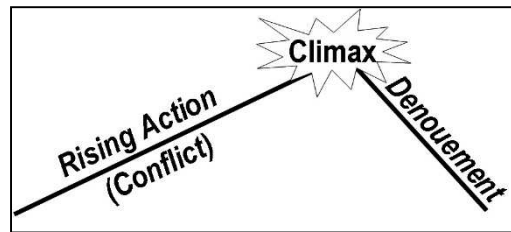


THE DRAMA OF SCRIPTURE

All of us love good stories. We are attracted to them. Whether going to a movie, picking up a good book, or finding an intriguing show on TV, stories capture our attention and often captivate our hearts. In fact, story has been called the “language of the heart.”

What makes a good story? Though there are a multitude of stories written and/or produced in a variety of styles, at the core, almost all good stories contain the same elements and follow the same pattern. Literary critics define four key elements of a story:

- **Characters**, including a protagonist—the central character—and an antagonist—one who opposes or competes against the protagonist in some shape or fashion.
- **Plot**, with the basic pattern of rising action (conflict), climax, and falling action (or denouement, meaning “the untying”).
- **Setting**, the times and places in which the events of the plot occur.
- **Theme**, the central unifying element of the story.



Why are we so attracted to stories? If stories, with the same basic elements, are loved across all cultures and all time periods, then a logical question is “why?” What attracts us to stories? What makes stories resonate with our hearts?

Certainly our own lives are “stories” to some degree but our own lives often lack the clarity, direction, purpose, and unifying theme that we find in a good story. In fact, we are probably drawn into good stories because our own lives lack the sense of meaning, adventure, and resolution that we find in a good story.

Here is a better answer: we love good stories because we are in one—not the small story of our own lives but a grander story that covers all of history. In other words, history itself is a story. As such, history has an Author, with a central theme, a developing plot, and live characters...us! Many people deny this answer. They would say that life has no Author. History has no direction. And consequently life really has no overarching meaning. This is the philosophy of William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* who near the end of his life lamented:

Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.
(Act V, Scene V)

Atheistic science and postmodern philosophy would both agree with Macbeth. There is no master author or metanarrative. Thus there is no ultimate meaning to life. Life is like the news—a series of snapshots with no universal meaning or connection.

The Bible, however, presents an alternative view. The Bible teaches that there is an Author, God, and there is a story, the story of history (or as some have noted, “His-story”). The Bible is unique among religious books in that it presents not just a collection of stories but rather a central story that encompasses all time and all people.

The Goal of the Study. The purpose of this study is to explore the redemptive story of Scripture, to uncover history’s ultimate characters, plot, setting, and theme, and, most of all, to grow deeper in love with the Author of the story. Even for those who have never considered or explored the story of the Bible, there can be great benefit in investing time and effort in this study.

- The Bible itself is a unique book. Written over a period of 1500 years with approximately forty different authors, it is the most read, most translated, most published, most controversial, and most influential book in history. Whether a person ultimately believes the Bible or not, it is obviously wise to at least know what it says.
- The Bible promises to transform those who read and heed its words (Psalm 19:7-11).
- If, as the Bible teaches, there is a grander story that encompasses all time and all people, then we are a part of this story! Discovering this part, designed by our Author, can bring purpose, meaning, wisdom, and joy to our daily lives.

The Format of the Study. Each weekly study consists of three primary sections:



Scripture Exploration. Each week in the study will feature five days of Scripture reading (a chapter or two per day) which will provide a general overview of the part of the grand story of Scripture covered.



Additional Resources. An excerpt from Christian books or other sources will help clarify and/or further expand the reading in Scripture.



Changed Hearts. Personal evaluation and reflection, along with group discussion questions, will help to apply the readings in the Bible so that we can live for God and experience together the joy of relationship with Him.

Here are some basics that may be helpful to you as you begin studying the Bible:

- ***Bible References.*** Bible references are stated in the order of book, chapter, and verse. Thus “John 3:16” refers to the book of John, chapter three, verse sixteen.
- ***Bible Languages.*** The Bible was originally written in Hebrew (Old Testament), Aramaic (parts of Ezra and Daniel) and Koine (or Common) Greek (New Testament). Over the years, the Bible has been translated into thousands of languages from Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. Every translation is limited to some degree since word meanings are not always equivalent from language to language.

Thus referring to a Hebrew or Greek dictionary (such as found at blueletterbible.org) can sometimes be helpful in understanding the Bible.

- ***English Translations.*** There are numerous English versions (translations) of the Bible. Some versions attempt to translate the Hebrew-Greek manuscripts of the Bible word-for-word (e.g., King James, New King James, New American Standard). Other versions translate the Bible concept-for-concept (e.g., New International, New Living). A concept-for-concept translation is easier-to-read but sometimes flavors the meaning of a verse in a way that may not be totally accurate. Thus for Bible study purposes it is best to use a word-for-word translation or at least to consult one before drawing too many conclusions from a Bible text.
- ***How did we get the books of the Bible?*** The authoritative nature of the 66 books of the Bible (39 in the Old Testament, 27 in the New Testament) was recognized by the people of God soon after the books were written. The Old Testament was compiled over several centuries with the books of Moses (Genesis-Deuteronomy) and the historical books collected and copied from generation to generation. The last prophetic book (Malachi) was written in 400 BC and shortly thereafter the 39 books of the OT were recognized as God's inspired Word.

The New Testament was officially compiled and recognized around the fourth century AD (after severe persecution of the church ended in the Roman Empire). Before this time the early church read, copied, preserved, and almost universally recognized the 27 books of the NT as the Word of God. In fact, many early believers were willing to die for the truth contained in these Scriptures.

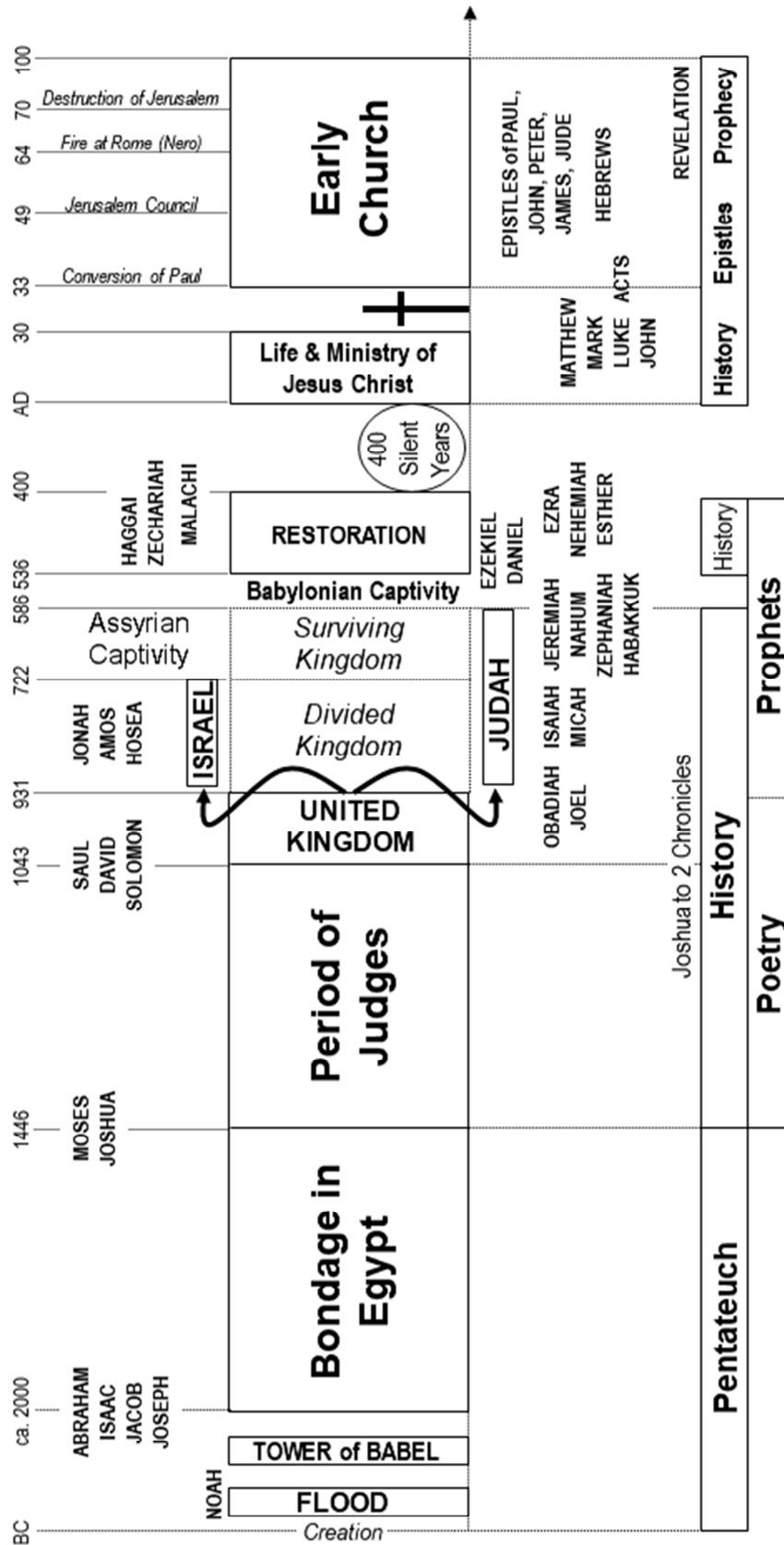
- ***What about the Apocrypha?*** The Apocrypha ("hidden") refers to eleven books which were composed during the time between the Old and New Testaments (400-100 BC). Roman Catholics generally recognize them as part of the Old Testament Bible. However, the Jews do not recognize them as part of the Old Testament, Jesus or the apostles do not quote from them, and they were not given full canonical status until 1546 at the Council of Trent (called in response to the Protestant Reformation). Thus Protestants do not recognize the Apocrypha as part of the Bible but do see them as having historical value for understanding the intertestamental period (i.e., the time between the completion of the Old Testament and the start of the New).
- ***What about the Gnostic Gospels?*** Recently there has been interest in our culture in certain "hidden" or Gnostic Gospels. Bible scholars agree that these books were all forgeries written 100-200 years after the NT writings. Their only historical "value" is to show the beliefs of early Gnostic heresies which tried to blend Christian concepts with Greek mystery religions and were rejected by orthodox Christianity.
- ***Internet Resources.*** There are many websites on the internet offering access to different Bible translations and search features. One site, biblegateway.com, is easy to use and features numerous Bible translations. Websites like bible.org and blueletterbible.org also have many excellent Bible study tools which can give you more information on the Bible passages you are studying.

Overview of the Study. We will cover the story of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. Twenty-five words will be used to summarize this story:

Week One	Creation Challenge	Genesis 1-2 Isaiah 14
Week Two	Curse Corruption	Genesis 3 Genesis 4-11
Week Three	Covenant Conduct	Genesis 12-50 Exodus-Deuteronomy
Week Four	Conquest Cycles	Joshua Judges
Week Five	Crown Captivity	1 Samuel-2 Chronicles
Week Six	Celebration Contemplation	Psalms, Song of Solomon Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes
Week Seven	Construction Comfort	Ezra-Nehemiah The Prophets
	<i>Cessation</i>	<i>Intertestamental Period</i>
Week Eight	Christ Cross	Matthew-John
Week Nine	Church Communication	Acts The Epistles
Week Ten	Catching Away Counterfeit	Revelation 1-6
Week Eleven	Conflict Coronation	Revelation 6-19
Week Twelve	Cleansing Consummation	Revelation 20-22

This study was written by Pastor Steve Foster, Community Bible Church, Baton Rouge, LA. You are welcome to reproduce any part of it for your own personal study. For any other use, please contact pastor@516church.org.

OVERVIEW OF BIBLICAL HISTORY



—Adapted from Jensen's Survey of the Old/New Testaments

I had always felt life first as a story; and if there is a story there is a storyteller.
G.K. Chesterton

*I cannot answer the question, "What ought I to do?"
unless I first answer the question, "Of which story am I a part?"*
Alasdair MacIntyre

*The best stories are good, standing the test of time, because they reflect another,
bigger and better story, the biblical story. And the biblical story is good because it is true—
so true, in fact, that it is simply Truth.*

*...The entire biblical story is at your disposal to inform and illumine and inspire you to stay on
course—the course of faith, hope, and love—no matter what your circumstances happen to be.
It is a redemptive story, and it is still unfolding.*
Jerry Sitser

*Life is a song we must sing with our days
A poem with meaning more than words can say
A painting with colors no rainbow can tell
A lyric that rhymes either Heaven or Hell
We are living letters that doubt desecrates
We're the notes of the song of the chorus of faith
God shapes every second of our little lives
And minds every minute as the universe waits by
The pain and the longing
The joy and the moments of light
Are the rhythm and rhyme
The free verse of the poem of life.*
Michael Card

INTRODUCTORY GROUP DISCUSSION

- What is one of your favorite stories (book or movie)? Why do you like this story so much?
- Take time to analyze some of the stories mentioned. Who is the protagonist(s)? Who is the antagonist(s)? What conflict or difficulty occurs? What is a key turning point in the story? What is the climax? How are things “untied” or concluded at the end?
- What difference does it make in your life to know that you are part of a bigger story?
- **Read Acts 17:24-31.** This is Paul’s sermon to the people of Athens, lovers of philosophy and “the latest ideas.” What do you learn about God? About us? About the movement of history?
- What do you hope to learn from this *Drama of Scripture* study? Which of the twelve chapters looks the most interesting to you? Why? How can this group encourage you in this study?

WEEK 1 CREATION & CHALLENGE

God is the Author of history. It is His story. As a story, it has a theme and a purpose. It has a plot and a direction. It has a setting—heaven and earth. It also has characters. The central character is God. The main antagonist is a created angelic being named Satan. And each of us play a key part in this divinely-directed drama as well.

Since God is eternal, the story is already written. The Bible reveals both the beginning (Genesis) and ending of the story (Revelation). But our parts in the story are not totally determined. God has chosen to give each one of us a capacity to choose how we will respond to the part that He has given us. Though in God's sovereignty, the story is already written; in His mercy and in the mystery of His will, there is opportunity for us to help write certain parts of the story. We live in a completed and an unfolding drama both at the same time.

So what kind of story is God writing? What is its purpose, its theme? History is the story of God's glory manifested in relationship by the establishment of His kingdom.

In its most basic sense, a kingdom involves a king, a king's right to rule, and a realm over which to rule. This seems to be God's plan from the beginning of creation. If we could picture God's original design in Genesis 1-2, it would look something like this:



In God's kingdom, He rules over all. He is sovereign over heaven and earth. In His love, He creates humanity, Adam and Eve, and endows them with His image. Thus, Adam and Eve are created to rule over God's creation on earth, to be His representatives, to love Him and to serve Him in accomplishing His purposes.

God's kingdom is to be marked by righteousness, peace, joy and beauty. Adam and Eve are to be in right relationship with God, with each other, and

with the world over which they rule. God also created angels to serve Himself and humanity in accomplishing His will. This is God's perfect plan.

In creating angels and humanity, God also endowed both with a free will—an ability to choose how they will respond to God. God did not want a kingdom of automatons. He wanted a kingdom of relationship, characterized by love. Relationship is at the heart of God's character and true intimate relationship involves voluntary choice.

In giving both angels and humanity a choice, God willingly and knowingly opened Himself up to a challenge to His authority and kingship. And this is what happened...

Westminster Confession of Faith

4.1. It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create or make of nothing the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good.

4.2. After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness after his own image, having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change.

SCRIPTURE EXPLORATION



Much debate today concerns the days of creation since many struggle to reconcile the biblical account with theories of modern science regarding evolution and the earth's age.

There is no indication in Genesis 1 that the days spoken of are longer than a normal day (cf. Exodus 20:11).

However, some see a possible gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 allowing time for Satan to fall and the world to be cast into a ruined state. Others see possible large gaps in the genealogies or propose the idea of *time dilation* in a newly formed and expanding universe. But many Christian scientists and teachers take Genesis at face value and see evidence for a young earth.

This debate is outside the scope of this study but many resources can be found at discovery.org.

CREATION

DAY 1

Genesis 1-2:3

Read Genesis 1:1-2:3. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart.

The word “Genesis” comes from a Greek word meaning “origin.” It reflects the first word of the Hebrew text, “in the beginning.” Thus Genesis is the “book of beginnings.” It was written by Moses around 1400 BC along with Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Together these first five books of the Bible are called the **Pentateuch** (“fivefold vessel”) and the **Torah** (“the law”). Moses wrote Genesis to introduce God as the Creator and Author of world history and as the covenant God of Israel.

Go back and highlight/underline the number of times “God” is used in Genesis 1. How many times does “God” occur in Genesis 1? _____

It is obvious that in Genesis 1 God is introduced as the central character of creation and of Scripture as a whole. He is the ultimate “protagonist” of the story so to speak. The introduction of a character in a story often highlights his essential features.

Underline/observe the various verbs (actions) that follow the word “God” in Genesis 1:1-2:3. List five things that you learn about God based on His actions.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Genesis 1 recounts the creation of all things in the universe—light, the atmosphere, dry land, vegetation, the heavenly lights, fish, birds, animals, and finally humanity. Man and woman are presented as the crowning feature of God’s creation. All things lead up to their creation. **Go back and focus on Genesis 1:26-28.** What are at least three things that set apart man and woman from the rest of creation?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

After God has finished creating the world, He pronounces it as being *very good* (1:31). This tells us that the physical world is not an illusion or an accident or a bad thing. This world we live in and our physical bodies are beautiful creations of God.

CREATION

DAY 2

Job 38-40:5

Job is considered by many Bible scholars to be the oldest book in the Bible, possibly written during the time of Abraham (~2000 BC). It is a dramatic poem that recounts the story of Job, a righteous man who suffers a great deal in his earthly life due to a heavenly conflict that is beyond his awareness. While Job struggles to understand his suffering, his “friends” are quick to attribute Job’s misfortunes to a hidden sin in his life. Overcome with grief, Job longs for his younger days when his “steps were bathed with cream” (29:6). He cries out for a hearing before God where he can declare his case of innocence and demand some answers (31:35-37).

Read Job 38:1-40:5. In this passage, God answers Job’s demands and also gives a poetic description of creation. Read these chapters reflectively and prayerfully.

What aspect of creation or what image particularly stands out to you in this passage?

God responds to Job’s demands for answers on his suffering by... (circle one)

- A. Giving him a detailed, theological explanation of suffering.
- B. Apologizing and promising Job that his life would get better from now on.
- C. Reminding Job that he does not have the power to control the universe or the mental ability to understand all the mysteries of His ways or of creation.

Why do you think God responds to Job in this way? What is He trying to teach Job?

What is Job’s response (40:3-5)?

CREATION

DAY 3

Genesis 2

Genesis 1 presents the overview of creation. Genesis 2 moves in for a closer look, particularly focusing on the creation of Adam and Eve. Genesis 1 presents God as the powerful Creator speaking the world into existence. Genesis 2 presents God as the intimate Creator speaking to man and caring for him. Together Genesis 1-2 introduce God as both powerful and loving, above creation and involved in it.

List three ways that you see God’s love and intimate care for man in Genesis 2.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Foundations of the earth (38:4)—Poetic language is used throughout this passage to describe aspects of God’s creation.

Sons of God (38:7)—A phrase often used to refer to angels. “Morning stars” may also refer to angels or be a poetic description of all of creation singing as God creates.

THINK ABOUT: *What can you learn from the fact that the angels and the stars sang when God created the world?*

This is the history of (2:4)—Hebrew, *toledoth*. This phrase is used 10 times in Genesis and indicates Moses’ outline for the book (2:4, 5:1, 6:9, 10:1, 11:10, 11:27, 25:12, 25:19, 36:1, 37:2). Moses uses the phrase with creation, Adam, Noah, Noah’s sons, Shem, Terah, Ishmael, Isaac, Esau, and Jacob.

Both Adam and Eve are created in the image of God affirming their equality. However, though they are equal in essence, Adam and Eve do not necessarily have the same function. They are created with different designs to accomplish different purposes.

David (~1030-960 BC) was the second king of Israel and a gifted singer and musician who composed the majority of the Psalms.

THINK ABOUT:
Why do you think children often have an easier time believing in God than adults do?

Psalms 8:8 was the verse that led Matthew Fontaine Maury to discover and map ocean currents in 1842.

THINK ABOUT:
How can our greatest strength or blessing become our greatest weakness or curse?

Why do you think God had Adam name all the animals (2:19-20)?

Genesis 1 tells us of the creation of male and female. Genesis 2 provides the details. Why does God create Eve?

What words would you use to describe the relationship that Adam and Eve are to have with one another?

CREATION

DAY 4

Psalms 8

Psalms 8 is a song written by David in response to God's creation. David probably wrote this song while sitting on a hillside in Israel at night looking up at the heavens. He was totally blown away by the vast universe God created (God's power) and at the same time God's willingness to be involved in the lives of men (God's love).

What do you think it means that "from the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise" (8:2, NIV)?

What things amaze David about God's creation of man?

CHALLENGE

DAY 5

Is. 14, Ezek. 28

Behind the scenes of God's creation in Genesis 1-2, there is an unseen conflict. At some point before God's creation of the world in Genesis 1, God created angels. Job 38:7 portrays the angels as "shouting for joy" as God creates the earth.

Angels are spirit beings different from man. Though they are more powerful than man, they were created by God as "serving spirits" (Hebrews 1:14) to serve both God and man. One angel in particular was not happy with this assignment. He is called "Lucifer" (i.e., "son of the morning") or Satan (i.e., "adversary").

Read Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:11-19. These two passages are addressed to earthly kings, the king of Babylon and the King of Tyre respectively. However, it is apparent that in speaking judgment against these two kings, God sees a greater judgment against the power behind these two kings, Satan. From these two passages, we can infer a lot about who Satan is and why he chose to rebel against God.

Write down the five “I will” statements in Isaiah 14:13-14.

I will _____

I will _____

I will _____

I will _____

I will _____

In light of Isaiah 14:13-14, why did Satan rebel against God? _____

Scripture does not detail all of what happened in Satan’s rebellion. But it is clear that when Satan rebelled, he enticed other angelic beings to rebel with him. These rebellious angels joined Satan and became his demons intent on opposing God’s purposes in the universe.

Thus behind the pristine paradise of Genesis 1-2 lies an enemy that is ready to pounce.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Read the following excerpts from Donald Grey Barnhouse’s book, *The Invisible War* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965), pages 22-51. Dr. Barnhouse (1885-1960) was a graduate of Princeton University and Seminary and the pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia (1927-60).

IN THE TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER OF EZEKIEL, there is a revelation of truth which can, and indeed must, be fitted into...the opening verses of Genesis. The first part of the chapter is a lamentation against one who is called the prince of Tyre. We have no reason for doubting that this portion of the chapter is addressed by the Holy Spirit to the reigning prince of Tyre, a contemporary of the prophet. He is one of many men throughout ancient and modern history who have been lifted up with such pride that they imagined themselves to partake of deity.

In the eleventh verse, however, there is a transition of thought. We read: “*Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus...*” So far as we know from secular history there was no king of Tyre, only the prince spoken of in the first part of the chapter. Who is this king of Tyre? Everything that is spoken to the prince could be said without difficulty of an earthly ruler. But in the judgment that is addressed to the one who is styled king of Tyre, it is immediately apparent that a being above and beyond the sphere of human life is in view. Nor should this astonish us. The Lord, on several occasions, addressed Satan indirectly, and we hope to establish that the power behind the earthly ruler of Tyre is Lucifer who became Satan.

It should be remembered that the first time in the Bible where Satan is addressed he is spoken to through the intermediacy of the serpent (Genesis 3:15), who was his mouthpiece. We remember again that in the gospels the Lord spoke to Satan through Peter. When Peter permitted the enemy to get control of his lips for a time, the Lord turned on His disciple, saying, “*Get thee*

behind me, Satan” (Matthew 16:22-23). ...It is not extraordinary, therefore, that God should speak to Satan here in Ezekiel through the intermediacy of an earthly ruler. Many things in history will become clearer to the student of the Bible who is also a student of history when it is realized that behind every earthly power there is a satanic power lurking, seeking to control and dominate for the glory of the rebel who declared war against God.

...The first statement in this judgment is a recognition of the high position which Satan had occupied in the government of God before his fall, *“Thus saith the Lord God; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty...”* (Ezekiel 28:12). There is evidence to the effect that God created the beings of the spirit world in ranks and orders. Like an army which has privates, non-commissioned officers, field officers, staff officers and a commander-in-chief, the spirit beings seem to be in similar ranks; the angels, the archangels, principalities, powers, the seraphs, the cherubs. Of all these orders of creation, Lucifer was the climax in gifts, power and beauty. So great was his rank and power that even after his fall, Michael, the archangel, one of God’s greatest messengers, *“dared not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee”* (Jude 9).

...Plainly our passage in Ezekiel teaches that Lucifer, upon his creation, took his place as the highest, most beautiful, most powerful and wisest of the creatures of God.

...The exalted state of this mighty prince is further shown by the description of the accompaniments of music which surround him from the very first moment of his existence. We read, *“The workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared for thee in the day that thou wast created.”* There are two important lessons here. First, we see that Lucifer was created. This ends the argument about the eternal duality of good and evil. Satan and evil had definite beginnings. They shall also have a definite end. Lucifer was a creation of God. The creature is subject to the Creator. The other fact of importance is that which shows Lucifer’s magnificence from the moment of his creation. He awoke in the first moment of his existence in the full-orbed beauty and power of his exalted position; surrounded by all the magnificence which God gave him. He never had known a lesser moment. He saw himself as above all the hosts in power, wisdom and beauty. Only at the throne of God itself did he see more than he himself possessed, and it is possible that even that was in some sense not fully visible to the eyes of the creature. Certainly there was no outward evidence that would show him the futility of opposing a second will to that of God. There was no example of sin in the universe. This does not excuse his rebellion, but when we come to the account of his outbreak we can, perhaps, in spite of our sinful minds, understand a little better how the insurgence came about.

The chief of all created beings was set in the government of God as ruler over the creation of God. This is to be seen not only by the royal environment in which he was placed, but also by the express statement that God placed him in power, for this is the significance of the phrase in verse fourteen: *“I had placed thee and thou wast upon the holy mountain of God.”* ...A reference to the concordance will bring out the fact that the mountain of God is a symbol for the government of God.

Herein we see the confirmation of a word spoken by Satan to the Lord Jesus Christ in the temptation. In Luke’s account we read that the devil showed our Lord the kingdoms of this world and said unto Him, *“All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it”* (Luke 4:6). In this the father of lies was not lying. God had placed him in the position of ruler and given him the authority which he exercised and

which he later wished to initiate from himself. Before his fall he may be said to have occupied the role of prime minister for God, ruling possibly over the universe but certainly over this world. The scene of Satan's government, therefore, becomes the theater of the entire invisible war.

...The next verse in Ezekiel's account gives us the key to the origin of evil in this universe. *"Thou was perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee"* (verse 15). What this iniquity was is revealed to us in some detail in the prophecy of Isaiah, but there are already interesting indications in our passage that we may not pass by. The fact given here is that iniquity came by what we might term spontaneous generation in the heart of this being in whom such magnificence of power and beauty had been combined and to whom such authority and privilege had been given. Here is the beginning of sin. Iniquity was found in the heart of Lucifer.

...We have one more phrase in Ezekiel's account to consider closely. The Authorized Version reads: *"By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned"* (verse 16). We shall see this whole picture much more sharply if we realize that each word is like a lens that needs to be finely focused to give a clearly etched image. First of all, we must not be led aside by our common use of the word *merchandise*, indicating things bought and sold. In Ezekiel's usage it means anything that passes through the hands. For example, we would say, in common speech, that a judge who used his high position for personal profit had made merchandise of justice. We knew of a distinguished musician who used his great talent, acknowledged throughout the world, to make himself the immoral master of the lives of some of his pupils. His merchandise was personality and artistic ability.

So Satan, passing through his hands, the merchandise of authority from God above to the creation below, and returning the merchandise of worship from the world of spirit beings to God above, decided that, since he was wise and beautiful to such a degree, he could retain some of the worship for himself, and that he could originate some of the authority in himself. Thus he filled his heart with the violence of rebellion. He had been entrusted with God's government, priesthood and spokesmanship, but he wanted to act independently of God. ...The Holy Spirit compares the actions of some overseers to that of Satan and says that a young convert should never be put into a place of spiritual responsibility, *"lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil"* (1 Timothy 3:6). What a window to let light in on the passage on the fall of Satan!

Two Wills

...There has been much theological argument and philosophical speculation concerning the origin of sin. Even a child knows that all is not right with the world. The adult can see that there are wars, catastrophes, death. The child can feel pain, sorrow and tears. When either, the adult or the child, is told that there is an absolutely perfect God, who has never made a mistake, in whom there could be no shade of unrighteousness, there arises a question which will not be drowned.

Some time ago, in the midst of World War II, the writer preached a sermon in which the omnipotence of God was brought forth. The Lord Jesus Christ was quoted, saying, *"With God all things are possible"* (Matthew 19:26). At the close of the meeting a high school boy came up with a question. With some little embarrassment he asked: "Please tell me this. If God can do absolutely anything, why doesn't He smack Hitler down?" That same question in a thousand

forms has possessed the minds of men throughout the centuries. Why does God permit sin? Why did God create the devil? Why does God allow wars and calamities? We dare to say that we have the certain answer, and that it is not a very difficult one.

...The answer is that there is now more than one will in the universe.

In order to understand the answer, it is necessary to get God's point of view. In the capital of the United States there is an obelisk more than five hundred feet high in memory of the first president. If someone placed you with your face six inches from the monument and told you to look at it, you would get an impression of a wall of stone, but little more. As you were led from it to obtain a proper perspective, the soaring needle point would take on quite different proportions in your mind and eye. So it is with the problem of Satan's sin and rebellion. There are some scenes which demand distance and angle if we are to appreciate their scope and grandeur. ...If you are willing to be subjected to God Almighty, the Author of the universe, He will set your feet on the summit from which you can see the whole of His tremendous plan, and there will not be the slightest shadow to dim the vision.

...We now look upon the question from the point of view of heaven and from the outlook of eternity. Time shrinks into an insignificant moment between two eternities. We look back and realize that there was "a forever and forever and ever" before God created Lucifer. We look into the future and we see that there will be another "forever and forever and ever," after God, the Lord Jesus Christ, has "*put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet*" (1 Corinthians 15:24-25).

What appears to us from our worm's eye view of earth to be vast stretches of time, covering all the generations of man's history and the ages of the earth, shrinks into a single moment between two eternities during which God is permitting evil to prevail for a brief space and out of which He shall bring a multitude of sons capable of sharing His glory and of ruling the universe from a position higher than that of Lucifer before the fall. Though these sons shall have a dignity and a glory far above that which Lucifer knew, and though they shall exercise powers and hold prerogatives far higher than those give to the first governor of the universe, there shall never rise in any heart the thought of rebellion against the authority of God. ...The old nature of Adam with its rebellious heart was judged at the cross of Christ; and at our death or at the transforming appearance of Christ it ceases forever to have a place within us. ...Thus God shall have with Him an infinite company of sons, ruling the universe for Him and giving all of the glory to Him.

...There were at least two courses open to God when Lucifer sinned. He could, in His omnipotence, have destroyed Lucifer with a stroke. Had He done this, He could never have created another being as high and wonderful as Lucifer, seated as prime minister of the universe, possessing the gift of will and of choice, without seeing the same rebellion occur again and again. We may be thankful that God did not strike Lucifer down and so make of eternity a series of high creations, willful rebellions and powerful outbursts of judgment and suppression.

However, the evidence of Scripture and history shows that God chose rather to give the rebel a full opportunity of exploiting every avenue of his power and wisdom so that it might be demonstrated that nothing good could ever come to the creation apart from that which originates in God Himself.

...War has been declared. The great, governing cherub had become the malignant enemy. Our God was neither surprised nor astonished, for, of course, He knew before it happened that it would happen, and He had His perfect plan ready to be put into effect. Although the Lord had the power to destroy Satan with a breath, He did not do so. It was as though an edict had been proclaimed in heaven: “We shall give this rebellion a thorough trial. We shall permit it to run its full course. The universe shall see what a creature, though he be the highest creature ever to spring from God’s Word, can do apart from Me. We shall watch this experiment, and permit the universe of creatures to watch it, during this brief interlude between eternity past and eternity future called time. In it the spirit of independence shall be allowed to expand to the utmost. And the wreck and ruin which shall result will demonstrate to the universe, and forever, that there is no life, no joy, no peace apart from a complete dependence upon the Most High God, Possessor of heaven and earth.”

What one thought or statement from this article stands out in your mind? Why?

CHANGED HEARTS



What is one truth from this lesson that has impacted your life? Why?

If you have time, go on a “creation walk” this week. Try to find some place away from too many distractions where you can see and hear various aspects of God’s creation. Spend time observing and listening to the creation around you (e.g., birds, plants, flowers, water, clouds, etc.). Jot down or sketch out any observations or feelings that you have after completing your walk. Use St. Francis’ hymn of praise on the next page as a guide for your thoughts.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- What is one of the most beautiful places you have visited? What feelings did it evoke in you?
- What do you learn about God in Genesis 1? What do you learn about humanity?
- What does Genesis 2 teach you about the relationship of God to humanity? About the relationship of Adam and Eve? About God’s original design of marriage (Gen. 2:24-25)?
- How does God answer Job’s complaints against Him? What can we learn from this?
- Satan’s privilege and beauty became the source of his pride and downfall. How can our greatest strength or blessing become our greatest weakness or curse?
- Read Psalm 8 together. What amazes you? What can you praise God for today?

All creatures of our God and King
Lift up your voice and with us sing,
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Thou burning sun with golden beam,
Thou silver moon with softer gleam!

O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Thou rushing wind that art so strong
Ye clouds that sail in Heaven along,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Thou rising moon, in praise rejoice,
Ye lights of evening, find a voice!

O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Thou flowing water, pure and clear,
Make music for thy Lord to hear,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Thou fire so masterful and bright,
That givest man both warmth and light.

O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

And all ye men of tender heart,
Forgiving others, take your part,
O sing ye! Alleluia!
Ye who long pain and sorrow bear,
Praise God and on Him cast your care!

O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Let all things their Creator bless,
And worship Him in humbleness,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
And praise the Spirit, Three in One!

O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Written by Francis of Assisi (1182-1226)
around AD 1225 shortly before his death.

My Thoughts and Prayer of Praise:

WEEK 2 CURSE & CORRUPTION

The Story begins in Paradise—"Eden" which means "delight." A powerful and loving God creates a beautiful world. He then creates Adam and Eve to rule over, care for, and enjoy this world.

The only hint of potential trouble is in God's warning to Adam: *"Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die (or literally, dying you shall die)"* (Genesis 2:16-17).

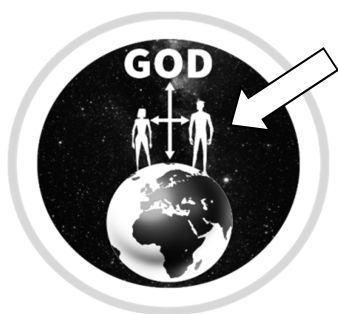
The tree of the knowledge of good and evil stood in the midst of the garden. The tree of life was also there (2:9). We do not know exactly where these two trees stood in the garden. We also do not know what kind of trees they were. But they must have been clearly designated. And God's command was unmistakable. "Eat freely of any tree in the garden except this one—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

Why did God do this? Did He set up Adam to fail? We all know that people want to do the very thing they are told not to do. Tell a child not to eat one particular cookie and he will be thinking about that cookie all day. But Adam is not your typical person. He is created in innocence with no inner leanings toward disobedience and sin.

God creates the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to give Adam a choice. Adam can choose whether to trust God and obey Him or he can choose to go his own way. It is an astounding thought. The powerful Creator of the universe creates creatures with the ability to make independent choices, the capacity to obey or disobey. Though this capacity is potentially dangerous, it is essential for relationship. In granting free will, God demonstrates that He values intimate relationship over involuntary servitude.

One creature in the universe has already taken advantage of God's gift of free will—Lucifer. Lucifer (Satan) does not appear in Genesis 1-2 but he is certainly lurking in the background waiting for his opportunity to strike and to spread his rebellion. This

opportunity has particular interest to him. Man bears God's image. A strike at man hits God. A strike at man also gives Lucifer control over man's appointed realm, earth.



So the stage is set for an attack. God has seemingly left Himself vulnerable. And Lucifer is all too ready to act. After running reconnaissance and strategizing the best way to infiltrate the garden and entice Adam to sin, Lucifer settles on a plan. It involves one of God's created animals, the serpent (just named by Adam in Genesis 2), and a pleasant conversation with Adam's newly created companion, Eve. Thus begins Genesis chapter three....

Westminster Confession of Faith

6.1 Our first parents, being seduced by the subtlety and temptations of Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin God was pleased, according to his wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to his own glory.

6.2 By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.

6.3 They being the root of mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by original generation.



Talking

Snakes?—

Satan used the serpent as his way of talking with Eve. Either animals had some type of communicating ability with man before the fall into sin or, being newly created, Eve simply did not have enough experience to find the snake talking to her surprising.

On your belly

(3:14)—Recent discoveries have indicated that many snakes have genes to develop legs but for some reason do not.

Between your seed and her seed (3:15)—

This verse is considered by many to be the first prophecy of the Messiah. The “seed” of the woman (an unusual phrase) will one day crush the head of Satan.

Tunics of skin (3:21)—

This implies animal skins. Thus the first death is an animal’s death to cover the shame of Adam and Eve.

CURSE

DAY 1

Genesis 3

Read Genesis 3. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart.

Satan, in the form of a serpent or using the serpent as his mouthpiece (cf. Revelation 12:9), tempts Eve and entices her, along with Adam, to disobey God. What tactics of Satan can you see in Genesis 3? See if you can list at least three tactics that Satan uses to lead a person to disobey God and do that which is wrong. Read 1 John 2:16 for additional insight.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

After the serpent’s conversation with Eve, she pauses for a moment before deciding to eat from the forbidden tree. She then gives the fruit to Adam and, seemingly without hesitation, he partakes as well. Though Eve partook first, the Bible places the ultimate culpability on Adam (Romans 5:12). Adam knew what he was doing. He deliberately rebelled against God and the consequences of sin immediately entered the world. Adam and Eve suddenly saw themselves, each other, and God differently. Looking back over verses 7-13, what observations can you make about the effects of sin? What emotions does it create? What actions does it cause?

Since sin separates us from God, it has an immediate impact on how we think, feel, and act. Apart from God, we lose our moral compass, our emotional anchor, and our source of life and peace. In addition to the immediate consequences of sin, God announces other consequences of sin on the serpent, Eve, Adam, and the earth (3:14-19). Summarize the consequence for each entity below:

The Serpent _____

Eve _____

Adam _____

The Earth _____

Adam and Eve are expelled out of the garden of Eden. God does this for protection as much as for punishment. If Adam and Eve were to partake of the tree of life, they would live forever in a body riddled with sin (3:22). In the midst of the curse, there is hope. God still loves Adam and Eve (3:21) and has a plan for redemption (3:15).

CORRUPTION**DAY 2****Genesis 4**

Genesis 4 details life on earth after Adam and Eve's fall into sin. The purpose of Genesis 4 is to show us the spread of sin and its devastating impact. It must be noted that the events of Genesis 4 take place over a considerable space of time. Because of the initial purity of the earth and of the human body (pure air, pure water, pristine climate, no viruses, etc.), the average life span during this time is 700-900 years (see 5:5, 8, 11). Thus ~100 years takes place between 4:1-2 and 4:3 (allowing for many people to be born) and the events of Lamech's life do not take place until perhaps 300-400 years later when the earth is filled with people.

Genesis 4 begins with Adam and Eve's two sons—Cain and Abel. They both bring an offering to God but in some way it is clear that Abel's offering is accepted by God while Cain's is not. Since God sees the heart behind the offering, it is evident that Cain's heart was not right when he presented his offering to God.

What is God's admonition to Cain (4:6-7)?

If you do well, _____

If you do not do well, _____

What are two things you can learn from the story of Cain and Abel?

1. _____

2. _____

After the passage of many years, the Bible focuses on the story of Lamech (Cain's great-great-great grandson). Why do you think the Bible stops to focus on Lamech? What aspects of sin does his life reveal? _____

Sin is spreading. Satan's plan is succeeding. But again hope is present (4:25-26).

CORRUPTION**DAY 3****Genesis 6**

Genesis 6 is the story of Noah and the Ark. Despite modern depictions of the ark with a nice old man and a bunch of cute animals on a little boat, Genesis 6 is anything but cute. It is a tragic story of man's sin and the corruption that consumes the earth. How does the Bible describe the condition of mankind during this time (6:1-2, 5, 11-13)?

Who is Cain's wife? (4:17)—

This is a classic question that is used to try to discredit the Bible. Cain obviously married one of his sisters (possibly even a niece). The prohibition against incest does not come until the Mosaic law and is not necessary at this time since genetics have not yet been corrupted to make marriage within a family harmful.

Death did not first strike Adam, the first sinful man; nor Cain, the first murderer; but Abel, the innocent and the righteous.
—Bishop Hall

Seth—The name means "appointed one" and his lineage yields many godly men and woman and eventually leads to Jesus, the Messiah (cf. Luke 3:38).

In Matthew 24:37-39, Jesus warns that the last days of the earth will be filled with the same type of rampant sin as Noah's day.

Sons of God saw daughters of men (6:2)—

Based on 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, some interpret this as demons (i.e., fallen angels) cohabiting with women and producing giant, super-like men. Since angels have no material body, this does not seem possible unless they possessed certain men.

Another possibility is that the “sons of God” refers to men of the line of Seth (with godly heritage) who also gave into sin because they simply could not control their sexual desires in an age rampant with sexual immorality.

Shinar—This plain, later named Babel, becomes the ancient city of Babylon in the Old Testament and it still exists today in modern-day Iraq. Ironically it is also somewhere near the original garden of Eden which was at the base of the Tigris and Euphrates (Gen. 2:10-14).

What is God’s response to this condition (6:6-7)? What does this tell you about God?

In the midst of the rampant depravity on the earth, again there is hope. *But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD* (6:8). Though man’s sin calls for judgment, God chooses to extend grace to Noah and, through Noah, grace to anyone willing to listen. It will take Noah 120 years to build the ark (see 6:3) and during this time Noah warns of the coming judgment of God (2 Peter 2:5) but people do not heed his voice. Genesis 8-10 recounts the story of the worldwide flood that God unleashed. This flood not only killed every living being on the earth, except for those on the ark, but it also radically changed the topography and environment of the earth. Lifespans decrease dramatically after the flood. The world is no longer the same. But God continues to give hope through the grace of the ark and the promise of a rainbow.

What are two things that you can learn from the life of Noah in Genesis 6?

1. _____
2. _____

CORRUPTION

DAY 4

Genesis 10-11

Genesis 11:1-9 takes place two generations after the flood (~200 years) since Genesis 10:6-10 indicates that the Tower of Babel building project was led by Nimrod, Ham’s grandson. Nimrod—whose name most likely means “let us rebel”—is described as a “mighty one on the earth” (10:8) and a “mighty hunter before the LORD” (10:9). Another possible translation of 10:9 is “a mighty despot in the face of the LORD.” Nimrod has plans to set up a massive kingdom on earth (see 10:10) ruled by none other than himself. And the fact that at this time all mankind speaks one common language and is assembled in one general region gives him a very good chance of achieving his goal. He truly desired to “rule the world.”

Why do the people at Shinar want to build this great city (11:4)? What are some of the things motivating them? _____

God’s original plan was for a righteous man (Adam)—submitted to Him and joined with his wife (Eve)—to rule over and care for the world. A rebellious Nimrod desired to set himself up—inspired by Satan and joined by others—as ruler over the world. God, in His mercy, prevented this from happening by confusing man’s language and scattering them across the face of the earth. Humanity unified in prideful hatred and rebellion against God would have devastating consequences on the earth.

CORRUPTION

Read Romans 1:18-32, 2:1-15. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart.

DAY 5**Romans 1-2**

Genesis 3-11 is a graphic demonstration of the curse and corruption of sin. Because of sin, there is something desperately wrong with the world in which we live. There is also something desperately wrong with *our* hearts. There is no way to sugarcoat this reality. The Bible doesn't try. That is why many in the world try to silence, contradict, downplay, or "spiritualize" its message. It is a painful one to listen to. But unless a person is willing to hear the diagnosis, he/she will never find the cure.

Based on Romans 1:18-23, what is one thing that you learn about the following:

God's wrath _____

Man's heart _____

Man's mind _____

Man's actions _____

Since man wanted nothing to do with God, God allowed them ("gave them up") to pursue their own sinful desires. Look at the list of sins in Romans 1:28-32. Have you ever been guilty of committing one of these sins (in thought or deed)? ☐ Yes ☐ No If so, then welcome to the human race! You are a part of the rebellion (guilty) and under the power of sin (bondage). You need God's grace to cancel your guilt and His power to deliver you from bondage (cf. 1:16-17).

How would you summarize the message of Romans 2:1-4 (see also 3:9-20)?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Read the following excerpt from Dr. Renald Shower's book, *What on Earth Is God Doing?* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1973), pages 55-61.

IN ORDER TO ESTABLISH HIS KINGDOM, Satan had to obtain subjects over which to rule. As a creature he lacked ability to create beings. For him the only possible way to obtain subjects was through the persuasion of other creatures of God to join his rebellion. If his kingdom were to rule over both heavenly and earthly spheres, he had to persuade both angels and humans to join him.

A sizeable number of angels did join Satan's rebellion and place themselves under his rule. There are several biblical references to Satan "and his angels" (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 12:7). As a result of this angelic decision, Satan became the prince of angels (Matthew 12:24-26), the ruler of the authority of the air (Ephesians 2:2). Satan organized his angels in several ranks, so that they could carry on the work of his kingdom efficiently (Ephesians 6:11).

The Rebellion of Man

...In a very subtle way Satan entered man's perfect earthly environment and tempted man to disobey a specific command of God. The bait that Satan used was the notion that if man would disobey, he would be as God (Genesis 3:1-5). In other words, he was telling man that he could be his own sovereign, that he could rule his own life, if only he would rebel. In spite of God's warning, man decided to disobey the directive of his divine King. Thus, the governor of the earthly province of the kingdom of God joined the rebellion against God.

The Consequences of Man's Rebellion

Several tragic consequences resulted from man's rebellion. First, man died spiritually at the moment of his disobedience (Genesis 2:16-17). This does not mean that the immaterial part of man passed out of existence. Instead, it means that man suffered a drastic change in his nature. God had created man with a governing disposition that was oriented toward God and that controlled the rest of man's nature. As a result, man fellowshiped with and served God in a proper way. When man rebelled, his governing disposition became actively confirmed in an attitude of enmity that his entire nature suffered a perversion called total depravity. As a result of this depravity, man's relationship to God, the Source of life, was broken.

Second, eventually man died physically. When man rebelled, a process of decay began operating in his body. It made him subject to disease, deformity, and death (Genesis 3:19; 5:5; Romans 5:12; 6:23; Hebrews 9:27). In addition to death by decay, man became subject to death by hazards, accidents, and violence. ...Because of his rebellion, man was denied access to a source that would cause him to live forever (Genesis 3:22-24).

Thirdly, man's ability to exercise dominion over the earth was changed. He lost ability to govern some things (Hebrews 2:5-8). The ability that he did retain became perverted. As a result, he became doomed to abuse the earth. Because of his attitude of enmity against God, man began to exercise his dominion in a manner contrary to what God had intended.

Fourthly, because man was the governor of the earthly province of the kingdom of God, his rebellion brought tragedy to his domain. A province of a kingdom often suffers as a result of its governor's choice to rebel against the king. In man's domain the productive level of the soil was reduced greatly (Genesis 3:17), and for the first time the soil brought forth thorns and thistles (Genesis 3:18). Animal nature changed drastically from a tame, non-carnivorous state (Genesis 1:30) to a wild, carnivorous state. Romans 8:19-22 indicates that all of God's earthly creation became subject to vanity and corruption because of man's rebellion. As a result, it continues to groan and travail in pain to the present day. Through his own sin man lost his perfect environment.

Fifthly, man was transferred from membership in the kingdom of God to membership in the kingdom of Satan. This consequence had a tragic effect upon the whole human race. Because the original parents of the race chose to rebel against God, and because humans reproduce after their kind, every human (except Christ) born in the world is born with a governing disposition at enmity against God. Thus, every human is born spiritually dead and a member of Satan's kingdom (Ephesians 2:1). Unless he accepts God's way of salvation (to be discussed later), each human continues through life...

- to be energized by Satan and to live his life according to Satan's ways (Ephesians 2:2)

- to be blinded to the truth by Satan (2 Corinthians 4:4)
- to be deceived by Satan into believing that error is truth (2 Corinthians 11:14-15)
- to be in spiritual darkness and to be held in Satan's power (Acts 26:17-18)
- to be a child of Satan (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8,10; Matthew 13:37-39)
- to head for the same place of judgment as Satan (Matt. 13:40-42; 25:41; Rev. 20:10,15)

2 Corinthians 6:14-15 indicates that every unsaved person belongs to Satan and his kingdom of darkness. Satan uses unsaved people to do some of the work of his kingdom (Job 1:9-15,17; Luke 22:3-6; John 8:37,40,44,59; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; 1 John 3:12).

Sixthly, because the governor of the province had become a member of Satan's kingdom, the earth became a province of Satan's kingdom. Through man's rebellion Satan usurped from God the position of king over the earth. The earth's government changed from a theocracy to a satanocracy. For this reason Christ called Satan "the prince of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11); Satan had authority to offer all the kingdoms of the world to Christ (Luke 4:5-6); some of Satan's angels are called "the world-rulers of this darkness" (Ephesians 6:12); "the whole world lies in the evil one" (1 John 5:19); and Satan dominates the present age of the world so completely that the Apostle Paul called him "the god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

These tragic consequences reveal that man had been duped by Satan into believing a lie (John 8:44). Instead of bringing man freedom, rebellion against God's authority had brought man slavery to a sinful disposition (Romans 6:6, 16-23), to death (Romans 5:12; Hebrews 9:27), and to the continual fear of death throughout life (Hebrews 2:15). Instead of becoming his own sovereign, man had been brought under the dominion of a new king. His original King was a loving, benevolent Ruler who offered man life, peace, happiness, and fulfillment in return for willing obedience. But his new king was a hard, selfish taskmaster who offered man death, sickness, conflict, grief, and frustration in return for service to him. Instead of improving himself by rebellion against God, man had prevented himself from obtaining the fullness of his original potential. He had debased himself and had lost much of his intended dignity (Romans 1:18-32).

Man's rebellion had confirmed him so strongly in his tragic predicament that he was rendered totally incapable of rescuing himself from it. Quite frequently his invention of ingenious devices or programs to improve his lot would boomerang and bring new problems not previously anticipated. Nothing short of supernatural, divine intervention would be able to save man from the predicament he had brought upon himself by his own choice (Isaiah 43:11).

With the fall of man the personnel of Satan's kingdom was complete. He had succeeded in transferring many of God's angels and all of God's humans into his domain. In the process he had made the earth a province of his kingdom. In this he appeared to be enjoying initial success in his challenge of the sovereign rule of God.

The Purpose of History

Now there were two opposing kingdoms in existence. The kingdom of Satan had attacked the kingdom of God with the goal of destroying it. If God were to remain sovereign, He must crush Satan and his kingdom. Thus, the stage was set for a fantastic conflict—the conflict of the ages. This conflict would be waged both in the heavens and on the earth (Revelation 12:7,13,17; Ephesians 6:10-12). Since the Bible is God's written revelation to *man*, it deals primarily with this earthly phase of the conflict.

This conflict of the ages provides the key for unlocking the mystery of the ultimate purpose of history. Both God and Satan have a purpose for history, but, since God is God, and Satan is only a creature, God's purpose is the ultimate one. Satan's purpose for history is to make himself the only sovereign king of the universe by establishing his kingdom as the only permanent one of the heavens, the earth, and all that is in them. When first set up, his kingdom was not permanently established as an everlasting one. It can become such only if Satan can crush God and His kingdom. This he has been attempting since his own rebellion began, and the attempt will continue almost to the end of this present world's history.

God's purpose for history is to demonstrate His sovereignty by totally and permanently crushing Satan and his kingdom, ejecting the rebellious ones from His original domain, and restoring His theocratic rule in those provinces that have been usurped by Satan. Inasmuch as God's purpose for history is the ultimate one, it is correct to conclude that *the ultimate purpose of history is the demonstration of God's sovereignty*.

In order to demonstrate His sovereignty during history, God must restore the present earth to the basic original condition it enjoyed before man's rebellion. Old Testament prophets received revelation to the effect that He would do just that (Acts 3:21). It is important to note that the restoration must take place on this present earth, not the new earth to be created by God for eternity future (Revelation 21:1). Should God permit the present earth to pass away at the end of history without restoration to its original conditions, it would appear that He is incapable of overcoming the devastating work of Satan and his kingdom. Thus, there would be no demonstration of divine sovereignty during history.

In order to restore the present earth to its original conditions, God must reverse during history all the tragic consequences of man's rebellion. First, He must make humans spiritually alive again. This would involve His giving to people a new governing disposition that is actively confirmed in an attitude of love and obedience toward God and that controls the whole of a man's nature in accordance with God's will.

Secondly, God must abolish physical death. This would involve ending and reversing decay in man's body; abolishing disease, deformity, hazards, accidents, and violence; and resurrecting the bodies of those already dead.

Thirdly, God must cause man to govern the present earth in the manner that He intended originally. This would involve a restoration of the governing ability man lost, a correction of the ability he retained in perverted form, and an end of man's abuse of the earth.

Fourthly, God must restore the perfect environment that man enjoyed before the fall. This would involve the changing of the soil to its original, fertile condition, the restoration of animal nature to its state of being tame and noncarnivorous, and the removal of the vanity and corruption to which all earthly creation has been subject since man rebelled.

Fifthly, God must transfer human beings from membership in Satan's kingdom to membership in the kingdom of God by causing these humans to experience a new, spiritual birth.

Sixthly, God must dethrone Satan as king of the world and restore the earth as a province of His own kingdom. In other words, God must re-establish His theocratic kingdom with all its power and glory on this present earth and rid the world of Satan, his angels, and his people.

The reversal of the consequences of man's sin could be called God's program of redemption.

The First Promise of the Coming Redeemer

In light of the necessity of God's crushing Satan and his kingdom in order to demonstrate divine sovereignty, it is interesting to note that no sooner had Satan usurped the earth for his kingdom than God delivered a prophecy concerning Satan's doom (Genesis 3:14-15). In this prophecy God addressed Satan in the subtle form that he had taken to tempt man. God forewarned Satan that eventually a man born of woman would deliver a devastating blow to him. Later Scripture revealed that this prophecy was God's initial way of promising that a Redeemer would be born in the world and that this Redeemer would do the work necessary to crush Satan's kingdom and work. In other words, the Redeemer was to be God's Counterrevolutionary who would make possible the defeat of the great revolutionary. The Redeemer, then, was to be the key to the fulfillment of God's purpose for history.

In order for God to reverse the consequences of man's sin, it was necessary to get rid of the cause of the consequences. This meant getting rid of human sin. Later Scripture revealed that only the payment of an adequate penalty to divine justice could remove man's sin. It also revealed that death was the only adequate penalty (Romans 5:12; 6:23). Because of this, in the Genesis 3:15 prophecy God also foretold that, while the Redeemer would crush Satan, Satan would bruise Him. This was God's way of saying that the promised Redeemer would suffer death in order to defeat Satan. Later Scripture revealed that through His death the Redeemer would pay the penalty for man's sin, thereby causing the removal of sin (Isaiah 53:4-6, 10-12; John 1:29) and making it possible for God to reverse the consequences of man's rebellion.

The Strategy of the Conflict

Genesis 3:15 made it evident that God intended the Redeemer to be the heart of His strategy in the war against Satan. The Redeemer, however, would not be the only person to serve the kingdom of God in the conflict. The holy, elect angels would fight against the forces of Satan (Daniel 10:20; Revelation 12:7). Through the redemptive work of the Redeemer, God would save people out of Satan's kingdom and make them members of His own kingdom (Galatians 1:4; Colossians 1:13). These redeemed humans would remain in the world for the rest of their lives to act as representatives of the kingdom of God in Satan's earthly province. Although they would live in Satan's world system, they would not belong to it (John 17:14-18). They would be strangers and pilgrims in the world with their citizenship in Heaven (Hebrews 11:13; 1 Peter 1:17; Ephesians 2:19; Philippians 3:20).

Occasionally God also would use nations and even unsaved people to serve His purpose (Isaiah 10:5-6; Jeremiah 25:9; Isaiah 44:28-45:5). Thus, although God's kingdom would not exist in a worldwide theocratic form during certain periods of history, it would be represented and working in the world during every period of history. This continuing function of the kingdom of God in the earthly province of the kingdom of Satan helps to explain the continuing presence of good alongside of evil in the world (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43).

Since the coming and work of the Redeemer would be the key to God's strategy, the key to Satan's strategy would be the preventing of the Redeemer's coming and work. In addition Satan would war against the holy angels and redeemed humans who would represent God's kingdom in the world (Daniel 10:13:20-21; Ephesians 6:11,16). He would use his fallen angels, the human members of his kingdom, nations, and occasionally even humans from God's kingdom to do his work (Dan. 10:13-21; Eph. 6:12; Job 1:9-15,17; Lk. 22:3; 2 Th. 2:9; Matt.16:21-23; Acts 5:1-3).

A study of the Scriptures indicates that Satan intended to use interchangeably two different lines of attack: (1) try to destroy the members of God's kingdom, and (2) try to pervert the witness of God's kingdom with apostasy in belief or practice. Both tactics will be observed repeatedly as the drama of the conflict unfolds.

CHANGED HEARTS



What is one truth from this lesson that has impacted your life? Why?

Because we are all created in God's image and designed for the Garden of Eden, we have an inherent understanding of righteousness (what is right) and an inherent desire to live forever in a place free from pain, sorrow, and death. However, because of the sin of Adam and Eve, we have all inherited a world corrupted by sin, a body subject to disease and death, and a heart bent toward what is wrong. Anyone with children can testify that this last point is true. We do not have to teach a child to do wrong or to want their own way; instead we have to encourage them to do right and to show love toward others.

To make it personal, here is your situation. You have a sinful heart prone toward sin. You live in a sinful world that provides opportunities for you to sin. And you have an enemy, Satan, who works to tempt you toward sin. Not too promising, huh? But this is reality. This is the problem with the world. This is *your* ultimate problem. Until you accept this diagnosis, you will never want or be able to find God's cure for sin. And He does have a cure, as you will find in His story.

Honestly evaluate your thoughts, attitudes, words, relationships, and actions before a holy, perfect God. Allow Him to search your heart and expose the areas of your life that bring you guilt, anger, shame, or sorrow. Instead of fighting, denying, or blame-shifting, simply confessing and acknowledging your sin is the pathway to forgiveness and freedom (cf. 1 John 1:8-10).

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- What is one of the first times in your life that you can remember "breaking the rules" or doing something you were told not to do? Why did you do it? What were the consequences?
- Someone once said: *Opportunity knocks only once but temptation leans on the doorbell.* What tactics of Satan do you see in Genesis 3? What other tactics of temptation have you observed in the world? In your own life?
- What did you learn about God from this study? About humanity? About yourself?
- What does the life of Abel teach you? What about the life of Noah? See Hebrews 11:4-7.
- Why do you think it is so hard for us to admit that we are wrong? Why would we often rather blame others or fight for our own way than confess or seek peace?
- What is an area of your life that God is confronting or exposing? How can we pray for you?

WEEK 3 COVENANT & CONDUCT

Satan's kingdom is spreading. Satan's rebellion has engulfed a third of the angelic beings (cf. Revelation 12:4) and now all of mankind finds itself under his domain. Adam and Eve's fall into sin expanded Satan's kingdom into the realm of planet earth. When Adam, the governor of earth, rebelled against God and aligned himself with Satan, earth effectively became one of Satan's provinces and Adam's children became his subjects. Thus, the universe now has a separate kingdom in opposition to God's.



Though Satan's realm now exists in opposition to God, it is important to note that his realm does not exist outside of God's sovereignty and control. Satan is like a child who has taken his things and locked himself in a room. Though he is in the room in defiance of his parents and though he has some control over the room (and all that is within it), he is still within his parents' house. The parents still control the heat, the electricity, the water, etc. The parents can also effectively end the rebellion through an immediate display of force; however, they

may allow the child to have his "space" for awhile and instead try to end the rebellion in another way, through the avenue of wisdom, patience, and love.

The same is true of God. God still controls the house but He has allowed Satan to have his room. Instead of crushing the rebellion and wiping out Satan, his angels, and mankind, God chose to go a different route—a route that would ultimately display His patience, mercy, wisdom, and love.

What is God's plan? God reveals His strategy in Genesis 3:15: *And I will put enmity between you [Satan] and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.* God reveals His plan for a coming Redeemer. Someone born of a woman ("her Seed") would come into the world and, though he would be bruised by Satan, He would ultimately crush Satan's head, free Satan's captives, and end his rebellion. God would not simply eliminate Satan's kingdom; He would invade it and redeem it.

Now the stage is set for a Redeemer. Who would He be? When would He come? To whom would He be born? God gives His first hint in the calling of a man named Abram. God promises that Abram's descendants would outnumber the stars in the heavens and the sand on the shore and that one of Abram's descendants ("seed") would bless all the nations of the earth (Genesis 22:16-18). Thus God showed His hand. Abram would be the one through whom the Redeemer would come and Abram's descendants would be a great nation through whom God would work. Abram's children would be an outpost of light in Satan's kingdom of darkness.



Westminster Confession of Faith

19.1. God gave to Adam a law...by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience....

19.2. This law, after his Fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon mount Sinai in ten commandments...the first four commandments containing our duty toward God, and the other six our duty to man

19.3. Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel... ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ... All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated under the New Testament.

19.4. To them also, as a body politic, he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people...

SCRIPTURE EXPLORATION



Why Abram? –

We are not told why God chose Abram. All indications are that God simply chose him out of His own sovereign will (cf. Joshua 24:2-3). Abram, like Paul in the NT, becomes an example of God's mercy and grace (cf. 1 Tim. 1:16). God chose Abram but Abram still had to respond to God's call to enter into God's promise.

Babel vs. Abram—It is interesting that the very things that the people of Babel wanted—name, greatness, security—God gave to Abram in a promise.

What other things do we often try so hard to get that God offers to us freely if we simply trust in Him?

He believed God—Hebrew, *aman*, “to confirm, affirm.” Faith is saying “amen” to God's Word, to affirm it as true and reliable, embrace it, and rest upon it.

COVENANT

DAY 1

Genesis 12, 15

Read Genesis 11:27-12:7 and 15:1-21.

Ten generations after the Flood, Abram is born to a man named Terah, a descendant of Noah's son, Shem. We do not know

much about Terah and his family except that they lived in Ur of the Chaldees (11:28)—a wealthy city near the region of Babylon. While in Ur, God appeared to Abram, Terah's son, and told him to leave the area, leave his kindred, and journey to the land of Canaan (cf. Acts 7:2). Though we do not know how God appeared to Abram or how much knowledge Abram had of God, we do know that Abram obeyed.



What are three promises God makes to Abram (12:1-3)?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What other promise does God give Abram (12:7)? _____

How old was Abram when he started his journey (12:4)? _____

How many children did Abram and his wife, Sarai, have (12:5)? _____

What did Abram do when he arrived in Canaan (12:7)? _____

What does this tell you about Abram? _____

Genesis 15 takes place ten years after Abram first received God's promise and arrived in the land of Canaan. What problem does Abram see with God's promise?

What is God's response to Abram (15:4-5)? _____

What is Abram's response to God's reiteration of the promise (15:6)? _____

Genesis 15:6 is one of the most important verses in the Bible. Abram believes in the LORD and God accounts it to him for righteousness. In other words, Abram is made right before God through the exercise of faith. Faith is the pathway of redemption; it is the road back into God's kingdom (Romans 4:1-5; Galatians 3:6).

Abram asks God for confirmation (15:8) and God responds by “cutting” a covenant with Abram. During that time period, if two people wanted to enter into a binding agreement they would cut several animals in half and then walk together through the midst of them. The symbolism was profound—“If I break this agreement may I be cut in half as these animals have been cut in half.”

What is significant in Genesis 15 is that God alone passes through these animals (15:17) indicating that God alone bound Himself to fulfill His promises to Abram. It was an unconditional promise on God’s part. This is known as the **Abrahamic Covenant**. God promises a land (Canaan), a seed (many descendants and One who would bless the world), and a blessing (you will be blessed and will be a blessing) to Abram. The sign of the covenant is circumcision (17:10).

A year after Genesis 15, Sarai grows impatient and encourages Abram to have a child with her maidservant, Hagar. Abram gives in to her request and Ishmael is born (16:15). But Ishmael is not the son of God’s promise. This son would come fourteen years later in a miraculous birth when Abram (changed to Abraham) is 100 years old and Sarai (changed to Sarah) is 90. His name would be Isaac, meaning “laughter.”

COVENANT

DAY 2

Exodus 1-2

Exodus is the second book of the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses. “Exodus” is from the Greek meaning “the way out.” Exodus records God’s deliverance of His people from the bondage of Egypt and His giving of the law to them as His holy nation.

God made an unconditional covenant with Abraham. This covenant was confirmed with Abraham’s son, **Isaac** (Genesis 26:1-6), and with Isaac’s son, **Jacob** (28:10-17), and with Jacob’s (later named Israel) **twelve sons** (35:9-12).

In Genesis 15:13-14, God indicated that Abraham’s descendants would dwell *in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years*. This was fulfilled in the lives of Jacob’s sons. One of them, Joseph, was sold by his jealous brothers into slavery in Egypt. Through God’s providence, Joseph would rise in power in Egypt. His father’s household would come to Egypt under his care to escape a famine that encompassed the region. Years later, the Israelites would grow in number and the Egyptians would begin to take away their rights and enslave them. It is four hundred years later when the events of Exodus 1-2 take place.

What is Pharaoh’s (the king of Egypt) subtle plan for reducing the number and power of the children of Israel (1:15-16)? _____

How is Pharaoh’s plan thwarted? _____

Pharaoh’s subtle plan is thwarted so he makes a more direct command to all his people: *Every son who is born you shall cast into the [Nile] river...* (1:22).

Why the name changes?— In the Hebrew mindset, one’s name reveals one’s character. Thus a new name indicates a new character. Abram (exalted father) is changed to Abraham (father of a multitude). Sarai (my princess, i.e., in Abraham’s eyes) was changed to Sarah (princess, a position of royalty). Later Jacob (supplanter) is changed to Israel (God wrestler).

Genesis 21-50 record the lives of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. There are many important events in the lives of these patriarchs that you will want to read on your own. For this study, however, we are skipping ahead ~500 years.

Exodus date— The events of Exodus 1-2 take place around 1525 BC, possibly under the Egyptian Pharaoh, Amenhotep I or Thutmose I.

Read **Acts 7:20-29** to get a better idea of who Moses was and what he hoped to accomplish in killing the Egyptian.

Midian—
Located in the Sinai Peninsula. The Midianites were nomadic descendants of Abraham's second wife, Keturah, after Sarah died (Gen. 25:1-4).

The Pharaoh during the final plague was probably Amenhotep II, placing the Exodus around 1400 BC.

Ten Plagues—
The ten plagues were designed to show God's power over *all the gods of Egypt* (Exodus 12:12). The Egyptians worshipped the Nile River, frogs, locusts, cattle, and the sun god, Ra. The firstborn of Pharaoh would also be considered a god, just as Pharaoh was. The ten plagues impacted all of these Egyptian gods.

This time Pharaoh's plan is thwarted when a Levite couple hides their baby boy and then floats him in a basket in the Nile River. Pharaoh's daughter finds him and eventually raises him as her own, calling him "Moses" (drawn from the water).

Forty years later, Moses is grown up and somehow knows his heritage. He is an Israelite, a Hebrew. What does Moses do (2:11-12)? Why do you think he did it?

Moses has to flee Egypt for fear of his life. He arrives in the land of Midian and settles there for the next forty years of his life. Based on what you have read about Moses so far, how would you describe him? What characteristics stand out in him?

In the midst of their bondage, the people of Israel cry out to God. God hears their cry and remembers _____ (2:24).

Why do you think this is significant? _____

COVENANT

DAY 3

Exodus 11-12

God raises up Moses, along with his brother Aaron, to be the deliverer of His people, Israel. Through Moses, God sends **ten plagues** on the nation of Egypt, one at a time, in an attempt to persuade Pharaoh to let the Israelites go and leave their bondage. Pharaoh, despite several empty promises, does not budge. What is the final plague that God announces on the nation of Egypt (11:4-5)?

How are God's people to be protected from this plague (12:6-7, 12-13)?



Exodus 12 details the observance of **Passover**. It is so important that God bases the Hebrew calendar on it (12:2). It is the central event of the Jewish faith. What are the characteristics of the lamb to be used in the Passover (12:5-6, 46)?

Where is the blood of the lamb applied? _____

The Passover brings deliverance to God's people. The blood of the lamb protects them from God's judgment. This marks the beginning of Israel as a *redeemed nation*.

CONDUCT

DAY 4

Exodus 19-20

After leaving Egypt and passing miraculously through the Red Sea (where again God showed His deliverance of His people and His judgment on the enemies of His people), God brought the nation of Israel to Mount Sinai. Here God gave them His law.

The **Abrahamic Covenant** was God's unconditional promise to Abraham. Abraham's descendants would multiply and occupy the land of Canaan and, through Abraham, the world's Redeemer would come. In Exodus 19-20, God establishes the Mosaic covenant with His people. The **Mosaic Covenant** is summarized in Exodus 19:5-6.

What are the two conditions of the covenant (19:5)?

1. _____
2. _____

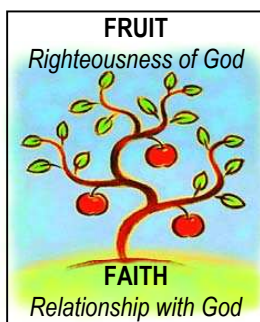
What are the two promises of the covenant if the conditions are met (19:5-6)?

1. _____
2. _____

Summarize the ten primary moral commandments in the covenant (20:1-17).

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

The Mosaic covenant became the constitution of the nation of Israel. It contained moral law (e.g., the ten commandments), ceremonial law (the sacrificial system designed to deal with Israel's sin), and civil law (laws for governing the nation).



The Abrahamic Covenant established the nature of God's people—those who respond in faith to God's promise and receive God's righteousness. The Mosaic Covenant established the conduct of God's people—those who, in relationship to God, live a life in line with God's righteousness. The two go together. The problem comes when people try to live the life (Mosaic) without the relationship that comes through faith (Abrahamic) or, conversely, try to claim the faith without demonstrating the life.

The Law—The law reveals God's conduct for His people. It is given in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers and reviewed again in Deuteronomy ("second law") for another generation.

Traditionally there are three aspects of the law. The moral law reveals God's righteous character. The ceremonial law details the sacrificial system. And the civil law deals with laws related to the nation.

The moral law, as a reflection of God's righteousness, still instructs us today on how to live. This law is fulfilled as we follow Christ.

The New Testament reveals that "loving one's neighbor as yourself" is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:9-10; Galatians 5:14).

Why do you think love fulfills the law?

CONDUCT**DAY 5****Numbers 13-14**

After spending a year at Mount Sinai, Israel sets out for the land of Canaan. Along the way, the people grumble and complain. Though God miraculously provides for them time and again, the people struggle to trust in God and in God's leader, Moses. The ultimate defiance occurs in Numbers 13-14. The people are at the edge of the Promised Land and spies are sent into the land.

What is the basic report of ten of the spies? _____

What is the basic report of the other two spies, Caleb and Joshua? _____

Whose report do the people believe? ☐ The ten spies or ☐ Caleb and Joshua

What do the people want to do? _____

What is the consequence that the people experience because of their disbelief? _____

What are two lessons that you can learn from Numbers 13-14?

1. _____
2. _____

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Read the following excerpts from Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost's book, *Thy Kingdom Come* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990), pages 82-100.

FROM...THE GARDEN OF EDEN, faith was the basis for entrance into the kingdom of the God of heaven on earth. Therefore the kingdom God would establish in and through Israel would have to be based on faith—faith that would be evidenced by obedience and would bring redemption.

Thus the tenth plague in Egypt was designed to provide Israel an opportunity to demonstrate faith that produced obedience that would in turn produce redemption. God demonstrated the extent of His sovereign authority over all of His creation by passing judgment on all the firstborn in Egypt—the firstborn of the Egyptians, the firstborn of all the Israelites, and the firstborn of the cattle.

But God also demonstrated He was a gracious and merciful God by providing a way of escape from the impending judgment—through a blood sacrifice. The point was that God's

judgment would either be carried out on the firstborn or executed on an innocent substitute for the firstborn.

The blood of the animal sacrifice was to be applied to the top and both sides of the entrance to the house (Ex. 12:7). Then those for whom the sacrifice was offered were to enter—literally—through blood into the security of the house. This act of obedience would demonstrate personal faith in the provision God had made, and the peace those within experienced was the result of their faith in the God who promised that *the blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt* (v. 13).

A Redeemed Nation

...The ten miracles accomplished exactly what God had designed them to accomplish. Pharaoh's initial response to God's command to liberate His covenant people was, *Who is the Lord, that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go*" (Ex. 5:2). The miracles, however, revealed who God is and the authority that rightfully belongs to Him. So at the conclusion of the tenth miracle, *Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me"* (12:31-32). Pharaoh had come to a point where he acknowledged the authority of God and recognized Moses as God's administrator for he sought a blessing from God through Moses.

That very night, the Bible tells us, the Children of Israel left the bondage of Egypt behind them. They became a redeemed people and began a journey by faith that was to take them into the land of promise where they would receive the covenanted blessings. By redemption the people became God's people. That's why Isaiah could convey God's message, *But now, this is what the Lord says—He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine"* (Isa. 43:1).

It is crucial to understand at this point that the nation as a nation was redeemed. They were taken out of the kingdom of darkness and were designated as the kingdom over which God ruled through His delegated ruler, Moses. We must also understand the distinction between individual salvation—which was based on faith through blood—and the redemption of the nation as a nation. By way of the first Passover and the Exodus, the redeemed nation became the people through whom God's theocracy would be established here on this earth.

The Conditional Nature of the Law

After redeeming His people, God gave them at Sinai a covenant for their guidance and protection. A redeemed people have an obvious obligation to their Redeemer, but because of their immaturity and the influence of Egyptian culture on them, the redeemed generation had no concept of how to fulfill their obligation. Thus God graciously gave them the Mosaic Covenant, or the Law. That brings up the question, what relationship can exist between an unconditional covenant and a conditional covenant?

Quite simply, the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant had conditional blessings attached to it. Those blessings would be obtained by faith that evidenced its genuineness through obedience. But obedience to what? Obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. In other words, the Mosaic Covenant was added *alongside* the Abrahamic Covenant (Gal. 3:19) in order to define and

delineate the obedience that was required in order to obtain the blessings promised by the Abrahamic Covenant.

The Abrahamic Covenant—not the Mosaic Covenant—was the source of blessings, and the Abrahamic Covenant was still unconditional. It was entirely dependent on God for its eventual fulfillment. But faith in the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant would produce obedience to the guidelines offered by the Mosaic Covenant. Conversely, a lack of faith in the covenant promises would produce a lack of obedience. And though a lack of faith resulting in disobedience would not nullify the Abrahamic Covenant, the covenanted blessings would not be extended to those who lacked faith in the unconditional covenant.

...Abraham was given promises by God (Gen. 12) which were repeated (Gen. 13) and ratified by a blood covenant (Gen. 15). All that Abraham obtained by faith, since no Law had been given in Abraham's time. Therefore, all that Abraham realized he realized by faith in the promise of God. ...It is extremely important to remember that the Law of Moses was given to *a redeemed people*, not to *redeem a people*. The writer to the Hebrews said of Moses, *By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land* (Heb. 11:28-29). Israel, on the night of the Passover in Egypt, was redeemed by blood, and by faith they began a walk through the wilderness toward the land of promise.

The Purposes of the Law

As the Scriptures are studied, a number of reasons why the Mosaic Law was given to the nation Israel become apparent.

First, the Law was given *to reveal the holiness of God*. In 1 Peter 1:15-16, Peter wrote, *But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written, "Be holy, because I am holy."* The fact that God is a holy God was made very clear to Israel in the Law of Moses. Perhaps the primary function of the Law was to educate the people concerning the character of God who had redeemed them from Egypt....

Second, the Mosaic Law was given *to reveal or expose the sinfulness of man*. ...In other words, the holiness of God as revealed in the Law became the test of man's thoughts, words, and actions; and anything that failed to conform to the revealed holiness of God was sin. This is exactly what Paul had in mind when he wrote, *For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). That in which God finds His highest glory is His own holiness. Sin is not only lack of conformity to the Law, but it is a lack of conformity to the holiness of God of which the Law is a revelation. Consequently the holiness of God—not the Law itself—becomes the final test of sin...

A third function of the Law...was *to reveal the standard of holiness required of those in fellowship with a holy God*. Israel had been redeemed as a nation in order to enjoy fellowship with God. As these redeemed ones faced the question of what kind of life was required of those who walk in fellowship with their Redeemer, the Law was given to reveal the standard that God required.

A fourth function of the Law is stated in Galatians 3:24: *The law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.*

A fifth function of the Law was *to be the unifying principle that made possible the establishment of the nation*. In other words, the Law was given by God as the national constitution for Israel. ...From the divine standpoint, Israel became a nation at the time the people voluntarily submitted themselves to the Law.

A sixth function somewhat related to the fifth is that Law was given *to separate Israel from the nations in order that they might become a kingdom of priests*. ...Israel was sanctified or set apart, according to Exodus 19:5-6, to become a kingdom of priests, that is, a nation that mediated the truth of God to the other nations of the earth. The Law became a hedge that separated and preserved Israel from these nations. In order that Israel might serve the function of a light to the world, the people were given the Law to make them distinct from all the other nations.

A seventh reason the Law was given to a redeemed people was *to make provision for forgiveness of sins and restoration to fellowship*. Leviticus 1-7 describes five offerings God instituted for the nation. ...The God who had redeemed the nation by faith through blood provided a way the redeemed could walk in fellowship with Him and with each other. The same Law that revealed their unworthiness for fellowship also provided for restoration to the fellowship.

Eighth, the Law was given *to make provision for a redeemed people to worship*. ...In Leviticus 23 the Law revealed a cycle of feasts the nation was expected to observe annually. These feasts were the means by which the nation...worshipped God. In the cycle of feasts, Israel's attention was directed backward to their redemption from Egypt, and also directed forward to the final redemption that would be provided through the promised Redeemer.

Ninth, the Law was given *to provide a test as to whether one was in the kingdom over which God ruled*. ...Even though the nation as a whole entered the Promised Land, because not all believed God, not all were eligible to receive the blessings promised to those in the land. The Law, then, became the standard that revealed whether or not a person was rightly related to God. Those who submitted to and obeyed the Law did so because of their faith in God which resulted in obedience. Conversely, those who disobeyed the Law did so because they were without faith in God, and their lack of faith produced disobedience. Whether or not a person obeyed the Law, then, became the test as to whether he was rightly related to God or in God's kingdom. It measured whether an individual was participating in God's covenant promises by faith, or was a Jew in name only.

Tenth, and finally, it becomes clear from the New Testament that the Law was given *to reveal Jesus Christ*. Great truths concerning the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ are woven throughout the Law, and the Law was given in order that it might prepare the nation for the coming Redeemer King.

CHANGED HEARTS



What is one truth from this lesson that has impacted your life? Why?

The **Law of Moses** reveals the condition of our hearts. We have all broken one or more of the Ten Commandments of God. In relation to God, the Ten Commandments command us...

- To have no other gods before the Lord, to not love anything above Himself.
- To make no carved images of God or worship any material thing.
- To avoid taking God's name in vain, demeaning His character or taking Him lightly.
- To observe the Sabbath, to give one day a week completely over to Him.

In relation to others, the Ten Commandments command us...

- To honor our parents and, by implication, all human authorities over us.
- To respect life by not murdering (in thought, word, or deed)
- To respect marriage by avoiding sexual sin (in thought, word, or deed).
- To respect property by not stealing (in thought, word, or deed).
- To respect truth by not lying.
- To be content in God's provision by not jealously coveting anything that is not ours.

James tells us that if we have broken one of these commandments, then we have violated God's Law and are guilty of all of them (James 2:10). We are lawbreakers, violators of the holy standard of God, guilty before a holy God who demands absolute purity and perfection.

Do you see why you are guilty before a holy God? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

It is in the **Abrahamic Covenant** that we learn how to be righteous before God, how to be made right before Him. It is not through good deeds but through faith in God's promise, a promise that is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the "seed" of Abraham (Genesis 15:6). God calls us. God extends His blessing to us. God gives us a promise. But we must choose to believe, to say "amen" to God's Word, to embrace His truth, to rest upon Him and Him alone. Once we believe, God begins to work in our hearts to change us from the inside out. We obey God's law not to earn God's blessing but because we love the One who has already blessed us.

Thus, there are three ways that you can live now in light of God's Law. *Where are you?*

- ☐ **Disobedience.** Ignoring and willfully violating God's Law; doing what I please.
- ☐ **Legalism.** Trying to live God's Law outwardly. This either leads to fear (have I done enough?) or arrogance (look how good I am compared to others).
- ☐ **Love.** Living for the Lord in gratitude because of the change He has made in my heart.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- Have you ever been "diagnosed" with anything? How did you feel about getting this diagnosis? What did you do (e.g., surgery, medicine) in light of this diagnosis?
- Review each of the Ten Commandments. In what ways do we violate each command?
- Based on Genesis 15:6 and Romans 4:1-5, how would you define faith in God?
- What does the Passover teach us about faith? How does the lamb point to Jesus?
- Why must faith in God's promise precede obedience to God's law?
- What did you learn about God from this study? About humanity? About yourself?

WEEK 4 CONQUEST & CYCLES



Creation



Challenge



Curse



Corruption



Covenant



Conduct

Creation. God created the heavens and the earth. He created humans (Adam and Eve) and gave them dominion over the earth. He also gave them free will to decide whether to serve Him or not. God also created angels with the same capacity of free will.

Challenge. Lucifer, one of God's highest created angels, because of pride, decided to challenge God's authority and rebel against Him. He persuaded many other angels to join his rebellion. Then he set his eyes on God's newest creation, humanity.

Curse. Satan tempted Eve to disobey God and Adam willfully chose to disobey God. Their sin brought separation from God, resulting in shame, suffering, and death. Their sin also put the earth, man's stewardship, under the dominion of Satan.

Corruption. Sin spread like a cancer. Man became defiant, selfish, and violent. God judged the world with a flood but, afterward, man still pursued evil. Inspired by Satan, man attempted to establish a worldwide kingdom (Babel) united in opposition to God.

Covenant. God called out Abram and made a covenant with him, promising to make him a great nation, to give him a land, and to bless the world through one of his descendants. God kept His covenant by bringing Abram's descendants out of Egypt.

Conduct. God established a law for His people, teaching them how they are to live.

God's covenant with Abraham reveals His plan for redeeming mankind and the earth. God would invade Satan's realm through a people, a nation in right relationship to Him (Abraham and his descendants). Through this nation (Israel), God would bring a future Redeemer—a Leader who would break Satan's hold on the earth—and, through them, He would also shine His light to the rest of the world. This nation was to be...

- **A Redeemed People.** Made right with God through faith. Delivered from Satan's bondage through the blood of a lamb.
- **A Righteous People.** Loving God and living out His character in the world.
- **A Reliant People.** Trusting God and walking in His power and strength.
- **A Redemptive People.** Shining a light so that others would know how to come into right relationship with God and enter His kingdom.

Unfortunately, Israel as a whole struggled to fulfill God's mission on the earth.

Westminster Confession of Faith

13.1. They who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified...

13.2. This sanctification is throughout in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life: there abides still some remnants of corruption in every part, whence arises a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

13.3. ...Although the remaining corruption for a time may much prevail, yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome: and so the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

SCRIPTURE EXPLORATION



Moses' death is recorded in Deut. 34. Moses is described as a prophet who knew God face to face and did mighty signs and wonders before God's people and the Egyptians. In Deut. 18:15-19, God promises that He will raise up a Prophet like Moses again in the future.

The Hebrew name, **Joshua**, *Yeshua*, is the same name as Jesus.

1:12-15—Two and a half tribes of Israel requested land on the east side of the Jordan River. Moses granted their request as long as they helped their kindred conquer the Promised Land (Numbers 32).

Jericho—Possibly the oldest city in history. It dates back to ~7000 BC. It was an ideal location for a city because of its natural springs, warm climate, and access to major trade routes.

CONQUEST

DAY 1

Joshua 1-2

The people of Israel are delivered from Egypt (~1445 BC). They receive God's law at Mount Sinai. Then they head toward the Promised Land of Canaan, the land promised to Abraham (~2000 BC). Though God reveals His power and love to them in great miracles, the people still struggle to trust Him. Ultimately when they stand on the edge of the Promised Land, they give in to fear and want to go back to Egypt. Their unbelief results in God's declaration that they will wander in the wilderness for forty years until everyone over the age of twenty (except Joshua and Caleb) die. Then their children will possess the land.

Joshua wrote the book that bears his name. The forty years of wandering have ended. A complete generation has died off (including Moses). Now it is time to enter the land. Joshua is God's appointed leader to bring the people into the Promised Land.

Read Joshua 1-2. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

What promise is repeated by God to Joshua (1:5, 9)? _____

What two commands did God give Joshua in light of His presence with him?

1. _____ (1:6, 7, 9).
2. _____ (1:8).

Jericho was a major, fortified city that sat on the edge of the Promised Land. To possess the land, the Israelites needed to conquer this city first. Joshua sends out two spies to survey the city of Jericho.



Whom did the two spies meet? _____

What was her occupation? _____

What does she know about God (2:8-13)? _____

What does she ask of the spies? _____

What is the spies' response? _____

What similarities do you see between her deliverance and the deliverance that the Israelites experienced during Passover (Exodus 12:21-23)? _____

CONQUEST**DAY 2****Joshua 6**

After the spies return, Joshua and the people are ready to enter the land of Canaan. They cross the Jordan River through God's miraculous intervention and they stand outside the walls of Jericho. Jericho was one of the first fortified cities of ancient history and, with walls over fifty feet high, it seemed impregnable. To conquer it, humanly speaking, would require a siege of months, possibly years.

Read Joshua 6. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

What is God's strategy for conquering Jericho (6:1-5)? _____

If you were part of Israel at this time, what would your response be to such a plan? _____

What would you have to believe about God in order to follow through with the plan? _____

To conquer their enemies and experience the blessing of God's promises, the people had to learn how to trust God and obey Him. Only through stepping out in faith and relying on God's power could they experience victory.

What happened to Rahab? _____

What does Hebrews 11:31 tell you about Rahab? _____

CONQUEST**DAY 3****Joshua 23-24**

It took Israel approximately seven years to establish a strong foothold in the land of Canaan. Many of the Canaanite cities were conquered but there still remained many rival tribes in the land. To conquer these remaining peoples, the land was divided up among the twelve tribes of Israel (with two and a half tribes receiving land to the east of the Jordan) so that each tribe could subdue their particular part of Canaan.

For those who struggle with the ethics of the Conquest, it must be remembered:

- God announced his judgment on the Canaanite tribes approximately six hundred years prior to the time of Joshua (Genesis 15:12-21). During this time, God certainly extended His grace to these peoples but they rejected it.
- The Canaanites had so corrupted their way that incest, adultery, human sacrifice, homosexuality, and bestiality were common practices (Leviticus 18:6-30). At some point, God's grace ends and His judgment of sin begins.
- The story of Rahab reminds us that God sees the heart of every individual and reaches out to save those whose hearts are inclined toward Him in faith.

Read Joshua 23-24. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

Jericho—

Though dates are debated, archaeology has discovered that one of the ancient cities of Jericho was well fortified but conquered and burned. The walls fell upon themselves and sudden destruction hit the city since large bins of grain were found untouched. One section of housing alongside the wall remained standing (Rahab).

Doomed to Destruction—

Jericho was to be completely destroyed. Those who did not die when the walls fell were to be killed in warfare. This is a stark reminder that God judges sin.

The sexual perversion in Canaan is similar to that found before Noah's flood and in Sodom and Gomorrah. It is possible that people can so pervert themselves sexually and genetically that God must wipe them out.

Intermarriage

—God warned His people of the danger of marrying those outside of Israel. His concern was not racial but spiritual (Ex 34:15-16; Deut. 7:2-4). God knows that sexual desire and “love” are often the things that pull people away from following Him.

24:15—We all must make a choice as to Whom or what we are going to serve. *What “gods” do people choose from today?*

Baal—The rain and fertility god of the Canaanites. Generally worship of Baal included animal sacrifice, male and female prostitution, and human sacrifice.

Ashtoreths—The female counterpart to Baal and the goddess of war and fertility. Later would be known as Ishtar, Athtart, Aphrodite, and Venus. Worship of her included many sexual perversions.

In his final speech, what does Joshua urge the people to do in relation to God?

23:6 _____

23:8 _____

23:11 _____

What things are mentioned in Joshua 23 that would tempt the Israelites to disobey God and ignore Joshua’s advice? _____

In Joshua 24:1-13, Joshua recounts all the things that God has done for Israel. List two things that God had done that really stand out to you.

1. _____

2. _____

Because of what God has done for them, what should be their response (24:14-15)?

CYCLES

DAY 4

Judges 2-3

The book of Judges records what happened to the nation of Israel after Joshua’s death and the initial conquest of Canaan. Judges covers ~300 years of Israel’s history (1380-1050 BC) and it gets its name from 2:16 which describes God raising up various leaders (i.e., “judges”) during this time to deliver Israel from their enemies.

Read Judges 2:1-3:6. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart.

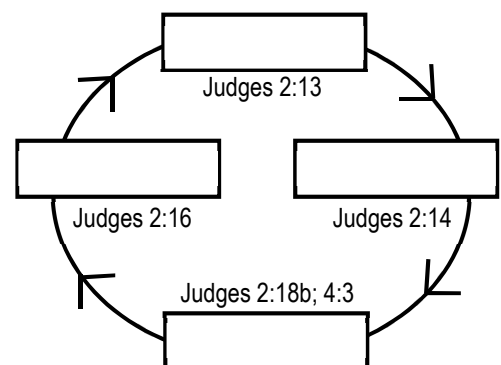
What is God’s promise to Israel (2:1)? _____

How did Israel respond to this promise (2:2)? _____

What happened after Joshua and his generation died (2:10-13)? _____

Why do you think this happened? _____

Judges 2:13-19 gives an overview of the “cycles” of Judges—a pattern that repeats itself over and over with the nation of Israel during this time. Look up each verse and fill in the chart with a word/phrase that describes what happened.



What happened each time God delivered His people (2:19)? _____

The cycle repeats itself at least six times in Judges with God raising up judges like Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and, perhaps the most well known, Samson. Each time God delivers the people, they revert back to their sins and become even more corrupt and obstinate. Thus, the cycles are not just going around and around but they are also spiraling downward into worse and worse sin. Do you think the same kind of cycles happen in people's lives today? If so, how have you seen it?

The theme of the book of Judges is found in 17:6 and 21:25. Write this verse below.

What can you learn from Judges 17:6 or from the book of Judges as a whole?

CYCLES

DAY 5

Ruth

Judges is one of the most depressing books in the Bible. It records graphic, even gruesome, acts of sin. God's people have forsaken Him. Consequently, despite the salvation offered them time and time again, they refuse to repent. *Judges shows that the bondage of sin is great.*

It also shows that being physically descended from Abraham does not bring a person into God's kingdom. A person must be a spiritual descendant of Abraham—trusting God by faith and being transformed by God's grace.

The book of Ruth demonstrates this truth. *Ruth is the lone bright spot during the time of the judges and she is not even a Jew by birth.* Her story points forward to God's promise of a Redeemer and His plan for redemption.

Read the Book of Ruth (four chapters). Find a readable translation and read the book straight through. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

What stands out after your reading of Ruth? _____

How would you describe Ruth based on the following verses:

1:14-18 _____

2:11-12 _____

4:13-15 _____

THINK ABOUT:
Which of the below quotes on sin stands out to you?

Men hate their sins but cannot leave them.

—Seneca

Sins begin like cobwebs, but become iron clamps.

—J.C. Ryle

All sin hardens the heart, stupefies the conscience and shuts out the light of truth.

—Wm. Plumer

Sin has two great powers: it reigns and it ruins.

—Anonymous

Moab—A nation to the east of the Dead Sea. Moab led Israel into great sin while in the wilderness (Numbers 25). By taking his family to Moab, Elimelech put his family in jeopardy and, in many ways, abandoned the Lord and His covenant.

1:20—The name **Naomi** means "pleasant" while **Mara** means "bitter."

In the Old Testament law, God established that if a person became a slave (Leviticus 25:47-49), lost their property (25:25) or were without an heir to carry on their family name (Deuteronomy 25:5-6), then a close relative could redeem them. This is the background to the story of Ruth and Boaz. Boaz is called a “kinsman redeemer” because of his relation to Naomi and his ability to redeem Naomi’s land and carry on the family name through his marriage to Ruth.

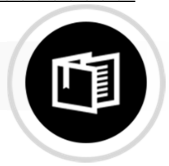
The book of Ruth gives us more clues as to God’s coming Redeemer.

What city is Naomi from (1:1, 19)? _____

What is the name of Ruth’s son? _____ Grandson? _____ Great grandson? _____

Who is Boaz’ mother (see Matthew 1:5)? _____ What can that teach us? _____

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Read the following excerpt from Gary Inrig’s book, *Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), pages 24-32.

JOSHUA was one of the great figures of the Old Testament. He was a great soldier, brilliant organizer, charismatic leader, and a gifted administrator. But merely to list those characteristics is to be very superficial, because none of them reveals the heart of the man. Two characteristics stand out above all others in his life and account for the way in which God worked through him. The first characteristic is Joshua’s responsiveness to the Word of God. At the beginning of his leadership, as he faced the awesome task of succeeding Moses, God came to him with a promise and a challenge:

Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success (Josh. 1:7-8).

God promised Joshua prosperity and wisdom through obeying, reading, and proclaiming His Word. Throughout his life, Joshua acted on that promise, and God honored his obedience.

Joshua’s second outstanding characteristic was his active faith. “*Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you*” (Josh. 1:5). Trusting that promise, Joshua guided two million people toward a river in flood, and God cut off the waters so the people crossed on dry ground. In obedience to God’s orders, he marched the nation around the city of Jericho, and the walls of the city crumbled.

...Joshua was not a perfect man, and Scripture is honest enough to record his failures. But God used him, not because of his gifts and abilities, but because he trusted God and ordered his life by the Word of God. As a result, God did great deeds for His people through Joshua. That is the thrust of Judges 2:7. Joshua kept Israel in the place of God’s blessing. “*And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the LORD which He had done for Israel.*”

This verse teaches an important lesson. One man, committed unreservedly to God and His Word, can make an enormous difference for good in the lives of God's people. One woman, living her life for Jesus Christ, can bring blessing to a whole group of people. If you will trust God and build your life on His Word, you can have a godly influence on your family, student group, or local church. That truth is written many times on the pages of Scripture.

But Joshua died, as verse 8 reminds us. Shortly after, "*All that generation also were gathered to their fathers.*" It had been a generation who knew victory, blessing, and forward movement. Then, abruptly in the middle of verse 10, we meet the second generation; and, with them, the situation entirely changes.

THE FAILURE OF THE SECOND GENERATION (2:10)

"There arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel." That statement cries out with questions. How did they fail? How could they fail? What produced this result when their parents had seen and experienced so much of God's hand of blessing?

The first questions we must ask are: "In what way did they fail? What was the nature of their failure?" When we read in verse 10 that the second generation "*did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel,*" that is not a reference to intellectual ignorance. They were not uninformed of the events of the Exodus or of the conquest. Theologically, they had a great deal of information about the Lord. What they had not seen with their eyes (and many of them had witnessed through children's eyes, the crossing of the Jordan River and the fall of Jericho), they had heard with their ears. It was not facts they lacked.

They knew about the Lord. They knew about His deeds. But they did not know Him or acknowledge Him. They had become complacent about the living God and had forgotten how to walk in fellowship with Him. They had lost touch with God. Instead of being filled with wonder that God had reached into Egypt and delivered His people from the hand of Pharaoh, or being moved to praise God when they heard the history of Mount Sinai or Gilgal or Jericho or the Canaanite conquests, they simply yawned with boredom. "Aw, we've heard all that before."

Here we come to the heart of the second-generation syndrome. It is a lukewarmness, a complacency, an apathy about amazing biblical truths that we have heard from our childhood, or from our teachers. Whether we like it or not, it is a syndrome which is very much a part of twentieth-century Christian experience. It operates on a personal or a family level, as we begin to leave our first love for the Lord Jesus. ...If we are not careful, the syndrome begins, as it does in Joshua and Judges, in the midst of a beautiful display of God's grace and power. History tells us that not even the most vivid display of the life-transforming power of the Holy Spirit will prevent this problem.

But why? Why did it happen then, and why does it happen to us? Some of us have been brought up in fine Christian homes; we know all about the truths of the Word of God, and yet there is a complacency about spiritual things in our lives that cripples us spiritually. We must realize two things about this kind of complacency. The first is something Erich Fromm once pointed out, when he said, "Hate is not the opposite of love. Apathy is." To be complacent in the face of Calvary is the greatest possible rejection of God. The second is that complacency grows like a cancer.

I don't quite know why, but a yawn is one of Satan's most effective weapons, and the thing that really troubles me about the second-generation syndrome is the effect it has on new believers. I am convinced that one of the greatest stumbling blocks young Christians must confront is not the opposition of the world, but the apathy of so-called established Christians.

So then, we need to examine carefully the cause of this second-generation syndrome in the lives of the people of Israel; and, perhaps as we realize the cause of their failure, we can guard against it in our lives. Maybe part of the problem lay with the first generation. Interestingly, however, the book of Judges puts none of the blame there. The second generation was held responsible for their failure, and God would not allow them to shift the blame.

THE CAUSE OF THEIR FAILURE

Three factors stand out, above others, as we analyze what happened to the second generation.

1. *They were satisfied with the status quo.* After Joshua had led the people in some victorious assaults on the land of Canaan, God came to him and said, "Joshua, you are old and advanced in years, and very much of the land remains to be possessed." Then, through Joshua, God gave orders to each of the tribes to take their territory from the Canaanites. The first generation did conquer parts of Canaan, but they left pockets of the enemy untouched.

Then the second generation came along. Their reaction was, "Why bother? We have all the land we need. Those Canaanites are not so bad. We can get along with them." God had given them a command to move out and take the land, but they refused to move out in faith. They were content and comfortable with the status quo.

...I thank God for godly Christian parents, but I want to take what they have given me and build on it and have an even richer experience than they had. I pray that my children will go one step beyond me, and so on. I thank God for what went on in churches in times past. I thank God for what He revealed and what men learned. But I will not, I cannot, be satisfied with simply reliving and reproducing the past. God has more country for Christians to take, and I want to move out for Him.

The first sign, then, of the second-generation syndrome is complacency about the status quo. Watch out for it! The second cause of the syndrome is equally dangerous, one God warned about years before it happened.

2. *They took God's blessings for granted and did not acknowledge Him.* In Deuteronomy 6:10-12, God issued a warning to His people that still speaks to us, especially in the affluent West.

Then it shall come about when the LORD your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you, great and splendid cities which you did not build, and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, and you shall eat and be satisfied, then watch yourself, lest you forget the LORD who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

God the Holy Spirit considered this message so important that He had Moses reinforce it in Deuteronomy 8:11-18. The great danger is that the enjoyment of God's blessings makes us blessing-centered rather than God-centered.

The Lord God does not command us to give thanks because it makes Him feel good, but because it does us good. Praise, worship, thanksgiving, and acknowledgement of God's blessings are the

greatest protections against the second-generation syndrome. ...Our attitude toward our blessings and possessions is one of the most determinative factors in our spiritual health. To be ungrateful about grace is not only foolish, it is dangerous.

We need to recognize the subtlety of our sinful hearts. In our desperation, we call upon God to meet our needs, and, in His infinite grace, He does. Then, with a characteristic display of spiritual amnesia, we begin to take the credit for God's blessing. Israel looked at the land they possessed and said, "Look at what we did!" They became man-centered in their view of life, and, by their attitude of self-congratulation, they sowed the seeds of self-destruction....

3. They neglected God's Word. The third cause of the second-generation syndrome is painfully obvious in Judges. It is astonishing to discover almost no reference to the study of Scripture in this book. What was so central in Joshua is peripheral in Judges. The people possessed Scripture but chose to ignore it. It is almost as if it were not written at all. Ritually, the people did many of the things the Law required, but their obedience was based on tradition, not on personal biblical conviction. ...Don't neglect the Word of God!

GOD'S STRATEGY AGAINST COMPLACENCY (3:1-6)

It is important to recognize that God did not leave the second generation to wallow in their apathy. His strategy for moving them forward is spelled out in verses 1-2. The Lord allowed unconquered nations, pockets of resistance, to remain *"to test Israel by them ... only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war, those who had not experienced it formerly."* Was God interested in giving Israel some kind of technical instruction in military strategy? Obviously not. God desired a group of people who knew how to trust Him in battle.

...Have you ever wondered why God did not take away your sinful nature when you trusted Him? Why are there so many areas of weakness in your life and such difficult problems and obstacles for you to overcome? Why are there so many needs around for you to fill? Are you ever puzzled because there are no perfect churches, but unsolved problems exist in even the most biblically faithful fellowships?

At least part of the answer is found in Judges 3:2. The Lord uses those difficulties to teach us how to wage spiritual war. He wants to shake us out of our apathy and teach us to trust Him. Often it is only when the enemy has run all over us, and our resources are gone, that we develop a teachable spirit. There are times in our lives when the roof gets blown off, and everything seems to fall to pieces. Those times of failure and crisis become teaching times as the Lord shows us how to make war—how to trust Him.

The implication of this strategy of God in our lives is clear. We cannot stand still in our Christian experience. There are enemies to be faced. There is ground to be gained. If we try to stand still, we can be sure that the principalities and powers, against which we contend, do not. Either we advance, or we perish. There are areas of need in our lives. There is ground to be won in our families and churches. And as long as we live in a world of more than 4 billion people, more than half of whom have never heard of the Lord Jesus, we cannot stand still...

...An old man was traveling on an ocean liner, when a huge storm blew up without warning. One woman lost her balance and fell overboard. People stood frozen with horror. Suddenly, a man plunged into the waves, grabbed her, and held her until a rescue boat came. When they were pulled out, everyone was astonished and embarrassed to discover that the hero was the oldest man on the boat—a man in his eighties.

That evening they held a party to honor him. When they called on him to make a speech, the old man rose slowly. He looked around at the people, then said, “I would like to know just one thing.” There was an embarrassed silence. “Who pushed me?”

Sometimes that is the only way we start moving. The Lord will keep pushing us out of our complacency, out of the second-generation syndrome, into a fresh, vital experience of walking with the Lord Jesus.

Are you already moving, or do you need a push?

CHANGED HEARTS



What is one truth from this lesson that has impacted your life? Why?

After God delivered His people from bondage in Egypt, He did not immediately bring them into the Promised Land. God took them through the wilderness. He allowed them to experience difficulties, hunger, and opposition. Why? Because God did not simply want to redeem His people; He wanted to change them. He wanted to teach them how to trust in Him and how to experience His power. God is able to change any heart except the one unwilling to be changed, the one unwilling to bow the knee, the one unwilling to seek His help.

What difficulty or struggle are you facing right now in your life? _____

How are you most often responding to this difficulty? ☐ Complaining ☐ Worrying ☐ Seeking an escape ☐ Becoming defiant ☐ Becoming depressed ☐ Seeking help from God and others.

One reason God allows difficulties is to humble us. There are some fortresses we cannot conquer on our own. We have to humbly bow before God, hear His Word, seek His strength, trust His timing, unite with His people, repent of any sin, and allow His Spirit to transform our hearts.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- What is a challenge or difficulty that you faced in your life that you overcame or gained victory in? How did you overcome it? What did you learn in the process?
- What do you learn from the life and faith of Joshua? From the life and faith of Rahab?
- What factors caused the next generation of Israel to drift away from the Lord?
- How have you seen the cycle of Judges play out in your own life? What breaks the cycle?
- What spiritual truths and applications can we learn from the book of Ruth?
- What did you learn about God from this study? About humanity? About yourself?
- What challenge are you facing right now in your life? How can we pray for you?



During the book of Judges, Israel is in the Promised Land but they are not experiencing the blessings of the Promised Land. They have the property but not the peace. Why? Because of their disobedience to God and His Word.

Through the Abrahamic Covenant, the Israelites are still God's people. God reiterates His promise to them even in the midst of their disobedience—*I will never break My covenant with you* (Judges 2:1). However, because of their disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant, Israel as a whole is not experiencing the blessings of being God's people but rather His discipline.

The disobedience of the people makes it clear that physical descent from Abraham is not enough. **To follow God one needs the faith of Abraham not simply the genes of Abraham.** Many people within Israel exercise this kind of faith—for instance, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Joshua. Many people outside of Israel also exercise this kind of faith—for instance, Rahab and Ruth—and they are brought into the community of Israel, not based on physical descent but based on spiritual faith.

The book of Judges makes it clear that something is wrong with the human heart. Mankind, whether Jew or Gentile, needs a Redeemer. Clues are piling up in the story of Scripture pointing to this Redeemer:

- **He would be of the “seed” of a woman (Genesis 3:15).**
- **He would be of the “seed” of Abraham (Genesis 22:18).**
- **He would be a king in the line of Judah (Genesis 49:10).**
- **He would be a prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18).**

More subtle clues are also emerging. God will provide a substitute sacrifice on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:14). God designates the blood of the Passover Lamb as the way to avert His judgment (Exodus 12:3-14). God institutes the sacrificial system whereby an animal without blemish is slain for the sins of the people (Leviticus 1:1-13). And God appoints the office of a “kinsman redeemer” (a near blood relative of a person in debt or bondage) as the only way that a person and/or lost property could be redeemed (Leviticus 25: 25, 47-49; Deuteronomy 25:5-6; the book of Ruth).

The book of Judges ends with the statement: *In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes* (Judges 21:25). The nation is in turmoil. Anarchy abounds. The people have rejected God as their King and have rejected His Law as their code of conduct. In spite of their rebellion, God continues to show His grace—not only in raising up deliverers for them but also in allowing them to go through difficulties so that they might turn back and follow Him. The nation needs to repent but instead they decide they need something else—a king *like all the nations* around them (1 Samuel 8:5). This is where this lesson begins...

Major Bible Themes

The Davidic covenant...was an unconditional covenant in which God promised David an unending royal lineage, a throne, and a kingdom, all of them forever.

In the declaration of this covenant, Jehovah reserves the right to interrupt the actual reign of David's sons if chastisement is required (2 Sam. 7:14-15; Ps 89:20-37); but the perpetuity of the covenant cannot be broken.

As the Abrahamic covenant guaranteed to Israel an everlasting entity as a nation and an everlasting possession of the land...so the Davidic covenant guarantees to them an everlasting throne, an everlasting King, and an everlasting kingdom. (Chafer and Walvoord)

SCRIPTURE EXPLORATION



They have rejected Me (8:7)—The request for a king was not wrong in itself. Moses in fact had predicted that at one point Israel would have a king (cf. Deut. 17:14-20). The problem with the request is their reasons for wanting a king. In effect, they are rejecting the leadership of God and wanting to be like other nations.

Anoint (10:1)—Anointing signified that one was set apart for a special service and divinely enabled to perform the service. Priests were anointed and also kings.

The Spirit of God will come upon you (10:6)—The Spirit came upon people in the OT to give them divine enablement to do the Lord's work (cf. Judges 3:10).

CROWN

DAY 1

1 Samuel 8-10

1 Samuel continues the story of the book of Judges. Indeed the last “judge” (i.e., deliverer and leader) of Israel is Samuel. Samuel is born around ~1100 BC. His birth is miraculous in that his mother, Hannah, was barren and prayed to God for a son—a son that she would dedicate back to the LORD if He would grant her request (1:11). God heard her prayer and gave her a son whom she named “Samuel,” meaning “heard by God.” Samuel grew up with a heart for the Lord and eventually led Israel in a period of repentance and victory over the nation’s enemies.

Read 1 Samuel 8-10. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

Why did Israel want a king over them (8:19-20)? _____

Saul, of the tribe of Benjamin, is designated as the first king of Israel by God. What can you learn about Saul (his character and attributes) from the following verses?

9:2 _____

9:21 _____

10:9 _____

10:21-22 _____

10:23-24 _____

10:26-27 _____

Saul is chosen by God and anointed by Samuel as the first king of Israel. God puts His Spirit on Saul and changes his heart so that he can have the ability to lead the people strongly and righteously. What can you learn about God’s Spirit from 10:6-9?

CROWN

DAY 2

1 Samuel 16-18

Saul initially rules the nation of Israel fairly well. He leads them to military victories and seeks to follow the voice of the Lord through the prophet Samuel. However, over time, Saul begins to drift away from the Lord and to take matters into his own hands. His rash character causes him to make an inappropriate offering to God (13:8-9), to place impossible demands on his troops (14:28), to disobey God (15:1-9), to exalt himself by building a monument to himself (15:12), and to try to cover his own sin by blaming his actions on the people (15:20-21). Because of his disobedience God rejects Saul as king over His people and promises to raise up a new king over Israel (15:26-29).

Read 1 Samuel 16:1-18:16. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

God rejects Saul as king over Israel and places His hand on David, the son of Jesse, of the tribe of Judah. What do you learn about David from the following passages?

16:11-12 _____

16:13 _____

16:18 _____

17:34-37 _____

18:14-16 _____

How does Saul respond to the faith, strength, wisdom and rising popularity of David?

David is identified as a *man after God's own heart* (13:14). His faith in God is strong as evidenced by his defeat of Goliath—an event that occurred when David was probably still in his teens. God is with David (a fact that is repeated several times, 16:13, 18; 18:12, 14, 28) and, through God's strength, David would become the greatest king in Israel's history.

Re-read 1 Samuel 16:7. What are two things that you can learn from this verse?

CROWN

DAY 3

2 Samuel 5-7

Saul and three of his sons, including Jonathan, die in battle in ~1010 BC (1 Samuel 31). Another of Saul's sons, Ishbosheth, briefly rules over Israel before David is recognized as king over the whole nation.

Read 2 Samuel 5-7. Ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

How old was David when he began to reign (5:4)? _____ How long did he reign? _____

What city becomes known as the "city of David" (5:6-7)? _____

Before every battle what does David do (5:19, 23)? _____

After establishing his rule over Israel, David wanted to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. The Ark was designed by Moses based on God's instructions (Exodus 25:1-22). The Ark was a large gold-covered container with a lid that featured two large angels with their wings spread out toward the middle. Inside the Ark were the Ten Commandments, a jar of manna, and Aaron's rod (Hebrews 9:4). The top of the Ark was called the "mercy seat." Here God promised to meet with Israel and speak with them (Exodus 25:22). Here also, each year on the Day of Atonement, blood from an animal was to be sprinkled by the priest to cover over Israel's sins (Leviticus 16).

Ruddy—

Reddish. David most likely had reddish hair and a fair complexion which was fairly unusual in the Middle East.

Five smooth stones

(17:40)—The stones were probably not small but rather about the size of a baseball. A person good with a sling could throw a stone about 100 mph.

Jonathan

(18:1)—Saul's oldest son would become David's best friend despite the fact that David's rise in power jeopardized his own right to rule.

18:8, 29—It is interesting to note that Saul's anger was motivated by fear. *How often do you think fear lies behind a person's anger?*

Ark of the Covenant—

The movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, was fairly accurate in its depiction of the Ark.

Jerusalem—
Meaning “city of peace.” Also called Zion and the “city of David.” The city’s location on a hill and its access to water makes it an ideal ancient city to defend.

Uzzah (6:7)—
God had given strict instructions on how to handle the Ark. It was to be carried and not touched (Ex. 25:14-15; Num. 4:15).

Davidic covenant—
The unconditional nature of this covenant is confirmed in Psalm 89:34-37; Isaiah 9:6-7, Jeremiah 23:5-6, 30:8-9, 33:14-17; Ezek. 37:34-35; Daniel. 7:13-14; Hosea 3:4-5; Amos 9:11; and Zech. 14:4,9.

The book of **Ecclesiastes** is Solomon’s testimony of how his pursuit of wealth, power, sex, and knowledge led him down a dead-end road of despair and depression.

God had established specific instructions regarding how the Ark was to be transported (cf. Exodus 25:12-14) and David did not follow these instructions. What happened because of this mistake? _____

What was David’s reaction (6:8-9)? _____

After the passage of time, David tried again—this time following God’s instructions by having the Ark carried instead of transported on a cart (6:13). How would you describe David’s worship of God as the Ark is being transported into Jerusalem? _____

2 Samuel 7 is a key chapter in understanding God’s plan for Israel and for the future Messiah. What did David want to do for the Lord? _____

In response to David’s desire, God speaks to him through the prophet Nathan. What promises does God make to David in the following verses?

7:12 _____

7:13 _____

7:16 _____

David responds to God’s promise in a prayer of thanksgiving and praise. What is one thing that stands out to you in David’s prayer? _____

CAPTIVITY

DAY 4

2 Kings 17

David reigns over Israel until ~970 BC. David’s son, Solomon, becomes the next king. Solomon is known as the wisest man who ever lived (1 Kings 4:29-34). For many years, he rules Israel well, building a glorious temple for the Lord (1 Kings 6), building up Jerusalem, establishing the military strength of the nation, and writing many proverbs of wisdom for the people.

But over time, Solomon began to take advantage of his kingly role and pursue wealth, power, and hedonistic pleasure, multiplying his wives and lovers and living a life of ease. After his death (~930 BC), his son, Rehoboam, tried to reign in the same way as Solomon and eventually the nation of Israel split in half with the northern ten tribes (called Israel) following a leader named Jeroboam and the southern two tribes of Judah and Benjamin (called Judah) following Rehoboam (cf. 1 Kings 12).

The next 200 years of Israel’s history (930-722BC) is marked by a downward spiral of disobedience. During this time, the northern tribes are not led by a single godly leader—all the kings forsake God. Meanwhile the southern tribes do have several godly kings who try to bring repentance and revival to the nation.

Read 2 Kings 17. Pray and ask God to speak your heart as you read His Word.

Historically it is known that Shalmaneser V, and his successor, Sargon II, conquered the northern tribes of Israel and their capital, Samaria, in 722 BC. The Bible tells us why this occurred. Beside each verse below, write the sin(s) that Israel committed:

17:13-14 _____

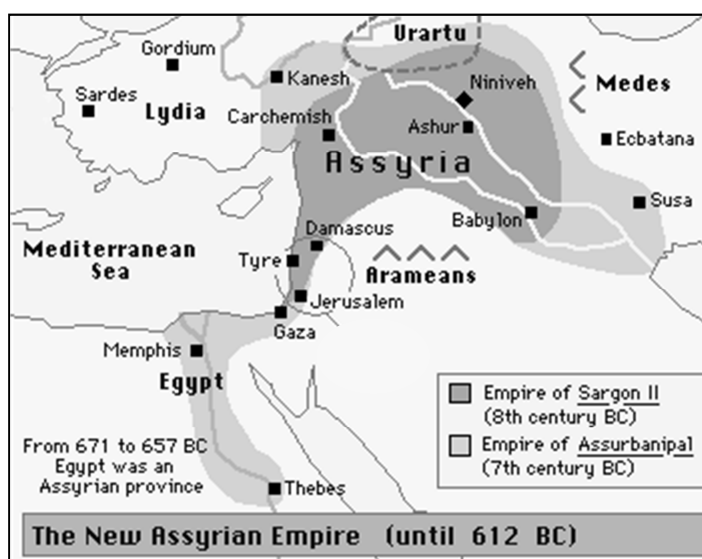
17:15 _____

17:16 _____

17:17 _____

What was God's response to their sin (17:18)? _____

Assyria was the dominant world power for most of the years between 1300-600 BC. Their strength particularly peaked around 900 BC and continued until they were defeated by the Babylonians around 600 BC. Assyrian war strategy was known for its cruelty. Many who were not killed in war were deported to Assyria and then the defeated land was often repopulated with various nations to water down any nationalistic ideas.



This is what happened to the northern tribes of Israel (17:24). The result was an intermingling of Jew and Gentile resulting in the Samaritan race. How would you describe the resulting religion of the Samaritans (17:29-33, 41)? _____

Was God pleased with this kind of worship? ☐ Yes ☐ No What does this teach us? _____

CAPTIVITY

DAY 5

2 Chronicles 36

1 & 2 Kings and **1 & 2 Chronicles** both record the history of the nation of Israel from Solomon's reign (~970 BC) until the fall of Judah to Babylon in 586 BC. *Kings* focuses more on the details of Israel's history while *Chronicles* is more selective, giving a more religious and spiritual perspective to Israel's history. *Chronicles* also focuses primarily on the history of the southern tribes of Judah, giving less attention to the history of the northern tribes of Israel taken into captivity in 722 BC.

Read 2 Chronicles 36. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read His Word.

Shalmaneser V

ruled from (727-722 BC). He may have been assassinated by **Sargon II**, his general, who took over the throne from (722-705 BC) when Samaria finally fell. Sargon records in his annals the deportation of 27,290 Jews to Assyria.

Jeroboam (17:21)—

Jeroboam was the first king to rule Israel after the division of the kingdom under Solomon's son, Rehoboam. Jeroboam's "great sin" was creating a false religion with aspects of Judaism mixed with idolatry (cf. 1 Kgs 12:25ff).

Nebuchadnezzar—

Ruled Babylon from 605-562 BC and established it as a world power. He was noted for his building projects including the Hanging Gardens, one of the seven wonders of the world.

Babylon defeated Assyria in 612 BC and Egypt in 605 BC to become the dominant world power. From 605-586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar would invade Judah three times:

- **605 BC.** Jehoiakim becomes his vassal and valuables are carried off (36:6-7; Dan. 1:1-2).
- **597 BC.** Jehoiakim rebels. His son, Jehoiachin, takes over. Nebuchadnezzar invades and deports more people to Babylon and takes more valuables from the temple (36:9-10).
- **586 BC.** Zedekiah rebels. Nebuchadnezzar invades and utterly destroys Judah (36:11-21).

What do Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah have in common according to 36:5, 9, 12?

How did God try to bring His people back to Himself (36:15)? _____

How did the people respond (36:16)? _____

How long would Judah remain in captivity in Babylon (36:20-21)? _____

The book of Chronicles ends with a ray of hope. Eventually the Babylonian empire would fall to the Persians (~538 BC) and the king of Persia, Cyrus, would allow the Jews to begin returning to the land. What motivated Cyrus to do this (36:22)? _____

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Read the following excerpt from Bob Deffinbaugh's sermon, "Building God's House," based on 2 Samuel 7:1-29 (www.bible.org)

One of my favorite movies is "Crocodile Dundee," and one of my favorite scenes is when Dundee is in New York City walking down the street with his girl friend. Suddenly, from out of the shadows, a gang of thugs emerges. One of the hoodlums brandishes a knife and demands that Dundee hand over his possessions. Calmly, Dundee looks at the thugs before responding, "That's not a knife . . . *this* is a knife!" And he pulls out an incredibly large knife, which makes the would-be mugger's switchblade look like a penknife as the thugs flee for their lives.

This scene reminds me of our text [in 2 Samuel 7]. David has just completed the construction of his palace. He looks out and sees the ark of the Lord, housed in a tent, and then begins to wonder. . . . A plan begins to formulate in his mind. Why not build a house for God, a temple? So David calls his friend and confidant, Nathan the prophet, and outlines his intentions. Nathan hastily consents, thinking that David's plans for such a "house" will be pleasing to God. But that night, Nathan is corrected by God, and he has to return to David with his revised prophetic evaluation. Through Nathan, God speaks to David. It is as though God were looking down at the blueprints which David had drawn up for God's "house." God then looks at David and says, in effect, "David, that's not a house, . . . *this* is a house." If David thinks he can build a house for God, he is wrong. It is God who plans to build a "**house**" for David. And what a house that will be. . . . This is a very crucial text in the Old Testament. One can hardly overestimate its

importance not only for David, but for Israel and all mankind. ...Our text contains what theologians have come to call the *Davidic Covenant*, one of the great covenants of the Bible.

DAVID'S PLAN AND A PROPHETIC APPROVAL (7:1-3)

...David has come a long way from his sheep-tending days as a young lad. It has just begun to dawn on David that God has established him as king over Israel (2 Samuel 5:12). The Philistines have twice sought to overthrow him, and twice David has defeated them. The enemies around Israel are, for the time being, at peace with David. With the help of Hiram, king of Tyre, David has completed his own palace, and he is now living in royal splendor. David now has the time to devote to other enterprises.

After a failed first effort, the ark of God has been successfully brought to Jerusalem, housed in a tent. David may have been looking out from the rooftop of his palace, his eyes fixed on the tabernacle-tent in which the ark was kept. Somehow it seems inappropriate for David to live in such splendor, while the ark of God is kept in such plain and seemingly provisional surroundings. The idea comes to him that he can build another house; this second house will be a temple in which the ark can be kept in far more fitting surroundings.

It is settled in David's mind. That is what he will do. And so David confides in Nathan the prophet, who seems also to be a friend and confidant of the king. How can such a generous gesture possibly be wrong? Why shouldn't God have a more fitting dwelling place? And so, without consulting God, Nathan gives David the go ahead. In effect, Nathan says to David, "Sounds good to me, and I'm sure it will be okay with God as well." In biblical terms, Nathan says, "David, do all that is in your mind, for the LORD is with you" (verse 3).

A VISION AND A REVISION (7:4-7)

...In the middle of the night, God gives Nathan a direct revelation, which he is to convey to David. In a way, it put both Nathan and David in their place. ...David had a bright idea, but it did not correspond with God's plan. The question which God asks David sets the tone for what is to follow: "Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in?" Oops. I like the way Eugene Peterson puts it:

But there are times when our grand human plans to do something for God are seen, after a night of prayer, to be a huge human distraction from what God is doing for us. That's what Nathan realized that night: God showed Nathan that David's building plans for God would interfere with God's building plans for David. (Peterson, *Leap Over A Wall*, p. 160.

...The message that Nathan delivers to David is dominated by a recital of what God has done, is doing, and will do. God is the first-person subject of twenty-three verbs in this message, and these verbs carry the action. David, full of what he's going to do for God, is now subjected to a comprehensive rehearsal of what God has done, is doing, and will do for and in David. What looked yesterday like a bold Davidic enterprise on behalf of God now looks picayune.

Does David want to offer God a helping hand by building Him a better house in which to live? God reminds David Who is taking care of whom. Would David do something great for God, like build Him a temple? History would remind David (and us) that it has always been God helping us, not us helping God. David, God's servant, should recall that it was He who took him out of the pasture, from following (not leading) the sheep, and made him ruler of all Israel (verse 8). God has been with David, wherever he went, and it was He who gave David's enemies into his

hand, resulting in his fame and reputation. It is God who has always come to man's aid, and not man who rescues God.

In verse 10, there is a significant change in the tense of the verbs. Previous verbs are in the past tense, referring back to what God has done in the past. Now, in verse 10, the verbs become future. After pointing out all that He has done for David and Israel in the past, God goes on to say something like: **“David, My servant, you have not seen anything yet. The best is yet to come.”** God promises to appoint a place for His people where they will be planted. They will have a place of their own (as David intended to give God a “place of His own”), and they will dwell in peace there because the wicked will no longer afflict them. It won't be like it used to be, from the time of the judges till the present. God will give David rest from all his enemies. Would David dare to think he could do something for God? It was God who gave David all that he had, and it was God who would give him yet even more.

The question must arise: when are these promises to David fulfilled? It is clear that they were not yet fulfilled, for they are expressed as a future reality. Some might think they are fulfilled in the next three chapters (8-10), when David prevails over all his enemies who surround Israel. I don't think we can see a complete fulfillment in David's lifetime or even in that of his son Solomon. I believe these promises to David are fully realized only in the coming Kingdom of God, when the Lord Jesus Christ subdues all His enemies and establishes His kingdom on the earth. It is that time spoken of in the last chapters of the Book of Isaiah. These promises are given to David here because they pave the way for the promise God is about to make to David in the following verses, the promise to build a **“house”** for him.

THE HOUSE GOD WILL BUILD FOR DAVID: THE DAVIDIC COVENANT (7:11B-17)

...The story of this chapter begins with David's intention to build a house (a temple) for God. God gently rebukes David for this heady plan. David has taken the wrong posture, of helping out God, rather than being the one who has constantly been helped by God. God did very well in taking care of His people when He associated Himself with the ark and the tabernacle. God did not ask for a temple, because He did not need one. God has been behind all of David's successes, and now He is promising even greater glory. And now God returns to the subject of a **“house.”** Would David build a house for God? No, he will not, though his son will. But God now announces to David that He is going to build a **“house”** for him. The details concerning this **“house”** are laid out in verses 12-17.

This prophecy, like many others, has a near and a distant fulfillment. On the near end is Solomon, David's second son by Bathsheba. It is he who will take David's place and reign over Israel after his death. We know that Nathan's words must refer to Solomon because they include the fact that David's **“son”** will sin, and that God will correct him. This statement cannot be made of the Messiah, the Son of David who will come to take away the sins of the world and to sit on the throne of His father, David. Unlike Saul, whose dynasty was taken away, David's **“house”** (his descendants) will be a dynasty, and will reign over Israel.

...David will have sons, and these sons will become **“sons”** of God in that they will rule over Israel. But there will come one very special **“son,”** and through Him all of the promises God has made here and elsewhere (pertaining to the Kingdom of God) will be fulfilled, either in His first coming, or in His return to the earth. David will have many sons, who will reign after him, and he and his sons will become **“sons”** of God. But the greatest promise of all is that a very special

“son” will come, who is a descendant of David, and His kingdom will be eternal. It is in this **“Son”** that all of David's hopes, all of Israel's hopes, all of our hopes are fulfilled. And this is the essence of the Davidic Covenant. God will give David sons who rule in his place, but God's promises will be fully and finally fulfilled in that special **“Son”** who is yet to come.

These words, spoken by Nathan, are the very word of God. They are given to Nathan in the vision, which necessitates a “revision” of the permission he has given David to build a house for God. God thus speaks to David through Nathan. These are the sure words of God.

DAVID'S RESPONSE (7:18-29)

...David has fallen into the very trap that God warned Israel to avoid. He has begun to take credit for what God has done. He begins to think of God as dependent upon him, rather than to worship God as a dependent creature. When David sees life from God's point of view, he sees life clearly, as it is. He sees life as Israel was supposed to view it. Now he is thinking clearly, and when he does, he recognizes that both he and Israel are great by the grace of God and nothing else. And for this David humbly praises God.

In verses 8-10, God reminds David of His blessings in the past. In verses 10-16 God promises David even greater blessings for himself and for the nation Israel in the future. In verses 22-24, David praises God for His grace in the past. Now, in verses 25-29, he will petition God to do as He has promised, and at the same time he worships and praises God for the things He will yet do. David picks up on the promises which God has just made, on the Davidic Covenant, which He has just made, and makes this the basis for his petitions. In short, David prays for what God has promised.

David is not just repeating God's promise back to Him; he is now putting this promise and its fulfillment in its proper perspective. David was wrong to think in terms of his successes. God reminds him that all of his apparent successes were really gracious gifts from His hand.... And so too the things which God promises David in the future are gracious gifts...for which He is to be praised. And so David now petitions God to fulfill these promises, not so that David's name will be exalted, but in order that God's name may be magnified (verse 26).

Through Nathan, God gently rebukes David for his arrogance in thinking he could build a suitable dwelling place for God, that he could better assess the need for one than God. This kind of rebuke tends to cause one to wish to hold his tongue indefinitely. Have you ever said something very stupid, with a whole lot of folks listening to you do so? If you have, then you know the urge never to speak again in public. David has that same feeling, but God's promise of an eternal house gives David the courage to ask God for the fulfillment of this very promise (verse 27).

Verses 28 and 29 continue the petition, reminding God of His promise, and asking Him to fulfill it. The reason for David's confidence is God, and not himself. The presumptuous self-confidence that characterizes David in the early verses of this chapter is gone, replaced by a humble confidence, based in the God who made it. God has promised this good thing to His servant (not, to the king). The promise is clear, and it is made by God. Any promise made by God is a sure thing, and thus David petitions God for its fulfillment. May the promise be fulfilled by the blessing of David's **“house,”** and may this blessing come from the God of all blessings. Finally, David prays that this blessing will be eternal. Such blessings can only be God's blessings.



What is one truth from this lesson that has impacted your life? Why?

The period of the kings of Israel and Judah once again teaches the importance of relationship to God demonstrated by obedience to His Word. There are three types of people highlighted in the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles:

- **Those who reject God.** All the kings of Israel and many of the kings of Judah simply refused to listen to God or to submit to His Word. *They did evil in the sight of the LORD.*
- **Those who try to appease God.** The Samaritans are a great example of people who want to appease God through ritual but do not want to give up their own gods and lifestyle. *They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods* (2 Kings 17:33a).
- **Those who seek to follow God.** David stands as one who sought to follow God with his whole heart. This does not mean that David did not fail. He certainly had a multitude of failures during his lifetime (the most notable being his adultery with Bathsheba and his attempted cover-up resulting in murder, 2 Samuel 11). However, David's heart was tender to God's Word, willing to repent of sin, and willing to submit to His lordship.

Is there an area of your life that you know is out of line with God's Word? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Are you willing to submit this area to God and seek to obey His Word? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If so, then seek the Lord's strength to obey His Word through prayer and through encouragement from other people who are also seeking to follow after God's heart and obey His Word.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- Who is someone that has had a great impact on your spiritual life? What characteristics of their life have made an impact on you?
- What characteristics do you see in Saul's life? What eventually led to his downfall?
- What is the difference between deep insecurity and true humility? How can you tell the difference in someone else's life? In your own life?
- What characteristics do you see in David's life? What made him an effective leader?
- What is the Davidic covenant? Why is it so important?
- What factors eventually led Israel and Judah to forsake the Lord? Where does drifting away from the Lord usually begin?
- What did you learn about God from this study? About humanity? About yourself?
- How important is a fellowship of believers in helping you to continue walking with the Lord?

WEEK 6 CELEBRATION & CONTEMPLATION

The Bible is more than a historical narrative. It tells the story of creation, the fall, the flood, the calling of Abraham, the exodus, the conquest, the kings, the captivity, and ultimately the redemption of the world through Jesus Christ. But in the midst of all the history, activity and events, the Bible also emphasizes times of reflection and rest.

The Bible teaches that life is more than activity. The command in the Psalms—*Be still and know that I am God* (Psalm 46:10)—teaches us that too much activity can be a sign of a life out of control or a life running away from God. We must stop and rest!

This is the concept of the Sabbath. The Jewish calendar had built in times of rest and reflection. The seventh day of the week (Sabbath, Exodus 20), the seventh month of the year (the Day of Atonement, Leviticus 16), the seventh year (the sabbatical year, Leviticus 25), and the seventh of seven years (Year of Jubilee, Leviticus 25) were all appointed times to stop working and running around and take time to focus on God.

The poetic writings of the Bible reflect this theme of rest. Some have estimated that as much as fifty percent of the Bible is written in poetic language. Biblical poetry is not like English poetry with an emphasis on rhythm, meter and rhyme. Biblical poetry has elements of rhythm and meter but, instead of the rhyming of words, its main characteristic is a rhyming of thoughts called *parallelism*.

*Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation.
Give heed to the voice of my cry, My King and my God, for to You I will pray.
Psalm 5:1-2*

Though poetic language fills the Bible, the primary books of poetry are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. In the threefold division of the Old Testament—the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (cf. Luke 24:44)—these books were considered part of the Writings. Together these books teach us four main things:

1. **Life is worship.** We are created to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. The Psalms particularly remind us that our lives are to be songs of praise to God.
2. **Life is short and difficult.** The Bible does not sugarcoat life. Ecclesiastes reminds us of the brevity of life and the emptiness of vain pursuits. Job and many of the Psalms remind us that life is filled with trials and tragedies that do not always make sense or have clear answers. We can only trust God.
3. **Life takes obedience and wisdom.** A good life begins with obedience—knowing right and wrong—but it also takes skill—discerning between good, better, and best. Proverbs teaches us how to live wisely in this crazy world.
4. **Life is a gift.** Life is to be enjoyed as a good gift from God. Song of Solomon reminds us of the beauty and passion of marriage. Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs teach us to rejoice in God and in life despite our circumstances.

Westminster Confession of Faith

21.1. The light of nature shows that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all; is good, and doeth good unto all; and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might.

21.2. Religious worship is to be given to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and to him alone: not to angels, saints, or any other creature: and since the Fall, not without a Mediator; nor in the mediation of any other but of Christ alone.

21.7. As it is of the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in his Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men in all ages, he hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto him...

SCRIPTURE EXPLORATION



At least 73 of the Psalms are attributed to David who was called “the sweet singer of Israel” (2 Sam. 23:1). Other psalms are attributed to the sons of Korah (music leaders during David’s day), Asaph, Moses, Solomon, Ethan, and Heman. The rest are anonymous.

I can see how it might be possible to look down upon the earth and be an atheist, but I cannot conceive how he could look into the heavens and say there is no God.

—Abraham Lincoln

The fear of the Lord (19:9)— Another description of God’s Word which emphasizes the fact that only those who fear God (i.e., show humble, reverent awe and respect of Him) will listen to His Word.

CELEBRATION

DAY 1

Psalm 19

The **Psalms** are the songs of worship of Israel. The word “psalm” means a “song sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument.” There are many types of Psalms. Some are hymns of praise extolling God for Who He is. Some are laments asking God to deliver them from difficulty, death, or enemies. Some are songs of thanksgiving thanking God for His deliverance from a trial. The fact that the largest book in the Bible is the book of Psalms teaches us of the importance of music. Music touches our emotions, teaches our minds, and transforms our souls. That is why you can often tell a lot about a person’s character by the music they enjoy.

Read Psalm 19. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Nature all around us is telling us that God exists. What things can you learn about God just from viewing the things He has made? _____

Nature tells us God exists but it is limited in telling us Who God is. After praising God for His creation, David next turns and praises God for His Word, the Bible (called poetically “the law,” “the testimony,” “the statutes,” etc.). Besides each verse below, write down the characteristic of God’s Word and its impact on us.

Verse	God’s Word	Characteristic	Impact
19:7	<i>Law</i>	<i>Perfect</i>	<i>Restoring the soul</i>
19:7	<i>Testimony</i>		
19:8	<i>Statutes</i>		
19:8	<i>Commandment</i>		
19:9	<i>Fear of the Lord</i>		
19:9-10	<i>Judgments</i>		

Which impact of God’s Word do you really need or desire in your life right now?

Write out Psalm 19:14 below. Let this be your own personal prayer to God.

CELEBRATION

DAY 2

Song of Songs 7-8

Song of Solomon (or Song of Songs) is a love poem. Some have seen it as an allegory of God’s love for His people but, at its most basic level, it is a poem exalting the beauty of marriage and sexual intimacy. God is not against sex. In fact, He designed it! And God designed it to be enjoyed within the lasting commitment of marriage. Unfortunately sin has corrupted the beautiful gift of sex and made it a “god” to many people. Removed from the security and intimacy of marriage, sex becomes an object of temporal lust, self-gratification, control, or, at its worst, abuse.

Read Song of Solomon 7-8. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

Song of Solomon is primarily written as a dialogue between Solomon and his wife. At times, the dialogue expands to include others in the conversation. How would you describe the relationship of Solomon and his wife based on chapter seven?

In 8:4, Solomon’s wife (called the Shulamite) speaks to the “daughters of Jerusalem,” a group of young girls who are apparently too young for marriage but may be tempted to pursue sex and love because of the “romance” often associated with it. What is her advice to these young girls (see also 2:7, 3:5)?

What is one thing you can learn about love from 8:6-7?

The Shulamite’s brothers speak poetically in 8:8-9 recounting what she was like as a younger sister and how they sought to protect her. If she was a wall (self-confident, not “hungry” for a man’s advances), they would reward her with trust and honor. If, however, she was a door (flirtatious, seeking a man’s advances), what would they do?

CONTEMPLATION

DAY 3

Psalms 90

Psalms 90 is the one psalm written by Moses; thus, it is perhaps the oldest psalm, written around ~1400 BC. It is called a psalm of wisdom—a song teaching us how to live wisely in this world.

Read Psalms 90. Ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

Moses teaches us that God is eternal, outside the limits of time. What are 1000 years like from God’s point of view (90:4)?

What words/phrases describe man’s life in 90:5-10?

Song of Solomon was written by Solomon, David’s son, who early in his life followed God and enjoyed the beauty of God’s design of love, marriage, and sex. Later in life Solomon drifted away from God and corrupted the gift of sex through multiple marriages and lust.

THINK ABOUT:
What can Solomon’s fall into sin teach us today?

Your neck is like an ivory tower (7:4)— Some of the poetry of Song of Solomon is not as clear to us because we are used to analogies of appearance. Hebrew analogy points more to quality. In other words, her neck was not really high (appearance) but conveyed strength and beauty (quality)

Like a watch in the night (90:4)—The Jewish people divided the night into three watches of four hours each:
6pm-10pm
10pm-2am
2am-6am
(cf. Judg. 7:19)

It is important to remember that **Proverbs** are not so much promises (this will definitely happen) as much as principles (this is what generally happens). Because of sin, our world does not always reward right living or condemn bad living. However the wise person navigates through this world with trust in God, peace in his heart, and hope in the life to come.

Proverbs 3:34 is a principle that is repeated throughout the Scripture—*God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble* (Job 22:29; Psalm 138:6; Matthew 23:12; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5).

Humility is the root, mother, nurse, foundation, and bond of all virtue.
—Chrysostom

THINK ABOUT: *What is humility? Why do you think it is so important?*

Because life is short, what does Moses pray/ask God to do in the following verses?

90:12 _____
 90:13 _____
 90:14 _____
 90:15 _____
 90:16 _____
 90:17 _____

CONTEMPLATION

DAY 4

Proverbs 3-4

Proverbs is a collection of sayings and thoughts that are intended to teach us how to live wisely in this often crazy world. Solomon wrote most of the book as a method of instruction primarily for his children. From a biblical standpoint, the wise person is the one who submits his life to God, recognizes that life runs according to God's principles, and aligns his life according to these principles. This is the life of success—not necessarily worldly success (riches, fame, etc.) but godly success, bringing peace and joy to this life and reward in the life to come.

Read Proverbs 3-4. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

Proverbs 3:5-8 summarize the life of wisdom. Write out these four verses below.

What stands out to you in these four verses? _____

Proverbs 4:23-27 also gives basic advice on living a life of wisdom. How would you summarize the message of these verses? _____

What other proverb or thought impacts your heart after reading Proverbs 3-4? Why?

CONTEMPLATION**DAY 5****Ecclesiastes 1-2**

Though Solomon was the wisest man to ever live and wrote the greatest words of wisdom in the Proverbs, he unfortunately did not always follow his own advice. As king, Solomon had the power and resources to enjoy all that this world can afford. The temptation was great and soon he embarked on the ultimate hedonistic pursuit, living the “Hollywood” lifestyle to the most extreme degree. **Ecclesiastes** is the book written by Solomon at the end of this pursuit. It is a powerful message to all, specifically those tempted with the treasure, leisure, and pleasure of this world.

Read Ecclesiastes 1-2. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

Solomon enjoyed or pursued everything this life offers in order to try to find lasting satisfaction. Beside each verse(s) below write down something that Solomon tried.

2:1-2 _____

2:3 _____

2:4-7 _____

2:8-9 _____

2:10 _____

Look at the following verses. What conclusions did Solomon reach after his full-throttled pursuit of pleasure? What thoughts did he think? What emotions did he feel?

2:17 _____

2:18-19 _____

2:20-21 _____

2:22-23 _____

Finally, after returning to his senses, Solomon realized some simple facts about life. These thoughts are summarized in 2:24-26. Solomon learned that ultimate satisfaction cannot be found in this world. It must come from Someone outside of this world—God.

What simple things does God enable us to do to enjoy this life (2:24-25; also 3:12-13)?

What does God give to the person who is good in His sight (2:26)? _____

What does God give to the person who refuses to listen to Him but instead pursues sin as the way to find satisfaction (2:26)? _____

Vanity (1:2)—

This word, used many times in Ecclesiastes, is from the Hebrew word, *hebel*. *Hebel* refers to the futility of life, to the simple, undeniable fact that nothing lasts in this world.

Grasping for the wind (1:14)—

A graphic picture of what man tries to do when he pursues the temporary things of this world, ignoring his own mortality.

Eat and drink (2:24)—

Solomon is certainly not advocating a hedonistic lifestyle (which he already tried to no avail). Rather he is advocating the simple enjoyment of God's good gifts in this world.

THINK ABOUT:
What are some modern illustrations of people who have pursued wealth and pleasure in this world and come up empty?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Read the following excerpt from Pastor Chuck Swindoll's book, *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), pages 14-21.

Country-western singer Glen Campbell cut a hit record several years ago entitled "Gentle on My Mind." Like all ballads it tells a story. This one is about a man who longs to be free. He wants a life that's uncluttered with irritating things like binding contracts and lifelong commitments. He's satisfied to stop off for a night or two, but he doesn't want anyone to hassle him with talk of a permanent relationship. As in another popular song, he's "gotta be free"; it's enough for him just knowing that the "door is always open" and the "path is free to walk." That's sufficient.

...He mentions again and again "the back roads of my memory" that keep things "gentle on my mind." Looking back over his shoulder with a superficial shrug, the playboy-cowboy refuses all attempts others make to tie him down. Not even a wife and a houseful of kids—*his* kids—can anchor him down...that wouldn't be "gentle." He's on a search for another path, another pleasure . . . another back road that will somehow satisfy. You get the distinct impression he will never find what he's looking for.

A MAN AND HIS PERSPECTIVE

There once lived a man who had the time, the money, and the energy to take such a journey. Not just a mind trip, but in actuality. ...Because he was "free to walk" and because no one was able to restrain him, he held nothing back. Thankfully, he kept an accurate journal of his journey, which is available for all to read.

The man's name was Solomon. The journal he kept is a book in the Bible named Ecclesiastes. Sounds like a strange name for the book, doesn't it? It means "preacher," or "one who addresses an assembly." If you prefer, "speaker of the house"—and the house is symbolic of life itself. In the book, Solomon speaks to all of us about all of life.

I should tell you ahead of time that the journey this man took, while mind-boggling, left him deflated, depressed, and disillusioned. The best word is empty . . . his favorite and most often repeated description of how he felt. In fact, Solomon's motto appears on the frontispiece of his journal: *Vanity of vanities...Vanity of vanities! All is vanity* (1:2).

Being interpreted in today's terms, it is "a wisp of a vapor . . . a puff of wind . . . a hollow, empty ring . . . zero . . . ZILCH!" That is the way Solomon described how he felt before he took his journey, while he endured his journey, and after the journey was over. Nothing satisfied. There was nothing that he saw, discovered, attempted, produced, initiated, or concluded as a result of his lengthy search that resulted in lasting significance or personal satisfaction.

But wait. Before we allow ourselves to accept his desperate, sweeping admission, we must ask why. Why was it such a pointless, empty treadmill? Why wouldn't the man who was king, who had such an endless supply of financial resources, find something—*anything*—that would have purpose?

This is a good time to clarify Solomon's perspective, especially since it's the same perspective most people operate from today. To quote from his own testimony, it is an "under-the-sun" perspective. Time after time, Solomon mentions his horizontal, strictly human viewpoint. In virtually every major section of his journal he uses the words "under the sun" and "under heaven." ...Because he seldom looks "above the sun" to find reassurance, life seems drab and depressing, hopelessly meaningless. In spite of the extent to which he went to find happiness, because he left God out of the picture, nothing satisfied. It never will. Satisfaction in life under the sun will never occur until there is a meaningful connection with the living Lord above the sun. Nevertheless, we, like Solomon, continue to try to find meaning in life, only to wind up on a dead-end road called Emptiness.

Talk about a relevant book! Ecclesiastes has today's world woven through the fabric of every page. Whether or not we are willing to admit it, deep within most of us there is this restless, irresponsible, adventuresome itch. Deadlines and responsibility grate at us. We find ourselves ready to run—to escape into the back roads of our memories.... "Surely, there I will find what it takes to fill the void." Before we are able to crank up the car, Solomon's advice brings us back to reality: "Don't bother, it's a pipe dream, empty as a puff of smoke, lacking in substance. It may look like it's worth the effort, but don't bother . . . life without God under the sun is despair personified."

Frankly, I am pleased that we have this ancient book available today to set the record straight. All around us are people who are buying into this empty, horizontal, who-needs-God perspective. Their world is strictly visible, their whole frame of reference is humanistic. We see it lived out in soap operas every afternoon and on prime time every night. We hear it in political speeches. We learn it in the halls of academia, on the streets of any city.

GOING ALONG WITH THE FLOW

Allow me a few minutes to set the stage by offering a bird's-eye view of Solomon's journal. A quick survey will reveal how hard the man tried to find meaning and satisfaction in life.

In the first half of his journal, the monarch recorded much of what he encountered during his mid-life crisis. He really went for it! With unrestrained determination he set out on a pursuit to find a purpose in existence. With painful honesty he recorded how boring and how monotonous his search became. Right out of the chute, he said, "There's no advantage ... there will be no remembrance" [1:11].

Yet, in spite of this up-front admission, he was off on a search...determined to find something under the sun that would satisfy. What did he try? Hedonism—pleasure at all cost—was his first stop off. Laughter, comedy routines, booze, sex, entertainment, ego building projects, art collections, fun trips, serious work, singing troupes, and a half dozen other attempts at happiness blew up in his face. Everything he tried, everywhere he turned . . . zero.

Then I thought about all that I had done and how hard I had worked doing it, and I realized that it didn't mean a thing. It was like chasing the wind—of no use at all.

So life came to mean nothing to me, because everything in it had brought me nothing but trouble. I had all been useless; I had been chasing the wind. Nothing that I had worked for and earned meant a thing to me, because I knew that I would have to leave it to my successor (2:11, 17-18, TEV, *Today's English Version*).

Next, he tried a couple of philosophical trips, fatalism and humanism. Those mind trips looked and sounded impressive on the surface, but, in the end, once again, nothingness. In fact, he wound up muttering heresy!

I decided that God is testing us, to show us that we are no better than animals. After all, the same fate awaits man and animal alike. One dies just like the other. They are the same kind of creature. A human being is no better off than an animal, because life has no meaning for either. They are both going to the same place—the dust. They both came from it; they will both go back to it. How can anyone be sure that a man’s spirit goes upward while an animal’s spirit goes down into the ground? (3:18—21, TEV).

It shouldn’t surprise us to read that kind of thinking from the pen of a man whose perspective was one hundred percent horizontal. Humanistic philosophy never has led mankind anywhere but into further confusion.

Since none of that worked, maybe the answer rested in social action, reaching out to those who hurt. Or, on the other hand, since the pathetic and the poor are always with us, perhaps it’s wealth that will satisfy. But, again, neither brought him any lasting pleasure.

In addition, I have also noticed that in this world you find wickedness where justice and right ought to be....If you love money, you will never be satisfied; if you long to be rich, you will never get all you want. It is useless. The richer you are, the more mouths you have to feed. All you gain is the knowledge that you are rich. . . . It isn’t right! We go just as we came. We labor, trying to catch the wind, and what do we get? (3:16; 5:10-11, 16, TEV).

There it is again—toiling for the wind! And he repeats it in the following chapter.

A man may have a hundred children and live a long time, but no matter how long he lives, if he does not get his share of happiness and does not receive a decent burial, then I say that a baby born dead is better off. It does that baby no good to be born; it disappears into darkness, where it is forgotten. It never sees the light of day or knows what life is like, but at least it has found rest—more so than the man who never enjoys life, though he may live two thousand years. After all, both of them are going to the same place.

A man does all his work just to get something to eat, but he never has enough. . . . How can anyone know what is best for a man in this short, useless life of his—a life that passes like a shadow? How can anyone know what will happen in the world after he dies? (6:3-7, 12, TEV).

What an apt description of many who are grinding out an existence today. Did you catch that? “The few years of a futile life!” There aren’t enough uppers or downers to keep life right side up. The desperate stories of so many film-star celebrities, entertainers, professional athletes, and top o’ the world entrepreneurs tell their own tales of woe. . . . Nothing ultimately brings satisfaction if it is limited to “life under the sun.”

When will we ever learn? . . . Horizontal happiness won’t last.

That’s the whole point of Solomon’s journal—and that’s what makes his words so relevant. Change the names, the geography, the year, the culture, and you’ve got today’s scene portrayed in living color. It only intensifies the further you go into his journal. Read on and you can take your choice—the mid-section of his journal is a veritable smorgasbord of dissatisfaction, discouragement, and despair. Not until we arrive at the end of his pursuit does Solomon finally turn the corner.

COMING TO A WISE CONCLUSION

The brakes on the sports car suddenly screech to a halt. The fast-lane, fast-living escape artist gets out, slams the door, and looks the reader right in the eye. In a thundering voice, like a mixture of Orson Wells and John Wayne, he shouts, “Now you listen to me!” Then, as he thinks through his journey and sums up his thoughts, he continues.

“Do you want meaning? Are you looking for purpose? An investment that will yield lasting dividends? Something to fill the void . . . something that will give real satisfaction? Then wake up and wise up! I can tell you before you go one step further—in order for your horizontal life to make up its mind, it is absolutely essential that you get your vertical life in place. Not until then will you really begin to enjoy this thing called living.”

He urges the reader not to waste a lot of time on a futile search (as he had done) . . . but rather, while in the prime of life, to secure a relationship with the living Lord once and for all. Here is his advice.

...After all this, there is only one thing to say: Have reverence for God, and obey his commands, because this is all that man was created for. God is going to judge everything we do, whether good or bad, even things done in secret (12:13-14, TEV).

His journal ends with such wise counsel. If I had my wish, it would be that every person on a quest for happiness would only heed his advice! But they won't. Many will still take that painful path that's “free to walk,” where an irresponsible don't-fence-me-in philosophy stays “gentle on my mind.” They will still have to learn for themselves that those blue highways may bring adventure and new vistas of experience . . . but no lasting hope, no permanent satisfaction. Escaping reality always leaves us shortchanged. Always.

...Allow me to state in three simple comments how directly his observations and experiences, though ancient, tie in with our journey today.

1. The sensual lure of something better tomorrow robs us of the joys offered today.
2. The personal temptation to escape is always stronger than the realization of its consequences.
3. The final destination, if God is absent from the scene, *will not satisfy*.

The good life—the one that truly satisfies—exists only when we stop wanting a better one. It is the condition of savoring what *is* rather than longing for what *might be*. The itch for things, the lust for more—so brilliantly injected by those who peddle them—is a virus draining our souls of happy contentment. Have you noticed? A man never earns enough. A woman is never beautiful enough. Clothes are never fashionable enough. Cars are never nice enough. Gadgets are never modern enough. Houses are never furnished enough. Food is never fancy enough. Relationships are never romantic enough. Life is never full enough.

Satisfaction comes when we step off the escalator of desire and say, “This is enough. What I have will do. What I make of it is up to me and my vital union with the living Lord.”

That, in essence, is the message Solomon announces in his journal.... Honestly now, do you believe it?

CHANGED HEARTS



What is one truth from this lesson that has impacted your life? Why?

This lesson began with the words of Psalm 46:10: ***Be still and know that I am God.***

Stop for a second. Put your responsibilities, worries, fears out of your mind. Block out the noise of this world. Meditate on the following questions:

Who is God? Do you know Him? Do you know His pure holiness? Do you know His mighty power? Do you know His great love?

Who are you? What are your fears? What are your regrets? What are your delights? What do you really want in life?

Do you realize the shortness of life? Do you recognize that your life is accountable to God? Are you willing to trust Him, to experience His forgiveness, to avoid sin, and to follow Him?

David prayed in Psalm 139:23-24: ***Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.***

Take time to write out a prayer to God that reflects where you are and where you want to be.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

- Describe a time in your life when you were particularly close to God.
- What things hinder you from communing with God and finding rest in Him?
- What did you learn about God from this study? About love? About life? About yourself?
- Describe the “life of wisdom.” What does this look like on a day to day basis?
- How has life frustrated you? What were you expecting? Is this a valid expectation?
- What change can you make in your life right now to find more rest and peace in God alone?

WEEK 7 CONSTRUCTION & COMFORT



Creation



Challenge



Curse



Corruption



Covenant



Conduct



Conquest



Cycles



Crown



Captivity



Celebration



Contemplation

So far the story of the Bible has not been greatly encouraging. Every positive act seems to be followed by a more negative one. God creates...Satan challenges and mankind falls into sin. God makes a covenant...His people grumble and disobey. God gives a victory to one generation...the next generations fall deeper and deeper into sin. God sets His crown and favor on David...years later the nation is in disarray and carried off into captivity in Babylon. Every ember of God's grace seems to be snuffed out by the hardness of man's heart.

But God's promise remains steadfast and thus hope shines through the darkness...

Abrahamic Covenant. God has promised Abraham a land, a seed, and a blessing. The land is given to Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 15:18-21). It is their land even when they do not possess it. The seed of Abraham is to be multiplied more than the stars in the sky and the sand on the shore (Genesis 22:17) and, in one of Abraham's descendents, the whole earth will be blessed (Genesis 22:18). God will not renege on this promise even when His people rebel against Him (Judges 2:1).

Davidic Covenant. God has promised David that his house, his kingdom, and his throne will be established forever (2 Samuel 7:16). A son of David will rule and his kingdom will have no end. This promise is absolutely sure. God says, *My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: his seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me; it shall be established forever...* (Psalm 89:34-37a).

Mosaic Covenant. God also promised that perfect obedience to His commands brings blessing (Exodus 19:5-6). However, mankind consistently shows that he is unable to obey God's law. He needs God's mercy in a blood sacrifice to cover his sin. He needs God's grace in an unconditional covenant to bring blessing. He needs God's power in the gift of His Spirit to change man's heart. In effect, he needs a new covenant...

New Covenant (Jeremiah 31)

31:31 "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

31:32 "It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.

31:33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people."

31:34 "No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD.

SCRIPTURE EXPLORATION



Cyrus (1:1)—God predicted the reign of Cyrus almost 200 years before he was even born (Isaiah 44-45).

Sheshbazzar (1:8)—The Babylonian name of Zerubbabel who led the first return of the people to the land of Israel.

Nehemiah (2:2)—This is not the Nehemiah who helped rebuild the walls of Jerusalem close to 90 years later.

Ezra, who wrote this book, is a priest who will return to the land of Israel around 75 years later and will help bring spiritual revival to the people (Ezra 7-10).

Nehemiah is the king's cupbearer, the one appointed to test the king's food and drink first to make sure it is not poisoned.

CONSTRUCTION

DAY 1

Ezra 1-3

The southern kingdom of Judah was totally destroyed and the majority of the population went into captivity in Babylon in 586 BC. Hope seemed lost. The glorious temple of Solomon was a pile of ashes. The walls of the city were gone. But God promised to restore His people to the land after He had judged them for their disobedience. In 539 BC, Persia conquered Babylon. A year later, the king of Persia, Cyrus, was moved by God to allow the peoples in captivity to return to their native lands. With the Jews in particular, Cyrus was motivated to go a step further. He encouraged them not only to return to their land but also to rebuild the temple of God. Though Cyrus was a pagan king of a pagan nation, God used him for His purposes, perhaps even changing his heart into a believer.

Read Ezra 1-3. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

To learn more about God's use of Cyrus, read Isaiah 45:1-7. What indications do you see that Cyrus became a true believer in the God of Israel? _____

Who led Judah's return to the land (2:2)? _____

Approximately how many people returned (2:64-67)? _____

What is the first thing the people do after they resettle in the land (3:1-6)? _____

What was the people's reaction when the foundation of the temple was finally laid?

Write down the words that they sing to God (3:11): _____

CONSTRUCTION

DAY 2

Nehemiah 1-2

It took over twenty years for the temple to be rebuilt with the work finishing around 516 BC. Though the temple was rebuilt and a number of people were in the land, things were far from normal. The city had no walls and thus no protection from outside enemies. There were many Jews still in Babylon who chose to remain in the comforts of that kingdom rather than venture out into unprotected land. In 445 BC, God stirred the heart of Nehemiah to complete the work.

Read Nehemiah 1-2. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

What is the condition of the people and the city of Jerusalem during this time (1:3)?

What is Nehemiah's response to this news (1:4)?

What does Nehemiah's response tell you about him?

Nehemiah's prayer is one of the great prayers of the Bible. It is motivated by a heart broken before God and it is filled with sincerity and truth. What are three observations that you can make about Nehemiah's prayer? What can you learn from his prayer?

1.

2.

3.

Four months after Nehemiah's prayer in chapter one, God began to answer. What prompts the king to address Nehemiah?

What did Nehemiah do when the king asked him what his request would be (2:4)?

Does the king grant his request? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Partially, after scolding him.

Do the people respond to his plan to rebuild the walls? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Through God's strength and Nehemiah's leadership, the people rebuild the walls of Jerusalem in a remarkable 52 days. Nehemiah leads the nation in a time of repentance and revival. But again, the revival will not last long and the people will once again drift away into sin. However, the hope of a Redeemer still looms on the horizon.

COMFORT

DAY 3

Isaiah 52-53

Isaiah is one of the major prophets of the Old Testament. The man Isaiah lived in the southern kingdom of Judah and prophesied from about 740-680 BC. During this time, Assyria took the northern kingdom of Israel into captivity (722 BC) and it looked like the southern kingdom would fall too. However the king of Judah, Hezekiah, prayed for God's deliverance and God answered, speaking of Assyria's defeat through the prophet Isaiah (cf. 37:1-38). **Isaiah** is the largest of the prophetic books and contains numerous references to the coming Messiah. In fact, **Isaiah** is the most quoted and alluded to Old Testament book in the New Testament.

Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

THINK ABOUT:

Is there anything that breaks your heart today? What is the last thing that you wept or mourned over?

What we cry and mourn over reveals the true desire of our hearts.

Chislev (1:1)

equals our month of December.

Nisan (2:1)

equals our month of April.

Thus Nehemiah prayed for four months without any apparent answer to his prayer.

The man Isaiah prophesied during the reigns of at least five kings of Judah—Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Manasseh. Manasseh was the worst of the kings of Judah and is said to have killed Isaiah by putting him in a hollow log and sawing him in half (Hebrews 11:37).

The Bible uses many terms to describe sin.

The word “**sin**” itself means a falling short of the mark, failing to meet God’s standard of righteousness.

Transgression refers to a stepping over the boundaries set by God.

Iniquity points to the guilt that we incur when we break God’s commands.

THINK ABOUT:
What do you know about sheep? Why do you think the Bible often compares us to sheep?

Jeremiah was known as the “weeping prophet” because he seems to have had a very sensitive heart and a real struggle understanding God’s plan at times.

A woman shall encompass a man (31:22)—There are various interpretations to this verse but it is possible that it points to the virgin birth in which a woman without sexual relations would give birth to a son (man).

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is considered by many to be greatest prophecy concerning the coming Messiah. The prophecy is divided into five sections of three verses each. Beside each section below, summarize what it says about the coming Messiah:

52:13-15 _____

53:1-3 _____

53:4-6 _____

53:7-9 _____

53:10-12 _____

Write out Isaiah 53:6. _____

Personalize Isaiah 53:6. What does it teach you about yourself? About Messiah?

Read Acts 8:26-35. What verses is the eunuch reading? _____

Who does Philip say fulfills these verses in Isaiah? _____

COMFORT

DAY 4

Jeremiah 31

Jeremiah is one of the major prophets. Jeremiah prophesied to the southern kingdom of Judah from 627-585 BC. During his ministry, the southern kingdom declined more and more into sin until finally Babylon, under Nebuchadnezzar, came in and destroyed the temple and the city and took the people into captivity. Jeremiah witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and wept. **Lamentations** records his lament over the ruins of the city he loved. Jeremiah forewarned the people of the coming destruction by Babylon. He also comforted them with God’s promise of a future restoration of the nation. Jeremiah 31 is one of these messages of hope.

Read Jeremiah 31. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart.

In a vision to Jeremiah, God reveals many promises to Israel—both to the northern kingdom of Israel (often referred to as Ephraim) and the southern kingdom of Judah. What promises does God make to Israel in the following verses?

31:4-5 _____

31:8-10 _____

31:12-14 _____

Why does God make these promises? How does He feel about Israel (31:3, 20)?

Jeremiah 31:31-37 is God's promise of a New Covenant. What are the four primary promises in this new covenant (31:33-34)? *Note: there are two promises in each verse.*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

How is this covenant different from the Mosaic Covenant? _____

Will God cast off the nation of Israel? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Only if the sun, moon, and stars cease to operate, the heavens are measured, and the heart of the earth explored.

The prophet Ezekiel also foretold of a future restoration of Israel and God's promise of a new heart to His people. Look up Ezekiel 36:26-27 and write out these verses below.

What really stands out to you in this promise from God? _____

COMFORT

DAY 5

Isaiah 11-12

The prophet Isaiah gives more details of the coming Messiah and the future restoration not only of Israel but also of the whole earth.

Read Isaiah 11-12. Ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

What does each verse below teach you about the coming Messiah?

- 11:1, 10 _____
- 11:2 _____
- 11:3 _____
- 11:4-5 _____

In what ways will the earth be different when Messiah finally reigns as King (11:6-9)?

Matthew 26:27-28 describes Jesus at the Last Supper: "Then He took the cup and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is the blood of the **new covenant**, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.'"

What does this tell you about the new covenant?

THINK ABOUT: How would describe the difference between a heart of stone and a heart of flesh?

What gives a person a heart of stone?

Jesse (11:1) refers to King David's father.

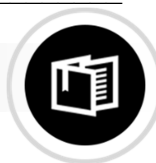
The fullness of the Spirit of God is seen in the sevenfold description of the Spirit being of the Lord, of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and might, and of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.

What response we will have when Messiah reigns and the earth is restored to peace (12:1-6)?

CESSATION

The last prophet in the Old Testament is Malachi who prophesied around 400 BC. After his prophecy, there is no recorded word from God until the time of Jesus Christ (~4 BC). God still protected His people during this time, often in miraculous ways, but the age of the prophets ended and the people awaited the coming of the Messiah. Read **Malachi 4:5-6** to see the last recorded OT prophecy. What does it promise? _____

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Read the following excerpt from Henrietta Mear's book, *What the Bible Is All About* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1966), pages 207-214.

THE poetical books belong to the golden age of the nation. The prophetic books belong to the dark ages of God's chosen people.

The prophets were the men whom God raised up during the dark days of Israel's history. They were the evangelists of the day, the religious patriots of the hour. Read what God says about them in 2 Kings 17:13:

Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants and prophets.

We read everywhere in the New Testament that God spoke through the prophets. The period of the prophets in Israel covered 500 years from the tenth to the fifth century B.C. Then the voices of the prophets were silenced until John the Baptist. These prophets spoke fearlessly to kings and people alike of their sins and failures.

The office of prophet was instituted in Samuel's time. When the kingdom was divided, and Judah and Israel were established as separate monarchies, the great prophets appeared. There were four major and twelve minor prophets.

There are seventeen prophetic books in the Old Testament (including Lamentations). They are subdivided into major and minor prophets. This difference is made not because of their importance but because of their length.

The captivities of Israel (the northern kingdom) and of Judah (the southern kingdom) are largely the theme of the Old Testament prophets. The record of these is found in 2 Kings 17:1-23; 24:11-25:21. These are called the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Some of the prophets served before the exile, some during and some afterwards. These are called pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic prophets.

The prophets before the exile (or pre-exilic) in order of their writings were: Obadiah, Joel, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah.

The prophets to Israel during this period were Jonah, Amos, and Hosea. The prophets to Judah were Obadiah, Joel, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah.

The prophets during the exile (or captivity in Babylon) were Ezekiel and Daniel. They prophesied to all the Israelites. Jeremiah extended for a while into this period. Those who prophesied after the exile were Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Prophets according to special messages [to nations]:

- Three to Israel—Amos, Hosea, Ezekiel.
- Two to Ninevah—Jonah, Nahum.
- One to Babylon—Daniel.
- One to Edom—Obadiah.
- Nine to Judah—Joel, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

THE PROPHETS—THEIR MESSAGE

The prophet's chief duty was to deal with the moral and religious life of his own people during his day. The prophet was never sent while the nation was walking in obedience to God. All of the writings are rebukes because of the bad condition that existed at that very time. There was nothing general about the prophet's denunciations.

The prophet was always an Israelite. He not only spoke of judgment that would come to pass to the people because of their sin but he was also a foreteller of future events. The events of which he spoke mainly concerned the nation of Israel. Other peoples were mentioned only as they came in contact with Israel.

Let us note some of the prophecies of the future which are recounted....

1. The dispersion and captivity of God's chosen people: Everywhere the prophet tells that the Jews are to be scattered among the nations of the world.
2. The coming of the Messiah: The Jew is still looking for his Messiah.
3. The restoration of the chosen people to their own land under the coming Messiah, David's greater Son: The Jews are returning from the four corners of the earth to dwell in their own promised land. Every Jew has a longing in his heart to be a part of a great nation. Now Israel is a nation.
4. The reign of the Messiah over the whole earth: Even though we see the final collapse of God's people—at first Israel, then Judah being led into captivity—nevertheless God revealed that the ending of His nation did not end His plans. There is yet to be a glorious future when the Prince of Peace shall reign over His people and sway His scepter *from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth* (Psalm 72:8).

When you read the Gospels, you find this phrase constantly, *that it might be fulfilled*. We find in examining these passages that God fulfills prophecy literally. ...Remember, the Church is not in the prophets at all. This is the "mystery" that God kept until He wished it to be revealed (Ephesians 3:3,11,12).

THE PROPHETS—THEIR CHARACTER

...The prophets were fearless men. They denounced the sins of their day. They called men away from idols back to God. It is true that the prophets were concerned about the moral and political corruption of the nation but the fact that the people were worshipping idols was their greatest concern. The nation had a wrong attitude toward God. Christ gave us a succinct statement of what our attitude should be: *Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart* (Luke 10:27). God knows that what a man's attitude is toward God will affect his whole moral life. Creed always determines conduct. This is true not only of individuals but of nations. The adage "it make no difference what a man believes" is completely refuted in the prophets.

The prophets exposed the cold formalism of their religion. They constantly reminded the people that Jehovah was the only true God. They pointed men to the law. They were statesmen of the highest order. They were prophets in that they came to tell forth what God said. They were not only forth-tellers but also fore-tellers.

So important is prophecy in God's Word that it occupies about one third of the whole Bible. Prophecy is God's revelation of His plans to His children.

...The Spirit of God spoke by the prophets. *As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets which have been since the world began* (Luke 1:70). ...The prophecies concerning Christ Himself are so definite that it gives great assurance to us that the Bible is the Word of God.

UNDERSTANDING ISAIAH

God puts a telescope before the eyes of the prophets and lets them look far into the future. Especially do we find this spirit of expectation in Isaiah. We hear the prophet cry, "He is coming!" ...The keynote of Isaiah is *salvation*. Isaiah's name means "Jehovah saves."

Isaiah was a man who certainly spoke boldly to his own time, but as a prophet he spoke of the future as well; hence he is the prophet for all times. We sit at his feet today, and following his index finger as it points into the future, we hear him say, "Lo, your King!"

This great statesman was the prophet of the southern kingdom of Judah. He lived at the time that the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed by Assyria. Isaiah was the one whose voice saved the kingdom of Judah during these trying hours.

It is interesting to note that this is also the time of Romulus and Remus and the founding of Rome. The traditional date of the building of Rome is 753 BC, just a few years after the birth of the prophet Isaiah. About this time Sparta and Athens in Greece were founded.

...Isaiah told of the judgment that must fall on Judah because she would not fulfill her mission in the world. But through the whole book we find the ultimate triumph of God's plan through His appointed Servant, the Lord Jesus Christ, who would bring in final victory through suffering and death (Isaiah 53).

This book of Isaiah is written with two distinct emphases. Because of this some Bible scholars believe that there was more than one author. This need not be the case. It is the work of one man with two messages. In the first of the book, Isaiah pictured Israel. In the last of the book, the prophet beheld Jesus bearing our load of sin, and he told the story; then he beheld Christ exalted and glorified and shouted of his vision from the housetop. It is the same prophet all the time but suiting his language to the theme at hand.

...The divisions of Isaiah are an interesting coincidence. Isaiah is a miniature Bible in structure. This book has sixty-six chapters, just as the Bible has sixty-six books. There are two great divisions just as there are in the Bible, with thirty-nine chapters in the first (like the Old Testament) and twenty-seven chapters in the second (like the New Testament).

The Old Testament opens with God's case against man because of his sin. Isaiah opens the same way (Isaiah 1:18). The first section closes with the prophecy of the coming King of Righteousness and the redemption of Israel (chaps. 34-35), just as the prophets close the Old Testament with the prediction of His coming kingdom. The second part of Isaiah (chap. 40) opens with the *voice of him that crieth in the wilderness* (John the Baptist), and is concerned with the person and work of Jesus Christ. The New Testament opens in exact accord with this. John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, is announced (John 1:6,23). Isaiah ends with the vision of the new heavens and new earth.... The New Testament closes with this same view in Revelation. This striking similarity between Isaiah and the whole Bible is unforgettable when once mastered.

...Isaiah is like a jewel case; and the fifty-third chapter is the jewel. This has a central position in the group of the chapters to which it belongs. As you see, it is located in the second division of the book or the last twenty-seven chapters. In the very middle of this precious group of twenty-seven chapters lies chapter 53. This is the chapter that tells of the Savior who *hath borne our griefs [sins], and carried our sorrows*. Chapter 53 is a wonderful one to store in your memory. Each verse is a nugget of golden truth...that pictures Christ, our suffering Redeemer.

TWO COMINGS OF CHRIST

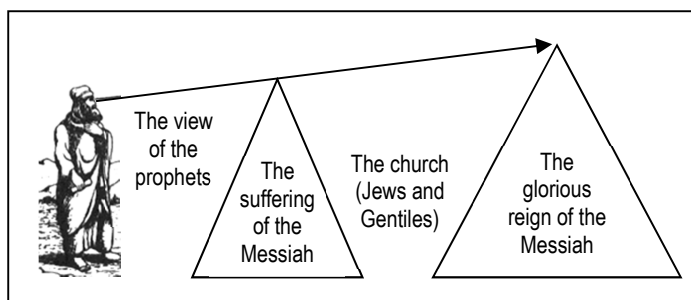
We see Christ in this book and hear the prophet crying, "He is coming!" and "He is coming again!" He is coming as Savior, pictured in chapter 53, in humiliation as our sin-bearer. He is coming again in power and great glory, pictured in chapter 34.

As we look through the telescope we see two mountain peaks with a valley between. One is called Calvary; on its hilltop is a cross. But as we look farther we see another peak. It is radiant with the light of a crown! This hill is Olivet. The eye of the ancient seer went farther than the sufferings of Calvary; his eye caught the kingdom and the glory that should follow!

Isaiah speaks of Christ's death when he says, *Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool* (1:18). Again, *He is despised and rejected of men* (53:3). This speaks of the first time when *He came unto his own, and his own received him not*. When He will come again we shall hear, *Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee* (60:1). Then he tells us of His coming kingdom. *And it shall come to pass in the last days...* (2:2-5).

The life of Christ is portrayed in Isaiah:

- Birth—7:14; 9:6
- Family—11:1
- Anointing—11:2
- Character—11:3-4
- Simplicity of life—7:15
- Gentleness—42:1-4
- Death—Chap. 53
- Resurrection—25:8
- Glorious reign—11:3-16; 32.



CHANGED HEARTS



What is one truth from this lesson that has impacted your life? Why?

The Old Testament prophets confronted sin and pointed people to the righteousness of God. Their message often stung and forced people to evaluate their hearts and their lifestyles. Read the following messages from the prophets and answer the questions next to each one.

“Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror,” declares the LORD. “My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” (Jeremiah 2:12-13)

In what area(s) of your life are you tempted to forsake God, the spring of living water, and to try to find satisfaction your own way?

“With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:6-8)

God isn’t looking for you to do a bunch of religious acts to impress Him or try to earn His approval. He wants your heart.

Are you acting justly, seeking to treat others with honesty, fairness, and respect?

Are you loving mercy, desiring the best for others even if it means sacrifice on your part?

Are you walking humbly, seeing every breath you take and everything you have as a gift of God’s grace and living in humble gratitude?

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up? Why?
- Why do you think we are so enamored by the future (e.g., weather forecasts, sports predictions, economic forecasts, etc.)? What are we looking for?
- What do learn from Nehemiah’s prayer in Nehemiah 1?
- What burdens you right now? What is on your heart?
- What amazes you about the prophecy in Isaiah 52-53?
- Why do we need a New Covenant?
- What encourages you about the prophecy in Isaiah 11-12?
- What did you learn in this study about God? About humanity? About yourself?

WEEK 8 CHRIST & CROSS

Malachi was the last prophetic voice to speak to the nation of Israel (~400 BC). His prophecy ended with several promises. *For behold, the day is coming...*

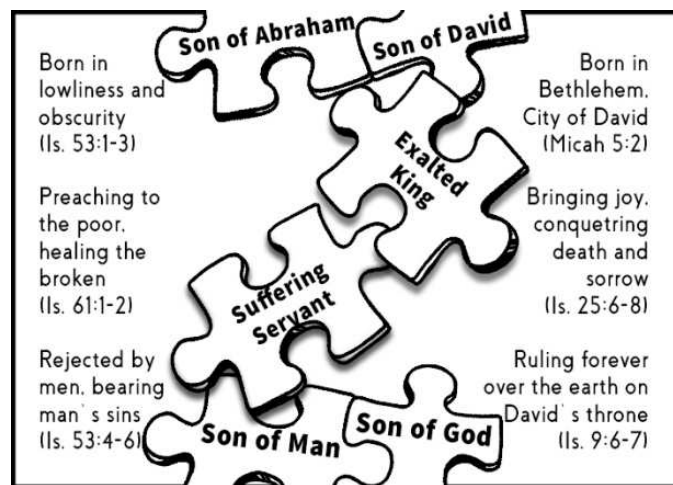
- When *all the proud* and *all who do wickedly* will be destroyed (Malachi 4:1).
- When the *Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings* (4:2).
- When *those who fear the Lord* will triumph over their enemies (4:2-3).
- When God will send Elijah to turn people back to Himself (4:5-6).

Four hundred years later, the Roman Empire ruled the known world, bringing together a variety of peoples and nations under the *Pax Romana* (Roman peace). Travel was at an all-time high with the building of Romans roads and safe sea routes. And, thanks to the Greeks, the whole empire shared a common language—*Koine Greek* (common Greek). In Israel, expectation was high. The people were under Roman control and were eagerly looking for the deliverance promised through the coming Messiah.



The Hebrew term “Messiah” means “anointed one.” The Greek equivalent is the title, “Christ.” To be anointed was to be set apart for God’s service. Olive oil was poured on a person’s head to signify the power of God’s Spirit coming upon them and enabling them to fulfill God’s purpose (cf. 1 Sam. 16:13). The three main offices in Israel—prophet, priest, and king—required God’s anointing. Messiah, the Anointed One, would fill all three offices. He would be the **Prophet**, speaking God’s Word like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18). He would be the **Priest**, sprinkling God’s people with blood and cleansing them from their sin (Isaiah 52:15). And He would be the **King**, ruling over the earth, on David’s throne, with righteousness and peace.

The Law, the Prophets and the Writings all provided clues regarding the Messiah. The Jews were simply looking for the person who completed the puzzle. But the picture was not totally clear. How could the Messiah be both man and “mighty God” (Is. 9:6)? How could He be rejected by men and exalted over all the earth? The entire puzzle did not make sense so many of the Jews chose to ignore the pieces they did not like or understand. But by leaving out certain pieces, they missed the picture of the Messiah who, in “the fullness of time,” had come (Galatians 4:4).



Westminster Confession

8.1 It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose...the Lord Jesus...to be the Mediator between God and men, the prophet, priest, and king; the head and Savior of the Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world....

8.2 The Son of God, the second Person in the Trinity...of one substance, and equal with the Father, did...take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof; yet without sin: being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person....

SCRIPTURE EXPLORATION



Matthew was probably written ~AD 60 and may have been the first gospel account written though most Bible scholars believe Mark was the first.

The genealogy of Jesus in Matthew is traced through Joseph; while Luke traces the genealogy of Jesus through Mary (Luke 3:23-38).

Jesus (1:21)—Jesus means “Jehovah saves” and is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew, Joshua.

Herod the king (2:1)—Also known as Herod the Great. He ruled from (40-4 BC) and was known for his cruelty and his building projects. He tried to gain Jewish favor by expanding and rebuilding the Temple.

Magi (2:1)—The wise men. Gentile astrologers who apparently knew Jewish prophecy, perhaps through Daniel.

Why Four Gospels? The New Testament begins with four different accounts (“gospel”=“good news”) of the life of Jesus. Each one has a unique perspective.

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Date	AD 50-60	AD 40-60	AD 60	AD 60-90
Audience	Jews	Romans	Greeks	All People
Genealogy	Son of Abraham	None	Son of Adam	Eternal
Distinctive	OT Prophecies	Miracles	Parables	Signs
Jesus	The King	The Servant	Son of Man	Son of God

Matthew was a Jewish tax collector who became a disciple of Jesus Christ. As a Jew, he was aware of the prophecies regarding the Messiah and he wrote his gospel to show that Jesus was the Messiah.

CHRIST

Read Matthew 1-2. Ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

DAY 1

How is Jesus identified in 1:1? What three titles is He given?

Matthew 1-2

What observations can you make from the angel’s announcement to Joseph?

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.” (Matt. 1:20b-21)

What did the wise men do when they found Jesus (2:11)? _____

The three gifts of the wise men point to the identity of Jesus as the King (gold), as the Priest (frankincense, Ex. 30:34-38), and as the Lamb/Sacrifice (myrrh, John 19:39).

Where did Joseph and Mary go to escape Herod’s wrath (2:13-15)? _____

How many times does Matthew point to a fulfilled prophecy in Matthew 1-2? _____

Matthew's account jumps from Jesus' birth and early childhood to the beginning of His ministry approximately thirty years later. During these early years, Luke tells us that Jesus was obedient to His parents, Joseph and Mary, and most likely worked with Joseph as a carpenter (Greek, *tekton*, a worker in wood; craftsman). According to Numbers 4:3, a priest could begin serving before God's altar at age 30. This is Jesus' age when John the Baptist began preaching in the wilderness (cf. Luke 3:23).

Read Matthew 3-4. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

What was John the Baptist's message (3:2)? _____

Matthew identifies John the Baptist as the one preparing the way for Messiah (Isaiah 40:3). John baptizes (immerses) people in water as a sign of repentance, spiritual cleansing, and identification with the coming Messiah. He makes it clear to the Jewish religious leaders (Pharisees and Sadducees) that physical birth and ancestry do not provide entrance into God's kingdom; rather it requires a spiritual birth (cf. John 3:3).

Jesus comes to John for baptism—not for repentance but *to fulfill all righteousness*, being identified as the Messiah, commissioned for service, and an example to us.

Jesus' early life models Israel's exodus from Egypt. Just as Israel was called out of Egypt, through the waters of the Red Sea, and into the wilderness for 40 years, so Jesus is called out of Egypt (2:15), goes through the waters of baptism (3:16), and then enters the wilderness for 40 days (4:2). Jesus, however, unlike Israel, obeys God in the wilderness and does not give in to temptation. What are Satan's three temptations?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How does Jesus respond to each temptation? _____

What can you learn about temptation from this passage? _____

Jesus began His ministry in the area of Galilee (northern parts of Israel) in fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1-2. His message was the same as John the Baptist's, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*" The Messiah, the King, had arrived. He proved His identity by showing His power over disease, sickness, and demons. He called people to repent and follow Him. The foretaste of the kingdom touched earth. But would people humble themselves, acknowledge their sin, and pursue God's righteousness?

Age 30 was the time priests began serving before the altar. It is also the age of Joseph when he stood before Pharaoh (Gen. 41:46) and David when he began to reign as king (2 Sam. 5:4).

Repent is the Greek word, *metanoia*, which means "a change of mind." It refers to a turning from sin and turning to God.

THINK ABOUT:
Can you see the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life in Satan's tempting of Jesus?

Pharisees were religious conservatives who resisted Greek influence on Judaism.
Sadducees were religious liberals who encouraged compromise with the Roman government. Both missed the fact that true repentance requires a real change in one's heart.

Matthew records the calling of Peter, Andrew, James and John—the core of Jesus' 12 disciples.

Sabbath—The Pharisees developed a myriad of laws to prevent one from violating the command not to work on the Sabbath. They turned God's provision for rest into a heavy burden.

Blasphemy of the Spirit (12:32)—Refers to the resistance of the Spirit's work in a person's heart (see Acts 7:51). God is able to forgive any sin except the sin of the person who refuses to humble himself, listen to God's voice and submit to Him.

Mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (13:11)—A mystery refers to a truth hidden in the OT that is now fully revealed. In this case, because of Israel's rejection, Jesus revealed that God's kingdom would be different than what they expected. It would not come immediately but there would be an interval of time between Christ's first and second comings (cf. Luke 19:11-27).

CHRIST

DAY 3

Matthew 12-13

Jesus' public ministry lasted approximately three years (~AD 27-30). The middle year of Jesus' ministry (AD 28-29) was marked by increasing opposition. Matthew 12-13 record many of these events.

Read Matthew 12-13. Ask God to speak to your heart.

Why do the Jewish religious leaders oppose Jesus? What is their issue with Him?

What is the crowd's question (12:23)?

How did the Pharisees explain Jesus' miracles (12:24)?

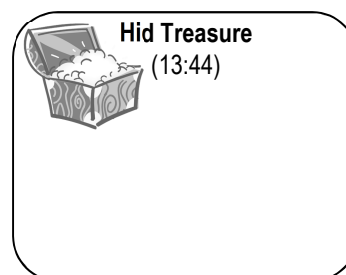
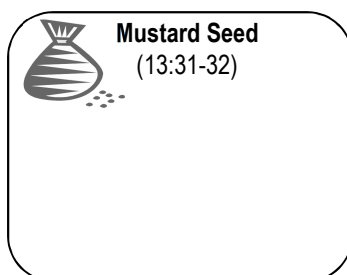
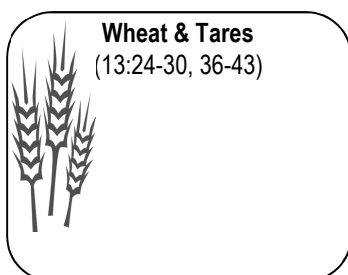
Jesus confronted the Pharisees by warning them that their resistance to God's Spirit would ultimately condemn them. The Spirit of God was speaking to their hearts, pointing them to the identity of Jesus. But instead of listening and submitting, they were resisting and essentially telling the voice of the Spirit to "Shut up!"

To an evil generation, demanding more and more signs, Jesus told them that there would only be one sign, "the sign of Jonah," His resurrection from the dead (12:40).

Because of the increasing opposition to His ministry, Jesus began to teach in parables (common stories that illustrated divine truth). These parables would hide the truth from those unwilling to listen and reveal it to those open to God's Word. Jesus' first parable illustrates the different responses to His message (13:3-9). What are the four responses to His message ("seed") based on the type of "soils" in a person's heart?

Wayside/Road	
Stony Places	
Thorns	
Good Ground	

Jesus' parables in Matthew 13 each teach something about God's kingdom. Because of the people's rejection, the kingdom would not be like the kingdom pictured in the Old Testament. What do you learn about the kingdom from the following parables?



CROSS

DAY 4

Matthew 26-27

By the end of Jesus' three year public ministry (~AD 30), opposition to Him reached a fevered pitch. Most people wanted a political deliverer not a deliverer from their sin and so the Messiah of Israel was rejected.

Read Matthew 26-27. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart.

Why do you think Judas decided to betray Jesus? _____

Jesus and His disciples celebrate the Passover, remembering Israel's deliverance from bondage and protection from God's wrath through the blood of the lamb (Ex. 12:1-13). But now the true meaning of Passover is revealed—Jesus is the Lamb whose pure, broken body is represented by the bread and whose blood is represented by the wine.

After the Passover meal, Jesus goes to the Garden of Gethsemane. He knows the time of His death is near. What does Jesus pray three times in the Garden of Gethsemane?

What is the significance of this prayer? _____

Why does all this happen to Jesus (26:56)? _____

Crucifixion was designed by the Romans as a slow, painful execution reserved for the lowest of criminals. Some crucifixions lasted for days. Jesus, however, due to the severe beating He received and God's plan, was on the cross for six hours (9am-3pm).

What did Jesus cry at the ninth hour (3pm) before He died? _____

At this moment the sins of the world were placed on Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). After Jesus' death, His body is taken down and buried in a rich man's tomb (Joseph of Arimathea). A Roman guard is set up, at the request of the Jewish leaders, to prevent the disciples from stealing His body.

CROSS

DAY 5

Matthew 28

Tradition says that Jesus was crucified on Friday (though Thursday is also a possibility). The Jewish Sabbath (Saturday) followed. The first day of the week (Sunday) would change the course of history forever.

Read Matthew 28. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart.

What did the angel announce to the women who came to Jesus' tomb that Sunday? _____

John 12:4-6

states that Judas was the disciple who had the biggest problem with the woman's anointing of Jesus with costly perfume.

Over time, the Passover meal included the drinking of four cups of wine. The cup after dinner was known as the cup of redemption. This is the cup referred to in Matthew 26:27.

THINK ABOUT:
What can you learn about prayer from Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane?

Pontius Pilate ruled as governor over Judea from AD 26-36. He made many questionable decisions during his time of leadership and was on shaky political ground at the time Jesus appeared before him. This is probably why he tried to avoid the whole affair. Pilate was dismissed as leader in AD 36 and is said to have committed suicide.

What two emotions did the women feel (28:8)? _____

What did they do when they finally saw Jesus? _____

Matthew 28:18-20 is called the Great Commission. It is Jesus' mission to His disciples and all those who claim to follow Him. It is a mission given based on Jesus' authority over all things. Write out 28:19-20. _____

Circle three key words/phrases that really stand out to you in these verses. Write the three words or phrases you chose in the spaces below along with a brief reason why you chose each one.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Read the following adaptation from Paul Little's book, *Know Why You Believe* (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, 1988). This adaptation is found at <http://www.everystudent.com/features/faith.html>.

It is impossible for us to know conclusively whether God exists and what He is like unless He takes the initiative and reveals Himself. ... We must scan the horizon of history to see if there is any clue to God's revelation. There is one clear clue. In an obscure village in Palestine, almost 2,000 years ago, a Child was born in a stable. Today the entire world is still celebrating the birth of Jesus.

He lived in obscurity until He was thirty, and then began a public ministry that lasted three years. It was destined to change the course of history. He was a kindly person and we're told that "*the common people heard Him gladly.*" And, "*He taught as One who had authority, and not as their teachers of the Law*" (Matthew 7:29).

THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST - HIS STORY BEGINS

It soon became apparent, however, that He was making shocking and startling statements about Himself. He began to identify Himself as far more than a remarkable teacher or prophet. He began to say clearly that He was God. He made His identity the focal point of His teaching. The all-important question He put to those who followed Him was, "*Who do you say I am?*" When Peter answered and said, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Matthew 16:15-16), Jesus was not shocked, nor did He rebuke Peter. On the contrary, He commended him!

He made the claim explicitly, and His hearers got the full impact of His words. We are told, *"The Jews tried all the harder to kill Him; not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God"* (John 5:18).

On another occasion he said, *"I and My Father are One."* Immediately the Jews wanted to stone Him. He asked them for which good work they wanted to kill Him. They replied, *"We are not stoning You for any of these but for blasphemy, because You, a mere man, claim to be God"* (John 10:33).

...So close was His connection with God that He equated a person's attitude to Himself with the person's attitude toward God. Thus, to know Him was to know God (John 8:19; 14:7). To see Him was to see God (12:45; 14:9). To believe in Him was to believe in God (12:44; 14:1). To receive Him was to receive God (Mark 9:37). To hate Him was to hate God (John 15:23). And to honor Him was to honor God (5:23).

JESUS CHRIST - THE SON OF GOD?

As we face the claims of Christ, there are only four possibilities. He was either a liar, a lunatic, a legend, or the Truth. If we say He is not the Truth, we are automatically affirming one of the other three alternatives, whether we realize it or not.

(1) One possibility is that Jesus lied when He said He was God—that He knew He was not God, but deliberately deceived His hearers to lend authority to His teaching. Few, if any, seriously hold this position. Even those who deny His deity affirm that He was a great moral teacher. They fail to realize those two statements are a contradiction. Jesus could hardly be a great moral teacher if, on the most crucial point of His teaching—His identity—He was a deliberate liar.

(2) A kinder, though no less shocking possibility, is that He was sincere but self-deceived. We have a name for a person today who thinks he is God. That name is lunatic, and it certainly would apply to Christ if He were deceived on this all-important issue. But as we look at the life of Christ, we see no evidence of the abnormality and imbalance we find in a deranged person. Rather, we find the greatest composure under pressure.

(3) The third alternative is that all of the talk about His claiming to be God is a legend—that what actually happened was that His enthusiastic followers, in the third and fourth centuries, put words into His mouth He would have been shocked to hear. Were He to return, He would immediately repudiate them.

The legend theory has been significantly refuted by many discoveries of modern archeology. These have conclusively shown that the four biographies of Christ were written within the lifetime of contemporaries of Christ. Some time ago Dr. William F. Albright, world-famous archaeologist now retired from Johns Hopkins University, said that there was no reason to believe that any of the Gospels were written later than A.D. 70. For a mere legend about Christ, in the form of the Gospel, to have gained the circulation and to have had the impact it had, without one shred of basis in fact, is incredible.

For this to have happened would be as fantastic as for someone in our own time to write a biography of the late John F. Kennedy and in it say he claimed to be God, to forgive people's sins, and to have risen from the dead. Such a story is so wild it would never get off the ground because there are still too many people around who knew Kennedy. The legend theory does not hold water in the light of the early date of the Gospel manuscripts.

(4) The only other alternative is that Jesus spoke the truth. From one point of view, however, claims don't mean much. Talk is cheap. Anyone can make claims. There have been others who have claimed to be God. I could claim to be God, and you could claim to be God, but the question all of us must answer is, "What credentials do we bring to substantiate our claim?" In my case it wouldn't take you five minutes to disprove my claim. It probably wouldn't take too much more to dispose of yours. But when it comes to Jesus of Nazareth, it's not so simple. He had the credentials to back up His claim. He said, *"Even though you do not believe Me, believe the evidence of the miracles, that you may learn and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father"* (John 10:38).

...Jesus' supreme credential to authenticate His claim to deity was His resurrection from the dead. Five times in the course of His life He predicted He would die. He also predicted how He would die and that three days later He would rise from the dead and appear to His disciples. Surely this was the great test. It was a claim that was easy to verify. It either happened or it didn't.

Both friends and enemies of the Christian faith have recognized the resurrection of Christ to be the foundation stone of the faith. Paul, the great apostle, wrote, *"If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith"* (1 Corinthians 15:14). Paul rested his whole case on the bodily resurrection of Christ. Either He did or He didn't rise from the dead. If He *did*, it was the most sensational event in all of history.

If Christ rose, we know with certainty that God exists, what He is like, and how we may know Him in personal experience. The universe takes on meaning and purpose, and it is possible to experience the living God in contemporary life.

On the other hand, if Christ did not rise from the dead, Christianity is an interesting museum piece—nothing more. It has no objective validity or reality. Though it is a nice wishful thought, it certainly isn't worth getting steamed up about. The martyrs who went singing to the lions, and contemporary missionaries who have given their lives in Ecuador and Congo while taking this message to others, have been poor deluded fools.

The attack on Christianity by its enemies has most often concentrated on the Resurrection because it has been clearly seen that this event is the crux of the matter. A remarkable attack was the one contemplated in the early 1930s by a young British lawyer. He was convinced that the Resurrection was mere fable and fantasy. Sensing that it was the foundation stone of the Christian faith, he decided to do the world a favor by once and for all exposing this fraud and superstition. As a lawyer, he felt he had the critical faculties to rigidly sift evidence and to admit nothing as evidence which did not meet the stiff criteria for admission into a law court today.

However, while Frank Morrison was doing his research, a remarkable thing happened. The case was not nearly as easy as he had supposed. As a result, the first chapter in his book, *Who Moved the Stone?* is entitled, "The Book That Refused to Be Written." In it he described how, as he examined the evidence, he became persuaded against his will, of the fact of the bodily resurrection of Christ.

THE DEATH OF JESUS

Jesus' death was by public execution on a cross. The government said it was for blasphemy. Jesus said it was to pay for our sin. After being severely tortured, Jesus' wrists and feet were

nailed to a cross where He hung, eventually dying of slow suffocation. A sword was thrust into His side to confirm His death.

The body of Jesus was then wrapped in linens covered with approximately 100 pounds of gummy-wet spices. His body was placed in a solid rock tomb. A 1 ½ - 2 ton boulder was rolled by levers to secure the entrance. Because Jesus had publicly said He would rise from the dead in three days, a guard of trained Roman soldiers was stationed at the tomb. And an official Roman seal was affixed to the tomb entrance declaring it government property.

In spite of all this, three days later the body was gone. Only the grave linens remained, in the form of the body, but caved in. The boulder formerly sealing the tomb was found up a slope, some distance away from the tomb.

WAS JESUS' RESURRECTION JUST A STORY?

The earliest explanation circulated was that the disciples stole the body! In Matthew 28:11-15, we have the record of the reaction of the chief priests and the elders when the guards gave them the infuriating and mysterious news that the body was gone. They gave the soldiers money and told them to explain that the disciples had come at night and stolen the body while they were asleep. That story was so false that Matthew didn't even bother to refute it! What judge would listen to you if you said that while you were asleep you knew it was your neighbor who came into your house and stole your television set? Who knows what goes on while he's asleep? Testimony like this would be laughed out of any court.

Furthermore, we are faced with a psychological and ethical impossibility. Stealing the body of Christ is something totally foreign to the character of the disciples and all that we know of them. It would mean that they were perpetrators of a deliberate lie which was responsible for the deception and ultimate death of thousands of people. It is inconceivable that, even if a few of the disciples had conspired and pulled off this theft, they would never have told the others.

Each of the disciples faced the test of torture and martyrdom for his statements and beliefs. Men and women will die for what they believe to be true, though it may actually be false. They do not, however, die for what they know is a lie. If ever a man tells the truth, it is on his deathbed. And if the disciples had taken the body, and Christ was still dead, we would still have the problem of explaining His alleged appearances.

A second hypothesis is that the authorities, Jewish or Roman, moved the body! But why? Having put guards at the tomb, what would be their reason for moving the body? Also, what about the silence of the authorities in the face of the apostles' bold preaching about the Resurrection in Jerusalem? The ecclesiastical leaders were seething with rage, and did everything possible to prevent the spread of this message that Jesus rose from the dead. They arrested Peter and John and beat and threatened them, in an attempt to close their mouths.

But there was a very simple solution to their problem. If they had Christ's body, they could have paraded it through the streets of Jerusalem. In one fell swoop they would have successfully smothered Christianity in its cradle. That they did not do this bears eloquent testimony to the fact that they did not have the body.

...The only theory that adequately explains the empty tomb is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

If Jesus Christ rose from the dead, proving He is God, He is alive today. ***He is willing to be more than worshiped. He is willing to be known and to come into our lives.*** Jesus said, "*Behold, I stand at the door [of your heart] and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him*" (Revelation 3:20).

The late Carl Gustav Jung said, "The central neurosis of our time is emptiness." All of us have a deep longing for our life to have meaning and depth. Jesus offers us a more meaningful, abundant life, which comes through a relationship with Him. Jesus said, "*I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly*" (John 10:10).

Because Jesus died on the cross, taking with Him all of humankind's sin, He now offers us forgiveness, acceptance and a genuine relationship with Him.

Right now you can invite Jesus Christ into your life. You could say to Him something like, **"Jesus, thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I ask You to forgive me and to come into my life right now. Thank You for giving me a relationship with You."**

CHANGED HEARTS



What is one truth from this lesson that has impacted your life? Why?

Jesus is the fulfillment of all that is promised and prophesied about in the Old Testament. He is the seed of the woman who will crush the serpent's head. He is the seed of Abraham in which all the earth will be blessed. He is the Passover Lamb whose blood averts God's judgment. He is the Son of David who will one day rule over the earth.

Jesus said, *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?* (John 11:25-26)

Do you believe this? If so, then you need to make a conscious choice to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Have you made this choice before? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure

If you are unsure or have not made this choice before, pray the simple prayer at the end of the article (or a similar prayer) from your heart. Share with someone the choice you made today!

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

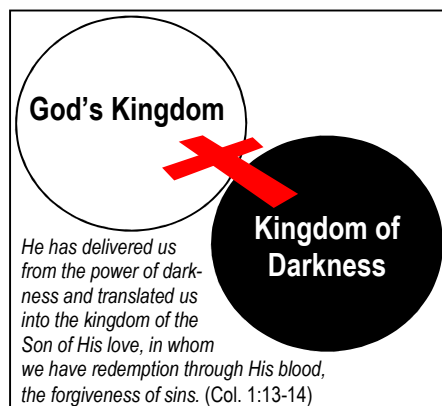
- When do you remember first hearing the message of the gospel—that Jesus died for your sins? How did you respond? Where are you now in your spiritual journey with Christ?
- What did you learn about Jesus from this study? About humanity? About yourself?
- What is a temptation that you are facing in your life right now? What is a passage of Scripture that gives you strength or direction in the midst of this temptation?
- How hard is it to pray "not my will but Yours be done"?
- What are all the implications of Jesus' physical resurrection from the dead?

WEEK 9 CHURCH & COMMUNICATION

The Messiah, the Anointed One of Israel, had come. And He had been rejected and crucified. It was part of God's plan prophesied in the Old Testament—*He is despised and rejected by men* (Isaiah 53:3), *the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone* (Psalm 118:22), *they will look on Me whom they have pierced* (Zechariah 12:10)—but certainly the meaning and details were hidden to men's eyes.

Messiah had to die because mankind needed more than just a **Prophet** who spoke God's truth and a **King** to rule over the earth. Mankind needed a **Priest** to pay for their sins. And the blood of animals in the Jewish sacrifices could not ultimately fulfill this purpose. ...*In those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins* (Hebrews 10:3-4).

Since God is holy (separate from sin), every sin brings death. Since God is just, every sin must be paid for. Since God is love, He provided a substitute to bear man's sins. This substitute must be perfect, without sin, and must be able to represent all mankind—His life must be of infinite value. Only Jesus—fully man and able to represent man, and fully God, of eternal nature—could fit the bill. ...*We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this Priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God* (Hebrews 10:10-12). The Anointed Priest paid for our sins by giving His own life.



So now the picture of God's kingdom is clearer. The Old Testament told of a coming kingdom in which the Messiah would reign over the earth—the wicked would be destroyed, the righteous would flourish, and the curse would be removed. However, because of man's sin, no one qualified for this kingdom, not even the Jew. Thus, God provided for a **New Covenant** in which a person's sins could be totally forgiven through the death of His Son. This would open the door for a person to enter God's kingdom.

Today God's kingdom is here and not yet here. Those who trust Jesus Christ as Savior enter God's kingdom but the ultimate experience of this kingdom will not be realized until Christ returns again. In the meantime, the citizens of the kingdom—the church, both Jew and Gentile—are to proclaim the message of good news (gospel) so that many more may enter in. This message will produce various responses (Parable of Sower); some of which will be impossible to discern (Parable of Wheat and Tares). But the message will grow (Parable of Mustard Seed) and those who respond positively will embrace it with joy (Parable of Hidden Treasure).

Westminster Shorter Catechism

Q. 84. What does every sin deserve?

A. Every sin deserves God's wrath and curse..

Q. 85. What doth God require of us that we may escape his wrath and curse...?

A. ...God requires of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life...

Q. 86. What is faith in Jesus Christ?

A. ...A saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation....

Q. 87. What is repentance unto life?

A. ...A saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, does, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.

SCRIPTURE EXPLORATION



The word **church** is the Greek word, *ekklesia* which means “the called out ones.” It refers to those called out of the world and into God’s kingdom.

The word **apostle** is a transliteration of the Greek, *apostolos* which means “sent one.”

Mount of Olives (1:12)—Mount between Jerusalem and Bethany where Christ will return (Zech. 14:4).

Pentecost is the Greek name for the Jewish Feast of Weeks (or Shavuot) which was an annual feast occurring 50 days after the Sabbath of Passover week. This feast also marks the time when the Law was given to Israel at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19) and is called the “marriage day” of God and Israel. The book of Ruth is read during this feast.

CHURCH

DAY 1

Acts 1-2

The book of **Acts**, written by Luke, records the “acts of the apostles” after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. It is the story of the church, the new community created by the coming of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of God’s people. This was the promise of the New Covenant (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

Read Acts 1-2. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

What final question do the disciples ask Jesus (1:6)? _____

How would you summarize Jesus answer to this question (1:7-8)? _____

Luke describes the early assembly of Jesus’ followers as composed of the eleven disciples (minus Judas) and 109 others. They continued together in prayer, selecting a new disciple to replace Judas and waiting for the promise of the Holy Spirit (1:8). On the day of Pentecost (the Feast of Weeks), the Spirit of God came upon the disciples, giving them the ability to speak in the native languages of the people assembled in Jerusalem so that each person could hear the message of Christ in their own tongue.

Peter preached his first sermon to the Jews and Jewish proselytes gathered together. Summarize the main point he makes in each of the following sections.

2:14-21 _____

2:22-31 _____

2:32-36 _____

2:37-39 _____

Three thousand people received Peter’s message and were baptized. Thus, the church began, devoted to the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, communion, and prayer (2:42).

What words would you use to describe this early church? _____

What encourages you the most about the early church? _____

CHURCH

DAY 2

Acts 9-10

As the early church grew, many of the Jewish leaders began to oppose it, just as they had opposed Jesus. They saw these new disciples of Jesus as threats to their authority and to established Jewish tradition. The leading persecutor was a Pharisee named Saul who *made havoc of the church, entering every house and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison* (Acts 8:1).

Read Acts 9-10. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

Determined to destroy the early church, Saul heads to Damascus to arrest any disciples of Jesus he finds. On the way, he is confronted by Jesus Himself in a blinding light.

Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? (9:4) What is the implication Jesus' words?

Saul's blindness and recovery of sight pictures his inner conversion to Jesus Christ. Saul, the fiercest persecutor of the church, suddenly becomes one of the greatest preachers in the early church. What was the essence of Saul's message (9:20, 22)?

Now the Jewish leaders want to kill Saul and the disciples are scared of him. Barnabas is convinced Saul's conversion is real and invites him in. How does Saul's conversion impact the church (9:31)?

Up until this point, the church is growing but only among the Jews and the Samaritans, half-Jews (8:4-25). The message has not yet reached the Gentiles, the non-Jews.

Who is Cornelius (10:1)?

How is he described (10:2)?

What is he instructed to do (10:3-6)?

Meanwhile Peter is praying and suddenly has a vision of unclean animals which he is commanded to eat. When he refuses, he is told, *What God has cleansed you must not call common* (10:15), preparing Peter to see the unclean Gentiles through God's eyes.

Peter arrives at Cornelius' house and preaches the message of the gospel (10:34-43). Write down what you learn about each of the following from Peter's message.

God

Jesus

The disciples

The gospel (10:43)

Saul was trained under one of the most revered Jewish teachers of the day, Gamaliel, and apparently was a very powerful and influential Pharisee (Acts 22:3, Phil. 3:5).

It is hard to kick against the goads—

This phrase is not in some manuscripts in 9:5 but it is used in 26:14 and reflects Saul's inner struggle in the midst of his persecution of the church. A goad was a sharp stick used to move an animal.

THINK ABOUT: *Some times the person who is most adamant against something is the one struggling with it the most. Have you ever seen this?*

Speaking in tongues was a special ability to speak other languages which was used by God to spread the gospel and confirm that Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles were saved in the same way.

Saul, who also is called Paul (13:9)—Saul was a Hebrew name. Paul was a Roman name. Paul apparently had both names at birth but went more by Paul as his ministry to the Gentiles increased.

Justified (13:39)—A legal term that means to be declared righteous or innocent. In Jesus, our sins are forgiven and we are declared righteous before a holy God.

Ephesus was a major city in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) and was home to one of the seven wonders of the world—the temple to the goddess Diana.

Predestined (1:5, 11)—God had determined before time that those in Jesus Christ would receive all the blessings described in Ephesians 1.

CHURCH

DAY 3

Acts 13-14

After his conversion, Saul, later known as Paul, began to work with Barnabas in teaching the early believers in the city of Antioch (in Syria). Paul and Barnabas were eventually called by God to spread the gospel throughout the rest of the Roman empire.

Read Acts 13-14. Ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

What does Paul teach about Jesus—who He is and what He did? (13:16-41)

What is the message of the gospel (13:38-39)?

How did the Jews respond to this message?

How did the Gentiles respond?

How would you describe Paul and Barnabas' ministry? What did they do (14:21-23)?

COMMUNICATION

DAY 4

Ephesians 1-2

Paul spread the good news of Jesus Christ all around the Roman empire. Everywhere he went he started churches—local assemblies of believers who met together to worship God, sing, pray, serve, and study Scripture. As he traveled, Paul wrote many letters (“epistles”) to these churches instructing them about Christian belief and encouraging them to live out their faith. These letters (or “epistles”) comprise most of the books of the New Testament. **Ephesians** is one such letter. It was written to the church in the city of Ephesus (cf. Acts 18:18-19, 19:1-10).

Read Ephesians 1-2. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart.

Paul begins his letter by recounting all the blessings that a believer has in Jesus Christ (1:3-14). Write down two blessings that really stand out to you.

1. _____
2. _____

How is the church described in 1:22-23? _____

Ephesians 2:1-10 describes the process by which a person is “saved”—delivered from sin and made right with God. From these verses, summarize the following...

Our life before Christ _____

Why God saved us _____

How a person is saved _____

How we should live now _____

In Ephesians 2:11-22, Paul deals with God’s salvation of Gentiles. Read and meditate on 2:19-22. Circle key words. Write down any thoughts you have from these verses.

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

COMMUNICATION

DAY 5

Romans 10-11

As the good news of Christ spread, a lingering question remained among some Jewish believers. *What about all the promises to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament? Will God still fulfill them? How? When?* Paul answered these questions in Romans 10-11.

Read Romans 10-11. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart.

What does Paul identify as the reason why the Jews did not believe in Jesus (10:1-3)?

How is a person saved (10:9, 13)? _____

Is there any difference between Jew and Gentile in this regard? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If there is no distinction with Jews and Gentiles, is God done with Israel? ☐ Yes ☐ No

What happened because of Israel’s fall (rejection of Christ) (11:11-12)? _____

THINK ABOUT:
What does it mean to be saved by grace?

Workmanship (2:10)—Greek word, *poema*, from which we get our English word, “poem.” It refers to a work of art.

Middle wall of division (2:14)—A reference to the wall in the temple that separated the Court of the Gentiles from the Court of the Jews. In Christ, this wall has been taken down.

The **olive tree** represents God’s place of blessing and service. In the Old Testament God worked primarily through Israel. Now He is working through the church—both Jews and Gentiles.

All Israel will be saved (11:26)—Not a reference to every Jewish person but to the nation as a whole (the majority of Jews) who will accept Jesus as Messiah at His 2nd coming.

What will happen when Israel as a nation accepts its Messiah (11:15, 25-27)? _____

When will this take place (11:25-27)? _____

How does Paul view the Jewish people who have not yet trusted in Christ (11:28-29)?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Read the following excerpt from Pastor Chuck Swindoll's book, *Learning to Walk by Grace: A Study of Romans 6-11* (Anaheim, CA: Insight for Living, 1999), pages 98-104.

God's plan of the ages still reserves a place for Jews as individuals and as a nation. Paul himself was proof that God has not rejected the Jews individually. And God hasn't rejected the Jews as a nation either, even though He has set them aside for awhile because of their unbelief.

The Gentiles have actually benefited from the Jews' disobedience, for through Israel's sin God has brought salvation to the world. Yet God has not closed the book on the Jews. In the future, He will write the final chapter of the Hebrew saga when He restores Israel to their original place of favor, just as He promised in the Old Testament. God always keeps His promises.

The *hows* and *whys* of His plan, we may never fully comprehend. In many ways, God's plan is beyond understanding—as an old preacher once warned, it's unwise to try to “fathom the unfathomable or unscrew the inscrutable.” However, some of the practical implications of God's dealings with the nations are within our reach. One has to do with how Jews and Gentiles should get along. In this section of Romans 11, Paul draws powerful word pictures to help us learn how to relate to one another in humility and grace.

Two Clarifying Metaphors

Paul offers two word pictures—one taken from the kitchen and the other from the garden.

The first word picture compares the Jewish nation to a lump of dough.

For if [the Jews'] rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also. (Rom. 11:15-16a)

Paul's argument is this: If Israel's rejecting the Messiah brought salvation to the world, certainly their accepting Him will produce at least an equal blessing for the Jews. It's important for Paul's Roman Gentile readers to understand that the Jews may be set *aside* but they are still set *apart* as God's covenant people.

To illustrate Israel's special place in God's program, Paul refers to the ancient Jewish practice of consecrating the first piece of dough made from the grain of the new harvest (see Num. 15:20-21). John A. Witmer explains that "since it is set apart to the Lord first it sanctifies the whole harvest." The parallel, then, is that the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—consecrated the generations of Jews to follow.

Paul's second illustration drives the point home: *And if the root is holy, the branches are too.*

Just as life-giving sap flows from the root of a tree through the trunk into the branches, the covenant blessing in Abraham (the root of Israel) courses through each limb of the Jewish nation. Nothing—not even the terrible sin of rejecting the Messiah—can stop up the flow and cause God to revoke His covenant. And yet, because of their transgression, the Jews must endure God's hand of judgment. As a result, writes Bible scholar John Stott, the Jews "are objects of God's love and wrath simultaneously."

This begs the question: How should Paul's Roman readers relate to the Jews—as objects of God's love or as objects of His wrath? As brothers or enemies?

Words of Warning

The Gentile Christians in Rome may have been tempted to brush off the Jews with an air of anti-Semitic superiority. So Paul continues his analogy of the root and branches with a word of caution against arrogance.

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. (vv. 17—21)

Paul's warning here reminds us of his caution to the Corinthians: *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall*" (1 Corinthians 10:12). The Gentiles took the place of the Jews, not because they were worthier, but because of God's grace alone. Before Christ, Gentiles were "separate ... excluded . . . strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). As pagan idolaters, they were like the wild olive tree—the hillside scrub of Palestine. Bitter, shriveled fruit hung from their limbs, making them unfit for God's orchard. It is only by grace that they have been grafted into God's succulent tree of life.

Because the branch contains the fruit-bearing capacity, a gardener normally grafts an orchard-quality branch to a wild stock, never the opposite. By reversing the usual procedure, Paul shows us that, in God's orchard, the true value is in the root, not the branch, and even a worthless branch can produce good fruit when the divine life flows through it.

If the Gentiles are not careful, though, they might repeat the Jews' mistake and receive a similar fate: *Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.* (Romans 11:22)

Cut off? Do these verses mean that if we fall into sin, we will lose our salvation?

Let's proceed with caution here. If the olive tree symbolizes salvation or the church, as some

Bible scholars say, then “cut off” might mean that we can lose our salvation. But that is not what we believe the olive tree represents. What does it represent, then? Bible scholar Alva McClain offers an answer. “[The olive tree] represents the place of favor or privilege. Abraham is the root, for ‘salvation is of the Jews’ (John 4:22). God first brought into favor the Jew then He cast him out of favor and put in the Gentile. It does not save anyone to be in this olive tree.”

In the Old Testament, Israel claimed “most favored nation” status with God because of the Abrahamic covenant. Yet that status didn’t mean each individual Jew was saved. Salvation was—and still is—a matter of personal faith. By the same token, although the Gentiles now are included in God’s blessing to Abraham, they are not saved on those grounds alone. Their new position of favor makes it possible for them to be saved, but it doesn’t save them. So “cut off” means losing the position of favor, not losing salvation.

What would happen if the Jews as a nation became receptive to Jesus as their Messiah? Would God restore them to their former glory? Certainly!

And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree? (vv. 23-24)

God’s Plan for the Future

The regrafting of the Jews turns Paul’s thoughts to the future...and a divine mystery:

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob. This is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” (vv. 25-27)

By *mystery*, Paul means a previously hidden truth that is now revealed. In this case, the mystery refers to a plan of redemption that appears in three phases.

First, God sovereignly hardens the Jews toward Christ so that the gospel could go out to the world (see 9:14-26; 11:7-11). This hardening is “partial” in that it is temporary, lasting only until the second part of God’s plan: when “the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”

What does this phrase mean? In one sense, it may refer to the full number of Gentiles whom God is calling as “a people for His name” (Acts 15:14). When all of the Gentile elect have come to faith, the Jewish hardening will be over. It may also allude to what Jesus called “the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24)—a period of Gentile domination that began when Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Ever since that time, no king from David’s line has ruled in Israel. But when the fullness of Gentile supremacy is complete, the Jews will have their Davidic king.

The third part is the coming of “the Deliverer,” Jesus Christ, who will establish a nation of saved Jews and reign over the entire earth in peace and righteousness during the millennial kingdom (see Isaiah 11; 59:20-21).

So, once again, God turns tragedy into triumph for the Jews.

In light of all this, how should Paul’s Gentile readers view the Jews: as enemies or as brothers? Paul sums up his answer in verses 28-29 of Romans 11:

From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

In a way, they are enemies *and* brothers. In almost every town Paul visited, the Jews were the fiercest opponents of the gospel. Not only did they reject Christ, but they actively prevented others from hearing the message. From the perspective of those Gentiles who yearned to hear the truth, they were enemies.

Yet, from the viewpoint of election, Jews hold a unique place in God's heart. He will never recant, because of His oath to Abraham. So, while the Jews may be enemies of the gospel at times, they deserve our respect and love because of their place in God's plan of the ages.

As we reflect on this passage, particularly in light of the terrible suffering that Jews have endured at the hands of anti-Semites, at least four truths come to mind.

First, *the Jew is currently hardened but ultimately beloved*. Jews are generally opposed to Christ. Even so, their place in God's plan demands that we not treat them as enemies but love them as God loves them.

Second, *Gentiles are spiritually honored but undeserving*. As Gentile Christians, remembering the scrubby stock from which we were taken keeps our pride in check.

Third, *the Lord is severe with some but fair to all*. The Lord never takes His discipline beyond the point of what's fair, for Jews or Gentiles. Such a reminder encourages us to love the God who judges us and to trust Him with whatever discipline He brings.

Fourth, *Gentiles were once far off but now are grafted in*. May we as Gentile Christians never forget the grace that brought us into favor with God.

Living Insights

From the first day Paul publicly proclaimed Christ in Damascus the Jewish leaders determined to destroy his ministry. Perhaps they hated him because he had once been a revered Pharisee, which made his conversion all the more detestable. In their eyes, he was the worst of sinners—a traitor to his people, a double-crosser, a blasphemer. They would resort to any means necessary to stop him—even murder (see Acts 9:23; 22:22).

In light of Paul's history of ill-treatment at the hands of his own countrymen, we wouldn't fault him if he bitterly fought back. Yet, as reflected in our passage, Paul returned their anger with love and a burning desire for their salvation.

Paul's love-your-enemy ethic comes from Jesus Himself. It is...based on the twin virtues of gratitude and grace—gratitude for our undeserved position of favor, and grace to others in response to the grace God has poured out on us.

Is there someone in your life who is determined to pull you down? How hard has it been to return evil with good? How can you apply the ethics of gratitude and grace to your situation?

God graced the Gentiles by grafting them into the covenant. He graced the Jews by designing for them a special plan of future restoration. Won't you enter into His grace today? Then share it with someone who needs it the most.

CHANGED HEARTS



What is one truth from this lesson that has impacted your life? Why?

Despite the persecution Paul faced from his fellow Jews, he still had a great love and burden for them. *I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel* (Romans 9:1-4a).

It is an incredible statement. Paul would trade his own salvation for the salvation of all his people, the Jews. He cannot, of course. God holds each person accountable for their own choice regarding Jesus Christ. God will not force anyone to believe and we cannot either. But Paul is so burdened for his people that he will do anything he can to see them come to salvation.

That kind of great burden only comes from great love.

Who are you burdened for? Is there someone in your life whom you greatly love but who is making poor choices that are breaking your heart? Someone who has not trusted Christ and/or is slowly destroying themselves without even realizing it?

If so, take time now to pray for them. Pray for God to break through the fog and speak to their hearts. Pray for wisdom in how you can minister to them. Pray for an opportunity to invite them to church and/or share the good news of Jesus Christ.

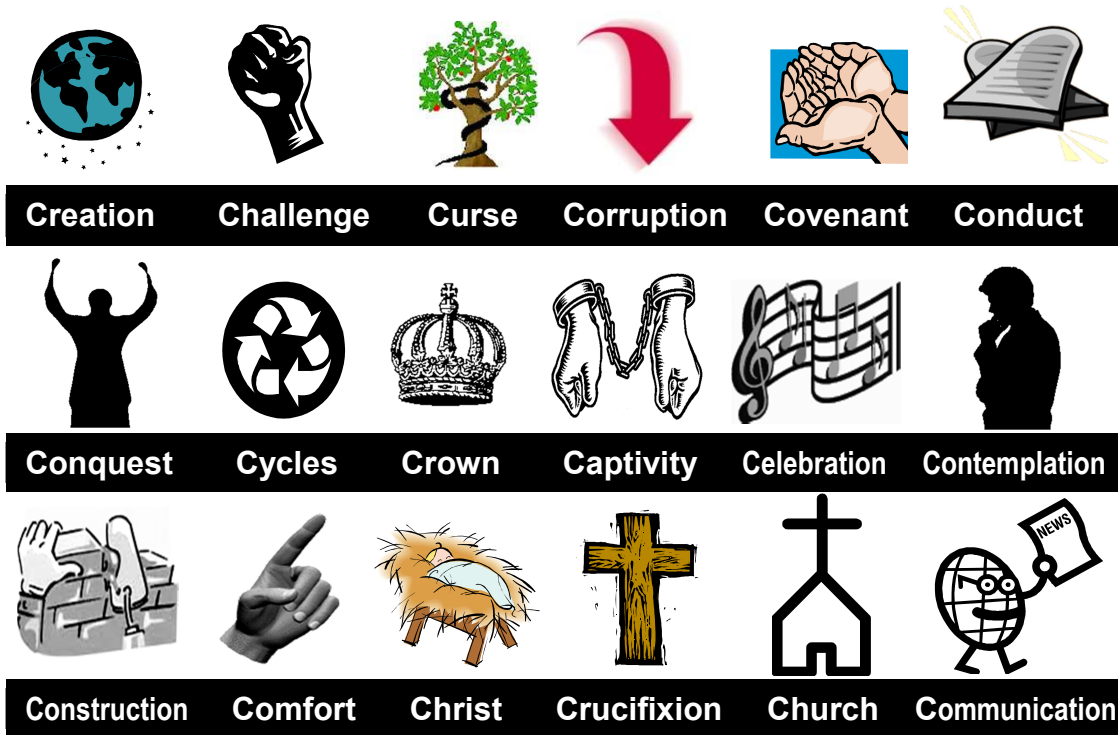
If no one comes to mind, pray for others whom you know that have such a burden. Or ask God to soften your heart and give you a greater love and burden for those who do not know Him.

The person(s) I am praying for _____

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- Who shared the gospel with you? Who is someone who has influenced your spiritual life?
- What do you learn about the church in Acts 2:41-47? What activities were they devoted to? How would you describe their relationship to God? To one another? To the community?
- What do you learn about Jesus from Peter's sermon in Acts 10?
- What do you learn about Jesus from Paul's sermon in Acts 13?
- Based on Peter and Paul's sermons, what should we emphasize in our gospel presentation?
- What blessing in Christ encourages you the most from Ephesians 1?
- Make a prayer list of those who need the gospel. Pray together as a group for these people.

WEEK 10 CATCHING AWAY & COUNTERFEIT



Three Major Views on Bible Prophecy

Pre-millennial. Christ will come back *before* His reign on earth for 1000 years (see Revelation 20:6). God will literally fulfill His promises to the nation of Israel. They will possess the land of Palestine and Christ will rule the earth from Jerusalem.

Post-millennial. Christ will come back *after* the church's reign on earth for 1000 years. The promises to Israel will be fulfilled by the church which will increasingly grow and eventually usher in worldwide peace.

A-millennial. There is no literal 1000 year reign of Christ on earth. He rules on David's throne in heaven. The promises to Israel have been forfeited through disobedience and are being fulfilled spiritually by the church.

We have seen the **past** with God's creation, man's sin, and God's work through the nation of Israel and ultimately Jesus Christ. Last week we covered the **present** with the formation of the church and the proclamation of the gospel. Now the last three lessons of this study turn to the **future**—the things ahead of us.

Mankind has always been fascinated with the future. *What will happen? Where is the world headed? Will the world end? How? When?* The Bible provides answers to these questions. Unfortunately Bible students do not always agree on the answers. This study will present a **dispensational, pre-millennial** perspective. Basically this view believes that God will literally fulfill His promises to the nation of Israel—the nation will possess the land promised to Abraham (Gen. 15:18-21) and the Son of David will rule over the earth from Jerusalem for 1000 years (Isaiah 9:6-7; Revelation 20:6).

Not every Bible believer agrees with this perspective. Many believe that the promises to Israel have already been fulfilled, have been forfeited through disobedience, and/or are to be interpreted in a more spiritual sense (e.g., Christ is ruling on David's throne in heaven). We will try to clarify these different views as this study proceeds.

Because of the different viewpoints surrounding the future, it is important to study biblical prophecy with humility and some level of caution. We should avoid dogmatic speculation and also remember that the primary purpose of prophecy is not to arouse our curiosity but to purify us from sin and give us assurance and hope for the future.

SCRIPTURE EXPLORATION



Shortly (1:1)–

The emphasis is not so much on when these events will occur (i.e., soon) but that once these events begin they will happen quickly.

The seven Spirits (1:4)–

Seven is the number of perfection and thus points to the perfect, sevenfold nature of the Holy Spirit (see Isaiah 11:2).

Seven stars and seven lampstands (1:12,16,20)–

The seven lampstands represent the seven churches in Rev. 2-3 and the stars represent the “angels” of the churches—this is either a reference to the pastors (angel can also mean messenger) or to the fact that a specific angel watches over each local church.

THINK ABOUT:
How special are local churches to Jesus?

CATCHING AWAY

DAY 1

Revelation 1

No book of the Bible has produced more divergent interpretations than the book of **Revelation**. Revelation was written by the apostle John sometime around AD 90. It was the last book of the Bible written. At the time of writing, John was in forced exile under the reign of the Roman emperor, Domitian, who vehemently opposed the early church. While in exile on the isle of Patmos, John, who was 80+ years old, received this revelation from Jesus Christ.

John’s writing is filled with symbolism which complicates its interpretation. There are four major views regarding how to interpret Revelation:

- 1) **Preterist**. It points to events that have already taken place, up to AD 312.
- 2) **Historical**. It is a panorama of all of history from AD 100 to the future.
- 3) **Idealist**. It is symbolic of the spiritual conflict between good and evil.
- 4) **Futurist**. It points primarily to events yet to be fulfilled in the future.

Read Revelation 1. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

The book of Revelation comes with a promised blessing (1:3). What three things bring this blessing? _____

Who is Jesus (1:5, 8, 17-18)? _____

What has He done for us (1:5-6)? _____

What will He do (1:7)? _____

What does He hold (1:18)? _____

How does John respond to Him (1:17)? _____

Revelation 1:19 gives the purpose and outline of the whole book. What three things does Jesus tell John to write about? _____

CATCHING AWAY

DAY 2

Revelation 2-3

Revelation 1 records the things John has seen. Revelation 2-3 are *the things which are* (the present). In these two chapters, Jesus gives a personal message to seven churches which were around during John’s day. Each message is different though the pattern (Jesus’ identity, the positive, the negative, the promise) is the same.

Read Revelation 2-3. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

The seven churches were *actual* churches during John's day. However, it seems that these seven churches were chosen to represent the various types of churches throughout history. Note the plural at the end of each address—*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*. And it is possible that these seven churches represent, in a general sense, the progression that will take place in church history.

Fill in the chart based on Revelation 2-3. With each church, summarize how Jesus is described, the positives and negatives, and the promise to the one who overcomes.

	Jesus' Identity	The Positive	The Negative	The Promise
Ephesus	<i>Holds the seven stars and walks among the seven golden lampstands</i>	<i>Hard work, perseverance, avoided false teaching & teachers</i>	<i>Forsaken your first love</i>	<i>The right to eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God</i>
Smyrna				
Pergamum				
Thyatira				
Sardis				
Philadelphia				
Laodicea				

Some say the seven churches mirror church history in general: Ephesus (33-100), Smyrna (100-312), Pergamum (312-590), Thyatira (590-1517), Sardis (1517-1750), Philadelphia (1750-1925), and Laodicea (1925-present). This view is certainly subjective and hard to prove but may have some validity.

Nicolaitans (2:6)—Probably a reference to followers of Nicolas (Acts 6:5) who, according to church history, forsook the Lord and began promoting a morally loose Christian life.

Satan's throne (2:13)—Pergamum was the center of much pagan worship.

Laodicea (3:14)—A wealthy city that made its wealth through banking, production of wool, and medicines (particularly an eye salve). Jesus sees Himself as outside of this church (3:20).

The **four living creatures** are apparently angelic in nature. Their unique appearances may point to the fourfold nature of Christ seen in the gospels—the King (lion), Servant (ox), Son of Man (man), and Son of God (eagle).

The **twenty-four elders** represent the redeemed people of God, perhaps pointing to the twelve tribes of Israel (OT saints) and the twelve disciples (NT saints).

Rapture is the Latin translation of “caught up” in 1 Thess 4:17 and describes Christ’s coming in the clouds to take His church out of the world before the 7-year tribulation in Revelation.

The rapture is different from the Second Coming of Christ at the end of the tribulation when Christ steps foot on Mt. Olivet, judges the wicked, and begins his reign on earth. The Second Coming was foretold in the Old Testament prophecies.

CATCHING AWAY

DAY 3

Revelation 4

Revelation 4 marks a transition from *the things that are* (present) to *the things which will take place after this* (future). After hearing Jesus’ message to the seven churches, John is suddenly transported into heaven *in the Spirit* (4:2). In this vision, John will see future earthly events from a heavenly perspective. However, first, John describes what he sees in the heavenly realm (chapters 4-5).

Read Revelation 4. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

John sees some interesting things in heaven. What particularly catches your attention? Why? _____

What do the four living creatures say over and over, day and night (4:8)? _____

The invitation to John is *Come up here and I will show you what must take place after this* (4:1). “After this” points to a chronological progression. In other words, the things in chapters 4-22 will take place *after* the age of the churches. So what happens to the church (i.e., those who believe in Jesus)? The same thing that happens to John. They are snatched up and taken into heaven before the events of Revelation take place. This event is often called the “rapture” which is from a Latin word meaning “to be caught up.” Why does God do this? To preserve the church from the judgment to come on the earth and to open the door to once again work primarily through the nation of Israel in fulfillment of Daniel’s 70th week in Daniel 9:25-27. It is interesting to note in this regard that the word “church” is not used again until Revelation 22:6.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 both detail the *mystery* (not revealed before) of the rapture. **Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.** Paul writes this to comfort those who are grieving over loved ones who have died (*fallen asleep*).

What is the basis of our hope (4:14)? _____

When Jesus comes in the clouds and the trumpet of God sounds, what will happen *first* (4:16)? _____

What happens next (4:17)? _____

How should this truth impact us (4:13,18)? _____

CATCHING AWAY

DAY 4

Revelation 5

Revelation 5 is one of the key passages of Scripture. It gives the heavenly perspective on what Christ accomplished through his life, death, and resurrection.

Read Revelation 5. Ask God to speak to your heart.

Revelation 5 has been entitled “The Scroll and the Lamb.” The scroll contains all the events of Revelation 6-22 thus it details how mankind and the earth are to be redeemed. It tells how sin is wiped away, how death is defeated, how Satan is destroyed, and how the curse on the earth (pain, sorrow, enmity) is removed. Why does John weep (5:4)?

Why does one of the elders tell him to stop weeping (5:5)?

Describe who John sees take the scroll (5:6-7).

Why is He worthy to take the scroll and open it?

Describe the response in heaven when He takes the scroll.

Because of Jesus Christ, we have hope! Sin is wiped away. Death will be defeated. Satan will be destroyed. The earth will be restored to paradise. And those in Christ will *be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth* (5:10). As the **Son of David**, Jesus will rule over the earth. As the **Son of Abraham**, He will bring blessing to all peoples. As the **Son of Man**, He will restore mankind’s position over the earth. And as the **Son of God**, He will reign forever bringing glory to God. Worship Him and rejoice!

COUNTERFEIT

DAY 5

2Thessalonians 2

Before mankind and the earth are fully redeemed, God must first deal with Satan and with the ungodly (those who refuse to submit to God). This is the bitter side of Revelation (cf. Revelation 10:8-11). In the last days, after the true believers (church) are snatched away from the earth, Satan will make his move. He will send a “counterfeit messiah,” an **antichrist**, to oppose God and lead the world astray. This antichrist will come in peace but ultimately exalt himself as the false god over all the earth.

Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, “Come and see.” And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. (Revelation 6:1-2)

The opening of the entire seven-sealed scroll takes seven years. These seven years are called the “tribulation” since they will be a time of great trouble and suffering on the earth. However, based on Daniel’s prophecy (9:25-27), the first 3 ½ years of the tribulation will be a time of relative peace. This first seal represents these 3 ½ years as the antichrist assumes worldwide leadership under the guise of good will (white horse).

Jesus is our kinsman-redeemer. In the OT, if a person owed a debt and/or lost property, they needed a close relative (kinsman redeemer) to pay the debt and restore the property.

Because of Adam’s sin, mankind owed an eternal debt to God and lost his position over the earth. Only Jesus (a close relative by virtue of his humanity) could pay the debt and restore man’s position over the earth.

Prayers of the saints (5:8)— All our prayers for healing, life, peace, etc. are ultimately answered in Jesus’ opening of the scroll.

THINK ABOUT: *What prayer have you prayed that was not answered but will be when Jesus comes back and removes the curse from the earth?*

The Greek prefix, **anti-**, means both to oppose and to substitute. Thus the **anti-Christ** will both oppose Christ and seek to replace him.

2 Thessalonians 2 describes this “antichrist” and his methods in more detail. Paul wrote this letter to the Thessalonians to further educate them on what will happen before Christ comes back to rule the earth. Apparently some false teachers had infiltrated the church and started teaching that Christ had already come back and that the kingdom on earth had already started (2:1-2). Paul explains why this is a false teaching and a lie. **Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17.**

What does Paul say will happen before Christ comes back and rules the earth (2:3)? _____

What will this “man of lawlessness” (i.e., antichrist) do when he is revealed (2:4)? _____

How will the antichrist deceive mankind (2:9-10)? _____

Why do people perish (2:10)? _____

Why are people condemned (2:12)? _____

What will eventually happen to the antichrist (2:8)? _____

Read and meditate on 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17. What encourages you from these verses?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Read the following excerpt from Dr. John Walvoord’s book, *What We Believe* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 1990), pages 103-109.

During the lifetime of Christ the disciples did not understand that some prophecies were to be fulfilled in relation to the first coming of Christ and others in relation to His second coming. It was not until Christ died, rose again, and ascended into heaven that it became clear to the disciples that He would not fulfill the prophecies relating to His second coming until He returned. Accordingly, “When will Christ return?” became a very important question.

Likewise for the Christian who comes to understand that Christ died for him and rose again and who enters into the wonder of his salvation as he walks and has intimate fellowship with Him, it is only natural to long to see Christ face to face. The church is described as a bride waiting for her husband (2 Cor. 11:2). Just as a bride looks forward eagerly to her coming marriage, so a believer in Christ even though he is thrilled with the fellowship he has with Christ now, looks forward to that fuller fellowship that will be his when he is in Christ’s presence forever. This is

why the hope of Christ's return is called a blessed or happy hope (Titus 2:13). The more one loves Christ and seeks to have more intimate fellowship with Him, the more he will be looking for the return of Christ....

The first coming of Christ fulfilled hundreds of prophecies in the Old Testament. As the Old Testament predicted, Christ was born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2); He was both God and man (Isa. 7:14); He was born of a virgin (Matt. 1:23); He performed miracles (Isa. 35:5-6); He died on the cross for the sins of the whole world as predicted in the Old Testament as well as in the Gospels (Isa. 53:6; 1 Cor. 15:1-3); and He rose again the third day, predicted in Psalm 16:9-11, and frequently mentioned by Christ Himself (Matt. 16:4, 21; 17:22; 20:18-19; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34; Luke 9:22; 18:31-33; John 10:15, 17-18).

The present age followed His life on earth, and Christ's discourse in John 13-17 outlined the major features of this age. The present age, however, will conclude with the return of Christ. All the church creeds that are orthodox include the idea that Christ is coming again as revealed in both the Old and New Testaments. Christ Himself spoke on this extensively in Matthew 24. In His second coming to the earth, He will set up His kingdom for a thousand years and reign on the throne of David (Luke 1:32-33; Rev. 20:4-6).

Not revealed in the Old Testament is the prediction of Christ that He would come and take His disciples to heaven. This was included in His Upper Room Discourse in John 14:3, where Christ said, *If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.* Though some people try to harmonize this with the doctrine of the Second Coming, it is actually a different event because here believers will be taken from earth to heaven, whereas in the Second Coming, Christ will come from heaven to earth to remain in the earth to set up His kingdom. The disciples did not understand this, and Christ did not explain it, as the disciples were in no condition to understand it. Actually, a number of tremendous events have to take place *after* Christ comes for His church but *before* His second coming, and this includes the rise of a world church, the formation of a world government led by a world dictator, and the re-gathering of Israel to her ancient land, a prophecy that is already being fulfilled. The period between Christ's coming for His church and His second coming to the earth is climaxed by a time of unparalleled trouble that will last for three-and-a-half years and will culminate in a gigantic world war that will be fought in the Holy Land. While this is still underway, Christ will come back to set up His earthly kingdom.

In the Scriptures, however, whenever Christ's coming *for* His saints is mentioned, it is always presented as an imminent event, that is, no events are predicted as preceding it. This is in contrast to His second coming to set up His kingdom. Many prophecies in both the Old and New Testaments must be fulfilled before His second coming can be realized.

THE CHURCH AS A MAJOR PURPOSE OF GOD

To understand prophecy it is important to determine the different programs of God. ...One of these is God's plan for the world, or the Gentiles. This is revealed especially in Daniel 2, 7, and 8. There it is revealed that four great empires would emerge in history: Babylon Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Preceding these historically were Egypt and Assyria, which figured largely in the history of Israel before Babylon. In all, six world empires were described in history and prophecy. The final world empire, or the seventh empire, will be the kingdom from heaven,

which will come after the Second Coming (Dan. 7:13-14). From God's point of view, these seven empires embrace the significant history of the world.

Another major program of God is His plan for Israel. This began with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the twelve tribes descending from Jacob's twelve sons. Most of the Old Testament deals with Israel's program. Promised in the Old Testament is a triumphant and glorious future kingdom to be brought in by the Second Coming. Christ will restore Israel spiritually and politically in her promised land along with His worldwide government over the Gentiles.

Revealed in the New Testament but not in the Old Testament is God's purpose in the present age to form the church as the body of Christ consisting of both Jews and Gentiles to fulfill a purpose different from His purpose for the Gentiles or Israel. The church is especially designed to illustrate the grace of God (Eph. 2:4—10). This will be its function in time and eternity. As the program for Gentiles reveals God's sovereignty and infinite power, and as Israel reveals God's faithfulness, love, and righteousness, so the church is designed to illustrate the grace of God.

Much of the confusion in the interpretation of prophecy may be traced to confusion of God's plan for Israel and His plan for the church. At the Rapture, the program of God for the church ends its progress on earth and begins its program in heaven. By contrast, the program for Israel and the program for the Gentiles will continue on earth. To some extent all the programs converge in the millennial kingdom and the eternal state that follows.

PROPHECIES OF THE RAPTURE

Though Christ did not stop to explain to the disciples what He meant in John 14 as they were not prepared to understand, it was given to the apostle Paul many years later when writing his first letter to the Thessalonians to outline exactly what would be done at the Rapture. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 Paul stated, *The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*

As these verses show, Christ will come bodily from heaven, where He is now seated at the right hand of the Father, to the air above the earth. This event will also feature the voice of the archangel who will give a shout of triumph. The rapture of the church will be accomplished, in spite of all that Satan has done to hinder the church..., and together they will rise to meet the Lord in the air, being raptured or snatched up, and subsequently go to heaven.

According to 1 Thessalonians 4:14, when Jesus comes from heaven to the air above the earth, He will bring with Him the souls of Christians who have died, as these souls have been in His presence in heaven. Now He brings them back to the sphere of earth because He is going to resurrect their bodies and their souls will reenter their bodies forever. At the same time living Christians are changed, and both those resurrected and those on earth will receive bodies that are suited for heaven, patterned after the resurrection body of Christ.

...In 1 Corinthians 15:51-58 more light is thrown upon the character of the change that will take place at that time. Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 15:50 that people in their natural bodies need to have a change before they can be with the Lord because our present bodies are sinful, they are subject to age and decay, and they are subject to death. A resurrection body should be without sin and without advancing age and without death. Accordingly, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53, *Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a*

flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

The fact that those raised from the dead and those translated will have new bodies is confirmed by Ephesians 5:27, where it is revealed that Christ will *present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless*. The same thought is given in Philippians 3:21, where it states that Christ will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF THE RAPTURE

...God intended that the revelation of the Rapture be a blessing. In John 14 it was part of the reassurance that Christ gave His disciples, who were struggling with His predicted death on the cross. In 1 Thessalonians 4:18 the Rapture is presented as an encouraging, or comforting, hope. At the Rapture, of course, Christians will see their loved ones who have died and preceded them to heaven. It will also end their earthly problems, and they will be forever with the Lord. Because this event is imminent, it is all the more real and precious.

The promise of the coming of the Lord is also purifying hope, because Christians realize that after the Lord comes they will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ.

...The central truth of the judgment seat of Christ is stated in 2 Corinthians 5:10, *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad*. As this text makes clear, this is a judgment for Christians only, as the issue of salvation was already settled by the fact of their rapture to heaven. This judgment is not concerned with the sins of Christians, as the words “good or bad” are words relating to value, not morality. The question is whether a Christian’s life included things of eternal value in God’s sight.

In 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 he compares our life to a building to be tested by fire:

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

The building is built on a foundation that is supplied—Jesus Christ, our salvation. The materials of the building, though not explained, illustrate the various values in life: gold...silver...precious stones represent any work reflecting the glory of God that has eternal value. ...In contrast, the wood, hay, or straw represent values not eternal.

...Paul offers another illustration in Romans 14:10-12:

Why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. It is written: “As surely as I live,” says the Lord, “every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.” So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

The figure is that of a steward or trustee who has committed unto him something that actually belongs to another. As a boy I used to love to go with my father to our little bank with its row of cashiers behind the iron grating. I was always impressed by the amount of money they had in their booths. It was not until I became older that I realized that the money did not belong to them but belonged to the bank. They were stewards or trustees and had to report the day's transactions each evening.

...Paul asked the question, *What do you have that you did not receive?* (1 Cor. 4:7). The more we receive the greater is our responsibility. Christians are saved and given spiritual gifts by God as a solemn trust, that they be used wisely. Christians should not attempt to judge others in regard to reward, for each will have to give account to God and to no one else.

This figure is the great leveler of human attainment. Judgment is on the basis of faithful use of gifts, not necessarily how successful an individual may be. Every Christian has an equal opportunity for reward, because those with few gifts must account only for what God gave them. Those with many gifts actually have the greater difficulty of using all that God has given them. Many an obscure Christian will be rewarded more than those who had many gifts. Therefore, comparison of one Christian's life to another's is unwise.

These truths will come into focus, especially at the time of the Rapture. The fact that the Rapture is an imminent event that could occur at any time teaches us the importance of making the most of our present opportunities, whether in the form of witness, stewardship or holy living. Paul's exhortation in 1 Corinthians 15:58 is most appropriate with regard to the Rapture when he says, *Stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

CHANGED HEARTS



What is one truth from this lesson that has impacted your life? Why?

Like mentioned earlier in this lesson, the purpose of prophecy is not simply to arouse our curiosity. Prophecy's purpose is basically threefold:

- 1) **To give us hope, reassurance, and joy** (1 Thessalonians 4:18). Prophecy tells us how the "game will end" thus relieving us from excessive sorrow, worry, or despair.
- 2) **To warn us and alert us to coming deception** (2 Timothy 3:1-17). We are not to be ignorant of Satan's schemes but instead we are to be alert, aware, and watchful.
- 3) **To purify us and make us more like Christ** (1 John 3:2-3). Knowing that Christ can return at any moment motivates us to avoid sin and to serve Him with our whole hearts.

The apostle Peter provides the proper application to the coming of Christ in 1 Peter 4:7-10.

But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

In light of Christ’s imminent return, Peter does not tell us to sell all our possessions, run to the hills, or yell at people, “The end is coming!” What things does Peter tell us to do?

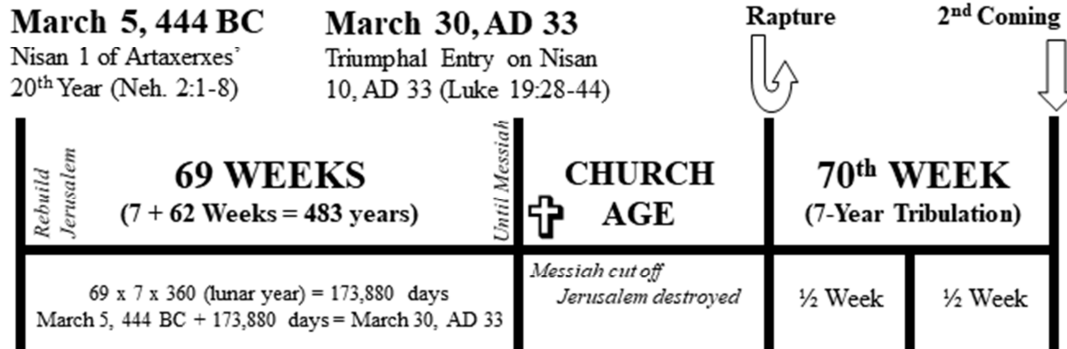
What are two specific abilities, spiritual gifts, or resources that God has given you?

God blesses us so that we can bless others. How can you use these abilities, gifts, or resources to serve others? _____

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- What are you looking forward to the most in the next 12 months? What do you fear?
- When you look toward the future, what emotions do you generally feel? Anxiety? Curiosity? Joy? Sorrow? Discouragement? Anticipation? Why?
- What difference does it make to have hope for the future?
- What do you learn about Jesus in Revelation 1? What do you think it was like for John, one of Jesus’ disciples, to see Jesus now in all of His glory?
- Which church in Revelation 2-3 stands out to you? Why?
- What do you think Christ would write to CBC?
- What stands out to you in John’s description of heaven?
- How do you think our present world is being set up to be deceived? In what ways have you been influenced by this present world?
- To keep the proper perspective when discussing the future, read 1 Peter 4:7-10 together. What activities does Peter tell us to focus on in light of Christ’s return? What is one specific way that you can apply Peter’s words this week?

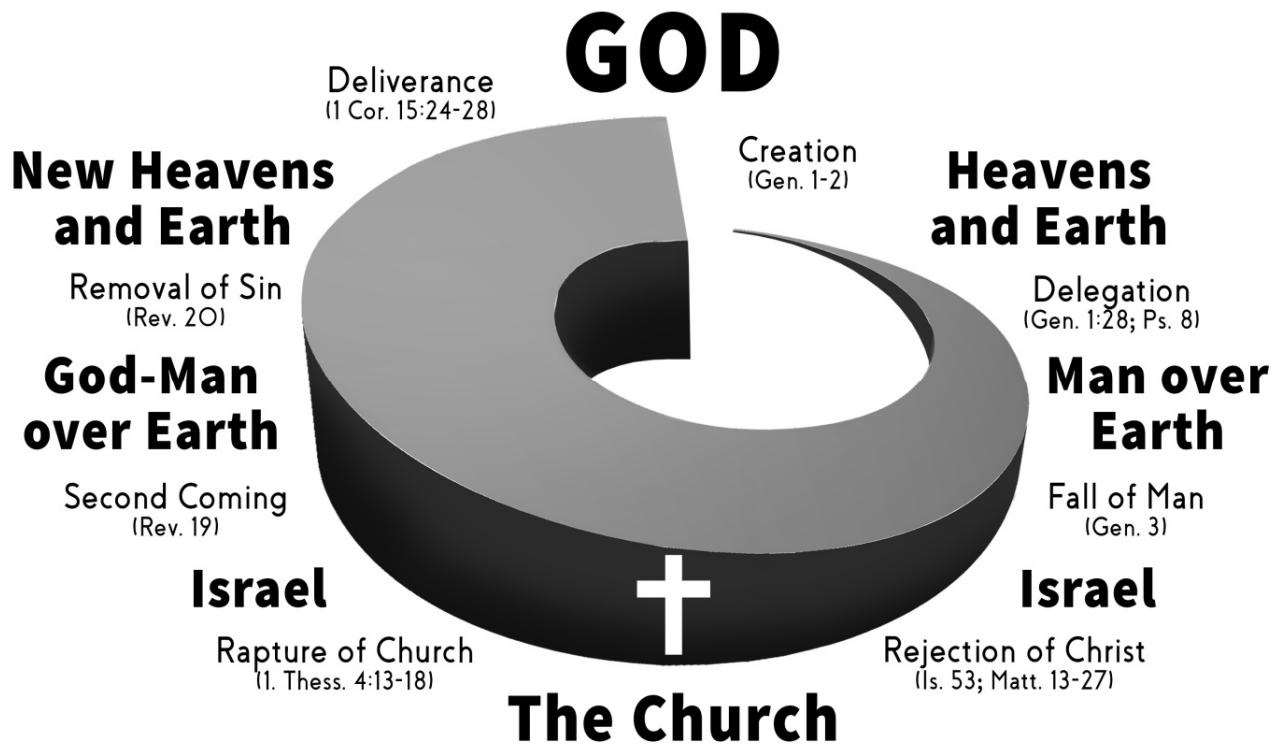
DANIEL'S SEVENTY WEEKS



444 BC to AD 33 = 476 years (1 BC to AD 1 = 1 year)
 476 years x 365.242 (solar year) = 173,855 days
 + days between March 5 & March 30 = 25 days
 173,880 days

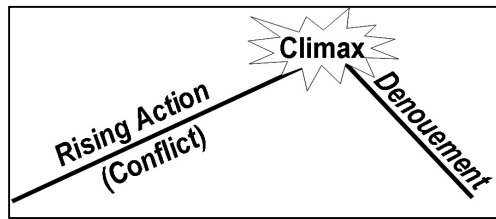
Future "prince" makes covenant with Israel for one week (7 years)
 Breaks covenant at halfway point—
 1260 days (3 ½ lunar years)
 (Matthew 24:15ff; Rev. 11:1-3)

—Dr. Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*



WEEK 11 CONFLICT & CORONATION

Have you noticed how many movies and stories deal with the “end of the world”? Something inside of us creates fear and fascination with the end of time. Of course, people have different views on how and when the world will end. Meteor strike? Nuclear holocaust? Natural disasters? Global warming and melting icecaps? Alien invasion? The Bible presents a different view. The world will end with a spiritual battle between God and Satan played out on earth’s stage.



Revelation 6-19 records the climax of history. Since the Garden of Eden, there has been a rising conflict between God and Satan. Satan’s rebellion began in heaven and then spread to earth with the fall of mankind into sin. Now the stage is set for a climatic battle.

The scroll of Revelation 5 is the “title deed” of the earth. It contains the plan for the redemption of mankind from sin and the earth from the curse. *But who can open it? Who can pay for man’s sin? Defeat death? Reverse earth’s curse? And conquer Satan? Who can restore the earth to the joy, freedom, peace, righteousness, and life of the Garden of Eden?* No politician, scientist, physician, musician, or league of nations can stop all disease, remove all pain, cure all of earth’s corruption, and end all death. **Mankind needs a “kinsman-redeemer”**—a near relative willing and able to pay the debt of man’s sin, free him from bondage, and redeem and restore his land, the earth.



Jesus Christ, the Conquering Lamb, is man’s kinsman-redeemer. He takes the seven-sealed scroll of Revelation 5 and, from chapter six through chapter eighteen, He opens the seven seals. When all seven seals are opened, Jesus Christ returns to earth as the Lion of Judah, the Son of David, and the King of Kings.

The details of Revelation 6-19 are hard to interpret. Orthodox Christianity believes that Jesus is coming back bodily to remove sin and redeem mankind. This much is agreed upon. What

Christ’s return will look like and what events precede His return are debated, especially in regard to the symbolism of Revelation 6-19. Again we must approach these chapters with humility and with dependence on the Holy Spirit.

We must also approach Revelation 6-19 with a level of reverence and sorrow. Revelation 10:8-11 provides a fitting analogy for how we should view these chapters. John takes and eats the words of prophecy, and they are sweet in his mouth but bitter in his stomach. The same is true for us as believers in Christ. God’s judgment means salvation and redemption for believers (sweet) but it also brings terrible consequences upon the world (bitter). Thus as we look forward to the coming of Christ, we are also aware of the sobering realities of God’s judgment on unrepentant people.

The Apostles’ Creed (~AD 100-200)

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

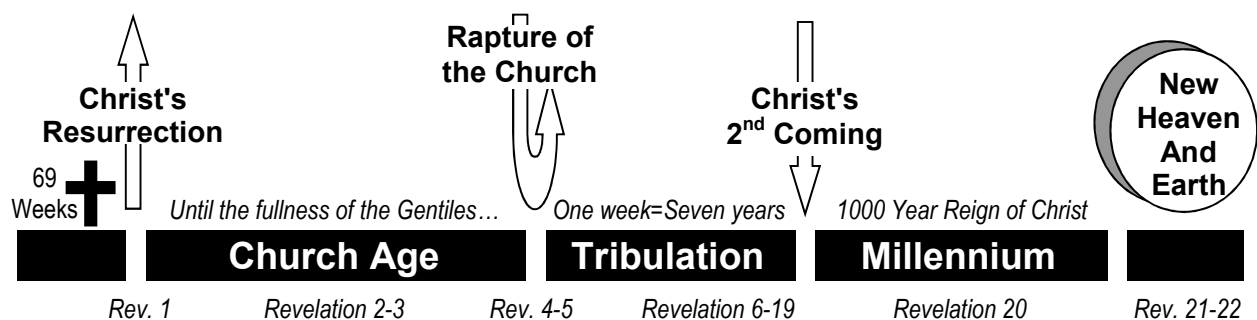
I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic [universal] church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. AMEN.

Daniel 9:24-27 is the lens for interpreting Revelation 6-19. The following explanation of Daniel 9 may be difficult to comprehend but read and review it before beginning this study.

Seventy weeks are determined For your people and for your holy city, <i>To finish the transgression,</i> <i>To make an end of sins,</i> <i>To make reconciliation for iniquity,</i> <i>To bring in everlasting righteousness,</i> <i>To seal up vision and prophecy,</i> <i>And to anoint the Most Holy.</i>	"weeks," lit., "sevens" A group of seven years. This prophecy specifically addresses the Jews and details a total period of 490 years (70x7). The first three are fulfilled in Christ's 1st coming. These three have not yet been fulfilled. They will be fulfilled at Christ's 2nd coming (Rev. 19).
<i>Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times.</i>	The decree of Artaxerxes, March 14, 445 BC, (Neh. 2:5) started this prophetic clock. 7 + 62 weeks later (i.e., 483 years), on April 6, AD 32, Jesus rode into Jerusalem (Zech. 9:9). Since a prophetic year is 360 days, the fulfillment of the prophecy was exact! (Anderson, <i>The Coming Prince</i>, 121-23)
<i>And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined.</i>	After the 62 weeks (and the 7 weeks), Christ was crucified, leaving one final week of seven years. The "prince who is to come" is the Anti-Christ whose "people" (Romans/Gentiles) destroyed the temple and Jerusalem in AD 70.
<i>Then he [prince who is to come] shall confirm a treaty with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate.</i>	The tribulation begins when the Antichrist signs a seven-year treaty with Israel. He breaks the treaty after 3½ years by forbidding sacrifices and setting up his own image in the temple to be worshipped (cf. Matt. 24:15-16; 2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:15). Jesus' mention of this event in Matthew 24 tells us that it has not yet been fulfilled.

A pre-millennial understanding of Daniel and Revelation would thus look like the following:



SCRIPTURE EXPLORATION



CONFLICT

DAY 1

Matthew 24

Revelation 6-18 detail the events of Daniel's 70th week. It is known as the "tribulation," "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer 30:7), or the "day of the Lord." The disciples asked Jesus about this time in Matthew 24. Jesus' answer to them gives a basic overview of this time period.

Read Matthew 24. Ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

What questions did the disciples ask Jesus (24:3)? _____

Jesus answers their questions in 24:4-31. Besides each verse(s) write a sign of Jesus' second coming. [This refers to Jesus' second coming not the rapture of the church.]

24:5,11,24 _____

24:6-7a _____

24:7b _____

24:9 _____

24:12 _____

24:14 _____

24:15-21 _____

24:29 _____

After these signs are fulfilled, Christ will come back for all the world to see (24:30) and He will gather the righteous together and judge the wicked (24:31). Christ next speaks of the proper response to His coming (24:32-25:30).

Who knows when Christ will come back (24:36)? _____

What will those days be like (24:37-39)? _____

How should we live in light of Christ's return (24:42-51)? _____

CONFLICT

DAY 2

Revelation 6-7

Revelation 6-7 record the opening of the first six seals of the scroll.

Read Revelation 6-7. Ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

The first four seals reveal the "four horsemen" of Revelation (6:1-8). They are symbolic of events that come upon the earth in successive order. Summarize what happens with the coming of each horseman.

Not one stone shall be left upon another (24:2)—Herod's Temple was a magnificent building and the pride of the Jewish people. In AD 70, it was destroyed by the Romans in fulfillment of Christ's words.

Abomination of desolation (24:15)—Used in Daniel 9:27, 11:31, this phrase describes the desecration of Jewish worship. It described Antiochus Epiphanes setting up an altar to Zeus in the temple in 168 BC. Jesus says a similar thing will happen in the last days (cf. 2 Thess. 2:4).

This generation (24:34)—The people alive to see the signs that Jesus mentions will also see His return. This indicates that once the end times begin, they will move quickly (i.e., within seven years).

White horse (6:2)—The anti-Christ comes under the guise of peace.

Denarius (6:6)—Roman silver coin that was roughly equal to a day's worth of work. In this case, the famine will be so severe that it will take a full day's wage to buy a quart of wheat (i.e., a loaf of bread). Ironically there will still be plenty of wine and olive oil!

Great earthquake (6:12)—This may be a natural disaster or it is possible that John, trying to describe future events with ancient terms, sees something like a nuclear explosion in 6:12-14 (see also Zechariah 14:12).

His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven (12:4)—This probably refers to a third of the angels joining Satan in his original rebellion against God. These angels now compose his demonic forces.

White Horse _____

Red Horse _____

Black Horse _____

Pale Horse _____

What does John see when the fifth seal is opened (6:9)? _____

What about the sixth seal (6:12-13)? _____

Do you see any similarities between the signs that Jesus mentioned in Matthew 24 and the events described in Revelation 6? ☐ Yes ☐ No

In Matthew 24, Jesus stated that during the tribulation *the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world* (vs. 14). Revelation 7 tells us how this will happen. In the midst of the judgments and trials upon the earth, God seals and protects 144,000 Jewish evangelists (12,000 from each tribe) who spread the gospel all over the world.

What does John see after the sealing of the 144,000 Jews (7:9)? _____

Who are they (7:13-14)? _____

What does this tell you? _____

CONFLICT

DAY 3

Behind the events of Revelation stands the conflict between God and Satan. Revelation 12-13 gives us a glimpse of this conflict and how it manifests itself during the great tribulation on earth.

Revelation 12-13

Read Revelation 12-13. Ask God to open your heart as you read.

Revelation 12-13 are not the easiest chapters to interpret or understand. In 12:1-6, John sees two great signs—the first is a woman who represents the nation of Israel and the second is a great dragon who represents Satan. Out of Israel comes the Messiah, Jesus, who is born of the virgin Mary. Satan tries to destroy Him but fails. Failing to destroy the Messiah, Satan instead turns his anger on Israel. This anger will fully manifest itself during the second half of the tribulation (1260 days or 3 ½ years).

In the midst of the tribulation, there will be a great war in heaven between Satan and the archangel Michael (12:7-12). Satan will be defeated and completely cast out of the heavenly realm (cf. Daniel 12:1). Knowing his time is short, Satan will turn his full fury on planet earth, specifically on Israel and on those who follow Jesus (12:13-17).

What titles or descriptions are used of Satan in 12:9-10? _____

How do believers overcome Satan (12:11)? _____

In his fury, Satan, the dragon, raises up a world political leader (the beast, 13:1) and a world religious leader (the false prophet, 13:11) to do his bidding on earth. The beast's description echoes back to Daniel 7:1-28 and points to a political leader who rules the seventh major empire of history (seven heads, Rev. 17:9-10), controls ten other modern political leaders (ten horns), and exalts himself like a god. If the seven heads represent world empires, then the wounded and reviving of one of the heads (13:3) probably refers to the fact that the beast rules over a revived Roman empire that seemingly died but is now alive again. The beast rules over this new empire for 42 months (3 ½ years).

How complete is his authority (13:7-8)? _____

The second beast (called the false prophet in 16:13, 19:20, 20:10) acts as a worldwide religious leader directing people to give their worship and obedience to the beast. How does he deceive the world (13:13)? _____

The false prophet also directs the making of an image of the beast which somehow comes to life (a TV image?). He also requires all people to receive a mark on their hand or forehead in order to _____ (13:17).

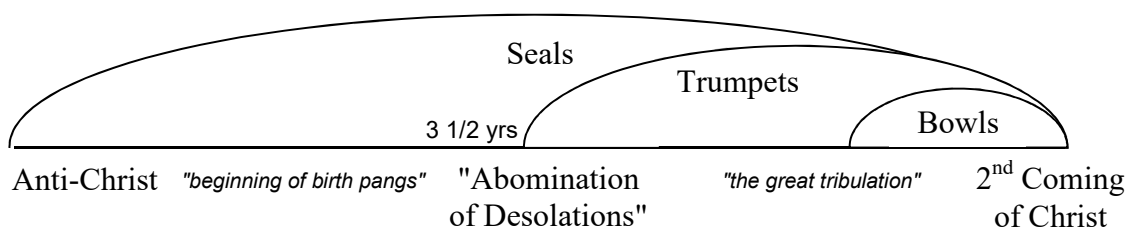
What is the number of the beast? _____ This number has been variously interpreted but it may simply refer to the "unholy trinity" of the dragon, beast, and false prophet.

CONFLICT

DAY 4

Revelation 15-16

Revelation 6-19 has a chronological perspective that is interrupted several times by other visions seen by John. The chronology centers around the seven seals which are opened successively in chapters 6-8. Within the seventh seal are fourteen more judgments—seven trumpets (ch. 8-9) and seven bowls (ch. 15-16). You could picture it as follows:



The final seven bowl judgments of God are poured out in Revelation 15-16.

Read Revelation 15-16. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

Accuser of the brethren (12:10)

—Up until the mid-point of the tribulation, Satan had access to God's throne in order to point out the faults of God's children, which he did day and night.

THINK ABOUT:
When people spend all day criticizing other people, whose footsteps are they following?

Daniel 7 uses the leopard, bear, and lion to describe the empires of Greece, Medo-Persia, and Babylon respectively. The beast of Revelation 13 will rule over a revived Roman empire that has all the speed, brutality, and power of these three empires.

666 (13:18)—This number has been the object of much speculation with people finding creative ways to identify it with Nero, Hitler, Ronald Reagan, Mikhail Gorbachev, UPC codes, and Bill Gates.

Song of Moses (15:3)—
Sung by the Jews after God judged Egypt and delivered them. The same type of song will be sung at the final judgment and deliverance by God.

Temple (15:5)—
Hebrews 8:5 teaches that the earthly tabernacle with its Holy of Holies was patterned after the heavenly temple in which God dwells.

There is much in the **bowls** judgments that could refer to a nuclear and chemical war.

Armageddon (16:16)—The city of Megiddo in Israel will be the final gathering place of a great world war between the Anti-Christ and the armies from the east (China?).

The armies in heaven (19:14)—A reference to believers, raptured by Jesus, now returning with Him.

What are the seven bowls filled with (15:7)? _____

What attributes of God are praised in the Song of Moses and the Lamb (15:3-4)? _____

For God to be just and righteous, He must judge sin. In Revelation 16, the time for the final judgment has come. Summarize what occurs when each bowl is poured out.

1st Bowl _____

2nd Bowl _____

3rd Bowl _____

4th Bowl _____

5th Bowl _____

6th Bowl _____

7th Bowl _____

How do the people on earth respond to these judgments (16:9,11,21)? _____

Where do the armies of men gather at the end of time (16:16)? _____

CORONATION

DAY 5

Revelation 19

After the seven bowl judgments are poured out, John is shown another vision in Revelation 17-18. There is much that is difficult to understand in these two chapters but basically John is shown the final destruction of “Babylon.” Babylon is symbolic of all that is opposed to God. It echoes back to Genesis 11 when Nimrod sought to establish a worldwide kingdom in opposition to God. The place was called “Babel” and eventually Babylon. Isaiah 14 identifies the “king of Babylon” as Satan himself (see 14:3-4, 12-15). Revelation 17-18 reveal two parts to Babylon—religious Babylon and commercial Babylon. Satan has used religion and riches to oppose and deceive mankind throughout history. Both will come to an end. After seeing the destruction of Babylon, John looks to see the return of Jesus Christ.

Read Revelation 19. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

All of history has been moving to this climactic moment. Praises erupt from all corners in heaven as Christ prepares to leave heaven and take His throne on earth. *The marriage of the Lamb has come (19:7)!* Christ, the new Adam, will take the church and the saints, the new Eve, and reign over a restored Paradise on earth. When John hears all the rejoicing, he falls at the feet of the one who has been speaking to him. What response does John receive to this act of worship (19:10)?

What names and titles are given to Jesus as He returns to earth (19:11,13, 16)? _____

What happens to the beast and the false prophet when Christ returns? _____

What happens to the rest of the people who oppose Christ at His return? _____

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Read the following excerpt from Dr. Renald Showers' book, *What on Earth is God Doing?* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1973), pages 104-112.

After the rapture of the Church, the world will enter a unique seven-year period, the latter half of which will be characterized by great, unprecedented tribulation (Matthew 24:21). Because Daniel foretold that this period would be the last of seventy periods of seven years planned by God for Israel, it has been called the seventieth week of Daniel. Because it will be characterized by tribulation, others have called it the tribulation period.

THE PURPOSES OF SATAN FOR THE SEVENTIETH WEEK

In his war against the kingdom of God, Satan will have four major purposes for the seventieth week.

1. ***The permanent establishment of a visible, political form of his kingdom.*** Satan's first purpose will be to establish permanently and worldwide a visible, political form of his kingdom. In order to do this, he must have a king who will rule this kingdom for him. This king must be a man who will do what Christ refused to do—turn himself over to Satan's control in order to rule the kingdoms of the world (Matthew 4:8-10).

Satan will find such a man.... He is called the Antichrist by the Apostle John. As the Antichrist, he will propagate man's present lie by denying the existence of the personal God and denying that Jesus Christ was God incarnate in human flesh (1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7).

...In his rise to power, Antichrist will ally himself with the one apostate church of the western world for the purpose of gaining the powerful support of it and its people (Revelation 17). In addition, in the beginning of his rule as head of the western world, Antichrist will make a covenant with the nation of Israel, guaranteeing her protection from her enemies and freedom to reestablish her Old Testament worship (Daniel 9:27). Because of this promised protection, Israel will phase out her defense program and focus her attention upon peaceful pursuits (Ezekiel 37:11,14). She will rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem and reinstitute her Old Testament sacrifices. Thus during the first three and one-half years of his reign, Antichrist will appear to be very benevolent to most people in the western world, the apostate church, and Israel.

Satan will inspire Antichrist to pursue the goal of a worldwide kingdom. However, in his attempt to reach this goal, Antichrist will be opposed by a huge military power north of Palestine. Sometime before the middle of the seventieth week Syria and Egypt will challenge Antichrist's guarantee of protection to Israel by invading that land from the north and the south (Daniel 11:40). It may be that these nations will be persuaded to do this by the power to the north. In reaction to this invasion, Antichrist will rush his western army to the Middle East, crush Syria, and march south to invade Egypt (Daniel 11:40-43). While conquering Egypt, he will hear disturbing news out of the east and the north (Daniel 11:44).

The news from the north may be to the effect that the great power north of Palestine has invaded Israel in response to the western world's intrusion into the Middle East (Ezekiel 38:1-16). When Antichrist will receive this news in Egypt, he will rush his armies north toward Israel with the goal of furiously destroying the northern invader (Daniel 11:44). However, before he will be able to get there, God will have destroyed the huge northern army supernaturally (Ezekiel 38:17-39:20).

This destruction of Antichrist's major opponent in the middle of the seventieth week will enable him to extend his rule to worldwide proportions. With no one left to challenge his authority, he will be free to do whatever he pleases. It is at that time that his false face of benevolence will come off and his true beastly character will be displayed. He will establish his headquarters in Israel (Daniel 11:45), will break his covenant with that country by forcing her to cease offering her Old Testament sacrifices (Dan 9:27), and will destroy the apostate church (Rev 17:16).

Having brought an end to these other forms of religion, Antichrist will erect an image of himself in the holy of holies of the Jewish Temple, will declare that he is God, and will demand that everyone worship him (Daniel 9:27; 11:36-37; Matthew 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:4). Satan will prompt him to do this, because through the worship of Antichrist he himself will receive worship (Revelation 13:4). Most of the people of the world will have no problem worshiping Satan's king (13:8). ...Because of Antichrist's supernatural powers, it will be easy for the world to conclude that he is the ultimate product of evolution; therefore, he should be worshiped as the representative of what man is becoming—deity.

Satan will give supernatural powers to another man to enable him to be the high priest of the Antichrist cult. This man, called the false prophet (Revelation 16:13; 19:20), will develop and lead a highly organized religious system on behalf of the king (Revelation 13:11-18). With the development of this system, Antichrist will reach the peak of his career. He will be given authority to remain in his high position for three and one-half more years (Revelation 13:5).

2. ***The destruction of all testimony for God.*** In spite of the intense activity of Satan, God will save many people during the seventieth week. These people will carry on an active witness for God and Christ in the world. One of Satan's goals will be the total annihilation of all testimony about his Enemy. Thus, he will prompt the apostate church, Antichrist, and the false prophet to make war against God's saints (Daniel 7:25; Revelation 13:7,15; 17:6). Many believers will be martyred for their faith (Revelation 20:4), but the witness never will cease.

3. ***The destruction of Israel.*** Since the repentance of Israel will be a major key to the establishment of God's theocratic kingdom, Satan will continue to attempt annihilation of Israel during the seventieth week. Realizing that his time is growing short, he will attack the nation with extreme intensity (Revelation 12). When the Jews will rebel over the king's image being

placed in their Temple, Antichrist will persecute them more severely than they have ever been persecuted (Matthew 24:15-20). Anti-Semitism will be the worst in history. For this reason Jeremiah referred to this period as “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30:4-7). At the end of the seventieth week Satan will draw all the armies of the world to Palestine (Revelation 16:13-14,16). This will threaten the existence of Israel (Zechariah 14:1-2), but God will continue to preserve at least a remnant (Jeremiah 30:7).

4. ***The gathering of the armies.*** Satan’s last purpose for the seventieth week will be to gather all the armies of the world together at Armageddon in Palestine. In order to accomplish this feat, he, Antichrist, and the false prophet will resort to demonic activity (Revelation 16:12-16). As the seventieth week nears its end, Satan will realize that Christ soon will come to Palestine to establish the theocratic kingdom. For this reason he will want the military might of the whole world there to help him wage war against the Redeemer (Psalm 2:1-3; Revelation 19:19). This will be his last ditch attempt to prevent the theocracy from coming.

THE PURPOSES OF GOD FOR THE SEVENTIETH WEEK

In His war against the kingdom of Satan, God also will have four major purposes for the seventieth week....

1. ***The salvation of many people.*** Near the beginning of the seventieth week God will save 144,000 Jewish men, seal them from all harm, and send them throughout the world to preach the gospel everywhere until Christ will return (Revelation 7:2-8). As a result of their evangelistic effort, a great multitude of Gentiles from every tongue, tribe, and nation will become saved (Revelation 7:9-17). To the nation of Israel God will send two special witnesses who will dress like Old Testament prophets, perform great signs, and preach the gospel together with repentance in preparation for the coming, theocratic kingdom (Revelation 11:3-13). Through their testimony many Jews will become saved, and they in turn will become witnesses (Revelation 12:17). Thus, God will use the seventieth week to enlarge the membership of His kingdom.

2. ***The crushing of the kingdom of Satan.*** From the fall of man to the seventieth week God has been allowing Satan to try every means possible to overthrow the kingdom of God. Although God has been preventing Satan from accomplishing his goal, He has not begun to execute the sentence of judgment upon him and his kingdom. Thus, Satan has been having his day. However, once the Antichrist is revealed and Satan begins his ultimate attempt of overthrow, God finally will begin to close in upon him to crush both him and his kingdom. Thus, God will start to have His day, and the seventieth week will begin a period of time called the day of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3).

The seventieth week will be characterized by divine judgment, as God pours out His wrath upon the godless people and domain of the earthly province of Satan’s kingdom (Zephaniah 1:14-15). Over the course of the seven years the judgments will increase in their severity, so that the latter three and one-half years will be far worse than the former. For this reason, Jesus said that the latter half of the seventieth week would be a time of *great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved* (Matthew 24:21-22).

As wave after wave of judgment comes, much of the earth’s surface will be ravished, and the apostate church, the capitol of Antichrist’s kingdom, and huge segments of the world’s

population will be destroyed (Revelation 6; 8-11; 16-18). As a result, the world will learn the horrible consequences of denying the existence of its Creator.

Near the middle of the seventieth week God will direct one stage of judgment against Satan himself. Michael, the archangel, and those angels of God that are under his command will attack Satan and his angels in the heaven which is their dwelling place (Revelation 12:7). As a result of this war in the spiritual realm, Satan and his angels will be evicted from their heaven and cast down to earth in partial defeat (Revelation 12:8-9). Thus, Satan and the whole of his kingdom will be confined to earth to await the final battle with Christ.

As God pours out His judgments upon Satan and his kingdom, it will become evident that He is beginning to execute His program of establishing the theocratic kingdom. Thus, in eager anticipation of that blessed, coming event, the creatures of God in Heaven will cry out in great exultation:

The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ: and He shall reign for ever and ever (Revelation 11:15).

Now is come the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, [who] accuseth them before our God day and night (Revelation 12:10).

3. ***The gathering of the armies.*** Satan will not be the only one involved in gathering all the armies of the world together in Palestine at the end of the seventieth week. God will have a hand in this too (Revelation 16:1,12; Zephaniah 3:8). His purpose for the gathering will be that of destroying these armies of godless men (Psalm 2:4-12).

4. ***The repentance of Israel.*** One of God's greatest purposes for the seventieth week will be that of bringing the nation of Israel to genuine repentance. For centuries Israel has been in a state of rebellion, refusing to repent so that the theocratic kingdom could be established. As a result, she has suffered wave after wave of persecution, as one Gentile nation after another has indulged in anti-Semitism. Thus far, however, there have been other nations to which the Jews could appeal for refuge and aid in their times of oppression. Now, after some 1,900 years of worldwide dispersion, they exist once again as a united nation in their homeland (as the Scriptures implied that they would at least by the time Antichrist would be revealed).

When Antichrist will persecute the Jews worse than they ever have been persecuted before, there will be no nations to which they can appeal for refuge or help because of the worldwide rule of their persecutor. When the armies of the world will be gathered in their homeland at the end of the seventieth week, the Jews will be threatened with total annihilation. God will use these fantastic pressures as His instrument for backing Israel into such a tight corner that there will be no release, no means of escape unless the nation turns to Him and His Redeemer. Thus, at the end of the seventieth week, Israel finally will respond with genuine repentance. She will mourn the fact that she had crucified her true Messiah, Jesus Christ, and she will cry out for God's deliverance (Zechariah 12:10-14). In response to this repentance, God will cleanse the nation from sin and send Christ to establish the theocratic kingdom (Zechariah 13:1).

THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST

Once the armies of the world have gathered in Armageddon, and Israel has repented. Jesus Christ will come riding out of Heaven on a white horse—the sign of a victorious conqueror. With Him will be all the angelic armies of Heaven. Antichrist, the kings under him, and their armies will unite to make war against Christ and His angels. but they will be overcome completely by the word and brilliant glory of the Redeemer (2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 19:11-16,19). Antichrist and the false prophet will be cast alive into the lake of fire, there to remain forever (Revelation 19:20). The kings and their godless armies will be killed, and the birds will feed on their flesh (Revelation 19:17-18,21). Thus Satan’s kingdom will be crushed completely.

CHANGED HEARTS



What is one truth from this lesson that has impacted your life? Why?

Read and reflect on Philippians 2:5-11. Mark any phrases or words that stand out to you.

⁵*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:*
⁶*Who, being in very nature God,*
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
⁷*but made himself nothing,*
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
⁸*And being found in appearance as a man,*
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
⁹*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place*
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰*that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,*
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹*and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,*
to the glory of God the Father.

Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. **Christ will rule.** The only question is, “Will a person bow voluntarily before Christ in faith, love and obedience or will they be forced to bow before Him involuntarily in judgment?”

Have you bowed your knee to Jesus and confessed Him as Lord? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

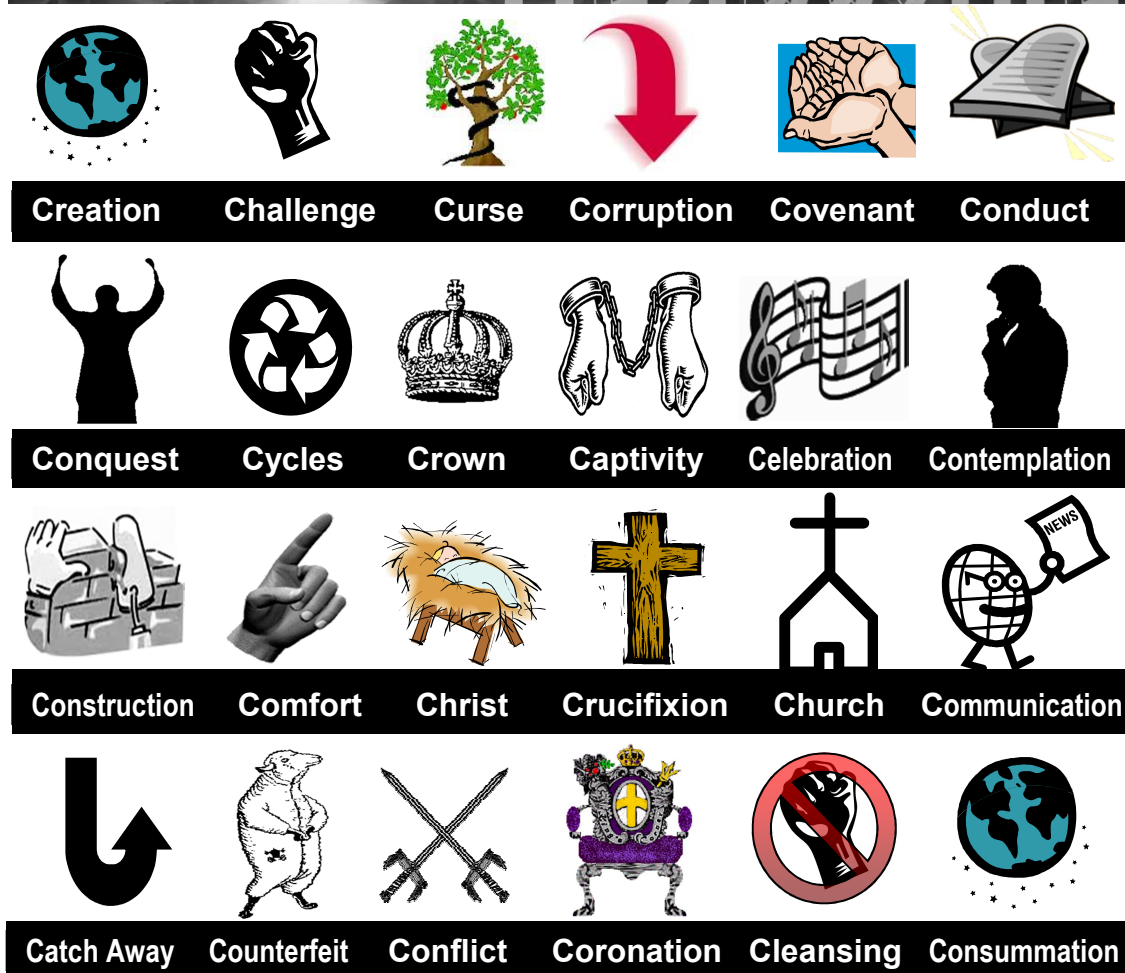
Not only are we to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord but we are to live under His Lordship. This is a daily battle and struggle. In what area(s) of your life are you struggling to give Jesus control?

Pray and ask God to give you the strength and courage to relinquish control of this area to Christ. It is also helpful to share your struggle with someone else who can faithfully encourage you and pray with you in your walk with the Lord.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- What are the top news stories in this week's news? What does each news story tell you about the heart of humanity? About the state of the world? What solutions are offered?
- Why did Jesus tell His disciples about the end times? How did He want them to think about these things? How were they to respond?
- What did you learn about the Anti-Christ from this study?
- How does deception work? What is the antidote to deception?
- What do the songs in Revelation 15 and 16 teach you about God?
- This study presents hard truth about the state of our world and the wrath of God. What are some ways that people respond to hard truth? How do you generally respond?
- What do you learn about Jesus Christ from Revelation 19? In what ways is Christ's second coming different from His first coming?
- Discuss the Lordship of Christ. What does it mean that He is Lord? How should that practically impact the way that you live? What comfort does His Lordship give you?

WEEK 12 CLEANSING & CONSUMMATION



Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)

33:1. God has appointed a day, wherein He will judge the world, in righteousness, by Jesus Christ, to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father....

33.2. The end of God's appointing this day is for the manifestation of the glory of His mercy, in the eternal salvation of the elect; and of His justice, in the damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient..

33.3 As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin; and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity: so will He have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful....

The story of Scripture is complete. Paradise is created in Genesis 1. Paradise is lost in Genesis 3. And paradise is finally restored in Revelation 20-22.

God has a purpose for history and He *works* (Greek, *energeo*) *all things according to the counsel of His will* (Ephesians 1:11). So what is His purpose? Why are there so many thousands of years in between Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained? There are at least three reasons brought out in Scripture:

1. **To reveal His glory.** We would not know the extent of God's mercy, love, patience, kindness, and grace apart from God allowing evil to run its course.
2. **To redeem a people for Himself.** God created us for relationship. He has given us free will so that we might choose to love Him. And He has allowed time to continue so that many may come to repent and join His family.
3. **To reveal the curse of sin.** Time has revealed the utter emptiness and deathly nature of rebellion against God. The purity and goodness of God's kingdom has been magnified by the corruption and evilness of sin's reign.

SCRIPTURE EXPLORATION



Parables are short stories from everyday life used to illustrate spiritual truth. Typically they have one primary point which they are trying to teach.

THINK ABOUT:
What is the primary point behind the parable of the ten virgins?

The English word “**talent**” actually comes from Jesus’ parable of the talents since early interpreters believed that the talents given to the servants represented a person’s abilities.

However, the talents are given “each according to his ability” (25:15) so they must point to more than simply one’s abilities. They probably represent all that God has given us to be used for His glory (e.g., our life, our gifts, our blessings, our relationships, etc.).

CLEANSING

DAY 1

Matthew 25

When Christ returns to earth, He will reverse the curse on the earth and begin making all things new. He will bring in the kingdom that mankind was meant to enjoy when God created Adam and Eve. Jesus’ miracles during His first coming are a foretaste of Jesus’ future kingdom—nature will be brought under control, demonic forces will be removed, sickness and disease will be eliminated, food and drink will multiply, and peace and righteousness will reign. Israel and all of mankind will experience the promised blessings of God’s kingdom on earth.

But essential to the beginning of Christ’s kingdom will be the removal of all that offends, not only in nature but in mankind. Christ must judge and remove those who refused to repent and who followed the leading of Satan and his anti-Christ.

Matthew 25 continues Christ’s words to His disciples in regard to the end of the age. Christ encourages His disciples to always be ready for His return and reveals to them the judgment of the nations that will precede His earthly reign.

Read Matthew 25. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

In Matthew 24:45-51, Jesus tells us to be ready because He may come *sooner* than we anticipate. In 25:1-13, He warns us to be ready because He may come *later* than we expect. In Jewish culture, the bridesmaids would go out and wait for the groom to come. Once he came, they would escort him to the bride and to the wedding feast. Once the feast started, it was considered rude to come late. Why does Jesus call five of the bridesmaids foolish? _____

In the next parable (25:14-30), Jesus tells the story of someone who doesn’t think Christ will come back sooner or later than expected. Rather he doesn’t think Christ is coming back at all! In the story, a master gives three of his servants various amounts of money (a talent was equal to ~70 lbs of gold or silver) to steward while he is gone.

What do the first two servants do with the resources given to them by the master? _____

What does the third servant (one talent) do? _____

After a long time, the master returns to settle accounts with the servants, to hold them accountable for the resources and opportunities he has given them. Summarize what the master says to the first two servants who used their resources for the master. _____

What is the basic excuse of the third servant for not doing anything with what the master graciously gave him (25:24-25)? _____

The master responds to the servant's excuse by pointing out that even the least amount of effort would have gained some approval from him. Instead the *wicked and lazy servant* did nothing. He squandered every gift, blessing, and opportunity from the master to basically do his own thing. He buried the gift so he wouldn't even have to think about it. What are the consequences of this servant's actions? _____

How would you summarize the message of this parable? _____

Finally in Matthew 25, Jesus paints a picture of the judgment of the nations (Gentiles) that will precede His earthly reign. The Jews who survive the tribulation will turn to Christ at His return (cf. Romans 11:26). They will enter His kingdom. Now Christ must judge the Gentiles who survive the tribulation to see who will enter His kingdom.

How will Christ separate the righteous from the wicked? What will show a person's true heart during the tribulation? _____

What a person does to the least of Christ's brethren, he/she does to _____.

CLEANSING

DAY 2

Revelation 20

The fifteen verses of Revelation 20 cover one thousand years of time. This is often referred to as the "millennium" (meaning "1000"). During the millennium, Christ will reign on earth in fulfillment of God's original design for mankind and His prophetic promises to Israel. The Old Testament describes the millennium as a time of abundant food, wine and crops (Amos 9:13-14), deserts blooming (Isaiah 35:1-7), animals at peace with one another and with man (11:6-9), sickness eliminated (33:24), physical handicaps removed (35:5-6), lives lengthened (65:20), peace between people and nations (Micah 4:1-5), restoration of one common language (Zephaniah 3:9), and the knowledge of the Lord filling the earth (Habakkuk 2:13-14).

Read Revelation 20. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

What happens to Satan during the millennium (20:1-3)? _____

The first resurrection includes OT saints (Daniel 12:2), the church (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), and the martyred tribulation saints (Revelation 20:4). What blessings do these resurrected saints receive (20:6)? _____

God's judgment is not based on how much we do but based on how we respond to that which He has given us. *For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required* (Luke 12:48).

THINK ABOUT: *What are three gifts, abilities, or blessings that God has given you? Are you using these things for God's glory or for your own?*

Nations (25:32)—

Greek, *ethnos*, meaning "nation" or, in the plural, often referring to the Gentiles.

During the tribulation, a person's heart will be revealed by how they treat the Jews who will be the special target of the anti-Christ. It will be similar, though even worse, than the Holocaust. Of course, Jesus' words also remind us that how we treat the oppressed, the poor, and the disadvantaged reveals the true nature of our hearts (James 1:27; 1 John 3:16-18).

The rebellion at the end of the millennium will reveal that man's ultimate problem is not his environment or his circumstances but rather the condition of his heart.

The **individual books** are records kept in heaven of each person's life. An interesting theory is that our brains themselves are the books since there is growing evidence that our brains record every act and experience of our lives even though we cannot recollect them all.

The **Book of Life (20:15)**—Scripture seems to indicate that every person is initially written in this book until their disbelief or rejection of Christ **blots** them out (cf. Ex. 32:32-33; Ps. 9:5; 69:28; Rev. 3:5).

Sorcerers (21:8)—Greek, *pharmakia* (from which we get our English "pharmacy") refers to the use of drugs or other herbs for occult purposes.

After the thousand years are completed, Satan is released (20:7-9). He will promptly deceive many people who will rise up in opposition to Christ and His reign (despite the abundant blessings of the millennium). In an instant, those in this final rebellion will be destroyed. *So who are these people and why does God release Satan to allow him to deceive them?*

When Christ returns, there will be many people (Jews and Gentiles) who survive the tribulation and enter His kingdom with earthly, non-resurrected bodies (cf. Matthew 25:31-46). These people will reproduce and replenish the earth. And with lengthened lifespans, the earth will be completely filled with people by the time the millennium is completed. Thus those people born during the millennium, though experiencing the peace and abundance of Christ's reign, will still have to make a choice on whether to follow Christ or not. This choice will be made when Satan is released.

What is the final destination of Satan (20:10)? _____

After this final rebellion, the *rest of the dead* (those not in the first resurrection) are judged by God at the great white throne. Individual books are opened and the Book of Life is opened. How are the dead judged (20:12)? _____

Everyone at this judgment is condemned but, just as there are degrees of reward in heaven, there will be degrees of punishment in hell based on a person's works. What is the final destination of those not found in the Book of Life? _____

CONSUMMATION

DAY 3

Revelation 21

Revelation 21 describes the New Jerusalem, the eternal city of God. After the millennium and the great white throne judgment, sin will be totally cleansed from God's kingdom. This will result in a new heaven and a new earth, recreated by God (cf. 2 Peter 3:10-13), and the descent of the New Jerusalem—the city that Jesus has been building for His people since the day He left earth. *I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also* (John 14:2-3).

Read Revelation 21. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

What catches your attention or strikes you the most after reading this chapter?

What things are not in the New Jerusalem?

21:4 _____

21:22-23 _____

21:8,27 _____

The New Jerusalem is called “the bride, the Lamb’s wife” (21:9) because it is the place that the redeemed of Christ will dwell for eternity. It is an enormous city—1500 miles wide, long, and high—forming a giant cube encompassing a total of 2,250,000 square miles going 1500 miles up! It is beautiful city made entirely of precious stone, gold, and pearl. And it is a holy city because God dwells there with His people. It is interesting to note that the Holy of Holies in both the tabernacle and the temple formed a cube in dimensions (cf. 1 Kgs. 6:16). Thus the New Jerusalem is the Holy of Holies.

CONSUMMATION

Revelation 22 continues John’s description of the New Jerusalem.

DAY 4

Read Revelation 22. Ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

Revelation 22

Beside each verse below write a characteristic of the New Jerusalem.

22:1 _____

22:2 _____

22:3 _____

22:4 _____

22:5 _____

What does Jesus say (22:7)? _____

What do the Spirit and the bride say (22:17)? _____

What should be our prayer (22:20)? _____

The Book of Revelation includes seven “blessings.” Summarize each one below:

1:3 _____

14:13 _____

16:15 _____

19:9 _____

20:6 _____

22:7 _____

22:14 _____

CONSUMMATION

Revelation ends the story of Scripture. Paradise is restored on earth. And the redeemed enjoy face to face fellowship with God for all eternity. The story ends in Revelation 22 but 1 Corinthians 15 gives us a full overview of how Paradise is restored, why it is restored, and how we should live in light of our hope.

DAY 5

1 Corinthians 15

Read 1 Corinthians 15. Pray and ask God to speak to your heart as you read.

The **New Jerusalem** is the heavenly city that Christ has been preparing that will descend and hover over the new earth. Each saint will have a special “apartment” in this city (cf. John 14:1-3).

Glorify and honor of the nations (21:26)—It appears that God’s heavenly city will include some of the great works of art produced by mankind.

The **number 12** is represented many times in the heavenly city pointing to both the twelve tribes of Israel (OT saints) and the twelve disciples (NT saints).

THINK ABOUT: Which blessing mentioned in the book of Revelation encourages you or captures your attention the most?

Tree of life (22:2)—The same tree in the Garden of Eden. Note that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not present.

What is the gospel (15:3-4)? _____

Complete this sentence: *If Christ did not rise from the dead, then...* (15:12-19).

What did Adam's sin bring (15:21-22)? _____

What did Christ bring (15:21-22)? _____

What will Christ do when He has eliminated all opposition to God (15:24)? _____

Why will He do this (15:28)? _____

What is the last enemy to be destroyed (15:26)? _____

1 Corinthians 15:35-49 teaches us that God will recreate our bodies after the pattern of Christ's resurrection body. In this new body, we will no longer be subject to sin or susceptible to death. We will have a body uniquely designed for our identity and perfectly crafted for eternal life.

How should you live in light of the hope that you have in Christ (15:58)? _____

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



**Read the following article from Dr. Renald Showers, *Behold, the Bridegroom Comes!*
Distributed by The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., W. Collingswood, N.J.**

The Comforting Promise

It was a night of destiny. Jesus had gathered with His disciples in the Upper Room. In a few more hours He would be crucified on a cross. Jesus had been warning His disciples concerning His coming death, resurrection and ascension to heaven. The prospect of these events caused the disciples to be greatly disturbed. In order to ease their fears, Jesus made the following comforting promise:

Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, Believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also. (John 14:1-3.)

Jewish Marriage Customs

Those who live in the modern western world do not catch the full significance of Jesus' promise. This is due to the fact that in His promise Jesus was drawing an analogy from Jewish marriage customs in biblical times. Since this is so, those marriage customs must be examined if one is to grasp the significance of the promise.

The first major step in a Jewish marriage was betrothal. Betrothal involved the establishment of a marriage covenant. By Jesus' time it was usual for such a covenant to be established as the result of the prospective bridegroom taking the initiative. The prospective bridegroom would travel from his father's house to the home of the prospective bride. There he would negotiate with the father of the young woman to determine the price (*mohar*) that he must pay to purchase his bride. Once the bridegroom paid the purchase price, the marriage covenant was thereby established, and the young man and woman were regarded to be husband and wife. From that moment on the bride was declared to be consecrated or sanctified, set apart exclusively for her bridegroom. As a symbol of the covenant relationship that had been established, the groom and bride would drink from a cup of wine over which a betrothal benediction had been pronounced.

After the marriage covenant had been established, the groom would leave the home of the bride and return to his father's house. There he would remain separate from his bride for a period of twelve months. This period of separation afforded the bride time to gather her trousseau and to prepare for married life. The groom occupied himself with the preparation of living accommodations in his father's house to which he could bring his bride.

At the end of the period of separation the groom would come to take his bride to live with him. The taking of the bride usually took place at night. The groom, best man and other male escorts would leave the groom's father's house and conduct a torch light procession to the home of the bride. Although the bride was expecting her groom to come for her, she did not know the exact time of his coming. As a result the groom's arrival would be preceded by a shout. This shout would forewarn the bride to be prepared for the coming of the groom.

After the groom received his bride together with her female attendants, the enlarged wedding party would return from the bride's home to the groom's father's house. Upon arrival there the wedding party would find that the wedding guests had assembled already.

Shortly after arrival the bride and groom would be escorted by the other members of the wedding party to the bridal chamber.... Prior to entering the chamber the bride remained veiled so that no one could see her face. While the groomsmen and bridesmaids would wait outside, the bride and groom would enter the bridal chamber alone. There in the privacy of that place they would enter into physical union for the first time, thereby consummating the marriage that had been covenanted earlier.

After the marriage was consummated, the groom would announce the consummation to the other members of the wedding party waiting outside the chamber (John 3:29). These people would pass on the news of the marital union to the wedding guests. Upon receiving this good news the wedding guests would feast and make merry for the next seven days.

During the seven days of the wedding festivities...the bride remained hidden in the bridal chamber. At the conclusion of these seven days the groom would bring his bride out of the bridal chamber, now with her veil removed, so that all could see who his bride was.

The Examination of the Analogy

Earlier it was stated that in His promise in John 14 Jesus drew an analogy from Jewish marriage customs in biblical times. Now that the marriage customs have been considered, it is essential that the analogy be examined. In what ways was Jesus' promise analogous with Jewish marriage customs? In the examination of the analogy the first thing that should be noted is the fact that the Scriptures regard the Church to be the Bride of Christ (Eph. 5:22-23). In addition, just as the Jewish bridegroom took the initiative in marriage by leaving his father's house and traveling to the home of the prospective bride, so Jesus left His Father's house in heaven and traveled to earth, the home of His prospective Church, over 1900 years ago.

In the same manner as the Jewish bridegroom came to the bride's home for the purpose of obtaining her through the establishment of a marriage covenant, so Jesus came to earth for the purpose of obtaining the Church through the establishment of a covenant. On the same night in which Jesus made His promise in John 14 He instituted communion. As He passed the cup of wine to His disciples, He said: *This cup is the new covenant in my blood* (1 Cor. 11:25). This was His way of saying that He would establish a new covenant through the shedding of His blood on the cross. Parallel to the custom of the Jewish groom paying a price to purchase his bride, Jesus paid a price to purchase His bride, the Church. The price that He paid was His own life blood. It was because of this purchase price that Paul wrote the following to members of the Church: *know ye not that...ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and your spirit, which are God's* (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Analogous with the Jewish bride being declared to be sanctified or set apart exclusively for her groom once the marriage covenant was established, the Church has been declared to be sanctified or set apart exclusively for Christ (Eph. 5:25-27; 1Cor. 1:2; 6:11; Heb. 10:10; 13:12).

In the same way that a cup of wine served as a symbol of the marriage covenant through which the Jewish groom obtained his bride, so the cup of communion serves as the symbol of the covenant through which Christ has obtained the Church (1 Cor. 11:25).

Just as the Jewish groom left the home of his bride and returned to his father's house after the marriage covenant had been established, so Jesus left the earth, the home of the Church, and returned to His Father's house in heaven after He had established the new covenant and risen from the dead (John 6:62; 20:17).

Corresponding with the period of separation between the Jewish groom and bride, Christ has remained separate from the Church for over 1900 years. The Church is now living in that period of separation.

Parallel to the custom of the Jewish groom preparing living accommodations for his bride in his father's house during the time of separation, Christ has been preparing living accommodations for the Church in His Father's house in heaven during His separation from His Bride (John 14:2).

In the same manner as the Jewish groom came to take his bride to live with him at the end of the period of separation, so Christ will come to take His Church to live with Him at the end of His period of separation from the Church (John 14:3).

Just as the taking of the Jewish bride was accomplished by a procession of the groom and male escorts from the groom's father's house to the home of the bride, so the taking of the Church will be accomplished by a procession of Christ and an angelic escort from Christ's Father's house in heaven to the home of the Church (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Analogous with the Jewish bride not knowing the exact time of the groom's coming for her, the Church does not know the exact time of Christ's coming for her.

In the same way that the Jewish groom's arrival was preceded by a shout, so Christ's arrival to take the Church will be preceded by a shout (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Similar to the Jewish bride's return with the groom to his father's house after her departure from her home, the Church will return with Christ to His Father's house in heaven after she is snatched from the earth to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17; John 14:2-3).

In the same manner as the Jewish wedding party found wedding guests assembled in the groom's father's house when they arrived, so Christ and the Church will find the souls of Old Testament saints assembled in heaven when they arrive. These souls will serve as the wedding guests.

Parallel to the custom of the Jewish groom and bride entering into physical union after their arrival at the groom's father's house, thereby consummating the marriage that had been covenanted earlier, Christ and the Church will experience spiritual union after their arrival at His Father's house in heaven, thereby consummating their relationship that had been covenanted earlier.

Corresponding with the Jewish bride remaining hidden in the bridal chamber for a period of seven days after arrival at the groom's father's house, the Church will remain hidden for a period of seven years after arrival at Christ's Father's house in heaven. While the seven-year Tribulation Period is taking place on the earth, the Church will be in heaven totally hidden from the sight of those living on the earth.

Just as the Jewish groom brought his bride out of the bridal chamber at the conclusion of the seven days with her veil removed, so that all could see who his bride was, so Christ will bring His Church out of heaven in His Second Coming at the conclusion of the seven year Tribulation Period in full view of all who are alive, so that all can see who the true church is (Col. 3:4).

The Significance of the Analogy

This analogy between Jewish marriage customs and Christ's relationship to the Church is very beautiful, but what practical significance does it have for today?

The answer to this question is twofold. First, if you have never taken Jesus Christ personally to be your Savior from sin, it has great significance for you. Christ came to this earth and died on a cross for the purpose of paying the penalty for your sins. Through the shedding of His blood He paid the price necessary to purchase you to be part of His Bride, the Church. He thereby established a new covenant through which you can enter into a special relationship with Him.

Every time the gospel of Jesus Christ is declared to you, Christ is proposing that you enter into this special relationship with Him. In essence He is saying to you:

"I, Jesus, take thee, sinner, to be My Bride. And I do promise and covenant before God the Father and these witnesses, to be thy loving and faithful Savior and Bridegroom; in sickness and in health, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in faithfulness and in waywardness, for time and for eternity."

Just as the proposal that the Jewish bridegroom made could be accepted or rejected, so Christ's proposal to you can be accepted or rejected. If you reject it throughout this lifetime, then you never will be rightly related to Jesus Christ. The tragic result will be that you will spend eternity separated from God and Christ in the eternal lake of fire (Rev.20:11-15).

If, however, you accept Christ's proposal, then your sins will be forgiven, and you will enter into that relationship that makes you part of His Bride, the Church. In addition, you will go to be with Him when He comes to take the Church, and you will remain with Him forever in great blessing. The way in which you can accept Christ's proposal is quite simple. If you sincerely believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He came to this earth, died for your sins and rose from the dead, then respond to Him as follows:

"I, sinner, take Thee, Jesus, to be my Savior. . . And I do promise and covenant before God and these witnesses to be Thy loving and faithful Bride; in sickness and in health, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, for time and for eternity."

Second, the analogy is most significant also for those who have taken Christ to be Savior. During the time of separation between the establishment of the marriage covenant and the coming of the bridegroom to take his bride, it was possible for the Jewish bride to commit adultery by giving herself to another man. In like manner it is possible for believers today to commit spiritual adultery against Christ before He returns to take His Church. Paul expressed concern over this possibility when he wrote the following to Christians:

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Cor.11:2-3).

James expressed the same concern when he rebuked Christians as follows: *Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.* (James 4:4) The context of James' statement indicates that spiritual adultery is committed when a believer becomes more devoted to the godless world system and the things that please it than he is to Jesus Christ and the things that please Him.

If you are a believer, honestly evaluate your devotion to Jesus Christ. Do you love him as much now as when you took Him to be your Savior? Is He truly the Center of your existence, the One who gives your life its meaning and purpose? Is your every attitude, action and lifestyle motivated and controlled by your devotion to Jesus Christ, or by a desire to have the friendship of the world system in which you live?

If you have been unfaithful to your heavenly Bridegroom, confess this to Him and be assured that even *if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.* (2 Tim.2:13) Then trust the Holy Spirit to renew your devotion as you wait for your heavenly Bridegroom to come at any moment.

CHANGED HEARTS



What is one truth from this lesson that has impacted your life? Why?

The story of Scripture is complete and, through God's Word, we know the end of the story. The real question is, "What part will we play in God's story?"

God has a purpose for each of our lives. *For **we are His workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them* (Ephesians 2:10).

The Greek word for "workmanship" is *poema* which points to a "work of art." It is the Greek word from which we get our English word, "poem." God is writing the poem of history, a perfect piece of rhythm and rhyme, and we are designed to be a part of this poem. *How?* By fulfilling the purpose for which He created us and doing the good works He has prepared for us to do.

Paul tells us the same thing in 1 Corinthians 15:58. What should we do in light of our hope in Christ? *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, **always abounding in the work of the Lord**, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*

And Peter says in 1 Peter 4:7, 10: *But the end of all things is at hand; therefore...**as each one has received a gift, minister it to one another**, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

We have each received a gift from God's grace. Included in this gift are not only the offer of forgiveness in Jesus Christ but also our very breath and life, our relationships, our personality, our opportunities, our experiences in life, our blessings and resources, and our spiritual gifts and abilities. This gift represents the "talents" given by the Master to each one of us in Matthew 25.

Consider for a moment the gift that God has given you. What things would you include in this gift from God? What has He given you? What blessings do you enjoy? What abilities do you have? What relationships has God put in your life? What opportunities has God given you? What experiences, though painful or difficult, have shaped you and helped you grow closer to Christ and to others?

Write down the things that come to your mind in the gift box to the right.



The ultimate gift from God is Jesus Christ.

Have you received the gift of eternal life from Jesus Christ? Have you asked Him to be your Savior and Lord? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

Do you see your life, your abilities, your relationships, and your blessings as a gift from God to be used for His glory or are you simply doing your own thing? This is the choice you must make.

In a symbolic act of worship, get on your knees and open up your hands before God. Pray to Him thanking Him for the life and breath He has given you. It is a gift. It is not something you are owed or deserve. Thank Him for the abilities, blessings, and relationships He has given you. All these things are gifts from His hand. Also thank Him for the experiences you have had in your

life. Thank Him that He has promised to take even the difficult and painful experiences of your life and use them for good—to draw you closer to Him, to draw you closer to others, and to deepen your character (Romans 8:28).

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created. (James 1:17-18)

After thanking God for His gifts to you, now offer these things back to God. Give them to Him as an offering. Ask Him to use you for His glory, to guide your steps, to keep you from sin, to uphold you in difficult times, to give you opportunity to use your abilities for His purposes and to help you to love the people in your life with the love of Christ.

Use the space below to write out any prayers or thoughts or resolutions that come to your mind after spending time on your knees before God.

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- What did you most enjoy from this study? What is one thing that you learned?
- Does God evaluate our lives based on success or faithfulness? What is the difference?
- What aspects of life do people long for in a “utopia”? Why do you think that we long for these things? Why aren’t we able to achieve a utopia on our own? How does the millennial reign of Christ on earth fulfill these longings?
- What strikes you the most about the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22? Why?
- Which of the seven blessings in Revelation stands out to you the most? Why?
- Why is Jesus’ resurrection so vital to all the promises of God and the hopes of believers?
- Have each person in your group share one thing that they can thank God for, one word of encouragement to someone in the group, and a prayer request that they have.



Now that you have completed this study, don’t get out of the habit of reading God’s Word! Read at least one chapter a day from the Bible. Get a journal or a notebook to record one thought that you have each day from your reading. Meditate on this thought throughout the day. The gospel of John or the book of Romans is a good place to start.

This study was written by Pastor Steve Foster, Community Bible Church, Baton Rouge, LA. You are welcome to reproduce any part of it for your own personal study. For any other use, please contact pastor@516church.org.