

Basics of Bible Literacy
Booklet # 3
Lessons 9-12

The Trip Begins

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

Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations in this booklet are from the THE HOLY BIBLE: NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. (NIV) © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Contact Information

Other booklets in this series can be requested free of charge from the source where you obtained this booklet. You may also send an email request to:
Oasis7@Gmail.com

Or send a written request to:

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

Be sure to include your full name and address, including ZIP code.

9 Bible Bibliography

Information Overload

In the 21st century, we are used to “instant history”! If an event happens that lasts for a few days or weeks, we will be able to get complete reports about it on the nightly network news and in the daily paper. If you have cable TV, you can be even more saturated with the event—Cable News Network (CNN) and other news networks often have continuous live coverage around the clock of everything from courtroom proceedings to police stand-offs to military invasions.

While the event is happening, reporters are right on the spot creating historical records with their tape recorders and video cameras. The next week, *Time* or *Newsweek* magazine will be on the newsstands with elaborate descriptions of every detail of the event, including charts, maps, diagrams, and candid photos.

It may be hard to remember in the midst of all this information overload that this is actually a very recent phenomenon. The history most people learned in school was not “gathered” this way. Communications didn’t always circle the globe instantaneously! For thousands of years—right up to just a few years ago—history was “pieced together” much more haphazardly.

Where did the writers of your high school history books get their information? In the back of most history books, you would find what is called a “Bibliography.”

**A bibliography is a
list of the sources
that an author uses to compile his information.**

What kind of sources are used by historians?

- Official documents such as court records, proclamations, law codes
- Private writings such as diaries and letters
- Eyewitness stories

- Poetry
- Folk songs
- Photographs, paintings, drawings
- Newspaper reports

Each of these sources can supply details about our past. You might be surprised to see “folk songs” among this list. We don’t often think about what we may have heard about history in songs.

For example: I don’t remember reading in a history book about the battle of New Orleans during the War of 1812. I probably actually did, but the details from what I read didn’t stick in my mind. What has stuck in my mind for decades is historical information in a “top forty” song hit titled *Battle of New Orleans* by country-western singer Johnny Horton. The first verse went this way:

*In 1814 we took a little trip
 Along with Colonel Jackson down the Mighty Mississip’
 We took a little bacon and we took a little beans
 And we caught the bloody British near the town of New Orleans.*

Just think of how much information is crowded into these few words:

- The battle took place in 1814.
- The enemy was the British army.
- The leader of the American forces was Colonel Jackson.

And the catchy tune stamped those facts in my mind permanently. I did happen to read about the event later in a history book, and realized the other verses of the song very cleverly captured more main facts.

Or how about poetry? You may remember more about a historical event from a poem like “The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere” than you remember from a page in your sixth grade history book.

So if your Bible had a bibliography in the back, what would it include? What kind of sources are included in the Bible?

- Official documents such as court records, proclamations, law codes
- Private writings such as diaries and letters
- Eyewitness stories
- Poetry
- Songs

The only things missing would be newspaper reports, because newspapers didn't exist in Bible times, and visual aids such as paintings, drawings, and photographs.

If you are surprised at this list, you are not alone. Many Christians have the mistaken notion that the Bible was dictated word for word by God, and written down as one long "thus saith the Lord." They have misunderstood what it means to declare that all of the Bible was **inspired** by God.

Bible Inspiration

Each writer who wrote part of the Bible was *inspired* by God. But that does *not* mean that each one heard a booming voice giving him the exact words to write down.

Most of the time, it means that God prompted a writer in his mind and spirit. God gave him *understanding*. The writer then wrote *in his own language and his own words*, communicating to others this understanding. God also had the power to insure that each writer *accurately* communicated this godly understanding, while allowing each one to express his own individuality in writing style.

There *are* passages in the Bible in which a writer declares that the Eternal God spoke a special message to him, and in these passages, the words of the Lord *are* quoted word for word. But in many other passages, writers express their own personalities, their own experiences, their own feelings. And, evidently, they sometimes copied facts and figures from official records to include in their reports. In this case, God would have inspired them to know what to include, and to copy the material accurately.

Biblical Variety

When you read the Book of Psalms, you are reading a collection of *poems and songs*. Some of them are praise and worship addressed directly to God. Some tell of important events in history. Others express the emotions of the writer during good and bad times in his life.

When you read the Book of Acts, you are reading *eyewitness stories* of events that happened early in the history of the Christian church.

When you read the Book of Romans or Galatians, you are reading *personal letters* written by the Apostle Paul to congregations of the early church.

And when you read certain sections of the Book of Exodus, the Book of Isaiah, and the Book of Revelation you are reading *direct quotes* from the Lord himself.

Each of these kinds of writing has its purpose.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

These things [Old Testament events] happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. (1 Corinthians 10:11)

The Big Picture

Fifty years ago, if you had a high school history textbook, you may have considered it boring. There would have been very few illustrations or photos to break up the text. And the writing would have been mostly dry “facts,” without anything to make you excited about history.

Modern educators have realized something needed to be done to make history “come alive” for young (and old) readers. So modern textbooks look a lot more like a *USA TODAY* newspaper or a *Time Magazine*. There are a variety of styles and sources shown directly on the page. A short description of an event may be surrounded by all kinds of photos, poems, songs, illustrations, maps, charts, diagrams, and photocopies of original related documents. You may read descriptions of the same event or time period by a wide variety of people.

For instance, in studying the period just before the Civil War, the history lesson might include:

- Speeches by Abraham Lincoln
- Speeches by others for and against slavery
- Diaries or letters from slaves
- Poster ads offering slaves for sale
- Captain’s records of conditions aboard slave ships
- Early photos or tin-types from the period
- Illustrations of conditions on Southern plantations
- Folk-songs and political songs from the period
- Newspaper articles from the period

By looking at the historical period from so many angles, you get a much better view of the big picture of what it was like to live in that time.

That is what the variety in the Bible provides also. Each style of writing, each different writer, contributes to a big picture of *His Story!*

For example, the book of 2 Samuel tells the story of David and his adultery with Bathsheba. From this account you get one view of the events.

But you can get a bigger picture by also reading the Psalms (songs) that David wrote during this period. In these he shares his agony and shame when he realizes he has sinned against God and deserves nothing but death. And he shares his gratitude to God for forgiving him and sparing his life, and his intent to serve God with his whole heart from then on.

For a New Testament example, you can read the Book of Acts, and see a description of the activities of the Apostle Paul as he traveled throughout the Roman Empire preaching the Gospel and establishing church congregations.

But you can get a bigger picture by also reading the Epistles (letters) he wrote during the same period to some of the very same congregations you read about in Acts. These provide a much more *personal* view of Bible history.

As we begin our trip through the Bible, these lessons will help you balance seeing a helpful overview of Bible History—a big picture—while taking time to notice many of the little details that make the big picture clear and interesting.

10

Don't Blink

The Long and Short of It

A common mistake many Bible students make is subconsciously assuming that the *length of a section* in the Bible is related to the *passage of time* covered in the section.

Have you heard the saying about a small town, “Don’t blink as you drive through or you’ll miss it”? That advice fits many sections of the Bible: “Don’t blink or you may not notice the passing of 100 years or more!” Yet other sections may cover page after page of the Bible with the events of one small period.

It’s easy to lose your sense of where you are in time if you don’t “keep your eyes open.” For instance, chapter five in Genesis, just 32 verses, covers all the time from Adam to Noah, over 1,500 years. Yet chapters 13 through 17 in the book of John, over 150 verses, describe the events during dinner in *one evening*.

This is just further evidence that the Bible is not intended to be a complete “history of the world.” God inspired the authors to carefully choose what events and characters to include, and decide how much emphasis to put on each, according to the purpose they were to accomplish.

One Man’s Family

Let’s begin at the beginning, with the Book of Genesis. The casual reader might assume the author wanted to tell a general history of the world in this book. Some overly enthusiastic Bible students want to use this book to try to prove or disprove all kinds of theories about the early years of our earth. What they fail to realize is that this **isn’t the purpose** of Genesis. The author included very few details of the kind of information scientists or archaeologists could use. What is there is accurate, but it would be very scanty evidence to work with.

No, the book of Genesis is not an overview of world history. In fact, it totally ignores most of the Earth in its stories, and most of the people in the world.

The book of Genesis provides an overview, through the story of Adam and Eve, of how Mankind started down the wrong path, away from an intimate relationship with God. But it quickly turns to a detailed view of just one small corner of the world, the Middle East. And that view narrows down even more quickly to one man's family. That man is Abraham.

God explained why this man's story is the focus of His Story:

[God said to Abraham] I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and **through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed**, because you have obeyed me." (Genesis 22:17-18)

But what does this have to do with Christians?

If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed [descendants], and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:29)

Jesus was the physical offspring of Abraham through whom the whole world would be blessed! And if we are "born again" in Him, we are also the "spiritual" offspring of Abraham. We inherit the blessing promised to him. And we are to be a blessing to the whole world.

Time Line

Let's see where the book of Genesis fits on our general time line.

The time line below covers just the 4,000 + years from the time of Adam to the time of Christ. Note that the events of the book of Genesis cover over half of this time period.

But when was this historical record written down in Hebrew, in the form later translated as we have it in our Bible? There is no way, just from reading the scriptures themselves, to know for sure. In the New Testament, many of the books were really letters. Most of them were signed, so you could know the author. It is not so with much of the Old Testament. The book of Genesis doesn't tell who wrote it!

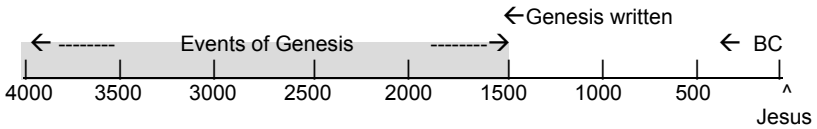
This is one of those areas where we have to go outside the Bible for clues. The only real evidence we have to determine the author of Genesis is the tradition handed down by the Jewish people. The Jews have preserved the contents of

what Christians refer to as the Old Testament for over 2500 years. During most of that time, they made copies carefully by hand. Paul says of them:

What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God. (Romans 3:1-2)

It is not unreasonable, therefore, to consider that traditional Jewish information about Old Testament matters may be true. Their tradition indicates that Moses wrote the Book of Genesis.

So on our time line, we have indicated that the book of Genesis was written **about** the year 1500 BC. Don't forget, this is only a general time label. Moses probably wrote it over a period of time, probably during the last 40 years of his life. So the actual date may have been nearer 1400. But we are mainly concerned with the order of events on our time line.



11

Flashback

Have you ever seen a “flashback” in a movie? Perhaps at the beginning of a movie there is a scene where a man is receiving a medal for bravery from his country. And suddenly the audience is “flashed back” to his childhood. Following scenes build on his experiences until they finally reach the events that led to his receiving of the medal. And at the end, you are returned to the present, as he accepts the medal with a speech.

On our general timeline, we noted that Moses lived about the year 1500 BC. If he wrote the book of Genesis, as tradition indicates, he was actually writing a flashback. Its purpose was to lay a foundation so that the reader could understand the “present” in which Moses lived.

“Let My People Go!”

Moses was born into a slave family in Egypt. All of his relatives were slaves. And he didn’t have just a few relatives! There were hundreds of thousands of people in Egypt who had the same ancestors as Moses, and all were slaves. How did this come to be? Why were they all slaves?

A child born into a black slave family in the U.S. in 1860 would have no understanding of how his situation came to be. It was just “the way things were.” His ancestors may have been captured in Africa and sold as slaves to European traders in the 1700’s. But since families were regularly torn apart, within a few generations few blacks would know their family history. They would have forgotten the civilizations they had come from, including their languages, religions, and customs. All of these would be only garbled stories passed on by word of mouth. Only after freedom and education came to blacks after the Civil War would many be able to read of the “roots” of their people.

It was the same with Moses’ relatives. His people, the Israelites (sometimes called “Hebrews” in the Bible) had been enslaved for hundreds of years. Their family history was probably very vague in their minds at that point in time. Their culture was the culture of the Egyptians, their customs were the customs of

the Egyptians. Garbled stories connected them to a dim past. But part of those stories told of a champion who would arise among their people some day who would lead them to freedom from their Egyptian taskmasters.

Is it any wonder that American blacks before the Civil War loved the stories of the “Exodus” in the Bible, and told and retold them in songs we now call “spirituals”—“Go down Moses, way down in Egypt land. Tell old Pharaoh to LET MY PEOPLE GO!” They found hope in the Bible stories that the Lord would some day send a champion to free them also.

*** Please stop at this point in the lesson and read

Exodus Chapters 1 and 2

Exodus Chapter 3, just verses 1 through 10

Acts Chapter 7, just verses 20 through 35

When you are through reading those passages, answer the following questions in your own words. You can consult the Bible if you need to while you are writing your answers.

Why did the king of Egypt (the Pharaoh) order that the Israelites be made slaves? (Exodus 1:8-11)

When slavery didn’t work to limit the numbers of Israelites, what did the Pharaoh order? Did his plan work? (Exodus 1:15-20)

What order endangered the life of the baby Moses? (Exodus 1:22)

How did his mother save him? (Exodus 2:1-10)

When Moses was 40, what did he think about himself? (Acts 7:23-25)

When he was 80, what did God say about him? (Acts 7:35, Ex. 3:9-12)

God chose Moses as the champion who would free the Israelites.

The Chosen People

Throughout history, many people have suffered in slavery. There has been much suffering also in times of wars, famines, and plagues. But at the time of Moses, God Himself looked down on Moses' people and chose to intervene for them, to rescue them from their suffering. In fact, from this point on in the Bible, the Israelites are called "the Chosen People."

Why? "Chosen" for what?

Were these people better than other people who had suffered? Were they holier, closer to God, living pure lives? Were they chosen because of something **they** were doing right?

If you read the rest of the book of Exodus, you will discover that **none** of these statements fit the Israelites! They were just as rowdy, just as ungodly, just as selfish, just as "dirty" as any other group of people.

The Israelites weren't chosen because of what they did, but because of **who** they were:

They were the *descendants of Abraham*.

And they were chosen because of **who** God is:

He is the Creator God who promised to Abraham that his descendants would be chosen to bless the whole world with the knowledge of salvation through the Lord.

That is why Moses included the flashbacks of Genesis. The Israelites needed to clearly understand:

- They didn't do something to "earn" God's intervention.
- God keeps all His promises.

In the next lesson, we will learn more about Abraham, the ancestor of the Israelites and the "Father of the Faithful."

12

Father of the Faithful

If You Were God...

Have you ever heard (or thought!) comments like these:

“Well, if **I** were God, I would have made a world in which nobody ever got hurt!”

“If God is All-Powerful, why didn’t He make people who never sinned?”

“If **I** were God, I would make a **perfect** world!”

It’s not unreasonable to wonder **why** God made a world in which things could go wrong.

But most people don’t take these ideas out to their natural conclusion. The only way to make a world in which people **never** make mistakes, is to make people who have **no free will**. They would have to be *programmed*, just like a computer, to always choose to do right.

Sometimes parents think they would like to have a child who **never** said “no” to anything, who just obeyed blindly without question. It **is** hard to get past the stage of two-to-three-year-olds who are just learning to say “no.” But it is one thing to teach a child proper obedience and respect of parents, and quite another to expect a child to never express his or her own opinions, personality, and desires.

We want children to obey when they are young, even without understanding “why,” so they are not hurt. But we really want children to mature to the point they are obeying because they understand the “why” of rules. We want them to become adults who choose to do what is wise.

It is a little hard to comprehend this principle—but it is true that free will, even to make wrong choices, is what makes us humans instead of robots.

Adam and C3PO?

No ... God didn't create "R2D2 and Eve," or "Adam and C3PO." He created Adam and Eve, two people with free will. Robots could have been programmed to ignore temptation. But Adam and Eve had a choice, and they chose the wrong answer. And everyone since then, except Jesus, has made wrong choices. That's how the world got in the mess it's in!

God's Answer

A potter who makes a clay pot that turns out flawed in some way can just smash it, take a new lump of clay, and try again. It certainly would have been just as easy for God to do the same with the "clay" he molded into Adam and Eve! He could have "zapped" Adam and Eve, and replaced them by creating Fred and Ethel. And if they messed up, he could have eliminated them and tried John and Marsha ... and then Bill and Barbara, Sam and Samantha, Tom and Sally—there would have been no end to it!

Instead, when Adam and Eve sinned, they had to live with the consequences of their sin. Those consequences included separation from God and from the lovely garden that had been their home, and eventual physical death. But they did live long lives, and had many children. Those children also had free will, and made many wrong choices.

Of course, at one point, God **did** think about eliminating everyone and starting over.

The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. (Genesis 6:5-8)

But "Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD." And he and his family were saved from the Flood that the LORD sent. Yet, even with a fresh start, Noah's descendants began making wrong choices again almost immediately.

We know from the New Testament that God had a plan all along which would rescue Mankind from this mess **without** eliminating free will. But that plan is

not outlined clearly in the Old Testament. With hindsight, however, we see it beginning to unfold in Genesis Chapter 11, with the life of Abraham.

In order to lay a foundation for you to see the unfolding of this plan in the Bible, and eventually in your own life, you need to know some of the details of Abraham's life.

At this point in the lesson, please stop and read the passages listed below. (Note that in these passages, Abraham is called "Abram." Later in his life, God changed his name from Abram to Abraham. God also changed his wife's name from Sarai to Sarah.)

Genesis 11:10-32 Genesis 12

AFTER you have read this whole passage, go back and find the answers to the questions below, which will help you focus on some of the main points of the story.

Which of the sons of Noah was the ancestor of Abram? (Gen. 11:10)

What was Abram's wife's name? (v. 29)

How many children had she had early in life? (v. 30)

What did the LORD tell Abram to do? (Gen. 12:1)

What did the LORD promise to him if he was obedient? (v. 2-3)

What did Abram do? (v. 4-5)

When there was a famine in the land, what did Abram do? (v.10)

What happened to Sarai in Egypt? (v. 11-20)

*** Answer the following questions with your own thoughts:

Did Abram believe the LORD'S promise? How do you know?

Did Abram have perfect faith *at all times* that the LORD would always provide for him and protect him? How do you know?

Did Abram get the blessing the LORD promised immediately as soon as he obeyed? How do you know?