

## **The Bible Timeline Course**

The worldwide-famous course devised by Jeff Cavins  
and delivered here by Mauro Iannicelli

# **Course Notes**

## **Written By Mauro Iannicelli**

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## **Brief Introduction to The Bible Timeline Methodology**

The Bible can be a book difficult to master. This is due to various reasons. Among them are:

1. The sheer size of the Bible: the Catholic Bible is made of 73 individual books, with many different episodes and characters.
2. Some of the books are not sorted by chronological order, but by literary genres.
3. Many books of the Bible are not narrative books, meaning that they do not bring the story forward. They contain other things like prayers, wisdom sayings, long lists of laws and regulations, etc. - so when the reader encounters these books, they can easily lose the thread of the story they were following.

The Bible Timeline Course is a worldwide-famous Catholic Bible Study devised by Jeff Cavins in the early 2000's which addresses these issues and more. This course allows one to understand the big picture of the Bible - that is, the overview of Salvation History (which is narrated in the Bible) from start to finish in all its stages.

The approach of this methodology is shown on the Bible Timeline Chart, which is an essential tool for this course. The chart shows how Salvation History is divided in 12 color-coded periods, easy to understand and memorise. To cover the 12 periods, the course does not focus on all the 73 books of the Bible, but only on 14 narrative books (that is, those books of the Bible that bring the story forward).

The other 59 books are called supplemental books and are left aside (not because they are less important of course, but simply because they don't bring the story forward). This is what St Augustine himself called the Narrative Approach to the Bible – that is, to learn the story first.

Both the narrative books and the supplemental books are, however, placed on the chart in chronological order, each under its relevant period. This way one can see exactly where each book of the Bible fits in the story.

The Bible Timeline Chart contains much more information –the six main covenants between God and humankind, the world powers of each period, the main events in secular history alongside Salvation History, etc.

The Bible Timeline Course covers systematically each of the 12 periods.

## Period 1, Early World

### 1. Introduction

The colour of this period is TURQUOISE (like the colour of the earth viewed from space, and also reminiscent of the purity of earth at the beginning).

Narrative books: **Genesis 1 to 11.**

This first period, 'Early World' is important because it sets **the stage, the cast and the plot** of the whole Bible. You can think of the Bible as being divided into two parts: the **problem** and the **solution**.

This first period, Early world, describes the problem: what goes terribly wrong and the crisis at the start of the story.

The remaining 11 periods of the Bible describe the solution: how God achieves his cosmic rescue of humanity from the mess they got themselves into in period 1!

### 2. The first six days of creation

*Bible Reading: Gen 1*

God creates 'out of nothing' the universe and what it contains with simple words of command. He speaks, and creation happens. "Let there be light"; and there was light." etc. God has absolute authority over his creation. And his word, the Word of God, is all-powerful, alive and active. What God speaks, he achieves.

God proceeds in an orderly manner, building a habitation in the first three days and filling it, 'furnishing it' in the second three days. The message for us is that our God is a God of order, beauty and goodness. He brings order where there is chaos. And the rest of the Bible will teach us that God does so whenever he enters in someone's life.

**A creation in six days** shouldn't put the Bible reader off simply because it goes against what science tells us. In the creation account, the divinely inspired Hebrew author of Genesis is using a particular literary genre which is ancient Hebrew poetry. So, there are at least some elements which are poetic and figurative. The purpose of these verses is not to tell us the 'HOW' of creation from a scientific point of view, but the 'WHY' of creation by conveying to us deep theological truths about God, about us and our ultimate end, as we'll see below.

In the creation account, man and woman are the last ones to be created in day number six. The following applies: last in execution, first in intention. Man and woman are the last ones in God's creation because they are first in His intention! Man and woman are **the crowning of God's creation** and God has made everything else for them!

God creates man and woman **in his own image** (1:27), male and female. The communion of love between male and female reflects the communion of love between the three persons of the Holy Trinity. God bestows also **sonship** upon man and woman, and **kingship** over creation.

### **3. The seventh day of creation**

*Bible Reading: Gen 2:1-3*

God blesses and hallows **the seventh day of creation** (Gen 2:1-3). To hallow means to set apart, to consecrate to God. So, day seven is meant to be the day in which Adam & Eve will only worship God.

But day seven is also the last day in this ‘poem of creation’; hence once again, last in execution, first in intention.

Which means that what happens in day seven is the aim of creation: the worship of God by humankind.

In other words, creation, the whole of this universe, is like a macro-temple in which humanity is created and placed with the ultimate end of worshipping God. That is why we were created!

Besides, in the Biblical narrative each of the first six days of creation has a beginning and an end:

“And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.”...

“And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.”... etc.

But the seventh day has no end in the narrative! So, in this poem of creation the seventh day is meant to last forever. The **theological message** of this is that man and woman are created in day six to enter the seventh day, which will last forever and where they will only worship God. This is a reference to our ultimate end: the worship of God without end: **eternal life in Heaven!**

### **4. Covenant of Creation and its sign**

There is at least another theological message in the seventh day of creation. In Hebrew, in Biblical language, to swear an oath, that is to make a covenant, is translated “to seven oneself”. The fact that in the poem of creation God accomplishes creation in **seven days** tells us that God is making **a covenant with his creation**, in particular with man and woman who are the summit of his creation. This makes sense within the wider context: a covenant creates family links; at this point of the story, before the fall, Adam and Eve are in perfect communion with God, created in his own image, which denotes sonship. They are God’s family on earth.

**The Covenant of Creation** between God and One Holy Couple happens in day seven of creation and is the first of the six main covenants between God and humanity in Salvation History.

The sign of keeping the Covenant of Creation is **to keep the Sabbath holy**, which for Christians means not to do any work on Sundays.

## **5. A second account of creation**

*Bible Reading: Gen 2:4-25*

After seeing the account of creation in seven days, the Bible presents us with a second account of creation whose purpose is to “zoom in” on the creation of man and woman and to give the background for what follows later (Original Sin).

God places Adam in a garden called Eden. There are two special trees in it.

- 1) the **Tree of Life**: Adam has access to it, hence at this point he enjoys eternal life.
- 2) the **Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil**: God prohibits Adam from eating of this tree to prevent him from death.

God addresses the issue of **the loneliness of Adam** by fashioning a woman from one of his ribs. She will be his wife (Gen 2:24). Interestingly the covenant of marriage is instituted within the Covenant of Creation itself. This also shows how marriage is foundational in God’s plan for humankind.

## **6. The Fall of humankind: Original Sin**

*Bible Reading: Gen 3:1-6*

The fall of humanity happens in just six verses (Gen 3:1-6). The rest of the whole Bible will deal with how God is going to repair what happens here.

The Serpent speaks to Eve and puts in her mind **the doubt that God cannot be trusted**. The serpent suggests that God’s prohibition is not for the good of Adam and Eve but is to prevent them from becoming like God himself. God is depicted like an adversary who wants to prevent Adam and Eve from realising their potential.

This is **the root of each of every sin** we can commit: the suggestion that God cannot be trusted, that he is not a father who loves us, that we would be better off doing things our own way.

Why does God’s prohibition concern eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? The message is: the moment we grasp the right to decide by ourselves what is good and what is evil, we act like gods and deprive God of his role. But that is a road to disaster as there is only one true God!

As the story goes, Adam and Eve believe the lie of the serpent and eat of the tree, disobeying what God has told them.

## **7. The consequences of the Fall**

*Bible Reading: Gen 3:7-24*

Disaster immediately follows.

- 1) Adam and Eve **lose communion between themselves**: they cover themselves up; Adam blames Eve for what happened.

- 2) They **lose communion between themselves and God** (they lose the ‘state of grace’): Adam hears God walking in the garden and hides himself
- 3) They **lose communion with creation**: the ground will be cursed, and Adam will have to toil and sweat to eat of it, all the days of his life. There will be pain in childbirth for Eve.
- 4) They **lose immortality** as God bans them from Eden, so they don’t have access to the Tree of Life any longer.

## **8. ‘Protoevangelium’: the first Good News**

*Bible Reading: Gen 3:15*

Even in the midst of this mess, God curses the serpent for what he has done and **promises the future victory** of the human offspring over the serpent itself. This is in Gen 3:15, where God says that the offspring of the woman will strike the serpent’s head (a blow to the head is mortal) while the serpent will only strike at the heel (a blow to the heel is not mortal).

Gen 3:15 is called ‘protoevangelium’, or the first Good News (Proto means first; Evangelium means Good news).

## **9. The spread of sin: Cain kills Abel**

*Bible Reading: Gen 4:1-15*

After the fall, Adam and Eve generate two sons, Cain and Abel. Through what happens between them, we can see straight away how sin and evil have infected humanity, as a consequence of the fall.

They both bring a worship offering to God. But God seems to prefer Abel’s offering, and disregards Cain’s offering. As a result, Cain kills Abel out of envy, committing the first murder in history.

Adam knows his wife again, and she bears another son and names him Seth. And *at that time people began to invoke the name of the LORD (Gen 4:26)*. This indicates that, unlike Cain the murderer, Seth is a godly character.

From these two sons, humanity will have two family lines: Cain’s and Seth’s.

## **10. The offspring of Adam and Eve: Cain and Seth**

*Bible Reading: Gen 4:16 - 6:5*

In Gen 4 and 5, **two genealogies** are skilfully employed to show how humanity is divided in one ungodly line or offspring (genealogy of Cain) and one godly line (Genealogy of Seth), from which Noah will descend.

Genealogies in the Bible are a narrative tool to make a **distinction between different family lines** which are important in the story while giving key information about them at the same time. Or they can be used to **focus** the attention on one key character of the story.

Things go wrong for the godly line as these men see that the women of the ungodly line were fair and begin to marry them (**intermarriage**). As a result, the men of the godly line take up evil practices from the women of the ungodly line. This way, all humanity ends up being contaminated by sin and evil, and in one of the saddest verses in the Bible God regrets that he has created them!

## **11. The Flood: a second creation**

*Bible Reading: Gen 6:7 - 9:19*

In order to wipe out sin from humanity, God decides for a fresh start for humanity, presented as a second creation. God **floods the earth for 40 days** killing all the sinners on it. But instead of starting totally from scratch with a new Adam and Eve and with new creatures, God saves the righteous Noah and his household (eight people in total) along with two of each kind of animal, on an ark God commanded Noah to build.

The flood is presented as a recreation, a new chance for humankind. Noah's three sons (**Shem, Ham, Japheth**) will repopulate the earth as it happened for Adam's two sons, Cain and Seth. Shem, Ham, Japheth will originate the three family lines of humanity after the flood.

God seals a **covenant with Noah**, promising he will never more flood the earth to kill everyone. This is the second of the six major covenants in salvation history and it can be seen on the Bible Timeline chart: "One Holy Family".

## **12. The Fall of Noah and its consequences**

*Bible Reading: Gen 9:18 - 9:29*

Almost immediately the Bible shows us that the solution of the flood hasn't quite worked. Sadly, the "second creation" is followed by a **second fall!** Noah commits a sin as he gets drunk and falls asleep naked in his tent (drunkenness is a sin in the Bible, as it darkens the intellect which is a gift from God).

Noah's son Ham sees his father drunk and asleep, naked in his tent, and in turn commits sin by telling everything to his brothers **slandering his father Noah**. At which Shem and Japheth take a garment, and walking backwards cover the nakedness of their father; their faces are turned away, and they do not see their father's nakedness.

When Noah wakes up and is told what Ham had done, he  **curses Ham's offspring**. Hence the second fall is followed by a second curse, like the fall of Adam was followed by God's curse to the serpent and to the ground. Noah also blesses his other son Shem whom took pity on him by covering his nakedness.

## **13. The offspring of Noah: Shem, Ham, Japheth**

*Bible Reading: Gen 10 - 11*

As a result of Noah's curse and blessing, we will have again two family lines for humanity (as it was for Cain and Seth): the ungodly line of Ham and the godly line of Shem. The genealogies

of chapters 10 and 11 show us that the ungodly line of Ham will originate all the future enemies of Israel: Egypt, Canaan, Babel, Assyria and the Philistines. While from the godly line of Shem will descend Abraham and God's chosen people. The genealogy of the third son of Noah, Japheth, is also reported: the gentiles (think Europeans) will originate from him.

So, Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, will repopulate the earth after the flood.

## **14. The Tower of Babel**

*Bible Reading: Gen 11:1-9*

The episode of the Tower of Babel shows how **after the flood sin continues to spread** throughout humankind.

The descendants of the ungodly line of Ham gather together with ungodly intents.

**Firstly**, they want to build a tower so high to reach the heavens. This is a sin, as it is an attempt to force their entry into heaven regardless of God's election.

**Secondly**, they want to *make a name for themselves (Gen 11:4)*. In Jewish culture, the name of a person is connected to the God given mission on earth for that person, or the vocation of the person. To make a name for themselves means they want to decide by themselves what their mission is, instead of receiving it from God.

But God sees the evil of their projects and stops them by confusing their languages and scattering them across the earth.

## **15. The theological message of the Flood**

It is evident how even after the flood, sin is back in the game which is most evident in the episode of the tower of Babel. Of course, God knew this would happen! **So why did God send the flood?** To teach us a spiritual lesson! The attempt to eliminate sin by killing the sinner does not work. Something else will be needed. God will rescue humankind through Jesus Christ, much later in the story.

Period 1 leaves us with one question: will we be like the people who invoke the name of the Lord (like the line of Seth) or like the people who want to make a name for themselves (like the line of Cain)? On this same question rests the individual journey of faith of **each one of us**. God's rescue plan for humankind will begin in period number 2 with the calling of one man: **Abraham**.



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