

THE  
***QUICK***  
***READ***  
BIBLE



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS  
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## The Quick-Read Bible

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## INTRODUCTION

“All of Scripture is inspired, but some parts are more inspiring than others.”

This well-known quip is funny because it rings true for most of us! Bible scholars hold various opinions about what “inspiration” means precisely, but nearly all them agree that the Bible is no ordinary book. Many people believe it was written over a period of 1500 years by 40 writers in two languages (plus a little bit in a third). Yet it somehow holds together stories of tragedy and triumph—and especially God’s love and faithfulness—in a unified story that continues to change lives today.

The problem is, the Bible is not an easy book. For one thing, it is set in times and cultures that are completely different from ours. If we’re not careful, important insights (not to mention healthy doses of humor) can get lost in translation. In addition, the Bible’s sheer size is intimidating. Readers can lose track of the main story line as they wander through genealogies, obscure laws, bizarre imagery, and some honest depictions of human nature at its worst.

And that brings us to the reason for *The Quick-Read Bible*. With this handy resource, you can easily trace from beginning to end the main theme of Scripture—that God loves people so much, he has made a way for them to live with him forever. You will find brief retellings of the rich stories that have for centuries captured the hearts of people from every walk of life. And, we hope, you will sense that the inspired Word of God is in fact inspiring you in a fresh, new way.





# THE **OLD** TESTAMENT



The creation story sets the stage for the entire biblical narrative. It gives us important clues about what God is like, his relationship to creation, and our place in the world.

## **The Creation Story**

### **GENESIS 1–2**

In the beginning, there was nothing at all. Then God created the heaven and the earth, but everything was still covered in darkness, so God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light! God called the light day and the darkness night, and that was the first day and the first night.

In the days that followed, God separated the water from dry land, and he covered the land with beautiful plants and trees. He made the sun to shine in the day and the moon and stars to light up the night sky.

Then God filled the seas and the skies and the land with wonderful creatures of all shapes and sizes.

Finally, God made man and told him to take care of this wonderful world and all the creatures.

God was pleased with all he had made and done, so on the seventh day, he rested and made that day a special day to stop working and give thanks.

## **Heaven on Earth**

### **GENESIS 2**

God created the beautiful Garden of Eden for Adam—a wonderful place filled with green grass, colorful plants, and beautiful trees. God told Adam to help himself to fruit from any of these trees except for one, the Tree of Knowledge, which was forbidden to him. But there were still plenty of other wonderful things for him to eat.

God brought all the animals and birds to Adam



The description of Eden sounds a lot like paradise—an important sign of God’s love for Adam and Eve and a foreshadowing of where the story of the Bible will end.

so he could name them. But none of the animals were like him, and Adam was lonely, so God created a woman, Eve, to be his special friend.

## **Disobeying God**

### **GENESIS 3**

Now, of all the animals, the most cunning was the snake. One day, he said to Eve, “Did God really tell you that you couldn’t eat fruit from any of the trees in this garden?” And she replied, “No, we can eat from any of them except from the one in the middle of the garden. We’re not even allowed to touch it!”

“The Tree of Knowledge?” asked the wily snake. “But the fruit is delicious, and it won’t harm you. The only reason God doesn’t want you to eat it is because it will make you wise like him. Go on, take a bite!”

The fruit looked so delicious that Eve picked some. She offered some to Adam too, and they both ate it.

At once, it was as though their eyes had been opened. They realized they were naked and tried to cover themselves with some fig leaves that they sewed together to make clothes.

## **Cast Out**

### **GENESIS 3**

Later that day, God was walking in the garden. When he found Adam and Eve hiding behind some bushes, he knew exactly what had happened. He was very angry. He cursed the wicked snake to crawl on its belly in the dirt for the rest of its life, and he banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.



This scene demonstrates the universal and tragic progression of disordered desire, temptation, and disobedience.



Mankind’s estrangement from God has tragic results—paradise is lost. The big question is, can humanity’s relationship with God ever be restored? And if so, how?



The downward spiral continues. Adam and Eve had turned from God, and now Cain commits murder. Things go from very bad to even worse, setting the stage for the great flood.

He told them that from now on they would need to work hard to get their food from the ground, struggling with sharp thorns and choking weeds, for they had disobeyed him.

Then he used some animal skins to make clothes for them and sent them from the garden. He placed an angel with a flaming sword to stand guard at the entrance.

## Cain and Abel

### GENESIS 4

Time passed, and Adam and Eve had two sons. Cain was a farmer who worked in the fields, and his younger brother Abel was a shepherd. One day both Cain and Abel brought offerings to God. Abel brought the finest and fattest of his lambs, and God was pleased. But God wasn't so pleased with the crops that Cain brought.

God saw that this made Cain angry, so God said, "Why are you looking so cross? If you do what is right, then I'll be pleased with you. But watch out—if you don't do what is right, you will find that sin is just around the corner! You must control it and not let it control you!"

Cain didn't heed God's warning. He invited Abel out to the fields, and there, filled with rage and bitterness, he killed his younger brother.

Later that day, God asked him where his brother was. Cain answered, "How should I know? Do you expect me to watch over him? Am I my brother's keeper?"



But God saw Abel's blood on the ground and was angry. He knew what had happened. He punished Cain and sent him away from his family to wander from place to place without a home.

## Noah Builds an Ark

### GENESIS 6-7

Many years passed, and soon there were lots of people in the world. But they were becoming more and more wicked, and this made God very sad. He made up his mind to send a huge flood to destroy everything he had created.

But there was one good man on the earth who loved and obeyed God. His name was Noah, and he had three sons. God told Noah to build an enormous boat so that he and his family might be saved, along with two of every living creature.

When people saw Noah building a boat in a desert, they made fun of him. But Noah ignored them, for he trusted God. He built the huge boat out of cypress wood. It had many rooms inside, and was three decks high. God told him exactly how it should be made and how big it should be. Noah and his three sons took a long, long time to finish it.

When the ark was finished, Noah, his wife, and his sons and their wives loaded it with food for themselves and the animals. Then God sent the animals into the ark, two by two, one male and one female of every kind of animal.

Once they were all safely in, God closed the door behind them.



This story contrasts Adam and Eve's disobedience (which caused a spiral of destruction) with Noah's obedience (which led to his family's deliverance).



In the New Testament, the apostle Peter relates baptism to the great flood (1 Peter 3).

## The Flood

### GENESIS 7–9

Then it began to rain—and how it rained! Water poured down from the skies, springs under the earth broke through the ground, and water flowed out everywhere. Soon water covered all the land. Every living creature was drowned—every human, every creature that crawled upon the earth, every bird.

The whole world was washed clean. All the towns and cities were washed away. Even the highest mountains could no longer be seen. The ark and its precious cargo floated on a world of water.

For forty days and forty nights it rained. Then, at last, it stopped. But even then, water continued to cover the earth for one hundred fifty days. God didn't forget about Noah or the animals. He made a wind blow over the earth, and the floodwaters began to go down. At last the ark came to rest on the top of a mountain.

When the tips of the mountains began to emerge from the water, Noah sent out a dove from the ark to see if water still covered the world. But the dove could find nowhere to rest and came back to the boat.

One week later, Noah sent out the dove again—and this time it returned with an olive leaf in its beak! Now Noah knew that the flood was over, for the trees were growing again. It was time to leave the ark. Noah was filled with gratitude, and God promised to never again send such a terrible flood. He put a beautiful rainbow in the sky as a reminder of this promise.

## The Tower of Babel

### GENESIS 11

Noah's descendants multiplied rapidly. They all spoke the same language, so everyone could understand everyone else. They decided to gather together and build a great city that would be famous throughout the land, with a tower that would reach to the heavens.

But this did not fit with God's plan for people to fill the whole earth, so God made them unable to understand one another. Soon a great babble of voices was heard all over the city, with everyone speaking in a different language. No one could understand his neighbor!

In all the confusion, building stopped. The people scattered far and wide, and the unfinished tower became known as the Tower of Babel.

## God Calls Abraham

### GENESIS 12

Abraham was a good man who trusted in God. God asked Abraham to leave his home, his country, and his extended family and go to another land. He promised to bless him and to make him the father of a great nation, through which God would bless the whole world.

Abraham had a good home, with large flocks of sheep and cattle. But when God told him to leave, he did. He took his wife, Sarah, his nephew Lot, and his servants and set out for Canaan.

Along the way, God appeared to Abraham and



Even the great flood did not turn humanity back to God. How will God ever restore his relationship with his beloved creation? The redemption of the world now begins with one man—Abraham.



Abraham was the first and greatest of Israel's patriarchs. He was far from perfect, but he trusted God and is often called the Father of Faith.



God had promised to bless the world through Abraham. Lot's prosperity foreshadows the fulfillment of that promise.

told him, "I will give this land to your children." Sarah and Abraham had been unable to have children, but Abraham was overjoyed at this news and built an altar to God and praised him.

Later, Abraham took his family to Egypt, for there was a terrible famine. By the time he left Egypt to return to Canaan, he had become very wealthy and owned many animals.

## **Going Separate Ways**

### **GENESIS 13–14**

Abraham and his nephew Lot had large flocks of cattle, sheep, and donkeys—so large that there wasn't enough grazing land for them all, and their herdsmen began to fight. Abraham decided they would have to split up. He gave Lot the first choice of where to go, and Lot chose to leave Canaan and head east to the green and fertile Jordan Valley. Abraham stayed in Canaan.

After Lot had left, God called Abraham to him. "Look as far as you can. All the land that you can see, I will give to you and to your children forever, and your children shall be like the dust of the earth—for there will be so many of them that no one will be able to count them!"

## **God Repeats His Promise**

### **GENESIS 15–17**

Abraham reminded God that he and Sarah hadn't had a child yet. God repeated his promise that Abraham would be a father and added that he would

have too many descendants to count—as many as the stars in the sky!—and that the land of Canaan would belong to them. Then God told him to prepare a special sacrifice.

That evening, God spoke to him again, telling him that his descendants would be slaves in a country not their own for four hundred years. But they would at last be free and would return to their own land, and those who had enslaved them would be punished.

When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, Abraham fell into a deep sleep. A smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces of the sacrifice as a sign to Abraham from God.

## **Abraham Entertains Angels**

### **GENESIS 18**

Not long after this, Abraham saw three strangers passing by. He hurried out to meet them and offered to bring water to wash their feet and food to eat while they rested in the shade of a nearby tree. Sarah baked some bread while Abraham brought his choicest meat for the men to eat and milk for them to drink.

Then one of the men, who is later called the Lord, asked Abraham where his wife was. When Abraham replied that she was inside the tent, God told him that he would come back within a year and that Sarah would have given birth to a son.

Sarah was listening in the tent and could not help laughing out loud. How ridiculous—she was far too old to have children!



**Animal sacrifices were common in Abraham's day, but this sacrifice was different. God performed the ritual himself, just as he would fulfill his promise to Abraham.**



**Would you like to be remembered as the person who laughed at God? But God didn't seem to mind, and Sarah's long wait for a son would soon be over.**



Abraham's intercession and Lot's hospitality stand in stark contrast to the behavior of the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah. God's people are to shine like lights in a dark world.

But God asked, “Why is Sarah laughing? Nothing is too hard for the Lord.” Sure enough, nine months later, Sarah gave birth to a baby boy. She named him Isaac, which means “he laughs”!

## **Sodom and Gomorrah**

### **GENESIS 18–19**

The people of Sodom and Gomorrah had turned away from God and were wicked and cruel. God decided to destroy them. But Abraham was worried, for his nephew Lot lived in Sodom. He asked God if he would still destroy the city if there were any good men living in it, and God said to him, “If there are even ten good people, I will spare the city.”

Lot was standing by the city gates when two strangers—angels in disguise—passed through. He begged them to spend the night in his house. He gave them water to wash their feet and prepared a meal for them, but an angry, violent crowd gathered, demanding that he send the strangers outside.

Lot begged them to leave the strangers alone, for they were his guests. But the mob became angry, and the angels had to pull Lot back inside. Then they struck the crowd with blindness so they could not find the door to break in!

## **God Destroys the Cities**

### **GENESIS 19**

The angels warned Lot to leave the city with his wife and daughters that very night because God was going to punish the city. They took them by the

hand and led them to safety, urging them to hurry: “Flee for your lives! Run to the mountains and don’t look back!”

As Lot and his family hurried away, they could hear a storm of burning sulfur raining down on the city. Nothing and no one survived—not one building, not one person. But Lot’s wife could not help looking back, and as she did so, she was instantly turned into a pillar of salt! Lot and his daughters were the only ones to survive the destruction.

## **Sarah and Hagar**

### **GENESIS 21**

Now when Abraham’s wife, Sarah, was ninety years old, she gave birth to a baby boy, Isaac, just as God had promised. Abraham and Sarah were overjoyed, but Sarah believed her maidservant Hagar was making fun of her. She was so angry with her that she made Abraham send Hagar away, along with her son, Ishmael, who was also Abraham’s son.

Abraham was sad, but God told him things would work out for Ishmael. So Abraham handed Hagar some food and water and sent her and Ishmael into the desert.

Soon all the water was gone and they began to weep in despair. But an angel called to Hagar from heaven and said, “Don’t be afraid, Hagar. God has heard the boy crying. Lift him up and take him by the hand, for he will be the father of a great nation.”

Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water!



**As this story was passed down through many generations of Israelites, they were reminded not to be enamored with the evil ways of the cities and nations around them.**



**Hagar was a lowly female servant in a patriarchal culture, but God saw her, called her by name, and provided food and water for her and her son.**

God was with the boy as he grew up. Ishmael lived in the desert and became an archer.

## **Abraham Is Tested**

### **GENESIS 22**

Isaac grew up to be a fine young boy, and his father and mother were very proud of him and thanked God for him. But one day, God decided to test Abraham's faith. He told Abraham that he must offer the boy as a sacrifice!

Abraham was heartbroken, but his faith in God was absolute, and so he prepared everything just as he had been commanded. But as he lifted up his knife, suddenly an angel said to him, "Abraham, Abraham! Don't harm the boy! I know now that you love the Lord your God with all your heart, for you would be willing to give up your own son."

God sent a ram to be sacrificed in the boy's place, and the angel told Abraham that God would truly bless him and his descendants because of his faith.

## **A Wife for Isaac**

### **GENESIS 24**

When Isaac had grown into a young man, Abraham asked his most trusted servant to go back to his homeland and find a wife there for his son. This was a difficult task, and when the servant reached his master's hometown, he prayed to God to send him a sign: "Let it be whoever comes to offer water not just to me, but also to my camels."

Before he had finished praying, beautiful Rebekah

Modern-day preachers have often compared the sacrifice of a ram in Isaac's place to the sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God, in our place.

This story emphasizes two important themes. The Israelites were not to intermarry with the surrounding nations (and thereby adopt their evil practices), and they were to trust God to provide for them.



came out to draw water from the well. When the servant asked her if he might have a drink, she offered him her jar and then hurried to draw water for his camels too.

The servant thanked God for listening to his prayers. He then explained his mission to Rebekah, and when her father was asked, it was agreed that she should become Isaac's wife. When she traveled back to Canaan to meet her new husband, Isaac fell in love with her instantly, and she with him.

## **The Bowl of Stew**

### **GENESIS 25**

Rebekah was old before she became pregnant, and when she did, it was with twins. They seemed to kick and push so much inside her that she was worried, but God told her that the two boys would one day be the fathers of two nations. The firstborn was a hairy boy, whom they named Esau, and his brother they called Jacob. When they grew up, Esau became a great hunter, but Jacob was quieter and spent more time at home. Isaac loved Esau, but Rebekah was especially fond of Jacob.

One day, Jacob was preparing a delicious stew when his brother came in, ravenous after a long trip. When he demanded some of the stew, Jacob said Esau could have some in return for Esau's birthright as the firstborn son. Esau was so hungry and impatient that he agreed!



**Jacob is conniving and manipulative, yet the story of redemption will unfold through him. The Bible makes clear that God can work through whomever he chooses.**