



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

NEW TO THE BIBLE

# Understanding the Different Types of Biblical Writing

## Beginner Guide

### The short answer

The Bible is one trustworthy Word expressed through many forms. History, law, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, Gospels, letters, visions, genealogies, and covenant passages communicate truth in different ways. Recognizing the writing type helps us understand what God has said and how each passage points into His unfolding story fulfilled in Jesus.

*“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching.”*

2 Timothy 3:16 WEB

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# Welcome

This guide was not written to replace your Bible. It was written to help you understand it and grow more confident reading it for yourself.

The Bible contains history, laws, poems, wisdom sayings, prophecies, letters, visions, parables, genealogies, covenant passages, and other kinds of writing. God gave us this variety intentionally. Learning to recognize what kind of passage you are reading helps you understand what the biblical writer meant and how the passage fits within God's unfolding story.

Every page is intended to send you back into God's Word with greater confidence, deeper understanding, and a clearer picture of Jesus Christ. If this guide causes you to spend more time reading your Bible than reading these pages, it has accomplished its purpose.

## Foundational truth

The Bible is not merely a book to be understood. It is God's self-revelation, given so that people may know Him through Jesus Christ.

God used many human writers, writing forms, historical settings, and literary styles to communicate His unchanging truth. We honor God's Word when we pay attention not only to what it says, but also to how each part was written.



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## Begin here

Different kinds of writing communicate truth in different ways.

### A quick guide

- A historical account tells us what happened.
- A law gives instructions within a covenant.
- A poem uses carefully chosen images and comparisons.
- A proverb expresses wise guidance for ordinary life.
- A prophecy communicates God's message through His appointed messenger.
- A Gospel announces the good news of Jesus through a carefully arranged account of His life, ministry, death, and resurrection.
- A letter addresses real believers facing real questions and problems.
- An apocalyptic vision uses vivid symbols to reveal spiritual realities and God's ultimate victory.
- A genealogy traces people, promises, covenant lines, and family relationships across generations.
- A covenant passage records a binding relationship God establishes and helps us follow His promises through Scripture.

### Beginner memory anchor

Read each passage according to the kind of writing it is. Genre does not change whether Scripture is true. Genre helps us understand how Scripture communicates truth.



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## What does “type of writing” mean?

A type of writing is often called a genre. Genre simply means a recognizable kind of communication.

We already recognize genre in everyday life. We do not read a recipe the same way we read a newspaper report. We do not interpret a poem like a legal contract. We do not treat a text message, instruction manual, biography, and song as though they communicate in exactly the same way.

Each can communicate truth, but each does so differently. The same principle helps us read the Bible responsibly.

### Why this matters

- Treating a proverb like an unconditional promise can create confusion when life unfolds differently.
- Treating poetic imagery like a technical description can hide its emotion and meaning.
- Treating every action in a historical account as approved by God can lead us to imitate sin.
- Treating an apocalyptic vision like an ordinary photograph can turn study into speculation.
- Reading one sentence from a letter without its surrounding argument can distort its application.
- Rushing through a genealogy can hide evidence of God's covenant faithfulness.
- Claiming a covenant promise without identifying its original recipients can distort God's redemptive plan.

### Important distinction

Recognizing genre is not a way to weaken Scripture. It is one way we listen more carefully to what Scripture actually says.



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## What you will learn

|    |                                                                                                               |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 01 | <b>Narrative and history</b><br>See how biblical accounts reveal what happened and what God was doing.        |
| 02 | <b>Law</b><br>Read God's commands within their covenants and redemptive setting.                              |
| 03 | <b>Poetry and songs</b><br>Recognize imagery, emotion, repetition, and parallel lines.                        |
| 04 | <b>Wisdom literature</b><br>Learn how wisdom guides faithful life without becoming a mechanical formula.      |
| 05 | <b>Prophecy</b><br>Hear God's call to covenant faithfulness, judgment, hope, and restoration.                 |
| 06 | <b>Apocalyptic writing</b><br>Understand visions and symbols as revelations of God's sovereignty and victory. |



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## What you will learn — continued

|    |                                                                                                               |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 07 | <b>Gospels and parables</b><br>See how the Gospels proclaim Jesus and His parables communicate kingdom truth. |
| 08 | <b>Letters</b><br>Read New Testament instruction within real church situations.                               |
| 09 | <b>Genealogies</b><br>Trace identity, covenant lines, and God's faithfulness across generations.              |
| 10 | <b>Covenant passages</b><br>Follow God's promises through Abraham, Israel, David, and the new covenant.       |
| 11 | <b>A repeatable process</b><br>Identify the writing type, understand its context, and respond faithfully.     |



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## One Bible — many kinds of writing

The Bible contains sixty-six books in the standard Protestant arrangement. They were written by many human authors across different historical periods, yet together they tell one unified story:

### The Bible's unfolding story

- God created.
- Humanity rebelled.
- God promised redemption.
- Jesus came, died, and rose again.
- The gospel is proclaimed to the nations.
- Jesus will return and make all things new.

### The variety serves the unity

History shows God acting. Law reveals His holiness and covenant order. Poetry gives language to worship, grief, fear, joy, and hope. Wisdom teaches faithful life. Prophecy calls people back to God. Genealogies trace promises through generations. Covenants frame God's unfolding plan. The Gospels reveal Jesus. Letters explain the gospel and form believers. Apocalyptic writing assures us that evil will not have the final word.

### One trustworthy Word

The forms differ, but together they reveal one God, one redemptive plan, and one Savior at the center.



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## Narrative and history

Biblical narrative tells the story of people, events, choices, consequences, and God's work in history. Large portions of Genesis through Esther and Acts are written primarily as narrative.

### Examples

- God calling Abraham — Genesis 12:1–9
- Israel leaving Egypt — Exodus 12–14
- David facing Goliath — 1 Samuel 17
- Esther approaching the king — Esther 4–7
- Jesus calming the storm — Mark 4:35–41
- Paul's missionary journeys — Acts 13–28

### Questions to ask

- Who was involved, and what happened?
- Where and when did it happen?
- What choices and consequences appear?
- What does the account reveal about God?
- How does it move the biblical story forward?

### Narrative memory anchor

Narrative tells us what happened. Context helps us understand why it matters.



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## Narrative reports sin honestly

The Bible records deception, violence, adultery, idolatry, pride, fear, and faithlessness. The presence of an action in a biblical story does not automatically make that action an example to follow.

### Ask a clarifying question

Is this behavior commanded, commended, condemned, or simply recorded? The surrounding passage and the rest of Scripture help us answer.

### Worked example: David and Goliath

Read 1 Samuel 17. The account is true history, but its main purpose is not to tell us that every personal difficulty is our “Goliath.” The immediate conflict concerns Israel, the Philistines, God’s honor, and David’s trust that the battle belongs to the Lord.

### What a beginner should notice

- Goliath dishonors the living God.
- Israel’s army is afraid.
- David trusts God rather than human strength.
- God delivers His people through an unexpected representative.
- The victory displays God’s power and faithfulness.

### Read before applying

The account can encourage us to trust God, but first understand what the story meant in its biblical setting.



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## Law

Biblical laws include commands, covenant instructions, civil judgments, worship regulations, purity practices, and moral teaching. The Law of Moses is found especially in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

God gave the Law to Israel after rescuing the people from slavery. Grace came before the commands: God redeemed Israel and then taught His covenant people how to live as a holy nation.

### When reading Old Testament Law, ask

- Who received this command?
- What covenant setting does it belong to?
- What does it reveal about God, holiness, sin, worship, justice, mercy, or community?
- Does the New Testament repeat, develop, fulfill, or transform its application?
- How does Jesus fulfill the Law and the Prophets?

### Law memory anchor

Read a biblical law within its covenant, then ask what it reveals about God and how it relates to Jesus.



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## Law and fulfillment

Jesus said, “Don’t think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I didn’t come to destroy, but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17).

Christians are not ancient Israel living under the Mosaic covenant. Yet the Old Testament Law remains God’s inspired Word. It reveals God’s character, humanity’s sin, the need for holiness, and the saving work Jesus came to accomplish. See Romans 3:20–24, Galatians 3:23–25, Hebrews 8:6–13, and Hebrews 10:1–14.

### Worked example: do not muzzle the ox

Deuteronomy 25:4 required humane treatment of a working animal. In 1 Corinthians 9:8–14, Paul applies the principle to those who labor in gospel ministry: a worker should receive appropriate support from the work.

### What Paul does not do

Paul does not erase the command’s original meaning. He begins with it and recognizes a broader principle. This shows why we should understand the original context and then allow Scripture to guide faithful application.

#### Read in both directions

Look backward to the covenant setting and forward to Jesus and the New Testament’s inspired use of the Law.



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## Poetry and songs

Biblical poetry appears especially in Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and the Prophets. It often uses imagery, comparison, repetition, emotional language, word pictures, and balanced or parallel lines.

Poetic language communicates real truth, but it may do so through vivid pictures rather than technical physical descriptions.

### Worked example: God is a rock

Psalms 18:2 calls the Lord “my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer.” God is not literally made of stone. The image communicates that He is strong, stable, dependable, protective, and a secure refuge.

### Why imagery matters

The image helps us feel the truth as well as understand it.

#### Poetry memory anchor

Poetry uses carefully chosen images and patterns to help us understand and feel truth.



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## Parallel lines in poetry

Hebrew poetry frequently places related lines beside one another. The second line may repeat, contrast with, or develop the first.

### Repetition

“The heavens declare the glory of God. The expanse shows his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1).

### Contrast

“Yahweh knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked shall perish” (Psalm 1:6).

### Development

“Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10).

### The Psalms give language for real life

The Psalms include praise, thanksgiving, lament, confession, wisdom, trust, royal hope, and cries for justice. A lament is not unbelief; it is pain brought honestly into God's presence. Psalm 13 begins with “How long?” and ends with trust in God's loving kindness.

#### Slow down

Compare the lines. Ask how the second line repeats, contrasts with, or develops the first.



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## Wisdom literature

The primary Old Testament wisdom books are Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. Wisdom also appears in Psalms and throughout Scripture.

Wisdom literature teaches faithful life in God's world. It wrestles with work, speech, relationships, suffering, justice, love, sexuality, money, aging, death, meaning, and the fear of the Lord.

### Proverbs give wise principles

A proverb usually describes how life ordinarily works under God's wise order. It is not necessarily an unconditional promise about every circumstance.

### Example: Proverbs 22:6

"Train up a child in the way he should go" teaches the lasting importance of faithful instruction. It should not be used to condemn a faithful parent whose adult child makes sinful choices.

### Wisdom memory anchor

Wisdom teaches faithful living, but individual sayings must be read alongside the whole counsel of Scripture.



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## The wisdom books speak together

### Proverbs

Wisdom generally leads toward life and folly toward harm.

### Job

A righteous person may suffer deeply without that suffering being direct punishment for a particular sin.

### Ecclesiastes

Life “under the sun” is frustrating and limited when pursued apart from the Creator. The book calls us to fear God.

### Song of Songs

Poetry celebrates covenant love, desire, and marital affection.

### The beginning of wisdom

Proverbs 1:7 says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. This includes reverence, worship, trust, submission, and recognizing God as the final source of truth.

#### Keep the books together

Reading one wisdom saying as though it explains every situation can produce shallow or hurtful conclusions.



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# Prophecy

Biblical prophets were people called by God to speak His message. They did more than predict distant future events.

## The prophets

- Called people back to covenant faithfulness.
- Exposed idolatry, injustice, pride, and empty worship.
- Announced God's judgment.
- Offered hope and promised restoration.
- Spoke to kings, nations, priests, and ordinary people.
- Pointed toward God's redemptive purposes.
- Proclaimed promises ultimately fulfilled in Jesus.

## Read prophecy in its original setting

- Who was the prophet and audience?
- What was happening historically?
- What sin, crisis, or question was addressed?
- Was the message warning, judgment, hope, restoration, or a combination?
- How does the New Testament use the passage, if it does?

### Prophecy memory anchor

Prophecy first spoke God's message into a real historical situation and also revealed His unfolding purposes.



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## Prophecy: Micah 5:2

Micah 5:2 promises a ruler from Bethlehem. Micah spoke during national corruption and danger. The promise offered hope grounded in God's faithfulness to David's royal line.

Matthew 2:1–6 later identifies Jesus' birth in Bethlehem as the fulfillment. The original context and the fulfillment in Jesus belong together. Understanding Micah makes Matthew's use richer, not weaker.

### Prophets sometimes used symbolic actions

- Isaiah walking barefoot and stripped of his outer garment — Isaiah 20:1–6
- Jeremiah wearing a yoke — Jeremiah 27:1–15
- Ezekiel constructing a model of Jerusalem's siege — Ezekiel 4:1–3
- Hosea's family life serving as a sign to Israel — Hosea 1–3

#### Important caution

These actions carried particular prophetic messages. They are not automatically commands for believers to imitate.



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## Apocalyptic writing

Apocalyptic writing uses visions, symbols, heavenly scenes, dramatic contrasts, and vivid images to reveal realities ordinary sight cannot fully see. Examples appear especially in parts of Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Revelation.

It often addresses believers facing oppression, danger, uncertainty, or persecution. Its purpose is not merely to provide a puzzle. It reveals that God remains sovereign, evil will be judged, Christ will triumph, and God's people can remain faithful.

### Common images

- Beasts, horns, thrones, lamps, and stars.
- Seals, trumpets, bowls, and symbolic numbers.
- Cosmic disturbances and heavenly conflict.

### Apocalyptic memory anchor

Apocalyptic writing uses vivid symbols to reveal God's sovereignty, Christ's victory, and the certain defeat of evil.



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# Let Scripture interpret the symbols

Daniel's visions often include explanations. See Daniel 7:15–27 and 8:15–26. Revelation 1:20 explains that the seven stars are angels of the churches and the lamp stands are churches.

## Before assigning a modern meaning, ask

- Is the symbol explained in the passage?
- Has the image appeared earlier in Scripture?
- What would it have communicated to the original audience?
- What main truth does the vision emphasize?
- Does my interpretation produce faithfulness to Christ or merely speculation?

## Worked example: Daniel 7

Daniel sees four beasts, and the passage explains that they represent four kings. They contrast with “one like a son of man,” who receives an everlasting kingdom. Jesus uses this title and applies Daniel’s imagery to His authority and future coming (Mark 14:61–62).

### The vision’s real message

Brutal human kingdoms do not last. God’s appointed King will reign forever.



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## The Gospels

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. They are rooted in history, but they are more than modern biographies. They select and arrange true events, teachings, miracles, conversations, and signs to reveal who Jesus is, what He accomplished, why He died, that He rose, and what it means to follow Him.

### Four Gospels — one Jesus

- Matthew emphasizes Jesus as the promised Messiah and King.
- Mark highlights His authority, service, suffering, and action.
- Luke emphasizes careful investigation, the Holy Spirit, prayer, compassion, and the gospel reaching every kind of person.
- John emphasizes Jesus' identity as the eternal Son and calls readers to believe.

#### Gospel memory anchor

The Gospels faithfully proclaim the life, identity, saving work, death, and resurrection of Jesus.



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## Parables within the Gospels

A parable is a story or comparison used to communicate spiritual truth. Jesus' parables often concern the kingdom, grace, repentance, stewardship, prayer, readiness, the lost being found, and the difference between outward religion and a heart responsive to God.

### When reading a parable, ask

- What prompted Jesus to tell it?
- Who was listening?
- What main contrast or surprise drives the story?
- Does Jesus explain its meaning?
- What does it reveal about God, His kingdom, or the listener's heart?
- What response does Jesus call for?

### Do not force every detail

Some details make the story memorable without representing a separate spiritual truth. Begin with the main point, give special attention to Jesus' explanation, and let the context guide you.

#### Parable memory anchor

Find the main point, notice the surprise, and respond to what Jesus is teaching.



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## Parable: the good Samaritan

Read Luke 10:25–37. A lawyer asks Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus tells of a wounded man ignored by a priest and Levite but helped sacrificially by a Samaritan—someone the original audience would not expect to be the compassionate example.

### The question Jesus asks

Jesus asks which person proved to be a neighbor. The parable does not merely ask us to identify which people deserve our love. It calls us to become people who show mercy.

### Jesus’ response

“Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37).



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## Letters

Twenty-one New Testament books are commonly identified as letters: Romans through Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, and Jude. Hebrews functions differently from a typical letter and calls itself a “word of exhortation” (Hebrews 13:22), but it is traditionally grouped with the letters.

The letters address real churches or individuals facing real circumstances: gospel truth, conflict, false teaching, conduct, family, gifts, leadership, suffering, unity, worship, and the return of Jesus.

### Read the whole conversation

- Who wrote, and who received the letter?
- What situation or question is being addressed?
- What comes before and after this verse?
- What argument is the writer making?
- Is this a command, explanation, encouragement, warning, promise, prayer, or personal instruction?
- How does it fit with the gospel?

### Letter memory anchor

Read a letter as a complete message written to real people in a real situation.



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## Letter: “I can do all things”

Philippians 4:13 is sometimes used to mean that Christ will enable us to accomplish any personal dream. The surrounding verses show that Paul is discussing contentment. He has experienced both abundance and need.

Christ strengthens Paul to remain faithful in either condition. The verse offers something better than unlimited achievement: Christ gives believers strength to remain content and faithful through changing circumstances.

### Read the complete paragraph

Study Philippians 4:10–20 and notice the movement from Paul's circumstances to contentment, strength, generosity, and God's provision.

#### Context protects the meaning

Reading one sentence from a letter without context can be like reading one line from someone else's mail.



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## Genealogies

Genealogies trace families and relationships across generations. They establish family identity, tribal membership, inheritance, priestly qualification, royal descent, covenant continuity, and the preservation of a promised family line.

God promised Abraham that blessing would reach all families of the earth and promised David an enduring royal house. Matthew begins: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1). Jesus belongs to both promised lines.

### Four questions for a genealogy

- Where does it begin and end?
- Which names or family lines receive special emphasis?
- Are any unexpected people included?
- What promise, identity, or transition does the list establish?

### Genealogy memory anchor

Genealogies trace God’s faithfulness through real people, real generations, and the promised line leading to Jesus.



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## Genealogy: Matthew 1

Matthew traces Jesus' line from Abraham through David, through the exile, and finally to Jesus. The major stages highlight covenant promise, kingdom, judgment, and restoration.

### Unexpected people

Matthew includes Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and “her who had been the wife of Uriah”—Bathsheba. Their stories involve sorrow, scandal, Gentile background, vulnerability, or unexpected grace. God carried His promise through imperfect people and complicated family histories.

### Ruth's family line

Ruth 4 ends by connecting the Moabite woman Ruth to David. God brought her into the covenant community and placed her within the family line that led to Jesus (Matthew 1:5–6).

### Selective arrangement

Genealogies may emphasize selected generations. “Father” or “son” can refer to a more distant ancestor or descendant. A genealogy need not include every biological generation to communicate truth faithfully.

#### You do not need perfect pronunciation

Look for familiar names, repeated patterns, unexpected people, major transitions, and connections to God's promises.



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## Covenant passages

A covenant is a binding relationship established by God. Covenant passages may contain divine promises, human responsibilities, signs, blessings, warnings, family or national commitments, and sacrificial ceremonies.

God's covenants show that redemption is not a collection of disconnected events. God makes promises and faithfully carries His plan forward.

### Six questions for a covenant

- Who establishes it?
- With whom is it made?
- What does God promise?
- What responsibilities or expectations appear?
- Is there a sign connected to it?
- How does it advance God's redemptive plan?

### Covenant memory anchor

God makes promises, keeps His Word, and carries His redemptive plan forward through Jesus.



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## The covenant with Abraham

Read Genesis 12:1–3, 15, and 17. God promised Abraham land, descendants, a great nation and name, divine blessing, and blessing that would reach all families of the earth.

Abraham believed God, and God counted his faith as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). In Genesis 15, God alone passes between the divided pieces, emphasizing His commitment to fulfill what He promised.

### Connection to Jesus

The New Testament explains that Abraham's promised blessing reaches the nations through Jesus Christ. See Galatians 3:8–16.

#### Beginner truth

The Abrahamic covenant establishes the family line through which God's saving blessing comes to the world.



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## The Mosaic covenant

Read Exodus 19–24 and Deuteronomy 5–30. After rescuing Israel from Egypt, God established covenant life with the nation at Mount Sinai.

### The covenant included

- The Ten Commandments.
- Laws for worship and community life.
- Priestly and sacrificial instructions.
- Blessings connected to covenant obedience.
- Consequences connected to covenant rebellion.
- Israel's calling to be a holy nation and kingdom of priests.

### Connection to Jesus

The Mosaic covenant reveals holiness, exposes sin, and prepares the way for Christ. Its sacrifices and priesthood point beyond themselves to Jesus' perfect work. See Galatians 3:23–25 and Hebrews 8–10.

#### Grace before commands

God rescued Israel before giving the Law. Redemption formed the setting for covenant obedience.



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## The Davidic covenant

Read 2 Samuel 7:8–16. God promised David a great name, rest for His people, a continuing royal house, a son who would build a house for God's name, and a kingdom and throne with an enduring future.

### Near and greater fulfillment

The promise immediately relates to Solomon, who built the temple. It also creates hope for a greater and everlasting King from David's family.

### Connection to Jesus

The New Testament identifies Jesus as the promised Son of David. See Matthew 1:1, Luke 1:31–33, Acts 2:29–36, and Romans 1:3–4.

#### Beginner truth

God's promise to David moves the Bible's story toward Jesus, the everlasting King.



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## The new covenant

Read Jeremiah 31:31–34, Ezekiel 36:25–27, Luke 22:14–20, and Hebrews 8–10. God promised instruction written on hearts, restored relationship, forgiveness, a new heart and spirit, and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

At the Last Supper Jesus said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” (Luke 22:20). Jesus established the covenant through His sacrificial death.

### A sufficient sacrifice

Jesus’ once-for-all sacrifice provides the forgiveness repeated animal sacrifices could never finally accomplish. See Hebrews 9:11–15 and 10:10–18.

#### Beginner truth

The new covenant brings forgiveness, transformed hearts, and relationship with God through Jesus.



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# How the covenants connect

## Abrahamic covenant

Promises blessing through Abraham's family to the nations.

## Mosaic covenant

Establishes Israel as a covenant nation and reveals holiness, sin, and the need for atonement.

## Davidic covenant

Promises a lasting King from David's family.

## New covenant

Provides forgiveness, transformed hearts, and relationship with God through Jesus.

## Jesus is the center

- Abraham's promised offspring through whom blessing reaches the nations.
- The One who fulfills the Law and provides the perfect sacrifice.
- David's promised Son and everlasting King.
- The Mediator of the new covenant.

### Important caution

Not every covenant promise was spoken directly to every believer. First identify its recipients and setting. Those who belong to Christ receive forgiveness, reconciliation, the Spirit, adoption, eternal life, and hope.



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## Other forms you will encounter

### Speeches and sermons

Scripture records Moses' speeches in Deuteronomy, Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8, Peter's sermon in Acts 2, Stephen's speech in Acts 7, and Paul's address in Acts 17. Ask who speaks, to whom, and whether the narrative approves, challenges, or corrects the speaker.

### Prayers

Biblical prayers teach praise, confession, thanksgiving, lament, petition, and intercession. Examples include Hannah's prayer, Daniel's confession, Jesus' prayer in John 17, and Paul's prayers in Ephesians. Learn from them without assuming every prayer is a formula to repeat word for word.

### Books contain combinations

Exodus contains narrative, law, poetry, and covenant material. Daniel combines court narratives with visions. The Gospels contain history, sermons, parables, prayers, genealogies, and prophetic teaching.

#### **Read the immediate passage**

Identify the form of the section you are reading, not merely the form most common in the entire book.



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## A simple reading process

|    |                                                                                                                                                              |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 01 | <b>Identify the writing type</b><br>Narrative, law, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, vision, Gospel, parable, letter, genealogy, covenant, or a combination?        |
| 02 | <b>Read the surrounding passage</b><br>Notice what comes before and after your selected verse.                                                               |
| 03 | <b>Consider the original audience</b><br>Ask what the passage first communicated to them.                                                                    |
| 04 | <b>Observe how the form communicates</b><br>Look for events, commands, images, principles, warnings, symbols, arguments, family lines, or covenant promises. |
| 05 | <b>Place it in the Bible's story</b><br>Consider creation, rebellion, promise, redemption, mission, and restoration.                                         |
| 06 | <b>Look toward God and Jesus</b><br>Ask what it reveals about God, exposes about human need, advances in His promises, or connects to Christ.                |



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## Keep the order clear

First observe. Then understand. Then apply.

Beginning with personal application before understanding a passage can cause us to make the Bible say what we want instead of receiving what God has said.

### Seven beginner habits

- Read complete paragraphs or story units.
- Identify the writing type.
- Notice repeated words and ideas.
- Pay attention to people, setting, and situation.
- Compare Scripture with Scripture.
- Look for Jesus responsibly, following connections established by Scripture.
- Respond with faith and obedience.

### The goal

Bible study is meant to deepen our knowledge of God and shape how we live.



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## Common questions

### Is one kind of writing more true?

No. History communicates through events, poetry through imagery, parables through comparison, and apocalyptic writing through visions. Different forms communicate truth in different ways.

### Do I need to be a literary expert?

No. Begin by asking whether the passage tells a story, gives instruction, uses poetic images, offers wisdom, delivers prophecy, records a vision, tells a parable, writes to a church, traces a family, or establishes a covenant.

### Do symbols mean the passage is untrue?

No. A symbol represents a real person, power, event, or spiritual reality through an image. Symbolic does not mean false.

### Confidence grows through practice

You do not need to identify everything instantly. Keep reading, comparing, and learning.



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PART ONE · BEGINNER GUIDE

## Common questions — continued

### Should I take the Bible literally?

Read the Bible according to its intended meaning. Jesus' statement "I am the door" is a metaphor: He is the way of salvation and life, not a wooden object. Faithful reading respects how the writer communicates.

### How do I know whether a command is for me?

Ask who received it, whether it belongs to a particular covenant, whether the New Testament repeats it, what principle Scripture confirms, and how Jesus fulfills or clarifies it.

### Why read long lists of names?

Genealogies establish identity, inheritance, covenant continuity, priestly or royal lines, and God's faithfulness. Look for familiar names, patterns, unexpected people, transitions, and promises.

### Can I claim every covenant promise?

First identify the original recipient and setting. Those who belong to Christ receive salvation blessings through Him, but should not remove every promise to Israel, David, or another person from its context.



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## Applying each type faithfully

Application should grow from faithful understanding.

### Ask

- What does this reveal about God?
- What does it reveal about humanity or sin?
- Is there a truth to believe?
- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there an example to follow or avoid?
- Is there a promise to understand in context?
- Is there a reason to worship?
- How does this lead me toward Jesus?

### Healthy application

The meaning belongs to the text. Faithful application brings that meaning into our beliefs, worship, choices, and relationships.



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PART ONE · BEGINNER GUIDE

## Beginner review

### Genre

A recognizable kind or form of writing that helps us understand how a passage communicates.

### Narrative

Records what happened but does not automatically approve every action.

### Proverb

Ordinarily describes wise patterns rather than guaranteeing every outcome.

### Prophecy

Speaks into real historical situations and reveals God's unfolding purposes.

### Apocalyptic writing

Uses symbols to reveal spiritual realities, God's sovereignty, and Christ's victory.

### Gospel

Proclaims Jesus' identity, ministry, saving work, death, and resurrection.



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PART ONE · BEGINNER GUIDE

## Beginner review — continued

### Letter

A complete message addressing real believers and circumstances.

### Genealogy

Traces identity, covenant lines, royal descent, and faithfulness through generations.

### Covenant passage

Records a relationship established by God and advances His redemptive plan.

### What comes before application?

Observation and understanding.

### Final beginner summary

The Bible uses different kinds of writing to communicate God's truth. I read faithfully when I recognize the writing type, examine the context, consider the original audience, and allow the passage's intended meaning to guide my response.



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PART ONE · BEGINNER GUIDE

## Beginner practice

Psalms 23 — What images describe God? How does John 10 use shepherd language?

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Proverbs 15:1 — What general principle does it teach? Is it an unconditional guarantee?

---

Mark 4:35–41 — What happens? What do the disciples learn about Jesus?

---

Philippians 4:10–20 — What situation is Paul discussing? What does verse 13 mean?

---

Revelation 1:9–20 — Which images are explained? What does the vision reveal about Jesus?

---

Matthew 1:1–17 — Why are Abraham, David, and the exile important?

---

2 Samuel 7:8–16 — What does God promise David, and how does it connect to Jesus?

---



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PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?

## Intermediate introduction

Genre is more than a label attached to an entire book. It creates expectations about how a passage communicates and what kinds of questions we should ask.

### An intermediate reader learns to notice

- The primary genre of a book.
- Smaller forms within the book.
- Places where genres overlap.
- How structure contributes to meaning.
- How genealogy and covenant shape the biblical story.
- How earlier Scripture influences later Scripture.
- How the New Testament uses the Old Testament.
- How revelation unfolds across covenants and history.

### Intermediate guardrail

Deeper study should increase humility, confidence, and faithfulness—not dependence on technical labels.



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**PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?**

## Book-level and passage-level genre

### Psalms

The book is poetry and song, but includes lament, praise, thanksgiving, wisdom, royal psalms, songs of trust, and historical reflection.

### Isaiah

The book is prophecy, but includes history, poetry, judgment speeches, promises, songs, symbolic imagery, Servant passages, and visions.

### Matthew

The book is Gospel, but includes genealogy, narrative, teaching, parables, miracles, prophecy quotations, apocalyptic teaching, and passion and resurrection narrative.

### Why both levels matter

Careful interpretation identifies both the book's larger purpose and the form of the immediate passage.



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PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?

## Descriptive and prescriptive passages

A descriptive passage tells what happened. A prescriptive passage tells someone what should be done or believed. The distinction helps, but does not answer every question.

### Ask

- Does Scripture command this action?
- Does the narrative commend or condemn it?
- Is it repeated as a positive model?
- Is it consistent with clear teaching elsewhere?
- Was it unique to a person or moment in redemptive history?

### A careful conclusion

Narrative can teach without turning every detail into a universal rule. A command can be authoritative while its direct application belongs to a particular covenant or circumstance.

#### Keep the distinction useful

Description and prescription are starting questions, not shortcuts around context.



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PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?

## Wisdom: principles, not formulas

Wisdom often describes moral order without claiming every result appears immediately. Proverbs teaches that diligence ordinarily benefits and laziness ordinarily harms. Job shows that suffering cannot always be traced to personal foolishness or sin.

### This protects readers from harmful conclusions

- A suffering person must have done something wrong.
- A faithful parent can guarantee every choice of an adult child.
- A wise person will never experience poverty, illness, injustice, or grief.

### Read canonically

Wisdom books speak alongside one another and within the whole counsel of Scripture.



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PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?

## Law: covenant and fulfillment

Old Testament laws are sometimes grouped as moral, civil, and ceremonial. Those categories can help, but the biblical text does not formally place every law under those three labels.

### A more foundational approach

- The Law reveals sin — Romans 3:20.
- It served as a guardian leading toward Christ — Galatians 3:23–25.
- Jesus fulfilled the Law and Prophets — Matthew 5:17.
- Christ offered the final sufficient sacrifice — Hebrews 10:1–14.
- Gentiles need not become Jews or keep the Mosaic Law to be saved — Acts 15.
- Love fulfills the Law's moral purpose — Romans 13:8–10.

### A recognized discussion

Christians differ in how they describe continuity between particular Old Testament commands and Christian obedience. Every approach should honor the Law's original setting, revelation of God, and fulfillment in Jesus.



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PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?

## Covenants: continuity without collapse

The biblical covenants belong to one redemptive story, but they should not be treated as interchangeable.

### Distinct contributions

- Abrahamic: family, land, nationhood, and blessing to the nations.
- Mosaic: Israel's covenant life, holiness, worship, and covenant consequences.
- Davidic: David's royal house and the promised King.
- New covenant: forgiveness, transformed hearts, and the Spirit through Jesus.

### Jesus brings the storyline to its saving center

- He is Abraham's offspring — Galatians 3:16.
- He fulfills the Law and Prophets — Matthew 5:17.
- He is David's promised King — Luke 1:31–33.
- He mediates the new covenant — Hebrews 8:6.

### Responsible covenant reading

Recognize original meaning, continuity, and development without flattening every covenant into the same promise.



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PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?

## Genealogies as theological history

Biblical genealogies are historically grounded, but their arrangement can also communicate theological emphasis.

### Matthew

Matthew arranges Jesus' line around Abraham, David, exile, and Christ—highlighting covenant promise, kingdom, judgment, and restoration.

### Luke

Luke places Jesus' genealogy after His baptism and traces backward to Adam, “the son of God” (Luke 3:21–38). This prepares readers for Jesus' temptation as the faithful Son who succeeds where Adam and Israel failed.

### Questions about differences

Matthew and Luke differ in ways Christians explain through several proposals, including legal and biological lines or connections through Joseph and Mary. Scripture does not explicitly settle every detail. State what the texts clearly teach and hold proposed harmonizations with humility.



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PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?

## Prophecy: speaking now and later

Prophets spoke God's message into their own time and sometimes announced what God would do in the future.

### Prophecy may include

- Covenant accusation and calls to repentance.
- Near historical judgment and future restoration.
- Messianic promise and symbolic action.
- Poetry, imagery, and more than one horizon of fulfillment.

### Conditional announcements

Jeremiah 18:1–10 explains that some announcements respond to repentance or rebellion. Jonah announced Nineveh's overthrow, but the people repented and God withheld disaster (Jonah 3:4–10).

### Near and far horizons

Isaiah 7 addresses Ahaz's crisis and reaches climactic fulfillment in Jesus' virgin birth (Matthew 1:22–23). Hosea 11:1 recalls Israel's exodus, and Matthew 2:15 applies that pattern to Jesus.



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PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?

## Apocalyptic writing and earlier Scripture

Apocalyptic writing frequently reuses earlier biblical images. Revelation draws from Genesis, Exodus, Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and other books.

### Examples

Revelation 13 combines features of Daniel 7's beasts. Revelation 21–22 draws from Eden, Isaiah's new creation, Ezekiel's temple vision, and restored Jerusalem.

### Read with an open Bible

Revelation is best interpreted alongside earlier Scripture rather than a current newspaper alone.

### Avoid speculation

Do not identify every technology, political leader, disaster, or conflict as the fulfillment of a symbol without strong textual support.



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PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?

## Gospels as theological history

The Gospels report real events while arranging and emphasizing material to communicate theological truth about Jesus.

### Luke's purpose

Luke investigated carefully and wrote an orderly account (Luke 1:1–4).

### John's purpose

John selected signs so readers would believe Jesus is the Christ and have life (John 20:30–31).

### Inspired selection

The writers may arrange material thematically, summarize teaching, emphasize different details, use Old Testament connections, and select events suited to their purposes. Selection and arrangement do not make the accounts unhistorical; they reveal inspired purposes.



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PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?

## Parable, allegory, and meaningful details

A parable generally communicates a central truth through comparison or story. Some parables also contain several meaningful correspondences.

### The soils

Jesus explains the seed, soils, birds, rocky ground, thorns, and fruit in Matthew 13:18–23.

### A balanced method

- Notice which details Jesus emphasizes or explains.
- Identify the contrasts that drive the story.
- Consider the question or situation that prompted it.
- Notice the response required by the ending.
- Test proposed meanings against context and Scripture.

### Two errors to avoid

“One point only” can be too restrictive, but inventing a hidden meaning for every object goes too far.



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PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?

## Letters as occasional documents

New Testament letters were written for particular occasions or circumstances. “Occasional” does not mean unimportant or temporary; it means a specific need prompted the communication.

We often hear only one side of the original conversation. Paul may answer a question we no longer possess or correct a problem described only indirectly.

### Look for

- Repeated words and changes in subject.
- Questions, answers, commands, and reasons.
- Connecting words such as therefore, for, but, and so that.
- Problems being corrected.
- Gospel truths supporting practical instruction.
- Connections between belief and behavior.



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## Indicative and imperative

Many letters move from what God has done to how believers should live. An indicative states what is true; an imperative gives a command.

### Ephesians

Chapters 1–3 emphasize what God has done through Christ: choosing, redeeming, forgiving, reconciling, and creating one new people. Chapter 4 begins, “walk worthily of the calling with which you were called.”

### Grace and obedience

Christian obedience grows from grace. We do not obey to earn salvation. We obey because God has saved us and is transforming us.

### Additional intermediate questions

- Who is speaking, and what do pronouns refer to?
- What does “therefore” connect?
- Does the sentence express reason, result, contrast, condition, or purpose?
- What cultural or historical setting shapes the passage?
- Does a footnote identify a translation or textual question?



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PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?

## Wisdom and the Bible's story

Wisdom books do not always advance the biblical plot as directly as narrative or prophecy. They reflect on how people should live faithfully within God's world while His story unfolds.

### Job

Wrestles with righteous suffering.

### Proverbs

Trains readers in wise living.

### Ecclesiastes

Exposes the limits of life pursued apart from the Creator.

### Song of Songs

Celebrates the goodness and power of covenant love.

### Their place

These books help us live between creation and final restoration amid beauty, pain, work, love, uncertainty, and the brevity of present life.



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PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?

## How genres work together: the exodus

### Narrative

Exodus 12–14 records Israel's deliverance.

### Law and covenant

Exodus 19–24 establishes covenant life with the redeemed people.

### Poetry

Exodus 15 celebrates God's victory in song.

### Worship and wisdom

Psalms 78, 105, 106, 114, and 136 teach, warn, and inspire worship.

### Prophecy

Isaiah 43:16–21 uses exodus imagery to promise restoration.

### Gospel

Jesus' death occurs during Passover; He is our Passover sacrifice (1 Corinthians 5:7).

### Letter

Hebrews 3:7–4:13 uses the wilderness failure to warn against unbelief.

### Apocalyptic writing

Revelation 15 uses exodus-like deliverance and the song of Moses and the Lamb.

### One Redeemer

The forms differ, but together they show God rescuing His people and ultimately saving through Jesus.



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PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?

## Intermediate guardrails

### Read with care

- Do not use genre to explain away an uncomfortable teaching.
- Do not force modern literary expectations onto ancient writing.
- Do not assume one genre label answers every interpretive question.
- Do not isolate genre from history or history from theology.
- Do not flatten distinct covenants into one undifferentiated promise.
- Do not invent hidden meanings; let Scripture establish connections.
- Do not let advanced study replace simple faith and obedience.

### The purpose

The goal is not merely to classify passages. The goal is to know God, trust Jesus, and respond faithfully.



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PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?

## Intermediate practice: Luke 4

Read Luke 4:16–30.

### Primary form

Gospel narrative.

### Smaller forms

Historical narrative, synagogue reading, Old Testament quotation, teaching, and conflict.

### Old Testament source

Isaiah 61:1–2, with wording also related to Isaiah 58:6.

### Jesus' claim

“Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21).

### Narrative development

The listeners initially marvel, then resist when Jesus exposes unbelief and points to God's mercy reaching outsiders.

### What it reveals

Jesus is the Spirit-anointed One who brings good news, freedom, sight, and the Lord's favor.

### Faithful response

Receive Jesus on His terms rather than admiring His words while rejecting His authority.



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PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?

## Reusable genre worksheet

Passage and book:

---

What kind of writing is this?

---

What clues helped me identify it?

---

Who is speaking or writing, and to whom?

---

What happens in the surrounding passage?

---

How does this form communicate its message?

---

What words, images, contrasts, commands, family lines, covenant promises, or ideas are emphasized?

---

What did this mean in its original setting?

---

Where does it fit in the Bible's unfolding story?

---

What does it reveal about God and human need?

---



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PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?

## Reusable genre worksheet — continued

How does the passage connect to Jesus or the gospel?

---

What truth should I believe?

---

What response should I make?

---

What questions should I continue studying?

---

### Writing types to consider

- Narrative · Law · Poetry or song · Wisdom · Prophecy
- Apocalyptic vision · Gospel · Parable · Letter
- Genealogy · Covenant passage · Prayer · Speech or sermon
- Other or combined form

### Intermediate summary

Genre creates reading expectations, but context, structure, history, covenant, and the whole counsel of Scripture work together to guide faithful interpretation.



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

**FINAL REVIEW**

## Final review

### One unified Word

Narrative tells what happened. Law reveals covenant instruction, holiness, sin, and the need for Christ. Poetry communicates through imagery and emotion. Wisdom teaches faithful life. Prophecy confronts sin and announces God's purposes. Visions reveal sovereignty and victory.

### One unfolding story

The Gospels proclaim Jesus. Parables communicate kingdom truth. Letters form believers in real situations. Genealogies trace faithfulness through generations. Covenants establish relationships and commitments within God's redemptive plan. Prayers, speeches, songs, and other forms enrich the message.

### Final memory anchor

Different kinds of writing—one trustworthy Word, one unfolding story, one Savior at its center.



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**FINAL REVIEW**

## A prayer

Father, thank You for giving us Your Word. Help me slow down, listen carefully, and receive each passage as You intended it to be understood. Give me wisdom to recognize the kind of writing I am reading, humility to learn from its context, and discernment to avoid forcing my own ideas into the text.

Help me recognize Your faithfulness through every generation and every covenant promise. Open my eyes to see Your character, my need, and the beauty of Your redemptive plan. Through the Holy Spirit, lead me toward Jesus and shape my beliefs, worship, choices, and relationships through Your truth.

In Jesus' name, amen.



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## THE GOSPEL

# The Gospel: responding to Jesus

Learning how to read the Bible is important, but its purpose is greater than increasing knowledge. Scripture leads us to Jesus Christ.

God created us for relationship with Him, but every person has sinned and fallen short of His glory (Romans 3:23). We cannot rescue ourselves through good works, religious effort, family heritage, covenant ancestry, or Bible knowledge.

God acted in love. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, lived without sin, died for our sins, and rose bodily from the dead (Romans 5:8; 1 Corinthians 15:3–4; 1 Peter 3:18). Salvation is God's gift, received by grace through faith rather than earned (Ephesians 2:8–9). Jesus calls us to repent and believe the good news (Mark 1:15).

## Responding in faith

Romans 10:9 says that if you confess Jesus as Lord and believe God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. A prayer is not a magic formula; Jesus saves. Prayer is one way to express genuine repentance and faith.



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THE GOSPEL

## A prayer of response

Jesus, I know that I have sinned and cannot save myself. I believe You are the Son of God, that You died for my sins, and that God raised You from the dead. Please forgive me, make me new, and teach me to follow You. I place my trust in You as my Savior and Lord. Amen.

If you have placed your trust in Christ, begin reading His Word, speak with Him in prayer, and connect with a faithful Bible-believing church where you can grow alongside other believers.



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INDEPENDENT SCRIPTURE VERIFICATION

## Key passages for further study

- Genesis 1–3; 5; 10–12; 15; 17
- Exodus 12–15; 19–24
- Deuteronomy 6; 1 Samuel 17; 2 Samuel 7:8–16
- Ruth 4:13–22; 1 Kings 8:22–53; 1 Chronicles 1–9
- Psalms 1; 13; 18; 23; 51; 78; 105–106
- Proverbs 1:1–7; 15:1; 22:6; Job 1–2; 38–42
- Ecclesiastes 12:13–14; Isaiah 7:10–17; 43:16–21; 53; 61:1–2
- Jeremiah 18:1–10; 31:31–34; Ezekiel 4:1–3; 36:25–27
- Daniel 7; 9:3–19; Hosea 1–3; 11:1; Jonah 3; Micah 5:2
- Matthew 1:1–2:15; 5:17–20; 13; 28:18–20
- Mark 4:35–41; Luke 1:1–4; 1:26–33; 3:23–38; 4:16–30
- Luke 10:25–37; 15; 22:14–20; John 10:1–18; 17; 20:30–31
- Acts 2; 7; 15; 17; Romans 3:19–24; 8:14–17; 13:8–10
- 1 Corinthians 5:7; 9:8–14; 15:1–4; Galatians 3:8–29
- Ephesians 1–4; Philippians 4:10–20; 2 Timothy 3:14–17
- Hebrews 3:7–4:13; 8; 9:11–15; 10:1–18
- 1 Peter 2:9–10; Revelation 1; 13; 15; 21–22



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