

Opening the Windows of Blessing

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HARVEST HOUSE™ PUBLISHERS

EUGENE, OREGON

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Cover by Koechel Peterson & Associates, Minneapolis, Minnesota

The New Inductive Study Series **OPENING THE WINDOWS OF BLESSING**

Copyright © 2003 by Precept Ministries International

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Arthur, Kay, 1933–

Opening the windows of blessing / Kay Arthur, Pete De Lacy, Bob Vereen.

p. cm. — (The new inductive study series)

ISBN 0-7369-0149-3 (pbk.)

1. Bible. O.T. Haggai—Study and teaching. 2. Bible. O.T. Zechariah—Study and teaching.

3. Bible. O.T. Malachi—Study and teaching. I. De Lacy, Peter. II. Vereen, Bob. III. Title.

IV. Series: Arthur, Kay, 1933–. The new inductive study series.

BS1655.55 .A78 2003

224'.9'0071—dc21

2002010022

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Printed in the United States of America.

03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 11 / BP-KB / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS



How to Get Started	5
HAGGAI	
Introduction	15
<i>Week One</i>	
Looking Forward to the Future	17
<i>Week Two</i>	
Do My Circumstances Have Anything to Do with My Behavior?	29
ZECHARIAH	
Introduction	39
<i>Week One</i>	
I Will Dwell in Your Midst	41
<i>Week Two</i>	
Clothed in Festal Robes	47
<i>Week Three</i>	
My House Is Not a Halfway House	53
<i>Week Four</i>	
Blessing Others	59
<i>Week Five</i>	
Your King Is Coming	65
<i>Week Six</i>	
The Blessing of the Lord as My Shepherd	69
<i>Week Seven</i>	
They Will Look upon Me Whom They Have Pierced	73

<i>Week Eight</i>	
The Nations Will Worship the King	79
MALACHI	
Introduction	87
<i>Week One</i>	
The Blessing of an Acceptable Offering	89
<i>Week Two</i>	
The Blessing of Keeping Covenant	97
<i>Week Three</i>	
The Blessing That Is Coming	105
Notes	111

HOW TO GET STARTED...



Let's face it, most of us think that directions are meant to be read only if we can't figure out what to do on our own. Reading directions slows us down and keeps us from getting on with the matter at hand. I understand. I feel the very same way! However, the brief directions which follow are an integral part of your study and will save you time and frustration in the long run, so take a few minutes and begin well!

FIRST

Let's talk about what you are going to need in order to do this study. In addition to this book, you will need three "tools":

1. A Bible. (*The New Inductive Study Bible [NISB]* is the ideal Bible for this type of study because of the single-column text, easy-to-read type, high-quality paper, wide margins, and innumerable study helps.) However, no matter which Bible you choose for this study, be aware that you will be instructed to mark its pages. So if you prefer not to mark in your Bible and you have access to a Bible program and a computer, you could print out the text of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi and work from your print-out. Or you could photocopy the text of these books from your Bible and work on that copy. (This is only permissible if it is for your own use.)

2. A four-color ballpoint pen, various colored fine-point pens, colored pencils, or an eight-color Pentel pencil (available from Precept Ministries International or at most office supply stores).

3. A composition book, journal, or notebook for working on your assignments and recording your insights and/or observations. Record your insights chapter by chapter, noting new chapter headings (chapter 1, chapter 2, and so on) as you move through the study.

SECOND

If you are doing this study within the framework of a group and find that you are not able to do each day's study in any given week, simply do what you can. Doing a little is better than doing nothing. Don't be an all-or-nothing person when it comes to Bible study.


Remember that when you get into God's Word, you enter into intensive warfare with the devil (our enemy). In Ephesians 6 we see that every piece of the Christian's spiritual armor relates to the Word of God. Our main offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, which Ephesians tells us is the Word of God. Satan wants you to fight with a dull sword. Don't cooperate! You don't have to! Just recognize that it's warfare.

As you study Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, you will be given specific instructions for each day. Each assignment will take about 15 to 20 minutes, depending on what is covered that day. Although you will have these specific daily instructions, there are basic things you need to know, do, and remember as you move through the books chapter by chapter. So let's cover these together now.

1. As you read each chapter, train yourself to ask the "5 W's and an H": who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Asking questions like these helps you see exactly what the Word of God is saying. When you interrogate the text with the 5 W's and an H, you'll ask questions like this:

- a. **What** is the chapter about?
- b. **Who** are the main characters?
- c. **When** does this event or teaching take place?
- d. **Where** does this happen?
- e. **Why** is this being done or said?
- f. **How** did it happen?



2. The time references indicating the “when” of events and teachings are very important and should be marked in an easily recognizable way in your Bible. We suggest putting a clock (like the one shown here)  in the margin of your Bible beside the verse where the time phrase occurs. You may prefer to draw the clock over the time-related word or phrase, or you may simply want to underline or color the references to time in one specific color.

Remember, time and chronological sequence may be expressed in a number of ways: by mentioning a specific time, day, month, or year, or by mentioning a specific event that clues you in to the time, such as a feast, a year of a king's reign, etc. Time may also be noted by words such as *then, when, afterwards, at this time*, etc.


3. There are key words you will want to color-code in the text of your Bible throughout your study. This is the reason for your colored pencils or pens. Developing the habit of marking your Bible in this way will make a significant difference in the effectiveness of your study and how much you remember.



A **key word** is an important word used by the author repeatedly to convey his message to the reader. In the same way that a key unlocks a door, key words unlock the

meaning of the text. Certain key words or phrases will show up throughout the book as a whole, while others will be concentrated in specific chapters or segments of the book. When you color-code a key word, be sure to mark its synonyms in the same way you mark the key word. (Remember that a synonym is a word that has the same meaning in the context as the key word you are marking.) Also mark pronouns that refer to the key word in the same way you are marking the word (*he, him, she, her, it, we, us, our, you, they, them, their*).

Marking key words allows you to identify the word and, thus, the sense of the text easily. You can mark words using colors, symbols, or a combination of both. However, colors are easier to distinguish than symbols when looking back at the text of your Bible. If you use symbols, try to keep them very simple. For example, I mark the word *curse* with a brown cloud outlined in orange . I mark the word *covenant* in red with a yellow rectangle around it .

Color draws your eye quickly to the word and trains it to recognize the word. A symbol conveys the meaning of the word. It may seem a little juvenile to mark words in this way, but if you will get past that feeling and cultivate the habit of marking key words in your Bible in a distinctive and memorable way, you will see a significant difference in your ability to retain what you study.

Let me give you another example of how to mark words. If you want to mark a particular reference to any of the Godhead, you can use yellow for all three, and then to distinguish between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you can draw a distinct symbol for each of the three with a purple pen. You could use a triangle like this:  *God* for God, mark the Son with a triangle incorporating a cross

in this way: Jesus , and mark the Holy Spirit with the triangle incorporating a cloud like this: Spirit .

You should devise a color-coding system for marking key words throughout your Bible so that when you look at the pages later, your eye will be drawn to the key words that you've marked. Once you begin color-coding key words, it's easy to forget what symbols or colors you are using to identify a particular word. You may wish to use the bottom portion of the perforated card in the back of this book to write the key words on. Mark the words the way you plan to mark them in your Bible and then use the card as a bookmark. You may want to make one bookmark for words marked consistently throughout your Bible and a different one for each specific book as you study.

In this study course, when you are instructed to mark a key word or phrase, you are given the New American Standard translation of the word or phrase. However, since other translations may translate a particular word or phrase from the Hebrew or Greek into English differently from the NASB, the King James Version (KJV), the New King James Version (NKJV), and the New International Version (NIV) equivalents are referenced in the notes section at the back of this book.

4. Since locations are very important when studying a historical or biographical book of the Bible, you will also want to mark these in a distinguishable way. We suggest simply double-underlining every reference to a location in green (grass and trees are green!).

It is also helpful to look up locations on maps to get a proper perspective of where things are occurring in relationship to each other. Using maps in this way will give you the "geographical" context. If you have a *New Inductive Study Bible (NISB)*, you will find maps pertinent

to a particular passage placed right in the text for ready reference. The maps are included in the Bible text so that you can tell where in the world it happened!

5. Every day when you finish your lesson, meditate on what you saw and ask your heavenly Father how you should live considering the truths you have just seen. At times, depending on how God has spoken to you, you might even want to record these “Lessons for Life” (LFL) in the margin of your Bible by the verses that contain the truth you are applying to your life. Put “LFL” in the margin of your Bible and then as briefly as possible record the lesson for life you want to remember under this heading.

6. Always begin your study with prayer. As you do your part to handle the Word of God accurately, remember that the Bible is a divinely inspired book. The words you are reading are truth, given to you by God that you might know Him and His ways. These truths are divinely revealed.

For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:10,11).

Therefore, ask God to reveal His truth to you, to lead you and guide you into all truth. He will, if you will ask.

THIRD

This study is designed to encourage you to spend time in the Word of God on a *daily* basis. Since man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God, we each need a daily helping of truth.

The weekly assignments cover all seven days; however, the seventh day is different from the other days. On the seventh day, the focus is on one or more major truths covered in that week's study. You will find a verse or two to memorize and STORE IN YOUR HEART. Then there is a passage to READ AND DISCUSS. This section will be extremely profitable for those who are using this material in a class setting because it will cause the class to focus their attention on a critical portion of Scripture. To aid the individual and/or the class, there's a set of QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR INDIVIDUAL STUDY. This section is followed with a THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK that will help you understand how to walk in the light of what you've learned.

When you discuss each week's lesson, be sure the answers and insights are supported from the Bible itself rather than opinion or just consensus. Using the Scripture in its context to support your answers develops the habit of "handling the Word accurately." Always examine your insights by carefully observing the text to see what it *says*. Then before you decide the *meaning* of a Scripture or a passage, make sure you interpret it in the light of its context.

Scripture will never contradict Scripture. If it ever seems to be contradictory, you can be assured that somewhere something is being taken out of its context. Therefore, when you come to a passage that is difficult to deal with, reserve your interpretations for a time when you can study the passage in greater depth.

Books in The New Inductive Study Series are survey courses. If you wish to do more in-depth study of a particular book of the Bible, we would suggest using the Precept Upon Precept Bible study course on that book.

More information on Precept Upon Precept Bible studies and where they are being taught can be obtained by contacting Precept Ministries International at 800-763-8280, visiting our website at www.precept.org, or filling out and mailing the response card in the back of this book.

Now then, reading the directions wasn't too bad, was it? You are on your way. Remember the prize is never given to those who don't finish the course...so "hangeth thou in there!"

*H*AGGAI

INTRODUCTION TO HAGGAI



“Obedience” is a word missing from the vocabulary of many people today. Yet it is the key to blessing. When God gave His commandments, statutes, and ordinances to His people, He had one objective—obedience! They were given for their good.

Among those commandments were statutes regarding the Sabbath. God instructed the children of Israel through Moses to observe a Sabbath once they entered the land He planned to give them. Six years the people could sow fields, prune vineyards, and gather crops, but during the seventh year they were commanded to let the land rest—a Sabbath to the Lord (Leviticus 25:1-7).

God warned them that if they chose not to obey, He would punish them seven times for their sins, lay waste their cities, make their sanctuaries desolate, scatter them among nations, and draw out a sword after them (Leviticus 26:27-35). God meant business. If they disobeyed, He would punish them until the land enjoyed its Sabbaths.

At the same time, God promised that if they would humble themselves before Him, confess their iniquity, and make amends, He would remember His covenant with them and not reject or destroy them (Leviticus 26:40-46).

Moses was faithful to give these words to the children of Israel. So they knew what to do, how to do it,

and when to do it. But they ignored the words God had spoken. The Lord sent prophet after prophet to remind them of what He had said, but they chose not to listen to His spokesmen. Therefore, God had only one option—to punish them for their own good, for blessing can never come apart from obedience.

Do you realize that because God is God, because He never changes, He deals with us today as He did with the children of Israel? We have His Word—the Bible. We *can* know what God wants us to do and how we are to live so that He might open the windows of heaven and pour out His blessings upon us. No book in the entire Bible illustrates the rewards of obedience and the penalties for disobedience in a more powerful and profound way than the book of Haggai.

LOOKING FORWARD TO THE FUTURE



In all probability, you've heard that wonderful promise God gave to Israel and Judah in Jeremiah 29:11 and you've longed to embrace it as your own. "For I know the plans that I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope."

Is it applicable to you?

Does God have a plan for your life?

Does God want the best for you?

Does God want you to have a future and a hope?

If so, what's your role in this promise, and how does it affect His ultimate desire for you?



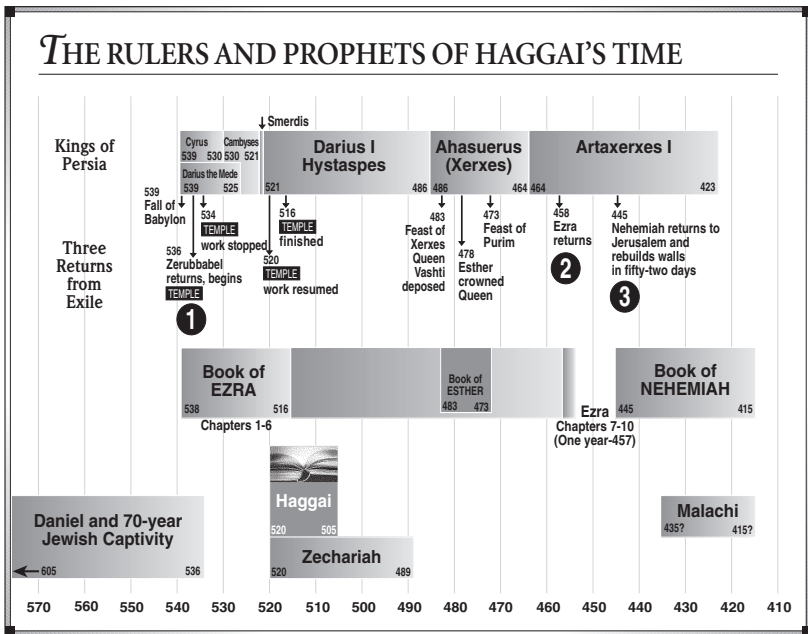
DAY ONE

Having a good grasp on the historical setting of the book of Haggai is critical to understanding the messages this spokesman for God delivered to the discouraged exiles of Judah. It will also help you in your study of Zechariah and Malachi. However, before you begin to establish the historical backdrop, read through this short book to get a sense of what it is all about.

Now, turn your attention to the first verse of chapter one. Using a green marker, underline the time phrase found at the beginning of this verse, including the year,

day, and month. Then draw a clock like this 🕒 in the margin next to verse 1.

Two questions to consider at this point are, Why do you suppose God reveals dates? And what is significant about the date given in verse 1? Does the RULERS AND PROPHETS OF HAGGAI'S TIME chart below give you a clue to the first question?



Let's see! Find "Darius I Hystaspes" on the RULERS AND PROPHETS OF HAGGAI'S TIME chart and record the dates he reigned:

Darius I Hystaspes reigned from _____ to _____ B.C.

Now look at the chart and record the dates of Haggai's ministry:

Haggai ministered from _____ to _____ B.C.

From this, what can you conclude about “the second year of Darius the king”? Is this the year Haggai began his ministry?

Why don't you write “520 B.C.” in the margin of your Bible next to Haggai 1:1 and record “Haggai begins his ministry” in the appropriate box on the TIME LINE chart on pages 26-27? This chart will be used throughout the week to develop a chronology of events that will help you see the historical setting of the book of Haggai. (If you find this chart too small to record answers, you might want to make a larger one in your notebook.)

DAY TWO

Today we want to answer the second question. What is the significance of 520 B.C. to what God says to the exiles through Haggai?

To answer this question, read 2 Chronicles 36:9-23.

In the *New Inductive Study Bible (NISB)*, 597 B.C. is written in the margin next to verses 9 and 11, 586 B.C. next to verse 18, and 538 B.C. next to verse 22. If you don't have this time-saving tool, write the dates in the margins of your Bible to show the chronology of the corresponding events.

As you read these verses, record the important facts you learn about kings Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, the people of God (Israel), and the temple (the house of the Lord) on the TIME LINE chart (pages 26-27) under the appropriate date.

DAY THREE

Now read Ezra 1:1-3 and notice how similar these verses are to 2 Chronicles 36:22,23.

Some historians believe that Cyrus conquered Babylon in October of 539 B.C. If this is true, “the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia” was from October 539 B.C. through September 538 B.C. These scholars also believe that Cyrus wrote his proclamation in the early months of 538 B.C. (the JEWISH CALENDAR below shows that the first month of the Hebrew calendar corresponds to our March-April). Accordingly, write 538 B.C. in the margin next to Ezra 1:1 to help you see the chronology.

The Jewish Calendar			
Babylonian names (B) for the months are still used today for the Jewish calendar. Canaanite names (C) were used prior to the Babylonian captivity in 586 B.C. Four are mentioned in the Old Testament.			
Adar-Sheni is an intercalary month used every two to three years or seven times in 19 years.			
1st month	2nd month	3rd month	4th month
Nisan (B) Abib (C) March-April	Iyyar (B) Ziv (C) April-May	Sivan (B) May-June	Tammuz (B) June-July
<i>7th month</i>	<i>8th month</i>	<i>9th month</i>	<i>10th month</i>
5th month	6th month	7th month	8th month
Ab (B) July-August	Elul (B) August-September	Tishri (B) Ethanim (C) September-October	Marcheshvan (B) Bul (C) October-November
<i>11th month</i>	<i>12th month</i>	<i>1st month</i>	<i>2nd month</i>
9th month	10th month	11th month	12th month
Chislev (B) November-December	Tebeth (B) December-January	Shebat (B) January-February	Adar (B) February-March
<i>3rd month</i>	<i>4th month</i>	<i>5th month</i>	<i>6th month</i>
<i>Sacred calendar appears in black • Civil calendar appears in gray</i>			

Now record the additional information you find in Ezra 1:3 on the TIME LINE chart under the 538 B.C. column.

You probably noticed that in Ezra and 2 Chronicles, one of Jeremiah’s prophecies is mentioned. What did he say?

Read Jeremiah 25:1-12. Keep in mind that the prophecy in Jeremiah 25 was given in 605 B.C.—prior to the reign of Jehoiachin and Zedekiah and just before Israel went into Babylonian captivity. Record what you learn in the appropriate column on the TIME LINE chart.

Now read Jeremiah 29:1-14. This prophecy was given after 586 B.C.—when the people of Israel were in exile in

Babylon repaying God for the Sabbaths they owed to the land. Record your insights on the TIME LINE chart under this date.



DAY FOUR

Today, read Isaiah 44:28–45:7 and note what Isaiah the prophet said about a king named Cyrus at least 100 years before his birth.

Look at the RULERS AND PROPHETS OF HAGGAI'S TIME chart once again on page 18 to see when Cyrus and Darius the Mede conquered Babylon.

Now read Ezra 1 to learn what Cyrus did and to see how the people responded. Record the major truths from chapter 1 on your TIME LINE chart under 538 B.C.

Ezra 2 includes a roll call of the first group of people led by Zerubbabel and Joshua (Yeshua) “who came up out of the captivity of the exiles” (2:1) and returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Look on the RULERS AND PROPHETS OF HAGGAI'S TIME chart to discover the date they returned. Record this fact on the TIME LINE chart under this date.

If you have time to read the entire chapter, it would be a good idea to do so. If not, at least read Ezra 2:64, which gives a summary of the total number of returnees. Add up the total number of people who returned. Record this number on the chart.

How long did it take the first group of exiles to return to Jerusalem from Babylon? The Bible doesn't say. However, read Ezra 7:8,9 to see how long it took the second group of exiles under the leadership of Ezra to make this same journey. Do you think it would have taken

Zerubbabel and Joshua approximately the same amount of time that it took Ezra? Record this also on the TIME LINE chart under 536 B.C.

Finally, read Ezra 3:1 and note where “the sons of Israel” went when they first arrived in the land and then where they later gathered in the seventh month. Now according to what you’ve already learned in Ezra 1, where were they supposed to go and what were they supposed to do? Did they immediately do it?

DAY FIVE

Read Ezra 3:2-9 to discover what the exiles did once they gathered in Jerusalem. Record these insights in the 536 B.C. column on the TIME LINE chart.

Also, look at the RULERS AND PROPHETS OF HAGGAI’S TIME chart on page 18 to locate the year when the people “began the work” on the temple. You may want to record this date in the margin of your Bible next to verse 8.

Now read Ezra 3:10-13 and record your summary of these events on the TIME LINE chart.

DAY SIX

Read Ezra 4:1-5 and record what you learn on the TIME LINE chart.

Ezra 4:6-23 is parenthetical. These verses tell us how long “the people of the land” tried to discourage “the people of the exile.” They tried during “all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia” (verse 5). Then they continued during “the reign of

Ahasuerus” (verse 6) and “the days of Artaxerxes” (verses 7-23).

Now read Ezra 4:24. Before you record anything on the chart, look again at the RULERS AND PROPHETS OF HAGGAI’S TIME chart to see when the work on the temple stopped. Record this date on the chart in the margin of your Bible next to verse Ezra 2:4.

Now for your final assignment in Ezra—establishing the historical setting for your studies in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Read Ezra 5:1,2. Record what you learn about the temple on your chart. Once again, look at the RULERS AND PROPHETS OF HAGGAI’S TIME chart to locate the date when the people “began to rebuild the house of God.”

Great! You’ve finished a good work. Now you have a brief overview of the historical setting of God’s people between 605 and 520 B.C. The temple had been lying desolate for some 14 years—from 534 to 520 B.C.—when God raised up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to speak to His leaders and to His people. What did God say? We’ll be looking at the messages delivered by these prophets in the weeks ahead.

DAY SEVEN



Store in your heart: Jeremiah 29:11.

Read and discuss: Jeremiah 25:8-12; 29:5-11; Ezra 1:1-11; 3:1-4:5; 4:24; 5:1,2.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

- ☞ Using the TIME LINE chart as a guide, what were the major events of each date and in which passage were these truths discovered?

- ☞ Why did God punish the children of Israel? What did they do? What did their kings do?
- ☞ How long was their punishment? Did the captivity last as long as God said it would? Explain your answer.
- ☞ What did God do when the punishment ended? How far in advance did God make plans for ending the captivity?
- ☞ How many exiles returned? What did they bring with them when they returned? Where did the resources to pay for the rebuilding of the temple come from?
- ☞ When the exiles gathered in Jerusalem, what did they do? Why did they gather in Jerusalem in that specific month? What was celebrated?
- ☞ How did enemies in the land respond to their building the temple? What happened shortly after they began?
- ☞ What role did Haggai and Zechariah play in the building of the temple?
- ☞ What did you learn about God from your study this week? What insights, if any, did you gain into His character or ways?
- ☞ Did you gain any insights into the consequences of disobedience? The blessings of obedience?

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

God declared centuries in advance that He would raise up a king to conquer the nation of Israel, take them into captivity, and keep them there for a specific length of time. He also stated that a king would be born to free His chosen people and release them from captivity. God fulfilled His

Word—both events are now recorded in His history book, the Bible.

God did what He said He would do. But His blessing was conditional—based upon the obedience of His people.

It's so easy to get discouraged, frightened, and frustrated. We can become sidetracked with personal projects, business ventures, relationships, finances, recreation, etc. It's easy to have our attention diverted to a thousand other things that have to be done. We often lose our focus and abandon the highest goal—knowing God and living accordingly.

His will and ways become clear to us when studying His Word becomes our first priority. Choosing to study the Bible is the very first act of obedience.

Congratulations! You've made that highest choice—one that pleases God and brings Him glory, for it gives a true estimate of who God is.

TIME LINE

605 B.C.

597 B.C.

586 B.C.

538 B.C.

536 B.C.

534 B.C.

520 B.C.