



# Basic Principles of Biblical Interpretation

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## Introduction

As I think back to the time when I first became a Christian starting to study the Scriptures, I look at what was taught and what was not taught in the Church, at Bible College and at the Seminary. This article is an attempt to provide some of the basics that I wish I would have had.

Whenever we study or evaluate anything, we have presuppositions that we may or may not be aware of. Since these presuppositions affect our evaluation and understanding of what we are studying, we must first uncover our presuppositions and then evaluate them. Once we have done that, we can then understand what we are studying in a more open and accurate way.

While much material has been written on the Scriptures and doctrines, we should really study the actual Scriptures first to understand what is written without being swayed by what others have written. Good resources would include maps, charts, timelines and a brief overview of the Bible. An electronic Bible such as [E Sword](#) is very helpful in searching for a specific Scripture and comparing Scriptures and words. A good Hebrew Lexicon (Brown-Driver-Briggs' Hebrew Definitions) and a Greek Lexicon (Thayer's Greek Definitions) is available for E Sword. The "International Standard Bible Encyclopedia" provides a lot of good information on many topics but has some theological and presuppositional biases. In terms of some commentaries, the following would be suggested, keeping in mind that they will have some doctrinal and presuppositional biases and should only be consulted after doing your own study. (These are all available free with E Sword)

- David Guzik's Enduring Word Commentary
- Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament
- Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary

It is helpful to have Strong's Concordance or use a Bible that has Strong's numbers in E Sword such as the King James Version (KJV) or the New American Standard Bible (NASB). The KJV comes free with E Sword, whereas the [NASB](#) is a paid add on. With these, searches can be done on the original language words. An excellent study Bible is the [Thompson Chain Reference Bible](#).

I have also prepared some E Sword modules that are available on the [Bible Support Website](#)

- [Charts and Maps](#)
- [Miracles in the Bible](#)
- [Genesis Chronologies - The Biblical Text that is relevant](#)
- [Overview of the Masoretic and Septuagint Text numbers related to the Patriarchal Ages](#)
- [Miracles and Archaeology Affirm the Inspiration of the Bible](#)

R. A. Torrey has written an excellent book on "How to Study the Bible"

- [E-Sword version](#)

R.C. Sproul has written an excellent [book](#) on this topic which goes into the subject of "[Knowing Scripture](#)" much more depth.

In our studies, we need to keep Jesus' statement in mind as to our purpose in studying:

*"And He said to him, " 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' "This is the great and foremost commandment. "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' "**On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.**" (Matthew 22:37-40)*

As Micah has recorded:

*"He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)*

## Presuppositions and Worldviews

The first thing that we should do is eliminate all the wrong worldviews and presuppositions that go along with them. The laws of logic demand that only one worldview can be true since mutually exclusive views cannot be true. This is a brief list with a short description of each item. A list of resources is provided in the Bibliography for further study.

- *Atheism.* There is no way to prove that God does not exist. Science requires that there be a "supernatural" creator.
- *Deism.* There is no way to prove this. You would have to be God in order to know that God just created the universe and then left it.
- *Agnosticism.* There is no way to know that you cannot know truth or that truth is not knowable. This is a self-defeating philosophy since by affirming that you cannot know truth or that truth is not knowable, you are in fact making a truth claim.
- *Polytheism.* Any religion that proclaims multiple gods is false since the gods would all lack something that the others have and therefore not be truly God. In order to truly be God, God needs to be totally complete and be of a consistent character.
- *Pantheism.* The belief that everything is a part of god does not work either. For example, people are different, with very different views. If they were all part of the same organism, then the views would be consistent. No one could proclaim anything to be true, since there are so many different views among people. Since we are finite beings, how can we be infinite at the same time? With this view there would be no such thing as stealing, since, if everything is a part of god, then it all belongs to everyone anyways. How do you kill a part of god? There is no such thing as relative truth since even stating that as a truth, violates its own statement.
- *Non-personal gods.* As we have already stated, in order to know truth, you have to know past, present and future. Aside from this, a god would have to be a personal god in order to communicate to people. Without this communicating ability and actually communicating to

people, we could never know anything. A non-personal god cannot communicate anything including truth, history, future or a worldview philosophy.

➤ *I have my truth; you have your truth.* This is also a self-defeating view. If you have contradictory or mutually exclusive beliefs, then they both cannot be true. They can both be false, but not true. This is similar to saying that we should “tolerate” or “accept” all the different views. This is self-defeating in that accepting all views, you accept views that exclude your own view. They cannot both be true at the same time. In order to be able to intelligently discuss any of these ideas, we need to accept and use the laws of logic or the discussions become totally meaningless.

➤ *Science holds all truth.* The Concise Oxford English defines “science” this way

1 *the intellectual and practical activity encompassing the systematic study of the structure and behaviour of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment.*

2 *a systematically organized body of knowledge on any subject.*<sup>1</sup>

Of note here is that science studies the physical and natural world through observation and experiment. You cannot directly observe and experiment with the past or the future. You also never know if there will be something that does not fit the present hypothesis. The history of science shows this as theories from the past have been either rejected or modified. No one can ever know if we have discovered all relevant information. By its nature, science can never determine absolute truth, it can only provide low or high probabilities on any subject related to the natural universe. By this definition, the systematic and organized study of Scripture would also qualify as science.

➤ *Big Bang and Evolution.* This is also rejected because of logic, reason and science.

- This universe had a beginning and is running down in energy. Science does not allow for everything from nothing.
- Life does not come from non-life.
- Information does not come from non-information.
- The fossil record demonstrates that complex life forms are in the “lowest” layers and appear fully formed. There is no evidence of the numerous transitional forms that would be required
- If everything is just random, then you could never know anything or be able to assume that there are consistent patterns, yet “science” assumes and demands this uniformitarianism.
- There would be no such thing as truth, right or wrong. No one would be able to assert anything at all since everything is just a random chemical process.

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., [\*Concise Oxford English Dictionary\*](#) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

- *Judaism.* While Judaism accepts the Old Testament, they also have other writings that they hold to. Jesus referred to this

*“And He said to them, “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. ‘BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.’ “Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.” He was also saying to them, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.”” (Mark 7:6–9)*

Aside from this, the main issue is that the Hebrew text foretold the coming of the Messiah with many prophecies that were fulfilled in the coming of Jesus, they reject Jesus as the Messiah.

- *Islam.* While Islam “accepts” the five books of Moses, the Psalms of David and the Gospels, they say that they are corrupted. There is no evidence to this effect. Consider that Muhammed came on the scene around 600 BC. Since he accepted these books at that time and we have texts that predate him, it is obvious that the texts that we have are not corrupted. While the Old Testament prophets and Jesus performed miracles to attest that they were proclaiming the Word of God, Muhammad did not perform miracles. Islam rejects the crucifixion of Jesus and His resurrection among other things.

After eliminating all of these proposed possibilities, the only viable candidate for a correct worldview is Christianity. It is the only worldview in which there is a cohesive, logical explanation for all that is and is the only one which has a viable way of knowing. God attested to His Word through the miracles that He performed, especially during the Exodus and the life and ministry of Jesus. The textual, archaeological and scientific evidence affirm the truth of the Scriptures.

## Christianity

Now that we have established that Christianity is the only viable option as a worldview, we can look at a few of the implications.

- The creator God is all powerful, all knowing and present everywhere.
- God is eternal and not of this natural realm that He has created.
- God is the only complete source of truth and knowledge.
- God has revealed himself to people.
- All Scripture is inspired by God and God is the author. (2 Tim 3:16, 2 Pe 1:21-21, 1 Th 2:13)
- Because God is the author of Scripture, it is accurate and true in everything it touches on.
- The history and events that are recorded in Scripture are accurate and refer to actual events and people.
- Since God is not limited to the laws that he has established for His creation, He is free to perform signs and miracles. In fact, the definition of a miracle is something that is outside of



the natural laws that this universe operates on. Creation was a miracle, as was the resurrection of Jesus. [List of Miracles](#)

- Since Adam and Eve were the first humans that God created and because they were designed to live forever, their DNA would not have been corrupted as ours are. This would account for the long lives of the people prior to the flood and even down to Abraham. They would also have been quite intelligent and likely strong.

## Reading and Understanding the Scriptures

Now that we have established some background truths, we can proceed to the basic principles for reading and understanding Scripture.

- The Scriptures were written by real people in history and record real events.
- God is the author of the Scriptures and used people to write them. The Scriptures are written in the style of the writer, but the writer is not the author. (Whenever you see commentaries talk about Paul's or John's theology, a red flag should go up. Another red flag should go up when you read a commentary that talks about how Hebrew theology developed over time and how it "evolved" from other cultures around them). Any reading of the text that places man as the author rather than God sows the seed for doubt, change or rejection of God's Word and contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture.
- The Scriptures should be read as plainly written and understood.
- The Scriptures should be read and understood as the writer and the recipients would have understood them. A good example of this is in Genesis. For example, in Genesis 1:5 we read:

*God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. (Genesis 1:5)*

In chapter 2 we read:

*By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. (Genesis 2:2)*

In addition to this, in Exodus 20:

*"For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:11)*

As we look at these passages, we see that God defines the word "day" as an ordinary 24-hour day. He then specifically says that he rested on the seventh day and then re-affirms that He created in 6 – 24-hour days in Exodus as the basis for the sabbath. In fact, the Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Lexicon states the following:

b. day (24 hour period)

1. as defined by evening and morning in Gen\_1

- There are sections which are obviously Poetic and use imagery. Consider the following:

The sea looked and fled; The Jordan turned back. The mountains skipped like rams, The hills, like lambs. What ails you, O sea, that you flee? O Jordan, that you turn back? O mountains, that you skip like rams? O hills, like lambs? (Psalms 114:3-6)

It is quite obvious that the Psalm is not saying that the mountains literally “skipped”

- There are sections such as Proverbs which give general principles by which to live by. The proverbs are not necessarily absolute statements.
- Some parts of Scripture use metaphors and parables and must be read as such.
- Scriptures which are very clear can be used to interpret or clarify those which are not true.

Consider what Peter said:

and regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

(2 Peter 3:15-16)

Consider this passage:

But *women* will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint. (1 Timothy 2:15)

The word “preserved” in the NASB has been translated as “saved” in some other translations. The ESV has:

Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. (1 Timothy 2:15 ESV)

Since we frequently use the word “saved” in conjunction with the salvation of our souls, it has caused some confusion. Thayer’s Greek Definitions gives the following meaning for the word:

1. to save, keep safe and sound, to rescue from danger or destruction
  - a. one (from injury or peril)
1. to save a suffering one (from perishing), i.e. one suffering from disease, to make well, heal, restore to health
2. to preserve one who is in danger of destruction, to save or rescue
  - b. to save in the technical biblical sense
1. negatively 1b
  - c. to deliver from the penalties of the messianic judgment 1b
  - d. to save from the evils which obstruct the reception of the messianic deliverance

We can see from the range of meaning for the word, that the salvation is only one meaning of the word. Most of the meanings relate more to a physical keeping safe. From other verses, we know that this verse cannot be talking about salvation of the soul. For example:

But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; (Romans 3:21-22)

Peter affirms that some things are hard to understand and that people distort them. Let's look at a controversial passage.

*A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. (1 Timothy 2:11-13)*

There are times when culture is a factor in interpreting the Scriptures. In the case of this verse, Paul explicitly removes the possibility of attributing this command to culture as he references the creation of Adam and Eve.

- Sometimes different issues will be dealt with in different books that may seem to be at odds with each other. Consider Paul and James. Paul is dealing with the issue of salvation by the Law or by faith, whereas James deals with people that are not expressing their faith through works. When looked at together, they are in harmony with one another.
- Another literary form is parallelism. An example of this is in Proverbs:  
*Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Or you will also be like him. Answer a fool as his folly deserves, That he not be wise in his own eyes. (Proverbs 26:4-5)*

The CSB translates it a bit different:

*Don't answer a fool according to his foolishness or you'll be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his foolishness or he'll become wise in his own eyes. (Proverbs 26:4-5 CSB)*

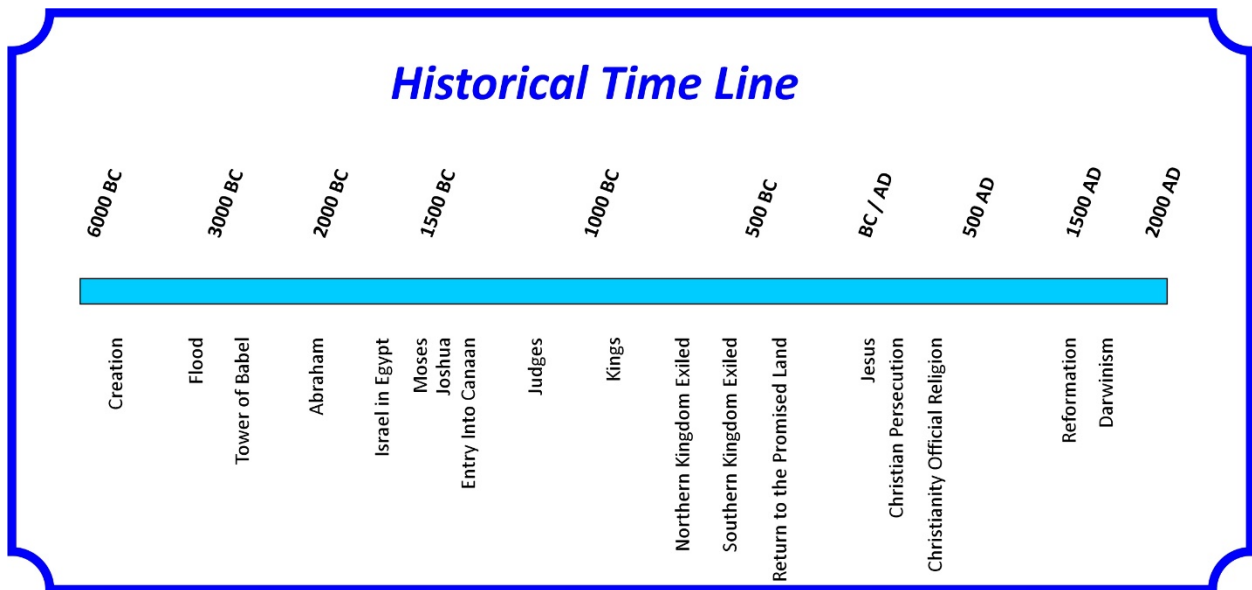
Notice that the NASB is clearer in the meaning. We are not to be like the fool in answering him, but rather expose his folly so that he will not be wise in his own eyes.

- Apocalyptic literature such as sections in Daniel, Ezekiel and Revelation need to be handled carefully. There is a lot of imagery in these books and generally it is best not to be too dogmatic in the study of these.
- Where things are clear and explicit, they can be confidently asserted. Implicit statements must be addressed more carefully.
- It is important to look at the context and purpose of the text. Who wrote it? (human author) Who was it written to? What was going on at the time? What is the historical setting? The logical and generally the simplest reading is the correct one. Do other passages of Scripture shed light on the passage? Since the Bible is authored by God, we are not going to see contradictions and any interpretations that would impose contradictions are therefore false.
- Hebrew and Greek dictionaries can be quite helpful in determining the meaning and range of meaning for a word. It is also helpful to do a search on the original language words to see how it is used in other verses and contexts.
- Once the Scripture is understood in its context, we should then see how it applies to our life and how we can Love God and others more.

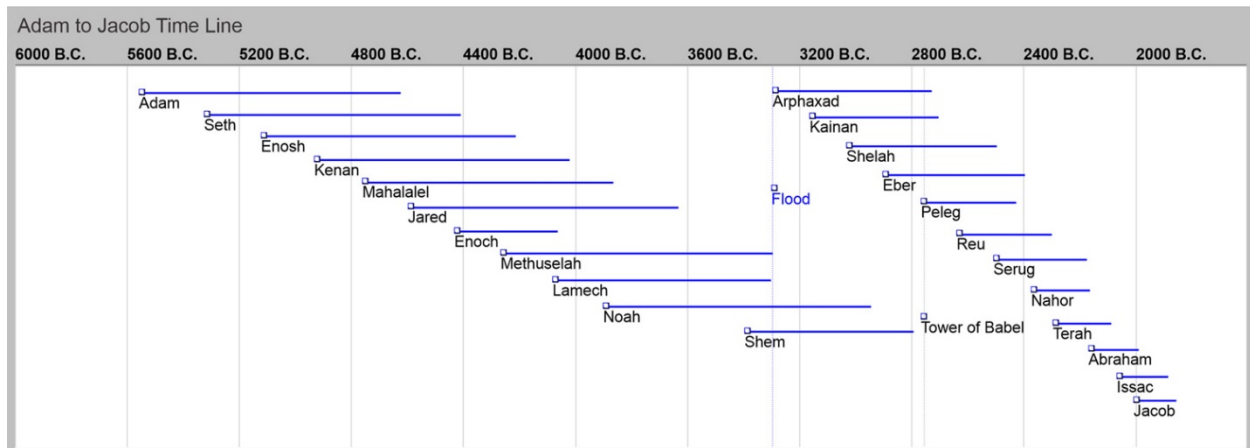
## Context

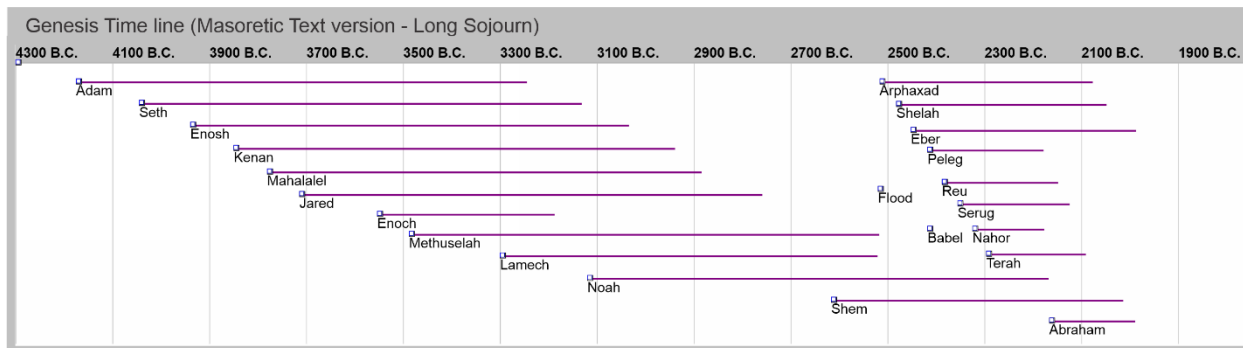
One of the most confusing things when I first started to study was trying to figure out where people and places fit, especially since the books of the Bible are not arranged in a chronological order. In this section, I will try and establish some of that and include charts and maps to help visualize things.

The first timeline is a really high level one showing some key events from creation to present. The following timelines present more specific periods.

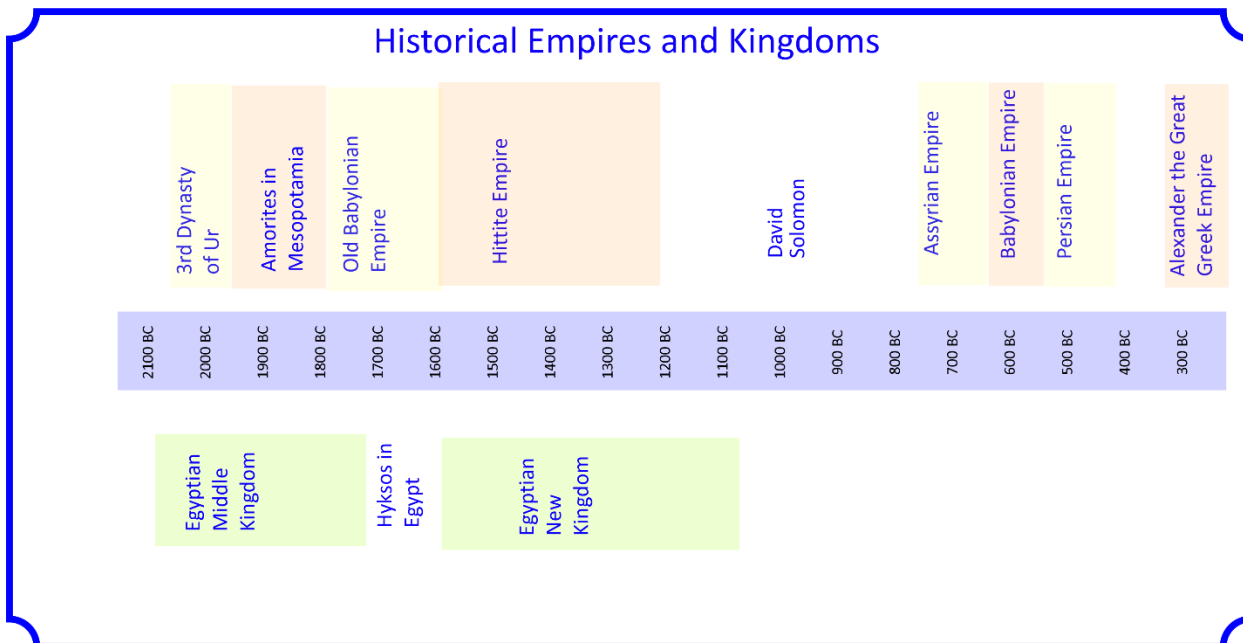
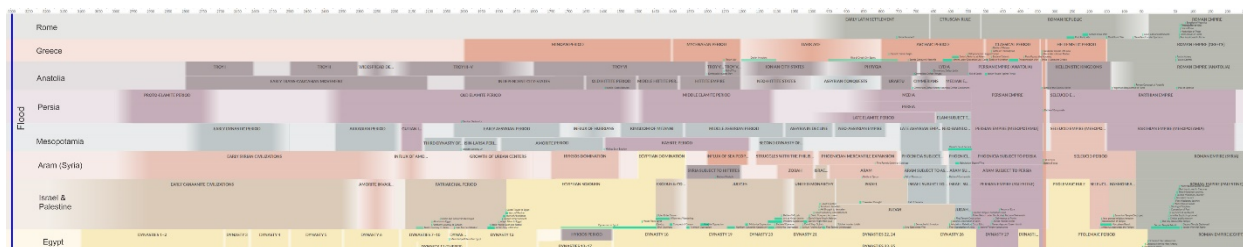


The timelines from creation to the Patriarchs – the first is the more likely based primarily on the Septuagint, while the second is based on the Masoretic text. [Overview of Long and Short Chronologies](#)

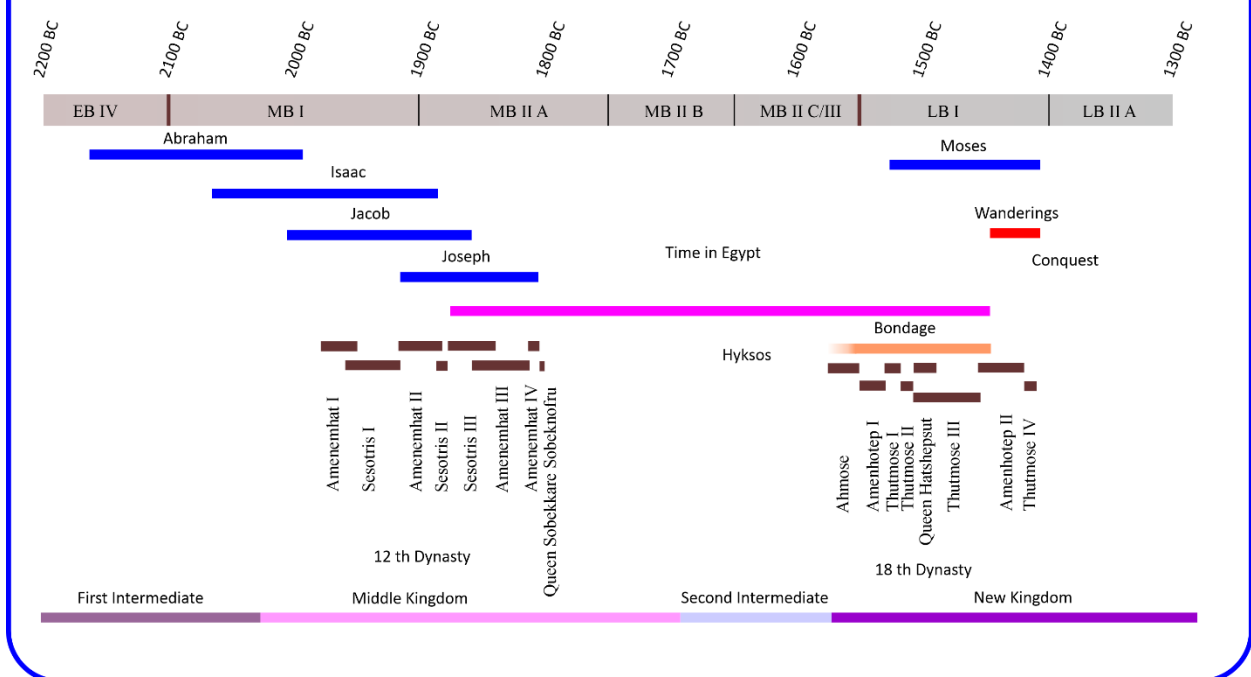




This timeline is better viewed as a [separate image](#). It shows the dominant kingdoms for different areas from the flood to about 250 AD.



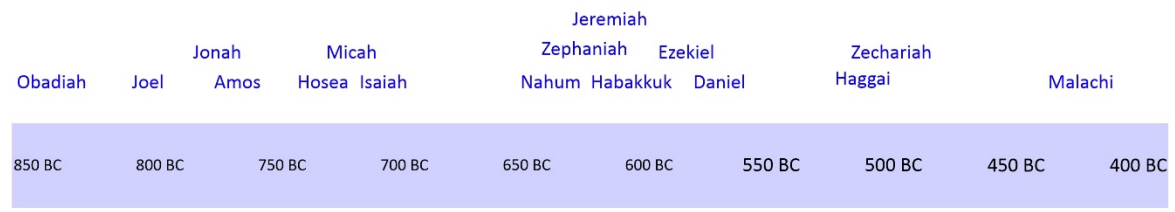
## Patriarchs to Joshua Time Line

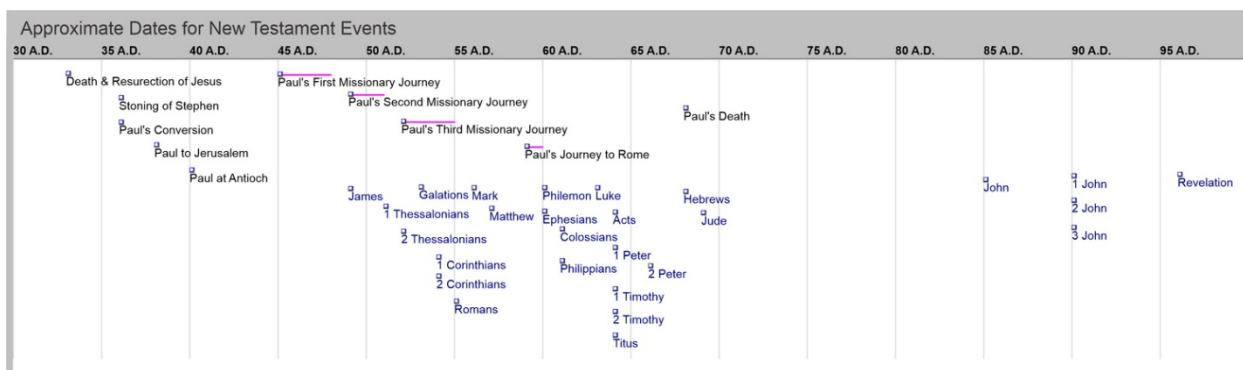
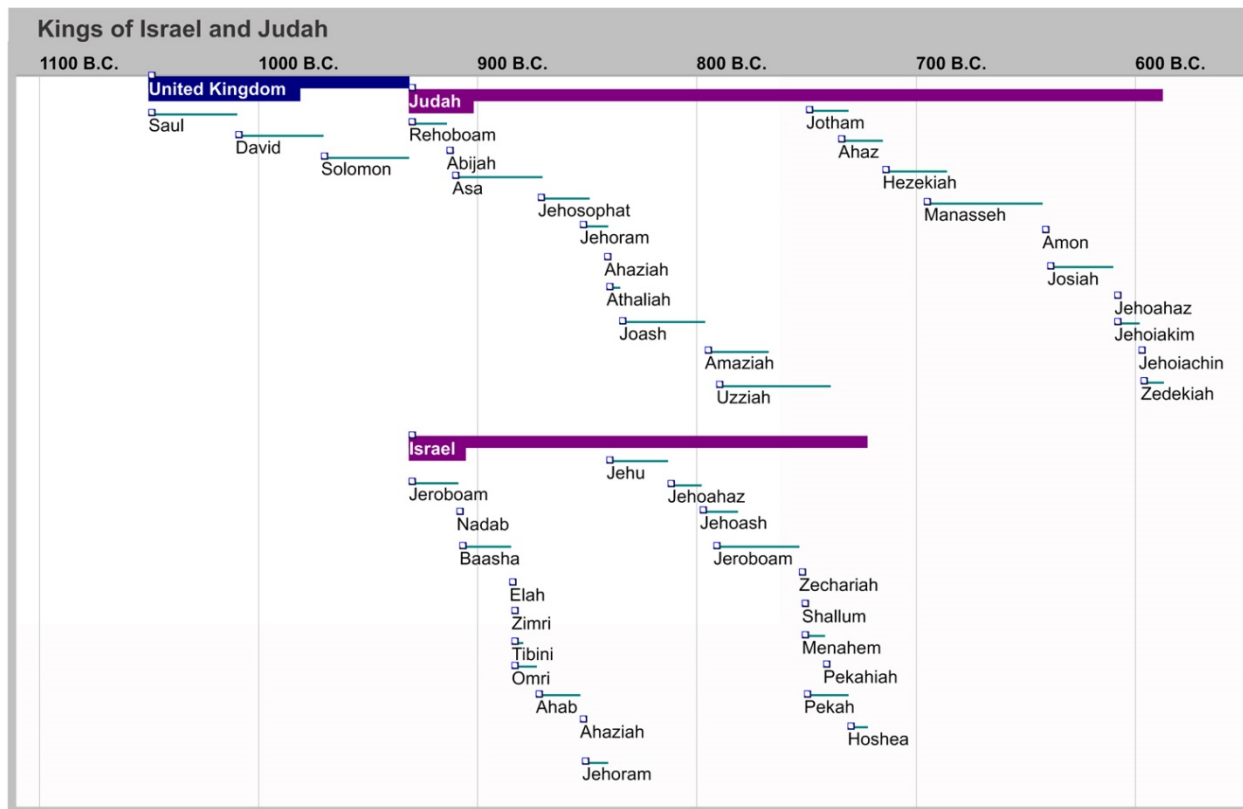


### Time of the Judges (approximate dates)



### Prophetic Books





## Historical Books

The “Historical” books of the Bible are

### Old Testament

- Genesis – covers from creation to 1805 BC. (The death of Joseph)
- Exodus – covers from about 1600 BC to about 1444-5 BC.
- Leviticus – during the Exodus period 1446 BC to 1406 BC. Primarily regulations.
- Numbers – covers from the end of Exodus to 1406 BC.

- Deuteronomy – recaps the events from Mount Sinai to the death of Moses in 1406 BC.
- Joshua – continues from 1406 BC to his death sometime in the early 1300 BC time frame.
- Judges – from the death of Joshua to the time just prior to Samuel around 1060 BC.
- Ruth – is a story that fits into the time of Judges and tells of the ancestor of King David.
- 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel – records the history from Eli, the predecessor of Samuel to the death of Saul around 1010 BC or so.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel - continues to a time before David’s death. Likely to about 970 BC.
- 1<sup>st</sup> Kings – Starts with the end of David’s reign and to the reign of King Ahaziah. ~ 842 BC.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings – starts with the death of Ahaziah and continues to the fall of Jerusalem - 586 BC.
- 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles – starts with a number of genealogies and then proceeds from the death of Saul to the death of David. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles are very much a parallel to Samuel and Kings.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles – starts with the reign of Solomon and proceeds to the fall of Jerusalem (586 BC) and the edict of Cyrus of Persia allowing the exiles to return. ~ 538 BC.
- Ezra – reports the return of the exiles about 458 BC and subsequent events.
- Nehemiah – records his journey to go to Jerusalem and rebuild its walls. 446 BC to about 430 BC.
- Esther – records the account of a plot against the Jews in the Persian time – about 470 BC – 480 BC.

#### New Testament

- Matthew – recounts the events of Jesus’ life.
- Mark - recounts the events of Jesus’ life.
- Luke - recounts the events of Jesus’ life.
- John - recounts the events of Jesus’ life.
- Acts – records the events from the ascension of Jesus to Paul in Prison about 65 BC.

#### Prophetic Books

##### Old Testament

- Isaiah – Lived in the 700 BCs – He prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah.
- Jeremiah – Lived in the late 600s BC and early 500s BC. He prophesied during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and the last king – Zedekiah. He was taken to Egypt after the fall of Jerusalem.
- Lamentations – written by Jeremiah
- Ezekiel- was one of the exiles taken by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon. This places him in the early 500s BC.
- Daniel – was one of the exiles and would have been young when he was taken to Babylon around 600 BC. He served several Babylonian and Persian kings.



- Hosea – predated Isaiah and overlapped with him. He would have been active in the middle 700 BCs to the early 600s BC. He served during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.
- Joel – was likely written around 800 BC.
- Amos – Dates to the reign of Uzziah around the early 700 BCs.
- Obadiah – difficult to date – likely early.
- Jonah – prophesied in the early to mid 700s during the reign of Jeroboam the 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- Micah – prophesied in the late 700s BC to early 600s BC during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.
- Nahum – likely prophesied around the middle 600s BC.
- Habakkuk – likely prophesied in the late 600s BC.
- Zephaniah – prophesied during the late 600s BC.
- Haggai – prophesied during the reign of Darius the Mede – late 500s BC.
- Zechariah - prophesied during the reign of Darius the Mede – late 500s BC.
- Malachi – wrote in the 400s BC.

#### New Testament

- Revelation – was written by the apostle John around 95 AD.

#### Poetic and Wisdom Books

- Job – dates to around the time of the Patriarchs or even earlier based on his age and other information in the book.
- Psalms – the dates of the various Psalms range from Moses ~ 1400 BC to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah after the exile.
- Proverbs – dates primarily to king Solomon 970 BC – 931 BC.
- Ecclesiastes – written by Solomon – likely towards the end of his reign.
- Song of Solomon – written by Solomon – likely more towards the beginning of his reign.

#### New Testament Writers

The names of the books reflect either the identity of the recipient or the identity of the writer. These books were all written between about 48 AD and 90 AD. The books generally address issues and doctrines. Only the letters by John the apostle were written after the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in 70 AD.

- Romans
- 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians
- Galatians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians
- 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy
- Titus
- Philemon
- Hebrews
- James
- 1<sup>st</sup> Peter
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter
- 1<sup>st</sup> John
- 2<sup>nd</sup> John
- 3<sup>rd</sup> John
- Jude

## Overview of the Events recorded in Scripture

When reading or studying Scriptures, it is helpful to have a high-level view and understanding of the flow of the whole Bible. This helps to provide context and reference points for the events that are recorded.

The Bible starts with an account of the creation of the universe, the earth and all living things by God. God called His creation “very good”.

- God planted a garden called Eden, put the man into it and gave some very basic commands
  - *Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food"; and it was so. (Gen. 1:26-30)*
  - *Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." (Gen. 2:15-17)*

- Adam and Eve did not obey the command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which resulted in the judgements and curses on people and the land. This is called the “fall of man” and led to the death, pain, suffering and groanings that we see all around us.
- Cain murders his brother Abel and we see the increasing wickedness of people.
- Enoch, the seventh from Adam, walked with God and was taken to be with God without dying.
- Because of the wickedness and evil of all people, God decided to destroy the world with a global flood. Only Noah was found to be righteous on the earth. God commanded Noah to build an ark for his family and the animals. The global flood then destroyed all creatures on the earth and in the sky.

*Thus He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky, and they were blotted out from the earth; and only Noah was left, together with those that were with him in the ark. (Gen. 7:23)*

- After the flood,

*And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. "The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given. "Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant. "Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. "Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man. "As for you, be fruitful and multiply; Populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it." (Gen. 9:1-7)*

- The people did not disperse as God had commanded, rather they wanted to remain together and make a name for themselves, so we have the episode of the tower of Babel. God confused their language and they stopped building and were scattered.
- We then move on to Abraham and his family. He is called out of Ur of the Chaldeans and led to Canaan. We come to the record of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wickedness. Abraham intercedes for the cities to the point that even if ten righteous are found, God would not destroy it. Obviously, ten righteous were not found.

- Abraham is promised a descendant by God. When this is taking a long time, Sarah suggests that she could have her descendant via Hagar, her maid. Ishmael is the result of this union and God said

*"He will be a wild donkey of a man, His hand will be against everyone, And everyone's hand will be against him; And he will live to the east of all his brothers. (Gen. 16:12)*

- God then tells Abraham that Sarah will bear him a child and that His covenant will be with that child and his descendants. The child that Sarah bore was named Isaac. Isaac then fathered Esau and Jacob. Jacob then became the father of the twelve tribes of Israel.
- Joseph, one of the 12 sons, is sold into slavery in Egypt where he ends up being second only to Pharaoh after he interprets the dream of Pharaoh regarding the seven good years to be followed by the seven very bad years.
- During the bad years, Joseph brings his family to Egypt where they lived 430 Years.
- They were subsequently enslaved by a later Pharaoh after which God sent Moses to lead the people out of Egypt into the promised land of Canaan. The Israelites frequently disobeyed, grumbled, and did not obey the command to enter the promised land. This led to the original group of men over 20 years old having to die in the wilderness prior to the Israelites entering the Promised Land.
- Moses leads them until the conquest of the East side of the Jordan is completed. Joshua takes over and leads them through the dried-up Jordan and starts the conquest with the destruction of the heavily fortified city of Jericho where God caused the walls to fall down.
- The Israelites serve God throughout the lifetime of Joshua and the elders that outlived him. After this, the tumultuous period of the Judges starts with the Israelites serving other gods and disobeying God. God then allows others to oppress them and, when the Israelites cry out to God, He sends a judge to deliver them. This pattern continues until the time of Samuel the prophet. As Samuel ages, the people want him to appoint a king over them.
- Saul is then appointed as the first king. He however is not obedient, and God chooses David as the next king. David is called a man after God's own heart.
- David's son, Solomon, takes the reigns after David and was given extraordinary wisdom. Under Solomon, the territory of Israel reached its maximum size. Solomon was not committed totally to God. His son Rehoboam does not listen to the advice of the elders, but rather follows the advice of his younger companions. The result is the division of the kingdom into the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel.
- God keeps sending prophets to the people to urge them to turn back to Himself during the time of the Judges and Kings. Unfortunately, the people do not respond very well and thus they experience God's judgement many times over.

- The northern kingdom rebels against God virtually right away and as judgement is exiled by Assyria in 723 BC.
- Judah has a mix of good, bad and half-hearted kings and is exiled by Nebuchadnezzar starting in 605 BC down to 586 BC.
- Under Cyrus, the Persian, the exiles are allowed to start to return and close to 50,000 go back to Jerusalem. While idolatry does not seem to be the problem anymore, disobedience to God and His commands certainly persisted.
- It is during the time between the return from the exile and the start of the New Testament, that the Pharisees and Sadducees appear.
- Jesus is born of the virgin Mary
  - *The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. (Lk. 1:35)*
- John describes Jesus in the following way
  - *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. (Jn. 1:1-4)*
- Jesus calls 12 disciples to Himself and goes about proclaiming the kingdom of God, teaching, performing miracles, healing people and casting out demons.
- The Pharisees and Sadducees conspire to convict Jesus and have Him crucified.
- Jesus is raised from the dead on the third day. He appears to his followers during the next 40 days and then ascends to heaven.
- Jesus, being God Himself, was the only one who was sinless and could therefore pay the penalty for all of our sins, from Adam on forward.
  - *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (Jn. 3:16-18)*
- The Holy Spirit comes on the Disciples at Pentecost (50 days after Passover) and the disciples speak in tongues and proclaim Jesus to the people. They also start doing miracles by healing people.
- The book of Acts records the growth of the church until shortly before the time of the Apostle Paul's death.
- The letters of the New Testament are written to address questions, problems and doctrinal truths.

- John writes the book of Revelation towards the end of his life. Here we have instructions and prophecies regarding the end times. The main take away from the book is to persevere and be faithful.
  - *"For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. (Matt. 24:37-39)*
- While many are always trying to figure out the exact time when Jesus returns, Jesus Himself said
  - *"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. (Matt. 24:36)*
  - *"For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will. (Matt. 24:44)*
- Revelation concludes with
  - *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. "He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Rev. 21:1-8)*

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# The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

## Preface

The authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian church in this and every age. Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to show the reality of their discipleship by humbly and faithfully obeying God's written Word. To stray from Scripture in faith or conduct is disloyalty to our Master. Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority.

The following Statement affirms this inerrancy of Scripture afresh, making clear our understanding of it and warning against its denial. We are persuaded that to deny it is to set aside the witness of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit and to refuse that submission to the claims of God's own Word which marks true Christian faith. We see it as our timely duty to make this affirmation in the face of current lapses from the truth of inerrancy among our fellow Christians and misunderstandings of this doctrine in the world at large.

This Statement consists of three parts: a Summary Statement, Articles of Affirmation and Denial, and an accompanying Exposition. It has been prepared in the course of a three-day consultation in Chicago. Those who have signed the Summary Statement and the Articles wish to affirm their own conviction as to the inerrancy of Scripture and to encourage and challenge one another and all Christians to growing appreciation and understanding of this doctrine. We acknowledge the limitations of a document prepared in a brief, intensive conference and do not propose that this Statement be given creedal weight. Yet we rejoice in the deepening of our own convictions through our discussions together, and we pray that the Statement we have signed may be used to the glory of our God toward a new reformation of the Church in its faith, life, and mission.

We offer this Statement in a spirit, not of contention, but of humility and love, which we purpose by God's grace to maintain in any future dialogue arising out of what we have said. We gladly acknowledge that many who deny the inerrancy of Scripture do not display the consequences of this denial in the rest of their belief and behavior, and we are conscious that we who confess this doctrine often deny it in life by failing to bring our thoughts and deeds, our traditions and habits, into true subjection to the divine Word.

We invite response to this statement from any who see reason to amend its affirmations about Scripture by the light of Scripture itself, under whose infallible authority we stand as we speak. We claim no personal infallibility for the witness we bear, and for any help which enables us to strengthen this testimony to God's Word we shall be grateful.



## A Short Statement

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.
2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms: obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.
3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.
4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.
5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

## Articles of Affirmation and Denial

### Article I.

WE AFFIRM that the Holy Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative Word of God.

WE DENY that the Scriptures receive their authority from the Church, tradition, or any other human source.

### Article II.

WE AFFIRM that the Scriptures are the supreme written norm by which God binds the conscience, and that the authority of the Church is subordinate to that of Scripture.

WE DENY that Church creeds, councils, or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of the Bible.

### Article III.

WE AFFIRM that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God.

WE DENY that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity.

### Article IV.

WE AFFIRM that God who made mankind in His image has used language as a means of revelation.

WE DENY that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration.

#### Article V.

WE AFFIRM that God's revelation within the Holy Scriptures was progressive.

WE DENY that later revelation, which may fulfill earlier revelation, ever corrects or contradicts it. We further deny that any normative revelation has been given since the completion of the New Testament writings.

#### Article VI.

WE AFFIRM that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration.

WE DENY that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.

#### Article VII.

WE AFFIRM that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine. The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us.

WE DENY that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.

#### Article VIII.

WE AFFIRM that God in His work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared.

WE DENY that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.

#### Article IX.

WE AFFIRM that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write.

WE DENY that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word.

#### Article X.

WE AFFIRM that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.

WE DENY that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.

Article XI.

WE AFFIRM that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses.

WE DENY that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated.

Article XII.

WE AFFIRM that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.

WE DENY that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.

Article XIII.

WE AFFIRM the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture.

WE DENY that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.

Article XIV.

WE AFFIRM the unity and internal consistency of Scripture.

WE DENY that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate the truth claims of the Bible.

Article XV.

WE AFFIRM that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration.

WE DENY that Jesus' teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.

#### Article XVI.

WE AFFIRM that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church's faith throughout its history.

WE DENY that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.

#### Article XVII.

WE AFFIRM that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word.

WE DENY that this witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against Scripture.

#### Article XVIII.

WE AFFIRM that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.

WE DENY the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.

#### Article XIX.

WE AFFIRM that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ.

WE DENY that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences, both to the individual and to the Church.

#### Exposition

Our understanding of the doctrine of inerrancy must be set in the context of the broader teachings of the Scripture concerning itself. This exposition gives an account of the outline of doctrine from which our summary statement and articles are drawn.

#### Creation, Revelation and Inspiration

The Triune God, who formed all things by his creative utterances and governs all things by His Word of decree, made mankind in His own image for a life of communion with Himself, on the model of the eternal fellowship of loving communication within the Godhead. As God's image-bearer, man was to hear God's Word addressed to him and to respond in the joy of adoring obedience. Over and above God's self-disclosure in the created order and the sequence of events within it, human beings from Adam on have received verbal messages from Him, either directly, as stated in Scripture, or indirectly in the form of part or all of Scripture itself.

When Adam fell, the Creator did not abandon mankind to final judgment but promised salvation and began to reveal Himself as Redeemer in a sequence of historical events centering on Abraham's family and culminating in the life, death, resurrection, present heavenly ministry, and promised return of Jesus Christ. Within this frame God has from time to time spoken specific words of judgment and mercy, promise and command, to sinful human beings so drawing them into a covenant relation of mutual commitment between Him and them in which He blesses them with gifts of grace and they bless Him in responsive adoration. Moses, whom God used as mediator to carry His words to His people at the time of the Exodus, stands at the head of a long line of prophets in whose mouths and writings God put His words for delivery to Israel. God's purpose in this succession of messages was to maintain His covenant by causing His people to know His Name—that is, His nature—and His will both of precept and purpose in the present and for the future. This line of prophetic spokesmen from God came to completion in Jesus Christ, God's incarnate Word, who was Himself a prophet—more than a prophet, but not less—and in the apostles and prophets of the first Christian generation. When God's final and climactic message, His word to the world concerning Jesus Christ, had been spoken and elucidated by those in the apostolic circle, the sequence of revealed messages ceased. Henceforth the Church was to live and know God by what He had already said, and said for all time.

At Sinai God wrote the terms of His covenant on tables of stone, as His enduring witness and for lasting accessibility, and throughout the period of prophetic and apostolic revelation He prompted men to write the messages given to and through them, along with celebratory records of His dealings with His people, plus moral reflections on covenant life and forms of praise and prayer for covenant mercy. The theological reality of inspiration in the producing of Biblical documents corresponds to that of spoken prophecies: although the human writers' personalities were expressed in what they wrote, the words were divinely constituted. Thus, what Scripture says, God says; its authority is His authority, for He is its ultimate Author, having given it through the minds and words of chosen and prepared men who in freedom and faithfulness "spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). Holy Scripture must be acknowledged as the Word of God by virtue of its divine origin.

#### [Authority: Christ and the Bible](#)

Jesus Christ, the Son of God who is the Word made flesh, our Prophet, Priest, and King, is the ultimate Mediator of God's communication to man, as He is of all God's gifts of grace. The revelation He gave was more than verbal; He revealed the Father by His presence and His deeds as well. Yet His words were crucially important; for He was God, He spoke from the Father, and His words will judge all men at the last day.

As the prophesied Messiah, Jesus Christ is the central theme of Scripture. The Old Testament looked ahead to Him; the New Testament looks back to His first coming and on to His second. Canonical Scripture is the divinely inspired and therefore normative witness to Christ. No hermeneutic, therefore, of which the historical Christ is not the focal point is acceptable. Holy

Scripture must be treated as what it essentially is—the witness of the Father to the Incarnate Son.

It appears that the Old Testament canon had been fixed by the time of Jesus. The New Testament canon is likewise now closed inasmuch as no new apostolic witness to the historical Christ can now be borne. No new revelation (as distinct from Spirit-given understanding of existing revelation) will be given until Christ comes again. The canon was created in principle by divine inspiration. The Church's part was to discern the canon which God had created, not to devise one of its own.

The word canon, signifying a rule or standard, is a pointer to authority, which means the right to rule and control. Authority in Christianity belongs to God in His revelation, which means, on the one hand, Jesus Christ, the living Word, and, on the other hand, Holy Scripture, the written Word. But the authority of Christ and that of Scripture are one. As our Prophet, Christ testified that Scripture cannot be broken. As our Priest and King, He devoted His earthly life to fulfilling the law and the prophets, even dying in obedience to the words of Messianic prophecy. Thus, as He saw Scripture attesting Him and His authority, so by His own submission to Scripture He attested its authority. As He bowed to His Father's instruction given in His Bible (our Old Testament), so He requires His disciples to do—not, however, in isolation but in conjunction with the apostolic witness to Himself which He undertook to inspire by His gift of the Holy Spirit. So Christians show themselves faithful servants of their Lord by bowing to the divine instruction given in the prophetic and apostolic writings which together make up our Bible.

By authenticating each other's authority, Christ and Scripture coalesce into a single fount of authority. The Biblically-interpreted Christ and the Christ-centered, Christ-proclaiming Bible are from this standpoint one. As from the fact of inspiration we infer that what Scripture says, God says, so from the revealed relation between Jesus Christ and Scripture we may equally declare that what Scripture says, Christ says.

#### Infallibility, Inerrancy, Interpretation

Holy Scripture, as the inspired Word of God witnessing authoritatively to Jesus Christ, may properly be called infallible and inerrant. These negative terms have a special value, for they explicitly safeguard crucial positive truths.

Infallible signifies the quality of neither misleading nor being misled and so safeguards in categorical terms the truth that Holy Scripture is a sure, safe, and reliable rule and guide in all matters.

Similarly, inerrant signifies the quality of being free from all falsehood or mistake and so safeguards the truth that Holy Scripture is entirely true and trustworthy in all its assertions.

We affirm that canonical Scripture should always be interpreted on the basis that it is infallible and inerrant. However, in determining what the God-taught writer is asserting in each passage,

we must pay the most careful attention to its claims and character as a human production. In inspiration, God utilized the culture and conventions of His penman's milieu, a milieu that God controls in His sovereign providence; it is misinterpretation to imagine otherwise.

So history must be treated as history, poetry as poetry, hyperbole and metaphor as hyperbole and metaphor, generalization and approximation as what they are, and so forth. Differences between literary conventions in Bible times and in ours must also be observed: since, for instance, non-chronological narration and imprecise citation were conventional and acceptable and violated no expectations in those days, we must not regard these things as faults when we find them in Bible writers. When total precision of a particular kind was not expected nor aimed at, it is no error not to have achieved it. Scripture is inerrant, not in the sense of being absolutely precise by modern standards, but in the sense of making good its claims and achieving that measure of focused truth at which its authors aimed.

The truthfulness of Scripture is not negated by the appearance in it of irregularities of grammar or spelling, phenomenal descriptions of nature, reports of false statements (e.g., the lies of Satan), or seeming discrepancies between one passage and another. It is not right to set the so-called "phenomena" of Scripture against the teaching of Scripture about itself. Apparent inconsistencies should not be ignored. Solution of them, where this can be convincingly achieved, will encourage our faith, and where for the present no convincing solution is at hand we shall significantly honor God by trusting His assurance that His Word is true, despite these appearances, and by maintaining our confidence that one day they will be seen to have been illusions.

Inasmuch as all Scripture is the product of a single divine mind, interpretation must stay within the bounds of the analogy of Scripture and eschew hypotheses that would correct one Biblical passage by another, whether in the name of progressive revelation or of the imperfect enlightenment of the inspired writer's mind.

Although Holy Scripture is nowhere culture-bound in the sense that its teaching lacks universal validity, it is sometimes culturally conditioned by the customs and conventional views of a particular period, so that the application of its principles today calls for a different sort of action.

#### Skepticism and Criticism

Since the Renaissance, and more particularly since the Enlightenment, world-views have been developed which involve skepticism about basic Christian tenets. Such are the agnosticism which denies that God is knowable, the rationalism which denies that He is incomprehensible, the idealism which denies that He is transcendent, and the existentialism which denies rationality in His relationships with us. When these un- and anti-biblical principles seep into men's theologies at [a] presuppositional level, as today they frequently do, faithful interpretation of Holy Scripture becomes impossible.

### Transmission and Translation

Since God has nowhere promised an inerrant transmission of Scripture, it is necessary to affirm that only the autographic text of the original documents was inspired and to maintain the need of textual criticism as a means of detecting any slips that may have crept into the text in the course of its transmission. The verdict of this science, however, is that the Hebrew and Greek text appear to be amazingly well preserved, so that we are amply justified in affirming, with the Westminster Confession, a singular providence of God in this matter and in declaring that the authority of Scripture is in no way jeopardized by the fact that the copies we possess are not entirely error-free.

Similarly, no translation is or can be perfect, and all translations are an additional step away from the autographa. Yet the verdict of linguistic science is that English-speaking Christians, at least, are exceedingly well served in these days with a host of excellent translations and have no cause for hesitating to conclude that the true Word of God is within their reach. Indeed, in view of the frequent repetition in Scripture of the main matters with which it deals and also of the Holy Spirit's constant witness to and through the Word, no serious translation of Holy Scripture will so destroy its meaning as to render it unable to make its reader "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15).

### Inerrancy and Authority

In our affirmation of the authority of Scripture as involving its total truth, we are consciously standing with Christ and His apostles, indeed with the whole Bible and with the main stream of Church history from the first days until very recently. We are concerned at the casual, inadvertent, and seemingly thoughtless way in which a belief of such far-reaching importance has been given up by so many in our day.

We are conscious too that great and grave confusion results from ceasing to maintain the total truth of the Bible whose authority one professes to acknowledge. The result of taking this step is that the Bible which God gave loses its authority, and what has authority instead is a Bible reduced in content according to the demands of one's critical reasonings and in principle reducible still further once one has started. This means that at bottom independent reason now has authority, as opposed to Scriptural teaching. If this is not seen and if for the time being basic evangelical doctrines are still held, persons denying the full truth of Scripture may claim an evangelical identity while methodologically they have moved away from the evangelical principle of knowledge to an unstable subjectivism, and will find it hard not to move further.

We affirm that what Scripture says, God says. May He be glorified. Amen and Amen.