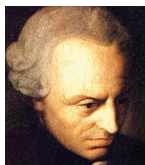


# INTRODUCTION

The Bible is both a book—the world’s best-selling book—and a library of 66 books. The impact of the Bible on Western civilization is enough to spark anyone’s curiosity about its content.



Victor Hugo, author of *Les Misérables*, observed, “England has two books, the Bible and Shakespeare. England made Shakespeare, but the Bible made England.”



Immanuel Kant, one of the world’s most influential philosophers, said, “The Bible is the greatest benefit which the human race has ever experienced. . . . A single line in the Bible has consoled me more than all the books I ever read besides.”



President John Quincy Adams treated the Bible as the key educational resource in the lives of his children: “So great is my veneration for the Bible that the earlier my children begin to read it, the more confident will be my hope that they will prove useful citizens to their country and respectable members of society.”

A number of years ago, 1,200 university presidents and 1,000 CEOs were asked to name the book that had most affected their lives. The Bible was by far the most influential book in this survey of leaders. One in four listed the Bible as the most important book in their lives. The second book on the list—Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*—was named as the most influential book by one in twenty-five.

In their classic *How to Read a Book*, Mortimer Adler and Charles Van Doren noted, “It would be true to say that, in the European tradition at least, the Bible is the book in more sense than one. It has been not only the most widely read, but also the most carefully read, book of all.”

The *Ultimate Bible Guide* is designed for those just beginning their study of this amazing book. The Bible is daunting just because of its size. More than that, it was written in times and cultures very different from our own. We are all like the Ethiopian official, riding along in his chariot reading the prophet Isaiah.

Philip approached him and asked, “Do you understand what you’re reading?” He replied, “How can I . . . unless someone guides me?” (Acts 8:30-31).

This *Ultimate Bible Guide* walks with you through the Bible—book by book—and provides a concise overview of each book beginning with

- **Key Text:** a verse that gives a clue to the meaning of the book
- **Key Term:** summarizes the book in one word
- **One-Sentence Summary:** shows how this particular book relates to God’s story. Fuller explanation of this summary is found in the section **GOD’S STORY**

The *Ultimate Bible Guide* then looks at how that particular book of the Bible contributes to and shapes a Christian’s worldview. Twelve themes that make up a *Christian worldview* are as follows:

*God; creation; sovereignty and providence; faith and reason; revelation and authority; humanity; rebellion and sin; covenant and redemption; community and church; discipleship; ethics and morality; and time and eternity.*

For each book, the *Ultimate Bible Guide* indicates which of those themes are present in significant ways. It then addresses the questions of *Author and Date of Writing*, *First Audience and Destination*, and the *Occasion* that prompted its being written.

The 66 books of the Bible are made up of numerous genres. Knowing the type of literature of a particular text is an important step in interpreting the Bible. The *Ultimate Bible Guide* addresses the *Literary Features* of each book.

The great reformer Martin Luther found Christ in the Scriptures, first in Romans and then in Psalms. As a result, he came to the view that the center of all Scripture is Christ. “The Scriptures begin very gently, and lead us on to Christ as a man, and then to one who is Lord over all creatures, and after that to one who is God. So do I enter delightfully and learn to know God.” Following Luther’s cue, each chapter in the *Ultimate Bible Guide* has a feature called:

- God
- Creation
- Sovereignty and Providence
- Faith and Reason
- Revelation and Authority
- Humanity
- Rebellion and Sin
- Covenant and Redemption
- Community and Church
- Discipleship
- Ethics and Morality
- Time and Eternity

## CHRIST IN . . .

While the *Ultimate Bible Guide* is designed for those who are just beginning their journey with the Bible, it will serve well those who have considerable experience with this book. Pastors and experienced Bible teachers will be acquainted with much of the material in this book, but the way the material is configured may provide new perspectives as they teach and preach.

At the beginning of our journey with the Bible, it's helpful to summarize, to compress a lot of information into some bite-size statements. In fact, we can summarize the entire Bible in the following sentence:

*The Lord God through his Christ  
is graciously building a kingdom of redeemed people  
for their joy and for his own glory.*

Notice that there is one subject (*the Lord God*—it's his story) and one agent (*Christ*—the one actively bringing about God's story). There is one major activity (*building a kingdom*, the main theme of Scripture) and one object of that activity (*redeemed people*, the center of God's mighty acts in both Testaments). There are also specific goals for God's story (*their joy*—the human goal; *his own glory*—the ultimate divine end for everything). When we keep this central truth before us, everything in Scripture falls into place as a development of this single concept. This is not just a story that you read about and put the book down. It's a story in which you are a participant. That's exciting!

Think of the biblical narrative as something like a modern novel. There is a *prologue*, giving background information that helps make sense of the plot. Then there is the plot development in a number of chapters. In the biblical narrative, the story develops in *six chapters* that take the account from beginning to culmination. Then finally at the end is an *epilogue*, telling what happens after the main story has ended.

## **PROLOGUE: THE NEED FOR REDEMPTION**

### ***(Genesis 1–11)***

It all begins by explaining why the story must be told. God is building a kingdom of redeemed people because human beings are rebels who cannot save themselves. Other religions begin by assuming that people can do enough good works or perform enough religious deeds to earn a place in heaven. The Bible starts by telling the opposite story. Genesis 1–11 belongs to real human history, but the events are almost impossible to date. The main thing about the prologue is that it describes events involving the entire human race and shows that humanity has rebelled against God from the beginning.

## **CHAPTER 1: GOD BUILDS HIS NATION**

### ***Israel Chosen as the People of Promise, ca. 2000–931 B.C.***

#### ***(Genesis 12–1 Kings 11; 2 Chronicles 9)***

The first chapter in God's plan to build an everlasting kingdom was to build an earthly nation in a particular time and place. This chapter carries the plot from the first family he called to his covenant (Abraham and Sarah) to the full splendor of the Israelite nation at its grandest expression (under David and Solomon).

**CHAPTER 2: GOD EDUCATES HIS NATION*****Disobedient Israel Disciplined, ca. 931–586 B.C.***

*(1 Kings 12–2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 10:1–36:21;  
Some Prophets)*

The second chapter in God's plan was to educate Israel about the consequences of sin. The Israelites compromised by worshiping other gods during the entire time they were in the land. God raised his prophets to urge people to repent of idolatry and injustice, to warn of the coming "day of the LORD" in judgment. They also predicted the coming of the Messiah. Their message was largely ignored. This chapter carries the plot from the division of the nation (because of sin) to its destruction (because of sin).

**CHAPTER 3: GOD KEEPS A FAITHFUL REMNANT*****Messiah's Space and Time Prepared, ca. 586–6 B.C.***

*(Ezra through Esther; Some Prophets)*

Chapter 3 in God's story is the "quiet chapter." Outwardly, it appeared that God was doing nothing for more than five centuries. For those who read the story carefully, however, he was doing two important things. On one hand, God was keeping the Jews together as a nation. They had their own land, laws, and temple, even though the kingship and national independence had disappeared. God was preparing to send his Son at just the right time (Gal. 4:4). On the other hand, God scattered most Jews throughout the nations to be testimonies to his name. By building synagogues to preserve their religious and ethnic identity, these Jews were often the starting point for proclaiming the message that the promised Messiah had come. This chapter carries the plot from the Babylonian captivity until the birth of the Messiah.

**CHAPTER 4: GOD PURCHASES REDEMPTION AND BEGINS THE KINGDOM*****Jesus the Messiah, 6 B.C.–A.D. 30***

*(Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John)*

The fourth chapter in God's plan to build an everlasting kingdom of redeemed people is the most important one of all—the four Gospels. It shows how God's unconditional covenant promises—first to Abraham, then to David—were fulfilled by the new covenant of Jesus. This chapter carries the plot from the birth of the Messiah to his resurrection and exaltation.

**CHAPTER 5: GOD SPREADS THE KINGDOM THROUGH THE CHURCH*****The Current Age, A.D. 30–?***

*(Acts and the Epistles)*

With chapter 5 in God's story, we come to our own part of the story. We belong here. This is the period of the Great Commission, when God's plan no longer

focuses on people of one ethnic group in one place (Israel). He is now redeeming people out of every ethnic group in every place. Wherever God's people are, they meet as churches, worshiping communities of the new covenant. From Pentecost until the end-time scenario unfolds, God is about the business of spreading the message of the kingdom through the church.

## **CHAPTER 6: GOD CONSUMMATES REDEMPTION AND CONFIRMS HIS ETERNAL KINGDOM**

### ***(Revelation 1–20; Other Scriptures)***

In chapter 6, God's plan to build an everlasting kingdom of redeemed people through his Christ for their joy and for his own glory is fully realized. Although students often disagree in interpreting the details of this chapter, the main points are clear. There will be violent hostility against God's people in the end times. Yet God will prevail through the personal, bodily, glorious return of Jesus. When he returns, the world's kingdoms will become the kingdom of Christ forever under his visible rule. This chapter carries the plot from the opening of "the day of the LORD" to the final judgment.

## **EPILOGUE: NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH**

### ***(Revelation 21–22)***

The kingdom of God will last forever. God's people will be filled with everlasting joy. God's glory will be magnified as his redeemed people fully enjoy him forever, without any taint of evil. This is visualized in the last two chapters of Revelation that describe a new heaven and new earth. The people of God are compared to a great and glorious city, as well as to a wonderful bride. God's servants will reign with him forever and ever, and they will serve him gladly, clearly beholding his face. The epilogue to God's story shows a brief glimpse of the glory that will be. The end of the story in time is only the beginning of the story in eternity, for *the Lord God through his Christ has graciously built a kingdom of redeemed people for their joy and for his own glory.*

May this book provide a growing understanding of the Bible and help you experience the abundant Life it reveals.

# GENESIS

## THE FIRST BOOK OF MOSES

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The English title is based on the name given by the Greek translators of this book in the second century B.C. The name could be translated “source” or “generation.” The original Hebrew title is simply the first word of the book, *Bereshith*, “In the Beginning.”

### ○ KEY TEXTS: 1:1 AND 12:3

*“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”*

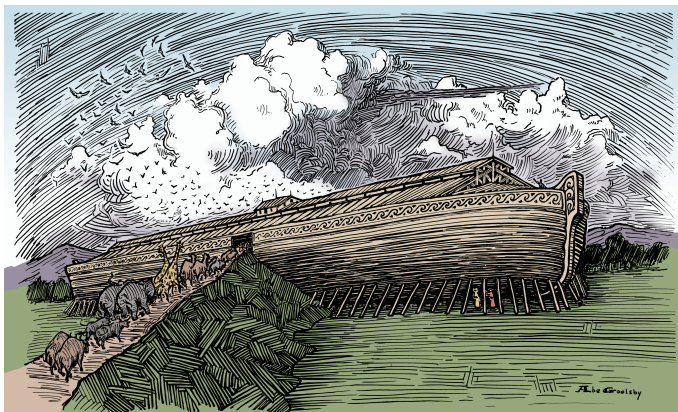
*“I will bless those who bless you, I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*

### ○ KEY TERM: “BEGINNING”

This book tells the beginning of many things: the creation of the world, the origin of the human race and marriage, the rise of sin and death. The book also shows the beginning of God’s glorious plan to build a kingdom of redeemed people.

### ○ ONE-SENTENCE SUMMARY

The God who created humankind and punished disobedience with death began his great plan of redemption with his covenant to Abraham, whose descendants arrived in Egypt as God’s cherished people.



A reconstruction of the ark Noah built. The dimensions of the ark made it eminently seaworthy. The vessel in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, a Mesopotamian account of the flood that has some parallel to Noah’s, is a cube. Such a vessel would have rolled over at the slightest disturbance.

## GOD'S MESSAGE IN THE BOOK

### **Purpose**

Genesis lays the historical and theological foundation for the rest of the Bible. If the Bible is the story of God's redemption of his people, Gen. 1–11 tells why redemption is necessary: humans are rebels, unable to redeem themselves. Further, Gen. 12–50 shows the steps God initiated to establish a redeemed people and to make a way for the Redeemer to come. He did this through his unconditional covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and with his providential care through Joseph's life. God's people who study Genesis today should view it with this original purpose in mind.

### **Christian Worldview Elements**

Genesis deals particularly with the worldview categories of *God*; *creation*; *humanity*; *rebellion and sin*; and *covenant and redemption*. No Bible book more fully teaches God as Creator and humanity as sinners who cannot save themselves.

#### **Teachings about God**

Genesis reveals God first as Creator. He is righteous in his commands, and he judges when humankind disobeys him. Genesis further reveals God as the One who makes his covenant with undeserving people (see Gen. 15). The first promise of Christ is given in Gen. 3:15; the Spirit of God is mentioned in Gen. 1:2 and 6:3.

#### **Teachings about Humanity**

Genesis shows the glory of humanity by emphasizing that mankind alone of all creation was made in "the image of God." On the other hand, Genesis shows the shame of humanity by recounting three incidents involving the whole race: the fall, the flood, and Babel. All three events portray humans as sinners in need of a Savior.

#### **Teachings about Salvation**

Genesis introduces critical truths about salvation developed in later parts of Scripture. In particular, the incident of the death of a ram instead of Isaac points to a substitutionary understanding of sacrifice. Further, the New Testament makes much of Abraham as a pattern of salvation for all the redeemed: "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (15:6). Genesis 12–50 shows the beginning of God's covenant people.

- **God**
- **Creation**
  - Sovereignty and Providence
  - Faith and Reason
  - Revelation and Authority
- **Humanity**
- **Rebellion and Sin**
- **Covenant and Redemption**
  - Community and Church
  - Discipleship
  - Ethics and Morality
  - Time and Eternity

## CHRIST IN GENESIS

Creation is the first theme of Genesis and Christ is the agent of creation. “For everything was created by him” (Col. 1:16). Christ as Redeemer is first promised in Gen. 3:15. When God commanded Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, he provided a substitute for Isaac (22:8) in the same way he provided Christ as our substitute through his sacrificial death. Through Abraham’s seed, Jesus Christ, all families of the earth will be blessed.



## GOD’S STORY

### ***When the Events of This Book Happened:***

*From creation until Joseph’s death (ca. 1805 B.C.)*

There is insufficient information to date the events of Gen. 1–11. Using the traditional early date for the exodus, Abraham’s birth in Ur was ca. 2166 B.C. and Joseph’s death in Egypt was ca. 1805 B.C., an amazing total of some 360 years for four generations. (This was the time of the First Dynasty of Babylon in Mesopotamia and of the Middle Kingdom in Egypt. The Bronze Age had developed by the end of Genesis.)

2166 B.C.	2066	2006	1915	1805
Abraham born	Isaac born	Jacob & Esau born	Joseph born	Joseph dies

### ***How Genesis Fits into God’s “Story”***

Genesis shows why redemption is needed and presents the first steps in God’s bringing a people into right relationship with him. The beginning of God’s plan is to bless all nations through the covenant he began with Abraham. Initially that plan focused on Abraham’s biological descendants, reaching its geographical zenith during the kingdom of David and Solomon. The greatest descendant of Abraham is Jesus, who inaugurated the kingdom of God at his first coming and will consummate it at his second coming.



## ORIGINAL HISTORICAL SETTING

### ***Author and Date of Writing:***

*Moses, perhaps ca. 1445 B.C.*

The book is technically anonymous. On the other hand, according to uniform Jewish and early Christian belief, the first five books of the Bible were written by Moses. Collectively these five books are called the Torah (Hebrew), the





**THE MIGRATION OF ABRAHAM**

GENESIS 11:31-12:9

- City
- City (uncertain location)
- ▲ Mountain peak
- Abraham's migration route
- Abraham's alternate migration route

Pentateuch (Greek), or the Law (English). Both Jesus and Paul affirmed that Moses wrote the Law (John 7:19; Rom. 10:19). Scholars who accept the testimony of Scripture at face value continue to affirm that Moses wrote Genesis.

During the 1800s, most critical scholars abandoned the belief that Moses wrote these books. The influential German scholar Julius Wellhausen presented evidence for a documentary theory (often called “JEDP”) for the composition of the Law. This theory argued that the Torah evolved over several centuries and was finally compiled during the time of Israel’s kings. Although Wellhausen’s theory has been modified over the years, it still dominates scholarly discussions of the origin of the Pentateuch.

The time of Moses’s life has been interpreted two ways. Because 1 Kgs. 6:1 notes the time between the exodus and Solomon, the exodus has been dated traditionally ca. 1446 B.C. Others, however, date the exodus ca. 1290 B.C., based on the word “Raameses” (or Rameses) in Exod. 1:11, and the first known occurrence of that name applied to a pharaoh. (See *Exodus* for more information.) Assuming an early date for the exodus and that Moses wrote while Israel camped at Mount Sinai, Genesis was written in the middle of the fifteenth century B.C.

### ***First Audience and Destination:***

#### ***The Israelites at Mount Sinai***

The original hearers and destination are not stated but are believed from tradition. The first audience was the Israelite nation in the wilderness on their way to Canaan.

### ***Occasion***

Genesis does not tell what prompted it to be written. Its events occurred centuries before the writer’s birth. Although some historical records from the dawn of humanity may have survived for Moses to use as sources, this does not appear likely. If one believes that Moses received the Ten Commandments by divine revelation, then one can just as readily believe that God also revealed to Moses the content of Genesis.



## **LITERARY FEATURES**

### ***Genre and Literary Style:***

#### ***A historical narrative written in excellent Hebrew***

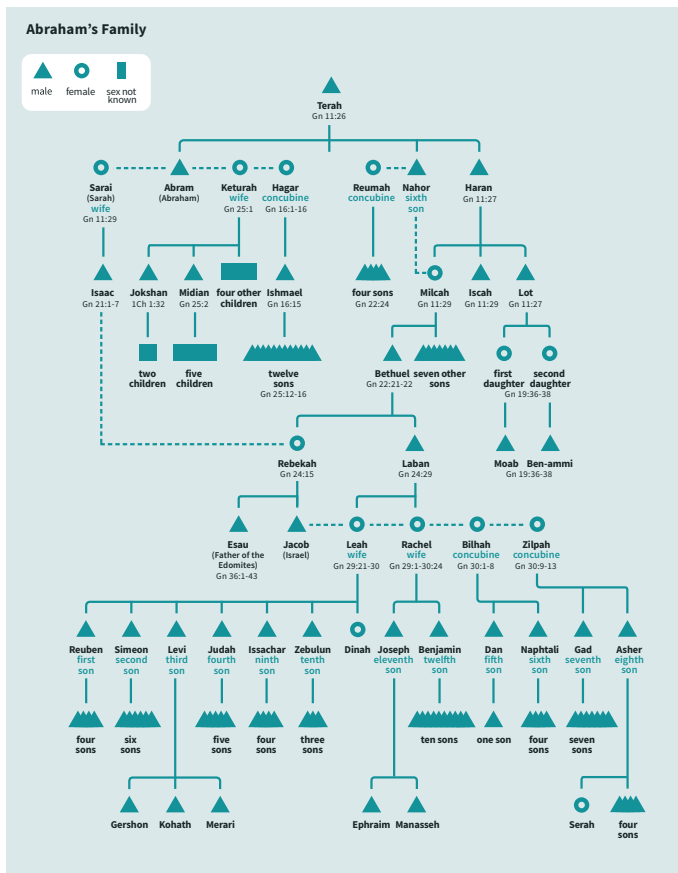
Although Genesis was the First Book of the Law, it recorded relatively few divine commands, some of which are 2:17 and 9:7. Genesis has preserved two historical narratives. Chapters 1–11 contain a selective history of the entire human race. (Other religions have their stories about creation and beginnings, with which Genesis shares certain features. The Babylonian *Gilgamesh Epic*, e.g., contains parallels to the flood narrative.) Chapters 12–50 tell the story of the direct ancestors of the Israelites. Genesis also contains a few passages of

poetry (see 3:14-19) and important genealogies (see chap. 5). The Hebrew style of Genesis is like that of the rest of the Pentateuch. The writer composed his account carefully.

### Themes:

#### Creation, death, flood, covenant, providence

The account of the creation of the world and of humankind in God's image provides the theological basis for the Bible's insistence on human account-



ability to the Creator. The words “and he died,” repeated with depressing regularity, show that the fall indeed had the effect God warned about. The flood narrative shows how God judged the race he had created. In God’s covenants with Noah and then with Abraham, he reached out in mercy to his fallen human creatures. The last half of the book, notably the story of Joseph, emphasizes God’s providential care over his covenant people (see 50:20).

### ***Book Features and Structure***

Genesis introduces themes that the rest of Scripture develops. Genesis is necessary to make sense of the rest of the Bible. The author organized chapters 1–11 around four great events: creation, fall, flood, and Babel. Genesis 12–50 has preserved the story of four great men: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

The geographical focus shifts from section to section. Chapters 1–11 happened generally in the Fertile Crescent. The action for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob shifts between Haran and Canaan, while the Joseph story alternates between Canaan and Egypt. Ten times the author uses the Hebrew word *toledot*, translated “records” or “family records.” Many scholars view this as a clue to the structure of the book.



The Great Sphinx and the Great Pyramid at Giza, Egypt. Both of these architectural wonders were several hundred years old by the time Jacob and his family moved to Egypt during a time of famine in the Ancient Near East.

# EXODUS

## THE SECOND BOOK OF MOSES

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In the Hebrew text, the book's first two words are its title, *We'elleh Shemot*, "These Are the Names." The English title is the name first used by the book's Greek translators (second century B.C.). *Exodus* could be rendered "going out" or "departure."

### ○ KEY TEXT: 14:30-31

*"That day the LORD saved Israel from the power of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. When Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and believed in him and in his servant Moses."*

### ○ KEY TERM: "REDEEM"

Exodus shows how the Lord for his name's sake redeemed his people Israel by buying them out of slavery through payment of a price, the death of the Passover lambs (see 12:13). Further, it records God's commands to those redeemed people.

### ○ ONE-SENTENCE SUMMARY

When God redeemed his chosen people Israel through his servant Moses, he entered a covenant relationship with them and instituted his dwelling with them, the tabernacle.



Jebel Musa: a traditional site of Mount Sinai where Moses received the law

## GOD'S MESSAGE IN THE BOOK

### **Purpose**

Exodus is double pronged. First, it narrates God's greatest redemptive act of the Old Testament, Israel's exodus from Egypt. Second, it recorded many of the laws by which those redeemed people were to live. If the overall Bible tells the story of God's kingdom, then Exodus tells how the first phase of that kingdom came into being by God's mighty power. Moses, of course, is the central human figure as God's agent of salvation. God's people who read and study Exodus today should also view it in light of the ultimate Redeemer who purchased people by his own death (John 1:17).

### **Christian Worldview Elements**

Exodus provides insight on the worldview categories of *sovereignty and providence*; *revelation and authority*; *covenant and redemption*; and *ethics and morality*. No Old Testament book more fully portrays that humans cannot know God unless God reveals himself or that humans must depend wholly on God for their redemption.

### **Teachings about God**

Exodus reveals the Lord as Redeemer. Because of his love and for his name's sake, he takes the initiative to save his people from bondage. Exodus further reveals him as the One who expects his redeemed people to live according to the provisions of the covenant made at Sinai. Christ is prefigured both by Moses and by the Passover lambs. Exodus 31:3 and 35:31 mention the Spirit as empowering a person for special service.

### **Teachings about Humanity**

Exodus highlights the universality of human evil by showing rebellion against God in a variety of ways. Pharaoh's wickedness (chaps. 4–14) and redeemed Israel's shameful idolatry in the golden calf incident (chap. 32) are perhaps the clearest examples. On the other hand, Exodus shows the great value God puts on humanity through the high price paid at the time of Israel's deliverance from Egypt.

### **Teachings about Salvation**

Until Christ's coming and his death on the cross, the exodus was the greatest divine redemptive act. God taught explicitly the substitutionary meaning of the Passover lamb's death: "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (12:13). This, however, only prefigured the coming One, "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

God

Creation

○ **Sovereignty and Providence**

Faith and Reason

○ **Revelation and Authority**

Humanity

Rebellion and Sin

○ **Covenant and Redemption**

Community and Church

Discipleship

○ **Ethics and Morality**

Time and Eternity