

SOARING THROUGH THE BIBLE

SKIP HEITZIG



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Soaring Through the Bible

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GET READY FOR TAKEOFF!

Do you know how special the Bible is? It's the only book in the world that tells us who God really is and how we can know Him. There's no other book like it!

That means we need to make sure we understand what God is saying through these ancient words. Sometimes that can be hard even for me—and I've been studying the Bible for most of my life!

But I've found that a great way to understand the Bible is by an overview. Imagine flying in an airplane. The higher up you go into the air and look down, the more you can see of the earth than you can from the ground.

Now imagine if you could look at the Bible like that. You would be able to see a much bigger picture of the whole book. That's why I wrote *Soaring Through the Bible*. I want to show you a bigger picture so that you can see what the Bible is all about.

I encourage you to read *Soaring Through the Bible* from cover to cover, like a normal book. Maybe read a chapter each day. Then you'll get to know the whole story of how God made people, how people sinned against Him, and how Jesus came to save people.

Each chapter in this book has these three sections:

- *Check Your Location*. This section talks about who wrote that book of the Bible, what was happening at the time when they wrote it, and what it's about.

- *Plot Your Course.* This section gives a summary of all the action in the book: what happened and what it means.
- *Enjoy Your Trip.* This section points out some of the big ideas in each book and how you can put them into practice in your own life.

Every “Enjoy Your Trip” section includes a part called “Where’s the Gospel?” Did you know every book of the Bible talks about the gospel? The gospel is the good news that God’s Son, Jesus Christ, came to earth to die on the cross and save you and me from our sin. God planned the gospel from before the beginning of time—before He made the earth or even you and me! So that means the gospel pops up all throughout Scripture. The Bible will repeat certain important themes, but this is the greatest theme of all!

I want to show you that studying the Bible is fun—and even downright crazy sometimes! So as we soar through Scripture, you’ll also find these special sections to enjoy:

- *Learn the Language.* The Bible wasn’t originally written in English, so here you’ll find what some words meant in their original language.
- *Must-See Sites.* These include interesting places and events.
- *Culture Shock.* The Bible is full of some weird and shocking things! This is where you can learn about some of them.
- *Tour Guide.* The Bible is also full of interesting people. This section gives you clues about certain people, and you have to figure out who the person is.
- *Pack Smart.* This section shows you how to not just learn about the Bible but also live out what you learn.

- *Expect the Unexpected.* This is where you'll learn some surprising facts in Scripture.

Keep a Bible near you as you read so you can look up verses when you need to and read them on your own. That way, you'll be able to remember where things are located in your Bible. Use a good translation that makes the Bible easier to understand. In this book, I used the New Living Translation (NLT) and The Living Bible (TLB). But you can use any Bible you have.

The biggest thing I want you to learn from this book is how much God loves you and how far He went to make sure you get to be with Him in heaven forever. So buckle up as we prepare to take flight and soar through the Bible!



GENESIS

Check Your Location

Moses wrote Genesis, the first book of the Bible, thousands of years ago. *Genesis* is a word that means *beginnings*. Genesis is important because it shows us that God is the Creator. It also describes the beginning of everything: life, sin, God’s solution to sin, and Israel—the nation Jesus Christ would come from.

LEARN THE LANGUAGE—*Create*

In Genesis 1:1, we read that God “created” the world. The word *created* comes from a Hebrew word that means “to carve or cut out.” God *carved* the world into shape like a master sculptor.

Plot Your Course

The Formation of Everything (Genesis 1–2)

The beginning of the universe is simple: God created it all. He made day and night, water and land, plants, the sun, the moon, stars, birds, bugs, sea creatures, all the animals, and His most special creation: human beings. When He was done, He called all He had made good, and then He rested.

PACK SMART

Some people wonder if God really made the world. Think about it like this: You breathe air, but can you make it? You can grow a plant, but can you make a seed? Only God can create like that. When you look closely at the world around you, it looks like it was designed. That's because it *was*. If you can believe God made the world, believing the rest of the Bible is easy.

The Fall of Humanity (Genesis 3–11)

In the Garden of Eden, God told the first people, Adam and Eve, not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But God also gave them free will, the ability to choose their actions. There was nothing wrong with this tree. It was just wrong to disobey God.

Satan came along in the form of a serpent, and he tempted Eve to sin—to disobey what God told her. So Eve ate some fruit from the tree, and Adam followed. This was the saddest day in the history of the human race. This is where all our problems began. Because of what Adam and Eve did—what we call *the fall*—every person sins and will die one day.

After Adam and Eve, the human race became so bad that God decided to start life over again with a huge flood. He chose the only good man He could find, Noah, to build a boat so that Noah's family and two of each animal could survive the flood of water that covered the earth.

But even after God gave people a second chance, they messed up. They built the Tower of Babel in rebellion against God. So God made everyone speak different languages. They had to stop building their rebel tower because they couldn't communicate. After that, everyone drifted apart, and God began to focus on making a special nation for Himself.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

God didn't kick Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden because they ate that fruit. He booted them because He didn't want them to eat from the other forbidden tree—the tree of life—and be stuck in their sinful ways forever. It was actually an act of mercy!

MUST-SEE SITES—*Babel*

After the flood, God gave mankind a second chance (He loves to do that!). He told them to spread out, explore, and live awesome lives. Instead, everyone gathered together and revolted. The Tower of Babel was probably a type of pyramid built in giant steps called a *ziggurat*. By confusing everyone's language, God forced them to do what He originally told them to. Nations grew out of the smaller groups of people who spoke the same language.

Four Great Men (Genesis 12–50)

The rest of Genesis is about four important men God chose to be the founders of Israel, His special nation: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

God first chose Abraham. Abraham didn't have kids, but God promised that Abraham would have a family that would grow into a big nation and live in a land God gave them. Even though Abraham was old enough to make your grandpa look like a youngster, he believed God's promises, and God called him His friend.

Abraham's son Isaac was next in line, and God gave him the same promise. Then there was Isaac's son Jacob, who had trouble getting along with others. He even wrestled with God! But God still promised Jacob that his family would become a great nation. He gave Jacob a new name: *Israel*.

Jacob had twelve sons, whose children became the twelve tribes of Israel—also called the Israelites. One of his sons, Joseph, was sold into slavery in Egypt by his own brothers. But Joseph trusted God, and God used him to save his family and all of Egypt from a famine.

Why do these men and their families matter? Because God Himself chose them to be His special people—over all the other nations of the world. And it was through this family that Jesus Christ would one day be born and save the world from sin. Israel is part of God’s big plan to save anyone who believes in Jesus—including you!

It’s easy to think Genesis is just a book of stories you learn about at church. But remember—these stories really happened. God cared about all of these people just like He cares about you.

CULTURE SHOCK

Can you believe that Jacob wrestled God to a standstill (Genesis 32:24-26)? It was more like when you wrestle with your dad. He lets you think you’re beating him—until he decides time is up and pins you with ease. God wanted to see if His blessing mattered enough to Jacob to wrestle with Him all night—and it turns out it did!

TOUR GUIDE

- My uncle gave me the choice of the best land around, and I picked a beautiful valley near a city where the residents hated God.
- My wife got salty when she refused to leave our home without looking back.

- I was a righteous man who was bugged by all the messed-up behavior of my neighbors.
- Read Genesis 13, Genesis 19:15–26 and 2 Peter 2:6–8 to find out who I am.

Enjoy Your Trip

Creation Shows You Who God Is

God's creation shows His power, creativity, and beauty. And since you are made in God's image, so do you. He made you just the way you are, and He thinks you're special. As wonderful as His creation is—sunsets, rainbows, tigers, oranges—you are even more amazing to Him.

Why Is Sin Such a Big Deal?

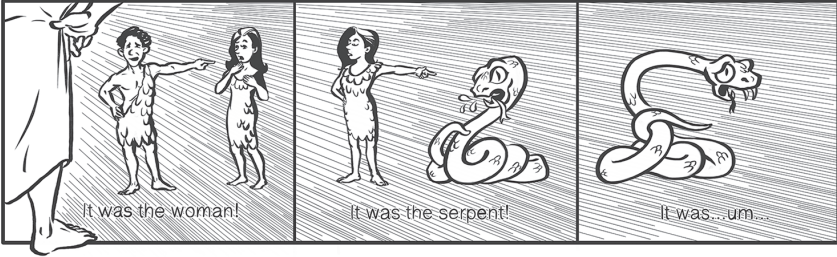
Sin is when you choose to do things your way instead of God's way. It separates you from God. Picture a clear, smooth lake that reflects trees and mountains and clouds like a mirror. Sin is like skipping a rock over the surface. It's fun, but it ruins the perfect reflection on the lake. Sin ruins God's image in you.

Where's the Gospel?

After Satan tempted Eve to disobey God, God told Satan, "From now on you and the woman will be enemies, as will your offspring and hers. You will strike his heel, but he will crush your head" (Genesis 3:15 TLB). The "offspring" of the woman is Jesus. In other words, Jesus would one day crush Satan's head. By defeating him at the cross, Jesus would make a way for people to stop sinning and follow God. Even thousands of years before Jesus was born, God told us about the rescue operation He was planning. How awesome is that?

► Adam and Eve

Read about their blame game in Genesis 3:8-13.





EXODUS

Check Your Location

Moses wrote the second book of the Bible, Exodus, thousands of years ago. *Exodus* means “going out.” Exodus tells how God freed the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. The Lord wanted the Israelites to go to the land He promised them and start living like they were His people. On the way, He told them how to do that by giving them His law.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

God designed each of the ten plagues to attack a specific Egyptian god or goddess. For example, changing the water in the Nile to blood showed God’s superiority to the Egyptian god of the Nile, Hapi. Thoth, the god of wisdom and medicine, was worshipped by throwing the ashes of human sacrifices into the air to bring blessing. So God had Moses throw soot (from a fireplace) in the air. When it came down, people got boils, bringing shame to Thoth. Over and over, God made it clear that He is the one true and living God. Since God is the *only* God, Moses could say, “My God is better than your gods.”

Plot Your Course

Slavery in Egypt (Exodus 1–12)

At the beginning of Exodus, Jacob and his family moved to Egypt, where they became known by the name God gave Jacob in Genesis: Israel. Over the next 350 years, the Israelites, also called the Hebrews, grew to around two million people. Egypt's rulers, the pharaohs, made the Hebrews their slaves. However, the Egyptians were afraid that the Israelites would rebel and take over, so one pharaoh ordered all Israelite baby boys to be killed. But God protected one baby named Moses.

When Moses grew up, God spoke to him through a bush that was on fire but didn't burn up! It's hard to ignore a flaming shrub calling your name. The Lord wanted to use Moses to deliver the Israelites and bring them back to their home, the land He had promised Abraham.

So Moses had an epic showdown with Pharaoh. God revealed His power to Egypt through ten plagues that brought all kinds of nastiness down on the Egyptians.

Through it all, Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go free. The suffering of his own people wasn't enough to make him change his mind, so God had to make it personal: The final plague was the death of all firstborn people and animals.

But God made a way for anyone, whether Hebrew or Egyptian, to be saved. He instructed each family to kill a lamb, smear its blood on the doorframe of their home, and eat a special meal. God then passed over the houses with blood on them, sparing everyone inside. This is what the Jewish people—descendants of the Israelites—still celebrate as *Passover*, a yearly reminder that God delivered them from slavery.

CULTURE SHOCK

The ten plagues were pretty gross! Imagine taking a sip of cool water on a hot Egyptian day only to find your drink has turned to blood. Frogs are cool, but imagine your bed being filled with them. Picture gnats and flies sticking to you all day long. As for the boils, imagine the worst, most painful acne ever—zits from the dark side! And that garden you spent months planting and weeding and taking care of? Gone! Blasted by flaming hail, with the smoking remains scarfed up by a swarm of locusts.

Stuck in the Wilderness (Exodus 13–18)

After that awful final plague, which led to the death of Pharaoh's own son, he basically kicked Israel out of Egypt. Free at last! When the Israelites came to the Red Sea, Moses split the water by God's power. The people walked through on dry ground. Pharaoh sent his army after them, but the water rushed back and wiped them out.

Yet as the Israelites traveled into the desert, they had a hard time trusting the Lord: "Are we there yet?" They grumbled and complained and ran out of provisions: "I'm hunnngrrry!" But God brought them quails to eat, made water come out of a rock, and dropped bread called *manna* from heaven for them each morning.

LEARN THE LANGUAGE—

I AM WHO I AM (Exodus 3:14)

God introduced Himself to Moses by this name. The basic meaning is "I exist." Sounds simple, but the Jews consider God's name so holy that the Hebrew version of this name is just four letters: YHWH. Usually pronounced "Yahweh," this was also a name Jesus used to describe Himself, making it clear that He is God (read John 8:58).

God Gives His Law (Exodus 19–40)

Three months after leaving Egypt, Israel came to Mount Sinai. God called Moses up the mountain and gave him the Law, God's list of rules for how to live. The Ten Commandments, which God wrote Himself on two stone tablets, are a good summary of these rules. The first five tell us how to respect God, and the second five tell us how to respect others.

God gave His people other rules too: how to celebrate holy feasts, how to live a pure life, and how to build a place to worship God—the tabernacle.

Learning all these rules might sound boring. But it actually shows us something cool: God cares about how we live every part our lives. It also shows us something important about God: He is holy. *Holy* means set apart or different. He is completely different than we are because He is perfect and every human being is sinful.

That means no matter how hard the Israelites tried to follow God's law perfectly, they couldn't do it. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, he found the people worshipping a golden statue they made!

But Moses punished the people, and they turned back to the Lord. Then they built the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant, following God's instructions. Once everything was finished, God's glory came to live in the tabernacle. What a great ending!

MUST-SEE SITES—*The Tabernacle*

The tabernacle was like a mobile church (see Exodus 25–27). It was a fence and tent that the Israelites could pack up at a moment's notice and take with them whenever God told them it was time to get moving—which happened a lot in the forty years they were in the wilderness.

TOUR GUIDE

- I had a responsibility to protect my people from any danger, especially the threat of foreign gods.
- I made a lot of big decisions that affected the welfare of a lot of people.
- My stubborn pride cost me the one thing I held closest to my heart.
- Read Exodus 8:24-30, Exodus 10:7, and Exodus 12:29-30 to find out who I am.

Enjoy Your Trip

No More Excuses!

When God first spoke to Moses through the burning bush, Moses made a lot of excuses for why he didn't want to obey God. He was scared. He had a stutter. But God told him, "I created you. Trust Me, and I'll help you." In what ways do you find it hard to obey God? Ask Him for help. He has all the power in the universe.

Nobody's Perfect

Go back and read the Ten Commandments in your Bible (look up Exodus 20:1-17). How many commands have you broken? These rules make it clear that none of us are perfect. But God still loves us! That should make us want to obey what He says.

Where's the Gospel?

The Passover is an awesome picture of salvation. Just like the Israelites used the blood of a lamb to save them from death, so the blood of Jesus, shed on the cross, saved us from sin. The

Bible even calls Jesus a Lamb (check out John 1:29 and 1 Peter 1:19). The blood of the Passover lamb set the Hebrew slaves free, and Jesus Christ the Lamb sets anyone who believes in Him free.

► The Golden Calf

Read about Moses, Aaron, and the lamest excuse ever in Exodus 32:1-8,15-24.

