

Basics of Bible Literacy
Booklet # 2
Lessons 5-8

It's About Time

Hebrew and Greek Definitions

Any simple English definitions of Greek and Hebrew root words in this series of booklets are not intended to be scholarly expositions, but merely helpful basics. Students who wish to go into more detail on the technical nuances in the ancient languages are encouraged to seek expert advice on what reference works would be most useful.

The definitions of Greek words are derived from a combination of:

The online *New Testament Greek Lexicon* at
bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/NewTestamentGreek/

This Lexicon is based on *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* and *Smith's Bible Dictionary*

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance: Greek Lexicon

The definitions of Hebrew words are derived from a combination of:

The online *Brown, Driver, Briggs Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon* at
bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/OldTestamentHebrew/

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance: Hebrew Lexicon

English Definitions

Unless otherwise noted, any definitions of English words in this booklet are adapted from the *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* at:
<http://www.m-w.com/home.htm>

Biblical Quotations

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Oasis7@Gmail.com

Or send a written request to:

Oasis Ministries, PO Box 734, Cedartown GA 30125-0734

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5 Where to Begin?

Relative Time

Imagine that you are a boy born in the year 1980. As you grow to be a toddler, you get your first tricycle. A little later you get a sidewalk bike with training wheels. But on your birthday in 1988, your folks present you with your first “big bike,” a really important milestone for you!

If someone in 1990 had asked you, “When did you get your first big bike?” what do you think you would have answered? Most kids would **not** say, “In 1988.” They would say, instead, “When I was 8 years old.”

Why is this so?

Because, for most of us when we are young, “time” begins with our own birth. After having some history classes in grade school, we have a vague notion of things that happened “before I was born.” But it takes years to develop a really coherent sense of the spacing of events in history.

But what if **everyone** always talked about all events as happening in relation to their own birth? If you asked three different people, “When was President John Kennedy assassinated?” you would get three completely different answers! For one, it might be, “When I was 30.” For another, it might be “When I was 5.” And for another, it might be, “Before I was born.”

In order to be able to describe “time” outside of our own life, people in society have had to agree on a *point in time* to start counting from. Most of us never stop to think about this as we go about our daily business. We are used to the way our society has agreed to talk about time. But you will have to understand this concept if you are to clearly understand the events of the Bible. For the writers of the Bible were **not** from our society, and our time in history. They had a much different way of talking about time. In the same way you need to translate **words** from Hebrew and Greek to English, you will need to translate **time** ideas from the Bible.

Where Does Time Begin?

If I mention to you, “This year is 2008,” what do I really mean? I mean that there have been 2,008 years since some starting point. Given that starting point, I can talk about something that happened 1,776 years from that starting point—the American Declaration of Independence. I can also pinpoint a year for any event since that starting point.

But wait! What if I want to talk about something that happened 4,000 years ago? That would be **before** that “starting point.” You have likely realized this is how we get the concepts of “AD” and “BC.” If I told you something happened in the year 2008 BC, you would know I meant a **long** time ago!

AD and BC

Most people realize AD and BC are abbreviations of some sort, but for what words?

The *point in time* that our society uses for calculating years is the time when Jesus Christ was born. Therefore,

BC stands for Before Christ.

The letters AD are not so obvious, however, because they stand for words in the *Latin* language.

AD stands for Anno Domini.

Most of us don't learn Latin in school anymore, so you may not recognize those words. But you do know some words that are related, which can help you remember what AD means:

The word part *ann-* on the beginning of a word usually means *year*—like in the word *annual*, which means *happening yearly*, or the word *anniversary*, an event that happens *every year*.

The word part *domin-* usually refers to the term *lord*. It shows up in words like *dominate*, which means to *lord it over someone*, and in the word *dominion*, which means the territory *ruled over by a lord*.

Anno Domini means The Year of the Lord.

Of course, the *Lord* referred to is the Lord Jesus. If a date is followed by AD, you know the event happened in a year *after* the birth of Jesus.

Before BC

This way of calculating time was not used by people before the year 500 AD. Before that time, even those that believed in Jesus didn't count time from his birth. They used other starting points.

One common starting point in use was the founding of the city of Rome (which was about 753 BC). If we still used that starting point, the year we now call 2008 might be called 2761.

A Catholic monk in the sixth century AD decided to try to calculate when Jesus was born, and construct a new kind of calendar that would use that date as a starting point. However, the Bible nowhere gives us enough information to **exactly** pinpoint Jesus' birth. The best modern calculations are that the monk was probably a few years off.

But everyone has agreed to his starting point for over 1,000 years. So our calendar will likely stay the same for a long time.

Bible Dates

You need to realize that the Bible writers, including those who wrote after Jesus' time on Earth, did not use the birth of Jesus as a starting point for describing time.

In fact, nowhere in the Bible is **any** regular starting point used!

Modern history writers almost always include the dates for important events that they write about. We are used to memorizing dates for history tests in school. So it is very hard for modern readers to try to wade through the events in the Bible without some familiar time references.

Bible writers **do** use time references.

Jesus was born "during the time of King Herod."

Daniel begins his story "in the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim king of Judah."

Ezra begins his record “in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia.”

Isaiah received a special message from God “in the year that King Uzziah died.”

But nowhere in the Bible are these and other events connected up to one starting point so that you can figure out how they are related in time to one another.

As we build a *Bible Triptik* in the next few lessons, we will use the calendar **you** are used to using to help you see how Bible events are related.

6 History Hooks

Throughout my grade school, high school, and college experience, I was exposed to a **lot** of American History! It would be reasonable to expect that I have many dates (at least by the year) of important American events memorized. If you asked me to repeat such dates the day after an important college history class exam, I probably could have rattled off a large number.

But the human mind is capable of sorting through its “active” memory periodically, and dumping a lot of unused information into long-term archival storage. Once there, they are pretty hard to retrieve. Right now, if you asked me to quickly rattle off dates for American History events for you, I have just ten dates to offer. I’ll bet most readers can identify what events are related to at least 5 or 6 of the dates below. Test your memory for American History:

1. 1492
2. 1776
3. 1789
4. 1812
5. 1861-1865
6. 1903
7. 1914-1918
8. 1929
9. 1941-1945
10. 1963

Here are the events. How did you do?

1. Columbus arrives in the New World
2. Declaration of Independence
3. Constitution
4. War of 1812
5. Civil War
6. First flight by Wright Brothers
7. World War I
8. Stock Market Crash that contributed to the Great Depression

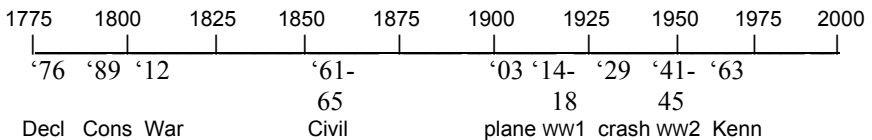
9. America at war in World War II
10. President John Kennedy assassinated

In fact, the only reason I really remember the 1903 date is because my grandmother was also born that year, and it seemed to me a long time ago a pretty interesting chronological connection.

Because these are the only dates I have really committed to memory, does that mean I have forgotten everything else I learned about American History? Not at all! What my mind has done is create its own “timeline,” with these events spread out along it as *points of reference*. While I don't remember other exact dates, I can place many, many historical events along that time line where they fit *related* in general to my nine points of reference.

Below is a time line like the one I see in my “mind's eye” when I think of American History.

Since the US became a nation less than 250 years ago, it is convenient for my mind to divide its history up into 25-year sections. My nine events are labeled on the time line. The 1492 date is the only one before 1775, so it isn't on the line.



Whenever I think of another event, I first envision my collection of dates as hooks on the time line, just like a row of hooks on a coat rack or cup rack. And then I mentally “hang” the new event on a hook either **on** or **between** my memorized events. For instance, if you asked me about when Abraham Lincoln died, I know he was the president during the Civil War, and that he died shortly before that war was over. So I would know that he died somewhere between 1861 and 1865.

If you ask me about when Franklin D. Roosevelt was president, I know he was President during the Great Depression, before America entered World War II; that he was elected 4 times; and that he died just before that war was over. So I would hook his presidency to the time line after 1929 and before 1946.

Obviously, the more details I know about a person or event, the more easily I can attach them to a hook. But I have found that I don't have to have hundreds of dates of events memorized, in order to have a decent grasp of the *flow* of

American History. What I need to do is understand how events **relate** in time to one another.

By understanding these time relationships, I can begin to understand how America developed, including how many of the problems we experience today began.

Have you ever heard the old saying, “Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it”? Unfortunately, many if not most people do not even know much about history. Even fewer have studied it to try to understand the world we live in now. And fewer still have really grasped how to learn from the lessons of history. Why?

1. Most serious history students have left God out of their perspective of history.
2. Most people who **do** believe in God don't study history.

It is sad that most Americans know so little about American history that we are ignorantly stumbling into more and more problems that could be avoided if we had learned from our history.

But it is even sadder that most Christians know so little about Bible history that they ignorantly stumble into more and more problems that could be avoided if they had learned from His Story!

Demolishing Mental Blocks

In the next lesson, we are going to begin construction of a Bible History Timeline that you can use to “hook” what you learn.

“But I have never been able to memorize dates!” I can hear some readers wail.

Is that so?

Try answering the following questions:

1. What year were you born?
2. What is the birthday (month and day) of one person in your family?
3. What is your zip code?
4. What is your telephone area code?
5. What is your phone number?
6. What is your street address?
7. Do you know a phone number for one friend or relative?

If you were able to answer those seven questions, you have proven that you can memorize at least seven numbers! That is all that dates are—they are numbers, just as a telephone number is a number.

I am convinced that most Bible students could make great progress in understanding the relationships among Bible events if they would memorize general dates for the lives of only **seven** Bible characters.

These dates can then be used as labels and points of reference—hooks—on each student's own mental Timeline.

A six year old child can be taught those seven numbers above!

So you **can** “teach yourself” seven general dates with the help of these lessons!

7

Using Clues

Solving Mysteries

Did you read *Nancy Drew* or *Hardy Boys Mystery* books when you were young? Or are you a fan of the various *CSI* (Crime Scene Investigation) or *Law and Order* TV series? If so, you probably enjoy trying to solve mysteries by considering clues. See how you do at solving this simple problem with the clues given.

1. My mother was 24 years old when I was born.
2. I was usually the youngest person in my classes in school.
3. I was a senior in high school when John Kennedy was killed.

Question: What year was my mother born?

At first glance, it may seem the question is totally unrelated to the clues! But they contain information that can be “added up” to answer the question.

How would you go about using these clues to solve the problem? You would need to consider what you know about the **details** given in clue 2 and clue 3.

You would need to know, or find out, when John Kennedy was killed (December, 1963.)

You would need to know, or find out, how old someone usually is when they graduate from high school (17 or 18).

It would help to know that where I went to school, most students started first grade at age 6. However, you could start at age 5 if your sixth birthday was coming by October 31. That would make you 16 by the beginning of your senior year. But you would turn 17 by October 31. I was one of the youngest, so I was probably one of the 17-year-olds.

Therefore: I was probably 17 in December, 1963.

My mother was 24 years older than me, which means she was age 41 in the year 1963.

Subtract: $1963 - 41 = 1922$.

Using these clues, my mother was likely born in 1922.

Back to the Bible

What does all this have to do with learning about the people and events of the Bible?

The kind of time clues given above are just the kind of clues that are in the Bible. Remember, there is no standard “starting point” for dates in the Bible. Some books of the Bible describe **how old** certain people were when they became a father, **how old** they were when they died.

Other Bible books date everything in the book on the number of years in the reigns of several kings. Just using the Bible **by itself**, there is no way we could figure out when, in the calendar we use, all these events happened.

Bible scholars have to use clues **in the Bible** and **outside the Bible** to solve these time problems. If a Bible book mentions a particular famous king of the ancient world, scholars look for records of that king's reign in sources outside the Bible that may have more specific time records.

Many of the people and events mentioned in the Bible **have** been found in historical records, and these records have helped Bible scholars to “piece together” a time line for Bible events.

Some parts of that time line are quite clear and specific and accurate. But the farther back in time you go, the harder it becomes to get enough clues for sure answers.

That is why it is so important that you understand you **don't** have to know **exact** dates to understand the Bible, but you **do** need to know the **order** in which things happened. And it helps to know the **general** amount of time that passed between Bible events.

In this lesson we are going to start building a **general** Bible time line.

The Starting Point

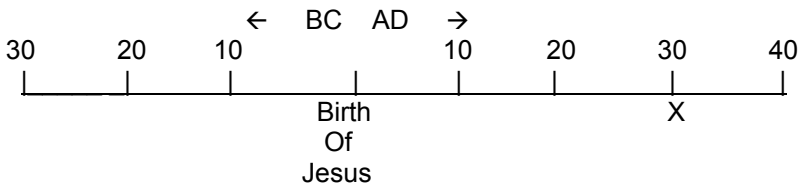
In Lesson 5 we learned that the starting point that divides AD from BC was about the time of the birth of Christ. The time line below shows the period right around that starting point.

The first period we will put on the time line is the life of Jesus.

Using the historical information given about King Herod in the Bible, and coordinating it with secular historical records, most Bible scholars have concluded that Jesus was probably born some time between 10 BC and 2 BC. A typical date offered in many Bible reference works is 4 BC.

The Bible states that Jesus was “about 30 years old” when he started his public ministry. And the details given about that ministry seem to point to it lasting 3 and 1/2 years. That would make him about 33 1/2 years old when He was crucified and resurrected. Counting forward 33 1/2 years from some time during 4 BC would take us to 29 or 30 A.D.

For purposes of our **general** Time Line, we are going to put an X on the time line at 30 AD to help you remember that is **about** the time of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

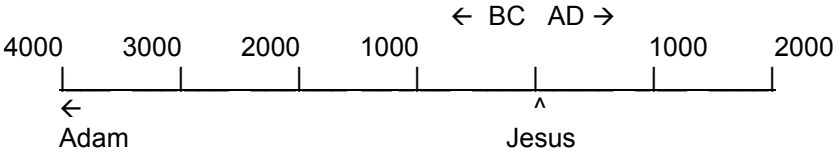


We are only seeing a tiny portion of the whole Bible time line above. It covers only a period of 70 years right around the life of Jesus. And each “space” on the time line is 10 years apart.

The complete time line we will be using throughout these lessons will need to cover 6,000 years. If we tried to mark each ten-year period, we would have to have a line much too big to fit on a lesson page. So we will first take a look at the **whole** time line, divided up into 1000-year periods. Later, as we study some of the details of events of the Bible, we will look at only a small portion of that whole time line.

Think of it as taking a “picture” of time with your video camera. First you can stand back and see the whole, big picture. Then you can use the “zoom” on the

lens to get in close and look at a small part of the picture. Below, we are “zooming out”:



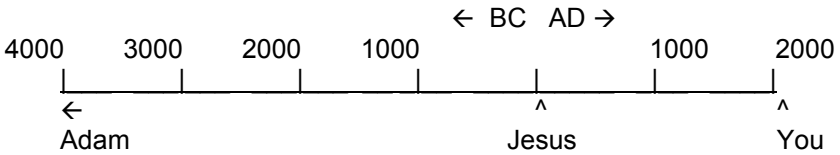
In addition to the life of Jesus shown on this time line, we have added Adam. There is no way, given the clues in the Bible or in regular history records, to calculate exactly when Adam was created. But all the evidence points to some time before 4,000 BC. That is why there is an arrow above Adam’s name pointing to the time before 4,000 BC on the line. Since we are now past the year 2,000 AD, that means Adam was created at least 6,000 years ago.



Completing the Timeline

Your Place in Time

In earlier lessons, it was explained that we would need to label only seven people on our general time line. In the last lesson, we placed Jesus and Adam. Before we go on with the rest of the seven, let’s add one more person to our line, number eight—you! Don’t forget, **you** are also a part of God’s plan. You are now living about 2,000 years after the time of Jesus, and about 6,000 years after the time of Adam.



Finding the Flood

As with the creation of Adam, it is impossible to determine from Bible clues or other sources exactly when Noah lived, and when the Flood happened. The book of Genesis follows the family history of Adam all the way down to Noah. It tells how old each man was when a particular son was born. And it tells that Noah was 600 years old when the flood happened. By adding up these figures, it appears that the time from the creation of Adam to the flood was 1,656 years. But we don’t know how long before 4,000 BC Adam was created.

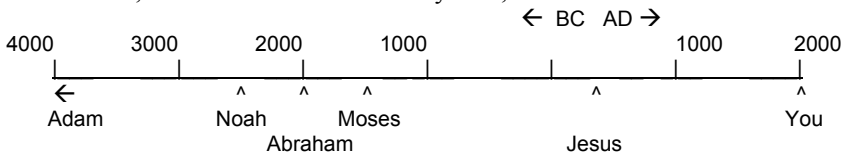
It is easiest to remember dates that are “rounded numbers.” Since all we need for our **general** time line is a sense of the **order** of events, it would be safe to say that Noah lived *around* the year 2,500 BC. The Bible states that he lived over 900 years altogether, so the year 2,500 was definitely somewhere in his life-span. And the flood was likely also in the general time period within 100 or 200 years either side of 2,500 BC.

endured that condition for hundreds of years. Their bodies at age 500 might have been like ours at age 50!

Of course, all of this is just pure speculation. These possibilities are only offered so that you can see that the scriptures aren't illogical. It can be fun to discuss possible answers to the mysteries of the Bible. But it is not necessary for us to be able to explain all of the mysteries in order to understand what God expects of us in our daily life, and what He promises to those who love and fear Him. Much of the Bible is very clear and open. Even a child can easily understand those principles that are **really** important!

On to Abraham

The next Bible person we need to locate on our time line is Abraham. Once again, the Bible does not provide enough clues to give exact years for his birth and death. The figures given in Genesis seem to indicate that Abraham died almost 500 years after the flood. Using round figures to locate general times on our time line, Abraham lived around the year 2,000 BC.



Next comes Moses, and the “Exodus” from Egypt made famous in the movie *The Ten Commandments*. We are still in a period of the Bible that is difficult to line up with historical records outside the Bible to establish firm dates. One of the main difficulties is to use the Bible clues to determine just *which* Pharaoh of ancient Egypt is the Pharaoh of the Exodus.

When new Bible students read the book of Exodus, they may not realize that “Pharaoh” is not a name, but a *title*, just like “President.” There were many Pharaohs in Egypt over a period of many hundreds of years. Bible scholars still disagree among themselves about which Pharaoh is described as dealing with Moses at the time of the Exodus.

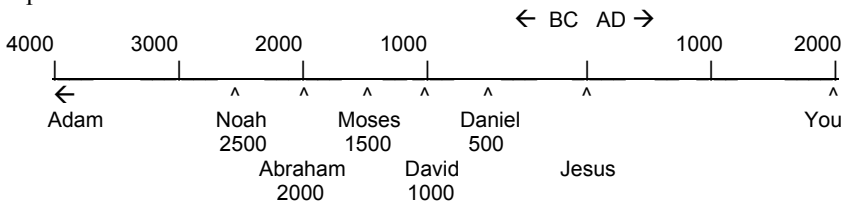
For purposes of our *general* time line, we are going to use the rounded year 1,500 B.C. for the time of Moses. The earliest date commonly proposed for the Exodus is about 1,450 B.C.. The Bible states that Moses was 80 years old at the time of the Exodus, and he lived for 40 years after that. So it is fair to estimate that Moses was living *around* the year 1,500 B.C.

David and Daniel

That leaves just two names left to add to our time line. By now you should have noticed that we are trying to make it **very** easy for you to memorize the dates involved by keeping them to the nearest 500-year mark.

This works well for David and Daniel. By the time of David, historical evidence outside the Bible is much more helpful, and we can pinpoint David's life fairly accurately. *The NIV Study Bible* gives the year 1,003 BC as the beginning of David's reign as king. So for purposes of our general time line, we can place David at the 1,000 BC point.

And the *NIV Study Bible* proposes that the book of Daniel was written about 530 BC. Since Daniel lived for some time after the book was written, it is convenient to place him at 500 BC on our time line.



Summary

In these lessons, we are **not** trying to remember exact dates.

- The **most important** thing to remember about the time line is the **order** of the people.
- It is helpful to remember that there is a period of **about** 500 years between most of the people on the time line, starting with Noah.
- It may help you to visualize the people listed in order as pairs:

Adam—Noah
 Abraham—Moses
 David—Daniel
 Jesus—You