

# **Finding Solid Ground**

Bethel Community Church *Sermon Series*

Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2004 (Sermon 1)

Pastor Steve Jones

## **The Book of all Books**

The Ark of the Covenant is still one of the most sought after archeological treasures in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Treasure hunters seek not only its beauty as an artifact, but the power that it contains. It is that power and absolute authority which is wielded by the God of the Universe.

What you may not realize is that the Ark of God is right in front of you; the Holy Bible.

The very power of God exists within its pages, the answers to the great questions of the human mind, but few ever see it for what it really is and find the keys to unlock it. It is surely the most dangerous book that you will ever read. No other book will rivet you like this book. No other book will awe you like this book. No other book will turn you upside down and inside out like this book. This book is God's first and last message to mankind.

My aim over the next 8 weeks is to introduce you to God's revelation and persuade you to take it to the core of your being.

### Context

I want to start by putting the Bible in its geographical and political context for you.

Most of the Bible events take place in and around Israel. Israel is a long and narrow country at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. It has a long coastal plain behind which the land rises up to a ridge of hills that runs almost the whole length of the country perpendicular to the coast. Behind that range of hills the land drops down into the lush and fertile Jordan River valley, again running perpendicular to the hills. On the eastern side of the Jordan River valley the land rises again to the rugged Golan Heights and the hills of Moab.

In the region, Israel is positioned pretty much at the cross-roads of the world. In earliest times the powerful Egyptian civilization (Africa) lay to the South and the equally powerful Syrian, then Assyrian, then Babylonian and then Persian civilizations bordered the Northern territory (Asia). Over the course of the centuries as either the northern or southern "superpowers" decided to make a take-over bid for the other's land, Israel (or as the land was then known, "Canaan") became the war corridor for the advancing "super-armies". This led the tribes in Canaan to assess which of the "superpowers" would be

likely to be the victor in the campaign and then sign a treaty with them in an attempt to survive.

This area is known as the Fertile Crescent, as there are significant river systems to the north and south (allowing agriculture and the development of civilization) with Canaan having the River Jordan system running through its length down into the Dead Sea. From a spiritual point of view, Canaan was truly a geographical axis point that would easily and quickly facilitate communication of God's plan of redemption to the known world via passing armies, traders and settlers.

Now that we have set the scene, let's take a walk through the Bible.

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### A Walk through the Bible

We start with the creation of the world in Genesis, and are introduced to Adam & Eve, our forebears, and it was through their disobedience of God's rules that mankind was banished from God's presence and sin and death entered the world.

Genesis goes on to reveal how mankind sank lower and lower into violence and depravity until God decided to bring punishment of those who had rejected Him. The Flood came and Noah and his family were sent forth by God to re-populate earth. One of Noah's sons was Shem. One of Shem's descendants was Abram (who became Abraham). Abraham lived in Ur. God called Abraham and told him that God would use Abraham's descendants to reach the world for Him. God told Abraham that He was taking him and his descendants to "the Promised Land" a land "flowing with milk and honey". It would be a land that would be called their own. Abraham enters Canaan at which time it is occupied by the Amorites. God makes a covenant with Abraham that the whole land will belong to the 4<sup>th</sup> generation after Abraham. Here begins the history of the Jewish people, with their Father Abraham. Abraham had two sons. Ishmael (a son by his wife's servant girl) became the father of the Arab nations. Isaac became the father of the Jewish nation. Isaac's son Jacob (later renamed "Israel" by God) had 12 sons. These sons, and their sons, became the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel. One son, Joseph was sold by the others into slavery in Egypt. Joseph later rose to become Pharaoh's right-hand man. Jacob (Israel) and the whole extended Jewish family moved to Egypt during a time of great famine in Canaan and settled there under the care and protection of Joseph.

After some 200 years or so Joseph was long forgotten, and fearing their increasing numbers the Jews were put under the yoke of slavery by their Egyptian hosts. Moses came to the rescue of the Jews leading them out of Egypt following the 10 plagues that God sent upon the Pharaoh and the people of the Nile. Moses led the people through the Red Sea and into the Sinai Peninsula. At Mount Sinai God entered into a covenant with the nation and presented them with the 10 Commandments. Following this the nation of Israel were taken to the southern edge of the land of Canaan, however they refused to go

into the land and take it for fear of the Amorites who occupied the land. For this lack of trust God made the people walk around in the wilderness of Sinai for almost 40 years.

The 40 years following the Exodus from Egypt concludes with the people of Israel gathered on the hills of Moab, east of Canaan looking down into the fertile River Jordan valley. They had finally arrived at the Promised Land. For his own disobedience to God, Moses was not allowed to enter into the new land and he handed the reins of leadership over to Joshua. Joshua led the people into the land, conquered Jericho (marching around the walls of the city until they fell down) and took possession of the rest of the land that the Lord had promised. Joshua then divided up the land between the tribes, save the tribe of Levi, who were permitted to serve God as His priests instead of receiving land allotments.

After Joshua died there was no-one to rule over the people. The tribes pretty much ran their own areas. God raised up a number of “Judges” or “Champions” to lead the peoples in time of trial and attack. At the end of the period of the Judges the people were very much rejecting God and “doing what was right in their own eyes”.

One of the most significant of the Judges was Samuel who at the end of the period became priest/leader/magistrate to the nation. The people kept asking for a King like the other nations around them. God wasn’t enough for them. They wanted an earthly King. Eventually, God agreed that a King could be appointed. Samuel selected Saul, who was to prove to be a bad choice as King. Saul was passed over for his disobedience and Samuel anointed David to be King over the whole of the nation of Israel.

David was a great warrior and king. He too failed God in part by his adultery with Bathsheba. David was succeeded by his son Solomon, the wisest man that the world has ever seen, beyond Jesus. Solomon brought great success and prosperity to the nation of Israel; however he too eventually broke God’s rules. When Solomon died his son Rehoboam carried on in the same way as his father had and civil war erupted. The land ended up being split into two separate Kingdoms, Israel (Northern Kingdom) and Judah (Southern Kingdom). The capital of Israel was Samaria and the capital of Judah was Jerusalem. The original nation of Israel never reunited. The two kingdoms fought each other periodically and also joined forces to fight common foes. In both Kingdoms there was, for the most part, a wholesale rejection of God for foreign idols and gods.

During these years (starting around 700 B.C.) God sent many prophets to the Northern and Southern Kingdoms to call the people to repentance and to foretell of the Messiah to come. Some prophets such as Elijah, Amos and Hosea had their ministries in Israel in the North, whilst others such as Jeremiah and Isaiah ministered in Judah in the South.

In around 722 the powerful nation of Assyria swept down from the North and savaged and conquered Israel. The city of Samaria was captured and the inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom were carried off to foreign lands as slaves. Foreign peoples were then relocated into Israel’s territory to be an occupying force. That was the end of the Kingdom of Israel forever.

Relatively shortly thereafter the Babylonians conquered the Assyrians and then set their sights on Egypt. Judah chose to side with its southern neighbour and as a consequence King Nebuchadnezzar's armies fell upon Jerusalem capturing it in 597 B.C. The cream of the local Jewish population were taken away into exile in Babylon. The Jewish people remained in Babylon for around 70 years, at which time the rapidly growing Persian Empire swallowed up the Babylonians. The new Persian King, Cyrus, benevolently allowed the Jewish people to return home in 3 waves over a 9 decade period. Nehemiah was appointed as their governor and he rallied the dispirited exiles to rebuild their city and the Temple.

The rebuilding of Jerusalem and the repopulation of the land marked a period of 400 years of silence from God to the Jewish people. There were no prophets after Malachi until John the Baptist.

John the Baptist came to announce the coming of Messiah foretold by the prophets. He pointed to Jesus. Jesus had a miraculous birth and then spent his childhood years as the eldest of at least 8 children. He lived with His earthly family in the Northern Province of Galilee. Joseph, Jesus' father was a carpenter and/or stonemason. Jesus was known as a young man in the same trade. It seems likely that Jesus was his father's right-hand man in the business as the eldest son. In order to do the work it seems likely that Jesus was physically strong and robust. Jesus was very bright in his knowledge of the Scriptures from an early age, and it seems likely that He would have been astute in business also.

When Jesus was around 30 he left His family business, selected 12 disciples and went around the countryside preaching Good News of the Kingdom of God, doing miracles and creating an enormous stir. He criss-crossed the region many times, traveling down often to Jerusalem. His teachings really upset the religious leaders of the day, the Scribes and Pharisees. He said that He was God. They considered that blasphemy and they wanted Him arrested and killed. They sent numbers of their group to test Him and trap Him to get Him arrested.

After 3 short years of relentless ministry, during which Jesus following had grown and grown He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey amid great celebrations and excitement. To His followers that signified that He was the King coming to take over the city and recover the land for the people of Israel. The Romans were going to get thrown out. They wanted an earthly Messiah.

In the Upper Room of a private house later that week Jesus told His followers that He was leaving them. They didn't understand. He gave some of His greatest teachings to them during this week. Jesus location was betrayed by one of His followers and the religious leaders sent soldiers to arrest Jesus. Jesus was beaten up and then taken to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. The Jews didn't have the authority to have someone put to death, but the Roman governor did. After much pressure Pontius Pilate agreed to the execution of Jesus, and then had Him scourged before He was taken to a hill called Golgotha outside the walls of Jerusalem for His execution.

Jesus was executed on a Friday, and put in a stone cave-tomb. His followers ran away, fearing that they too would be crucified. They hid in private homes with the doors and windows barred and locked. On Sunday morning His followers were stunned to find the tomb empty. Over the next 40 days Jesus appeared to literally hundreds of His followers. He walked with them, ate food with them and showed them His wounds. He then sent them out into the world to spread the Good News that God would forgive sins and welcome all people back into His fold through trusting in Jesus Christ. Jesus then ascended visibly into Heaven where He sits at God's right hand preparing a place for all who trust in Him alone.

The disciples waited in Jerusalem until the Feast of Pentecost (or weeks). On that day the Holy Spirit (the presence of Christ) entered the believers and they were empowered to do great things on Christ's behalf. This was the start of the Church. There was great persecution of the Disciples of Christ. Peter, James and John and most of the other disciples (now Apostles) took the Gospel (Good News) initially to the Jews. Paul, who used to be a Pharisee and persecutor of the Church, but became a follower of Christ, with other associates, took the Gospel to the rest of the known world.

The Apostle John, during exile on the island of Patmos wrote the Book of Revelation to show the future of mankind, the Church and history itself.

### The Bible

Bible – Greek word –biblia

Ta biblia - the books

Ta grammata - the writings

Hai graphai - the Scriptures

The other names of the Bible; The Scriptures; God's Word

### The Hebrew Bible

The Law: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

The Prophets:

(a) Former prophets: Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings

(b) Latter prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Book of the Twelve

The Writings: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and 1 and 2 Chronicles.

12 Minor Prophets are known simply as the Twelve in the Hebrew Bible

## The Christian Bible

2 Tim. 3:16 [ESV Church 1199 Compact 996] “All Scripture is God-breathed – *pasa graphē theopneustos*” Every part of Scripture is the out-breath of God.

### *Old Testament New Covenant*

The Latin *testamentum* is taken from the Greek *diatheke*. In most occurrences in the Bible it means covenant rather than testament.

Question: Why is the Bible referred to as a single book and not just a collection of books? Answer: Because it has a central message throughout. The 3 strands – Salvation message

Bringer of Salvation – Jesus Christ

Way of Salvation – God’s Grace

People or heirs of salvation – The Church and Israel.

### *The Church*

Ekklesia	-	OT	=	Assembly, Israel, The Lord’s People
		NT	=	Church

**The Bible** – The Divine Revelation of God about himself, His People and their Future.

The Bible is the most extensively printed, most widely translated and most frequently read book in the world.

**The Form of our Bible today.** From original Bible in Greek (Christian) INDEX

### **OT**

5 Books of the Law or Pentateuch (Genesis to Deuteronomy)

12 Books of History (Joshua to Esther)

5 Books of Poetry (Job to Song of Solomon)

17 Books of Prophecy (Isaiah to Malachi). Sometimes divided into 5 Major Prophets and

12 Minor Prophets (Jeremiah wrote 2 books)

This arrangement of OT books derived from Latin Vulgate translation, which in turn is derived from the Septuagint or Greek version.

### **NT**

**5 Books of History and Narrative** (Matthew to Acts)

(Four Gospels and the Book of Acts. 3 Synoptic Gospels and one written later (John) which is the theological Gospel. Acts of the Apostles is a continuation of the story by Luke.

## **21 Books of Doctrine** (Romans to Jude)

Books written by inspired men. First 13 bear the name of Paul. Pauline Epistles are of two groups those written before his 2 years imprisonment and those written later, which are sometimes called the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) Hebrews is sometimes put in with the Pauline group, although Paul's authorship is questioned. General Epistles: James the letters of Peter and John and Jude. In early Greek manuscripts these books are found after Acts and before the Pauline letters.

## **1 Book of Prophecy** (Revelation).

Summarizes in symbolic language the principles revealed in the preceding books and gives a prophetic foretaste of things to come in the future of mankind.

## Languages of the Bible

Bible originally written in 3 languages

**Hebrew.** Almost all of the 39 books of the OT are in Hebrew. Semitic language. No vowels.

**Aramaic.** After the time of the exile (500 BC) became the tongue of the common man in Palestine (Nehemiah 8:8 – the people didn't know pure Hebrew and therefore needed a translation into Aramaic).

Language of Jesus in everyday speech. *Talitha cumi* (Mark 5:41) *ephphatha* (Mark 7:34) *Eli eli lama sabachthani* (Matthew 27:46) *Abba* is Aramaic for father (Rom 8:15; Gal. 4:6)

**Greek.** Spoken language of Jesus was Aramaic, but the books of the NT were written in Greek (Koine or common Greek). Greek was the universal language of the First Century as English is today.

So was the Bible for its *own* time or for *all* time?

Matthew 24:35 [ESV Church 1000 Compact 830]

Heaven and Earth are due to pass away into a new order after the Final Judgment.

Even then Jesus tells us that the Word of God will stand eternally, immovable, immutable and inerrant.

This book is the only 100% absolute truth that exists. On this rock we will stand.  
The Bible is not a book. It is The Book!

Let's end with a quote from Professor Monterro Williams, who 100 years ago was the William Boden Professor of Sanskrit (ancient language) at Oxford University. This man spent his life studying the great books of the world. With regards to sacred books of the East he wrote:

“Pile them if you will on the left side of your study table, but place the Holy Bible on the right side, all by itself, all alone, and with a wide gap between them. For there is a gulf between it and the so-called sacred books of the East which severs the one from the other utterly, hopelessly and forever, a veritable gulf which cannot be bridged over by any science or religious thought”.

### Home Assignments

1. Memorize the order of the first 5 books of the Bible (Torah)
2. Memorize 2 Timothy 3:16

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