



## HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE FOR YOURSELF

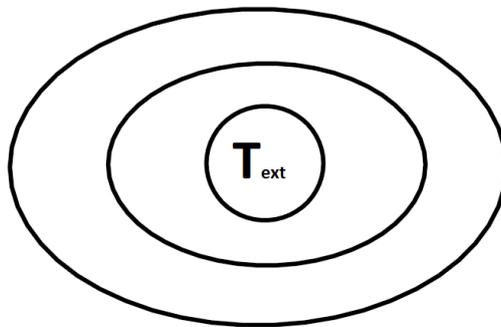
### PART 3

*Clinton Stone*

#### Tools #1 – Context

**Principle:** We must understand the context of the passage in order to grasp how the original audience understood the text

**Explanation:** In handling God's word, it is tempting to isolate our text. When we do, we rip it from its context and we run the risk of missing the point or even getting the text wrong. But, by understanding the text in its context (or how it would have been understood by the original audience (them/then)), we can be better prepared to understand the right application of the text to us / now.



There are various dimension to the Context of a Passage, and for each we are to ask some key diagnostic questions:

#### 1. Literary Context

- Why is this passage here?
- What is before it and after it?

#### 2. Historical Context

- When was this written?
- Into what historical / political / religious / cultural context was it written?
- How would the original hearers understand this?

#### 3. Biblical Context

- Where does this passage fit into the big picture of the bible storyline?
- How does its location in the big picture inform the meaning of this text?

## Overview of the Bible Storyline



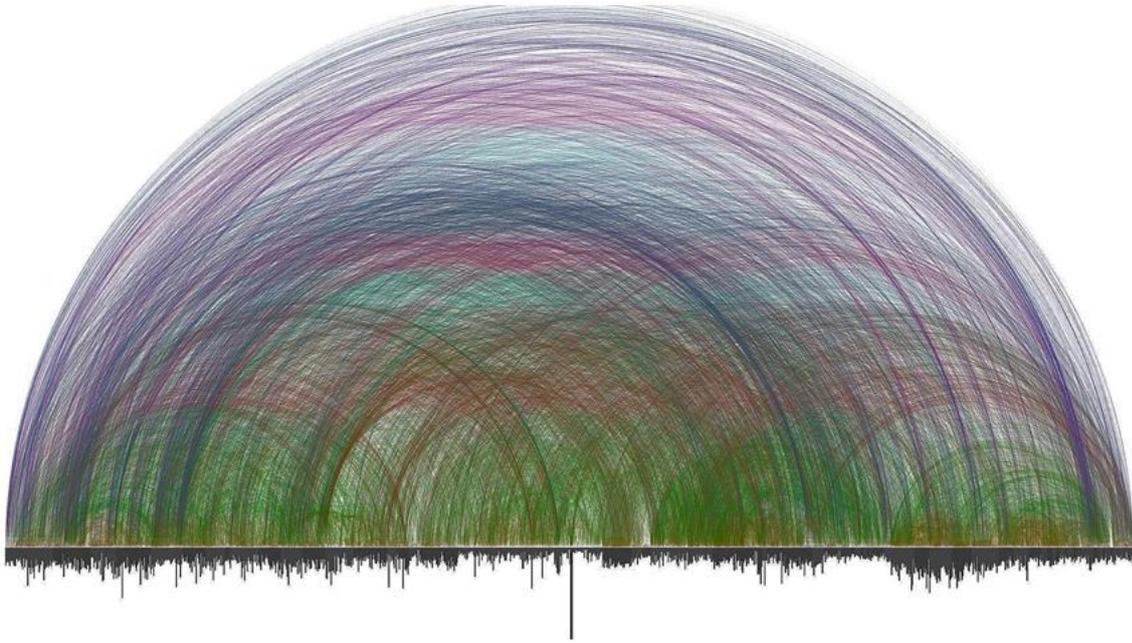
KEY:

1	Creation / Eden	8	Slavery in Egypt	15	King Solomon	22	Judas Maccabaeus
2	The Fall	9	Exodus	16	Israel & Judah Split	23	400 years of Silence
3	The Flood	10	Moses, Sinai & Law	17	Prophets	24	Jesus Christ Comes!
4	Covenant with Noah	11	40yrs in Wilderness	18	Exile of Israel	25	Pentecost & Gospel Age
5	Babel	12	Conquest of Canaan	19	Exile of Judah	26	Last days – Church Age
6	God calls Abraham	13	Time of the Judges	20	Rebuilding Jerusalem	27	Christ's Return
7	Joseph in Egypt	14	King David	21	Antiochus Epiphanes	28	New Creation

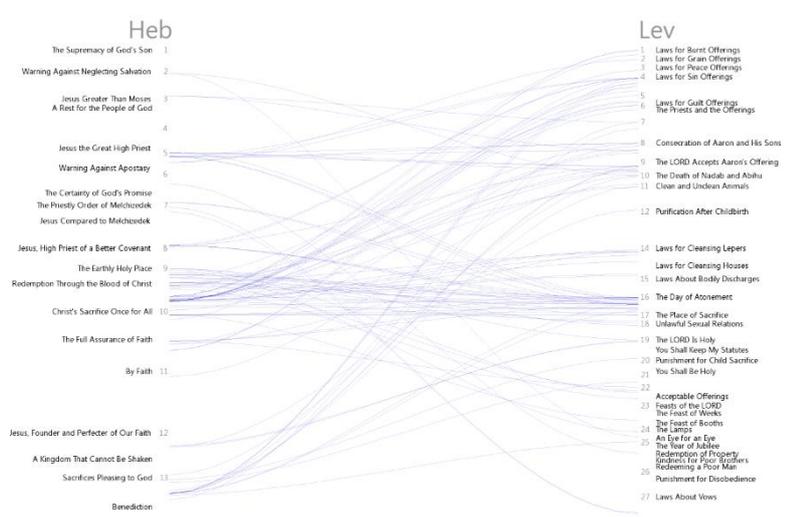
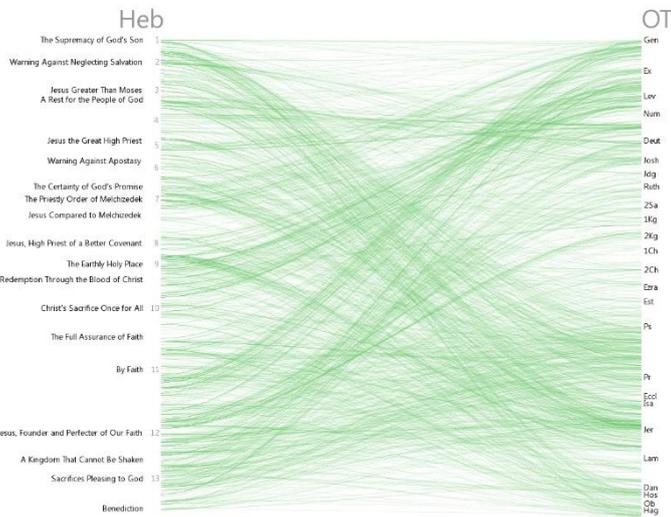
The following are some helpful ways to understand the passage in its context

- Read the entire paragraph or section in which your text is found
- Read the Chapter on both sides of the passage
- Read the Entire Book
- If it is part of a book pair, then read both books
  - Luke & Acts
  - 1 & 2 Corinthians
  - Etc.
- If you have a study bible, read the introduction notes at the beginning of the book to establish the historical context of the passage. A good introduction will usually give you dates, geography and key themes or issues being addressed.
- Read other books of the bible which shed context light onto your passage
  - Many of the Psalms are rooted in historical events in 1 & 2 Samuel
  - Much of the NT Epistles find their context from Acts
  - Hebrews draws heavily on Leviticus

# No Passage of Scripture Stands Alone!



A wonderful tool is available at: <https://www.openbible.info/labs/cross-references/visualization>



## Example #1 - Lets Do Some Context Work!

**Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)** — *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*

### Q1: How is this verse usually understood by Christians?

- That God has plans to prosper me materially, and to protect me, and to bless my life ahead.



- This is a typical example of a "Motivational Talk"... going from the text directly to application.

## Lets do some Context Work!!!

### a. Historical Context: Who is writing, to Whom, When, Where?

- Jer 1:1 The Prophet Jeremiah (also a Priest)
- To the People of Judah (Southern Kingdom)
- Jer 1:2-3 During the time preceding and leading up to the Exile in Babylon
- Jer 1:2-3 In the Southern Kingdom of Judah / Jerusalem (cf 2:1)

### b. Literary Context:

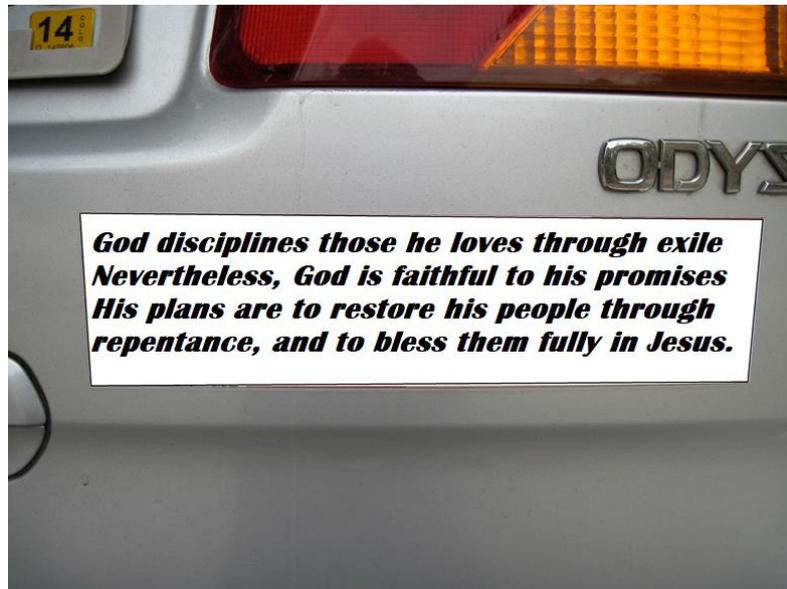
- What is the immediate context of Jer 29:11?
  - See Jer 29:1 - The People were in Exile in Babylon!
  - Why?
    - See Jer 25:1-11 - The people had refused to repent from Idolatry back to God.
- Why is Jer 29:11 here?
  - To encourage God's people in Exile that God will restore them
- When is the Restoration promised?
  - Jer 29:10 - In Seventy Years Time!!
- What Restoration is Promised?
  - Jer 29:12-14
  - Firstly Repentance
  - Then Spiritual Restoration
  - Then Physical Restoration back to the promised land

### c. Biblical Context

- How does this passage fit into the overall storyline of the bible?
  - God's plans are much bigger than just restoring Judah from Exile
    - See Jer 30:1-3 - All God's people (Israel & Judah) will be restored
  - God's promises are clearly spiritual to some degree
    - See Jer 30:8-9
  - God's promises point forward to Jesus
    - See Jer 31:31-34
    - See Jer 33:14-18

**In the light of this... How should Jer 29:11 be understood?**

- God disciplines those whom he loves - by sending his disobedient people into exile
- Nevertheless, God is faithful to his promises and will restore them to himself through repentance
- God's purposes in discipline are not to harm but to restore
- God's plans for his people are to bless them fully and finally in the Lord Jesus Christ

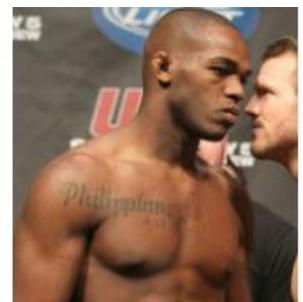


**Example #2 - Lets Do Some Context Work!**

*Philippians 4:13 (ESV) — <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

**Q1: How is this verse usually understood by Christians?**

- That God will help me to accomplish my goals
- Victory! Motivation!
- Jesus is my personal trainer.



**Lets do some Context Work!!!**

**a. Historical Context: Who is writing, to Whom, When, Where?**

- Phil 1:1-2 Paul & Timothy are writing to the church in Philippi
- Phil 1:12-13 Paul is in Prison for the Gospel
- Philippi was an important Roman city - inhabited mostly by gentiles
- Phil 1:27-30 The church in Philippi is facing persecution & suffering

**b. Literary Context:**

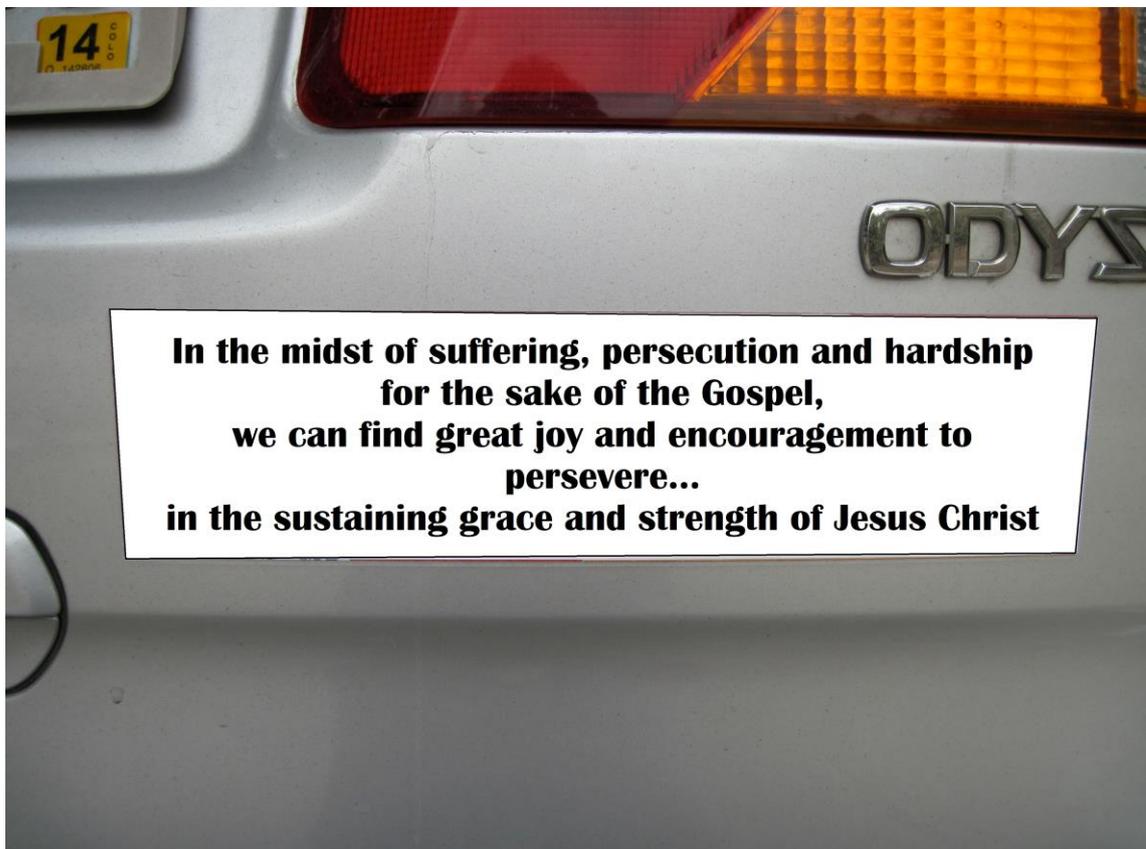
- Immediate
  - Vs 11-12 Paul knew Contentment in the varied circumstances of Life
  - Vs 14 - Paul was going through great trouble (Prison!)
- Wider
  - Suffering, Persecution, Illness (2:26)
  - Opposition and False Teaching
  - Conflicts in the church (4:2-3)
- Main Theme of the Letter
  - Joy / Rejoicing (16x)
  - Phil 4:4 - Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, rejoice!

**c. Biblical Context**

- The church is to live in the light of the Cross
- Phil 1:21 - "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."
- Phil 1:27 - "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ."
- Phil 2:1-10 - "Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ"

**In the light of this... How should Phil 4:13 be understood?**

- In the midst of suffering, persecution and hardship for the sake of the Gospel, we can find great encouragement to persevere in the sustaining grace of Jesus Christ and his strength.



## Some Others to Consider for Homework

- Matt 18:20... "When 2 or 3 are gathered..." --> Not really about God's presence at prayer meetings!
- Rom 8:28... "God works all things for our Good" --> What is God's definition of good?
- 1 Cor 10:13... "God will never give you more than you can handle." --> This statement is not even in the Bible!
- 1 Cor 13:4-8a "Love is..." --> Not really about Romance and marriage and Valentine's day
- 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 "Do not be unequally yoked..." --> Not really about dating or business partnerships
- 2 Tim 2:22 "So flee youthful passions" --> Not really about Lust and Sexual purity

## Tools #2 – Melodic Line

**Principle:** We will handle a specific text better if we understand what the whole book is about.

**Explanation:** Every book of the bible has a purpose which is conveyed through a coherent, sustained message - or big idea - similar to the unique melody of a song. It is waiting to be heard. It unites the whole book together (macro-theme or macro-aim) by concisely stating what the whole book is about.

Every passage in the book will in some way be related to the melodic line (Directly, indirectly, as support, or by contrast).

Our task is to listen well enough and long enough to hear the melody.



**Diagnostic Question:** How does my text relate to the theme of the whole book?

### Strategies:

- Read and re-read the book
- Identify if there is a Top & Tail which unites the book
  - Compare Romans 1:1-5 with Romans 16:25-27
  -

1:1	Gospel of God	16:25	My Gospel
1:2	Through the Prophets	16:26	Prophetic Writings
1:5	Obedience of Faith	16:26	Obedience of Faith
1:5	All nations	16:26	All nations
1:5	Jesus Christ	16:25-27	Jesus Christ

- Look for purpose statements
  - 1 Cor 1:10
  - John 20:30-31
  - Ecc 1:12-14
- Look for Summary Statements / Thesis Statements
  - See Prov 1:7
  - Ecc 12:9-14
- Find Repeated words or phrases or ideas
  - **Vanity / Under the Sun** in Ecclesiastes
  - **Joy / Rejoicing** in Philippians
  - **Kept / Keeping** in Jude
  - **Suffering** in 1 Peter

### Examples:

#### #1: What do you think is the Melodic Line of John's Gospel?

- Read and Re-Read the book
- Identify if there is a Top & Tail
  - John 1:1-5 and John 21:25
- Look for purpose statements
  - John 20:30-31
- Look for summary statements
  - John 1:1, 11-12, 14, 18
- Find repeated words, phrases or ideas
  - "I AM..." John 6 / John 8-10
    - Bread, Light, Gate, Good Shepherd, Resurrection & Life, Way Truth Life
- Believe that Jesus is the Son of God who came from the Father to reveal him, and has returned to the Father to open up the way to eternal life for his people.

## **#2: What do you think is the Melodic Line of Acts?**

- See Acts 1:1-2
- See Acts 1:8
- The continuing Acts of Jesus Christ as the saviour of the whole world, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the establishing of the church... From Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, to the ends of the earth.

## **#3: What is the Melodic Line to the Book of 1 Peter?**

- Find repeated words, phrases or ideas
  - Suffering: 1 Peter 1:6; 2:19-21; 3:8-18; 4:12-19
  - Standing firm together: 1 Peter 1:1-2, 22; 2:9-12; 3:8; 4:9-11
  - Hope of eternal Salvation: 1 Peter 1:3-12; 2:12; 3:18-22; 4:13; 5:4, 10
- "In the midst of present suffering, stand firm together in the eternal hope of your salvation in Christ Jesus."

## **SOME FINAL HELPFUL RESOURCES**

1. Short Summaries of Each Book focusing on what it teaches us about God
2. A suggest Melodic Line for each book of the Bible (Proclamation Trust)

# Short Summaries & Themes

## THE BIBLE: God of Jesus

- **Old Testament:** Anticipation of Jesus
- **Gospels:** Manifestation of Jesus
- **Acts:** Proclamation of Jesus
- **Epistles:** Explanation of Jesus
- **Revelation:** Consummation of Jesus

## THE OLD TESTAMENT

### The Law

- **Genesis:** God of Promise – Beginnings
- **Exodus:** God of Power – Deliverance
- **Leviticus:** God of Purity – Instruction
- **Numbers:** God of Perseverance – Journeys
- **Deuteronomy:** God of Preparation – Obedience

### History

- **Joshua:** God of the Land – Conquest
- **Judges:** God of the Rebels – Deterioration and Deliverance
- **Ruth:** God of Redemption – Redemption
- **1 Samuel:** God of the Heart – Transition
- **2 Samuel:** God of the Throne – Unification
- **1 Kings:** God of Israel – Disruption
- **2 Kings:** God of Israel – Dispersion
- **1 Chronicles:** God of Judah – Israel's Spiritual History
- **2 Chronicles:** God of Judah – Israel's Spiritual Heritage
- **Ezra:** God of the Temple – Restoration
- **Nehemiah:** God of the Wall – Reconstruction
- **Esther:** God of the Gallows – Preservation

### Wisdom

- **Job:** God of Pain – Blessings Through Sufferings
- **Psalms:** God of Praise – Praise
- **Proverbs:** God of Prudence – Practical Wisdom
- **Ecclesiastes:** God of Purpose – All is Vanity Apart from God
- **Song of Solomon:** God of Passion – Love and Marriage

### Major Prophets

- **Isaiah:** God of Glory – Salvation
- **Jeremiah:** God of Weeping – Judgment
- **Lamentations:** God of Faithfulness – Lament
- **Ezekiel:** God of Visions – The Glory of the Lord
- **Daniel:** God of History- The Sovereignty of God

## Minor Prophets

- **Hosea:** God of the Unfaithful – Unfaithfulness
- **Joel:** God of the Locusts – The Day of the Lord
- **Amos:** God of the Oppressed – Judgment
- **Obadiah:** God of the Mountain – Righteous Judgement
- **Jonah:** God of Compassion – God’s Grace to All People
- **Micah:** God of Justice – Divine Judgment
- **Nahum:** God of Wrath – Consolation
- **Habakkuk:** God of Sovereignty – Trusting a Sovereign God
- **Zephaniah:** God of Judgment – The “Great Day of the Lord”
- **Haggai:** God of Renewal – Rebuilding the Temple
- **Zechariah:** God of Restoration – God’s Deliverance
- **Malachi:** God of Worship – Formalism Rebuked

## THE NEW TESTAMENT

### Gospels

- **Matthew:** God of the Jews – The Kingdom of God
- **Mark:** God of the Romans – The Suffering Servant
- **Luke:** God of the Outcast – The Perfect Man
- **John:** God of the World – The Son of God

### History

- **Acts:** God of Power – The Spread of the Gospel

### Pauline Epistles

- **Romans:** God of Righteousness – The Righteousness of God
- **1 Corinthians:** God of Holiness – Christian Conduct
- **2 Corinthians:** God of Weakness – Paul’s Defense of his Apostleship
- **Galatians:** God of Justification – Freedom in Christ
- **Ephesians:** God of Unity – Blessings in Christ
- **Philippians:** God of Joy – The Joy Filled Life
- **Colossians:** God of Preeminence – The Supremacy of Christ
- **1 Thessalonians:** God of Encouragement – Concern for the Church
- **2 Thessalonians:** God of Admonishment – Living in Hope
- **1 Timothy:** God of Godliness – Instructions for a Young Disciple
- **2 Timothy:** God of Endurance – A Charge to Faithful Ministry
- **Titus:** God of Works – A Manual of Conduct
- **Philemon:** God of Reconciliation – Forgiveness

### General Epistles

- **Hebrews:** God of Fulfillment – The Superiority of Christ
- **James:** God of Trials – Genuine Faith
- **1 Peter:** God of the Persecuted – Responding to Suffering
- **2 Peter:** God of Patience – Warning Against False Teachers
- **1 John:** God of Love – Fellowship with God
- **2 John:** God of Truth – Christian Discernment
- **3 John:** God of Discernment – Christian Hospitality
- **Jude:** God of Protection – Contending for the Faith

### Prophecy

- **Revelation:** God of Eternity – The Unveiling of Jesus Christ

## Suggested Melodic Lines (Proclamation Bible)

- 1. Genesis.**  
The Creator God is faithful to his covenant promises and redeems humanity through the promised line, despite their sin and rebellion. (Seulgi Byun)
- 2. Exodus.**  
Trust, obey and worship the redeeming, covenant-making God who is with us. (Douglas Stuart)
- 3. Leviticus.**  
The holy God makes his people holy, calls them to be holy, and provides atonement through blood when they are not. (Robin Weekes)
- 4. Numbers.**  
God has saved us and, as we travel through the wilderness of this world, we need to go on exercising faith to enter the inheritance Christ has secured for us. (Adrian Reynolds)
- 5. Deuteronomy.**  
God's people are called to respond to God's salvation with love and loyalty, worshipping the one true God in the midst of surrounding cultural idolatries and living in the midst of the nations as a community shaped at every level of life by God's character of grace, justice, purity, compassion and generosity. (Chris Wright)
- 6. Joshua.**  
God gave the Land he promised and Israel took it (11:23; 21:43-45). (Liam Goligher)
- 7. Judges.**  
The book of Judges demonstrates that if the Israelites survive the dark days of Canaanisation under the judges it is entirely to the Lord's credit. (Daniel I. Block)
- 8. Ruth.**  
The Lord is committed to his people even in the darkest days, and will preserve his plan of salvation through a godly king, for both Jews and Gentiles. (Daniel I. Block)
- 9. 1–2 Samuel.**  
Even the best human leaders fail us, but God is faithful to his people and promised a king who would be powerful, wise, righteous and faithful. (John Woodhouse)
- 10. 1–2 Kings.**  
Ruling justly and wisely depends on obeying God's Word, and disobeying has serious consequences. (Bob Fyall)
- 11. 1–2 Chronicles.**  
Restore the people, raise up the king and renew the temple; then God will pour out his blessings. (Richard L. Pratt, Jr)

**12. Ezra-Nehemiah.**

In response to God fulfilling his promises, his people should repent, reform and 'follow the Law of God', or literally, 'walk in the Law of God' (Neh. 10:29). (Peter Adam)

**13. Esther.**

God fulfills his redemptive promises through his divine providence. (Karen H. Jobes)

**14. Job.**

The obedient suffering of a believer brings glory to God. (Christopher Ash)

**15. Psalms.**

Praise the Lord: meditate on his circumstance-defying covenant love in the Messiah! (James Hely Hutchinson)

**16. Proverbs.**

Proverbs recognizes the difficulties of living in God's complex world and offers wise words to live by. (Simon Vibert)

**17. Ecclesiastes.**

Death and judgment are the only fixed realities in life, and everything else is uncertain and often subject to frustration and sorrow. (David Gibson)

**18. Song of Songs.**

Desire wisdom, desire your husband or wife, and above all desire Christ. (Ros Clarke)

**19. Isaiah.**

God will rescue and renew a faithful, obedient people for himself, out of the ashes of Israel's failure and exile, through the coming of his Servant King (the Messiah). (David Jackman)

**20. Jeremiah.**

'Therefore that he may raise, the Lord throws down.' –John Donne (Andrew Shead)

**21. Lamentations.**

'In your righteous wrath, O LORD, remember mercy!' (Mervyn Eloff)

**22. Ezekiel.**

Align yourselves with the God who has acted in judgment on Judah, and with the Israel which God is restoring. (James Robson)

**23. Daniel.**

God always remains the true God, so stay faithful to him despite pressure to compromise. (Graham Beynon)

**24. Hosea.**

'Go, show your love to your wife again, through she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, through the turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.' (3:1) (Canon David Gibb)

**25. Joel.**

Judgment day is approaching, so sincerely repent, call on the name of the Lord, and you will be blessed. (Paul Williamson)

- 26. Amos.**  
The sovereign Lord will not tolerate a proud and complacent people, but will judge all human evil with perfect justice so that his kingdom may come.  
(Andrew Shead)
- 27. Obadiah.**  
Divine sovereignty is the audacious theme of Obadiah, seen in the impending role reversal of Edom and Judah on the day of the Lord. (Jonathan Gibson)
- 28. Jonah.**  
'Salvation comes from the LORD' (2:9), who is the Creator and Lord of the nations. (Bob Fyall)
- 29. Micah.**  
'He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.' (6:8)  
(Myrto Theocharous)
- 30. Nahum.**  
The Lord will bring inescapable and deserved judgment on mighty Assyria, and this is good news for God's people, Judah. (Justin Mote)
- 31. Habakkuk.**  
Be joyful and secure in an unjust world, by trusting in the God who promises to deliver his people and defeat evil. (Paul Darlington)
- 32. Zephaniah.**  
God will judge the sin and rebellion of the world, but there is hope because of the character and promises of God. (Simon Austen)
- 33. Haggai.**  
The rebuilding of the Lord's temple will bring about an even greater glory.  
(Seulgi Byun)
- 34. Zechariah.**  
In a time of economic and spiritual crisis, the prophet Zechariah challenged a new generation to become participants, not spectators, in the plans the Lord Almighty has for the restoration of temple, city and society, and to welcome the Lord, the King of Jerusalem and King of the whole earth. (Wolter Rose)
- 35. Malachi.**  
'"I have loved you," says the LORD.' (1:2) (Peter Adam)
- 36. Matthew.**  
Become disciples of Jesus, so that you may participate in the kingdom of the heavens, and make further disciples in all the nations. (Ben Cooper)
- 37. Mark.**  
Jesus, God's Son, King and Servant, has come, died and risen that we may know, confess and serve him. (R.C. Lucas)
- 38. Luke.**  
You can be confident that Jesus, in his life, death, resurrection and ascension, heralds the fulfilment of all God's promises in the Old Testament. (Matthew Sleeman)

- 39. John.**  
Believe that Jesus is the Son who came from the Father to reveal him, and has returned to the Father to open up the way to life for his people. (Gavin Perkins)
- 40. Acts.**  
The ascended Lord Jesus continues to draw people from every nation to himself, growing his church through the preaching of the word and the ministry of the Spirit. (David Peterson)
- 41. Romans.**  
God is glorified in a united missionary Church humbled together under grace. (Christopher Ash)
- 42. 1 Corinthians.**  
All believers in Christ are God's holy temple and should live in keeping with that holy status by becoming unified, shunning pagan vices and glorifying God under the lordship of Jesus. (Brian Rosner)
- 43. 2 Corinthians.**  
Be confident in the "weak" but authentic ministry of gospel proclamation. (William Taylor)
- 44. Galatians.**  
The grace of God in the gospel and the promised Spirit are sufficient both for salvation and the Christian life. (Simon Gathercole)
- 45. Ephesians.**  
You are one in Christ now, so be united and stand firm in him. (Lee Gatiss)
- 46. Philippians.**  
Live joyfully as citizens of God's kingdom in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. (Matthew Harmon)
- 47. Colossians.**  
"Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him."  
(2:6) (John Woodhouse)
- 48. 1 Thessalonians.**  
Be reassured in the truth of gospel and press on in living it out, despite opposition, until Jesus returns. (Graham Beynon)
- 49. 2 Thessalonians.**  
While waiting expectantly for Christ's glorious return, live lives of faithful perseverance, patient vigilance and obedient service. (Mark O'Donoghue)
- 50. 1 Timothy.**  
Local churches need gospel-driven leaders to guard their conformity to gospel truth. (Julian Hardyman)
- 51. 2 Timothy.**  
Guard for future generations the precious deposit of God's glorious, life-giving gospel, despite opposition. (Sophie de Witt)
- 52. Titus.**  
Change in belief by the power of the gospel leads to changed lives, so straighten out those deceived by false teachers. (Melvin Tinker)

- 53. Philemon.**  
The gospel is powerful to reconcile deeply (and understandably) estranged people. (Mark Maynell)
- 54. Hebrews.**  
Because Jesus is utterly supreme, Christians should stick with him alone whatever happens. (Peter O'Brien)
- 55. James.**  
Christians need to be entirely focused on God in all that they do. (Douglas Moo)
- 56. 1 Peter.**  
God's chosen people should live God-glorifying, Christlike lives amidst suffering and persecution, assured of ultimate glory themselves. (Angus MacLeay)
- 57. 2 Peter.**  
Those who are truly known by God, and know him in Christ, are those who resist the theological and moral laxities of godless preachers and remain robustly tied to the apostolic message. (David Helm)
- 58. 1 John.**  
You can know you are Christians because you believe Jesus is the Christ, you recognize your sin and you love fellow Christians. (Moore Casement)
- 59. 2 John.**  
The one who knows the truth loves God, through obeying his commands, loving his people and not being hospitable to the false teacher. (Jane Tooher)
- 60. 3 John.**  
The one who walks in the truth will be in partnership with Christians, and not reject them. (Jane Tooher)
- 61. Jude.**  
Contend for the faith in the face of godless denial and immorality. (Nat Schluter)
- 62. Revelation.**  
Willingness to suffer for faith in and worship of the sovereign God and his Christ is the path to ultimate victory and the triune God's glory in the new creation. (G.K. Beale)