowship forever.

# Bible Reading Checklist

2015-2016 Year



## EXODUS

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40

## NUMBERS

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36				

## JUDGES

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21									

## 1 SAMUEL

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31									

## 2 SAMUEL

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24						

## EZRA

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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## NEHEMIAH

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13							

## SONG OF SONGS

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
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## OBADIAH

1
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## MICAH

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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## HAGGAI

1	2
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## MARK

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16				

## ROMANS

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16				

## PHILIPPIANS

1	2	3	4
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## PHILEMON

1
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## JAMES

1	2	3	4	5
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## JUDE

1
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## REVELATION

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22								