ANKYRA

The Bible Story in Ten Steps

Sixty-six books, one story. This is the shape of it, so you always know where you are.

The Bible is not a collection of separate stories with a moral at the end of each one. It is a single story, and it runs in this order. Once you can see the shape, any passage you open makes more sense, because you know roughly where in the story you have landed.

1 **Creation** Genesis 1–2

God makes a good world and puts people in it to look after it, in an open relationship with him. Everything is as it is supposed to be. This is the only part of the story with no problem in it.

2 **The break** Genesis 3

People decide they would rather run things themselves. The relationship breaks, and shame, blame, violence and death follow. Chapters 4 to 11 show the damage spreading through every part of human life.

3 **A promise** Genesis 12

God picks one man, Abraham, and promises him a people, a land, and a blessing that will eventually reach every nation on earth. Everything from here on is that promise working itself out.

4 **Rescue** Exodus

Abraham's descendants end up as slaves in Egypt. God rescues them, gives them his law at Mount Sinai, and then does something startling: he comes to live among them.

5 **A land and a king** Joshua to 2 Samuel

They settle in the land and ask for a king like everybody else has. They get David, and God promises him that one of his descendants will reign for ever. Remember that promise.

6 **Failure and exile** 1 Kings to the prophets

The kings mostly fail. The nation splits in two, prophets warn them for centuries, and eventually Babylon takes Jerusalem, around 586 BC. Some return decades later, but nothing is as it was.

7 **Waiting** Between the Testaments

Roughly four hundred years pass between the last Old Testament prophet and the birth of Jesus. No new Scripture is written. Empires come and go, and Rome ends up in charge.

8 **Jesus** Matthew to John

The promised king arrives, and almost nobody recognises him. He teaches, he is executed as a criminal, and three days later he is alive. Everything before this points here; everything after flows from it.

9 **The church** Acts and the letters

God's Spirit comes on ordinary people and the message goes out to every nation, which is exactly what was promised to Abraham around two thousand years earlier.

10 **Everything put right** Revelation

God finishes what he started. Heaven and earth are joined, death is gone, and God lives with his people face to face, which is where the whole thing began.

THE THREAD TO HOLD ON TO

God made people to live with him. We walked away. He spent the whole of history getting us back, at his own cost. If you can hold that, you have the story; everything else is detail filling it in.

Where the sixty-six books sit

GROUPED BY TYPE, NOT BY DATE

OLD TESTAMENT: 39 BOOKS		
Law	5	Genesis – Deuteronomy
History	12	Joshua – Esther
Poetry and wisdom	5	Job – Song of Songs
Major prophets	5	Isaiah – Daniel
Minor prophets	12	Hosea – Malachi

NEW TESTAMENT: 27 BOOKS		
Gospels	4	Matthew – John
History	1	Acts
Paul's letters	13	Romans – Philemon
Other letters	8	Hebrews – Jude
Prophecy	1	Revelation

Four things that help

NOBODY TELLS YOU THESE

It is a library, not a book. Sixty-six documents by dozens of authors, written over more than a thousand years, in three languages: Hebrew, a little Aramaic, and Greek. Letters, law, poetry, history, songs and visions all read differently.

It is not in date order. The books are grouped by type. Paul wrote most of his letters before the Gospels were finished, yet they are printed after them. Where a book sits tells you what kind of writing it is, not when it happened.

Chapters and verses were added much later. The chapter divisions came in around the year 1200, and the verse numbers in the 1550s. No biblical author wrote in them. So a chapter break is not always where the thought ends: read past it and see.

Some Bibles have more books. Catholic and Orthodox Bibles include a further set, often called the deuterocanonical or apocryphal books. Protestant Bibles leave them out or print them separately. If someone's Bible has books yours does not, that is why, and it is not a modern argument.

> **A good habit**
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> Before you read anything, ask two questions: what kind of writing is this, and where in the ten steps am I? A psalm written during the exile and a letter written after the resurrection are both true and both God's word, but they are not doing the same job. Half of the confusion people have with the Bible comes from missing that.

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