

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## PERSONAL JOURNAL & DISCUSSION GUIDE

JEAN E. JONES



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**The Story: Personal Journal & Discussion Guide**

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## Personal Journal & Discussion Guide

### *About the Author*

**Jean E. Jones** is a freelance author who began teaching the Bible to her friends in high school and has been teaching it in various capacities ever since. She has written several study guides for women's and couples' studies at various churches, including a thirteen-week study on Philippians and series for C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* and *The Screwtape Letters*.

Jean E. is privileged to serve on the women's Heartline ministry team at Crossline Community Church in southern California. Her husband, Clay Jones, who is always her first reader and offers valuable insights, holds a D.Min. from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and is an associate professor in the master of arts in Christian apologetics program at Biola University.

Jean E.'s most recent reflections can be found at [www.jeanejones.net](http://www.jeanejones.net).

### *About the Study*

*The Story: Personal Journal & Discussion Guide* is designed to accompany *The Story, NIV: The Bible as One Continuing Story of God and His People*. The questions will enhance your personal devotions by guiding you to more fully understand the text, by encouraging you to find ways to apply what you've learned to your everyday life, and by stimulating small group discussion.

Some of the questions are personal. These help you put yourself in the place of the people you're reading about and help small group members get to know each other. I encourage you to write out your answers, but you need not share your answers to personal questions unless you feel comfortable doing so. You'll discover that hearing others' stories enriches everyone and makes more evident the hand of God at work today.

How I wish I could hear your answers! Any time you wish, please feel free to hop over to my website's "**Let's Talk About 'The Story'**" page (<http://jeanejones.net/lesson-resources/>). Let me know your personal stories, what you're learning, and any questions you might have.

### *Introduction*

*Discover the Bible's grand story in thirty-one weeks!*

*The Story: Personal Journal & Discussion Guide* takes us through the Bible's main themes and reveals God's plan throughout human history. We'll read through excerpts from Genesis to Revelation using *The Story, NIV: The Bible as One Continuing Story of God and His People*. Then we'll answer questions in this journal and discussion guide, which will help us understand the passages we read and apply them to our lives. Through the thirty-one chapters, God's plan will unfold starting with what was lost in the Garden of Eden and culminating in what is regained in eternity.

The chapters in this study guide have five divisions so that you can break them into daily devotionals of about twenty minutes if you wish. Chapters begin with a key question that illumines the main theme. They then delve into questions designed to aid deeper reflection, spur spiritual growth, and promote meaningful discussions. The text explains historical background and key concepts. Timelines and charts illustrate how pieces fit together.

For those who want to dig deeper, footnotes provide additional explanations, related verses, and hyperlinks to related reading. The footnotes are entirely optional—I wrote them for small group leaders who want to prepare for questions that might come up and for the insatiably curious. They include links to scholarly articles by my wonderful husband, Dr. Clay Jones, who teaches Christian apologetics at Biola University. If you want still more, check out the “**Let’s Talk About ‘The Story’**” page on my website (<http://jeanejones.net/lesson-resources/>), where I’m regularly adding links.

Now, I’ve a short note for those of you who are reading the Old Testament for the first time. There will be some dark scenes: the Bible doesn’t hide human sin. The lives of some of the people we’ll read about were messy, just like ours. But just as light shines more brightly in darkness, so the glory of God’s redemption shines through the depth of human failing. We’ll find lessons in the darker parts too, and your understanding of God’s grace and mercy will deepen. I hope you’ll find that you can relate to many of these imperfect characters and take comfort in the fact that we all fall sometimes, but not farther than God’s grace can reach.

I pray that your love for God and his words will abound these thirty-one weeks as you step in with me to look closely at scenes here and there and then step back to see how each affects the big picture God is painting with the brushstrokes of history.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jean Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



# THE STORY

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## *Chapter 1: Creation: The Beginning of Life as We Know It*

**Key Question:** What was lost in the Garden of Eden, and why? Is there hope of getting it back?

### **Creation**

*Pages 1–4*

“In the beginning.” That’s where our story begins: the beginning—genesis—of creation.

1. (a) Who created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1)? (b) What rights do creators have over their creations?
  
2. For what purpose were humans created (Genesis 1:26)?
  
3. What was the status of all creation when God finished creating (Genesis 1:31)?

God made Adam<sup>1</sup> from the dust of the earth and placed him in the Garden of Eden. There God formed woman from man. Initially Adam called her *woman*; later he would name her Eve.

4. (a) What command did God give (Genesis 2:16–17)? (b) What would happen if Adam disobeyed? (c) Why do you think God gave Adam free will?

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<sup>1</sup> *Adam* is Hebrew for *man*.

5. (a) What two things did Adam and Eve not have (Genesis 2:25)? (b) Why did they feel no shame?

## Adam and Eve

*Pages 4–5*

Satan in the form of a serpent<sup>2</sup> spoke to Eve.

6. (a) How did the serpent's representation of God's command differ from God's actual command (compare Genesis 2:16–17 with Genesis 3:1)? (b) How does emphasizing what is denied rather than what is freely given affect contentment and gratefulness? (c) How can such an emphasis affect our relationship with God? (d) What can we do to combat this?
7. (a) In what way did the serpent say God had lied (Genesis 3:4)? (b) What did the serpent say was God's true motivation for denying the fruit (3:5)? (c) Why is it important to remember God's intentions for us are good when we're tempted to disobey his commands?

Eve had a choice: she could believe God or she could believe the serpent. God had never given her reason to doubt his character or his word, but now the serpent told her God was keeping something good from her. The desire to be like God, to be his equal even, enticed her, and she chose to believe the serpent.

8. How was Eve's rebellion against God similar to teenage rebellion against parents?

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<sup>2</sup> Revelation 12:9.

She reached out her hand, took of the fruit, and gave some to her husband. Their eyes opened and those who had never known shame felt its deathly pall and knew Eve had chosen wrongly. They knew too that they were naked, for the ashamed dread nakedness.

9. (a) Adam and Eve tried to cover up their shame with fig leaves.<sup>3</sup> What are ways we try to cover up shame? (b) When they heard God coming, they hid behind trees.<sup>4</sup> What are ways people hide from God when they feel ashamed? (c) When God asked Adam where he was, what did Adam reply (Genesis 3:10)?

God had seen Adam naked before. Adam's great fear was that God would find out about the fruit, not his nakedness.

God asked Adam if he had eaten the forbidden fruit. God knew the answer, but gave Adam a chance to confess.

10. (a) What two beings did Adam blame for his transgression (Genesis 3:12)? (b) Whom did Eve blame (Genesis 3:13)? (c) Does blaming others remove guilt? Why or why not? (d) Eve's response was an appeal to pity: "I'm a victim, so it's not really my fault." What are other ways people appeal to pity to escape responsibility for wrongdoing?

## The Judgment

*Pages 5–7*

God judged the three beings, but in the judgment gave hope to the man and woman.

11. (a) What would the serpent do to a descendant of Eve's (Genesis 3:15)? (b) What would Eve's descendant do to the serpent (3:15)?

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 3:7.

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 3:8.

God cursed the serpent, but not the man and woman.<sup>5</sup> Instead, God promised a Serpent Crusher would one day come. The serpent would bruise his heel, but Eve's offspring—her “seed”<sup>6</sup>—would deal him a mortal blow.

Within Eve's judgment of painful childbirth lived the hope of bearing children. Within Adam's judgment of painful toil remained the hope of producing life-sustaining food. Though they would die, the human race would continue.

God cursed the ground too: it would bear thorns and thistles and was bound to decay.<sup>7</sup> The earth would pass away.<sup>8</sup>

12. Are there any natural evils—mold, cancer, tsunamis, etc.—that could not have resulted from God cursing the ground?<sup>9</sup>

Hearing God's judgment combined with hope, Adam with faith now “named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all living.”<sup>10</sup> In compassion, God clothed Adam and Eve, covering their shame and protecting them from the elements.

13. (a) What would humans now know (Genesis 3:22)? (b) Why did God banish them from the Garden of Eden (3:22–24)? (c) Why wouldn't God want creatures that had chosen to rebel to be able to live forever? (d) What hope did God give in letting us know a tree of life exists?

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<sup>5</sup> Not all divine penalties are curses. Adam and Eve did not lose God's entire blessing, and their penalty contained hope of future blessing.

<sup>6</sup> The Hebrew word translated *offspring* means “seed.” In the Bible, offspring are often called seeds.

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 3:17–19; Romans 8:21.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 21:33; 1 John 2:17.

<sup>9</sup> See also Isaiah 24:4–6.

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 3:20. *Eve* sounds like the Hebrew word for *living*.

By taking of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam plunged humankind into knowing evil, but also into knowing good.

14. (a) Give an example from history in which great good became known in the face of great evil. (b) Without naming names, give an example in which an experience with a person who lacked a virtue caused you to better understand the virtue and appreciate it in others. (c) How does knowing evil enhance our knowledge and appreciation of good?

In the face of evil, such goods as self-sacrifice, courage, grace, and mercy are made evident. None of these are humanly possible without the risk of personal loss or harm. The greater the loss or harm, the more heroic is the virtue that counters it.

## **Eve's Offspring**

*Pages 7–9*

Eve bore children, and the earth bore food. Her first children, Cain and Abel, brought offerings to the Lord. The Lord accepted Abel's offering, but not Cain's.<sup>11</sup>

15. (a) How did Cain respond to God's disapproval (Genesis 4:5)? (b) How do God's three questions indicate Cain knew what was right to do and therefore had no valid reason for anger (4:6–7)? (c) What did God warn Cain he must do (4:7)? (d) List some temptations that accompany jealousy. (e) What are things we can do to help us master sin?

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<sup>11</sup> We're not told what was wrong with Cain's offering. That Abel brought "some of the firstborn" while Cain brought "some of the fruits"—not some of the firstfruits—suggests Cain may have brought leftovers. The heart attitude counts most in offerings. Hebrews 11:4 tells us Abel gave his offering in faith, unlike Cain. (See Exodus 23:19a on the later firstfruits offerings.)

Cain didn't heed the Lord's warning. Instead, he gave in to sin and killed his brother. God cursed Cain and drove him from his presence,<sup>12</sup> and Adam and Eve knew evil.

Time passed. Adam and Eve bore more children and eventually died. In those days, people lived nearly 1,000 years. As people increased, so did violence.

16. (a) What did the Lord see when he looked into people's hearts (Genesis 6:5)? (b) With what did this heart condition fill the earth (6:11)? (c) Was creation's status still "very good"? Why or why not? (d) Think of a violent, corrupt ruler from history. What would be different if that person could live 1,000 years? (e) What do you think it was like to live during that time?

Among all the evil people of the time, a righteous man stood out: Noah. God told Noah to build an ark to save himself, his family, and animals from coming floodwaters.

The Lord said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years."<sup>13</sup> Though this passage may mean that God gave Noah 120 years to build the ark, there's another meaning: after the flood, God shortened people's lives, thus limiting the evil any one person could commit, as well as limiting the evil any one person had to endure.

## The Flood

*Pages 9–12*

Rain fell for forty days. Only those in the ark survived. They stayed in the ark until the waters receded, just over a year.<sup>14</sup>

The Lord brought Noah's family out of the ark and warned them not to return to violence, for he would demand an accounting for bloodshed.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Genesis 4:11–16.

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 6:3.

<sup>14</sup> Compare Genesis 7:11 with 8:13.

<sup>15</sup> Genesis 9:5–6.

17. (a) What covenant did God make with earth's creatures (Genesis 9:12–16)? (b) What was the sign of the covenant? (c) How was the flood meant for humankind's ultimate good? (d) How did the rainbow reflect God's good intentions for humankind?

God blessed Noah's family and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth."<sup>16</sup> The blessing was similar to that which God gave to their first parents, Adam and Eve, but it left out something: ruling the earth. For when Adam and Eve obeyed Satan rather than God, they lost their reign to him.<sup>17</sup>

And yet there remained elements of hope. The rainbow gave hope of life and told of God's love and his desire for people to live kindly together. That God did not destroy the tree of life, but merely barred the way to it, gave hope that one day the way to it might be opened. The promise of a Serpent Crusher gave hope that the serpent's rule would end. That Adam and Eve through pain could bear and sustain life gave hope that the Serpent Crusher's bruised heel might be life-giving too.

The story has just begun. Next week we meet the family through which the seed of the Serpent Crusher will be traced.

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<sup>16</sup> Genesis 9:1.

<sup>17</sup> Jesus calls Satan the prince of this world (John 14:30). See also Ephesians 2:22.

## Bible Outline

### Old Testament

#### Five Books of Moses

Genesis  
Exodus  
Leviticus  
Numbers  
Deuteronomy

#### Histories

Joshua  
Judges  
Ruth  
1 Samuel  
2 Samuel  
1 Kings  
2 Kings  
1 Chronicles  
2 Chronicles  
Ezra  
Nehemiah  
Esther

#### Books of Wisdom

Job  
Psalms  
Proverbs  
Ecclesiastes  
Song of Songs

#### Prophetic

##### Major Prophets

Isaiah  
Jeremiah  
Lamentations  
Ezekiel  
Daniel

##### Twelve Minor Prophets

Hosea  
Joel  
Amos  
Obadiah  
Jonah  
Micah  
Nahum  
Habakkuk  
Zephaniah  
Haggai  
Zechariah  
Malachi

### New Testament

#### Four Gospels

Matthew  
Mark  
Luke  
John

#### History

Acts

#### Letters

##### Letters of Paul

Romans  
1 Corinthians  
2 Corinthians  
Galatians  
Ephesians  
Philippians  
Colossians  
1 Thessalonians  
2 Thessalonians  
1 Timothy  
2 Timothy  
Titus  
Philemon

##### General Letters

Hebrews  
James  
1 Peter  
2 Peter  
1 John  
2 John  
3 John  
Jude

#### Prophetic

Revelation



# THE STORY

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## *Chapter 2: God Builds a Nation*

**Key Question:** What can we learn about faith from Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob?

### **The Call**

*Pages 13–16*

Noah's descendents spread out over the earth. As time passed, people again rejected God's way for their own way. God chose a man for a special purpose: building a nation to represent him.

The prophet Abram was seventy-five years old when God told him to leave his home and go to Canaan. His wife Sarai was sixty-five, still beautiful, but barren.

1. (a) What did God tell Abram he would do for him (Genesis 12:2–3)? (b) What would happen through Abram to all peoples on earth (12:3)? (c) What part of this promise was particularly surprising considering Abram was childless? (d) How did Abram show his faith in God (12:4)? (e) How does our obedience to God's commands show our faith in him?

After Abram arrived in Canaan, God showed him the land he would give Abram's offspring, who would be more numerous than the dust of the earth.<sup>18</sup>

The Lord blessed Abram by keeping him safe in this dangerous land, just as he promised. In fact, God enabled him to rescue his nephew Lot from the armies of four strong kings with only 318 men.<sup>19</sup> Yet one thing puzzled Abram.

2. (a) What had God still not given Abram (Genesis 15:2–3)? (b) What did God promise Abram (15:4–5)? (c) What was Abram's response (15:6)? (d) What was the Lord's response (15:6)?

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<sup>18</sup> Genesis 13:14–17.

<sup>19</sup> Genesis 14.

That night, God gave Abram a miraculous sign. When people made covenants in those days, they sacrificed animals, cut the carcasses in two, and laid the pieces across from each other. The parties spoke the terms of the covenant and walked between the pieces. God told Abraham to sacrifice and lay out animals. He told Abram to know for certain that his descendants would possess this land in four hundred years. Then a smoking firepot and blazing torch appeared and passed between the animal pieces: all would come to pass.<sup>20</sup>

## The Proof

*Pages 16–18*

A decade passed and Sarai, thinking she had no chance of bearing a child for Abram, offered her servant Hagar to mother a child for her.<sup>21</sup> When Hagar became pregnant, though, she acted haughtily towards Sarai. They argued and Hagar fled. The angel of the Lord came to Hagar.

3. (a) What did the angel of the Lord tell Hagar to do (Genesis 16:9)? (b) Why does it take humility to mend a relationship by doing what was right, even though the other person did wrong too? (c) Why did the angel of the Lord say to name her child Ishmael, which means “God hears” (16:11)? (d) What name did she give to the Lord (16:13)? (e) What do you learn from these two names for God that you can apply to a current situation?

A long thirteen years later, the Lord again appeared to Abram.

4. (a) How did the Lord identify himself to Abraham (Genesis 17:1)? (b) What do you learn from this name that you can apply to a current situation? (c) What did God tell Abram to do (17:1)? (d) What was God about to do (17:2)?

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<sup>20</sup> Genesis 15:7–21.

<sup>21</sup> This was a common practice. Hagar became a wife of lower status than Sarai.

God told Abram to call himself Abraham.<sup>22</sup> He made a covenant with Abraham in which God would make Abraham the father of many nations and kings. Abraham's part of the covenant was to circumcise himself and all the males of his household. Every baby boy descended from him was to be circumcised at eight days old.

God also told Abraham to call his wife Sarah instead of Sarai,<sup>23</sup> and said he would bless the approximately eighty-nine-year-old Sarah so that she could bear a son within a year. They were to name him Isaac, and he would be the child through whom God would establish his covenant.<sup>24</sup>

Though such a pregnancy was humanly impossible, Abraham trusted God and circumcised all the males in his household.

And so, twenty-five years after God told Abraham to go to Canaan, when Abraham was one hundred years old and Sarah ninety, God miraculously blessed Sarah and she bore the child of promise: Isaac.

## The Test

*Pages 18–21*

Abraham watched Isaac grow up. He'd seen God's miraculous hand in his life many times. He was a prophet who had talked with God and with angels. He'd received astonishing blessings. God had promised Abraham that Isaac would be his heir and the child of the covenant. But then God tested Abraham's faith in this promise by asking him to do something that appeared to make the promise's fulfillment impossible.<sup>25</sup>

5. (a) What did God ask Abraham to do with his beloved son, the only son of God's promise (Genesis 22:2)? (b) "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead,"<sup>26</sup> and so his faith stood firm. How did Abraham demonstrate his faith that obeying God wouldn't stop Isaac from being the child of promise (22:5)?

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<sup>22</sup> *Abram* means *exalted father* and *Abraham* means *father of many*.

<sup>23</sup> Both names mean *princess*.

<sup>24</sup> Genesis 17:15–19.

<sup>25</sup> For a fuller examination of this test, see *Abraham, Isaac & Child Sacrifice* at [www.jeanejones.net/2011/10/abraham-isaac-child-sacrifice](http://www.jeanejones.net/2011/10/abraham-isaac-child-sacrifice).

<sup>26</sup> Hebrews 11:19.

The angel of the Lord stopped Abraham before Isaac was harmed.

6. (a) What did Abraham's willingness to obey God prove (Genesis 22:11–12)? (b) When God provided a ram to substitute as a sacrifice, what did Abraham call the place (22:13–14)?
  
7. (a) What would happen through Abraham's offspring—his "seed" (Genesis 22:18)? (b) What "seed" did we read about last week that was promised to Eve<sup>27</sup>?

God sometimes asked prophets to perform actions that foreshadowed and explained important future events. Abraham and Isaac were both prophets, and their actions told their descendants that God can provide a substitute for someone destined for death. They didn't know it yet, but their actions also foreshadowed how the seed promised to Eve and now to them would one day crush the serpent and bless all peoples.

## Jacob

*Pages 21–24*

Isaac married Rebekah when he was forty. She, like Sarah, was barren. Isaac prayed for her, and finally, twenty years later, she became pregnant. God told her she carried twins, both of whom would become nations, but the older would serve the younger. She gave birth to Esau and Jacob. They grew into manhood, with Isaac favoring Esau and Rebekah favoring Jacob.

Esau was born first and normally would have received both a double inheritance and the covenant promise of fathering the nation that would belong to God. But he came home hungry one day and found Jacob cooking red lentil stew. In exchange for a bowl, he swore an oath giving Jacob his birthrights, thus despising God's covenant and showing himself to be godless.<sup>28</sup>

When Isaac was old and blind, he asked Esau to hunt game and fix him a meal, after which he would bless Esau.<sup>29</sup> Rebekah overheard, and she and Jacob tricked Isaac into blessing Jacob. Isaac blessed him with the riches of the land, with ruling over his relatives, and with blessings for those who bless him and

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<sup>27</sup> Genesis 3:15

<sup>28</sup> Genesis 25:34; Hebrews 12:16.

<sup>29</sup> Oral deathbed blessings were legally binding.

curses for those who curse him—all aspects of God’s promises to Abraham and an unwitting affirmation of God’s promise to Rebekah.

When Esau discovered Jacob had received the blessing Isaac intended for him, he was furious and said he would kill Jacob after Isaac died. Wanting to keep Jacob safe, Rebekah convinced Isaac to send Jacob to her brother to marry one of her nieces.

As Jacob journeyed, the Lord appeared to him in a dream and told him the covenant promise would be through him, and God would watch over him and bring him back safely.<sup>30</sup> Jacob named the place where God spoke to him Bethel.<sup>31</sup>

Jacob fell in love with his cousin Rachel and arranged to marry her in return for seven years’ work. But after the seven years, his uncle deceived Jacob into marrying Rachel’s sister Leah. When Jacob discovered he’d married the wrong girl, he angrily confronted his uncle. The girl’s father agreed to let him marry Rachel a week later in return for Jacob’s promise of another seven years’ labor.

Through the years, the sisters’ dad repeatedly tricked and cheated Jacob, but God intervened and made Jacob wealthy at the expense of his deceitful uncle. Twenty years later God told Jacob to return home.<sup>32</sup> Jacob feared facing Esau, but obeyed.

The night before reaching his brother, a man wrestled with Jacob until daybreak.

8. (a) How did the man show Jacob he could disable him at any time (Genesis 32: 25)? (b) Jacob apparently realized the man was no ordinary human. For what did he ask (32:26)? (c) The man gave Jacob a new name: Israel.<sup>33</sup> With whom had Jacob been wrestling (32:28–30)?<sup>34</sup> (d) Who was the true source of all his blessings (32:29)?

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<sup>30</sup> Genesis 28:13–15.

<sup>31</sup> Genesis 28:19.

<sup>32</sup> Rebekah had promised to send for Jacob as soon as Esau’s anger subsided (Genesis 27:45), probably anticipating a short separation. She never called for him and may not have lived to see his return or the reuniting of the brothers. By manipulating her husband and children to get what she wanted for her son, she lost her treasured relationship with her son. She hurt Isaac and Esau, and she indirectly caused Jacob to suffer as he unlearned the deceitfulness she taught him. She didn’t trust God to fulfill his promise to her without her intervention.

<sup>33</sup> *Israel* means “God struggles” or “he struggles with God.”

<sup>34</sup> God appeared in the form of an angel so that Jacob could wrestle with him (see Hosea 12:3–4). Some Christians think such appearances are of the preincarnate Christ.

Jacob had used trickery to get the blessing his father wanted to give Esau, and suffered the consequence of estranged relationships. Jacob learned what it was like to be at the receiving end of deceit and trickery when he suffered under his uncle's treachery. But though God disciplined Jacob, he also blessed him and showed him repeatedly that it was he who was the true source of blessings.

9. (a) Briefly describe how deception hurt a relationship in your life, without naming names.  
(b) God commands us not to lie or use deceit.<sup>35</sup> How does using deception to obtain what we want rather than obeying God show lack of faith in God?

## Israel

*Pages 24–27*

Instead of trying to kill him, when Esau met Jacob, Esau embraced and kissed him. God had changed Esau's heart and kept Jacob safe, as he promised.

10. (a) Describe a time God mended a relationship in your life by changing someone's heart (yours or another person's). (b) Write a praise to God for this restoration.

God sent Jacob back to Bethel, where he had appeared to him previously. There he told him again that his new name was to be Israel, and that he would give his descendants the land promised to Abraham and Isaac.

11. Many years later, a New Testament author wrote about the faith of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob. What stands out to you the most from Hebrews 11:6–20? Why?

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<sup>35</sup> "Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another" (Leviticus 19:11). See also Romans 1:29; 2 Corinthians 4:2; Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Peter 2:1.

12. Which one of the following attributes of God that we've read about this week do you most need to remember today? Why?

Your shield

Credits your faith as righteousness

Hears your cries

Is faithful

Is God almighty

Your very great reward

Has power to do what he promises

Sees you

Will provide

From the twelve sons of Israel would come a nation of twelve tribes. But there would be hard times first. When the Lord made his covenant with Abraham, he told him this:

Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites<sup>36</sup> has not yet reached its full measure. *Genesis 15:13–16*

The descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob needed to remember the miracles the Lord had done in the patriarchs' lives if their faith wasn't to waiver.

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<sup>36</sup> The Amorites were Canaanites. God would remove the Canaanites because of their great wickedness. Though God judged two Canaanite cities in Abraham's time (Sodom and Gomorrah—see Genesis 18–19), the people in the rest of the land would not reach the level of sin that would justify removal for four hundred years.

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 3: Joseph: From Slave to Deputy Pharaoh*

**Key Question:** What can we learn from Joseph about trusting God through hardship and betrayal?

### **From Favorite to Enslavement**

*Pages 29–31*

Everyone knew Joseph was his dad’s favorite. His mother, Rachel, was the only wife his dad had truly loved.<sup>37</sup> She was barren, though, and his dad prayed many years for her to have a child. Finally when his dad, Jacob, was 91,<sup>38</sup> Rachel gave birth to Joseph, bringing joy to them both.

Joseph was Jacob’s eleventh son. Eventually Rachel became pregnant again, but grief struck when she died giving birth to little Benjamin.

Although the family was blessed in many ways, they suffered tragedies too, some from living in a harsh land and some from Joseph’s brothers’ bad choices,<sup>39</sup> including his oldest brother, Reuben, sleeping with his dad’s concubine.<sup>40</sup>

When Joseph was seventeen, Jacob gave him a beautiful coat, inflaming his brothers’ jealousy.

1. (a) What are some of the reasons Joseph’s brothers hated him (Genesis 37:2–11)? (b) What are some areas in which Joseph’s character perhaps needed to grow? (c) What are ways that parents can combat rivalry among their children?

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<sup>37</sup> Jacob fell in love with his cousin Rachel. His uncle agreed to give him Rachel as wife if Jacob worked for him seven years. Jacob did so, but on his wedding night, his uncle sent Leah into his dark tent. Leah slept with him, letting him think she was Rachel. When Jacob discovered the deception the next morning, he was furious and demanded Rachel as promised. His uncle let him marry Rachel a week later in return for another seven years’ labor. Leah envied Jacob’s love for Rachel. She bore four sons right away and hoped this would cause Jacob to love her like he loved Rachel. Rachel desperately wanted children and out of jealousy over Leah’s sons, gave Jacob her maidservant to bear children for her. The maidservant bore two sons. Leah stopped bearing children for awhile and, competing with Rachel, gave her maidservant to Jacob too. That maidservant also bore two boys. Leah bargained with Rachel to let her sleep with Jacob, and she bore two more sons and a daughter—seven children in all. Finally, Rachel became pregnant and bore Joseph.

<sup>38</sup> Jacob came to Egypt when he was 130 (Genesis 47:9) and Joseph was 39 (41:46–47; 45:6), making him 91 at Joseph’s birth.

<sup>39</sup> A Canaanite raped Joseph’s sister, and two of his furious brothers (Simeon and Levi) in revenge killed all the city’s men and plundered the city’s goods, women, and children (Genesis 34). Jacob later said their violence towards men and beasts was cruel and cursed (Genesis 49:5–7).

<sup>40</sup> Genesis 35:22. Firstborn sons inherited their father’s concubines, and Reuben was probably trying to claim prematurely what he thought would be his right one day.



Not long after Joseph had brought a bad report to his father about how his brothers tended their flocks, Jacob again sent Joseph to check on his brothers. The brothers saw him coming and plotted to kill him.

2. (a) How did the oldest brother, Reuben, attempt to rescue Joseph (Genesis 37:21–22)? (b) What plan did Judah—fourth oldest—devise (37:26–27)? (c) The other brothers followed Judah’s leadership. How might Reuben’s incest have eroded his moral authority and lessened his effectiveness as a leader among his brothers?

They sold Joseph to Ishmaelite merchants, who took him to Egypt. To cover their crime, the brothers dipped Joseph’s robe in goat’s blood and gave it to their father so he would think Joseph dead. Jacob was devastated.

### **Can It get Any Worse?**

*Pages 31–33*

In Egypt, Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh’s guard, bought Joseph as a slave.

3. (a) What are some of the feelings Joseph may have had when he found himself a slave in Egypt? (b) Had he ended up in this situation because God had abandoned him (Genesis 39:2)? (c) In what ways did God bless Joseph (39:2–4)? (d) Briefly describe a hardship you endured and how God cared for you through it.

Potiphar's wife thought Joseph handsome and wanted to sleep with him.

4. (a) What did Joseph consider about his master that helped him resist sexual temptation (Genesis 39:8–9a)? (b) What did Joseph consider about God that helped him resist (39:9b)? (c) What actions did Joseph take to resist (39:10)? (d) When he found himself alone with her and entrapped, what did he do (39:11–12)? (e) What can we learn from Joseph about resisting sexual temptation?

The rebuffed temptress accused the young Hebrew of trying to sleep with her, and Potiphar threw Joseph in prison.

5. (a) Was Joseph in prison because God had abandoned him (Genesis 39:21)? (b) What evidence of God's presence did Joseph find (Genesis 39:21–23)? (c) Does faithfulness to God mean we'll never suffer wrongly from the schemes of the wicked on this earth?

The wicked must be permitted to succeed in some evil schemes to expose what's in their hearts and to justify judgment. Yet the New Testament tells us there is a time appointed when the Lord "will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God" (1 Corinthians 4:5).<sup>41</sup>

6. (a) What warning should we heed about motives being exposed? (b) What comfort can we derive from this verse when others believe false accusations about us?

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<sup>41</sup> In this passage, Paul was responding to false accusations regarding his motives. He says his conscience is clear, but he knows that doesn't mean he's innocent. He tells his accusers not to judge his motives, which are for now hidden in darkness but will be exposed and open to judgment at the appointed time.

Joseph again served faithfully in the difficult, undeserved circumstances in which he found himself. One night two fellow prisoners had prophetic dreams, and God showed Joseph their interpretations. He told one of the prisoners he would be freed in three days and asked for help clearing his name. The man was freed, but forgot Joseph.

Two years later, Pharaoh had a disturbing dream, and the exonerated prisoner told him about Joseph.

7. (a) How did Joseph know what certain dreams meant (Genesis 41:16)? (b) Joseph told Pharaoh the dreams were God revealing to Pharaoh that seven years of abundance would be followed by seven years of famine. He advised Pharaoh on how to prepare for the famine. How did God exalt Joseph (41:39–40)?

## **Dreams Proved Prophetic**

*Pages 34–37*

Joseph was thirty years old when he entered Pharaoh's service.<sup>42</sup> He collected grain during the abundant years. When the predicted drought arrived and famine began to spread, he sold the grain to those in need. Joseph's ten older brothers were among those who came to buy grain. When they bowed before him, Joseph recognized them and realized the dreams he had told his brothers about when he was seventeen had now come to pass.

8. (a) How did the dreams let Joseph know he had been in God's hands through all the hard times? (b) Joseph said he wanted to find out if they were "honest men." The brothers assumed he meant only whether they were honest about not being spies. About what else might Joseph have wanted to know whether they were being honest (Genesis 42:19–20)? (c) Is it wise to test someone who has intentionally sinned against you before trusting him or her? Why or why not?

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<sup>42</sup> Genesis 41:46.

9. (a) Joseph overheard his brothers talking about how they had treated him two decades before. What were they feeling (42:21–23)? (b) What do you think it was like for them to carry their secret for over twenty years, knowing they'd greatly grieved both their brother and their father? (c) What did overhearing this conversation tell Joseph about his brothers? (d) Joseph kept Simeon<sup>43</sup> in prison until the others returned with Benjamin. Do you think Simeon felt this imprisonment was just? Why or why not (42:21, 24)?

Jacob wouldn't let them take Benjamin to Egypt until they ran out of food and he had no choice. Judah told his father he would be personally responsible for Benjamin's safe return, and the brothers returned to Egypt with Benjamin.

## Secrets Revealed

*Pages 37–40*

Joseph had tests for the men who had once gone to extraordinary, dishonest means to get rid of a brother of whom they were jealous. He offered them an easy and legitimate way to dispose of another. First he served a meal and gave Benjamin five times the food as the rest. Then he had his steward place his silver cup in Benjamin's sack of grain. The next morning, the steward found the cup in Benjamin's sack.

10. (a) If the older brothers were still driven by jealousy, how would they have reacted to Benjamin's receiving more food than they (Genesis 43:34)? (b) When the steward found the cup in Benjamin's sack, what did Judah say had been uncovered, and what do you think he meant by it (44:16)?

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<sup>43</sup> Simeon was the second oldest. Perhaps Joseph chose him because he now knew that Reuben, the oldest, had tried to rescue Joseph from the others.

Joseph said he would keep Benjamin as a slave while the rest returned to their father in peace.

11. (a) In what ways had Judah's heart changed since he devised the plan to sell Joseph (Genesis 44:33–34)? (b) What did Joseph now know about his brothers' intentions towards Benjamin?

Joseph sent away his attendants and wept loudly, the pain of all he'd suffered pouring from his heart and the knowledge that his brothers mourned their ill-treatment of him spreading salve over his wounds.<sup>44</sup> Speaking in Hebrew to them for the first time, he told them who he was.

12. (a) How did Joseph try to comfort his terrified brothers (Genesis 45:5)? (b) Why had God allowed the brothers to carry out their cruel act (45:5–8)? (c) If possible, describe a good that came out of a wrong done to you, without naming wrongdoers.

## God's Plan

*Pages 40–42*

Joseph told his brothers to bring his father to Egypt. That meant confessing to their father the secret sin that had weighed on them so long.

13. If you've confessed a burdensome secret to someone mature who loved and accepted you, briefly describe your feelings before and after.

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<sup>44</sup> For more on how Joseph triumphed over betrayal and forgave his brothers, see [www.jeanejones.net/2012/06/joseph-triumph-over-betrayal](http://www.jeanejones.net/2012/06/joseph-triumph-over-betrayal).

The family lived together in Egypt. Seventeen years later, Jacob knew he was close to death and adopted Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, so they would inherit as one of his other children.<sup>45</sup> In this way he gave Joseph the double-inheritance of a firstborn son.<sup>46</sup> Then he blessed his twelve sons and prophesied over them. There was a special promise to Judah, who had been willing to lay down his life for his youngest brother for the sake of his love for his father:

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his. *Genesis 49:10*

After Jacob died, the ten oldest brothers feared Joseph's wrath. They sent Joseph a message saying their father wanted him to forgive them, and they asked his forgiveness.

14. (a) How was the brothers' offering themselves as slaves appropriate (Genesis 50:18)? (b) How did Joseph demonstrate forgiveness (50:19–21)? (c) How can you demonstrate forgiveness to someone who wants your forgiveness?

Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

15. (a) How did God work all things in Joseph's life for good? (b) Why is faith in God's ability to work good out of bad circumstances necessary to forgive those who have wronged us in ways that seem irreparable?<sup>47</sup> (c) Describe the good God worked from a hardship that you couldn't imagine good coming from while you were in the midst of it. (d) What lessons do you need to remember to trust God through the current or next hardship you encounter?

Prophets' lives sometimes foretold momentous future events. Next week we'll see how just as Joseph went from favorite to enslavement to exaltation, so did the growing nation of Israel.

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<sup>45</sup> Jacob also said that when their descendants returned to the Promised Land and the territories were named for the sons, Manasseh and Ephraim would have territories named for them (Genesis 48:5–6).

<sup>46</sup> The oldest son, Reuben, sacrificed his right to it when he slept with his father's concubine (Genesis 49:3–4).

<sup>47</sup> Sometimes we don't know the good God brings until heaven.

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 4: Deliverance*

**Key Question:** How can we nurture faith rather than doubts?

### **The Call**

*Pages 43–47*

God warned Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved and mistreated in a foreign land for four hundred years, after which he would bring them to the Promised Land.<sup>48</sup> As we pick up the story, four hundred years have passed since Joseph's family came to Egypt, and the people were indeed suffering under Pharaoh.

1. (a) In what ways did Pharaoh oppress the Israelites (Exodus 1:11–16, 22)? (b) Do you think the Israelites would have been willing to follow Moses out of Egypt if their lives were prosperous and comfortable? Why or why not? (c) If possible, briefly describe a time God used difficulties to guide you to make a change.

When Moses was born, Pharaoh's daughter rescued him from the Nile and raised him as her son. When he grew up, he killed an Egyptian who mistreated a Hebrew<sup>49</sup> and fled from Pharaoh to Midian. That Pharaoh eventually died, but the new Pharaoh continued mistreating the Hebrews, and the people cried out to God in their misery.

One day on Mount Horeb,<sup>50</sup> Moses saw a bush that appeared to be on fire without being consumed by the flames. As he approached to see this wonder, the Lord God called to him from the bush.

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<sup>48</sup> Genesis 15:13–15.

<sup>49</sup> At this time, the Israelites (descendants of Israel) were often called *Hebrews* (descendants of Eber, Genesis 11:14). After the Assyrian exile they were also called Jews (from Judah).

<sup>50</sup> Mount Horeb is probably another name for Mount Sinai.

2. (a) How did God first identify himself to Moses (Exodus 3:6)? (b) What had God seen and heard, and what was his reaction (3:7, 9)? (c) What did God plan to do about what he had seen (3:8)? (d) What do you learn about God from this passage?

Moses asked God his name.<sup>51</sup>

3. (a) What name did God give himself (Exodus 3:14)? (b) What does this name tell you about God? (c) Whom did God tell Moses to say sent him (3:15)?

The Hebrew word translated *LORD* in capital letters is “Yhvh,”<sup>52</sup> which means the “Self-Existent or Eternal,”<sup>53</sup> and is the third-person form of the Hebrew for “I AM.”

God told Moses he was sending him to Pharaoh to bring the Israelites out of Egypt into the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses asked what to do if the Israelites didn’t believe God had sent him—a valid concern—and God enabled him to give miraculous signs.

4. (a) What was Moses’ reaction (Exodus 4:10)? (b) What was God’s response (11–12)? (c) What do you learn from this about how God equips us to do that which he calls us to do? (d) Is there anything you think God may be calling you to do that you don’t feel equipped for yet? If so, what encouragement can you take to step out in faith as Moses did?

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<sup>51</sup> The Hebrews lived among Egyptians who worshipped many gods.

<sup>52</sup> Or “Yhwh”; sometimes transliterated “Jehovah.”

<sup>53</sup> *Strong’s Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary* (Austin: WORDsearch, 2008).



## The First Signs

Pages 47–50

Initially God allowed Moses' brother Aaron to accompany him and speak for him. Moses and Aaron met with the Israelite elders, told them all God had said, and showed them signs as proof. The elders believed and worshipped God in gratitude for his concern over their misery.

But when Moses told Pharaoh that God said, "Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert," Pharaoh refused. He accused the Hebrews of laziness and told them he'd no longer supply the straw they needed to make bricks: they'd have to search for their own straw to make the same number of bricks. The slave drivers beat the Israelites for not meeting their impossible quota, and the Israelites blamed Moses.<sup>54</sup> Dismayed, Moses asked God why things got worse instead of better when he did what God told him to do.

5. (a) What did God tell Moses to tell the Israelites (Exodus 6:6)? (b) What do we learn about God from the fact that he planned to judge Egypt for mistreating the Israelites? (c) What relationship did God want to have with them (6:7a)? (d) Once they saw God redeem them mightily, what would they know (6:7b)?

God promised to redeem them with mighty acts of judgment so they would have no doubt that he was God.

6. (a) Where was God going to take them (Exodus 6:8)? (b) What comfort might they have taken in being reminded of God's promise to their forefathers? (c) Briefly describe the last time you were reminded of one of God's promises. How did that encourage you?

But the discouraged Israelites wouldn't listen to Moses. God told Moses to approach Pharaoh again. Moses replied, "If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me?" Despite his misgivings, he obeyed God and went.

As a sign to Pharaoh that God sent Moses, Aaron threw down his staff and it became a snake. Pharaoh's magicians did likewise, but Aaron's staff swallowed the other staffs, showing God's power was greater.

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<sup>54</sup> Exodus 5:21.

7. (a) What was Pharaoh's reaction to Moses' repeated call to let the people go (Exodus 7:13)? (b) Had God called Moses to convince Pharaoh, or to simply say what God told him to say? (c) When you share a truth about God, are you ever discouraged when people don't respond positively? Why or why not? (d) Moses obeyed even though he felt inadequate; briefly describe a time you obeyed God in something you didn't feel capable of doing and saw him come through in an amazing way.

God's judgment on Egypt now began. Nine times Moses went before Pharaoh and announced a plague unless Pharaoh let God's people go: the Nile turned to blood, frogs encroached, gnats clung, flies swarmed, livestock died, boils infected, hail destroyed, locusts devoured, and darkness overcame.<sup>55</sup> Nine times Pharaoh refused.<sup>56</sup>

## The Passover

*Pages 50–52*

After the ninth plague, Pharaoh told Moses if he ever saw him again, he would kill him. Moses announced the tenth and final plague: at midnight, every firstborn male of Egypt would die.

Moses told the Israelites what they must do to escape the plague that night.

8. (a) What kind of animal were the Israelites to slaughter (Exodus 12:21)? (b) What were they to do with the animal's blood (12:22)? (c) What would happen when the destroyer came to Egypt (12:23)?

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<sup>55</sup> The Egyptians believed in many gods, each of which had power over aspects of nature. These plagues showed the God who sent Moses—the God of Abraham—had the true power over all of nature.

<sup>56</sup> Pharaoh hardened his own heart after the first five plagues. After that, his judgment was sealed and God hardened his heart.

The Israelites followed Moses' command.

9. (a) What happened at midnight (Exodus 12:29–30)? (b) How did Pharaoh respond to the tenth plague (12:31–32)? (c) What indication is there in Pharaoh's words that he realized God was greater than he?

Judgment came, and the nation which had murdered Hebrew sons now lost their own.

## **The Deliverance**

*Pages 52–55*

The Lord led the Israelites in a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. Meanwhile, Pharaoh changed his mind about letting the Hebrew slaves leave. He pursued them with chariots, horsemen, and troops, finally hemming them in next to a sea. The Israelites cried out in fear.

10. (a) What did Moses tell the Israelites to do (Exodus 14:13–14)? (b) What would the Lord do (14:14)? (c) What do we learn about God from this?

11. Summarize how the Lord fought for the Israelites (Exodus 14:15–29).

Something important happened that day: The Israelites learned that the Lord was God and had power to save.

12. (a) In whom did the Israelites put their trust (Exodus 14:30–31)? (b) Would they have trusted as much if Pharaoh had let them go easily so there was no need for a miraculous salvation? (c) Word of God's miraculous salvation spread all around;<sup>57</sup> what did that tell people of other nations? (d) If possible, describe a difficulty you went through that helped others see God's glory.

## The Journey

*Pages 55–57*

The angel of the Lord led the Israelites towards Mount Horeb, where Moses had encountered the burning bush. But the people's memory was short. They focused not on their destination, but on the difficulties of their journey.

13. (a) As they trekked through the desert, what did the people do (Exodus 16:2)? (b) What things slipped from their memory that enabled them to speak as they did (16:3)?<sup>58</sup> (c) We're on a journey to the heavenly Promised Land. What things slip from our memory when we grumble against God?

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<sup>57</sup> Joshua 2:10–11.

<sup>58</sup> Consider what they'd cried out for God to rescue them from, what they'd seen of God's power and care, and where God promised to take them.

In the midst of barren desert, God caused manna to appear each morning to feed the multitude. Once again, God proved he was able and willing to carry out his promise to deliver the people to the Promised Land.

Fed by manna, the people traveled for three months to Mount Horeb.<sup>59</sup> When nearly there, the angel of the Lord led the Israelites to camp in a waterless spot, and they again doubted God.

14. (a) Instead of asking God for water or patiently waiting, what did the people do (Exodus 17:2)? (b) What question did the people ask that tested God (17:7)? (c) How had God already answered that question? (d) Of what else did they accuse Moses and God (17:3)? (e) Was that a valid accusation? Why or why not?

15. (a) How did the Israelites' grumbling show lack of faith? (b) What could they have done to nurture their faith instead of their doubts?

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<sup>59</sup> Exodus 19:1.

There near the base of Mount Horeb—the holy Mountain of God—God instructed Moses to strike a rock, and when he did, out flowed water.

16. (a) How did Moses' obedience to God grow his faith between the time God first called him from the burning bush on Horeb until he returned to the mountain? (b) What is a practical way you can nurture your faith today, based on what you learned from Moses and the Israelites?

God told the people to commemorate their deliverance with an annual feast called Passover. Families reenacted events and ate a meal of an unblemished roasted lamb, bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast.<sup>60</sup> Parents told their children how on the day of Egypt's judgment, the destroyer passed over all who trusted in lamb's blood so that God might deliver them from slavery to Egypt.

God commanded the Israelites to celebrate this Passover yearly so that they would remember his power to deliver ... and so that they would recognize the true Passover Lamb when he came. For there will be a final Judgment Day in which another destroyer will pass over all who have trusted in that Lamb's blood so that God might deliver them from slavery to sin and death. That story is coming, but first we continue with God's revealing of himself to Abraham's descendants.

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<sup>60</sup> Exodus 12:5–8. Moses interspersed instructions about the annual ceremony with the actual telling of the story.

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 5: New Commands and a New Covenant*

**Key Question:** How do we fulfill the purpose to which God has called us?

### **Kingdom of Priests**

*Pages 59–61*

Three months to the day after escaping Egyptian slavery, the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai.<sup>61</sup> God told Moses to explain that to which he was calling them.

1. (a) What had the Israelites seen, and what did this tell them about God (Exodus 19:4)? (b) God was about to offer to make a covenant—or contract—with the Israelites. What was the Israelites' part of the covenant (19:5a) (c) If they did that, what would they become (19:5b–6)?

God called the Israelites to obey his commands and be his treasured possession—a nation he cared for and blessed. They would be a kingdom of priests—a people set apart for God's service, making him known to all people groups, and teaching what was right and wrong in God's eyes. They would be a holy nation—a land set apart for God's purpose.

But to fulfill their calling, they had to obey God fully. Only then could other nations see the result and wisdom of God's laws.<sup>62</sup> Moses later explained it this way:

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Mount Sinai is probably another name for Mount Horeb, where Moses had seen the burning bush.

<sup>62</sup> Jesus later told his disciples that if they held to his teaching (that is, obeyed him), then they would know the truth and the truth would set them free from slavery to sin (John 8:31–34).

<sup>63</sup> Deuteronomy 4:5–8.

The New Testament tells us Christians are likewise “chosen...for obedience to Jesus Christ.”<sup>64</sup> It says, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).

2. (a) God chose you for obedience to Jesus; how can you fulfill this purpose? (b) God calls you to be a royal priesthood. A priest’s duties are serving God, proclaiming God, teaching what is right and wrong according to God, and guiding others to the mercy of God. Briefly describe one way you’ve fulfilled that purpose. (c) God calls Christians to be a holy nation—a people set apart to serve God and experience his blessings. How are you fulfilling that purpose? (d) God calls you to belong to him; what does that mean to you? (e) What praises can you declare about God as a result of his calling you out of darkness and into light?

From the base of Mount Sinai, God spoke.

3. (a) What did the people see and hear as God spoke (Exodus 20:18)? (b) How did they react (20:18–19)? (c) Why do you think they feared they might die if they continued to hear God’s thunderous voice? (d) Moses told them not to fear dying then, for that wasn’t the purpose of these signs. What was the purpose (20:20)?

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<sup>64</sup> 1 Peter 1:2, 15.



A child might know her parent loves her and wants the best for her, and yet fear her loving parent's discipline if she does wrong; that fear keeps her safe from the consequences of wrongdoing when she doesn't yet understand the reason for her parent's commands. The Israelites had come from a land that neither knew nor followed God's laws, and they weren't going to understand God's reasoning behind all of them. They needed to understand that God's power to punish rebellion was real.

4. (a) Does fearing fire's ability to harm cause you to avoid it, or to handle it safely? Explain.  
(b) Similarly, how does fearing the consequences of disobeying God keep people from sin?  
(c) Should the fear of God cause us to avoid God or avoid sin? Explain. (d) As some Israelites grew to know God's love and to trust his intentions, how would their motivation not to sin change?

Moses had already chosen to obey God even when he didn't understand the reasons, and he had seen God act powerfully, benevolently, and faithfully. Consequently, he trusted God and didn't fear approaching him. Therefore, the people begged Moses to mediate between them and God as they "remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was."<sup>65</sup>

## The Ten Commandments

*Pages 61–62*

God gave the terms of the covenant he offered.

5. (a) Who would be the parties to the covenant, and what was their relationship (Exodus 20:2)?  
(b) Why was it important for the Israelites to remember what God had already done for them?  
(c) When we are tempted to disobey God, why is it important to remember what God has already done for us?

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<sup>65</sup> Exodus 20:21.

God's first four commands told the Israelites how they should relate to him.

6. (a) What was the first commandment (Exodus 20:3)? (b) What was the second commandment (20:4)? (c) How would their ability to fulfill their purpose be hindered if they disobeyed these commands? (d) Greed is idolatry.<sup>66</sup> In fact, anything we put before God is an idol, and any time we disobey God we do so because we put something else before God. Name an area of temptation and what the idol is behind that temptation.
7. (a) What is the third commandment (Exodus 20:7)? (b) Why is it important to treat God's name respectfully and with honor, not using it in meaningless exclamations or curses? (c) What is the fourth commandment (20:8–9)? (d) Do you have a day<sup>67</sup> each week for attending church? (e) How might a weekly day of rest benefit us?

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<sup>66</sup> Colossians 3:5.

<sup>67</sup> The Sabbath is from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. Most Christian churches hold church services on Sunday in celebration of the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10).

God's last six commands told how the Israelites should relate to each other.

8. (a) How are the fifth through tenth commandments ways to love others (Exodus 20:12–17)? (b) Pick two of the commands and briefly describe an incident for each where you or someone else didn't follow it and thereby hurt others<sup>68</sup> (please don't give names if the incident is not public knowledge). (c) How might knowing the hurt that disobedience causes help us to choose obedience and trust God? (d) How can disobeying the tenth command lead to disobeying the other commands?

## The Covenant

*Pages 62–64*

Along with the Ten Commandments, God gave Moses the Book of the Covenant.<sup>69</sup> Moses repeated the Lord's commands and laws to the Israelites, and they agreed to obey them. He wrote everything down.

The next morning, Moses built an altar to God and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. He sacrificed animals and sprinkled half the blood on the altar.

9. (a) What did Moses do next (Exodus 24:7a)? (b) How did the people respond (24:7b)? (c) What did Moses do after that?

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<sup>68</sup> One of the ways we come to know good and evil is by seeing what results from them, not just in our own lives, but in the lives of all we know.

<sup>69</sup> The Book of the Covenant is Exodus 21:1–23:19.

In ancient times, covenant making involved oaths accompanied by blood sacrifice. The blood symbolized the parties' agreement that they deserved death if they broke the covenant. Thus the Lord God made a covenant<sup>70</sup> with the Israelites and they became his people.

God called Moses up Mount Sinai where he remained forty days and forty nights while God showed him how to make a tabernacle, furnishings for worship, and the ark of the covenant. He also gave him instructions on the priesthood and how to worship him acceptably.

10. (a) When the Israelites had made everything, what would God do (Exodus 25:8)? (b) How were they to make the tabernacle and furnishings (25:9)?

The tabernacle was a copy of a real, heavenly tabernacle, and therefore Moses had to ensure the Israelites made it just as God had instructed.<sup>71</sup>

When God finished speaking to Moses, he wrote the Ten Commandments on two stone tablets.

## **The Golden Calf**

*Pages 64–67*

The Israelites weren't expecting Moses to be gone so long, and they began to doubt he would return. They told Aaron to make them a god to lead them.

11. (a) What did Aaron make with the people's gold jewelry (Exodus 32:4)? (b) What did they say about it? (c) How is this similar to someone promising to follow God if God delivers them from something, but after the deliverance reneges and claims the deliverance came from another source (such as luck or their own skill)? (d) How is this similar to someone receiving something prayed for, but attributing the answered prayer to something else?

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<sup>70</sup> Christians now call this the "Old Covenant."

<sup>71</sup> Hebrews 8:5.

Forty days after making their covenant with the Lord God, the Israelites broke it.

Moses descended the mountain and in disbelief beheld dancing and revelry and bowing before a golden calf. He hurled the stone tablets to the ground. They shattered, symbolizing the broken covenant. He cried out for any who were still for the Lord. The Levites ran to him. He told them God's judgment, and they put to the sword three thousand of those who had broken their oath to worship the Lord God alone and make no idols.

The next day Moses went before the Lord to intercede for the people.

12. (a) What did Moses ask God to do if he would not forgive the Israelites their sin (Exodus 32:32)? (b) Would God do this to Moses (32:33)? (c) Nonetheless, what consequences would come (32:34)?

The Lord kept a book with the names of those who were truly his—for not all descendants of Israel were such.<sup>72</sup>

God told Moses to lead the people to the Promised Land—he would not wipe them out. But he said he would not go with them.

## **The Glory of the Lord**

*Pages 67–70*

Moses went into the tent where he regularly met with God to intercede for the people and ask God to go with them on their journey.

13. (a) What had God told Moses about their relationship (Exodus 33:12b)? (b) Why did Moses want God to teach him his ways (33:1)? (c) How does learning God's ways help us to know God and honor him? (d) How can we learn God's ways? (e) How did God respond (33:14)? (f) What does that teach us about intercessory prayer?

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<sup>72</sup> Later God will reveal more about the book of life, for the Promised Land to which God was bringing the Israelites was a type of a heavenly dwelling promised to those whose names are written in the book of life. See Romans 9:6.

After this assurance, Moses asked to see God's glory. God told him to ascend to the top of Mount Sinai the next day with two more stone tablets to replace the broken ones. Moses did so.

14. (a) What did the Lord proclaim when he descended in a cloud (Exodus 34:5)? (b) When he passed Moses, how did he describe himself (34:6–7)? (c) What does this description tell you about your relationship with God? (d) The Lord repeated part of the fifth commandment: people were to honor their parents, but not by following them into sin.<sup>73</sup> What would happen if people chose to repeat the sins of their parents or grandparents<sup>74</sup> (34:7b)?

Moses worshipped God, and God wrote the Ten Commandments on the two new stone tablets. Moses stayed on Mount Sinai another forty days, pleading with God on behalf of the people.<sup>75</sup> When he finally descended, his face was radiant.

He guided the people in making the tabernacle, furnishings, and ark of the covenant. When they finished, he placed the stone tablets in the ark and placed the ark in the holy of holies within the tabernacle.

15. When all was completed, what happened (Exodus 40:34–35)?

The Israelites were now ready to set off for the Promised Land where they could fulfill their purpose of being a kingdom of priests making the Lord God known to the world.

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<sup>73</sup> Exodus 20:5–6; Deuteronomy 5:9–10.

<sup>74</sup> This verse does not mean the innocent will be punished for their ancestors' sins, but rather that those who choose to continue in their ancestors' sins will receive the same punishment as their ancestors (Deuteronomy 24:16). For more on this topic, see <http://jeanejones.net/2012/05/sins-of-the-fathers/>.

<sup>75</sup> Deuteronomy 9:25.

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 6: Wandering*

**Key Question:** What is the relationship between faith and obedience?

### **Opposition**

*Pages 71–74*

The Israelites stayed nearly a year at Mount Sinai. There they made the items needed to properly worship God. They learned God’s laws and that if they sinned by disobeying those laws, they could receive forgiveness through sacrificial offerings.<sup>76</sup>

God told them he was driving the Canaanites out of the land because they had defiled the land with sin: extreme sexual immorality and burning children as sacrifices to the god Molech.<sup>77</sup> And God told them that if they defiled the land by committing the same sins as the Canaanites, God would drive them out too.

Finally the people set out for the Promised Land, where milk and honey flowed. For the desert journey, God fed them manna, a perfect food that met all their bodily needs and never carried disease.

But the non-Israelites who had accompanied them from Egypt—the “rabble”—complained.

1. (a) What did the rabble begin to do, and how did that spread (Numbers 11:4–6)? (b) Were the Israelites lacking a need or a desire? Explain. (c) The desert’s lack of other food showed the necessity for manna; why do you think the Israelites weren’t grateful for their needs being met? (d) How does remembering what we have to be grateful for help us to trust God? (e) List three things for which you are grateful to God.

Some Israelites wailed, “Why did we ever leave Egypt?” God explained the heart issue: “You have rejected the LORD, who is among you.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Leviticus 4:27–31 is one example.

<sup>77</sup> Leviticus 18 lists the Canaanite sins. See also Deuteronomy 9:4–6. For God’s prior judgment on two Canaanite cities during Abraham’s day, see Genesis 18–19.





They traveled on, but soon Moses' own family opposed him. His siblings—the prophetess Miriam<sup>82</sup> and the high priest Aaron—challenged his leadership.

4. (a) How did Miriam and Aaron challenge Moses (Numbers 12:2a)? (b) Who heard (12:2b)? (c) What can we learn about God from this that can help when we're unjustly criticized? (d) Who are some of the people God has put into positions of authority in your life?
  
5. (a) How did the Lord rebuke Miriam and Aaron for speaking against Moses (12:8)? (b) God wanted the people to trust Moses as the mediator of the covenant; how did he react to their exaltation of themselves (12:9)? (c) How did God humble Miriam (12:10)? (d) How did Aaron show repentance (12:11)? (e) What can we learn from this about speaking against legitimate, God-given authority?<sup>83</sup>

Moses interceded for Miriam, and God in mercy agreed to heal her, but demanded she be confined in disgrace outside the camp for a week.

## Rebellion

*Pages 74–78*

After Miriam's confinement ended, the people encamped at Kadesh Barnea, just south of their destination. Moses sent twelve men to scout the land.<sup>84</sup> They discovered the land was indeed wonderful and filled with lush grapevines and bountiful fruit trees.

<sup>82</sup> Exodus 15:20. Miriam was a spiritual leader of the women.

<sup>83</sup> Note that they were not exhorting Moses about sin, but were offended Moses hadn't given them more leadership, perhaps because Moses had just granted more authority to seventy elders (Numbers 11:24–25).

<sup>84</sup> According to Deuteronomy 1:20–23, Moses directed the people to take the land, but they asked to send scouts first. Moses apparently sought the Lord, who told him to do so.

When they returned, two of the scouts, Joshua and Caleb, urged the people onward. But ten scouts balked: they said the Canaanites were too strong, the cities too fortified, and the task impossible. The people's faith failed. They asked why God had brought them there just to kill them, and they looked for a leader to take them back to Egypt.

6. (a) How did Joshua and Caleb try to convince the people not to rebel (Numbers 14:7–9)?  
(b) What evidences of God's power were they forgetting that allowed doubt to rule them?  
(c) Describe a time you saw God's protective hand in your life and explain how that should encourage you to do whatever he calls you to do.

When the people threatened to stone Joshua and Caleb, the glory of the Lord suddenly appeared.

7. (a) According to the Lord, how were the people treating him (Numbers 14:11a)? (b) What were they refusing to do (14:11b)? (c) What had he done for them to show he would complete the work he'd begun (14:11c)? (d) How would God punish their rebellion (14:22–23)?

They had come to the Promised Land, and refused to enter. God's judgment came: the ten disbelieving scouts died for instigating the rebellion, and those who rebelled with them would now wander the desert for forty years until they died too. Of those twenty years old and older, only Joshua and Caleb would enter the Promised Land. The rest would suffer for their unfaithfulness, and their children would enjoy the land they had rejected.

8. (a) What is God calling you to do that seems hard? (b) Will God call you to anything that he won't help you to do? What assurance does this give you?

## The Next Generation

*Pages 78–83*

The people wandered in the desert, their grumbling hearts still bitter. Some tried to change the Lord's mind by going up against the Canaanites anyway, and they fell by the sword.<sup>85</sup> Others refused responsibility and blamed Moses for not bringing them in successfully, instigating another cycle of rebellion, judgment, intercession, and mercy.<sup>86</sup> Slowly the rebellious generation died out.

When nearly forty years had passed, the next generation of Israelites returned to Kadesh where their parents had rebelled. They found no water.

9. (a) How did this generation repeat the sins of their fathers (Numbers 20:3–5)? (b) The Lord told Moses to tell a rock to pour forth water, but instead he angrily beat the rock. What consequence did that bring (20:12)? (c) Moses pleaded with God to change his mind, but God finally told him not to ask again.<sup>87</sup> Why do you think God held Moses to such a high standard?<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Numbers 14:39–45.

<sup>86</sup> Numbers 16.

<sup>87</sup> Deuteronomy 3:23–26.

<sup>88</sup> Consider Jesus' words: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (Luke 12:48).

The Israelites looked for a way into the land they were to possess. God had warned them not to provoke Edom, Moab, or Ammon, for they were not among the Canaanites God wanted driven out.<sup>89</sup> They asked Edom to allow them passage, but Edom refused and sent an army against them, so they turned back.

As they traveled, a Canaanite king<sup>90</sup> attacked the Israelites, and the Israelites defeated him. But as they looked for a way into the land around Edom, the people grew impatient and spoke against both God and Moses. Suddenly poisonous snakes appeared, biting and killing many.

10. (a) How did the Israelites respond to the snakes (Numbers 21:7)? (b) When Moses interceded for the people, how did God show mercy (21:8)? (c) What act of faith could someone bitten do in order to live (21:9)?<sup>91</sup>

Anyone stricken by sin's consequence could look to the raised-up image of that consequence and live.

The Israelites then asked the Amorites—one of the Canaanite peoples—for passage. They not only refused, but attacked Israel. The Israelites overcame them and captured their cities. The taking of the land had begun.

When the Israelites camped along the Jordan River, the bordering Moabites were terrified. They joined with the Midianites<sup>92</sup> in hiring the pagan diviner Balaam to curse them. God warned Balaam not to curse the people, but he tried to find a way using sorcery to speak some word that would earn him pay. But God gave him only blessings to speak.

Balaam found another way to feed his greed. He advised the kings to send women to entice the Israelites into joining them in the sexually immoral worship of the Canaanite god Baal<sup>93</sup> so they would bring God's curse on themselves.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>89</sup> The descendants of Esau lived in Edom, and the descendants of Lot lived in Moab and Ammon. The prohibitions against provoking them to war are in Deuteronomy 2:4, 9, 19.

<sup>90</sup> Canaan consisted of many city-states, each with their own king.

<sup>91</sup> This was a type of a future event: see John 3:14–15, 12:32–33.

<sup>92</sup> They were descended from Midian, a son of Abraham through Keturah. Moses lived in Midian when he fled from Pharaoh, and his wife Zipporah was Midianite.

<sup>93</sup> Baal worship practices and myths are stomach churning to read, but help with understanding God's punishment of the Canaanites. For more information on the Canaanites suitable for most audiences, see Clay Jones, "Killing the Canaanites: A Response to the New Atheists' 'Divine Genocide' Claims," *Christian Research Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 4, 2010, available at <http://www.equip.org/articles/killing-the-canaanites/> (accessed July 18, 2012). For an academic, but also more graphic, treatment, see Clay Jones, "We Don't Hate Sin So We Don't Understand What Happened to the Canaanites: An Addendum to 'Divine Genocide' Arguments," *Philosophia Christi*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2009, available at [clayjones.net: http://www.clayjones.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/We-Dont-Hate-Sin-PC-article.pdf](http://www.clayjones.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/We-Dont-Hate-Sin-PC-article.pdf) (accessed July 12, 2012).

11. (a) What did the Israelite men do (Numbers 25:1–3)? (b) How can sexual temptation be an attempt to stop us from achieving all God wants us to achieve?

Israel's judges executed some of those who broke the first two of the Ten Commandments, and a plague killed others. In all, 24,000 Israelites died. What Moab and Midian could not accomplish in war, they managed through enticement.

### **Moses' Farewell**

*Pages 83–85*

The time for Moses to pass on leadership to Joshua drew near, and he anointed him before the people. Then he gathered the people and began a farewell address.

12. (a) Why had God shown the Israelites so many miraculous signs (Deuteronomy 4:35)? (b) Why was that important considering what God called them to do?
13. (a) What did Moses call the Israelites to hear (Deuteronomy 6:4)? (b) What were they to do (6:5)? (c) How does the way Moses told them to treat God's commands emphasize their importance and the necessity not to forget them (6:6–9)? (d) What is something you do to know and remember God's commands?

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<sup>94</sup> Numbers 31:16; Revelation 2:14.

## The Choice

Pages 85–88

Moses set before the people the blessings they would enjoy if they obeyed the Lord God, and the curses they would suffer if they abandoned him. He warned them if they took on the detestable sins of the people he was driving out, he would likewise drive them out of the land.

14. (a) What was the way of life and prosperity (Deuteronomy 30:15–16)? (b) What was the way of death and destruction (30:17–18)? (c) What is the relationship between faith and obedience?

Moses climbed to the top of a mountain and God showed him the land the people would soon possess. Then he died.

15. How did Moses differ from all other Old Testament prophets (Deuteronomy 34:10–12)?

And yet, Moses said one day a prophet like him would arise. When he did, the people must recognize him and follow him, else they would be held accountable.<sup>95</sup>

For Moses was a type of someone greater, someone yet to come: the seed promised to Eve who would crush the ancient serpent. Like Moses he would fast forty days and nights, do mighty miracles, intercede for sinners, and offer a covenant from God to people, a covenant sealed in blood. And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake that all who looked to it might be saved from death, so would he be lifted up that all who looked to him might be saved from the death brought by the serpent that deceived Eve and her children.

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<sup>95</sup> Deuteronomy 18:15, 19.

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 7: The Battle Begins*

**Key Question:** What can we learn from Joshua's taking of the Promised Land that can help us conquer sin and fight spiritual battles?

### **Joshua's Call**

*Pages 89–91*

God called Joshua to lead the Israelites to inherit the Promised Land. They had already taken land west of the Jordan River from Amorites<sup>96</sup> who answered their request for passage with an attack. Now it was time to enter the land.

1. (a) What did God promise Joshua when he told him to lead the people to their inheritance from him (Joshua 1:5)? (b) If God was going to give him the victory, why did Joshua need to be strong and courageous to fulfill his calling (1:6)? (c) God calls us to overcome sin, fight spiritual battles, and minister to others. Why do we need to be strong and courageous to fulfill our calling? (d) If possible, describe a time you needed strength and courage to obey God.
2. (a) What did Joshua need to do to succeed in his calling (Joshua 1:7)? (b) What did he need to do to ensure he obeyed God (1:8a)? (c) What would result from doing this (1:8b)? (d) What can you learn from this that applies to what God calls you to do?

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<sup>96</sup> The Amorites were one of the Canaanite people groups. Sometimes *Amorite* and *Canaanite* were used interchangeably.

3. (a) Why else should Joshua be strong and courageous (Joshua 1:9)? (b) What can you learn from this when obeying God seems scary, difficult, or even impossible?

Joshua told the people what God had commanded, and they agreed to obey everything. He sent two spies into Jericho. Jericho was a fortified city surrounded by protective walls atop a high mound<sup>97</sup> in the midst of the Jordan Valley. It guarded the major route into Canaan.<sup>98</sup>

The spies entered the house of a Canaanite prostitute named Rahab. When the king of Jericho learned of their presence, Rahab hid them.

4. (a) What did Rahab know (Joshua 2:9a)? (b) How did the Canaanites feel about the Israelites (2:9b)? (c) Why (2:10)? (d) What did Rahab say she knew about God (2:11)?

Rahab had heard about all the Israelites' God had done, and she concluded their God was God of both heaven and earth, so she acted on that faith.

## Jericho

*Pages 91–94*

After the spies returned, The Israelites prepared to cross the Jordan. God gave the Israelites a miraculous sign so they would know that Joshua was a true prophet accurately giving them God's commands: When the priests carrying the ark of the covenant stepped into the Jordan River, its flooded waters stopped

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<sup>97</sup> Settlements built on top of old settlements eventually formed hills called *mounds* (or *tells*).

<sup>98</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, second edition (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 2008), 126–127.



flowing and piled into a heap so the people could cross on dry land.<sup>99</sup> When the people finished crossing, the priests stepped out of the river's normal boundaries and the waters returned to their place.<sup>100</sup>

God did this so all the peoples of the earth would know his power.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, the Canaanites along the river's coast quickly spread the terrifying word.

The Israelites encamped at Gilgal<sup>102</sup> and paused to circumcise the men born during the desert wanderings and to celebrate Passover. The pause gave any Canaanites who interpreted the parting of the sea and the river in the same way as Rahab the opportunity to convert or flee. Some shut themselves up within Jericho's walls, trusting their local gods and their own strength to protect them.

Then the Lord told Joshua to march.

5. (a) What was strange about God's command on how to take the city of Jericho (Joshua 6:2–5)?
- (b) Why did obeying these instructions require faith?

Joshua told the people what God said to do, and they obeyed. Just as God promised, when the priests blew the trumpet and the people shouted on the seventh day, Jericho's walls collapsed.

The army took the city and destroyed everything except for Rahab and her family. Normally, armies took plunder from cities they captured. But God said they were to take no plunder from Jericho: everything was to be devoted to him and destroyed.<sup>103</sup>

The New Testament tells us Rahab is a hero of faith:

By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days. By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.<sup>104</sup> *Hebrews 11:30–31*

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<sup>99</sup> Joshua 3:7–17; 4:14.

<sup>100</sup> Joshua 4:18.

<sup>101</sup> Joshua 4:24.

<sup>102</sup> Joshua 5:10. There is no mention of resistance. Gilgal's occupants had heard about the parting of the sea in Egypt and had seen the taking of the Amorite cities across the Jordan. Did they simply flee upon seeing the parting of the Jordan River, knowing what was coming?

<sup>103</sup> Joshua totally destroyed three cities: Jericho, Ai, and Hazor. Others he captured so the Israelites could settle in them (Merrill, 127).

<sup>104</sup> The NIV's text note points out the word translated *disobedient* could also be translated *unbelieving*.

6. (a) From what you've read so far, in what ways did Rahab show her faith in God? (b) Rahab had been a Canaanite prostitute, but when her faith turned her to God, she married an Israelite and became part of the Israelite community.<sup>105</sup> What does this teach us about God's willingness to embrace and redeem those who turn to him in faith no matter their background?
7. (a) What happened as a result of Jericho's miraculous fall (Joshua 6:27)? (b) What evidence about God did this give to the Israelites? (c) What evidence about God did this give to the Canaanites?

## **Ai, Shechem & Gibeon**

*Pages 94–97*

### **Ai**

One man disobeyed God's command to take no spoils from Jericho: Achan had taken a beautiful Babylonian robe, gold, and silver and had hidden them in his tent.

When Joshua sent troops against the small city of Ai, Ai routed them. Joshua asked God why, and God told him Israel had sinned: "That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction" (Joshua 7:12).

God revealed that Achan was the thief, and when Joshua confronted him, he confessed. The entire community had sworn to obey God's commands through Joshua on pain of death. The community stoned Achan and destroyed the Canaanite treasures.

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<sup>105</sup> She played a significant part, as we will see in lessons 9 and 22, for she was an ancestress of Jesus.

8. (a) From the summary above, what do you think the Israelites learned about God from the fact that he knew Achan's secret sin? (b) What did they learn about taking for themselves that which God ordered destroyed? (c) What did they learn about their dependence on God during battles?

The Canaanites saw a small city easily rebuff the Israelites, and this emboldened them to fight, making the task of taking the land harder. It also discouraged Joshua's men.

9. (a) How did the Lord encourage Joshua after the defeat (Joshua 8:1)? (b) What was the army permitted to do at Ai that was forbidden at Jericho (8:2)? (c) If Achan had patiently waited for God to give him riches in a way God allowed, how would things have been different? (d) It was not all riches God forbade, but only those which were taken in a way he forbade; how can remembering this help us patiently wait when we're tempted to obtain something in a way God forbids?

Joshua set an ambush and captured Ai.

### Shechem

Joshua took the Israelites to Shechem, a fortress city between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal.<sup>106</sup> There both Abram and Jacob had built altars to God.<sup>107</sup> Moses had told Joshua to build an altar on Mount Ebal, and to have the people proclaim blessings from Mount Ebal and curses from Mount Gerizim.<sup>108</sup>

Joshua did all Moses commanded him. He gathered the people together to hear the Law read and to renew their covenant with the Lord.

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<sup>106</sup> Joshua 8:33. "That Israel had access to Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, between which Shechem was located, implies either that Shechem was abandoned at the time or that it surrendered without a struggle." (Merrill, 130.)

<sup>107</sup> Genesis 12:6–7; 33:18–20.

<sup>108</sup> Deuteronomy 11:29; 27:1–26.

10. Why do you think it was important that the people hear all the words of the law and renew their covenant agreement with God as they began taking possession of the Promised Land (Joshua 8:34)?

### **Gibeon**

Back at the encampment in Gilgal, the people of Gibeon came to Joshua. They claimed to be from a distant land and asked for a peace treaty, offering themselves as slaves to the Israelites. Believing them, Joshua agreed to the treaty without consulting God. Only then did he learn Gibeon was nearby.

When Joshua asked them why they had deceived him, they replied, “Your servants were clearly told how the LORD your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you the whole land and to wipe out all its inhabitants from before you. So we feared for our lives because of you, and that is why we did this” (Joshua 9:24).

Joshua honored his treaty. But five alarmed Amorite kings set out to punish Gibeon for becoming an ally of the Israelites. The Gibeonites asked Joshua for help, and the Lord told Joshua to give it.

11. (a) In what ways did the Lord fight for Israel (Joshua 10:10–14)? (b) What sign did this give the remaining Canaanite people groups who had, like the Gibeonites, heard that the Lord God was giving the land to the Israelites?

## Inheritance Received

Pages 97–99

### Northern Canaan

Joshua captured and killed the five kings, taking more land in the process. He finished his central and southern campaigns and returned to the camp at Gilgal.

The king of Hazor, the largest city of northern Canaan, heard of all Joshua had done, gathered an alliance with a great many kings, and advanced with a huge army. Joshua attacked and defeated them. Some fled north beyond the territory which the Lord had said to take.<sup>109</sup> Those who didn't, the Israelites put to the sword. Joshua captured their cities.

12. What did Joshua do (Joshua 11:23)?

### Inheritance Allotted

With the major fortified cities taken throughout the Promised Land, Joshua divided the territory into twelve parts so the people could begin settling the land. He gave two allotments to Joseph's descendants (the half-tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh), none to Levi's descendants, and one to each of the other tribes named for the sons of Israel. The Levites received no allotment because they were set apart to serve God in cities within the boundaries of the other tribes, and their inheritance was to be the people's offerings to the Lord.<sup>110</sup>

There was still work to do: as the Israelites' numbers increased, they needed to continue to drive out the remaining Canaanites.

13. (a) What have you learned from Joshua that can help you battle sinful desires (1 Peter 2:11), thoughts that are against the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:3–5), and spiritual forces of evil (Ephesians 6:12)? (b) What have you learned from Joshua that can help you be on your guard, stand firm in faith, be courageous, and be strong (1 Corinthians 16:13)?

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<sup>109</sup> Joshua 11:8 describes the limits to which the Israelites pursued the armies. (Merrill, 135.)

<sup>110</sup> Joshua 13:14.

**Final Words***Pages 99–102*

When Joshua was old and knew his time to leave this earth approached, he again gathered the people at Shechem.

14. (a) What did Joshua tell the Israelites they knew (Joshua 23:14)? (b) How well did they know it? (c) What did Joshua warn them (23:15–16)?

The time had been long since Joshua led the people across the Jordan.<sup>111</sup> The newest generation hadn't seen the early miracles. Joshua reminded them of all God did from the time of Abraham until then. He told them to make a choice.

15. (a) What did Joshua tell them to do based on all God had done for them (Joshua 24:14)? (b) What choices did he give them (24:15a)? (c) What choice did Joshua and his family make (24:15b)? (d) Imagine Joshua were speaking to you now. What choice would you make?

The people responded, "We will serve the LORD our God and obey him."<sup>112</sup>

Joshua led the Israelites in renewing their covenant with God again. He set up a stone as a witness to the renewal.

The Israelites were finally in the Promised Land. They were God's people and they vowed to serve and obey God. Next week we see how well they kept their vows.

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<sup>111</sup> Eugene H. Merrill calculates more than 30 years (Merrill, 157).

<sup>112</sup> Joshua 24:24.

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 8: A Few Good Men ... and Women*

**Key Question:** How can we keep from repeating the Israelite's sin cycle in our own lives?

### **Othniel**

*Pages 103–105*

The book of Judges explains what happened to the Israelites during the first few centuries after Joshua died. Most of the Israelite tribes did not finish driving out the Canaanites as God told them to do.<sup>113</sup> They allowed the Canaanites to live among them, but subjected them to forced labor. It wasn't long before the people intermarried with the Canaanites, adopted their practices, and ignored God's commands.

1. (a) What happened after Joshua's generation died (Judges 2:10–12)? (b) The author of Judges summarized the tale he was about to tell in Judges 2:13–19. What strikes you most about this summary? (c) Why did God raise up judges (2:16)? (d) What happened to each generation that abandoned God, in comparison to their fathers (2:19)?

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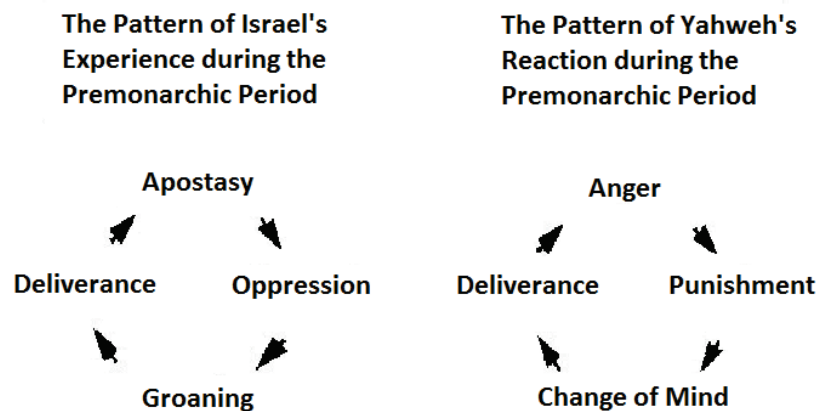
<sup>113</sup> Judges 1:27–36.

The first judge God called to rescue and rule his people was Othniel.

2. (a) What did the Israelites do in Judges 3:7? (b) What was God's response (3:8)? (c) What did the Israelites do next (3:9a)? (d) What was God's response (3:9b–10)? (e) What happened to the land as a result (3:11)?

This cycle repeats throughout the book of Judges, which covers the time period between the taking of the land and the first king (called the “premonarch period” in the chart below). Over and over, Israel abandoned God and began doing evil, particularly by worshipping Canaanite gods, participating in the highly sexualized Canaanite worship practices, and oppressing the weak. God punished them by no longer protecting them and by delivering them into the hands of their enemies. The Israelites groaned under their hardship and cried out to God. God relented and gave them a judge who delivered them. But when things got good, the people once again committed apostasy by abandoning the true God for false gods.

The *New American Commentary* charts it like this:<sup>114</sup>



<sup>114</sup> Diagram from Daniel I. Block, *New American Commentary—Volume 6: Judges, Ruth*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 133.



3. (a) The Israelites turned to God when they were afflicted and oppressed, but left him when life was good. What does this suggest about the type of relationship they desired to have with God? (b) What would you think about a friend who treated you well only when he or she wanted something from you? (c) Do you find yourself spending more time with God when you want something badly from him? Why or why not? (d) What practices could you implement to be sure you don't seek God only when you want something from him, but rather have a true relationship with him?

## **Deborah**

*Pages 105–107*

After a couple more judges, the Israelites had peace for eighty years.

4. (a) After this time of peace, what happened (Judges 4:1)? (b) If the Israelites had driven out the Canaanites, would they have fallen to a Canaanite king from within their midst (4:2)? (c) What happened under Sisera, the commander of a Canaanite army (4:3)? (d) How can allowing “small” amounts of sin to stay in our lives lead us to be enslaved and oppressed by that sin?

Out of compassion, God raised up another judge: the prophetess Deborah.

5. According to Judges 4:4–5, what positions did Deborah hold?

6. In what ways did Deborah and Jael show courage?

## **Gideon**

*Pages 107–112*

The Israelites continued their cycles of abandoning God whenever life seemed good. Eventually they fell under the oppression of the neighboring Midianites.<sup>115</sup>

7. (a) What did God do when the Israelites cried out to him (Judges 6:7–8a)? (b) Was God unable to deliver them (6:8b–9)? (c) Why had God allowed Midian to oppress them (6:10)?

The angel of the Lord appeared to an unlikely hero named Gideon.

8. (a) Despite the prophet's explanation for the Midianite oppression, what did Gideon ask the angel of the Lord (Judges 6:13)? (b) Why do you think Gideon didn't accept the prophet's explanation for their oppression (see previous question)? (c) If possible, give a modern day example of someone disobeying God and then wondering why God allowed unpleasant consequences (please do not give names).

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<sup>115</sup> The Midianites were not Canaanites. They were the descendants of Abraham through Keturah, whom he married after Sarah died.

Gideon didn't consider himself a mighty warrior, yet God chose him.

9. Why do you think God often uses “weak” people to accomplish mighty things<sup>116</sup> (Judges 6:15)?

10. (a) Why did God reduce Gideon's army from 32,000 men to 300 (Judges 7:2, 7)? (b) What do you think God wanted to teach the Israelites through this?

God worked a mighty victory and freed the Israelites from Midian through Gideon and his three hundred men. The land had peace ... until Gideon died.

## Samson's Rise

*Pages 112–116*

The cycle repeated, with each rebellious generation becoming more corrupt than all those before. Even some judges followed the practices of the people among whom they lived, as was the case with Samson.

The angel of the Lord appeared to Samson's parents in the midst of forty years of oppression under the Philistines.<sup>117</sup> He said Samson was to be set apart from birth for God's service.<sup>118</sup>

11. What commands did the angel of the Lord give regarding how Samson was to live (Judges 13:5)?

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<sup>116</sup> See also 1 Corinthians 1:27–29.

<sup>117</sup> The Philistines migrated to Canaan from the Aegean and also wanted to occupy Canaan.

<sup>118</sup> Samson was to be a *Nazirite*. People could take Nazirite vows for short times, such as thirty days. Samson, John the Baptist, and perhaps Samuel were called to be lifelong Nazirites.

Despite his calling, Samson didn't take seriously God's commands not to marry those who didn't worship the Lord God.<sup>119</sup>

12. In what ways did Sampson's chasing after foreign women illustrate Israel's chasing after foreign gods?

Samson delivered the Israelites from the Philistines, but his confidence in his own strength left him seeing no need to rely on God's strength. That led to his downfall.

### **Samson's Downfall**

*Pages 116–119*

Samson continued to chase women who worshipped other gods. Eventually he fell in love with Delilah, and the Philistine rulers saw their opportunity. They bribed Delilah to find out the secret of Samson's great strength.

Delilah tried her best. Each time Samson told her how to subdue him, she waited until he slept and tested what he told her. Samson treated her attempts like a game. One day, though, he told her his hair had never been cut because he was a Nazirite dedicated to God, and if she shaved his head, he would become as weak as any other man.

Samson knew Delilah would shave his head, but he didn't know the Spirit of the Lord would leave him as a result.

13. (a) What might be reasons Samson told Delilah she could weaken him if she shaved his head, even though he knew she would attempt this deed which was forbidden to him? (b) Samson's strength wasn't in his hair; what was the true source of Samson's strength (Judges 16:20)? (c) What were ways Samson took the Source of his strength for granted? (d) How can Christians keep themselves from taking God for granted?

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<sup>119</sup> Deuteronomy 7:3–4.

As the hair which was the outward sign of Samson's dedication to God left him, so did the Spirit of the Lord. Samson discovered too late his strength depended on God's presence. The Philistines gouged out Samson's eyes, bound him in shackles, and imprisoned him.

One day the Philistine rulers and three thousand people gathered on the temple roof to mock Samson and celebrate their god having delivered Samson into their hands. As Samson leaned against the temple's supporting pillars, he prayed.

14. (a) What did Samson's prayer show he now understood about his strength's source (Judges 16:28)? (b) What lessons can we learn from Samson about the gifts God gives us for serving him and helping others? (c) What can we learn from Samson about additional reasons God uses the weak more than the strong?

God had called the Israelites to be his people and to make him known to the surrounding peoples. But many Israelites let the culture influence their ideas of right and wrong, rather than God's commands given through Moses. The differences between Canaanites and Israelites diminished.

15. (a) In whose eyes were the peoples' actions considered evil (Judges 2:11)? (b) In whose eyes were the peoples' actions considered right (Judges 21:25)? (c) What steps can we take to be sure we're doing right in God's eyes, and not just our own?

16. What steps can we take to keep from repeating the Israelite's sin cycle in our own lives?

Both Moses and Joshua warned the Israelites that if they didn't drive out the inhabitants, then they would be seduced by their evil practices; if they did, God would drive the Israelites out too.

Sadly, the Canaanization of Israel marched on.

But all was not lost. Some Israelites still wanted to follow God in the Promised Land. They mourned over the depths of Israel's sin and committed themselves to obeying God's commands. We'll see faithful God followers shine in this dark era next week as we watch God make himself known.

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 9: The Faith of a Foreign Woman*

**Key Question:** How does God show loving kindness directly and through the hands of his followers?

### **Naomi Emptied**

*Pages 121–123*

The book of Ruth begins with Naomi’s family traveling from Bethlehem to Moab,<sup>120</sup> a foreign land unfriendly to Israelites. Eventually, Naomi would return and say that she left Bethlehem full, but returned empty.

1. (a) *Bethlehem* means “house of food.” Ironically, what was Bethlehem empty of that caused Naomi’s family to travel to Moab (Ruth 1:1)? (b) Of what else was Naomi emptied (1:3)? (c) How did they attempt to fill their family (1:4)? (d) Naomi’s daughters-in-law bore no children, leaving Naomi empty of what? (e) Of what was Naomi then emptied (1:5)?

Naomi heard that the Lord has provided food in Bethlehem so she and her two daughters-in-law set off for Bethlehem. She changed her mind, though, and told the girls to return to their mothers in the hope of the Lord giving them new husbands. In those days, widows usually faced poverty unless they remarried, and she probably thought the girls’ prospects of finding a husband in Bethlehem bleak because of the mistrust between the Israelites and Moabites.

2. What reason did Naomi give the girls for why they shouldn’t go with her (Ruth 1:11)?

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<sup>120</sup> The Moabites descended from Abraham’s nephew, Lot.

God in his loving kindness gave the Israelites a law to help widows who had no sons.<sup>121</sup> A brother of the widow's husband was to marry her, care for her financially, and provide a son who could inherit her husband's property and carry on his name. This kept her from destitution. But Naomi couldn't provide sons for them, so she wanted them to stay in Moab where she thought they'd have the best chance of finding husbands.

Orpah tearfully kissed Naomi good-bye. But not Ruth. Ruth wrapped her arms around her weeping mother-in-law and refused to let go.

3. (a) How did Ruth show loving kindness to Naomi and put Naomi's needs above her own (Ruth 1:16–17)? (b) To whom besides Naomi did Ruth commit herself, and what did that say about where her faith resided? (c) If possible, describe a time someone showed loving kindness to you as Ruth did to Naomi.

When Naomi arrived in Bethlehem with Ruth, she told the women there to no longer call her *Naomi*, which means “pleasant,” but rather *Mara*, which means “bitter.”

4. (a) How did Naomi describe the way she left Bethlehem (Ruth 1:21)? (b) How did she describe the way she returned? (c) How might Ruth have felt over this? (d) Is it important to have a bit of a tough skin when talking to the grieving? Why or why not?

## In Boaz's Field

Pages 123–124

God showed loving kindness to his people by providing laws to help the poor. When workers harvested fields, they weren't to go back and pick up missed grain, but were to leave it for the poor to gather, a process called gleaning.<sup>122</sup> Ruth asked Naomi to allow her to glean so they'd have food.

<sup>121</sup> Deuteronomy 25:5–10. *Brother-in-law* in Latin is *levir*, so this is called a “levirate marriage.”

<sup>122</sup> Leviticus 19:9–10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19.

5. (a) In Ruth 2, in what ways did Boaz<sup>123</sup> show loving kindness to Ruth by going above and beyond God's requirements? (b) Briefly describe a time someone blessed you by giving you more than required of something. How did that make you feel?

When Naomi saw the huge amount<sup>124</sup> of grain Ruth brought home, she knew someone had extended extra kindness.

6. (a) What did Naomi say the Lord had not stopped doing (Ruth 2:20)? (b) What evidence had there been so far that God was showing kindness to Ruth and Naomi? (c) What evidence do you have of God showing loving kindness to you?

Naomi told Ruth that Boaz was one of their *kinsman-redeemers*. God provided laws that called on close relatives to care for each other in time of need. One of them stated if an Israelite became poor and had to

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<sup>123</sup> Boaz's extra sensitivity to Ruth's plight may have come from Rahab being his mother or grandmother or ancestress. Matthew 1:5 reads Rahab was the "mother" of Boaz, but the words for father, son, and mother had broader meanings in the Bible than we use in English, and genealogies were often telescoped—that is, shortened to the most important names. (Matthew 1:8 telescopes when it skips three generations between "Jehoram the father of Uzziah.") Jericho probably fell about 1380; if Rahab were twenty at the fall and bore Boaz at fifty, he would have been born about 1350. David was born in 1040. That would leave 310 years for Boaz to Obed to Jesse to David, which would mean Boaz, Obed, and Jesse were bearing their sons at an average age of 103!

<sup>124</sup> The *New American Commentary* estimates between 30 and 40 pounds.



sell land, the closest male relative with financial means was to redeem, or buy back, the land.<sup>125</sup> Naomi saw a way this law might help them.<sup>126</sup>

## On Boaz's Threshing Floor

*Pages 124–126*

Boaz's kindness stirred hope in Naomi's heart, and she saw a possible way to provide Ruth a home and financial security. It was time to winnow the barley—they arrived in April at the beginning of harvest and it was now early June. Naomi told Ruth to wash, perfume herself, and put on her best clothes.<sup>127</sup> She sent her off to the threshing floor where Boaz and his workers would spend the night.

When all were asleep, Ruth quietly laid down at Boaz's feet. In the middle of the night, he awoke and discovered her.

7. (a) What did Ruth ask Boaz to do (Ruth 3:9)? The word translated *corner* is literally *wings*. She was asking Boaz to marry her and give her the wings of protection that a husband can give a wife. (b) What reason did Ruth give for her request?

Back when Ruth first met Boaz in the field, Boaz had talked about protective wings.

8. (a) Under whose protective wings did Boaz tell Ruth she had taken refuge (Ruth 2:12)? (b) In what ways had the God under whose wings Ruth sought refuge protected her? (c) Briefly describe a way God protected you when you turned to him for refuge in a difficult circumstance.

Boaz commended Ruth for her kindness to Naomi through this request: not only did she not go to Moab to seek a husband as Naomi had first urged her, but even in Bethlehem she didn't seek marriage to a young man, but was loyal to Naomi's family, who would be most likely to provide for Naomi (3:10).

<sup>125</sup> Leviticus 25:25. The original owner could get back his land by buying it back if he prospered, or by waiting until the Year of Jubilee, a special time God set up for all land to be returned to the original owners who had lost it through poverty. In Israel, God owned the land and allowed the people to live in it as tenants as part of his covenant with them.

<sup>126</sup> Elimelech likely sold his property before he left for Moab, with the hope of redeeming it when times got better. Land didn't typically pass on to widows, but the right to receive back the land would go to any son or grandson Naomi might have in the name of her husband or sons.

<sup>127</sup> Naomi may have been telling Ruth to end her mourning and put on clothes that showed she was ready to marry.

9. (a) The law required only brothers-in-law of widows to marry widows, but what did Boaz assure Ruth he'd do, once again going farther than the strict requirement of the law? (b) Ruth had thought others saw her as just a destitute widow, a despised foreigner, disgracefully barren, and lower than a servant.<sup>128</sup> How did Boaz assure her the townspeople viewed her? (c) Describe someone you consider to be a woman of noble character. What makes her that in your eyes?

But there was a hitch: there was a relative closer to them than Boaz.

### **At the Town Gate**

*Pages 126–127*

Boaz went to the town gate where business transactions often took place.

10. (a) What did Boaz tell Naomi's closest relative (Ruth 4:3)? (b) We're not told why this relative wasn't already reaching out to help Naomi since the whole town seemed to know her situation. Why is it important not to turn a blind eye to family member's true needs?

Naomi was destitute and called upon her closest relative to help if he could, as the law required.<sup>129</sup> The man planned to do it until he discovered attached strings.

11. What changed the man's mind (Ruth 4:5–6)?

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<sup>128</sup> Ruth 2:11, 13.

<sup>129</sup> If Elimelech sold the land before leaving, no relative could permanently inherit the land while it was possible Naomi might marry and have a child to carry on Elimelech's name. Therefore she might have been offering to sell that right of redemption. If Elimelech didn't sell the land, she might have been asking a kinsman-redeemer to buy it before she sold to an outsider.

The money he spent redeeming Naomi's property had to be taken out of his own estate, and her property would pass on to a son he'd be responsible to give Ruth. Perhaps he had other children whose inheritance he didn't want to lessen; we don't know.<sup>130</sup> But he decided not to redeem, and Boaz followed through on his word to Ruth.

## Naomi Filled

Pages 127

Although Ruth had been barren, the Lord enabled her to conceive and she gave birth to a boy, Obed. The townswomen told Naomi this child was her kinsman-redeemer. Not only did he bring her the joy of being a grandmother, but he would carry on the family name and inherit the property Boaz had redeemed, enabling him to care for Naomi in her old age.

12. (a) Consider the ways Naomi had been emptied. Now how has she been filled (Ruth 4:14–17)?
- (b) Describe some of the ways God has filled you.

God gave Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi a blessing bigger than they could imagine, for little Obed would be the grandfather of the mighty King David, who would bless all of Israel. And many years later, another descendant of Obed would come, this time to redeem the world.

13. Because of the loving kindness Ruth showed Naomi, the name *Ruth* has come to mean friend, the word *ruth* to mean compassion, and the word *ruthless* to mean cruel and pitiless. Review the ways in which God, Ruth, and Boaz showed loving kindness to hurting people. What is a way that you can show loving kindness this week to someone in need of compassion?

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<sup>130</sup> Technically, Moses' law didn't require him to marry Ruth. Since Naomi made this stipulation and Boaz had agreed to marry Ruth if he didn't, can you imagine what would happen to his reputation if he wanted to redeem the land without marrying her? Besides, Boaz had made it clear he fully intended to try to give Ruth a child to inherit the property, and this kinsman would then lose the property.

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 10: Standing Tall, Falling Hard*

**Key Question:** What attributes helped Hannah and Samuel stand tall?

### **Hannah**

*Pages 129–131*

This week we look at two people who stood tall before the Lord, and at two who were in positions to stand tall, but instead fell hard. We begin with Hannah, a woman of downcast circumstances whose faith stood strong.

In Hannah's day, barrenness was a great disgrace; some even considered it a sign of God's disfavor.

1. (a) In 1 Samuel 1:10–13, what did Hannah do about her anguish over not having children? (b) How did Hannah address God (verse 11)? (c) She is the first person in Scripture to address God like this. What does her use of this title suggest about her relationship to God? (d) What strikes you about Hannah's prayer, both in what she says and what she doesn't say? (e) Why do you think Hannah's misery drew her closer to God, rather than driving her farther from Him?

When God answered Hannah's prayer, she gave him credit by naming the child Samuel, which sounds like the Hebrew for *heard of God*. She also wrote a lengthy poetic prayer praising God.

2. (a) Why is it important to tell others about answered prayers and to give thanks? (b) Write a prayer of thanksgiving that incorporates something from 1 Samuel 2:1–2.

**Eli***Pages 131–132*

The child Samuel served under Eli, who was both priest and judge in Israel. Eli had two adult sons who were priests, like he. Unfortunately, they had no regard for God. They took for themselves and Eli the portions of peoples' sacrifices that were supposed to go to the Lord, thus treating the offerings with contempt.<sup>131</sup> They also had sex with the women who served at the tabernacle with them.<sup>132</sup> God sent a prophet to warn Eli and ask him why he honored his sons over God. But nothing changed.

One night God called to the boy Samuel while he was lying down in the temple near the ark.

3. (a) What did God tell Samuel he was going to do to Eli's family (1 Samuel 3:12–14)? (b) What are some possible reasons why Eli didn't stop his sons from misusing their office? (c) Why was Eli's failure to restrain his sons so serious?

**Samuel***Pages 133–136*

Like other children we've seen born to barren women after a long wait, Samuel had a special calling.

4. (a) What was Samuel attested as (1 Samuel 3:19–21)? (b) Why do you think God raised up a godly prophet like Samuel after Israel had suffered under the poor leadership of Eli and his sons?

Eli's sons hadn't faith in God to obey him or treat him respectfully. On the other hand, they treated the ark of the covenant of God as if it were a good-luck charm, taking it to a battle against the Philistines in the hope of securing victory from the God with whom they had no relationship. But the Philistines captured the ark and killed Eli's sons.

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<sup>131</sup> 1 Samuel 2:12–17.

<sup>132</sup> 1 Samuel 2:22.

5. What are ways people today treat things of God as good-luck charms?

God miraculously brought back the ark, proving he was God.

Samuel became judge over Israel. He gathered the people together, calling them to repent and turn back to God. Unexpectedly, the Philistines attacked them. Samuel cried out to God, who responded with loud thunder crashes against the Philistines. The Philistines panicked and the Israelites routed them. It was a perfect example of God going before them as King to lead their battles.

But the people weren't satisfied with that and eventually asked for a change.

6. (a) When Samuel grew old, what did the Israelites ask him to do (1 Samuel 8:5)? (b) Whom were they trying to imitate? (c) If possible, describe a time you wanted something so that you could be like everybody else, but it turned out not to be the best for you.
7. (a) Their request displeased Samuel, so what did he do (1 Samuel 8:6)? (b) In what way was he imitating his godly mother, Hannah? (c) Explain how you can respond as Samuel did to something displeasing you today.
8. (a) Whom did God say the people were really rejecting (1 Samuel 8:7–8)? (b) Nonetheless, what does God tell Samuel to do (verse 9)? (c) Samuel warns them what having a king will cost them. How do the people respond (verses 19–20)?

**Saul Starts Well***Pages 136–141*

God brought Saul to Samuel and told him to anoint Saul king.

9. In what ways was Saul like the kings of other nations, just as the people had requested (1 Samuel 9:1–2)?

Samuel anointed Saul king. Shortly after, Ammonites threatened one of the Israelite cities.<sup>133</sup> When Saul heard about it, “the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him” and he successfully delivered the city, solidifying his position as king in the eyes of the people.

10. What warning did Samuel give the people when he reaffirmed Saul as king (1 Samuel 12:14–15)?

11. (a) What did Samuel assure the people of, despite their having rejected his advice (1 Samuel 12:23)? (b) How can you apply this to your own relationships, particularly difficult ones?

**Saul Finishes Poorly***Pages 141–143*

Saul summoned troops to meet him at Gilgal for another battle against the Philistines.

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<sup>133</sup> Saul had relatives in the city, Jabesh Gilead.

12. (a) What had Samuel instructed Saul to do at Gilgal (1 Samuel 10:8)? (b) What did Saul do instead (1 Samuel 13:8–10)? (c) What did his lack of obedience to God’s command through Samuel show?

The kings of other nations performed priestly duties; in fact, they often claimed deity themselves. But that was strictly forbidden in Israel. The Israelite kings were to be submissive to God, and that included both following direction from godly prophets speaking in his name and obeying God’s laws regarding kingship. Saul failed both.

Nonetheless, the Lord rescued Israel again, this time through the hand of Saul’s courageous son Jonathan and an earthquake.

Later, Samuel came to Saul with a prophetic message from God.

13. What assignment did the Lord Almighty give to Saul in 1 Samuel 15:1–3?

The Amalekites were not among the Canaanite groups God told the Israelites to drive out of the land.<sup>134</sup> They were descended from Esau’s grandson, Amalek.<sup>135</sup> As Moses led the weary Israelites out of Egypt and through the Sinai Peninsula, the Amalekites attacked them from behind, cutting off those who lagged behind. Joshua turned back to lead the fight against the Amalekite army at their rear. A hard and difficult battle ensued, but the Israelites finally drove them away.<sup>136</sup>

<sup>134</sup> The Amalekites were nomads dwelling mostly in the Sinai Peninsula. They often acted as mercenaries, assisting others in wars and raids.

<sup>135</sup> Genesis 36:12. Amalek would have known about the promises God made to his great-great-grandfather Abraham, including that some of his descendants would be enslaved 400 years and then brought to the land of Canaan to drive out the inhabitants when the inhabitants’ sin had reached the measure warranting it (Genesis 15:13–16). Perhaps Amalek continued the jealousy over Jacob being chosen over Esau for the birthright. Did the Amalekites upon hearing of the miraculous deliverance of Jacob’s descendants now think they could prevent God from completing his plans? Whatever the case, they set out to destroy the people God had just rescued from Pharaoh, and in so doing set themselves against God.

<sup>136</sup> Exodus 17:8–16.



The Lord pronounced the severest form of judgment on the Amalekites: total destruction.<sup>137</sup> He told Moses to write down that God himself would be at war against the Amalekites.<sup>138</sup>

During the time of the judges, the Amalekites often oppressed the Israelites, joining forces with other peoples raiding them.

Samuel told Saul the time had now come to bring God's judgment against the Amalekites. They were to take no spoils or prisoners.

14. Did Saul obey God's command completely (1 Samuel 15:8–9)?

When Samuel confronted Saul, he claimed the people kept the animals in order to sacrifice them to God.<sup>139</sup> But that's not what God told Saul to do.<sup>140</sup>

Saul's refusal to obey God yet again brought consequences: his kingdom would not endure.

15. (a) What caused Saul to finish poorly? (b) What attributes did Saul and Eli lack that caused them to fall? (c) What attributes did Hannah and Samuel have that helped them stand tall?

We've seen how Hannah cried out to God in her misery and praised him in her joy. We saw Samuel talk to God when he was displeased, and we saw his commitment to intercede for those who had rejected his advice.

16. Write a prayer below based on one of these examples.

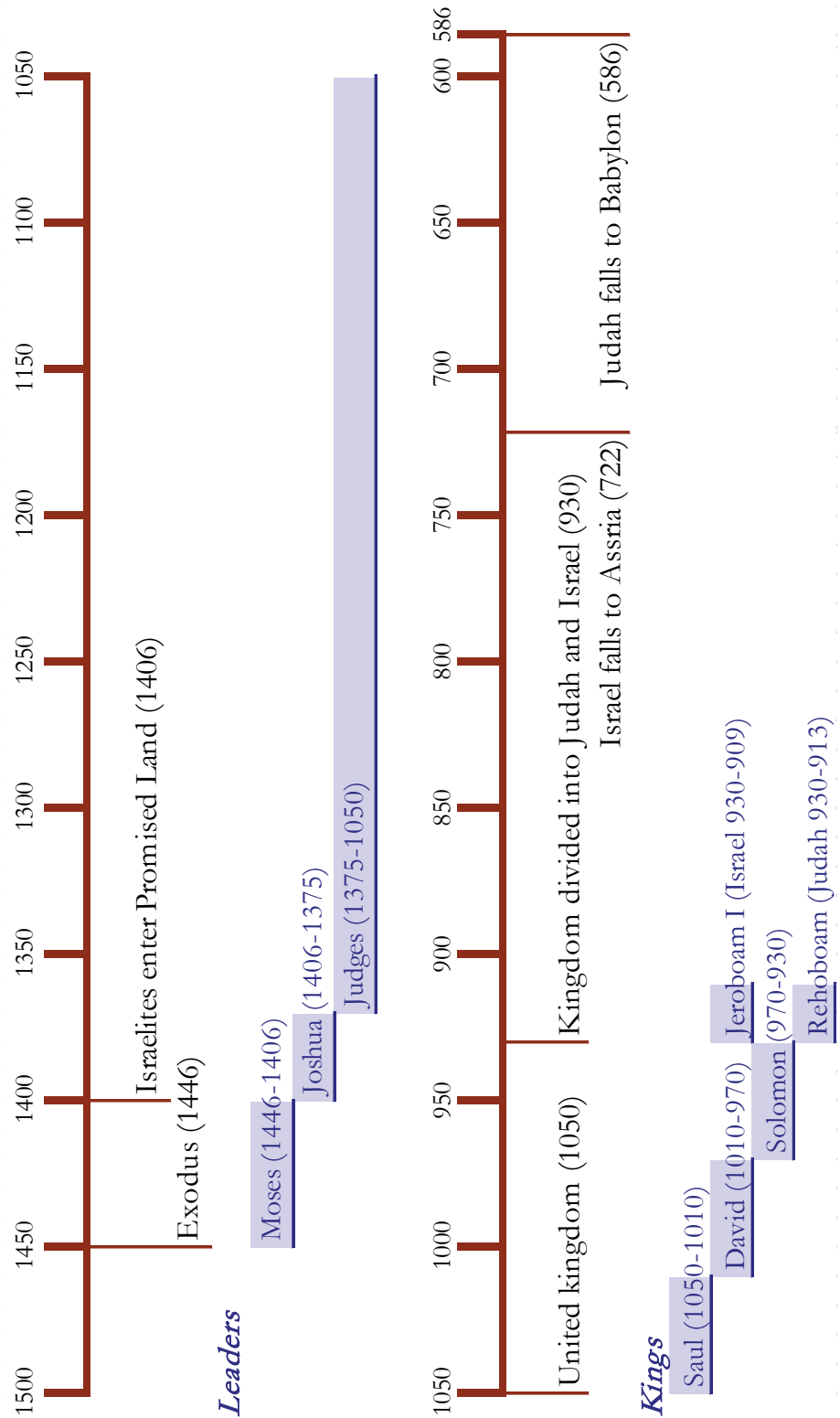
<sup>137</sup> The Hebrew word refers to the irrevocably giving over of things or persons to God, often by destruction.

<sup>138</sup> Later, when Moses addressed the next generation of Israelites just before they entered the Promised Land, he told them to remember, "When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and cut off all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God" (Deuteronomy 25:18). Moses gave them this charge: "When the LORD your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land he is giving you to possess as an inheritance, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!" (Deuteronomy 25:19).

<sup>139</sup> Note that those offering such fellowship sacrifices ate much of the offering.

<sup>140</sup> Saul did not kill all the Amalekites. Quite a few survived and David later fought against them too. They remained in the land until the time of Hezekiah. It's unclear whether Saul was to go after just the Amalekites residing in that portion of the land to which Samuel sent him.

## Timeline: Israel's First Leaders (1500–586 BC)



# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 11: From Shepherd to King*

**Key Question:** How did David live so as to fulfill God's purpose for his life?

### **Chosen**

*Pages 145–150*

God rejected Saul as king because Saul refused to obey him. Saul forgot the Israelites' purpose was to make God known to all nations, and that his duty as king was to lead them in fulfilling this purpose. Instead, he sought what he thought would bring himself the most glory.

God sent Samuel to the house of Jesse to anoint one of Jesse's sons as the next king.

1. (a) In 1 Samuel 16:7, what does God tell Samuel not to consider? (b) How do people tend to look at people? (c) How does God look at people? (d) Briefly describe a time you looked at someone based on outward appearances and discovered later that inside they were different. (Please do not share names if someone could be hurt.)

Samuel anointed David with oil, and the Spirit of the Lord came onto him. The anointing had to be kept secret, though, or all their lives would be at stake.

In time,<sup>141</sup> the Philistines gathered to attack the Israelites. They had a champion named Goliath who was over nine feet tall.<sup>142</sup>

2. (a) What did Goliath propose be done instead of an all-out battle (1 Samuel 17:8–9)? (b) What was Saul's and the rest of the Israelites' reaction (17:11)? (c) The Israelites had wanted a king to lead their battles; how was Saul measuring up?

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<sup>141</sup> Years have probably passed since David was called a "brave man and a warrior" before he first met Saul (1 Samuel 16:18).

<sup>142</sup> Goliath was likely descended from the Anak, of whom the ten spies were afraid when Moses sent them to explore the land. The Anak lived among the Philistines, who were part of the Sea Peoples, most of whom invaded the coasts in 1200 BC during the time of the judges.

3. (a) Why did David think he could defeat Goliath (1 Samuel 17:34–37)? (b) David could have considered shepherding beneath him since he would one day be king, but instead he gave it his all. Why is it important to be faithful in work that seems small or insignificant? (c) If possible, describe a time that you were faithful in something menial and that faithfulness led to something bigger.

David viewed the Philistine situation differently than Saul.

4. (a) How did David come against Goliath (1 Samuel 17:45)? (b) What would the whole world know if David defeated Goliath (17:46)? (c) What would all the frightened soldiers know (17:47)?

David knew the purpose for which God had called the Israelites: revealing to the whole world that God is God so they would turn to him and seek to know him through the revelations he gave through Moses.

## **Pursued**

*Pages 150–152*

Impressed, Saul kept David with him. His son Jonathan became David's close friend.<sup>143</sup>

David rose quickly in rank in the army as the Lord gave him success in all his missions. But there came a day when David's successes no longer pleased Saul.

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<sup>143</sup> Jonathan was a warrior at the beginning of Saul's reign, a decade before David was born (1 Samuel 13:3), so there was a large difference in age between them. That Jonathan gave David his sword and bow suggests he may have already suspected David would replace his father as king. See 1 Samuel 23:17.

5. (a) What angered Saul (1 Samuel 18:7–8)? (b) What did Saul do from then on (18:9)? (c) The next day an evil spirit<sup>144</sup> tormented Saul and David tried to soothe him with music. What did Saul in his jealous anger try to do (18:10–11)?

When David eluded the spear, Saul began giving David dangerous missions he didn't think David could survive. But God protected David and made him successful. After Saul tried more times to kill David, David finally fled. To convince his army to pursue David, Saul lied and said David was a traitor out to kill Saul.<sup>145</sup>

6. While fleeing from Saul, David wrote Psalm 59. (a) What did David pray for in Psalm 59:1? (b) David sang of the attributes of God which he most needed to remember. What were they (59:16–17)? (c) Which of God's attributes do you most need to remember right now? (d) What song or hymn has helped you to remember God's care during troubled times?

## Vindicated

*Pages 152–155*

Saul went into a cave to relieve himself, not knowing David and his men were hiding there. David's men were convinced God had delivered Saul into David's hands so he could kill him and become king. David cut a piece of Saul's robe, but didn't harm Saul.

<sup>144</sup> God gives evil spirits boundaries. Because Saul had abandoned God, he no longer had God's protective hand on him and God allowed an evil spirit to torment Saul as punishment.

<sup>145</sup> In 1 Samuel 22:8, Saul claims Jonathan convinced David to kill Saul. See also 1 Samuel 22:13

7. (a) What did David tell his men (1 Samuel 24:6–7)? (b) When Saul left the cave to return to his army of 3,000 men, David daringly stepped out of the cave and called to Saul. What strikes you most about what David said in verses 24:9–10? Why? (c) What did Saul admit (24:17)? (d) How did David's refusal to take Saul's life and Saul's admission vindicate David before Saul's army and David's men?

Despite Saul's admission, he continued to pursue David. Eventually David hid among the Philistines where Saul couldn't follow.

Years later, David wrote a psalm remembering all the times God had delivered him from his enemies, including Saul.

8. (a) In 2 Samuel 22:2–3, what did David say God was to him? (b) How then did God answer David's prayer in Psalm 59 (see question 6)? (c) David declared God's faithfulness to others. Think of a time God helped you after you prayed and then write a sentence or two declaring God's faithfulness to you.

## **Crowned**

*Pages 155–158*

About a year and a half after Saul's last encounter with David, Saul died in battle against the Philistines. Sadly, Jonathan died too.

The tribe of Judah crowned David king, but one of Saul's sons became king of the northern tribes. Seven and a half years later, Saul's son was assassinated. David put the assassins to death and the northern tribes asked David to be their king too.

9. David was 30 when he became king of Judah (2 Samuel 5:4). (a) Briefly describe a time you waited what seemed a long time before you saw a prayer answered yes. (b) How did you feel when the prayer was answered? (c) Why do you think God waited to answer your prayer?

David built his palace in Jerusalem.<sup>146</sup> After he was settled, he wanted to bring the ark of the testimony to Jerusalem, so he gathered many people to join him in doing so.

The ark was at Abinadab's house in Kiriath Jearim,<sup>147</sup> where it was left after the Philistines sent it back on an ox cart. Through Moses, God had given specific instructions about how to handle the holy ark.<sup>148</sup> The ark had gold rings fastened to its feet through which wood poles overlaid with gold were inserted. The ark was normally kept inside a tabernacle behind a curtain in a place called the Holy of Holies. It was out of sight of all but priests descended from Aaron. If it needed to be moved, Aaronic priests covered it with hides and cloths. Then Kohathites (a clan of Levites charged with caring for the most holy things) would carry the ark with the poles on their shoulders; however, they were not permitted to touch or look into the ark, lest they die.

10. (a) How did the men try to transport the ark of God (2 Samuel 6:3–4)? (b) Because the ark wasn't transported properly, what happened (6:6)? (c) What did God do (6:7)? (d) David later realized he hadn't checked to see how God said the ark should be handled. How can you find out how God wants you to live?

They had imitated the Philistines in how they transported the ark, rather than seeking God's instructions. God had permitted the Philistines who didn't have God's law to transport the ark that way, but he expected more from his people who did have it. The Lord told the priests it was their responsibility to know and to teach people how to treat the things of God: "You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean, and you must teach the Israelites all the decrees the LORD has given them through Moses" (Leviticus 10:10–11).<sup>149</sup>

<sup>146</sup> David conquered Jerusalem, which was between Judah and Benjamin (Saul's tribe). Ruling from Jerusalem helped unify the twelve tribes.

<sup>147</sup> Kiriath Jearim was also known as Baale Judah and Baalah of Judah.

<sup>148</sup> See Exodus 25:12–14; 26:30–33; and Numbers 4:4–6, 15.

<sup>149</sup> Abinadab took custody of the ark after a number of men died upon looking into it (1 Samuel 6:19–17:1), so his family members were aware it needed special treatment. It's not clear whether Uzzah and Ahio were Levites, though 1 Chronicles 15:2 says priests and Levites were involved.

Later David discovered his error and called together nearly a thousand priests and Levites. He told them God's anger had broken out because "we did not inquire of him about how to do it in the prescribed way."<sup>150</sup>

So the priests and Levites consecrated themselves and put on the sleeveless robes and ephods<sup>151</sup> made of fine linen which they wore when ministering before the Lord. David removed his royal garments and donned the same attire. Accompanied by a large multitude who sang and danced and played music, Levites carried the ark to Jerusalem.<sup>152</sup>

## Promised

*Pages 158–160*

David wanted to build a great temple to house the ark, so he consulted Nathan the prophet.

11. (a) What answer did God give in 1 Chronicles 17:4? (b) What did God declare he would build for David (17:10b)? (c) Whom would God allow to build the temple (17:11–12)?

David pleased God. David wanted to build God a physical house in the form of a temple, and God promised to build David a house in the form of a dynasty.

12. (a) What promise did God make to David in 1 Chronicles 17:8b? (b) How did David respond to Nathan's words in 17:16–17?

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<sup>150</sup> 1 Chronicles 15:12–13.

<sup>151</sup> An ephod was a short pullover the Levites wore over their knee-length robes. See 1 Chronicles 15:27.

<sup>152</sup> 1 Chronicles 15:15.



13. What have you learned from David as to how you might better allow God to fulfill his purpose in your life?

Saul sought to exalt himself and establish a dynasty, but achieved neither. David sought to exalt God, and God exalted him and promised him a dynasty. Jesus said, “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”<sup>153</sup>

14. (a) When you encounter situations where you think others aren’t treating you with the respect you deserve, how can you react with humility like David rather than with pride like Saul? (b) What is a practical way you can humble yourself this week?

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<sup>153</sup> Luke 14:11.

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 12: The Trials of a King*

**Key Question:** What qualities of King David's do you most need to imitate?

### **Bathsheba**

*Pages 161–163*

One evening David looked from the roof of his palace and saw a beautiful woman bathing. He asked about her and discovered she was Bathsheba, the wife of a valiant soldier he knew, Uriah.<sup>154</sup> Nonetheless, he slept with her and she became pregnant.

David brought Bathsheba's husband home, hoping Uriah would sleep with her. But he didn't.

1. (a) What did David ask Joab—the commander of the army—to do (2 Samuel 11:14–15)? (b) If you've ever been asked by a boss to do something wrong, explain how the request affected your opinion of and trust for the person. (c) What is a good way to respond when someone in leadership asks you to do something you believe is wrong?

After Uriah died, David married Bathsheba. But the Lord was displeased and sent the prophet Nathan to him.

2. (a) What was David's reaction when Nathan told him of the rich man stealing the poor man's precious sheep (2 Samuel 12:5–6)? (b) On whom had David actually pronounced judgment (12:7)? (c) We tend to find fault in others for the faults we don't want to see in ourselves. If you're angry with someone right now, prayerfully consider whether you've done the same sort of thing yourself.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Uriah was a member of David's elite military unit called the Thirty. Bathsheba was the daughter of Eliam, another member of the Thirty. Eliam's father was Ahithophel, David's wisest counselor. See 2 Samuel 11:3; 16:23; 23:34.

<sup>155</sup> See Jesus' teaching on this in Matthew 7:3–5.

God detailed the wonderful things he had done for David.

3. (a) How can remembering what God has done for us help keep us from temptation (2 Samuel 12:8)? (b) Why is doing what is evil in God's eyes equivalent to despising the word of the Lord (12:9a) and despising God (12:10)?

David's sin had been found out. When Nathan confronted him, David didn't make excuses or argue: He simply confessed, "I have sinned against the Lord."

That's what God wants us to do when we've done something wrong. And when we do, he promises to forgive us: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."<sup>156</sup>

God forgave David. Nonetheless, David's actions would bring painful consequences that God wasn't going to stop.<sup>157</sup>

## **Psalms of Mercy**

*Pages 163–166*

After David talked to Nathan, he wrote Psalm 51 as a prayer asking God to forgive him.

4. (a) In Psalm 51:1, upon what two attributes of God does David call? (b) How does knowing God has these attributes give us hope when we've sinned?

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<sup>156</sup> 1 John 1:9.

<sup>157</sup> Nathan said the sword wouldn't depart from David's house and someone close to him would sleep with his wives in broad daylight. In those days, kings took the harems of their predecessors, so to sleep with a king's wife was to claim his throne.

5. (a) In Psalm 51:7, what did David know would happen if God cleansed him?<sup>158</sup> (b) Why is this important to remember?
6. (a) David asked God for pure heart, steadfast spirit, and willing spirit (Psalm 51:10, 12). Why is a willingness to obey important to have before temptation strikes? (b) Take a few moments to ask the Holy Spirit to show you if there is sin you need to confess. If so, confess like David did, “I have sinned against you.” Then pray Psalm 51.

David didn’t just ask for forgiveness: he accepted it and rejoiced in it. In Psalm 32, David described the joy of being forgiven.

7. (a) What is the state of those whose sins God forgives (Psalm 32:1)? (b) What had life been like before David admitted his sin (32:3–4)? (c) What did David finally do (32:5a)? (d) What did God do in response (32:5b)?

Our merciful and compassionate God sent Jesus Christ to pay for our sins so we might be thoroughly cleansed.

8. Write a short prayer below accepting and rejoicing in God’s forgiveness and cleansing.

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<sup>158</sup> Priests used hyssop branches to sprinkle people or things that were ceremonially unclean with the blood of a specially sacrificed animal or the water of cleansing.

## Absalom

Pages 166–169

One day, David's son Absalom conspired to take over the throne.<sup>159</sup> In the ensuing battle, David commanded his men to treat Absalom gently. But Joab, David's commander, ignored his wishes and killed the young man, ending the rebellion, but breaking David's heart.

9. David's son turned on him and led a rebellion against him. Both Samuel and David loved God wholeheartedly, but faced the heartbreak of children who didn't. Are you in the same place, or do you know someone who is? Take a moment to pray the verse below for the wayward one. If you have a child who is not walking with God as you desire, ask your small group to pray for him or her this week.

Create in \_\_\_\_\_ a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within \_\_\_\_\_. *Psalm 51:10*

## Giving Back

Pages 169–172

God restored David's kingdom. Eventually, the time came for David to pass the throne to his son Solomon.

10. David prayed the following prayer for Solomon. Stop and pray the same prayer for yourself and your loved ones.

Give \_\_\_\_\_ the wholehearted devotion to keep your commands, statutes and decrees. *1 Chronicles 29:19a*

King David knew all that he had came from God, and in gratitude and deep love, found ways to give to God what he could.

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<sup>159</sup> Bathsheba's grandfather, the brilliant Ahithophel—David's most trusted counselor—joined Absalom. When Absalom's forces overtook Jerusalem causing David to flee, Ahithophel advised Absalom to sleep with his father's concubines in a rooftop tent and then to quickly send a large force to kill only David. Absalom followed the first part of the advice, thus fulfilling the word of the Lord foretold by Nathan. The Lord prevented him from following the second part of the advice and so saved David's life. It may be Ahithophel sought revenge over David sleeping with his granddaughter and murdering her husband.

11. David gave God heartfelt praise and gratitude. (a) What strikes you most about how David saw God in 1 Chronicles 29:11–13? (b) David had wealth, honor, strength, power, and exaltation. From where did they come (29:12)? (c) Write a prayer of thanksgiving for what God has given you.

David gave God his possessions. He gave above and beyond the tithes required by the law and provided lavishly for the construction of the temple his son Solomon would build to glorify God.

12. (a) What did David recognize about the gifts he gave to God (1 Chronicles 29:14, 16)? (b) How did recognizing this enable him to give with a willing and grateful heart? (c) David praised God as he gave gifts to him. Write a prayer to accompany your next offering to God.

## Psalm 23

*Pages 172–173*

David reigned forty years and then departed to be with the God he loved. In this psalm, the shepherd who became king pictured himself as a sheep cared for by the Lord.

13. Psalm 23:1–2 describes the Lord as a shepherd who *provides* for the sheep. What is a way God has provided for your needs?

14. Psalm 23:3 describes the Lord as a shepherd who ***perfects*** the sheep. What is a way God has been perfecting you?
  
15. Psalm 23:4 describes the Lord as a shepherd who ***protects*** the sheep, using a rod to discipline errant sheep and to chase off predators, and using a staff to keep the sheep from danger and to lift up a fallen sheep. What is a way God has protected you?
  
16. Psalm 23:5–6 describe the Lord as a shepherd who ***prepares*** good things for the sheep. What is a way God has prepared good things for you?

David, the man after God's own heart, went home to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 13: The King Who Had It All*

**Key Question:** What were Solomon's mistakes, and how can we keep from making them ourselves?

### **Solomon's Wisdom**

*Pages 175–178*

Soon after Solomon became king, the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.”

1. (a) What did Solomon say God had already done (1 Kings 3:6)? (b) What does this tell us about Solomon's attitude? (c) According to Solomon, why was God kind to his father, David (3:6)? (d) Solomon was married and had an infant son.<sup>160</sup> Yet how does he describe himself (3:7)? (e) What does this tell us about his character at this point in his life?
  
2. (a) Solomon could have asked for anything. What was his request (1 Kings 3:9)? (b) What does this tell us about Solomon's priorities? (c) What was God's reaction (3:10–13)?
  
3. (a) If God came to you in a dream and asked what you wanted from him, what would you request? (b) What would your request reveal about your attitude and character?

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<sup>160</sup> First Kings 11:42 says Solomon reigned 40 years, while 1 Kings 14:21 tells us his son Rehoboam became king at 41.



**Solomon's Proverbs***Pages 178–181*

At the beginning of Proverbs, Solomon explains why he has collected these wise sayings.

4. (a) In Proverbs 1:1–3, Solomon lists attributes he wanted to help others gain. What two attributes would you like to grow in most? Why? (b) There are 31 chapters in the book of Proverbs, making it easy to grow in wisdom by reading a chapter a day according to the day of the month. If you have done this in the past, describe one practical way Proverbs helped you. (c) If you've never done this, consider beginning now and continuing for at least six months.

Some proverbs instruct us about walking with God.

5. (a) According to Proverbs 3:5–6, if you want the Lord to direct your paths, what three things should you do? (b) How are these three things related? (c) We follow this proverb when we obey God, even though it might seem better not to. We also follow it when we choose to trust God, even when we can't see how any good can come out of our hardships. How can you apply this proverb to a current situation?

Many proverbs say something similar in two ways, emphasizing the point and rounding out the meaning.

6. (a) In Proverbs 3:11, what two things does Solomon say not to do? (b) Proverbs 3:12 gives the reason not to do these things; what is it? (c) Why do parents discipline children they love and delight in? (d) Why does God discipline you, whom he loves and delights in?

**More Proverbs***Pages 182–185*

Some proverbs require a bit of thought.

7. (a) In Proverbs 21:2a, how do our ways seem to us? Why? (b) In Proverbs 21:2b, what does the Lord do? (c) When we think our ways are right, why might the Lord find something different when he weighs our hearts? (d) What can we do so our opinion of our ways matches his?
  
8. (a) In Proverbs 21:3, what is more acceptable than what to the Lord? (b) In Solomon's time, someone who sinned sacrificed an animal to receive God's forgiveness. Why is doing right more acceptable to the Lord than doing wrong and asking for forgiveness? (c) What insight does this proverb shed on this attitude: "It doesn't matter if I obey God because he will forgive me anyway"? (d) How do Proverbs 21:2 and 21:3 relate to each other?

Proverbs often explain the benefits of living God's way and the hazards of not doing so. The benefits and hazards are general truisms—there might be the rare exception, but for the most part, these wise sayings accurately reflect real-life consequences. Consider these proverbs about finances.

9. (a) According to Proverbs 21:5, what should and shouldn't be a part of your life if you want financial success? (b) Why is Proverbs 21:6 true? (c) What does Proverbs 21:20 teach about finances?

## The Temple

Pages 185–189

Solomon built a temple to God in Jerusalem, just as David instructed.

10. (a) What did Solomon realize about the inadequacy of building a temple for God (2 Chronicles 6:18)? (b) What did Solomon ask God to do (verse 6:20)?

When Solomon finished praying, he blessed the people gathered before him.

11. (a) What did Solomon say had not failed (1 Kings 8:56)? (b) Summarize the blessings Solomon pronounces in verses 57–59. (c) What is the purpose for these blessings upon Israel (8:60)? (d) What reminder does Solomon give the people of what was needed for this purpose to be accomplished (8:61)? (e) God will never leave or forsake his children,<sup>161</sup> and he has promised to work in us to help us walk in his ways.<sup>162</sup> For God's full purpose to be accomplished in our lives, what do we need?

The Lord appeared to Solomon a second time.

12. (a) What did God tell Solomon in 2 Chronicles 7:12? (b) If the Israelites turned from God and he held back rain or sent a plague, what four things could the people do to receive forgiveness and healing for the land (7:14)?

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<sup>161</sup> Hebrews 13:5.

<sup>162</sup> Philippians 2:13.

13. (a) If the Israelites instead rejected God, what would God do (7:20)? (b) What would be the reason for these actions against the nation (7:22)? (c) Should this have been enough warning for the people to heed forever? (d) Should this have been enough warning to keep Solomon firm the rest of his life?

## Solomon & Women

*Pages 189–192*

During the time when Solomon was faithful to God, he helped others know God.

14. (a) What did the queen of Sheba do when she heard about Solomon's fame, despite having to travel 1,500 miles<sup>163</sup> (1 Kings 10:1)? (b) What does this teach us about the importance of seeking truth? (c) Why did the queen of Sheba glorify God (10:9)?

But Solomon didn't remain faithful.

15. (a) From where did many of Solomon's wives come (1 Kings 11:1–2)? (b) Why had God forbidden such marriages (11:2)? (c) What resulted from these marriages (11:3–6)?

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<sup>163</sup> Nearly 1,000 years later, Jesus gave miracles as a sign that he came from God. The unbelieving Jewish leaders discounted them, slandered their source, and demanded more proofs. Jesus said, "The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here."<sup>163</sup> The Queen of Sheba's costly pursuit of truth condemned the Jewish leaders who refused to believe Jesus was sent from God, despite their having seen even greater evidence than she.

16. (a) Why did it particularly anger God that Solomon turned from him after he had appeared to him twice (1 Kings 11:9)? (b) Disobeying a smaller command led to disobeying what big command (1 Kings 11:10)? (c) Sometimes people discount the importance of obeying commands they consider small. How does disobeying God in small things lead to disobeying in larger things?

Solomon was wise enough to know the best way to live, but he didn't always do it. In the end, he ignored his own advice: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."

17. How can you keep from making Solomon's mistake?

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 14: A Kingdom Torn in Two*

**Key Question:** Why is it important to do what is right in God's eyes?

### **Rehoboam's Folly**

*Pages 193–196*

After Solomon died, the people gathered to crown his son, Rehoboam, king. They asked him to lighten their taxes and labor laws.

1. (a) What advice did the experienced elders give Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:7)? (b) How did Rehoboam respond (12:8)? (c) What does this tell us about Rehoboam? (d) Do you think it is important for leaders to be servants? Explain.
2. (a) Whose advice did Rehoboam take (1 Kings 12:13)? (b) What does Rehoboam's answer tell us about him (12:14)? (c) How did the northern tribes respond to him (12:19–20)? (d) What can we learn about seeking advice from Rehoboam's mistakes?

The kingdom that David and Solomon had so carefully built split in two. The kingdom to the south became known as Judah,<sup>164</sup> and the kingdom to the north Israel.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> The kingdom of Judah contained the tribes of Judah and Simeon, and part of Benjamin. By the time Israel divided, the large tribe of Judah had absorbed the small tribe of Simeon in its midst, which is why the prophet Ahijah told Jeroboam God would give him ten tribes, leaving David's dynasty "one" (1 Kings 11:31–32).

<sup>165</sup> Prophets often called the northern kingdom Ephraim after the large tribe from which its first king, Jeroboam, came.

## Jeroboam's Idolatry

Pages 196–198

During Solomon's reign, the prophet Ahijah had told Jeroboam that God was going to take ten tribes away from Solomon's son and give them to Jeroboam to rule. He made him this promise: "If you do whatever I command you and walk in my ways and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and commands, as David my servant did, I will be with you. I will build you a dynasty as enduring as the one I built for David and will give Israel to you."<sup>166</sup>

Just as God promised, the northern tribes crowned Jeroboam king.

3. (a) According to 1 Kings 12:26–27, what did Jeroboam fear? (b) What does this show about his trust in God's promise to him? (c) What did Jeroboam try to stop the people from doing (12:28)? (d) What does this tell us about his priorities?

After Jeroboam sought advice, he placed one golden calf in Bethel on the main road to Jerusalem and the other in Dan, near Israel's northern border. He broke the Second Commandment: "You shall not make for yourself an idol."<sup>167</sup>

4. (a) Jeroboam's advisors told him to disobey God's command. What does this tell us about the advisors (12:28)? (b) What did people do with the calves (12:30)? (c) Jeroboam ignored Psalm 1:1: "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked." What can we learn about seeking advice from Jeroboam's mistakes?
5. (a) According to 1 Kings 12:31, what else did Jeroboam build? (b) What types of priests did he appoint? (c) What did Jeroboam do that only priests were permitted to do (12:33)?

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<sup>166</sup> 1 Kings 11:38.

<sup>167</sup> Exodus 20:4–6.

Since Jeroboam wouldn't let Levites perform their priestly duties, many of them moved to Judah.<sup>168</sup> Other God-fearing Israelites soon followed.<sup>169</sup>

6. How do you think the loss of priests and godly people affected Israel?

When Jeroboam's son Abijah became ill, the queen went to Ahijah, the prophet who had told Jeroboam he would be king.<sup>170</sup> The prophet gave her a message to take back to her husband.

7. (a) Who had made Jeroboam king (1 Kings 14:8)? (b) God had promised to build Jeroboam a lasting dynasty if he kept God's commands. What did Jeroboam do instead (14:8–9)? (c) Because of this, what was God going to do (14:10)?
8. (a) Why would young Abijah die (14:13)? (b) Isaiah 57:1 says, "The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil." From what was the boy Abijah being spared (14:11, 14:14)?

The very steps Jeroboam took to secure a dynasty doomed it. Although he passed the throne to a son, a rebel soon overthrew it.

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<sup>168</sup> 2 Chronicles 11:14. Note that 1 & 2 Kings tell the stories of both Israel and Judah, while 2 Chronicles tells the story of only Judah.

<sup>169</sup> 2 Chronicles 11:16–18.

<sup>170</sup> Some of these names can be confusing! *Abijah* is spelled with a *b* as in **boy**, while *Ahijah* is spelled with an *h*, as is **prophet**.



## Judah's Kings

Pages 198–201

Back in Judah to the south, Solomon's son Rehoboam abandoned God too, but unlike his northern counterpart, he repented after a prophet's rebuke.<sup>171</sup> His son's short reign (see the timeline on the last page) was half-hearted towards God. But his grandson, Asa, sought God and tried to reverse the problems his father and grandfather caused.

9. (a) According to 1 Kings 15:12–15, what did Asa king of Judah do? (b) Why (15:15)? (c) In contrast, his grandfather Rehoboam “did evil because he had not set his heart on seeking the Lord.”<sup>172</sup> How can you set your heart on seeking the Lord?

## Israel's Kings

Pages 201–202

Meanwhile, in Israel to the north things weren't going well. The rebel Baasha overthrew the throne. Godly Israelites compared the waywardness of their King Baasha to the devotion of Judah's King Asa and even more moved south to Judah.<sup>173</sup>

10. (a) What did Baasha king of Israel do about the defections (1 Kings 15:17)? (b) What should Baasha have done instead?

Israel's kings suffered a series of assassinations<sup>174</sup> that plunged the new nation into turmoil.

Finally the people crowned the powerful army commander, Omri, as king of Israel. Omri fortified a strategic hill and built a magnificent royal city on it, which he named Samaria.<sup>175</sup> Unfortunately, God wasn't his priority.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> 2 Chronicles 12:5–6.

<sup>172</sup> 2 Chronicles 12:14.

<sup>173</sup> 2 Chronicles 15:9.

<sup>174</sup> Nadab, Elah, Zimri, and probably Tibni.

<sup>175</sup> 1 Kings 16:24. During the time of the divided kingdom, the prophets sometimes used the names *Samaria* and *Jerusalem* to refer to Israel and Judah respectively because they were the seats of power, just as in politics we sometimes use *Washington* and *Moscow* to refer to the United States and Russia.

And then came Ahab.

11. (a) What was Ahab king of Israel like (1 Kings 16:30)? (b) Whom did he marry (16:31)?  
 (c) Jezebel's father was Ethbaal, the king of Tyre and Sidon and a priest of Baal. What did Ahab build and set up in the royal city, Samaria (16:32)?

Ahab also worshiped the goddess Asherah (16:33). Queen Jezebel wanted Baal to be Israel's national god and began killing the Lord's prophets.<sup>177</sup> Ahab king of Israel didn't stop her.

12. What was God's reaction (1 Kings 16:33)?

Things looked bleak for Israel. But God wasn't done with her. Next week we'll see how God miraculously intervened to let his people know that he was indeed God.

Let's pause to take a bird's eye view of the divided kingdoms.




## In the Eyes of the Lord

### Chart

The kings in Israel and Judah were supposed to be servants of God who implemented justice and led people to follow God so all nations would know God. But most didn't embrace that role.

The Bible sums up the kings' lives according to whether they did right "in the eyes of the Lord." They may have done right in their own eyes—most people do—but that wasn't the basis upon which their lives were judged.

The upcoming chart lists the passages that summarize kings' lives.<sup>178</sup> The gold rows show the kings of Judah, and the white rows show the kings of Israel. Keep this chart handy for your next few lessons.

<b>Legend</b>	
	King assassinated
	Kingdom divided under two rulers
	King dethroned by foreign power

<sup>176</sup> 1 Kings 16:25.

<sup>177</sup> 1 Kings 18:4.

<sup>178</sup> Dates are from the 1985 edition of *The NIV Study Bible* (Zondervan). Where dates in a single dynasty overlap, a father and son co-reigned.

13. Turn to the verses in the *Passage* column, and then check the box that best summarizes each king's life. (a) Judah had twenty kings. How many of them did right in God's eyes (gold rows)? (b) Israel had 20 kings too. How many of them did right in God's eyes (white rows)? (c) What does this tell us about the kingdoms?
14. Look at the *Dynasty* column.<sup>179</sup> (a) How many dynasties did Judah have (gold rows)? (b) How many dynasties did Israel have (white rows)? (c) What does this tell us about the stability of the two kingdoms' governments? (d) What conclusions can we draw from the *Notes* column?

Second Corinthians 10:18 says, "For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends."

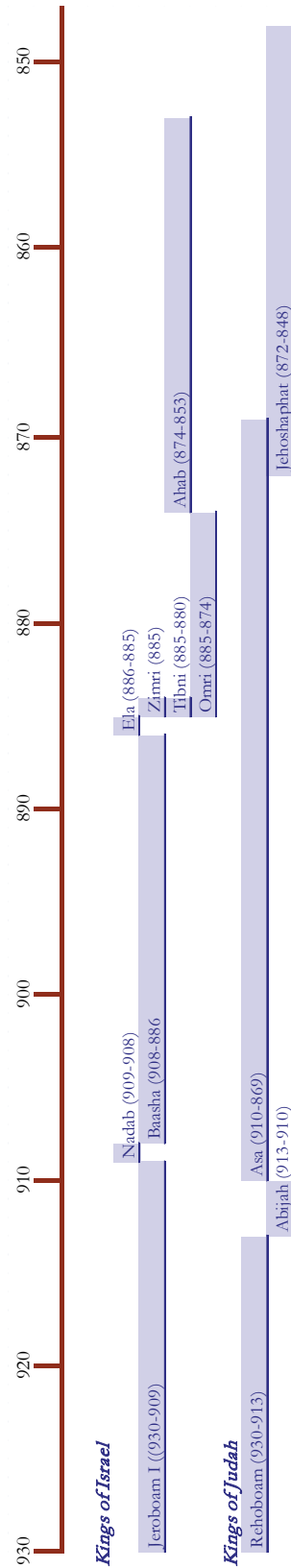
15. Which of these descriptions would best describe your actions? Why?
- ☐ Seek to find out what is right in the eyes of the Lord and then do it
  - ☐ Do what I feel is right in eyes of the Lord
  - ☐ Do what my friends or family think is right
  - ☐ Do what I want (I can always ask for forgiveness)
  - ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
16. (a) How do you want your life to be summed up? (b) What steps can you take to ensure that what you want will happen?

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<sup>179</sup> A king who overthrew the throne but was unable to pass it on to a son had no dynasty.

<i>Passage</i>	<i>Reign*</i>	<i>Notes</i>	<i>King in Judah</i>	<i>Right Evil</i>	<i>King in Israel</i>	<i>Right Evil</i>	<i>Dynasty</i>	
1 Ki 14:22	930–913		Rehoboam	□ □			David	
1 Ki 14:9	930–909				Jeroboam I	□ □	Jeroboam	
1 Ki 15:3	913–910		Abijah	□ □			David	
1 Ki 15:11	910–869		Asa	□ □			David	
1 Ki 15:26	909–908	✖			Nadab	□ □	Jeroboam	
1 Ki 15:34	908–886				Baasha	□ □	Baasha	
1 Ki 16:13	886–885	✖			Elah	□ □	Baasha	
1 Ki 16:19	885	✖			Zimri	□ □	—	
1 Ki 16:21–22	885–880	✖ ≠			Tibni	—	—	
1 Ki 16:25	885–874	≠			Omri	□ □	Omri	
1 Ki 16:30	874–853				Ahab	□ □	Omri	
1 Ki 22:43	872–848		Jehoshaphat	□ □			David	
1 Ki 22:52	853–852				Ahaziah	□ □	Omri	
2 Ki 3:2	852–841	✖			Joram	□ □	Omri	
2 Ki 8:18	848–841		Jehoram	□ □			David	
2 Ki 8:27	841	✖	Ahaziah	□ □			David	
2 Ki 10:31	841–814				Jehu	□ □	Jehu	
2 Ki 11:1	841–835	✖	Athaliah	□ □			—	
2 Ki 12:2	835–796	✖	Joash	□ □			David	
2 Ki 13:2	814–798				Jehoahaz	□ □	Jehu	
2 Ki 13:11	798–782				Jehoash	□ □	Jehu	
2 Ki 14:3	796–787	✖	Amaziah	□ □			David	
2 Ki 14:24	793–753				Jeroboam II	□ □	Jehu	
2 Ki 15:3	792–740		Azariah	□ □			David	
2 Ki 15:9	753	✖			Zechariah	□ □	Jehu	
2 Ki 15:15	752	✖			Shallum	□ □	—	
2 Ki 15:18	752–742	≠			Menahem	□ □	Menahem	
2 Ki 15:24	742–740	✖ ≠			Pekahiah	□ □	Menahem	
2 Ki 15:28	752–732	✖ ≠			Pekah	□ □	—	
2 Ki 15:34	750–732		Jotham	□ □			David	
2 Ki 16:2–3	735–715		Ahaz	□ □			David	
2 Ki 17:2	732–722	⊙			Hoshea	□ □	—	
2 Ki 18:3	715–686		Hezekiah	□ □			David	
2 Ki 21:2	697–642		Manasseh	□ □			David	
2 Ki 21:20	642–640	✖	Amon	□ □			David	
2 Ki 22:2	640–609		Josiah	□ □			David	
2 Ki 23:32	609	⊙	Jehoahaz	□ □			David	
2 Ki 23:37	609–598		Jehoiakim	□ □			David	
2 Ki 24:9	598–597	⊙	Jehoiachin	□ □			David	
2 Ki 24:19	597–586	⊙	Zedekiah	□ □			David	

### Timeline: Kings of Israel & Judah (930–850 BC)



# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 15: God's Messengers*

**Key Question:** How can we listen to God better?

### **Elijah on Mount Carmel**

*Pages 203–206*

A little over fifty years after the northern tribes split from Judah, Ahab became king of Israel. Influenced by his wife Jezebel, he made Baal worship the national religion.

God sent prophets to call his people back to him, but Jezebel killed as many as she could find. It seemed Baal was stronger than the Israelite God, Yahweh. The people wavered: Who was the *real* God?

God answered that question through the prophet Elijah.

1. (a) What did Elijah tell King Ahab in 1 Kings 17:1? (b) The Canaanites believed Baal<sup>180</sup> was a storm god who controlled rain, gave life through rain, spoke through thunder, and used lightening as a weapon. What was Elijah's message designed to prove?

After three years of drought drove home the point, God sent Elijah to Ahab. Elijah, Ahab, 450 Baal prophets, 400 Asherah prophets, and onlookers gathered on Mount Carmel.

2. (a) What did Elijah ask the people (1 Kings 18:21)? (b) Considering the people's beliefs about Baal, why do you think Elijah proposed calling for an answer by fire (18:23–24)?

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<sup>180</sup> *Baal* means "lord."

From morning to evening the Baal prophets called for their god to answer, to no avail. Finally, Elijah stepped forward. It was time to call on the God who had named their forefather Israel, the very name by which they now called themselves.<sup>181</sup>

3. (a) What was this contest designed to let the people know (1 Kings 18:36–37)? (b) What happened when Elijah prayed (18:38)? (c) How did the people respond (18:39)? (d) What long-lasting results should this have brought in Israel?

God acted miraculously so the people would know he was the one true God. Miracles are temporary suspensions of the laws of nature designed to prove that God is God and to confirm messengers and messages as being sent from him. The miraculous birth of Isaac to the barren elderly Sarah confirmed God's promise that he was building a nation through Isaac. The miraculous deliverance from Egypt through Moses proved that God called the Israelites, gave the covenant, and sanctioned Moses as leader and prophet.

And now, the miraculous fire from heaven proved the Lord God was God and he was the provider of rain, not Baal.

4. We communicate with God through prayer. Compare the Baal prophets' prayers in 1 Kings 18:26–29 with Elijah's prayer in 1 Kings 18:36–37. What can we learn about prayer from these passages?

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<sup>181</sup> 1 Kings 18:31.

## Elijah on Mount Horeb

Pages 206–209

The contest on Mt. Carmel showed decisively that the Lord is God. But Jezebel didn't buy it: When King Ahab told her what happened, she sent a message to Elijah that she planned to kill him.

Frightened, Elijah fled south. Leaving his servant in Judah, he continued alone into the wilderness beyond. There, convinced that the events on Mt. Carmel had failed to turn Israel back to God, he asked God to let him die.

5. (a) How did God provide for the exhausted and discouraged prophet's needs (1 Kings 19:5–8)?  
(b) What can we learn about God's character from this?

Elijah traveled to Mt. Horeb, the place where God had called to Moses from the burning bush,<sup>182</sup> established his covenant with the Israelites,<sup>183</sup> and passed by Moses to show him his glory.<sup>184</sup>

6. (a) What reason did Elijah give for going to Mt. Horeb (1 Kings 19:9–10)? (b) What other reasons might Elijah have had?

The Lord told Elijah he was about to pass by.

7. (a) In what phenomena did Elijah not find the Lord (19:11–12)? (b) Elijah may have thought that the Israelites' rejection of God's covenant would bring immediate destruction through one of these phenomena, but that was not so. What form did God take to reveal himself to Elijah (19:12–13)? (c) What can we learn from this?

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<sup>182</sup> Exodus 3:1–4.

<sup>183</sup> Exodus 17:5; 19:1–3; 20:18–19; Deuteronomy 5:2; 18:16. Mount Sinai is probably another name for Mount Horeb.

<sup>184</sup> Exodus 33:18–23; 34:5–7.



Elijah may have felt like a failure with no purpose for living, but God assured him otherwise. He sent Elijah back to continue his work, but not alone. He told Elijah to anoint a successor, Elisha, who would travel with him and serve him. He assured Elijah that Israel had 7,000 other faithful followers. Other prophets came out of hiding and Elijah mentored them. Elijah was no longer alone: He had fellowship and support. God met his every need.

God continued reaching out to Israel through more messengers. Jehoshaphat king of Judah encouraged Ahab to follow God, to ignore the false prophets who only told him whatever he wanted to hear, and to respect God's true prophets.<sup>185</sup> After Ahab died, Jehoshaphat sent Levites into Israel to teach Scripture.<sup>186</sup>

## Elisha

*Pages 209–213*

Elisha eventually inherited Elijah's ministry, and God did miracles through him too.<sup>187</sup> Ordinary people spread the word throughout Israel, Judah, and other nations.

8. We're God's messengers when we tell others about what God has done, even when it's not miraculous. Briefly describe something God has done for you.

Sometimes God grants special glimpses into the spiritual realm. That's what he did for Elisha's scared servant when an Aramean army approached.

9. (a) What did Elisha tell his servant (2 Kings 6:15–16)? (b) After Elisha prayed for his servant's eyes to be opened, what did the servant see (6:17)? (c) What can we learn about the spiritual realm from this?

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<sup>185</sup> 2 Chronicles 18:5–7.

<sup>186</sup> 2 Chronicles 17:7–9; 19:4.

<sup>187</sup> Elisha's request for a "double portion" of Elijah's spirit in 2 Kings 2:9 was a request for the inheritance rights of the firstborn.

**Amos***Pages 213–215*

Kings and prophets came and went. About forty years after Elisha's death, Amos prophesied in Israel.

A wealthy class now lived in luxury and pleasure seeking, but ignored God's laws to protect the needy. They oppressed the poor and sold them into slavery over paltry debts. The courts denied justice to the weak. Cheating, lying, drunkenness, and immorality abounded. Leaders silenced God's prophets and forced godly people to break vows. Idolatry was everywhere.<sup>188</sup>

10. (a) According to Amos 3:1–2, why would God punish Israel's sins? (b) What does God's decision to punish the unrepentant tell us about his care for the oppressed? (c) What does it tell us about God's justice?

11. (a) When the people refused to listen to the Provider of all good things, how did he communicate they were heading for danger (Amos 4:6 and 4:10)? (b) The New Testament tells Christians to "endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?"<sup>189</sup> What does this tell us about how God uses hardship?

A prophet's life was hard, for few people like being told their actions are wrong. A priest accused Amos of conspiring against the king and ordered him to get out.<sup>190</sup>

12. (a) According to Amos 5:6 and 5:14–15, what could the people do to avert disaster? (b) What does this tell us about the purpose behind godly exhortation? (c) Who was doing what was truly best for the people: Amos with his unwelcome message, or the priest who ordered him to stop prophesying? Why?

<sup>188</sup> Amos 2:6–12; 4:1; 5:7; 5:10–12; 6:4–6; 8:4–6.

<sup>189</sup> Hebrews 12:7.

<sup>190</sup> Amos 7:10–13.

**Hosea***Pages 215–217*

After Amos, God sent Hosea to Israel.<sup>191</sup> Conditions had worsened. Political assassinations divided the nation. Worse, the Israelites were sacrificing children to Canaanite gods.<sup>192</sup>

13. (a) In Hosea 4:1, what did Hosea say the people lacked? (b) What did they have instead (4:2)? (c) Hosea said people were mourning and wasting away because of this (4:3). Describe how you imagine it was like to live in Israel then. (d) What does God's concern about these things tell us about him?

Israel as a nation no longer served her purpose, and her oppression of the helpless had to be stopped.

14. What was inevitable now for the northern kingdom of Israel (Hosea 9:7)?

Israel's people could not stay in the land; they were going to Assyria.<sup>193</sup> By this God would heal their waywardness<sup>194</sup> so one day, the Israelites might seek God and again be under David their king.<sup>195</sup>

15. We've seen God speak to people through dramatic miracles, gentle whispers, loving provision, godly teachers, inspired Scripture, everyday people, spiritual glimpses, caring discipline, and stern exhortations. What are two steps you can take this week to listen to God better?

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<sup>191</sup> Amos prophesied from about 760–750 B.C., and Hosea from about 750–715 B.C.

<sup>192</sup> Hosea 13:2.

<sup>193</sup> Hosea 9:3.

<sup>194</sup> Hosea 14:4.

<sup>195</sup> Hosea 3:4–5.

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 16: The Beginning of the End*

**Key Question:** What can we learn from Ahaz and Hezekiah about trusting God in difficult times?

### **Assyria's Attacks**

*Pages 219–222*

To Israel's north, the Assyrian empire grew powerful and threatening. In 735 BC, the kings of Israel and Aram tried to force the newly crowned king of Judah, Ahaz, to join a coalition against Assyria. When he refused, they attacked, threatening to replace him with a king who would comply.

God sent the prophet Isaiah<sup>196</sup> to encourage Ahaz king of Judah not to be afraid, for he wouldn't let them overthrow him. He told Ahaz to ask for any sign as proof.<sup>197</sup> But Ahaz refused and instead sought Assyria's<sup>198</sup> help. He voluntarily became a vassal<sup>199</sup> to Assyria's king, paid him a large tribute, and set up shrines to Assyria's gods in Jerusalem.

In return, Assyria's king attacked and deported Aram's people.<sup>200</sup> Then he attacked Israel and took over all but the hill country of Ephraim<sup>201</sup> and forced her new king, Hoshea, to be a tribute-paying vassal.<sup>202</sup> Many Israelites fled south to Judah.

Eventually Hoshea king of Israel stopped paying tribute. Assyria responded brutally. The royal city of Samaria fell in 722, and the nation of Israel was no more.<sup>203</sup> Assyria deported Israel's inhabitants to other lands within its empire, replacing them with captives from other conquered nations.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Isaiah began prophesying in Judah in 740 BC, a little after Hosea began prophesying in Israel.

<sup>197</sup> Isaiah 7:11–12.

<sup>198</sup> 2 Kings 16:7.

<sup>199</sup> In such a relationship, the Assyrian king was called a *suzerain*, or *king of kings*. The vassal king submitted to the suzerain, paid tribute, and provided troops. In return the suzerain protected the vassal. The kings of Israel and Judah were supposed to be vassals of God.

<sup>200</sup> Aram fell in 732 (see the timelines on the last page).

<sup>201</sup> John H. Walton, ed., *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Iaian Provan 2009), 3:172.

<sup>202</sup> 2 Kings 15:29.

<sup>203</sup> The northern kingdom of Israel split from Judah in 930 and fell two centuries later. For perspective, consider how far the United States moved from the Biblical principles on which it was founded in just two centuries.

<sup>204</sup> 2 Kings 17:6, 24. Assyria designated this area the province of Samerina. Agricultural workers probably stayed behind. The mix of people were called the Samaritans by New Testament times.

1. (a) How had the Lord sought to keep Israel whole (2 Kings 17:13)? (b) How did the Israelites respond (17:14)? (c) Why does obedience require trust in the Lord? (d) Prayerfully consider if there is any area in which you are not obeying God. If so, ask God to show you where you lack trust and write out steps you will take to obey God.

Meanwhile in Judah, Ahaz found that Assyria gave him more trouble than help.<sup>205</sup> He abandoned the God of Abraham altogether and built an altar to the god of Damascus in the Jerusalem temple.<sup>206</sup> He built shrines for Canaanite gods and even sacrificed his sons in the fire of the god Molech.<sup>207</sup> Finally, he shut down the temple.

Ahaz died seven years after Israel fell, leaving his son, Hezekiah, with a kingdom in spiritual and moral disarray.

Hezekiah immediately set out to turn things around. He removed the idols and shrines, reopened and purified the temple, and put the temple back into service. He planned a huge Passover celebration and sent couriers not only throughout Judah to announce it, but also into the north to invite Israelites who had escaped deportation.<sup>208</sup> He emphasized that they were all really one people under the God of Israel.<sup>209</sup>

Hezekiah stopped paying tribute to Assyria. But undoing the sins of his father proved difficult, for in 701, Assyria laid siege to Jerusalem.

2. (a) How did the Assyrian field commander try to discourage the people within Jerusalem's walls from trusting God (2 Kings 18:29–32)? (b) How does Satan similarly try to discourage us from trusting God? (c) Briefly describe a time someone tried to discourage you or a loved one from trusting God.

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<sup>205</sup> 2 Chronicles 28:20.

<sup>206</sup> 2 Kings 16:10–14.

<sup>207</sup> 2 Chronicles 28:3.

<sup>208</sup> 2 Chronicles 30:6.

<sup>209</sup> 2 Chronicles 30:5. Since only one kingdom remained, the name *Israel* again referred to all descendants of Israel.

**God's Deliverance***Pages 222–224*

In the midst of the siege, Assyria's King Sennacherib sent Hezekiah a threatening letter. Hezekiah took it to the temple, spread it out before the Lord, and prayed.

3. (a) How does Hezekiah describe God (2 Kings 19:15)? (b) How does recalling God's attributes in prayer help us to trust God? (c) What does Hezekiah ask God to do in 19:16? (d) The letter said no nation's god had been able to deliver it from Assyria, and neither would Judah's God. How does Hezekiah's view differ (19:17–18)? (e) What does Hezekiah say will happen if God delivers Judah (19:19)?
  
4. Think of a situation in your life that you need to entrust to God. Find an object that symbolizes that situation, such as a letter, photo, or sketch. Lay it before you. Write a prayer based on Hezekiah's prayer. Begin by worshipping God for his attributes that you can depend on. Ask God to see your symbolic item. Explain the situation from a godly viewpoint as best as you can. Then ask for help with the situation, and thank him for using difficult circumstances to teach you how to trust him more.

God sent the prophet Isaiah to tell Hezekiah that he would save the city.

5. How did God rescue Jerusalem (2 Kings 19:35–37)?

**Judah's Judgment Foretold***Pages 224–226*

Isaiah's prophecies are collected in the book bearing his name.<sup>210</sup> Chapter six describes how God called him to be a prophet years earlier.<sup>211</sup>

6. What strikes you most about Isaiah's reaction to seeing God (Isaiah 6:5–7)?

The first six chapters of Isaiah call Judah to repentance and announce exile is imminent.<sup>212</sup>

7. (a) What did Isaiah see happening to Judah in Isaiah 3:8–9? (b) What causes people to parade sin?

Isaiah announced Judah's exile wouldn't happen in Hezekiah's lifetime and would be by Babylon, not Assyria.<sup>213</sup>

8. (a) What happens to children whose parents do not discipline them? (b) What happens to countries whose citizens suffer no consequences for crimes? (c) Explain the reason for God's judgment of Judah according to Isaiah 26:9–10.

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<sup>210</sup> In the Bible, the prophetic books are separated into the major (or long) collections and minor (or short) collections. Isaiah is not arranged chronologically.

<sup>211</sup> Isaiah 6:1 refers to King Uzziah's death in 740 BC. (He was also called Azariah.)

<sup>212</sup> Isaiah 5:13.

<sup>213</sup> Isaiah 39:6–7.

## Judah's Return Promised

Pages 226–228

Though exile would come, it wouldn't last forever.

9. Even though Jacob's descendants<sup>214</sup> would be exiled, what would eventually happen (Isaiah 14:1)?

Isaiah's final chapters were written to comfort the future exiles. They are filled with promises of restoration and hope.

10. (a) What would the future exiles feel was the reason for their suffering (Isaiah 49:14)? (b) What would be the truth about their situation (49:15–16)? (c) Have your emotions ever told you something different than the Bible tells you? What do you do when that happens? (d) Explain how Isaiah 49:15–16 applies to you.

## The Messiah Promised

Pages 228–230

Isaiah spoke of a future suffering Servant who would be the perfect Israel, the Messiah, the Great High Priest who would redeem people from all nations from sin and who would make known the Holy One of Israel.

11. (a) Why do you think the Messiah would have “no beauty or majesty to attract us to him” (Isaiah 53:2)? (b) Why would it be necessary for him to be familiar with suffering (53:3)? (c) Briefly describe a time Jesus took up your pain and bore your suffering (53:4).
12. The table on the next page lists New Testament passages showing how Jesus fulfilled Isaiah 53:4–12. Write the number of the fulfilled verse in the column on the right. (There may be more than one passage with the same verse, but verses are in order.)<sup>215</sup>

<sup>214</sup> After the northern kingdom of Israel fell, people began to again use the name *Israel* to refer to all Jews.

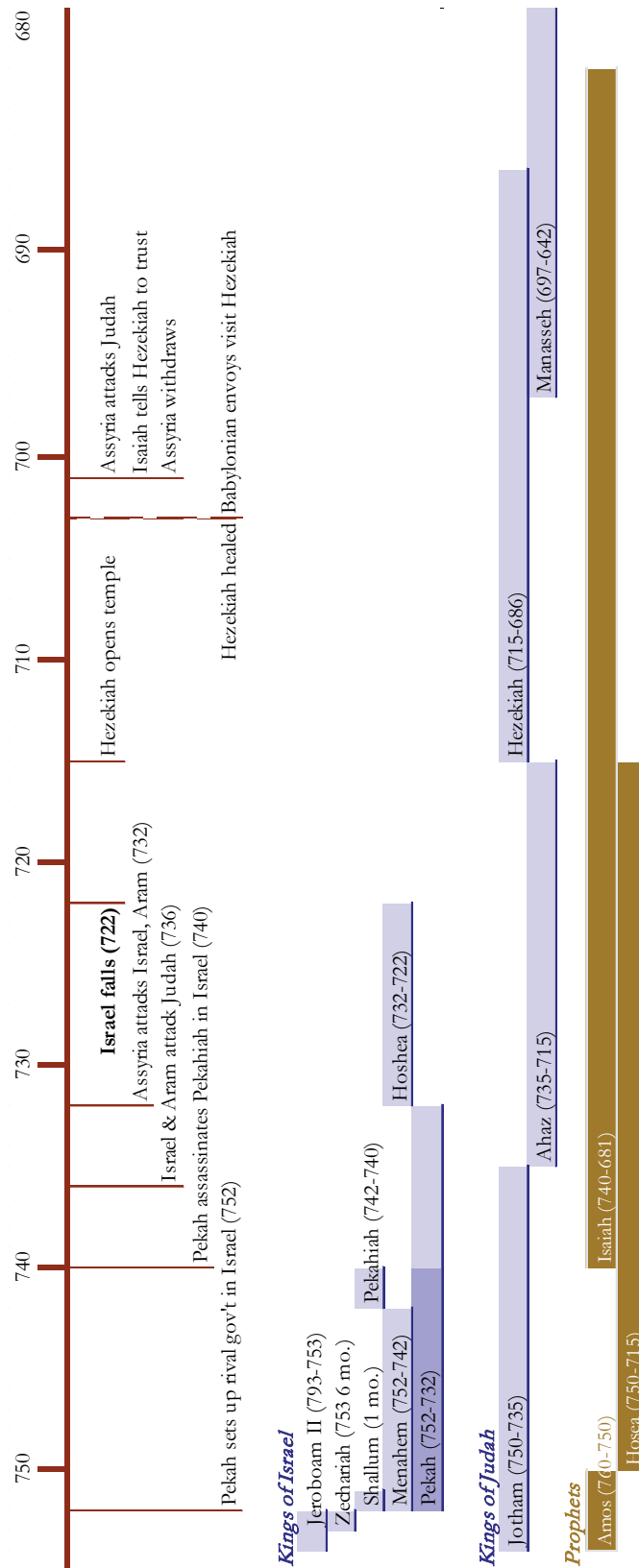
<sup>215</sup> Answer key: 4; 5; 5–6; 7; 7; 8; 9; 9; 9; 10; 10; 11; 11; 12; 12; 12.



New Testament Passage	Isaiah 53 Verse
When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: “He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.” <i>Matthew 8:16–17</i>	
Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. <i>John 19:34</i>	
He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. <i>1 Peter 2:24–25</i>	
The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” <i>John 1:29</i>	
When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him, “Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?” But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor. <i>Matthew 27:12–14</i>	
The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. <i>Matthew 26:59</i> For [Pilate] knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him. <i>Matthew 27:18</i>	
Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. <i>Matthew 27:38</i>	
As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. <i>Matthew 27:57–60</i>	
But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” <i>1 Peter 2:20–22</i>	
This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. <i>Acts 2:23</i>	
For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <i>John 3:17</i>	
... that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <i>1 Corinthians 15:4</i>	
For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. <i>Romans 5:19</i>	
And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! <i>Philippians 2:8</i>	
It is written: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors’; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me [Jesus]. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment.” <i>Luke 22:37</i>	
Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. <i>Hebrews 7:25</i>	

13. What passage in Isaiah is most meaningful to you? Why?

## Timeline: The Beginning of the End (750–680 BC)



# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 17: The Kingdoms' Fall*

**Key Question:** Why were the Jews exiled?

### **Manasseh**

*Pages 231–234*

Manasseh led people so astray that they did more evil than the Canaanites had done before them.<sup>216</sup> Yet he repented at the end of his life.

1. (a) How did God first try to reach Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33:10)? (b) How did God next try to reach Manasseh (33:11)? (c) What two things did Manasseh then do (33:12)? (d) How did God respond to Manasseh (33:13)?
  
2. (a) Briefly describe a time you had to increase disciplinary measures when a child refused to listen to correction. (b) When children are willfully disobedient, small consequences may not change their bad behavior, and increasing those consequences becomes necessary. How does this illustrate what happened with Manasseh? (c) What does God's willingness to forgive Manasseh tell you about God's willingness to forgive you?

Even though Manasseh personally repented at the end of his long reign, the moral and spiritual damage under his leadership had corrupted the nation. The rich and powerful oppressed the poor and weak. The people had become murderers, thieves, adulterers, and perjurers who regularly worshipped other gods.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> 2 Chronicles 33:9.

Manasseh's grandson Josiah tried to reverse the wrongs his family had done. His reforms affected many, including the towns of the northern tribes. But the changes proved to be only outward for most people. After Josiah died, the people quickly left God and returned to their old ways. Things got so bad that some asked why God allowed this evil to go on so long.<sup>218</sup>

Meanwhile, during Josiah's reign, the Babylonians had broken free from Assyria's rule. Not long after, Babylon conquered Assyria. The Assyrian Empire was over—the Neo-Babylonian Empire quickly expanded.

The last page of this chapter has a timeline of Judah's final years. Take a look at it before going to the next question.

3. In the passage we just looked at (2 Chronicles 33:10–13), how was Manasseh's life symbolic of what happened to Judah?

## Ezekiel

*Pages 234–237*

Ezekiel had spent 30 years preparing for the priesthood, and he was finally at the age in which he could serve. Then life suddenly changed.

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had put Judah under his empire's control eight years earlier, while allowing it to remain a nation.<sup>219</sup> He'd taken royalty, military, and craftsmen as captives to Babylon. One of the exiles, Daniel, was now well known for his righteousness and ability to interpret dreams.<sup>220</sup>

Then Judah's king rebelled against Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar returned to Judah, replaced the king, and took more captives, including Ezekiel.

Ezekiel's profession was useless in his new country. But God gave him a new purpose: proclaiming God's words as a prophet.

4. (a) How did God describe the people to whom he was sending Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:3–4)? (b) What did God tell Ezekiel not to fear (2:6)?

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<sup>217</sup> Jeremiah 7:5–9.

<sup>218</sup> Jeremiah 12:1; Habakkuk 1:2–4. When God told Habakkuk that he was about to send Babylon as punishment, Habakkuk initially argued passionately against this, but then came to trust God's bigger plan to stop wickedness.

<sup>219</sup> Judah's kings became vassals of Nebuchadnezzar, paying tribute and sending troops.

<sup>220</sup> Ezekiel 14:14, Daniel 2. We'll read more about Daniel next week.

5. Check the box that best describes Ezekiel's responsibility, according to Ezekiel 2:7:

- ☐ Speak in such a way that no one gets angry or hurt
- ☐ Hint at what God says so you can deny your meaning if someone gets mad
- ☐ Speak such persuasive words that everyone listens and repents
- ☐ Speak only to those who want to listen
- ☐ Speak what God says no matter what the reaction

Jesus said, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over."<sup>221</sup> Our motivation should be love. But having loving intentions doesn't mean our hearers will always respond well. Jesus' words were motivated by love, yet some of his hearers were so angered they killed him.

6. (a) Which of the responsibilities above do you usually feel most burdened by when you need to talk to someone who has done something wrong? Why? (b) According to God's instruction, should Ezekiel feel bad about himself if people responded angrily, cried, didn't listen, or didn't do what he said? Why or why not? (c) Should you feel bad about yourself if you've spoken to someone truthfully and in love, but they become angry? Is this hard for you?

## Jeremiah

*Pages 237–240*

More than any other prophet, Jeremiah recorded his feelings, shortcomings, and personal conversations with God, giving us an intimate look into what it was like to be a prophet during difficult times.

7. (a) When did God first know Jeremiah and appoint him as a prophet (Jeremiah 1:5)? (b) How did Jeremiah respond to God's call (1:6)? (c) What did God then tell Jeremiah (1:7)?

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<sup>221</sup> Matthew 18:15.

8. (a) Do you believe God equips those he calls? How should that belief affect your actions? (b) When God is calling you to do something, do you tend to hesitate? Why? (c) In what ways do God's words to Jeremiah apply to you? How can you move forward where God wants you to go?

Jeremiah began prophesying shortly after the godly King Josiah began his reforms. Through Jeremiah God told the people that they needed to change their ways if they wanted to stay in the land. They were breaking God's laws and then going to the temple with sacrifices, thinking that kept them safe from God's punishment. That, God said, was treating the temple as if it were a robbers' den—a place to go to escape consequences so they could continue their wrongdoing. They were trusting lies.<sup>222</sup>

Josiah listened to God's prophets and responded well to them. It was a good way for Jeremiah to begin his ministry and gain confidence and courage.

9. (a) How did God describe the strength he would give Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:18)? Why did God equip Jeremiah in this way? (b) What did God warn was going to happen (1:19)? (c) What did God promise to do (1:19)? (d) Describe a way God has strengthened you for serving in your family, profession, or ministry.

## The End Comes

*Pages 241–245*

Josiah's reforms died with him. The people had outwardly conformed, but their hearts were unchanged.

Many people didn't like the true prophets' unpopular messages and listened only to false prophets who told them what they wanted to hear: that they would have peace.<sup>223</sup> They persecuted and even killed prophets to shut them up.<sup>224</sup> God had promised Jeremiah that no one would kill him.<sup>225</sup> Even so, Jeremiah

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<sup>222</sup> Jeremiah 7:3–11.

<sup>223</sup> Jeremiah 5:31; 6:13–15; 14:14–15; 23:14–17; 27:9:10; 29:8–9; Ezekiel 13:1–23.

<sup>224</sup> Jeremiah 26:20–23.

<sup>225</sup> Jeremiah 1:8.

was mocked, cursed, threatened, beaten, put in stocks, imprisoned, thrown into a dungeon, and dropped into a muddy cistern where he was left to die.<sup>226</sup>

10. Sometimes we think if we encounter difficulties in ministry, we must be out of God's will. What can we learn from the hardships Jeremiah endured?

After the people rejected the prophets' call, Ezekiel saw another amazing vision. This time he saw the glory of the Lord depart from the temple.<sup>227</sup>

Judah's last king, Zedekiah, was young, weak, and uncertain. His officials had told him Jeremiah deserved death because he was "not seeking the good of these people but their ruin."<sup>228</sup> Zedekiah asked Jeremiah for advice, but didn't follow it because he feared his officials, even though Jeremiah assured him that God promised to protect him—if he would just obey.<sup>229</sup>

11. (a) What happened to the temple (2 Kings 25: 9)? (b) What happened to the walls that protected Jerusalem (25:10)? (c) What happened to the people (25:11)? (d) Who was left (25:12)?

12. (a) Explain why Zedekiah's officials were wrong about Jeremiah. (b) Prayerfully consider if there are any commands in the Bible you may be ignoring because you think obeying them would harm rather than help you (for example, the Bible tells us not to lie, but sometimes people think being truthful will get them in hot water).

<sup>226</sup> Jeremiah 11:18–23; 15:10; 20:2; 20:7–8; 26:8; 33:1; 37:15–16; 38:4–6.

<sup>227</sup> Ezekiel 10:18.

<sup>228</sup> Jeremiah 38:4.

<sup>229</sup> Jeremiah 38:14–27.



Jeremiah stayed in Jerusalem to help the few who remained. Despite having been mocked and persecuted, Jeremiah loved God's people and wrote lamentations<sup>230</sup> to help them grieve.

13. (a) How did Jeremiah weep with his people (Lamentations 1:1–2)? (b) The New Testament tells us to “mourn with those who mourn.”<sup>231</sup> Why is it important to acknowledge pain and sorrow before offering advice? (c) What can we learn from Jeremiah about loving those who have mistreated us?

Jeremiah knew what it was like to suffer. He shared what he had learned with those he sought to comfort.

14. (a) Jeremiah said he called to mind what he knew about God. Doing that gave him hope. What did Jeremiah call to mind (Lamentations 3:22–26)? (b) When we're caught in times of sorrow and pain, why is it important to actively call to mind what we know about God? (c) What do you most need to call to mind today?

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<sup>230</sup> Think of a country Western song describing a hurting heart to listeners experiencing similar hurts.

<sup>231</sup> Romans 12:15.

## Hope

Pages 245–247

After Jerusalem fell, God comforted the people through Ezekiel.

15. (a) What message of hope did Ezekiel bring (Ezekiel 36:33)? (b) What would the nations then know (36:36)? (c) Describe how God has used a loss or “exile” in your life to purify you and develop godly character so that those who know you can see God’s hand in your life.

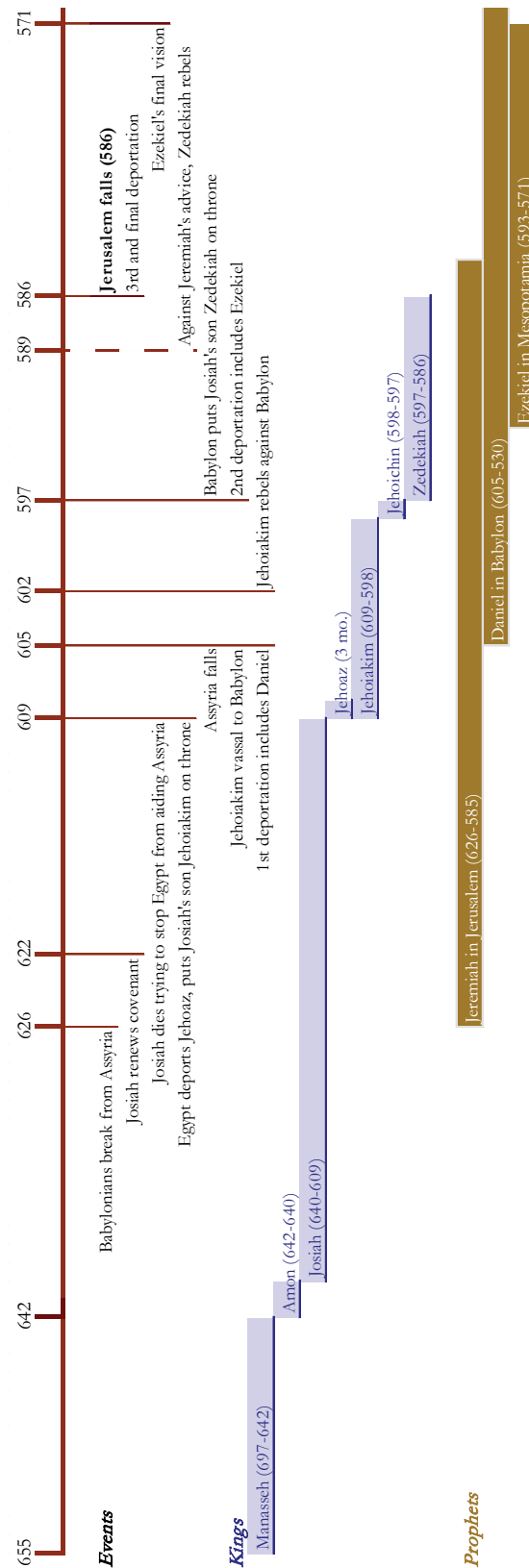
God punished the Israelites to purify them, not to destroy them. After the second deportation—the one that included Ezekiel—Jeremiah wrote a letter to encourage the exiles. He told them they would be exiled seventy years and then would return. He gave them this assurance from God: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”<sup>232</sup>

16. Is there an area of life in which you now feel desolate? Or do you feel as if you’re in an “exile” right now? What words of hope can you take from the Israelites’ experience? What hope can you remember for future times of difficulty?

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<sup>232</sup> Jeremiah 29:11.

## Timeline: The Kingdoms' Fall (655–570 BC)



# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 18: Daniel in Exile*

**Key Question:** What godly character traits did Daniel and his friends have that you would like to imitate?

### **Wisdom**

*Pages 249–250*

Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon overcame Judah and carried away treasures and captives. One of his officials selected from the captives young men of royal and noble birth who were handsome and intelligent, and who could one day serve in the palace. These were placed in a three-year training program for government positions.

Among those chosen were Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

But there was a problem. The king had assigned them rich food and wine from the royal table—the best in the land—but the young men didn’t want to be defiled by it.<sup>233</sup> So Daniel asked the chief official to allow them not to eat it. The chief official feared they’d look unhealthy, and that would put him in danger of losing his head (literally!). Daniel next turned to his guard.

1. (a) What did Daniel ask the guard to do (Daniel 1:12–13)? (b) Daniel could have stomped his feet, crossed his arms, and insisted he wouldn’t eat royal food. Instead, how did he show tact and respect? (c) On the one hand, Daniel couldn’t risk the chief official’s life. On the other, eating just vegetables and water might have caused him to lose weight. How did his request give room for God to act? (d) What were the test’s results (1:15–16)? (e) Briefly describe a time you were asked to do something against your conscience. Were you able to find a tactful and satisfactory solution?

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<sup>233</sup> The word translated *defiled* is sometimes translated *unclean*, and means moral or ceremonial uncleanness (*New American Commentary*). Among their concerns may have been that the Mosaic Law labeled some foods popular in Babylon, such as pork and horsemeat, as unclean (Lev. 11 and Deut. 14). They may have been concerned that the meat wasn’t prepared as the Law required, with blood carefully drained out. Another concern may have been that the wine and meat were at times offered to idols. The text doesn’t specify their concern and scholars give a number of possible explanations. Note, though, that the young men didn’t reject the food because they considered it unhealthy: in that era, it was the vegetable and water diet that was considered less healthy.

2. (a) What did God give Daniel and his friends (Daniel 1:17)? (b) God gives us talents to use in serving him and people. When the king noticed the young men's gifts, what happened (1:19)? (c) Describe a time God put you in a place where you could use the talents he gave you to serve him.

God put four gifted young men of faith in the service of the king who had just made Judah part of his empire. He was ready to show that even though he'd let Nebuchadnezzar overcome Judah, it wasn't because he lacked strength to stop it.

## Revelation

*Pages 250–254*

Nebuchadnezzar had such a bizarre, disturbing dream that he knew it had special meaning. He couldn't chance being told the wrong interpretation, so he demanded something astonishing: his wise men had to tell him what his dream was before they interpreted it, or he would execute them.

3. (a) Compare the astrologers' response in Daniel 2:11 to Daniel's response in Daniel 2:16. How did their religious beliefs differ? (b) What did Daniel urge his friends to do (2:18)? (c) What can we learn from this response to a seemingly impossible situation that we can apply to our lives? (d) Describe a time you joined with others to pray through a difficult situation. How did having group prayer support help?

God revealed both the dream and its interpretation to Daniel in the middle of the night.

4. (a) Daniel didn't claim to have the ability to tell people what their dreams were. Instead, what did he tell the king in Daniel 2:27–28? (b) Why was this important for the king to know? Consider what the king needed to know both about God and about Daniel. (c) What did Daniel call God in 2:29? Why was that an appropriate title?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. (a) Why did God reveal the dream to Daniel (2:30)? (b) Describe a time God revealed something to you that helped another person, or revealed to another person something that helped you. (c) How can you apply Daniel's attitude to situations like these?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. (a) What was the king's reaction to Daniel's knowing and interpreting his dream (Daniel 2:46)? (b) If Nebuchadnezzar ever thought he had conquered Judah because his gods were more powerful than Judah's God, what did he know now (2:47)? (c) What happened to Daniel and his friends (2:48–49)? (d) How might that fit into God's plans? (e) Describe a difficult time that showed you God is God.

**Courage***Pages 254–256*

Worshipping other gods was not an option for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Nebuchadnezzar was furious when they disobeyed his order to worship the enormous gold image he set up. He gave them another chance to obey, or he'd have them thrown into a fiery furnace.<sup>234</sup>

7. (a) What did Nebuchadnezzar say about gods in Daniel 3:15? (b) What did the three Jews say about themselves in 3:16? (c) What did they say about God in 3:17? (d) What would they do if God didn't do what he was capable of doing (3:18)?

They believed God was able to rescue them, but might choose not to.

8. (a) Why would they serve a God who might not rescue them even though he was able? (b) What can we learn about facing hardship from this?

Thrown into the blazing hot furnace, they were joined by someone the king described as looking like the son of gods.<sup>235</sup> They were no longer bound, and they walked among the flames unharmed.

Nebuchadnezzar had been wrong: the God of heaven was perfectly capable of rescuing his servants from the king.

9. (a) After Nebuchadnezzar called Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego out of the furnace, what did he say about them (Daniel 3:28)? (b) What did Nebuchadnezzar then decree (3:29)? (c) How did God use this event to let the nations know he is God, even though at the moment things weren't going well for the little nation that was supposed to represent him?

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<sup>234</sup> The furnace was probably the kiln used to make the statue. It had a large opening at the top and a smaller one at the side, through which its fire was stoked.

<sup>235</sup> This was Nebuchadnezzar's description of a supernatural being. We're not told who it was. It may have been an angel or the preincarnate Christ.

10. What can we learn about standing firm in our faith from Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

## Righteousness

*Pages 256–260*

The Neo-Babylonian Empire fell to Persia. The Persian King Darius was impressed with Daniel, who was an old man now, but still filled with wisdom. Darius planned to put Daniel over the kingdom, but jealous colleagues sought a way to stop him.

They knew Daniel prayed three times a day,<sup>236</sup> which gave them an idea for setting a trap. They and a group of other leaders went to Darius and claimed that all his leaders had agreed he should decree that no one could pray to any god or human for a month, except to Darius, on penalty of being thrown into a lion's den. It wasn't true, of course: Daniel hadn't agreed to it. Fooled, Darius followed their advice and issued the decree.

11. (a) What did Daniel do when he heard about the decree (Daniel 6:10)? (b) Describe Daniel's prayers (6:10–11). (c) What can we learn about prayer from Daniel?

An angel closed the lions' mouths, and Daniel remained safe. Darius's men lifted Daniel from the den and threw his accusers in instead.

Darius sent a letter throughout the Persian Empire.

12. (a) What had Darius learned about God from Daniel (Daniel 6:26–27)? (b) What are some of the reactions the exiles and other peoples may have had when they heard this news? (c) Describe a time when God rescued you from danger.

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<sup>236</sup> Daniel 6:13.



The Israelites were supposed to be a nation that made God known to all other nations. When they abandoned God, they couldn't serve that purpose as a nation. Yet God used even their disobedience as a means to reach people!

## Hope

*Pages 260–261*

When Daniel had been in Babylon 67 years, he recalled a letter the prophet Jeremiah sent to the exiles. It said the nations that had scattered Israel and Judah would be destroyed.<sup>237</sup> That had happened: both the Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian empires had fallen. Hope must have arisen in Daniel's heart.

13. (a) According to Jeremiah's letter, how long would the Lord wait to bring his people back to Jerusalem (Jeremiah 29:10)? (b) What was God's plan behind exiling his people (29:11)? (c) What did he want the people to do when the time was nearing its end (29:12–13)? (d) When they did, what would God do (29:14)? (e) What can we learn from this about our own times of "exile"?

Daniel, the righteous man of prayer, acted on God's promise.<sup>238</sup> He fasted, put on sackcloth and ashes, and prayed earnestly for God's mercy. He confessed his own sins and the sins of the Israelites. He expressed dismay over those who still refused to seek God. He called on God's love, mercy, and willingness to forgive.

Give ear, O God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name. *Daniel 9:18–19*

While he was still praying the Angel Gabriel appeared. The decree to rebuild the city was coming!<sup>239</sup>

14. (a) What lesson from Daniel and his friends do you most want to apply to your life this week? (b) What steps can you take towards achieving that?

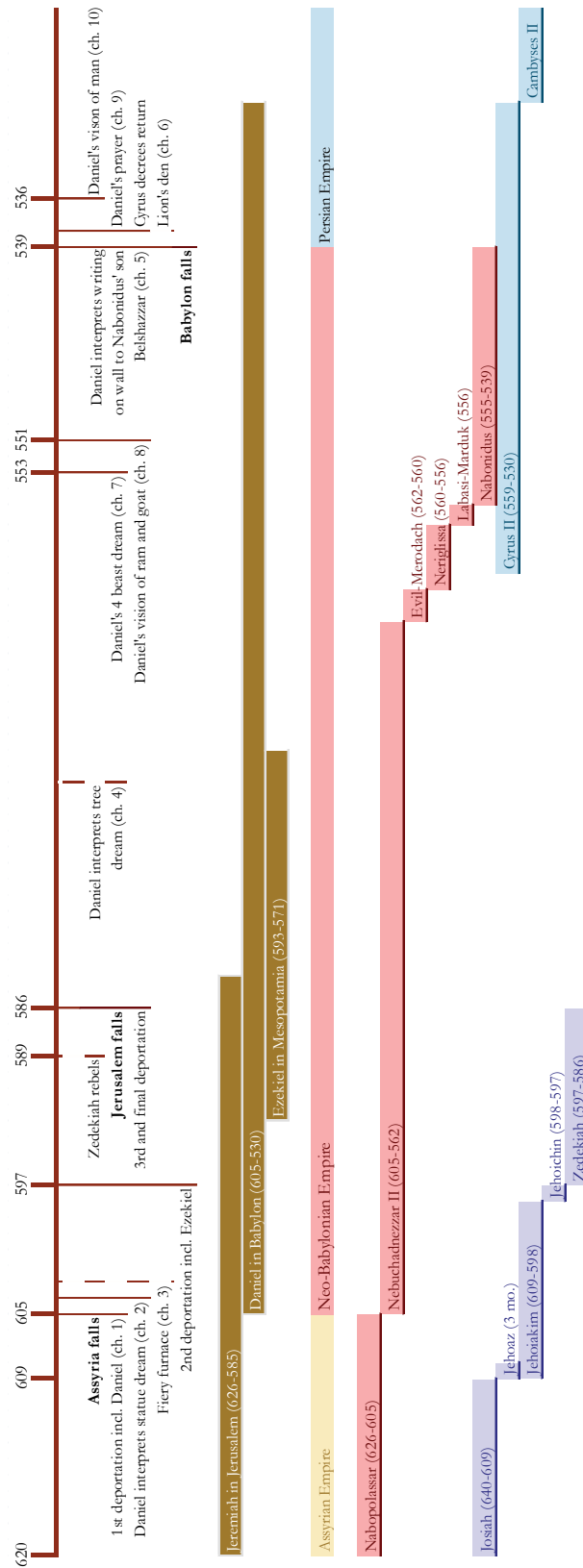
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<sup>237</sup> Jeremiah 30:11.

<sup>238</sup> Daniel 9:1–19.

<sup>239</sup> Daniel 9:25.

## Timeline: Daniel in Exile (620–530 BC)



# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 19: The Return Home*

**Key Question:** How can we rebuild an area of life that's been torn down?

### **The Return**

*Pages 263–266*

We have seen God's promises to Abraham miraculously fulfilled when Moses led the people to the Promised Land. We've seen highs, such as Israel's renown under David and Solomon. We've seen lows, too, through which God extended mercy. Finally, though, the split kingdoms of Israel and Judah abandoned God to the extent that they no longer could serve their purpose of making God known to all the nations, so the Lord sent them into a temporary exile.

Our last lesson ended with Daniel praying for God to fulfill his promise given through Jeremiah: bring the people back in 70 years.

1. King Cyrus decreed that the Jews could all return to their homeland (Ezra 1:1–4). (a) How did the Lord bring this about (1:1)? (b) What does this tell us about one way God works to fulfill his promises? (c) What were other people supposed to do for the Jews who wanted to return to their former land (1:4)? (d) What does this tell us about God's ability to provide the means for what he wants done? (e) Briefly describe a time God moved your heart to do something for someone else.

A century and a half earlier, God had said through the prophet Isaiah, “I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free.”<sup>240</sup>

- [illegible]

Although Cyrus told the Jews they could return to Judah, this restoration promise wasn't for just the tribe of Judah: it was for all Jacob's descendants wherever they lived.<sup>242</sup> Israelites had begun moving to the southern kingdom of Judah ever since the kingdoms split.<sup>243</sup> But when Assyria attacked Israel, a great number of Israelites fled into Judah, preserving a remnant there until Babylon came and moved most of the Jews to other places.<sup>244</sup>

When Cyrus conquered Babylon,<sup>245</sup> he divided the empire into provinces and set governors over each. He decreed the Israelites could return to their homeland, now a Persian province called Judah.

<sup>240</sup> Isaiah 45:13.

<sup>241</sup> For instance, are you recovering from a difficult or even devastating loss? Have you abandoned addiction? Has God torn away a false belief and are you in the midst of rebuilding on truth? Are you mending a shattered relationship? Are you building new friendships after a move?

<sup>242</sup> See 1 Chronicles 9:2–4. Some Israelites escaped Assyrian deportation or returned to their former homeland (2 Chronicles 30:1–13; 34:6–9).

<sup>243</sup> See 2 Chronicles 11:14; 15:9.

<sup>244</sup> See 2 Chronicles 30:25. Archeology shows a sizable population increase in Judah at this time (*The NIV Study Bible*, “Introduction: 1 Chronicles”).

<sup>245</sup> His general Gubaru captured the city and governed it under Cyrus. “Darius the Mede” (mentioned in Daniel) is probably another name for Gubaru. Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, second edition (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 2008), 497.

Nearly 50,000 exiles returned to Jerusalem in about 537 BC.<sup>246</sup> Babylon appointed one of them, Zerubbabel,<sup>247</sup> as governor. Within seven months, the people had settled in towns, and Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua called them together to begin restoring the things of God.

4. (a) What did the people build first (Ezra 3:2)? (b) What did they fear (3:3a)? (c) Nonetheless, what did they do when the altar was finished (3:3b)?

Since Jerusalem fell, the Israelites had had no altar on which to sacrifice sin and fellowship offerings. They knew their exile was due to sin. Now they finally were able to properly show their repentance and acknowledge their need for forgiveness. After this, they could also offer fellowship offerings.

5. What part does repentance and confessing sin play when we're recovering from loss due to sin?<sup>248</sup>

Next the Israelites laid the foundation of the temple. That brought a great celebration, but it also brought their enemies' attention.

6. (a) What happened that hindered their work (Ezra 4:4–5)? (b) What hindrances do you face in an area you're rebuilding?

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<sup>246</sup> Ezra 1:11; 5:16.

<sup>247</sup> Sheshbazzar (perhaps the son of the former king Jehoiachin) led the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:11, 5:16) as its first governor. Zerubbabel (perhaps Sheshbazzar's nephew) apparently became governor soon after.

<sup>248</sup> See 1 John 1:9.

The Jews' enemies were able to force all temple work to stop.<sup>249</sup>

## Haggai

Pages 266–268

In 520 BC, the prophet Haggai told Zerubbabel and Joshua it was time to finish the temple.

7. Consider Haggai's words to the people in Haggai 1:7–9. (a) What was keeping the people from their work? (b) What can we learn from this that applies to our seeking God first and giving to Christian ministries? (c) In an area of life you're rebuilding, in what ways has discouragement impeded your progress? (d) In this area, is there anything you've stopped work on that perhaps it's time to finish?

The people obeyed and set to work. Yet to those who had lived through the exile, the new temple seemed insignificant compared to Solomon's magnificent temple.

8. (a) How did God address their discouragement (Haggai 2:3–4)? (b) Although their work seemed small and insignificant, where was God and why was that important (2:4b)? (c) Is there anything in your life now that seems small and insignificant, compared to where you dreamed you'd be today? If so, how can the Lord's words through Haggai encourage you?

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<sup>249</sup> Work apparently halted during the reign of Cambyses, which was between the reigns of Cyrus and Darius. Ezra 4:1–23 summarizes a century of opposition. Verse 24 returns to about 520 BC and picks back up the story of rebuilding the temple; chronologically it belongs after verse 5. (See notes in *The NIV Study Bible*.)

Haggai proclaimed that this small temple would one day be filled with glory.<sup>250</sup> He also spoke of a coming judgment and glory that the New Testament tells us will be fully fulfilled in the future when God's people inherit a kingdom that cannot be shaken.<sup>251</sup>

9. What comfort is there in the promise that though our lives are often shaken here, there awaits an unshakeable kingdom for God's people?

## **Zechariah**

*Pages 268–270*

The prophet Zechariah joined Haggai in encouraging the people to be strong and rebuild the temple. Zechariah reassured the people that God would make them a blessing.

10. (a) How was God like a parent reassuring a child that's just been disciplined (Zechariah 8:13–17)? (b) What were the people to do? (c) How can we apply this message to our own lives?

11. (a) What would one day happen in Jerusalem (Zechariah 8:20–22)? (b) This promise encouraged the workers. What promises encourage you today?<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Many think this prophecy was fulfilled four hundred years later when Jesus entered the temple.

<sup>251</sup> Hebrews 12:26–28 quotes Haggai 2:6–7.

<sup>252</sup> If none leap immediately to mind, consider Romans 8:18; Roman 8:28; Philippians 1:6.

**Opposition***Pages 270–271*

So the Jews set to work despite opposition. Their enemies sent a letter to King Darius informing him that the Jews claimed Cyrus had authorized their work.

12. (a) According to their enemies, what kind of progress were the Jews now making on the temple (Ezra 5:8)? (b) How was their response to Haggai and Zechariah different than many of their forefathers' responses to prophets?<sup>253</sup>
13. (a) The enemies asked for the leaders' names; did the leaders let that intimidate them into stopping the work (Ezra 5:8–10)? (b) Briefly describe a time someone tried to intimidate you into not doing what you knew was right. (c) If you're rebuilding an area of your life, what intimidations have you faced?

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<sup>253</sup> Recall lessons 15, 16, and 17.



## The Temple Rebuilt

Pages 271–273

Darius found documents proving Cyrus had indeed authorized the Israelites to rebuild the temple.

14. (a) How did King Darius help the Jews (Ezra 6:6–12)? (b) How did this turn the tables on their enemies? (c) What does this teach us about God’s ability to complete what he wants done? (d) Describe a time God helped you overcome opposition to complete something you believed he called you to do.

The Jews finished building the second temple in 516 BC. The temple became known as Zerubbabel’s temple<sup>254</sup> in honor of the faithful governor who oversaw its completion. There had been about 70 years between the first exiles’ departure for Babylon and the first exiles’ return. There had also been about 70 years between the first temple’s destruction and the second temple’s completion.

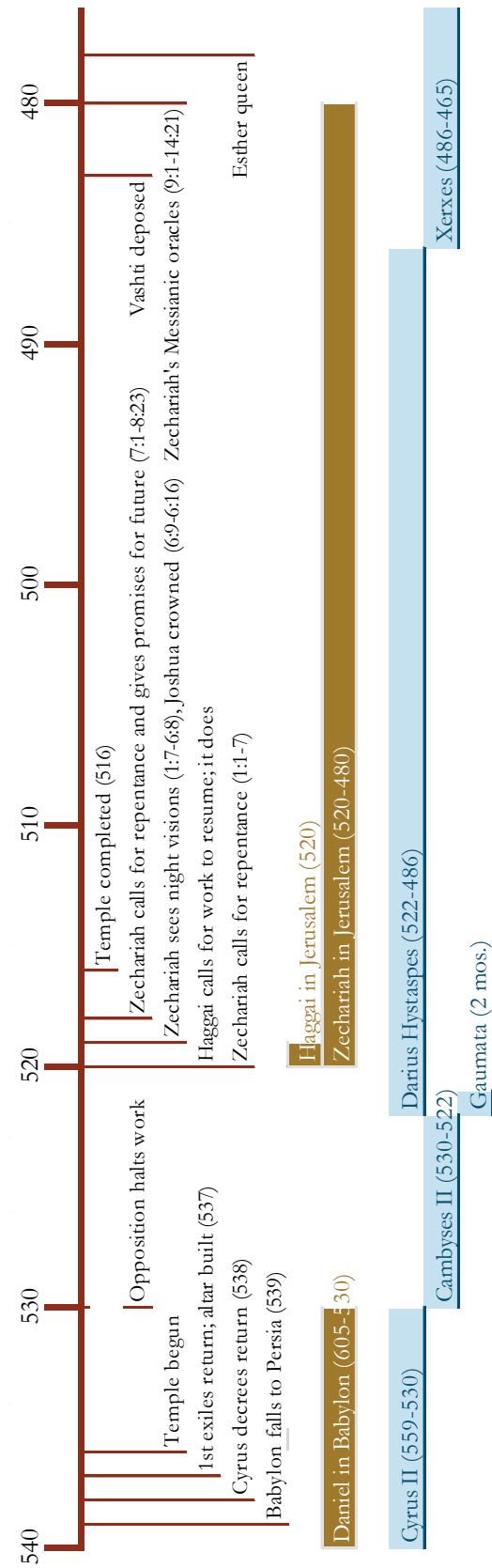
15. (a) What did the people of Israel do when they finished the temple (Ezra 6:16)? (b) Briefly describe a way you celebrated completing something.
16. (a) What lesson stands out to you the most about rebuilding an area of life that’s been torn down? Why? (b) How can you apply that lesson to your life?

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<sup>254</sup> The first temple is often called Solomon’s temple.

The restored exiles continued to rebuild their homeland and their lives. Many Jews did not return from exile, however, and God worked through them where they were, including through a Jewish girl we'll meet next week.

Timeline: The Return Home (540–470 BC)



# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 20: The Queen of Beauty and Courage*

**Key Question:** What are ways God works invisibly to accomplish his purpose?

### **A Royal Decree**

*Pages 275–277*

Zerubbabel finished building the second temple in Jerusalem in 516 BC, and the Jews who returned to their home continued building their lives in the Persian province of Judah. Most Jews remained in the places to which they'd been exiled, however, including the family of a man named Mordecai.

About thirty years later in a magnificent palace in Susa,<sup>255</sup> the ruler of the Persian empire, King Xerxes, demonstrated the glory of his possessions and position before his nobles for six months. At the end of the time, he gave a week-long banquet.

1. (a) In what mood was King Xerxes on the final day of the banquet (Esther 1:10)? (b) What did he wish to display to the people (1:11)? (c) How did the king feel about Vashti's refusal<sup>256</sup> (1:12)?

Enraged, Xerxes asked his highest legal experts how he should punish Vashti.

2. (a) What did the king's advisor seem most concerned about regarding Vashti's conduct (Esther 1:16–18)? (b) What did he recommend be done to her (1:19)? (c) What did the advisor say would be the outcome of the royal decree he recommended (1:20)?

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<sup>255</sup> Susa was east of Babylon and above the Persian Gulf in modern day Iran.

<sup>256</sup> The author doesn't give us Vashti's reason. Some suggest to display her beauty would mean appearing unveiled, which she may have considered inappropriate. Some Jewish commentators say Vashti was to appear naked, wearing *only* her crown, though the book of Esther does not specify that. If Vashti was another name for Queen Amestris, she may have been pregnant, for her son Artaxerxes was born about this time. In any case, she may have thought parading her beauty before inebriated men shameful.

3. (a) How did the king's attendants propose he find a new queen (Esther 2:2–4)? (b) How did the king feel about the proposal (2:4)? (c) Did the king consider the dreams and desires of the girls or their families? (d) Did he consider the feelings of the men who may have been courting the girls? (e) What have you learned about Xerxes so far?

## Lives Changed

*Pages 277–279*

King Xerxes sent commissioners throughout the kingdom to find beautiful girls for his harem so he could pick a new queen from among them. They found Mordecai's cousin, Hadassah, who also went by a local name, Esther.

4. (a) What happened to change Esther's life (Esther 2:5–10)? (b) What have you learned about Esther so far? (c) What might have been some reasons Mordecai forbade Esther to reveal she was Jewish (2:10)?

Esther was now in the king's harem and would soon be one of his many concubines, having a status lower than a wife. Yet she had a chance to be elevated to a queen.

5. (a) How might Esther have felt about this drastic change in life? (b) Have you ever had an unexpected life-changing event? If so, describe your feelings at the time.

6. What happened to Esther (Esther 2:15–17)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. (a) Meanwhile, what happened to Mordecai (Esther 2:21–23)? (b) What have you learned about Mordecai's character so far?

## Lives Imperiled

*Pages 279–282*

Once again the Jews faced enemies.

8. What happened that endangered all the Jews' lives<sup>257</sup> (Esther 3)?

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<sup>257</sup> The author does not tell us why Mordecai refused to kneel before Haman. Mordecai was a Benjamite and Haman an Amalekite, so the long-standing animosities between the people groups may have played a part (see 1 Samuel 15 and lesson ten). Religious scruples probably played a part too: "Although the Israelites used the custom of bowing down to superiors ... the Persians saw it as an act of reverence that bordered on recognizing the official as divine." Mervin Breneman, *New American Commentary – Volume 10: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1993), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 325-326.

Mordecai heard about the king's edict and fasted. When Esther heard that he lay in sackcloth and ashes, she sent attendants to find out why. He explained and instructed Esther to beg the king for mercy for the Jews.

9. (a) Why did Esther initially balk at Mordecai's instructions (Esther 4:8–14)? (b) What did Mordecai believe would ultimately happen for the Jews (4:14a)? (c) What did Mordecai tell Esther about the possible purpose for her being in her current position (4:14b)? (d) Describe a situation where you eventually discovered God's purpose for you being there.
10. (a) How did Esther show courage (Esther 4:15–16 and elsewhere)? (b) If possible, briefly describe a time you decided to do what was right despite potential terrible consequences.

10. (a) How did Esther show courage (Esther 4:15–16 and elsewhere)? (b) If possible, briefly describe a time you decided to do what was right despite potential terrible consequences.

Esther called for all the Jews to fast with her for three days, humbling themselves by denying their bodies' physical need for food to concentrate on their spiritual need for God through prayer.<sup>258</sup>

## Circumstances Reversed

*Pages 282–285*

The king's wives and concubines were supposed to wait for the king to call for them. Esther couldn't do that, though. So she put on her royal robes and stood in the king's court, even though so doing carried the death penalty. She risked her life, not knowing if he would react angrily, as he had when Vashti disobeyed him, or favorably, not counting her approach as an affront.

She waited. The king held out his gold scepter and spared her life.

<sup>258</sup> That they fasted assumes prayer.

Xerxes asked Esther what she wanted, fully aware it must be important. But she didn't just blurt out her request. They hadn't been together for some time, so she asked him to come to a banquet with Haman. There they could reconnect and she could ask for her people's lives without distractions.

11. (a) How was serving a banquet a way to look out for the king's needs before asking about her own needs? (b) When you want to ask someone for something, what are ways you can address their needs first?

12. What happened at the banquet (Esther 5:6–8)?

Esther apparently sensed the time wasn't right. She delayed her request a day and invited the king to another banquet.

13. (a) Briefly describe a situation in which you delayed requesting something because you realized the time wasn't right. (b) What are some things that can alert us that it's not a good time to ask for something?

Haman left the banquet happy, until he noticed Mordecai showed no fear in his presence. Furious, he erected a pole on which to impale Mordecai the next day.

But that night, everything began to change for God was working behind the scenes.



14. (a) What happened that night (Esther 6:1–2)? (b) What do you think was the cause of the king's sleeplessness and interest in his chronicles?

15. How were Mordecai's and Haman's circumstances reversed (Esther 6–7)?

### **More Reversals**

*Pages 285–289*

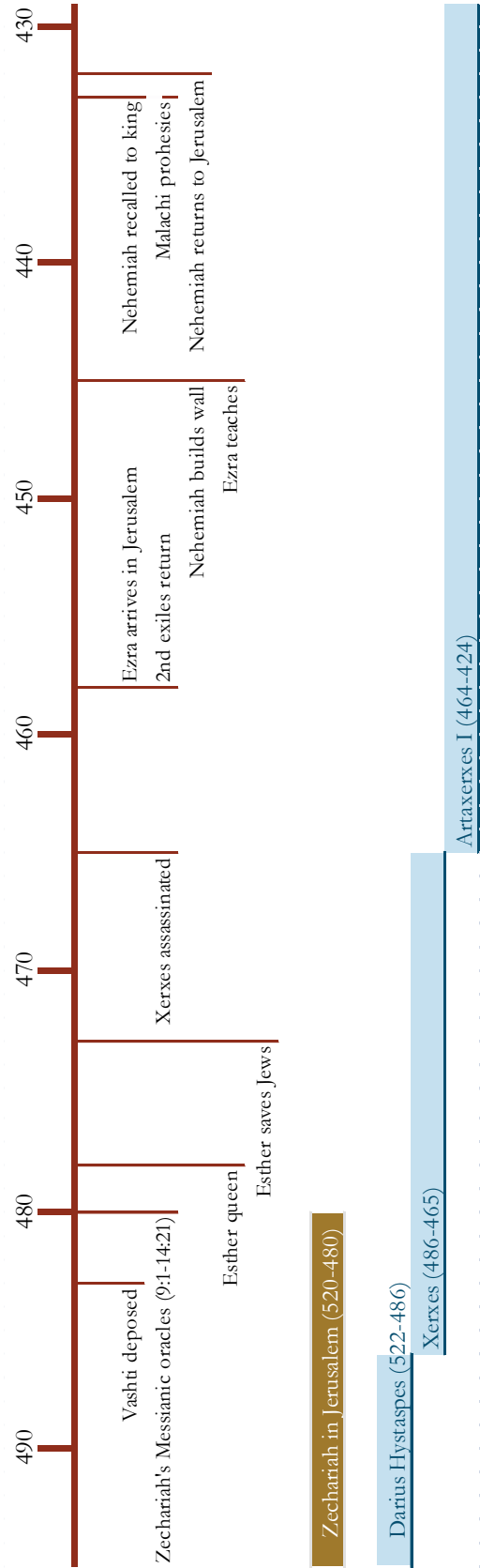
Haman was dead, but there was still the problem of the king's irrevocable edict that the Jews' enemies kill them.

16. How were the Jews' and their enemies' circumstances reversed (Esther 8–9)?

17. (a) List some ways God worked invisibly in the book of Esther. (b) What does this tell us about how God works in our lives?

18. Telling our stories of God's hand in our lives encourages others to trust God. Describe a situation in which God worked behind the scenes to accomplish something in your life.

Timeline: Esther (500–430 BC)



# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 21: Rebuilding the Walls*

**Key Question:** How can we prepare for and carry out the tasks God gives us to help others?

### **Ezra Prepares**

*Pages 291–294*

Back in the Garden of Eden, Satan tricked Eve into thinking God didn't have her best interests in mind when he forbade eating fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Though that disobedience brought death to mankind, God promised Eve a seed—an offspring—who would one day crush the serpent's head.<sup>259</sup> We traced that seed through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David.<sup>260</sup> We saw a nation built, divided, and fallen. We saw Jacob's descendants restored to the land, but not to self-rule.

Each time God's people failed to show God's righteousness on earth and the serpent appeared to be winning, God revealed a bit more about the promised seed and told his people not to give up hope.

Our story today opens nearly 60 years after Zerubbabel led 43,000 exiles carrying temple treasures, gold and silver back to Judah to rebuild the temple,<sup>261</sup> and 15 years after Esther saved the Jews. The majority of the displaced Jews did not return, having settled well in their new communities.<sup>262</sup>

As at all times in history, some people had hearts fully set on God, and some didn't. God sent three people with very different gifts to help and strengthen those in the Persian province of Judah who wanted to know him. The first was Ezra, who had been serving the king in Babylon.

1. (a) What was Ezra (Ezra 7:6)? He was also a priest. (b) Why had the king given Ezra everything for which he asked? (c) Describe a time someone who was well-versed in the Bible helped you to understand something about God. What difference did that make in your life?
2. (a) How had Ezra developed his teaching gift (Ezra 7:10)? (b) How are you developing the gifts God has given you?

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<sup>259</sup> Genesis 3:15.

<sup>260</sup> Genesis 12:7; 49:10; 1 Chronicles 17:14; Galatians 3:16.

<sup>261</sup> Ezra 1:6–11; 2:64–65; 2:69.

<sup>262</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel, Second Edition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 484.

Ezra asked the king to allow him to go to Judah and teach the people how to live according to God's laws. The king agreed and gave Ezra a letter granting authority, people, and supplies to accomplish his task.

3. (a) For what did Ezra praise the Lord (Ezra 7:27)? (b) Now that the king had given him what he needed, how did Ezra prepare for the task ahead of him (7:28)? (c) Describe a time God called you to do something that required courage. (d) What tasks do you have before you today that require courage?

Ezra brought 1,500 men and their families with him to Jerusalem, along with a huge amount of gold and silver donated by the king and others.<sup>263</sup> There he soon discovered the city's leaders had been unfaithful to God. Ezra mourned, fasted, and prayed over the situation. He led the people into confessing sins and repenting. Then he taught them about God, his laws about loving God and loving people, and God's purpose for the descendants of Abraham.

## **Nehemiah Prepares**

*Pages 294–296*

Ezra ministered to the people's spiritual needs, but they had other needs too. In particular, Jerusalem's walls were broken down, and in those days, a city needed walls to protect its inhabitants from raiders and other enemies. For these physical needs, God called another gifted leader: Nehemiah.

4. (a) What did Nehemiah do when he heard about the trouble in which Jerusalem's inhabitants were (Nehemiah 1:4, 6b)? (b) These were the same actions Ezra took when he discovered the problems in Judah and he wanted to know what God would have him do; why do you think this was their first response when encountering a major problem? (c) What can we learn from this?

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<sup>263</sup> Ezra 8:1–14; 8:24–27.

Nehemiah's heart ached for his people. He wanted to help. But he was the king's trusted cupbearer and couldn't take a leave of absence without permission. He decided to present a plan to the king.

5. (a) What did Nehemiah pray before talking to the king? (b) How might the king's response provide direction as to what God wanted him to do? (c) Briefly describe a time God gave you direction through the response of someone who had the authority to advance something or stop it.

The king granted Nehemiah's request, made him governor of Judah, and gave him everything he needed.

## **Nehemiah Builds**

*Pages 296–299*

The Jews' enemies were angry that Nehemiah was rebuilding Jerusalem's wall. They wanted them unprotected so they could attack at will.

6. (a) How did they try to stop the work (Nehemiah 4:1–3)? (b) The New Testament tells us we're in a struggle against the devil and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm.<sup>264</sup> What kind of "protective walls" are you trying to build for yourself, your family, and your areas of ministry? (c) Why don't your spiritual enemies want you to succeed? (d) Describe any discouraging thoughts you have been encountering as you try to build these walls. How are they similar to Nehemiah's enemies' taunts? Might your discouraging thoughts be coming from a spiritual enemy who wants to stop you from your work?

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<sup>264</sup> Ephesians 6:12.

Nehemiah prayed for God to turn the insults back on the insulters, and got back to work. He didn't let the mocking stop him.

When the wall was halfway up, new problems arose.

7. (a) How did the enemies respond to the workers' progress (Nehemiah 4:7–8)? (b) How did Nehemiah respond back (4:9)? (c) What other problems did the workers face (4:10–12)? (d) Briefly describe any similar challenges you're facing in your spiritual "wall building."
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. (a) How did Nehemiah respond to his problems (Nehemiah 4:13–14)? (b) How can you respond like Nehemiah in your spiritual battles?

In all, the Jews' enemies tried to stop the work by using mockery, distractions, threats, intimidation, false accusations, and temptations to compromise. But Nehemiah stayed focused and helped the workers in every way he could. They completed the wall in just 52 days.

9. (a) Why were the Jews able to succeed (Nehemiah 6:16)? (b) Why will you be able to succeed in the things God calls you to do?

## **Ezra Teaches**

*Pages 299–301*

Nehemiah completed the wall on October 2, 455 BC. On October 8, Ezra climbed on top a high wooden platform and read God's word to the people assembled around him.

10. (a) Ezra read from dawn to noon. What did the people do (Nehemiah 8:3)? (b) When Ezra opened the book of the Law and praised God, how did the people respond (8:6)? (c) What did the Levites with Ezra do (8:8)? (d) What can we learn from this?
11. (a) As the people listened to the words, what did they begin doing (Nehemiah 8:9)? (b) What might have been some of the reasons for their tears? (c) Why did Nehemiah tell them not to grieve that day (8:10)? (d) What did he mean by, “The joy of the Lord is your strength”? (e) What did the people then do (8:12)? (f) How can you joyfully celebrate something you’ve learned from God’s word recently?

## Malachi Exhorts

*Pages 301–304*

As always, not everyone had hearts after God. Eliashib the priest maintained ties with the Jews’ enemies. When Nehemiah returned to his cupbearer job, Eliashib misused the temple and quit giving the Levites their pay. Some Jews ignored the laws Ezra taught them about sacrifices. People stopped keeping the Sabbath holy. Divorce became common, and some married non-Israelite worshippers of other gods.<sup>265</sup>

God sent the people another prophet: Malachi.

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<sup>265</sup> Nehemiah 13.

12. (a) Malachi said those who offered defiled animals as sacrifices dishonored God (Malachi 1:6–7), and those who refused to bring the required tithes robbed God (3:6–10). What do those actions tell us about the relationship the people doing these things had with God? (b) What did God hear the people saying about him (Malachi 3:14–15)? (c) What does that tell us about their reason for serving God? (d) What is the difference between serving God only because we think he'll prosper us on earth, and serving him because we recognize he is the Almighty Creator who loves us?

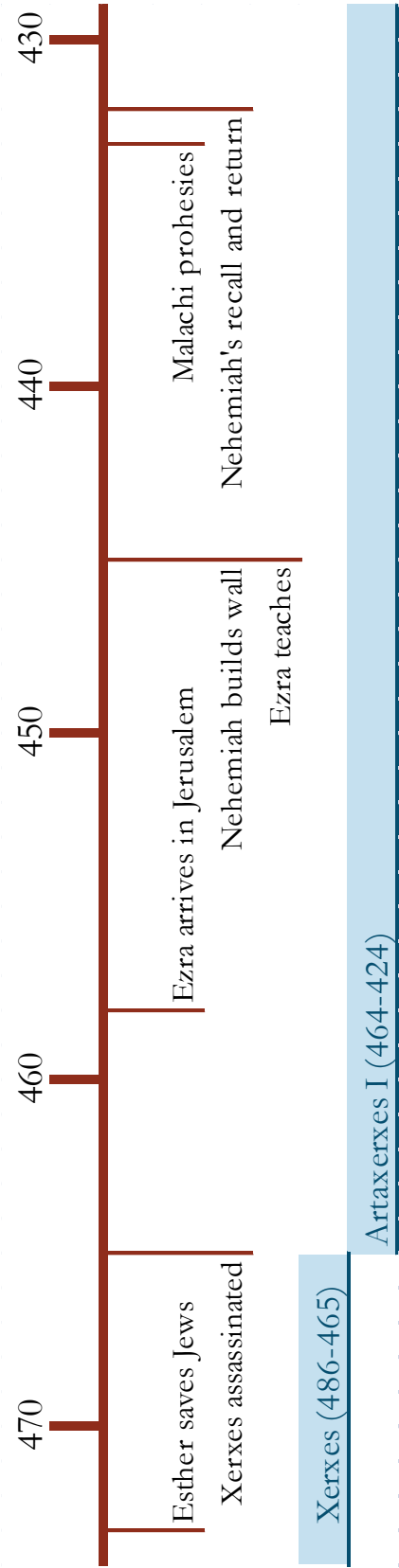
Those who feared the Lord responded well to Malachi's message, and God promised to remember them. Malachi told the people about a future Day of the Lord.

13. (a) What did God say about those who feared him (Malachi 3:17)? (b) On that coming day, what will everyone see (3:18)?
14. (a) What will happen to the arrogant and evildoers (4:1)? (b) What will happen to those who revere God's name (4:2)?
15. (a) Whom do you most relate to: Ezra, Nehemiah, or Malachi? Why? (b) How can you prepare for and carry out the tasks God gives you to help others?

Yes, God promised Eve a serpent crusher. Next week we meet him.



Timeline: Rebuilding the Walls (480–430 BC)



# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 22: The Birth of the King*

**Key Question:** What does “the Word became flesh” mean?

### **The Word**

*Page 306–310*

At the end of our last lesson, Abraham’s descendants had returned to the land, but not to a kingdom. They’d rebuilt the temple, but not filled the Holy of Holies.

As today’s story unfolds, four hundred years have passed since Malachi foretold the coming of the day of the Lord.<sup>266</sup> Palestine is part of the Roman Empire. The people are still waiting for the Messiah, the one anointed by God to deliver the Jews from bondage and be their king.

Now we open the New Testament and read from the Gospel of John of the bigger story of how God reached out to humankind. The Apostle John begins his story long before, with someone he calls the Word.

1. (a) When did the Word exist (John 1:1–2)? With whom was the Word? Who was the Word?  
(b) What does John 1:3 tell us about the Word?

John then describes what the Word offers people.

2. (a) What does the Word have in him (John 1:4)? What was that to people? (b) What did the light do (1:5)? (c) Describe a time you needed to go someplace in the dark. Why do we need light?  
(d) Why do people who live in darkness about God need light?

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<sup>266</sup> Just as the Israelites had 400 years of silence between the prophet Joseph and the deliverer Moses, so they had 400 years of silence between the prophet Malachi and the Deliverer Jesus.

The Apostle John next explains that John the Baptist testified about the light—we'll read more about John the Baptist next week.

3. (a) To whom did the Word give true light (John 1:9)? (b) Did everyone recognize him as such (1:10)? (c) The Word came to his own people (Abraham's descendants). Did they all receive him (1:11)? (d) Who has the right to become a child of God (John 1:12)? (e) The children of God aren't born the way human children are; how are they born (1:13)? (f) Many people assume all humans are God's children. According to this passage, is that true?

We'll read more about becoming God's children next week.

4. (a) What did the Word do (John 1:14)? (b) What did John and others see? (c) From whom did the Word come? (d) With what two characteristics was he filled?

The Word became flesh—we'll read how that happened in just a bit. After this build up, John finally tells us the Word's name and title on earth.

5. (a) Who was the Word known as on earth, and what did God give through him (John 1:17)? "Christ" is the Greek word for the Hebrew word "Messiah"! (b) Whom did the one and only Son reveal to people (1:18)? (c) Where was the Word at the time of John's writing?

Through Moses, God gave the law that showed people how to live righteously before him, and demonstrated that sin carried penalties that needed to be atoned for through blood sacrifice.

Now the Word of God—who was with God and was God—became flesh and lived on earth among people.<sup>267</sup> Through him God gave grace and truth, and revealed himself in an all new way. The Word was Jesus, the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah.

## A Willing Young Woman

Pages 310–311

The angel Gabriel appeared to a young woman living in Galilee<sup>268</sup>: Mary. He told her not to be afraid, for God favored her.

6. (a) What did Gabriel tell Mary in Luke 1:31? (b) How did Gabriel describe the child in 1:32–33? (c) What would the child be called (1:35)? Why? (d) How, then, did the Word become flesh?

Mary's child was conceived of God's Spirit, not of a physical union. Yet she would be looked upon as an unwed mother who disobeyed God's law. She likely wondered who would believe her story.

7. (a) Despite the difficulties she faced, how did Mary respond (Luke 1:38)? (b) What qualities did Mary have to be able to respond like this? (c) Briefly describe a situation in which serving God might have brought you hardship. How did you respond? (d) How can you respond like Mary in a situation today?

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<sup>267</sup> Jesus is with God and is God. Christians describe this with the term *Trinity*: in the nature of the One God are three eternal Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Bible refers to the three individually in several places, including in Jesus' great commission: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

<sup>268</sup> For most of the New Testament period, much of what was formerly Israel and Judah was divided into three Roman provinces: Galilee to the north, Samaria in the middle, and Judea to the south.

**The Savior's Birth***Pages 311–313*

When Mary's fiancé, Joseph, learned she was pregnant, he planned to break off their engagement quietly so she wouldn't face public disgrace. But God had something else in mind.

8. (a) How did God let Joseph know the truth about Mary's situation (Matthew 1:20)? (b) What did the angel tell Joseph about the child (1:21)?

Joseph obeyed the angel of the Lord and took the pregnant Mary as his wife

9. (a) What hardships might Joseph's obedience have caused him? (b) How did Joseph's obedience help Mary? (c) Describe a time when someone's obedience to God helped you. (d) Who is someone you could help today?

Joseph took Mary to Bethlehem, and there she gave birth in a stable. Heavenly angels didn't let this momentous event go unnoticed on earth.

10. (a) What did an angel tell shepherds about who the newborn was (Luke 2:10–12)? (b) What did a great number of angels then proclaim (2:14)? (c) The shepherds went to Bethlehem and found Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. What did they then do (2:17–18)?

## A Father's Protection

Pages 313–315

When King Herod<sup>269</sup> heard the king of the Jews had been born in accordance with prophecy, he tried to kill the child. He asked Jewish leaders where the Messiah would be born. Quoting Micah 5:2, they replied, “In Bethlehem.”<sup>270</sup>

11. (a) How did God protect his Son (Matthew 2:13–15)? (b) Briefly describe a time God protected you. Is it possible to know all the times God intervenes to protect us? (c) What family from the Old Testament went to Egypt to escape death (see lesson 3)?

Matthew says Jesus’ stay in Egypt fulfilled Hosea 11:1, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” This passage tells of God calling the Israelites out of Egypt. The young nation of Israel was born in the Promised Land, traveled to Egypt to escape death, was later called out of Egypt to establish a covenant, and returned to the Promised Land to fulfill its purpose of making God known. Matthew presents Jesus’ life as paralleling significant parts of Israel’s past, and thus fulfilling this prophetic word.<sup>271</sup>

## The Father's House

Pages 315–319

Joseph and Mary accidentally left the twelve-year-old Jesus behind in Jerusalem.

12. (a) Where did his parents find Jesus (Luke 2:46)? (b) Where did Jesus say he was (2:49)? What does this tell us he already knew? (c) What was young Jesus doing there, and why were people amazed (2:46–47)? (d) What does this tell us about Jesus?

<sup>269</sup> Herod the Great was Idumean (a descendant of Edom—Jacob’s twin brother). The Idumeans had been forced to convert to Judaism around 125 BC; Herod considered himself Jewish and called himself King of the Jews.

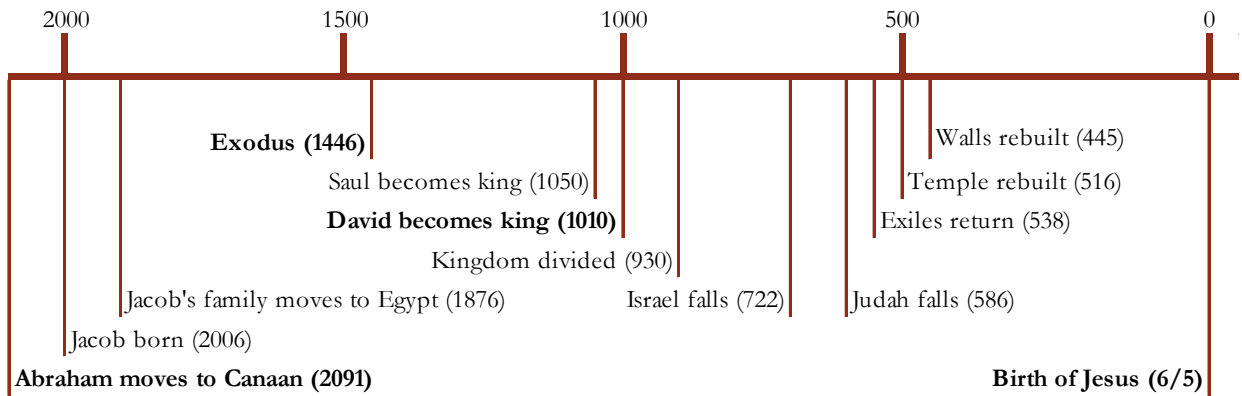
<sup>270</sup> This is an example of *predictive* prophecy.

<sup>271</sup> Israel was a *type* of Christ, so events in Israel’s history foreshadow events in Jesus’ life. The Bible uses many types that point forward to something greater. Some scholars call Hosea 11:1’s fulfillment here *typological* prophecy, for it referred to a past event that was a type of a greater future event.

Mary must have had some tough years, but God sent her many precious reminders of what he was doing and how he could let others know the truth about her Son at any time.

13. (a) What did Mary do with God's reminders (Luke 2:51b)? (b) What is something from God you have treasured in your heart?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
14. (a) All the women mentioned in Jesus' genealogy had something about them people considered questionable: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary (pages 318–319). What does that tell you about how God viewed them? (b) Many people believe they have things about them that others consider questionable. If God isn't embarrassed to have "questionable" women related to Jesus, is he embarrassed about the things that we might fear are questionable about us? (c) What advice do you have for Christians struggling with a questionable background?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
15. The shepherds to whom the angels appeared went to see the Savior child. They "returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen." Write a prayer below that glorifies and praises God for the things you've heard about Jesus this week.

Next week we'll see what happens when people begin to recognize the Messiah.

**Timeline: Abraham to Jesus (2000 BC–AD 0)**



# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 23: Jesus' Ministry Begins*

**Key Question:** How can expectations affect our reception of God?

### **The Test**

*Pages 321–323*

Back in Genesis, the devil tested Eve's obedience to God by telling her the forbidden fruit wasn't fatal, but would make her like God. Thinking God denied her something beneficial—something good to eat, exalting to have, and pleasing to behold—she stretched out her hand, wrapped fingers around the focus of her desire, tugged, and ate.

In the desert, the Israelites too faced tests. Like Eve, they doubted God's intentions for them were good. They despised the manna God fed them; disregarded his promise of grapes, figs, milk, and honey to come; and wailed for Egypt's leeks and garlic—thus giving in to the temptation to satisfy their physical hunger rather than obey God's word.<sup>272</sup> When thirsty, they did not turn to the God who had met their needs supernaturally time and again, but rebelled and tested God, asking, "Is the Lord among us or not?"<sup>273</sup> They gave in to bowing to a golden calf and to the Baal of Peor with its seductive women offering sexual pleasures, thus forgetting their promise to worship God alone.<sup>274</sup>

Tests confronted Jesus too.

After being baptized, Jesus followed the Spirit into the wilderness. There he fasted forty days and nights. When he was hungry and physically weak, the devil came to test him.

The first test called on Jesus to use his supernatural powers to turn stones into bread to satisfy his hunger.

1. (a) Jesus waited for the angels to attend him rather than create bread for himself. How did his response<sup>275</sup> differ from Eve's and the Israelites' responses<sup>276</sup> when they wanted food God had not given them? (b) What can we learn from Jesus about responding to physical cravings (Matthew 4:3–4)?

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<sup>272</sup> See Deuteronomy 8:2–3, which Jesus quotes after the first temptation. See also Numbers 11:4–5, 18–20.

<sup>273</sup> See Deuteronomy 6:16, which Jesus quotes after the second temptation. See also Exodus 17:1–7; Psalms 95:8–9.

<sup>274</sup> See Deuteronomy 6:13, which Jesus quotes after the third temptation. See also Exodus 32:4; Numbers 25; Numbers 31:16.

<sup>275</sup> See Deuteronomy 8:2–3.

<sup>276</sup> See introductory paragraphs or Genesis 3:6; Numbers 11:4–5; 18–20; Psalms 78:18–19.

For the second test, the devil stood Jesus on the highest point of the temple and told him to throw himself down, for Scripture said angels would protect him.

2. (a) What had the Israelites asked when they tested God?<sup>277</sup> (b) What similar doubt did Eve entertain?<sup>278</sup> (c) What part does doubt in God's intentions towards us play in most temptations? (d) What can we learn from Jesus' response (Matthew 4:5–7)?<sup>279</sup>

In the third test, the devil offered Jesus the glorious kingdoms of the world if he would bow to and worship him—a seemingly easier path than the Father offered, which was the cross.

3. (a) What are ways the tempter today claims his method is easier than God's? (b) How is ignoring God's commands a way of bowing to the tempter? (c) Covetousness is idolatry.<sup>280</sup> What can we learn from Jesus about responding to desires for possessions, positions, and power which God isn't giving us (Matthew 4:8–10)?

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<sup>277</sup> See introductory paragraphs or Exodus 17:7. The Israelites tested God by doubting he'd provide for them when they met difficulties and by demanding proofs of God's presence and abilities, even though they'd seen his miraculous works: Numbers 14:22, 21:6; Psalms 78:18, 41, 56; Psalms 95:8–9.

<sup>278</sup> See introductory paragraphs or Genesis 3:4–5.

<sup>279</sup> See Deuteronomy 6:13.

<sup>280</sup> "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5, ESV). See also Deuteronomy 5:21.

4. (a) When Jesus ordered Satan to leave him, what did the devil do (Matthew 4:11a)? (b) What else happened (4:11b)? (c) Why do you think they didn't come until after Jesus resisted the devil's temptations? (d) The Bible says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you."<sup>281</sup> How can you follow Jesus' example in resisting the devil in whatever temptations you face today?

Where Adam, Eve, the Israelites, and all humankind failed, Jesus prevailed.

## Introductions

*Pages 323–326*

Last week we saw the Messiah come into the world: the Word of God made flesh. This week we'll see people's reactions as they suspect the long-awaited Messiah might finally have arrived.

John the Baptist called people to repent from wrongdoing and to be baptized as a sign of committing their lives to God. Crowds responded. When Jesus came to be baptized, John hesitated, but Jesus told him it was the proper thing to do.

5. Let's look back at a passage from our previous reading. (a) What happened when Jesus was baptized (Matthew 3:16–17)? (b) What three supernatural beings are present during the baptism?

Because John the Baptist had a large following, the Jewish leaders asked him if he was the Messiah. He denied it, and told them he was the person Isaiah prophesied about who called others to "Make straight the way for the Lord"<sup>282</sup> in anticipation of the Messiah.

6. (a) What did John tell people Jesus was (John 1:29)? (b) John was older than Jesus. What did he mean when he said Jesus was before him (1:30)?<sup>283</sup> (c) John had many followers, yet he told them Jesus surpassed him. What can we learn about humility from John?

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<sup>281</sup> James 4:7.

<sup>282</sup> Isaiah 40:3.

<sup>283</sup> Recall last week's reading on the Word (John 1:1).

John's testimony counted because he was highly esteemed as a prophet.<sup>284</sup> But the Father had special plans, plans that Jesus' followers had to be sure came from him.

7. At a wedding in Cana, Jesus turned water into wine. Why (John 2:11)?

## One on One

Pages 326–329

One night a religious leader named Nicodemus came to visit Jesus, convinced the miracles Jesus did showed he was from God.

Nicodemus belonged to a popular Jewish sect called **Pharisees**, a mostly middle-class group who believed the Messiah would return when the Jews were righteous enough to deserve him. Not wanting to ever experience an exile again, they created a set of oral rules meant to be a protective hedge around the Law of Moses. They believed in an afterlife for righteous Jews who obeyed both the written Scripture<sup>285</sup> and their own oral traditions.<sup>286</sup>

So what did Jesus tell this Jewish teacher?

8. (a) Who can have eternal life (John 3:15–16)? (b) Was eternal life limited to just righteous Jews? (c) Why did God send his Son to the world (3:17)? (d) What happens to those who believe in him and those who don't (3:18)? (e) How did this teaching differ from Nicodemus' beliefs about how to receive eternal life?

Jesus didn't talk to just the respected spiritual elite. Next we look at a conversation with someone on the opposite end of the Jewish popularity scale: an immoral Samaritan woman. In that culture, men looked down at women as inferior, and most Jews looked down on those with immoral lifestyles. But her religious beliefs caused major problems.

<sup>284</sup> Matthew 21:26.

<sup>285</sup> For most Jews of that time, Scripture consisted of the same books included in what Christians now call the Old Testament, but arranged differently. They did not consider the Apocrypha (a collection of Jewish books written during the 400-year silent period) to be Scripture.

<sup>286</sup> In AD 200 these oral traditions were written down into what is now called the *Mishnah*.

Whereas most Jews respected the Pharisees, they almost universally despised the **Samaritans**. While the Pharisees added to Scripture, the Samaritans subtracted, using only the first five books of the Bible.

The Samaritans lived in the Roman province of Samaria. They were the descendants of the Israelites who escaped Assyrian deportation and the people that the Assyrians brought in to repopulate what had been the northern kingdom of Israel. They had intermingled in both marriage and religious beliefs.

Jesus caught the woman's attention when he knew her secrets. Realizing he was a prophet, she went right to a difference in their beliefs: where to worship.

9. (a) What strikes you about Jesus' response to the Samaritan woman (John 4:21–24)? (b) In what ways did Jesus' response present teaching that was different from the woman's beliefs? (c) What can we learn about sharing the gospel from Jesus?

When Jesus told her he was the Messiah she expected, she headed back to town to tell others. They asked him to stay in their city, and many became believers.

10. (a) Who did the Samaritans say Jesus was (John 4:42)? (b) What is significant about their calling him this (as opposed to "Savior of the Jews" or "Savior of the Samaritans")?

These Samaritans did not hold their prior beliefs and expectations so tightly that they ignored the evidence of who Jesus was.<sup>287</sup>

## Before the Crowds

*Pages 329–331*

As word of Jesus' authoritative teaching and miraculous abilities spread, crowds sought him, hoping he was the Messiah.

One day while Jesus taught in a crowded home, an opening appeared in the ceiling and down came a paralyzed man on a mat. Jesus told the man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

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<sup>287</sup> Nicodemus probably didn't either, since he helped bury Jesus (see John 19:38).

11. (a) How did the teachers of the law respond to Jesus' statement (Mark 2:7)? (b) They had expected the Messiah to be but a man. How did Jesus show he had the power to do that which they had just said only God could do (2:10–11)? (c) What possible conclusions may the teachers have considered?

Another surprise awaited the Jewish leaders: Jesus called a tax collector to follow him. The Jews despised tax collectors and even expelled them from synagogues. The Pharisees considered them “unclean” and kept away from them. This tax collector—Levi<sup>288</sup>—invited Jesus to dine with other people of less than sterling reputations.

12. (a) Calling an outcast like Levi to be his disciple might have hurt Jesus' credibility with some people. Why do you think Jesus did it? (b) The Pharisee teachers asked Jesus' disciples why Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners; what did Jesus respond (Mark 2:17)? (c) What did he mean? (d) What does this tell us about how Jesus feels towards outcasts? (e) What can we learn from this?

## Unmet Expectations

*Pages 331–334*

Most Jews yearned for the coming of the Messiah. They wanted the Messiah to set them free from Roman rule and restore the kingdom they'd had before exile.

Although many signs pointed towards Jesus being the Messiah, there were things about him no one expected. Some people looked at the evidence and changed their expectations. Others clung to their expectations and rejected Jesus.

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<sup>288</sup> He was also called Matthew. He later authored the Gospel of Matthew.

The **Herodians**, a Jewish sect which supported the current Palestinian dynasty, didn't want a Messianic king disrupting their political goals. The **Zealots**, who believed the righteousness that would bring the Messiah required not submitting to Rome or even paying taxes, wanted a warrior to deliver them from Roman rule. The **Sadducees**, the priestly aristocracy who didn't anticipate a Messiah, didn't want anyone disrupting their political power and religious position.

But it was the **Pharisees** who perhaps most struggled. Herod had given them political clout, which they didn't want threatened. Before Jesus came along, they were the most popular Jewish sect; now Jesus threatened that. They had been highly respected for their righteousness and their strict rules which went beyond the requirements of Moses' Law, but Jesus didn't care much for their rules, dismissing them as "traditions of men," not commands of God.

A clash was inevitable.

One Sabbath<sup>289</sup> Jesus went to synagogue and found a man with a shriveled hand. The Pharisees had told him it was wrong to heal people on the Sabbath. Jesus told the handicapped man to stand.

13. (a) What did Jesus ask (Mark 3:4)? (b) What distressed Jesus (3:5)? (c) When Jesus healed the man, what did the Pharisees and Herodians decide to do (3:6)? (d) Why do you think the Pharisees were so angry?

Unmet expectations affected even Jesus' staunchest followers. When John the Baptist was imprisoned for months, he sent his disciples to ask Jesus if he was the Messiah or not.<sup>290</sup>

14. (a) Jesus didn't answer a simple yes or no. What did he tell John's disciples to do in Matthew 11:4–5? (b) Why was that better than a simple yes? (c) Jesus listed things he was doing that Isaiah had predicted the Messiah would do; how would that help John? (d) What final word did Jesus give in 11:6? (e) What did John need to do to keep from stumbling?

<sup>289</sup> One of the Ten Commandments was to keep the Sabbath (Saturday) holy by not working (Deuteronomy 5:12–15).

<sup>290</sup> Perhaps prison produced hesitation, or perhaps he wished to prod Jesus to greater action.

Jesus praised John the Baptist highly and said he was “the Elijah who was to come.” No, he wasn’t the man Elijah who had never died and whom John denied being, but he was the one of whom Malachi spoke.<sup>291</sup>

15. (a) Without using names, briefly describe someone who left God because God didn’t meet his or her expectations. (b) Have you ever had expectations about God that turned out to be mistaken? What did you do to keep from stumbling?

We’ve met Jesus, watched him prevail against temptation, and seen the miraculous signs that drew many to him. There were things about him, though, which no one expected. What will come of that we’ll see soon. Next week, we read what the Son of God taught.

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<sup>291</sup> Malachi 4:5.



# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 24: No Ordinary Man*

**Key Question:** Who is Jesus and how ought we respond to him?

### **Teller of Parables**

*Pages 335–337*

Last week we saw Jesus' introduction to the Jews brought hope that the Messiah had finally come. Yet he didn't meet all expectations. This week we look at who Jesus is.

Jesus told many parables. These stories illustrated truths, but they often required careful consideration and a willingness to learn—what Jesus called “ears to hear.” The parable of the sower is one of his most well-known.

1. (a) Briefly describe the four kinds of soil in Jesus' parable (Mark 4:14–20). (b) In your own spiritual journey, have you ever been like the hard path, the shallow soil, or the thorny soil? Explain. (c) What kinds of things can we do to improve the condition of our soil so that the seed of God's message lands in deep soil cleared of thorns?

Jesus explained that the message hidden in a parable is meant to be disclosed.

2. (a) What did Jesus tell his disciples to do with what he says (Mark 4:24a)? (b) How would the effort they put into understanding his words affect how much they understood (4:24b)? (c) What will be given to those who start to understand spiritual things (4:25)? (d) What will happen to those who decide Jesus' sayings are too hard and so ignore or reject them (4:25)? (e) What are practical ways we can consider Jesus' words carefully? (f) What kind of soil are we when our thinking is shallow?

**Seeker of the Lost***Pages 337–340*

Some of the Pharisees<sup>292</sup> and other Jewish leaders were bothered that Jesus spent so much time with “sinners.” Jesus told them some parables that showed where their attitudes were astray.

3. (a) What were the tax collectors and “sinners” doing that bothered some Pharisees and teachers (Luke 15:1)? (b) What did Jesus say a shepherd would do if he lost a sheep (15:4)? (c) What would he do if he found the sheep (15:5–6)? (d) What happens in heaven when a sinner repents (15:7)? (e) What, then, was Jesus—the Good Shepherd—doing by spending time with sinners?
  
4. (a) What attitude should the Jewish leaders have had towards what Jesus was doing (Luke 15:6–7)? (b) What did the fact that they muttered rather than rejoiced show? (c) How can we cultivate an attitude like Jesus’ towards the lost?

Jesus told a parable about a father and his two sons. The younger son asked for his inheritance early and then wasted it. Starving, he decided to return to his father as a hired man, knowing he wasn’t worthy of being treated as a son.

5. (a) What happened when his father saw him approaching (Luke 15:20)? (b) What was the father’s reaction (15:22–24)? (c) What does this teach us about God’s reaction when someone comes to him in humble repentance after living far astray? (d) Why was the elder son angry (15:28–30)? (e) What attitude should the elder son (and the Pharisees) have had (15:31–32)?

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<sup>292</sup> This Jewish sect had oral rules by which they determined how righteous people were. They kept away from people they considered “unclean.”

**Teacher of Truth***Pages 340–343*

Matthew recorded a sermon Jesus gave while sitting on a mountainside.

6. (a) Why and how do hypocrites pray (Matthew 6:5)? (b) How should we pray instead (6:6)? (c) What will God do for those who pray in secret (6:6)? (d) Why does Jesus tell his followers that God rewards certain actions?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. (a) Why did the pagans babble their prayers to their gods over and over (6:7)? (b) Why is that not necessary with our Father in heaven (6:8)? (c) What are some reasons God wants us to pray?

Jesus taught on how to keep our soil free from choking thorns.

8. (a) According to Jesus, what two masters can we not serve (Matthew 6:24)? (b) Give two examples of situations where we must make a choice between serving God and money. (c) What kind of soil are we when we put money before God?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. (a) What does Jesus say not to worry about (Matthew 6:31)? (b) Why shouldn't we worry about these (6:32)? (c) What should we do instead (6:33)? (d) What will be the result of doing this (6:33)? (e) What kind of soil are we when we put these cares before God's kingdom? (f) What is a way you can seek God's kingdom and righteousness first today?

10. Write a prayer that gives a concern to God and expresses thanks for his loving care.

Jesus ended his sermon with an analogy that enforced his message.

11. (a) What does the wise person do with Jesus' words (Matthew 7:24)? (b) What is he like (7:24–25)? (c) What does the foolish person do with Jesus' words (7:26)? (d) What is he like (7:27)? (e) Why is listening to Jesus without putting his words into practice silly? (f) What lesson from the Sermon on the Mount can you put into practice today?

## **Master of Nature, Spirits & Life**

*Pages 343–348*

After a long day of teaching, Jesus told the disciples to cross the Sea of Galilee in a boat.

12. (a) What do we learn about Jesus from Mark 4:37–41? (b) Why didn't the disciples need to be afraid?

When they landed, a demon-possessed man came to meet him.

13. What do we learn about Jesus from Mark 5:7–13?

Jairus, a synagogue ruler, asked Jesus to come heal his dying daughter.<sup>293</sup> But before he arrived, news reached them that the child had died. Jesus insisted on going anyway.

14. What do we learn about Jesus from Mark 5:41–42?

Jesus tried to take the disciples someplace quiet where they could rest and eat, but crowds followed him everywhere. Moved with compassion, Jesus asked his disciples to do something surprising: feed the 5,000 men and their families with five bread loaves and two fish.

15. What do we learn about Jesus from Mark 6:41–43?

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<sup>293</sup> On his way, Jesus healed a woman: see [Jesus and the Timid Woman](#).

**Bread of Life***Pages 348–351*

Jesus sent the disciples off in a boat, and then went to pray alone until nearly dawn.

16. (a) What do we learn about Jesus from Matthew 14:25? (b) What caused Peter to begin to sink (14:29–31)? (c) What analogy can we make from this that can apply to things that frighten us when we're doing what Christ has called us to do? (d) What did Jesus do when Peter cried out for help, and how can that encourage us when we don't respond to something with as much faith as we would have liked (14:31–32)? (e) How did the disciples respond to all this (14:33)? (f) What does the fact that Jesus did not stop the disciples from responding this way teach us?<sup>294</sup>

The people whom Jesus had miraculously fed searched for and found him.

17. (a) What did Jesus say their real reason for looking for him was (John 6:26)? (b) What did he tell them to do (6:27)? (c) When they asked him to explain this work, what did Jesus reply (6:29)?

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<sup>294</sup> Remember from last week's lesson that Jesus told Satan people are to worship God only (Matthew 4:10).

Still fixated on their desire to feed their physical bodies, they began to grumble and argue.

18. (a) What did Jesus say he was (John 6:48)? (b) What happens to those who eat of the Bread of Life (6:50)? (c) What did Jesus mean when he said, “This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (6:51)? (d) Many people found this teaching too hard and quit following him (6:60, 66). What does this tell us about why they followed Jesus? (e) What kind of soil were they? (f) Why do you think Jesus refused to keep feeding the crowds, when that would have given him more followers?<sup>295</sup>

19. According to Peter, why should people follow Jesus even if he doesn’t always give them what they want and sometimes says things that are hard to understand (John 6:68–69)?

20. Review what you’ve learned about who Jesus is. Then write a worshipful prayer, song, or poem.

This week we got to know more about who this amazing man Jesus was. Next week we’ll see what happens when Jesus speaks more plainly about his purpose for coming to earth.

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<sup>295</sup> Consider Jesus’ purpose, the needs of the people who left, and the needs of those who remained.

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 25: Jesus, the Son of God*

**Key Question:** How did Jesus put eternity ahead of life on earth, and how can we be like him?

### **The Plan Unveiled**

*Pages 353–355*

Last week we saw Jesus' crowd-drawing lessons, compassion for the lost, power over nature, authority over spirits, and command over life. These made him popular for awhile. But some Jewish leaders turned against him for dismissing the Pharisees' oral traditions as mere rules taught by men, not commands of God, and for continuing to heal on the Sabbath after they ordered him to stop.<sup>296</sup> Some of the masses abandoned him when he refused to continue providing food miraculously and instead pointed them towards spiritual food.<sup>297</sup>

Today we pick up our story about 2½ years into Jesus' ministry.

Jesus knew the time for him to complete the work for which he'd come was drawing near, and he began preparing the twelve disciples for it. He explained that the Jewish leaders were going to kill him and that he would rise from the dead. The confused disciples pondered what he could possibly mean. Peter even took him aside and rebuked him.

1. (a) What was wrong with Peter's concerns (Mark 8:33)? (b) Jesus called the crowd over. What must anyone who followed him do (8:34)? (c) In those days, people "took up their cross" only to be led to death. How did Jesus explain what he meant (8:35–36)? (d) What are ways people try to "save" the portion of their life that is here on this earth, rather than "lose" that portion of life by using it to serve Jesus and the gospel? (e) How does Jesus emphasize which is the better way to spend earthly life (8:36)?

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<sup>296</sup> See Mark 7:1–15, Luke 6:14, and John 5:18. The Sabbath was from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. The Fourth Commandment said the Sabbath was holy and was to therefore be a day of rest, not work (Deuteronomy 5:12–15). The Pharisees were used to telling people what constituted breaking the Sabbath, based on their oral traditions. Jesus not only healed on the Sabbath, but he told a lame man to pick up his mat and walk on the Sabbath, both things the Pharisees said broke the law (John 5:1–18).

<sup>297</sup> See John 6:1–66.



Six days later, Jesus led Peter, James, and John onto a mountain.

2. (a) How was Jesus transfigured (Matthew 17:2)? (b) Moses and Elijah appeared “in glorious splendor” and talked with Jesus about his coming departure from earth.<sup>298</sup> As Peter started to talk, what happened (17:5)? (c) How would all this help the disciples accept Jesus’ mission and understand that it involved more than earthly life?

## The Person Revealed

*Pages 355–358*

Jesus began to speak plainly about being more than a prophet. He told the Pharisees that the Father sent him. When they asked where his father was, he replied they didn’t know him or the Father, for if they knew him they’d know the Father.<sup>299</sup> Then he told them where he came from.

3. (a) Where did Jesus say he was from, unlike the ordinary people to whom he was talking (John 8:23)? (b) What would happen if they didn’t believe his claim (8:24)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. (a) Who are Jesus’ true disciples (John 8:31)? (b) How do we hold to Jesus’ teaching? (c) What’s the first result of holding to Jesus’ teaching (8:32a)? (d) What’s the second result (8:32b)? (e) Give an example of how holding to Jesus’ teaching taught you a freeing truth.

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<sup>298</sup> Luke 9:30–31.

<sup>299</sup> John 8:18–19.

When the Jews asked how he could set them free since they weren't slaves of anyone, Jesus explained that everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Holding to his teachings would bring truth which would set them free from sin.

5. (a) What claim did Jesus make in John 8:51? (b) What two questions did the Jews ask, and what do these questions tell us about them (8:52–53)? (c) Who did Jesus say his Father was (8:54)? (d) What did Jesus say in John 8:58?

Not “I was”: “I AM.”

Back in lesson four we read of someone using that name:

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM’ has sent me to you.” *Exodus 3:14*

Jesus used the name by which God called himself, the name signifying eternal existence.

Jesus' meaning wasn't lost on the Jews. He claimed existence before Abraham was born. He had called himself the Son of God, making himself equal to God,<sup>300</sup> and now he used God's name for himself. They tried to stone him for blasphemy.<sup>301</sup>

## Resurrection Promised

*Pages 358–361*

Jesus crossed the Jordan and stayed where John the Baptist used to minister. Many of John's followers believed in him.

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<sup>300</sup> John 5:18.

<sup>301</sup> See Leviticus 24:16.

Then messengers brought word from two sisters, Mary and Martha, that their brother Lazarus was ill. When Jesus arrived at their house, Lazarus had been in a tomb four days.

6. (a) How did Jesus describe himself to Martha (John 11:25) (b) What did Jesus promise (11:25–26)? (c) Do you believe this? (d) Can you respond like Martha (11:26)?

Mary came to Jesus and fell at his feet, weeping.

7. (a) What does Jesus' response to people's tears tell you about Jesus (John 11:33–35)? (b) Jesus didn't tell anyone not to weep, but instead wept with them, leaving us an example of how to comfort the grieving. If you've suffered a loss, what was the most helpful comment you heard? (c) What are some perhaps well-intentioned but unhelpful things Christians sometimes say to the grieving?

Jesus told the people to remove the stone from the tomb, even though Lazarus had been dead four days and his body was decaying. Jesus called, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came to life and obeyed.

Jesus had just demonstrated what he meant by his claim, "I am the resurrection and the life."

Not everyone appreciated the miracle. Some reported it to the Pharisees, who called a meeting of the Sanhedrin,<sup>302</sup> the court that governed the Jews' internal affairs.

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<sup>302</sup> The Sanhedrin had members from two Jewish sects: Sadducees and Pharisees. The Sadducees were aristocratic priests who did not believe in an afterlife (Luke 20:27) and who were not expecting a Messiah. Though many of their religious views clashed with the Pharisees, they had in common the desire to prevent Jews from believing Jesus was the Messiah.

8. (a) Did the Jewish leaders doubt that Jesus performed miracles (John 11:47)? (b) They didn't believe Jesus was who he said he was, and as religious leaders, they didn't want the masses believing what they themselves didn't believe. What other reason had they for not wanting people to believe in Jesus (11:48)? (c) What can we do to keep our own wishes from blinding us to truth?

The high priest spoke prophetically, though without understanding the full meaning of his words: "It is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."<sup>303</sup>

## Exchanges Required

*Pages 361–363*

A rich young man asked Jesus how to receive eternal life. Jesus looked at him lovingly, realizing there was something holding the man him back from following Jesus.

9. (a) What did Jesus ask the young man to do (Mark 10:21–22)? (b) How would what he would gain compare to what he would give up?<sup>304</sup> (c) Have you ever given up something you thought was hindering your walk with God, whether for a short time or permanently? If so, describe how that affected your walk with Christ.

Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25). Such a large animal through a tiny opening? Impossible! The disciples astutely asked, "Who then can be saved?" But what's impossible for people to achieve is God's specialty.

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<sup>303</sup> John 11:50.

<sup>304</sup> This wasn't a command for all people, but it teaches us to watch out for things that keep us from fully following Jesus.

10. (a) What promise did Jesus give in Mark 10:29–31? (b) Describe something you gave up for Jesus and the gospel, which God returned to you many times over. (c) What comfort is there in Jesus' assurance that we will have persecutions in this age? (d) What will we have in the age to come (10:30)? (e) How does eternal life make up for the losses and persecutions of this life?

## The Hour Arrived

*Pages 363–366*

And now we reach Jesus' last week.

On Sunday, Jesus rode a colt that had never before been ridden into Jerusalem. People ran ahead, throwing leafy branches and cloaks before him, and shouting "Hosanna," a praise meaning "Save."

11. How were the people's shouts particularly appropriate for Jesus' mission (Mark 11:9–10)?

On Monday, Jesus cleansed the outer court of the temple of buyers, sellers, and money changers, for this area was supposed to be a place for Gentiles to pray. Then he healed those who came to him while children shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David."

On Tuesday, Jesus taught in the temple, delighting the crowds.

Sometime during the week, the disciples told Jesus that Greeks had come to see him—and Jesus replied thus:

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. *John 12:23–25*

And so Jesus illustrated the means of glorification.

He prayed, “Father, glorify your name!” A voice from heaven answered, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” To the crowd of Jews and Greeks, Jesus said, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”<sup>305</sup> Not just Jews—all people.

12. (a) When we believe in Jesus, in whom else do we believe (John 12:44, 49)? (b) What happens to those who believe in Jesus (12:46)? (c) What was Jesus’ purpose for coming into the world (12:47)? (d) What is the danger of rejecting Jesus and his words (12:48)? (e) Why are Jesus’ words crucial to accept (12:49)? (f) To what does the Father’s command lead (12:50)? (g) If Jesus was not who he said he was—God’s Son—does this speech allow him to be a “good teacher”? Explain.

Next week, we see Jesus lifted up from the earth.

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<sup>305</sup> John 12:28–33.

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 26: The Hour of Darkness*

**Key Question:** Why did Jesus die?

### **The Last Supper**

*Pages 367–369*

Jesus gathered with his disciples to eat the Passover meal on Thursday of his final week. They recalled how Pharaoh refused to believe Moses came from God, despite miraculous signs; how the Israelites painted the blood of a lamb on the top and sides of their homes' doorframes so the destroyer would pass over their homes without bringing death;<sup>306</sup> how God freed the Israelites from slavery to Egypt; and how God led them to the Promised Land.

Before they ate, no servant had washed their feet, which were dusty from walking dirt roads. So Jesus arose from the meal and performed the lowly task.

1. (a) What was Jesus to the disciples (John 13:12–13)? (b) Washing feet was a lowly servant's job. What did Jesus want them to do for each other (13:14–15)? (c) Consider prayerfully if there's an area of service which you've considered beneath you. What do Jesus' words tell us about this attitude (13:15–16)? (d) What does Jesus say will happen if we follow his example (13:17)? (e) In Jesus' time, footwashing was welcomed and necessary. What is an equivalent welcome and needed service<sup>307</sup> you could do for someone this week?

During the meal, Jesus did something special with the bread and wine.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them,

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<sup>306</sup> Exodus 12:21–23.

<sup>307</sup> The early church treated footwashing as a good deed, not a universal rite: "The heart of Jesus' command is a humility and helpfulness toward brothers and sisters in Christ that may be cruelly parodied by a mere 'rite' of footwashing that easily masks an unbroken spirit and haughty heart" (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991], 468).

saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” *Matthew 26:26–28*

When Moses confirmed the Book of the Covenant<sup>308</sup> with the Israelites, he sacrificed young bulls, sprinkled half their blood on the altar and half on the people who agreed to obey the covenant, and said, “This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you.”<sup>309</sup>

Jeremiah foretold that God would one day establish a new covenant, for the Israelites had broken the old one.<sup>310</sup>

2. (a) Whose blood would be shed to establish this new covenant (Matthew 26:28a)? (b) What would the pouring out of blood bring (26:28b)?

Jesus told his disciples to eat bread and drink wine in memory of him,<sup>311</sup> a practice we call Communion.

## Final Words

*Pages 369–371*

Jesus continued to teach his disciples.

3. (a) Jesus knew difficult events would soon shake the disciples. What did he tell them to do (John 14:1)? (b) How can you apply these words to a situation you are currently going through?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. (a) Where was Jesus going and what was he going to do there (14:2)? (b) What did he promise (14:3)? (c) What comfort do these words offer?

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<sup>308</sup> Today, Christians call the covenant established through Moses the *Old Covenant* and the covenant established through Jesus the *New Covenant*.

<sup>309</sup> Exodus 24:6–8.

<sup>310</sup> Jeremiah 31:31–32.

<sup>311</sup> Luke 22:19.



Jesus told them they knew the way to where he was going. But Thomas was confused and said he didn't know where Jesus was going, so how could he know the way. He didn't understand what Jesus had been telling them about dying and rising from the dead, so he didn't grasp that Jesus spoke of his Father's house in heaven.

5. (a) What did Jesus say was the only way to the Father (John 14:6)? (b) This was quite a claim. Consider it prayerfully. Have you been trying to reach the Father by being good enough, like the Pharisees? Have you been trying to reach the Father through a person other than Jesus? (c) What might you tell someone who is trying to reach the Father through a means other than Jesus?
  
6. (a) What did Jesus say those who love him will do (John 14:15)? (b) What is the difference between obeying to earn a place in heaven and obeying out of love? (c) How would you respond to someone who says, "I love Jesus, but I don't have to obey his commands"?
  
7. (a) What word of comfort did Jesus give in John 16:33? (b) How can you apply this encouragement to the troubles that you have today?

## **Jesus' Arrest & Trial**

*Pages 371–374*

Jesus and the eleven disciples went to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. He warned them what was about to happen.

8. (a) What did Jesus say all the disciples would do that night (Matthew 26:31)? (b) What did Peter declare he would never do (26:33–35)? (c) Jesus knew his disciples wouldn't stand by him. Briefly describe a time someone didn't stand by you, without naming names. What did you learn?

Jesus took Peter, James, and John aside.

9. (a) Was the task Jesus was about to accomplish easy for him (Matthew 26:38)? (b) What can we learn about prayer from Jesus (26:39–42)?

Judas Iscariot arrived with an armed crowd. They arrested Jesus and brought him before the Sanhedrin.<sup>312</sup> The Jewish leaders looked for false evidence against Jesus so they could put him to death.

10. (a) What did the high priest command Jesus (Matthew 26:63)? (b) Where did Jesus say they would see him in the future (26:64)?<sup>313</sup>

Thus Jesus gave himself a position of heavenly authority, and applied to himself a prophecy from Daniel in which one like a “son of man”<sup>314</sup> would be given authority, glory, and sovereign power; would be worshipped by people from all nations; and would rule forever.

11. What does Jesus' statement tell us about Jesus (Matthew 26:64)?

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<sup>312</sup> The Sanhedrin was the governing body for the internal affairs of Jews and was made up of Pharisees and Sadducees.

<sup>313</sup> He combined Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13. See Daniel 7:13–14

<sup>314</sup> Jesus called himself *the Son of Man*.

Just as Pharaoh refused to believe Moses came from God despite miraculous signs, so the Jewish leaders refused to believe Jesus came from God. They rejected Jesus' claim as blasphemy, and condemned him to death.

## Peter & Pilate

*Pages 374–378*

Peter had followed the soldiers to the high priest's house.

12. (a) Peter had assured Jesus he would never deny him. But what happened (Luke 22:60–62)?  
(b) Next week we'll see Jesus forgive and strengthen Peter. Briefly describe what you learned from failing at something you thought you could handle.

They tortured and mocked Jesus throughout the night. Early Friday morning, the Jewish leaders delivered Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor.<sup>315</sup> Pilate asked Jesus if he was the king of the Jews and what he had done.

13. Why didn't Jesus want his supporters to fight for him (John 18:36)?

Repeatedly Jesus had taught on the kingdom of heaven.<sup>316</sup> Yes, he was the Messiah, but he wasn't there to establish an earthly kingdom, as most Jews expected.

14. How does remembering we belong to a heavenly kingdom help us when we, like Jesus, are treated unfairly?<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> When describing the Roman execution, John probably used Roman time, in which a day started at midnight, while Mark used Jewish time, in which a day started at daybreak.

<sup>316</sup> For example, Matthew 4:17, 4:23, 5:10.

<sup>317</sup> "For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come" (Hebrews 13:14). Also see Colossians 3:1–4.

**Jesus' Crucifixion***Pages 378–380*

At 9:00 a.m. Friday, Roman soldiers crucified Jesus, the Holy One of God. They nailed his wrists and feet to a wooden cross and lifted him from the earth. He endured excruciating pain and the insults of bystanders and criminals. Then at noon, darkness covered the land. At 3:00, still in darkness, Jesus cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

In this prayer, Jesus quoted the first line of Psalm 22. Anyone who recognized the words could have turned to the psalm and read an amazing prophecy of the crucifixion.

15. Compare the following verses and explain how Psalm 22 was fulfilled in Christ:

Matthew 27:35

Psalm 22:16, 18

Matthew 27:39

Psalm 22:7

Matthew 27:43

Psalm 22:8

Matthew 27:46

Psalm 22:1

John 19:28

Psalm 22:15

John 19:30

Psalm 22:31

The prophecy would have encouraged them to trust God as they struggled to understand the dying of the one whom they thought was the Messiah come to rule the world.

However, there was more to Jesus' cry to his Father, for in these words he proclaimed to humankind that he too suffered in darkness without sensing God's presence or hearing God's answer.<sup>318</sup> Even in this, he became like us.

Shortly after uttering the first line of Psalm 22, Jesus echoed the psalm's last line by crying out, "It is finished."

Jesus died.

Perhaps the spiritual forces of darkness thought the victory won.

But at Jesus' last breath an earthquake shook the land and the curtain that separated humans from the temple's Most Holy Place ripped in two from top to bottom,<sup>319</sup> for something had happened in the heavenly realms: Jesus' torn body had opened the way to the throne of grace in heaven.<sup>320</sup>

Jesus' work was finished. With the Father's purpose achieved, light returned to the land.

16. In the midst of our own dark times when we cannot sense God's presence or hear his voice, we must remember that when the Father's work is finished, light returns. (a) What can we learn from Jesus' willingness to drink the cup the Father gave him? (b) What encouragement can we take from Jesus' endurance through darkness?

Although light returned to the land, Jesus' followers could not yet see the parallel of Jesus' last meal with them to the sight before their eyes. They did not comprehend that the blood that dripped from the wooden cross was the blood of the Great Passover Lamb. It was the blood that would protect those who trust in it from death and free them from slavery to sin. It flowed from the body that opened the Way to the heavenly Promised Land.

But we have not reached the end of his story, for Jesus promised that in three days he would rise.

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<sup>318</sup> Though scholars offer many views as to what exactly happened when Jesus uttered this cry, at the least it was a separation of the sense of the Father's presence.

<sup>319</sup> Matthew 27:51.

<sup>320</sup> Hebrews 10:19–20 (see also 9:23–28).

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 27: The Resurrection*

**Key Question:** What happened to Jesus after the crucifixion?

### **The Tomb**

*Pages 381–382*

The Jewish leaders wanted the crucified bodies brought down before the Sabbath began at sunset Friday. Because crucifixion victims had to push up on their feet to breathe, the soldiers broke the legs of the two thieves, guaranteeing death within minutes.<sup>321</sup> But when they reached Jesus, they could see he was no longer breathing.<sup>322</sup> A soldier plunged his spear into Jesus' side, piercing the lungs and heart, and causing a flow of blood and water.<sup>323</sup> There was no doubt: he was dead.

The Jewish leaders were not unanimous in condemning Jesus. Two of them, Joseph of Arimathea<sup>324</sup> and Nicodemus,<sup>325</sup> placed Jesus' lifeless, battered body in a new tomb belonging to Joseph.<sup>326</sup> There they wrapped it in linen strips and a shroud, using an amount of spices one would use for a king. They rolled a stone in front of the tomb

1. (a) Why had Joseph kept the fact that he was a disciple of Jesus' a secret (John 19:38)? (b) By caring for Jesus' body, Joseph and Nicodemus publicly declared they were followers. What were they risking? (c) What are ways you let non-Christians know you follow Christ? (d) If you are Jesus' disciple, prayerfully consider if there is anyone from whom you've been keeping your discipleship a secret. What can you do to change that?

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<sup>321</sup> Exhaling required victims to push up on their wounded feet and pull with their shoulders. Breathing caused excruciating pain to their nailed feet and wrists and to their scourged backs. Crucifixion was designed to cause a slow, torturous, and humiliating death. See William D. Edwards, MD; Wesley J. Gabel, MDiv; Floyd E. Hosmer, MS, AMI, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," *JAMA* 1986; 255:1455–1463.

<sup>322</sup> A victim who was no longer pushing up on his feet to exhale had stopped breathing. Jesus had died at 3:00 p.m. and his body was taken down a little before sunset. Crucifixion victims died within a few hours to a few days, often depending on how much blood they lost when, just prior to crucifixion, soldiers scourged their backs with a leather whip embedded with small iron balls and sharp sheep bones. *Ibid.*

<sup>323</sup> The "water" John describes was likely the fluid that surrounds the lungs and heart (serous pleural and pericardial fluid). Jesus' sudden death likely came from a heart rupture or cardiac arrest. *Ibid.*

<sup>324</sup> Joseph was a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin who had not consented to the vote (Matthew 27:57; Luke 23:51).

<sup>325</sup> Nicodemus was a Pharisee in the Sanhedrin who had tried to stop the other leaders from condemning Jesus (John 3:1–2; John 7:50).

<sup>326</sup> Matthew 27:60; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53.

## The Risen Lord

Pages 382–384

Arising before dawn on Sunday, a few women courageously headed to the tomb with more spices.<sup>327</sup>

There they discovered an angel had rolled back the stone from the tomb and the guards were shaking in fright.

2. (a) The angel told them not to fear. What did he say happened to Jesus (Matthew 28:5–6)?  
(b) What evidence did he give them (28:6)? (c) They saw the empty grave clothes, but did not understand. What did the angel tell them to do (28:7)?

Frightened and bewildered, they found the disciples and told them someone had taken the body.<sup>328</sup> Peter and John ran to the tomb.

3. (a) What did the disciples see when they looked into the tomb (John 20:6–7)? (b) If someone had stolen the body, the linen strips and head cloth would have been missing or in disarray, not folded where the body had been. What did seeing the cloths like this cause John to do (20:8)? (c) What did they not understand still (20:9)? (d) Describe an event that confused you before you understood Scripture better.

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<sup>327</sup> For a synchronization of the gospel accounts, see [Questions about the Women at the Resurrection](#).

<sup>328</sup> Mark 16:8 and John 20:2.

Crying, Mary Magdalene followed the disciples back to the tomb. After the disciples left, she looked in and saw two angels. They asked her why she was crying.

4. What did Mary answer the angels (John 20:13)?

Still not understanding, she turned and saw through her tears the figure of a man standing near.<sup>329</sup> Thinking he was the gardener, she asked where the body was.

5. (a) What did the man say (John 20:16)? (b) Who was he? (c) To whom did he say he was returning (20:17)? (d) In large letters, write out what Mary told the disciples (20:18).

6. What does the fact that Jesus' first appearance was to a woman teach us about how God regards women?<sup>330</sup>

Mary had come looking for a torn and lifeless body, and instead found Jesus whole and alive, standing on feet that had so recently been impaled. It wasn't possible, and yet...!

## Seeing & Believing

*Pages 384–386*

Later that day, two disciples on their way to a village called Emmaus met Jesus, but didn't recognize him immediately.<sup>331</sup> Walking with them, he explained the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah.

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<sup>329</sup> Some skeptics claim Jesus must have swooned on the cross and revived in the tomb. But note that he was standing, not crawling on hands and knees, weakened and near death from blood loss, dehydration, and not having eaten for days. If he had merely swooned, Mary would have wondered how he survived and rushed to get him medical help. He also would not have inspired the frightened disciples to risk their lives and the lives of their families by boldly proclaiming his resurrection.

<sup>330</sup> Skeptics agree that this lends credibility to the story, for the disciples would not have concocted a story in which Jesus appeared first to a woman. People of the day didn't consider a woman's testimony trustworthy.



7. (a) When the man broke bread and gave it to them, what happened to them (Luke 24:30–31)? (b) Something about Jesus' resurrected body was a little different, so they didn't recognize him immediately. What was his body able to do (24:31)? (c) What did the two disciples realize (24:32)?

They hurried back to Jerusalem and found the still frightened disciples in a locked room,<sup>332</sup> talking about how Jesus had appeared to Peter. Suddenly, Jesus stood among them.

8. (a) They thought he was a ghost. What did he ask them (Luke 24:38)? (b) What did Jesus have that ghosts don't have (24:39)? (c) How did he prove he wasn't a ghost (24:39–43)?

Those present now believed, but Thomas was missing. When the others told him about the risen Lord, he didn't believe them.

9. (a) What happened a week later when the disciples were again gathered behind locked doors (John 20:26)? (b) What did Jesus tell Thomas to do (20:27)? (c) What does this tell us about Jesus' concern for Thomas? (d) What did Thomas call Jesus (20:28)?

If these titles were not true, Jesus would have rebuked Thomas!

10. (a) Who did Jesus say are blessed (20:29)? (b) Are you one of those who are thus blessed?

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<sup>331</sup> This is another point which one would not expect in a concocted tale.

<sup>332</sup> John 20:19.

Jesus had a spiritual body,<sup>333</sup> something unheard of in any culture before. Jews knew humans had physical bodies on earth, and most believed in a resurrection of the spirit. But this body that was recognizable but somewhat different, that could be touched yet could enter through locked doors, that could eat and yet disappear at will, that bore the wounds of honor from his suffering yet without harm—that was entirely new.

This was what Jesus meant when he promised his followers resurrection: one day Jesus “will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”<sup>334</sup>

## Peter Restored

*Pages 386–388*

At the Last Supper, Peter had promised greater faithfulness than all the other disciples: “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will,” he said.<sup>335</sup> But that same night, warming himself in front of a fire, Peter disowned Jesus three times, saying, “I don’t know him.”<sup>336</sup>

Jesus didn’t ignore Peter’s failure, but took steps to show Peter he forgave him and wanted their relationship to continue. One morning, Jesus lit a fire and made breakfast for the disciples. Afterwards he asked Peter three times if he loved him.

11. (a) Jesus first asked Peter if he loved him “more than these,” recalling Peter’s claim to greater faithfulness than the others. How does Peter’s reply show a new humility (John 21:15)? (b) Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him, leaving no doubt that he was calling Peter to confront his three denials before that other fire. How was Jesus allowing Peter to revoke his denials (21:15–17)? (c) What tasks did Jesus give Peter each time Peter said he loved Jesus? (d) How did this show Peter he forgave and still valued Peter? (e) What does this teach us about God’s willingness to use our strengths despite our weaknesses?

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<sup>333</sup> See 1 Corinthians 15:42–49 for a description of the spiritual body.

<sup>334</sup> Philippians 3:21.

<sup>335</sup> Matthew 26:33–35.

<sup>336</sup> Matthew 26:69–74.

12. (a) What did Jesus tell Peter would happen when he was old (John 21:18–19)? (b) How did this assure Peter that he would have another chance to show his faithfulness? (c) What did Jesus tell Peter to do (21:19)? (d) How did this demonstrate their relationship was fully restored?

As we will see next week, not many days later Peter boldly proclaimed Jesus before a crowd.

In fact, for years to come, Peter proclaimed that he knew Jesus. One day, he received another opportunity to choose between life and acknowledging his relationship to Jesus. Just as Jesus foretold, this time Peter chose crucifixion rather than denying Christ.<sup>337</sup>

## The Great Commission

Page 388

Jesus chose his disciples for a purpose. They had a task before them that would take courage.

13. (a) What authority did Jesus now have (Matthew 28:18)? (b) What three things were Jesus' disciples to go and do (28:18)? (c) What should they remember as they did these things (28:20)? (d) Are you a disciple of Jesus' who has been baptized and who is obeying Jesus' commands? (e) If yes, what can you do to guide others into becoming Jesus' disciples, being baptized, and obeying Jesus?

14. (a) Why were the gospels written (John 20:31)? (b) What is the result of believing Jesus is the Christ (Messiah) and the Son of God?

The disciples had been with Jesus, watched him die, and now had witnessed him alive—the conqueror of death and the grave. Emboldened, they were ready to share what they'd seen with the world.

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<sup>337</sup> Tertullian, *Scorpiace* XV, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anfo3.v.x.xv.html>.

# THE STORY

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## *Chapter 28: New Beginnings*

**Key Question:** How does the Holy Spirit work to bring a harvest of people to God?

### **The Holy Spirit Arrives**

*Pages 389–392*

When Jesus spoke in the temple during Passion Week, throughout Palestine wheat stalks were bowing under heavy seed heads. He said, “I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”<sup>338</sup>

On Friday, the Kernel died. On Sunday, HE AROSE.

Over the next forty days, Jesus appeared to over 500 people chosen to witness his resurrection and tell others about it.<sup>339</sup> These put their faith in him, and the Kernel of wheat which had returned to life produced seeds.

Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for a special gift.

1. (a) For what did Jesus tell them to wait (Acts 1:4–5)? (b) Why did they need this gift (1:8)? (c) What does this teach us about the Holy Spirit? (d) Where would the witnesses of his resurrection testify about what they’d seen (1:8)? (e) What have you witnessed Jesus do in your life?

Then Jesus ascended from the Mount of Olives into heaven before the apostles’ eyes.<sup>340</sup> The apostles returned to Jerusalem to pray with 120 other believers gathered there.<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> John 12:24.

<sup>339</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:6.

<sup>340</sup> Luke 24:50–51. Bethany was on the Mount of Olives.

On Sunday ten days later, Jews from all surrounding nations<sup>342</sup> gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost<sup>343</sup> by offering God a portion of the grain they'd harvested between Passover and Pentecost. The believers whom Jesus had harvested between Passover and Pentecost gathered too, and bowing in prayer, offered themselves to God.

2. (a) What happened when Jesus baptized his followers with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–3)? (b) Who enabled them to speak in the languages of the people within hearing (2:4)? (c) What did the Jews visiting from other nations hear (2:11)?

Peter, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, stood and addressed the crowd. Three thousand people turned to Jesus that day. The harvest grew.

## The Lame Man Healed

*Pages 392–395*

The Holy Spirit empowered the apostles to do more than preach powerfully. One day Peter healed a well-known lame man. As a crowd quickly gathered, Peter spoke.

3. (a) How did Peter explain what happened (Acts 3:12, 16)? (b) What can we learn from this? (c) Why did God heal the man (3:13)?

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<sup>341</sup> Acts 1:15.

<sup>342</sup> After the exile officially ended, the majority of Jews chose not to return to Palestine.

<sup>343</sup> Jews celebrated this feast fifty days after Passover. It was a day of thanksgiving marking the end of the grain harvest. It was also called the day of first fruits, for they offered God new grain from the harvest taken between Passover and Pentecost. See Leviticus 23:15–22; Numbers 28:26–31.

Peter proclaimed the gospel: Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension.<sup>344</sup>

4. (a) What did Peter tell the people to do (3:19)? (b) Repentance is turning away from sin and to God by faith in Jesus. What happens to the sins of those who do this (3:19)?
  
5. Summarize the gospel message in a way you could share it, using Peter's message as an example.

Two thousand more people turned to God through faith in Jesus.

The apostles' teaching so upset the Jewish leaders that they jailed Peter and John. The next day the Sanhedrin asked them, "By what power or what name did you do this?"<sup>345</sup>

6. (a) What was Peter's state (Acts 4:8)? (b) In whose name did Peter say the man had been healed (4:9–10)? (c) How did Peter explain what happened to Jesus (4:10)?

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<sup>344</sup> Acts 3:15, 21.

<sup>345</sup> This is another way of asking the apostles who gave them the authority to teach and act.

Peter said this fulfilled prophecy,<sup>346</sup> for Jesus was “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone”—the most important stone of the building.

7. (a) What else did Peter say about Jesus’ name (4:12)? (b) What can we learn from this? (c) How might you explain what the Bible teaches to someone who says all religions lead to salvation?

Though the Jewish leaders couldn’t deny the lame man could walk, they refused to believe Peter’s explanation. The seed of the gospel fell on the path where it couldn’t take root.<sup>347</sup> They commanded the apostles to stop teaching in Jesus’ name.

## The Church Persecuted

*Pages 395–399*

The disciples prayed for boldness and miracles, and received both.<sup>348</sup> The miracles attracted crowds, but the sight of the crowds infuriated the jealous Sadducees.<sup>349</sup>

The Sadducees jailed the apostles, but an angel freed them that night, saying, “Go, stand in the temple courts and tell the people the full message of this new life.”<sup>350</sup> They obeyed.

The Sadducees ordered the apostles before the Sanhedrin and demanded to know why they had disobeyed their orders to cease teaching in Jesus’ name.

8. How did the apostles respond to the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:29)?

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<sup>346</sup> Psalm 118:22.

<sup>347</sup> Matthew 13:19.

<sup>348</sup> Acts 4:23–31.

<sup>349</sup> The Sadducees were aristocratic priests who did not believe the dead could be resurrected and whose teachings were therefore in conflict with the apostles’ message.

<sup>350</sup> Acts 5:19.

When the apostles proclaimed Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation to God's right hand, many called for their death, but they settled for flogging the apostles.

9. (a) How did the apostles react (5:41–42)? (b) If possible, describe a time you chose to obey God rather than men. If you suffered for it, write out a response similar to the apostles'. (c) Prayerfully consider if there is anything you're resisting God about out of fear of retribution.

The church continued to grow over the next few years. The apostles expanded the church leadership to include more godly men, such as Stephen.

10. (a) What did Stephen do (Acts 6:8)? (b) Why were the Jews who argued with him no match for Stephen (6:10)? (c) What does this teach us about the Holy Spirit? (d) Briefly describe a way the Holy Spirit has helped you share the gospel.

The defeated debaters found liars willing to accuse Stephen of blasphemy. Standing before the Sanhedrin, Stephen reminded them of the Israelites' history of persecuting prophets.

11. (a) Whom did Stephen say these Jewish leaders were like (Acts 7:51)? (b) What were they doing to the Holy Spirit (7:51)? (c) How should Stephen's next words have been a warning (7:52)?



The Jewish leaders stopped listening to Stephen.

12. (a) How did the Holy Spirit prepare Stephen for what was about to happen (7:55–56)?  
(b) Describe a time the Holy Spirit strengthened you.

Furious, the Jewish leaders dragged Stephen out of Jerusalem and stoned him to death.

## **Saul**

*Pages 399–401*

After Stephen's martyrdom, the Jewish leaders waged war against the church.

13. (a) What happened the day Stephen died (Acts 8:1, 4–5)? (b) How did the persecution further the fulfillment of Jesus' command to them (see question 1d)? (c) Describe a difficulty in your life which brought a greater good.

The harvest field grew.

Meanwhile, Saul—a young, zealous Jew who had witnessed Stephen's death—set out to destroy the church. He searched door to door for Christians and imprisoned all he found, sending many to death.<sup>351</sup>

About AD 35, Saul's life changed.

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<sup>351</sup> Acts 26:9–11.

14. (a) What happened to Saul as he traveled to Damascus<sup>352</sup> to persecute Christians (Acts 9:3–6)? (b) When people persecute Christians, whom else are they persecuting (9:4–5)? (c) How can remembering this help when we are persecuted for our faith in Jesus?

The heavenly light blinded Saul, and in that time of physical blindness he came to know his spiritual blindness. Three days later, the Lord sent Ananias to pray for Saul.

15. (a) What did the Lord say about Saul (Acts 9:15)? (b) What was he going to show Saul?

Just as he had prepared the prophets of old, so God prepared Saul for the difficult mission before him.

16. (a) How would Saul's knowing that his mission would be painful strengthen him? (b) If possible, describe a time you did something right knowing there could be unwelcome repercussions. (c) How did knowing potential consequences help you?

When Ananias prayed for Saul, God healed Saul's eyes and filled him with the Holy Spirit. Saul immediately began preaching in synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God and the resurrected Messiah.

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<sup>352</sup> Damascus was Syria's capital city.

## The Gospel Spread

Pages 401–405

The disciples preached the gospel to Jews in synagogues everywhere. It was time for the harvest field to expand again.

One day Peter saw a vision in which a voice told him not to call creatures unclean which God had made clean. While Peter puzzled over the meaning, the Holy Spirit told him to go with three men who had just arrived, for he had sent them. The men were Gentiles—non-Jews.

They brought Peter to the house of Cornelius, a Roman Centurion whom an angel had directed to Peter.

17. (a) What did Cornelius do when Peter arrived (Acts 10:25)? (b) How did Peter react (10:26)? Explain.<sup>353</sup> (c) A large gathering of Gentiles awaited Peter. How did Peter now interpret the vision (10:28)?

Peter told them about Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation, and that the prophets said everyone who believed in Jesus would have their sins forgiven.<sup>354</sup>

And then—the Holy Spirit descended on the Gentiles. Peter now realized God offered the gift of salvation to everyone. He told the other apostles what had happened.

The church grew, but so did persecution. Around AD 44, King Herod beheaded the Apostle James.

18. (a) Whom else did Herod plan to kill (Acts 12:2–3)? (b) What happened instead (12:7)? (c) Does the fact that James was martyred and Peter was rescued mean Jesus favored one of them? Explain.

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<sup>353</sup> Jesus allowed people to worship him because he was God (John 1:1).

<sup>354</sup> Acts 10:39–43.

19. (a) How did the believers' remaining true to Jesus despite the death of an apostle demonstrate the strength of their belief? (b) How did Peter's miraculous rescue demonstrate God was still in control, despite James's death? (c) Give an example of someone whose faith through difficulties has inspired you.

The believers' determination to keep preaching the gospel despite suffering and death threats gave credence to their testimony. Everyone knew Pilate had crucified Jesus—that wasn't in doubt. But these disciples claimed to have seen Jesus alive after his execution. Herod and the Jewish leaders believed they lied and—knowing liars don't make good martyrs—they threatened many with death.

But by the power, wisdom, and boldness of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' followers were willing to suffer and die rather than recant their testimony that they had seen Jesus alive.

20. Write a prayer asking for the Holy Spirit's power, wisdom, and boldness.

The Holy Spirit continued to work, and the harvest continued to grow. Next week we'll see how Saul—who will become known as the Apostle Paul—took the gospel to the Gentiles.

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 29: Paul's Mission*

**Key Question:** Paul said, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”<sup>355</sup> How can we live like the Apostle Paul?

### **Preaching the Gospel**

*Pages 407–412*

The Holy Spirit called Saul—who soon became known as Paul—to go on several missionary journeys. The one who once persecuted the church became one of its apostles.

This week and next we’ll look at Paul’s life and glimpse some of his letters.

1. Which of Paul’s attributes stand out to you the most in Acts 13–16 (pages 407–412 in *The Story*)? Why?

Paul spoke boldly, and God confirmed his message with signs and wonders. Yet some refused to believe and tried to turn others against Paul.

2. What are some reasons people refuse to believe God’s message of salvation even if they’re given sufficient evidence (Acts 14:1–3)?

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<sup>355</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:1.

**Planting Churches***Pages 412–419*

Paul planted many churches while on his missionary journeys.

3. Which of Paul's attributes stand out to you the most in Acts 16–18 (pages 412–416 in *The Story*)? Why?

Paul kept in touch with the churches he had planted by writing letters which explained, among other things, how to live in a way that pleases God.

4. What is something you can put into practice this week from Paul's letter known as 1 Thessalonians (pages 416–419 in *The Story*)?

**Debating Persuasively***Pages 419–424*

Paul continued spreading the gospel. He debated persuasively and worked miracles as signs that God was with him.

5. Which of Paul's attributes stand out to you the most in Acts 18–19 (pages 419–423 in *The Story*)? Why?

6. Who else stood out to you in this section? Why?

## Strengthening Churches

*Pages 424–431*

Sometimes Paul heard about problems arising in churches he had planted. If he couldn't visit right away, he wrote letters, such as the one he wrote to a church in Corinth, Greece, to address church conflicts.

7. What is something you can put into practice this week from Paul's letter known as 1 Corinthians (pages 424–429 in *The Story*)?

Paul's letters often corrected doctrine. Some Christian Jews mistakenly believed Gentiles had to not only have faith in Jesus, but had to become Jews who kept the Law of Moses. Paul heard this teaching had infiltrated the church in Galatia, so he wrote a letter to address it.

8. In the letter to the Galatians, what stands out to you about the way Paul balances his teaching that Christians were not under the Law of Moses, but were nonetheless not to indulge in sin (pages 429–431 in *The Story*)?

9. What is something you can put into practice this week from the letter to the Galatians?

## Teaching Doctrine

*Pages 431–437*

Paul heard about a church springing up in Rome. He wasn't able to visit right away, so he sent a letter explaining doctrine and how Jewish and Gentile Christians should get along.

10. What stands out to you in Paul's letter to the Romans regarding the impossibility of achieving salvation by being good enough (pages 431–437 in *The Story*)?

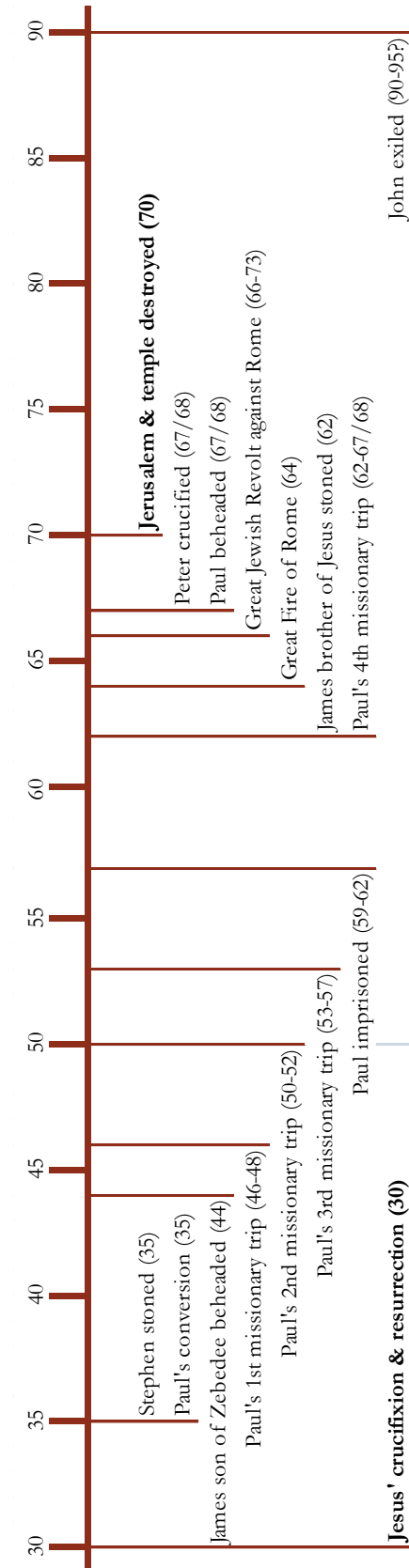
11. What is something you can put into practice this week from the letter to the Romans?

12. What is one way you would like to imitate Paul? What steps can you take to do so?

Next week, we'll see Paul's final days as persecution against Christians increased.



## Timeline: The Early Church (AD 30–90)



# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 30: Paul's Final Days*

**Key Question:** What can we learn from Paul's willingness to obey God despite facing hardship?

### **Enduring Hardship**

*Pages 439–443*

Last week we saw how God used the apostle Paul mightily to spread the gospel, teach doctrine, and strengthen churches. This week we look at Paul's final days.

1. (a) What did Paul say the Holy Spirit warned him awaited him (Acts 20:23)? (b) What was Paul's response (20:24)? (c) What can we learn from Paul's willingness to continue preaching despite knowing persecution was coming?
2. What strikes you the most about Paul's arrest and defense (Acts 21–22, pages 441–443 in *The Story*)? Why?

**Imprisonment***Pages 443–447*

Paul was under arrest, but the Lord appeared to him and told him he would testify in Rome.

3. Summarize how things worked out that Paul would set sail to Rome, where God wanted him to testify (Acts 22–26, pages 443–447 in *The Story*).

4. What can we learn about how God can use hardship from this section?

**To Rome***Pages 447–452*

Paul sailed to Rome as a prisoner.

5. What stood out to you most about Paul's journey to Rome (Acts 27–28, pages 447–450 in *The Story*)? Why?

6. What stood out to you most about Paul's house imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28, pages 451–452 in *The Story*)? Why?

## **Letter to Ephesus**

*Pages 452–458*

Paul didn't let imprisonment stop him from ministering. He used prison time to dictate letters to churches.

7. What is something you can put into practice this week from Paul's letter known as Ephesians (pages 452–456 in *The Story*)?

8. If possible, briefly describe a way you were able to minister amidst hardship.

## Persevering to the End

Pages 439–452

Acts ends with Paul's release from prison (AD 62/63).

Initially, Rome considered Christianity a Jewish sect. Judaism was an authorized Roman religion and exempt from the otherwise universal mandate to worship the emperor. Rome tolerated Judaism's monotheism partly because Jews seldom converted Gentiles.

But Christians preached the gospel to Gentiles everywhere. Many Gentiles converted, causing social upheaval as shrines lost supporters and idol makers lost income.<sup>356</sup> Idol worshippers detested the Christians' insistence that manmade gods were not gods at all. They bristled over hearing their lifestyles considered sinful.

By the 60s, Jews and Gentiles throughout the Roman Empire despised the Christians. Jewish leaders convinced Rome Christianity wasn't a Jewish sect, and Rome declared Christianity a new, unauthorized religion that called an executed criminal Lord instead of the emperor.

In AD 64, the Great Fire of Rome burned much of the city, and rumors quickly spread that Emperor Nero had started the fire to facilitate a building project.<sup>357</sup> Needing a scapegoat, he blamed the now reviled Christians. Imprisonments and grisly executions quickly followed for anyone bearing the name of Christ. Some he burned on posts to light the night sky; others he covered in animal skins and threw to dogs; and still others he crucified—including the Apostle Peter.

In AD 66/67, Paul sat chained in a damp, dark dungeon in Rome. Knowing his execution neared, he wrote a letter to strengthen Timothy, a pastor whom he'd mentored.

9. What stands out to you the most from Paul's letter known as 2 Timothy (pages 456–458 in *The Story*)? Why?

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<sup>356</sup> Acts 19:23–29.

<sup>357</sup> The fire's real cause is unknown.

Paul persevered to the end. The testimony of the man who once persecuted the church, and then claimed to have encountered the living Jesus Christ, stands through the ages, for he boldly testified to having seen the resurrected Lord, no matter what it cost him in this life, for he looked forward to the life to come.

In AD 67/68, Rome beheaded Paul.<sup>358</sup>

10. Consider what you've read about Paul's willingness to endure hardship for God, his boldness in preaching to his persecutors, and the way God used him even in dire circumstances. What can we learn from this?

By the end of the first century, most of the apostles gave their lives for the gospel: Peter, Andrew, Philip, and Bartholomew were crucified; Thomas, speared; James the son of Alphaeus and James the brother of Jesus, stoned; James the son of Zebedee and Paul, beheaded.<sup>359</sup>

All of these were willing to die, and even watch their loved ones die, for their conviction that they saw Jesus raised from the dead and exalted to God's right hand.

Some people may die for a lie they believe to be true. But these men claimed to have seen the risen Jesus with their own eyes. If they had not, they would have died—and watched those dear to them die—for what they knew was a lie. And who dies for what they know is a lie?

The Holy Spirit's work did not end with the death of Jesus' first followers. Many were convinced by their eyewitness testimony and willingness to suffer rather than recant. Despite persecution, the church grew and the gospel spread.

In the midst of these tribulations, Jesus appeared to the Apostle John with words of encouragement and a vision of the end times. We'll read that next week.

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<sup>358</sup> Paul was a Roman citizen and could not be subjected to the crueler executions.

<sup>359</sup> Hippolytus (second century church leader) and other historians recorded these martyrdoms. John was not martyred. Traditions (though insufficient early historical evidence) suggest the other apostles were martyred too.

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 31: The End of Time*

**Key Question:** How do we conquer Satan through faith?

### **Jesus Among the Churches**

*Pages 459–461*

Late in the first century AD, Rome banished John to the tiny island of Patmos.<sup>360</sup> There, John saw a series of visions meant to encourage persecuted churches to overcome hardships through faith. He wrote these visions in the book of Revelation.

1. (a) In Revelation's prologue, John described Jesus' second coming to earth. What will it be like (Revelation 1:7)? (b) John quoted two passages that Jesus quoted when he spoke about his second coming at the end of the age.<sup>361</sup> What does this tell us about one of the themes of the book? (c) What do you most look forward to when Jesus returns?

In John's first vision, someone like a son of man held seven stars in his right hand while standing among seven golden lampstands. The man he saw wasn't an ordinary man, however, for John's visions were of symbols.

Many of the symbols were common in Jewish life and literature.<sup>362</sup> The man wore a long robe and a golden sash, such as a king or priest would wear.<sup>363</sup> His hair was described in the same way as the hair of

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<sup>360</sup> Revelation 1:9. Some banishments were to hard labor in penal colonies; others were simply banishments to a particular place, limiting movement. John probably wrote Revelation in AD 95; his exile likely ended in AD 96. Note that Rome destroyed Jerusalem, burned the temple, and exiled the Jews in AD 70 after the Jews in Judea and Galilee revolted in the hope of establishing an earthly nation under an earthly Messiah.

<sup>361</sup> Matthew 24:30. "Look, he is coming with the clouds" quotes Daniel 7:13, which depicts "one like a son of man" being worshiped and given everlasting dominion over his kingdom. The phrases, "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him" and "will mourn because of him," come from Zechariah 12:10, which is part of an oracle describing the Lord rescuing Jerusalem from a multinational assault, people looking at the one who was pierced and mourning (either in repentance or realization of impending judgment), and a fountain of living water that cleanses from sin.

<sup>362</sup> Bible interpreters agree on the symbolism for many passages, but offer multiple suggestions for others. It's important not to look down upon those with interpretations that might differ from ours or let such differences cause disunity. As is often said, "The main things are the plain things."

<sup>363</sup> Exodus 28:4.

the Ancient of Days: white like wool and snow, depicting dignity, wisdom, and long life.<sup>364</sup> His eyes were like “blazing fire,” burning away all that is false and seeing into hearts and minds.<sup>365</sup> His feet were like fired bronze, refined and stronger than the clay and iron feet of Rome.<sup>366</sup> His voice was “like the sound of rushing waters”—the divine voice.<sup>367</sup> A sharp double-edged sword came from his mouth, for he was able to divide soul and spirit, and to judge the heart’s thoughts and attitudes.<sup>368</sup> His face shone like the sun.

The one like a son of man identified himself and explained some of the symbols.

2. (a) What did the one speaking call himself in Revelation 1:17? (b) This was one of God’s titles.<sup>369</sup> Who was the speaker, and how do you know (1:18)? (c) What keys did he hold (1:18)? (d) What do those keys tell us about Jesus and of his power over eternal things? (e) The seven lampstands symbolize the seven churches to whom the message would go (1:20). Seven symbolizes completeness, and the seven churches represent all churches in all ages. How does knowing Jesus stands among them help persecuted churches?<sup>370</sup>

## Letters to Churches

*Pages 461–462*

Jesus’ messages for the churches depended on their need.

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<sup>364</sup> Daniel 7:9.

<sup>365</sup> Jeremiah 17:10.

<sup>366</sup> The Israelites made fortified walls from bronze (Jeremiah 15:20). Daniel 2:41–43 describes Rome as a kingdom with feet of baked clay and iron—a divided kingdom that has strong and brittle parts.

<sup>367</sup> Ezekiel 43:2.

<sup>368</sup> Isaiah 49:2; Hebrews 4:12.

<sup>369</sup> Isaiah 44:6; 48:12.

<sup>370</sup> Churches provide the light of truth, like lampstands. Just as the priest tended the seven lamps on the temple’s lampstand so that their light did not go out in darkness (Exodus 27:20; Leviticus 24:1–4), so Jesus now tended these lampstands so that their light would not go out in spiritual darkness.



3. (a) For what does Jesus commend the wealthy church at Ephesus (Revelation 2:2–3, 6)? (b) They had rejected the Nicolaitans' teaching that spiritual freedom allowed them to participate in the idolatry and immorality of the culture around them.<sup>371</sup> What does Jesus say the church needs to correct (2:4–5)? (c) How can we hold on to right doctrine without losing love? (d) If a church loses its zeal for Christ and stops sharing the gospel, it will no longer give light to the world (2:5). Jesus makes a promise to those who overcome. The word translated *overcome* is *nikaô*, which means to overcome, prevail, conquer, triumph.<sup>372</sup> What will Jesus give those who overcome (2:7)?
4. (a) How did Jesus' assessment of the affluent church at Laodicea differ from the church's assessment of itself (Revelation 3:15–17)? (b) How can earthly riches blind us to spiritual poverty? (c) Laodicea was famous for its textiles, medical center, and eye salve, yet what did Jesus tell them to do (3:18)? (d) Why did he rebuke them (3:19)? (e) Where is Jesus in relation to the church, and what does he want to do (3:20)? (f) Eating with someone is having relationship. What was this lukewarm, self-satisfied church missing? (g) How can we avoid being lukewarm? (h) What would happen if they overcame (3:21)?

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<sup>371</sup> Acts 20:29–30.

<sup>372</sup> The maker of athletic shoes, Nike, gets its name from this word.

## The Throne & the Lamb

Pages 462–465

After John received the messages for the churches, he found himself in heaven.

5. (a) Poets describe lovers in symbols meant to evoke emotion: “her lips are like rubies” describes color, rarity, and preciousness. Read Revelation 4 as you might poetry. What emotions does the heavenly scene<sup>373</sup> evoke? (b) What strikes you most about this scene? Why?

John saw a sealed scroll in God’s hand. The only one worthy to open the scroll was the triumphant Lion of Judah. A lion usually conquers with muscles, claws, and fangs. Not so Jesus the Lion of Judah and the Root of David.

6. (a) How did the Lion of Judah triumph (*nikaō*), according to Revelation 5:5–6, 9? (b) By allowing his physical body to be conquered on earth, Jesus conquered spiritually. When we persevere in faith through hardship, how are we likewise triumphing over Satan?

Just as John portrayed Jesus as the Lamb who conquered, so Paul said that Christians are often considered as sheep to be slaughtered who nonetheless overwhelmingly conquer (*hupernikaō*):

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are **more than conquerors** through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. *Romans 8:35–39*

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<sup>373</sup> Don’t worry about the symbolism too much since interpretations vary. For instance, the 24 elders might represent humans (either believers in heaven or the twelve patriarchs and twelve apostles), celestial rulers, etc. Enjoy the descriptions and look for the main idea of the symbols without worrying about getting just the “right” answer!

7. (a) Does the Christian conquer by going *around* or *through* trouble, hardship, and suffering? (b) What assurance does the Romans passage above give you? (c) Why shouldn't we fear that something might conquer us and separate us from God? (d) Briefly describe a time when you conquered *through* difficulty.

## The Judgment

Pages 465–467

As the Lamb opened the seals, John saw a series of visions of those who warred against the saints: the dragon, Satan, who had failed to devour the child born from heaven; a great prostitute who made many rich with her adulteries and excessive luxuries; and blasphemous beasts who influenced rulers. Although satanic forces outwardly defeated the saints on earth by slaying them, like the Lamb they conquered by staying faithful unto death, thereby humiliating Satan.<sup>374</sup>

Plagues came against people who followed the dragon, prostitute, and beasts, but they refused to repent.<sup>375</sup> One of the beasts devoured the prostitute,<sup>376</sup> and heavenly multitudes rejoiced over her fall.<sup>377</sup> Heaven opened, and John saw a rider on a white horse.

8. (a) List the names given to the rider in Revelation 19:11–16. Who is he, and how do you know? (b) What strikes you most about the rider on the white horse? Why?

<sup>374</sup> G. K. Beale: “‘Overcomers’ [*nikaō*] are those whose lives are characterized by refusal to compromise their faith despite the threat of persecution. They ironically conquer when they maintain their faith even though they may appear defeated in the world’s eyes because of persecution.” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text, NIGCT* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 1057. See also 1 John 5:4.

<sup>375</sup> Revelation 16:9, 11, 20.

<sup>376</sup> Revelation 17:16–17.

<sup>377</sup> Revelation 18:15, 20; 19:1.

John described how the rider and his army captured the beast and threw it into a fiery lake; how the ancient serpent, Satan, was also thrown into the lake of fire; and how the dead then stood before the great white throne.

9. (a) How were the dead judged<sup>378</sup> (Revelation 20:12–13)? (b) What is the lake of fire (20:14)? (c) What happened to those whose names were not found in the book of life (20:15)?

Those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life have their sins paid for by the Lamb's shed blood, for Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24).

## The New Heaven & New Earth

Pages 467–470

John saw a new heaven and new earth, for the first heaven and first earth had passed away.<sup>379</sup> A Holy City, the New Jerusalem, composed of those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life, came down out of heaven from God.<sup>380</sup> It shone with the glory of God, and was bejeweled with precious stones, gold, and pearls.<sup>381</sup> It was the bride of the Lamb.

10. (a) What will be different in the new heaven and earth (Revelation 21:3–5)? (b) Who will inherit this, and what relationships will they have (21:7)?

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<sup>378</sup> See also Romans 2:6–8.

<sup>379</sup> Revelation 21:1.

<sup>380</sup> "The people themselves will be both the city and the temple in which God's presence resides." Beale, *Revelation*, 1066.

<sup>381</sup> "It is best to see this list [of jewels] as a general depiction of the glory of the people of God." Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 756.

“He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’”<sup>382</sup> And he made a new heaven and a new earth for the people whom he had made new.<sup>383</sup>

11. (a) What emotions does John’s description of the Holy City evoke (Revelation 21:9–27)?
- (b) What strikes you most about this description? Why?

The revelation ends with what was lost in the garden being restored.

12. (a) When Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God banished them from the garden so they could not eat from the tree of life and live forever.<sup>384</sup> What grows in the heavenly city (Revelation 22:2)? (b) God cursed the ground of the first earth, making it produce thorns and thistles, and subjecting it to decay.<sup>385</sup> What is different in this city (22:3a)? (c) God promised an offspring of Eve’s would crush the head of the serpent that deceived her.<sup>386</sup> Where is the serpent crusher in this city, and what is he called (22:3b)? (d) After the fall, people no longer saw God’s face on the first earth.<sup>387</sup> What will change (22:4)? (e) The first heaven and earth were given the sun, moon, and stars for light. What provides light in this city (22:5)? (f) God had made Adam and Eve to reign over the earth, but they followed the serpent instead of God, and gave the earth’s reign to Satan.<sup>388</sup> What will be restored (22:5)?

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<sup>382</sup> Revelation 21:5a.

<sup>383</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17–19.

<sup>384</sup> Genesis 3:22–24.

<sup>385</sup> Genesis 3:17–18; Romans 8:19–21.

<sup>386</sup> Genesis 3:15.

<sup>387</sup> Exodus 33:20.

<sup>388</sup> Genesis 1:26–28; John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2.

And so Eve's seed crushed the serpent that deceived humankind into sinning and separating themselves from God. The Great Passover Lamb gave his righteousness to his beloved and reconciled them to God. The King of kings gave them a new heaven and new earth, and placed his throne among them. The Bridegroom made them his own. And they will reign for ever and ever.

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13. What stands out to you the most from your study of *The Story*?

# For Further Reading

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Barker, Kenneth, gen. ed. *The NIV Study Bible: New International Version* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1985). Many experts contribute archaeological, historical, and explanatory notes to this outstanding study Bible.

Merrill, Eugene H. *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, second edition (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 2008). This excellent overview of the Old Testament is filled with archaeological and historical insights.

Metzger, Bruce M. *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1993). Renowned New Testament scholar Metzger explains much of Revelation's symbolism while avoiding hard stances in areas open to multiple interpretations.