

UNDERSTANDING
BIBLICAL
PROPHECY

— A 30-DAY BIBLE STUDY —

DR. DAVID JEREMIAH

 HarperChristian
Resources

Understanding Biblical Prophecy
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INTRODUCTION

Would you like to know the future? I don't think I know anyone who would answer that question by saying "no." There would be many benefits to receiving insider information about tomorrow. We could identify opportunities before they arise and be ready to pounce on them. We could avoid catastrophes and failures—both our own and those of others. We could always be in the right place at the right time.

Just imagine the possibilities!

Unfortunately, our practical options for seeing into the future are limited at best. Weather forecasters have been especially unreliable throughout my lifetime. Fortune cookies and horoscopes are silliness and blasphemy and vagueness all wrapped together to form an ineffectual mess. So-called clairvoyants and others who claim to have a form of "second sight" are not only wrong most of the time, but they also consistently fail to capitalize on the kinds of opportunities I mentioned above.

The truth is that God alone has the power to see history like a piece of paper—past, present, and future all together in one display. He has that ability because He is the author of the past, the present, and the future. He is the Creator of time itself, which means He can look backward and forward with no difficulty and no hesitation.

Human beings, on the other hand, are not equipped to see the future—with one exception.

There have been times in history when God spoke to individuals about the future. These individuals are called prophets, and the words given to them by God are recorded in the Bible as prophecy. They are glimpses of what's to come. More, they are promises of what God will do.

Throughout the history of the church, the prophetic portions of Scripture have received an enormous amount of literary attention. Countless books claim to offer insight on the hundreds of topics related to biblical prophecy, all of them written from

a wide variety of theological perspectives and positions on how to interpret Scripture. These studies can create a variety of questions, concerns, and even confusion in our minds. Sometimes it's difficult to see how obscure passages, distant places, and unfamiliar symbols can have any significance for our lives. After all, if we can't understand what the Bible is teaching, how in the world can it have any relevance to what we are experiencing today?

This drive to understand has been a major foundation of my ministry for decades—including the drive to understand and apply the truths communicated through biblical prophecy. My interest in that subject as a preacher and a writer has always been anchored in my love for the Bible, which I believe to be the inspired Word of God. I find it fascinating that the Bible dedicates more space to the subject of prophecy than almost any other. There are over eighteen hundred prophecies in God's Word concerning the first and second comings of Jesus Christ alone!

Obviously, prophecy is important to God, and He desires for us to understand His plans. He has given us His promises for a reason.

Sometimes biblical prophecy acts a warning, showing us the dangers ahead and encouraging us to go around them. Other times biblical prophecies are invitations. They draw us forward toward critical events on God's eschatological calendar—His plan for human history. Finally, there are other prophetic passages that are primarily informational. Meaning, they tell us important truths we need to know.

In these pages, we're going to explore thirty very specific, very important examples of biblical prophecy. Ten of those prophetic passages will be from the Old Testament, ten will be from the main portion of the New Testament, and ten will be from the book of Revelation, which has a special and specific focus on the end of our current age and beyond.

As we study these prophecies together, let's remember that doing so is more than an informational exercise. Much more! We're going to explore God's promises for humanity—God's promises for you and me. And we're going to see how those promises for tomorrow influence our daily lives today.



DAY 1

A GREAT NATION

“I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

GENESIS 12:2-3

CONTEXT

You may have noticed the early pages of the Bible move rather quickly. The first two chapters of Genesis describe God’s creation of the universe, including the handcrafting of human beings. Then comes the Fall and the corruption of creation in Genesis 3. We get the first murder in human history in Genesis 4. Then, at the beginning of Genesis 6, we read a sentence that is as shocking as it is depressing: “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (verse 5).

Talk about everything going wrong in a hurry!

The pace doesn’t slow down. Genesis 7–9 tells us about Noah, the ark, the great flood, and the aftermath. Genesis 10 quickly enumerates the nations that descended from Noah in a post-flood society. And Genesis 11 describes the strange story of the Tower of Babel.

It is not until Genesis 12 that the story really starts to slow down—and the reason is a man named Abram (later renamed Abraham by God). Specifically, the story slows down with an astonishing command that results in an amazing prophecy. Here’s the command: “Now the LORD had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you’” (verse 1).

Now, we tend to give credit to Abraham for the many ways in which he demonstrated his God-honoring faith later in life—and rightfully so. By faith, Abraham conquered kings and believed God’s promise to make him the father of many nations, even though he and his wife, Sarah, were of advanced age and had no children. When Isaac finally did arrive on the scene, Abraham had enough faith to hold his son with open arms rather than turn him into an idol.

But I don’t think we give Abraham enough credit for the courage he displayed in this first act of obedience. Look again at God’s command. He told Abraham to leave his *country*, which at that time was a relatively advanced city called Ur of the Chaldeans. Not only that, but God told Abraham to leave his *family*—to leave his father’s house, which would have included almost everyone and everything he valued. God commanded Abraham to travel far away to an entirely new place he had never seen and make a home there not just for himself but also for an entire nation. Plus, all this happened when Abraham was “seventy-five years old” (verse 4).

Amazingly, Abraham obeyed. Every word of God’s command. He left what was familiar and went somewhere completely new simply because the Lord had told him to do so. As a result of that obedience, Abraham received a set of prophetic promises that have shaped not only biblical history but also *human history* for thousands of years.

Let’s take a deeper look at those prophecies.

REFLECT

1. Read Genesis 12:1-9. What are the specific promises God made to Abraham in those verses?
2. What did God require of Abraham in order to receive those promises?
3. Verse 3 ends with a famous prophecy: “And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” That future blessing was made possible through Jesus, who was Abraham’s descendant. What are some specific ways that prophecy has been fulfilled?
4. In verse 7, God told Abraham, “To your descendants I will give this land.” He was referring to the land of Israel, once known as Canaan. How is that land, and God’s promise connected to it, still relevant today?

APPLY

5. Beyond the physical land of Israel, God's promise to make Abraham into a "great nation" (the Jewish people) set the stage for the rest of the Old Testament, the rest of the New Testament, and everything we understand to be church history. What are some ways this prophecy has impacted your life?

6. Abraham risked a lot by choosing to leave his home and settle where God directed him. When has God asked you to take a step of faith that included genuine risk? How did you respond?

7. How do you typically respond when you feel God is leading you in a direction that is uncomfortable?

8. Abraham was willing to risk much because he trusted much. As a result, he experienced untold blessings. What are some obstacles that are currently hindering your ability to trust in God and His plans for your future?

AHEAD

The passage we've been exploring in Genesis 12:1-9 is what theologians refer to as a "conditional prophecy." Most of the time, when God declares that something will take place in the future, we can take that declaration to the bank. Prophecy will become reality simply because the Lord has declared it to be so.

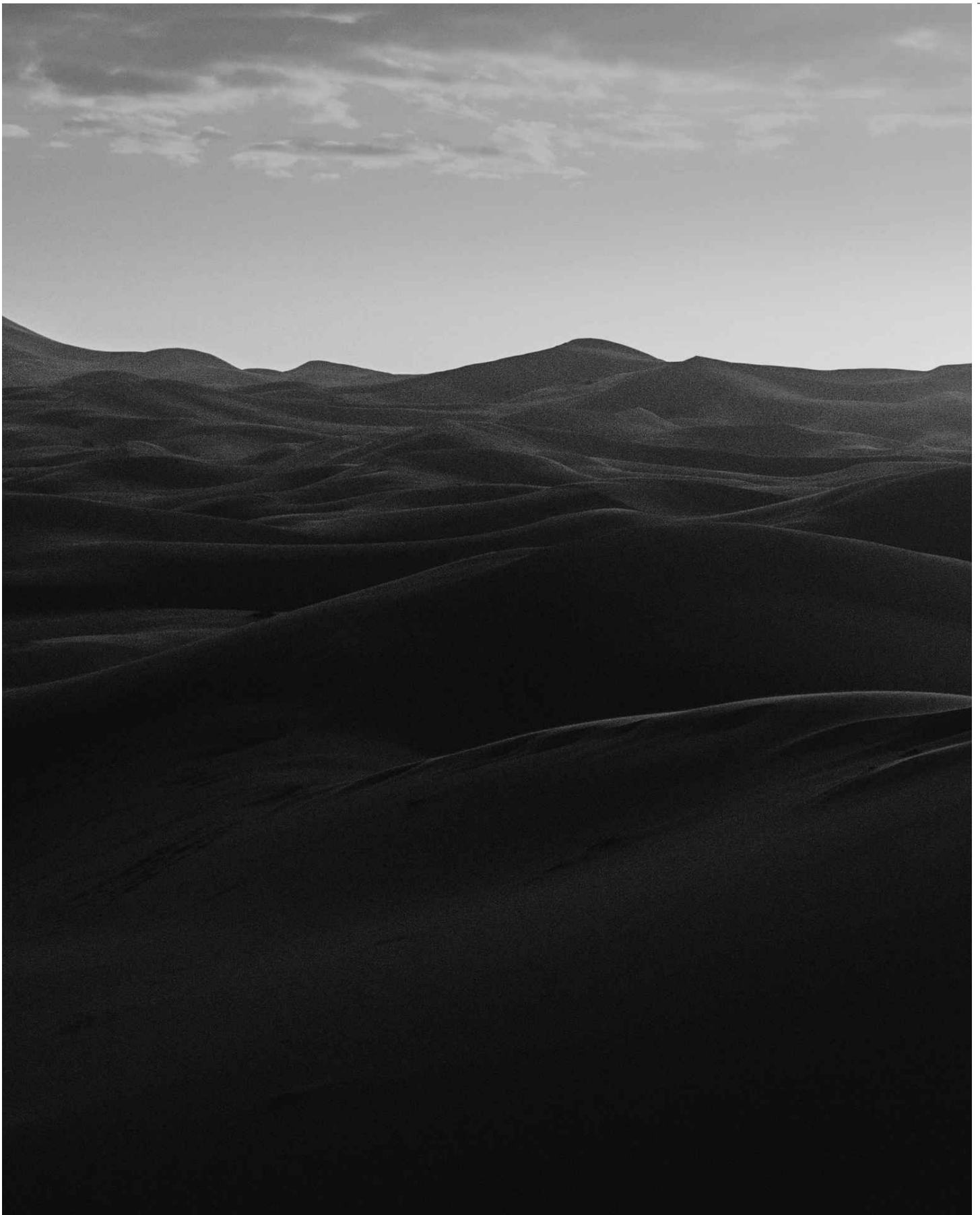
However, there are other times when something must take place to trigger the fulfillment of prophecy. In this prophecy in Genesis 12, for example, each of the gifts that God said Abraham would receive was contingent on his obeying the initial command to "go from your country . . . to the land I will show you" (verse 1 NIV).

I mention this because you and I are not separated from biblical prophecy. We are not disconnected even from the major prophecies we'll be exploring in these pages. Instead, many of those prophecies have a direct application to both our present and our future. Indeed, many of God's prophetic promises will be fulfilled even through our lives and our choices each day.

*"Get out of your country, from your family
and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you."*

GENESIS 12:1

*When Abraham heard that command, he obeyed that
command. As a result, he received a set of prophetic promises
that have since shaped human history.*





DAY 2

AN ETERNAL THRONE

*“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers,
I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body,
and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for
My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.
I will be his Father, and he shall be My son.”*

2 SAMUEL 7:12-14

CONTEXT

David walked a long road before being crowned king of Israel. Yes, he was a young man when Samuel anointed him as the future king of God’s chosen people. But Saul was still the present king, and he had no plans to relinquish the throne willingly. As David became more popular after defeating Goliath, Saul became more jealous. Eventually he determined to kill David, and he spent several years chasing the younger man throughout the wilderness.

Fifteen years after David’s anointing, Saul and his sons were killed during a battle against the Philistines. That opened the door for David to be crowned king of the territory inhabited by the tribe of Judah—but not all of Israel. It took another seven years for the other tribes to finally recognize David as their king (2 Samuel 5:1–5).

During David’s time in the wilderness, he was forced to live in caves and other less-than-luxurious accommodations. That may be one of the reasons why David chose to commission a royal palace in Jerusalem near the end of his reign as king. David oversaw the construction of this palace of cedar—but soon after felt a twang of conscience. The king had a palace, but God still dwelt in a tent outside the city.

Moving swiftly, David consulted with the prophet Nathan about building a more permanent home for God’s name to dwell—a glorious temple. Yet God responded in a surprising way. Through that same prophet, He rejected David’s plan to build a temple. Instead, He made two critical promises that He would accomplish Himself. First, God promised to “plant” His people in the land of Israel as a place of safety and peace (2 Samuel 7:10–11). Second, He promised to establish a “house” for David that went well beyond walls of cedar.

Here is the core of that promise:

“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever” (verses 12–16).

These prophetic promises are significant hinges on which human history bends and turns. They point forward to the importance of Israel on the world stage and the central role of the Messiah in our past, present, and future. Let’s take a deeper look to learn more.

REFLECT

1. Read through 2 Samuel 7:1-17 to get the full picture of these important prophecies. What can we learn from these verses about David? What can we learn about God?
2. What promises did God make in that passage? List as many as you can find.
3. Biblical prophecies often include several layers of meaning. Look again at verses 12-16. Which of the promises in those verses apply to David's son Solomon? Which promises apply to the Messiah, who would be one of David's descendants?
4. Read Luke 1:30-33 to see Gabriel's announcement to Mary about the incarnation of Jesus. Where do you see specific connections between those verses and the covenant established in 2 Samuel 7?

APPLY

5. God made clear in His promises to David that Jesus would sit on the throne of David “forever.” How does the eternal nature of that promise apply to you in the present? How does it apply to your future?

6. Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s prophecy to David, which means He is King. On an emotional level, how do you respond to the idea of having a King and being part of a kingdom?

7. On a practical level, what does it mean for you to recognize Jesus as King not just of the world or the universe—but of your life specifically?

8. What are some practical steps you can take in the near future to actively submit to Jesus as your King?

AHEAD

In 2 Samuel 7, David began by expressing his desire to build a temple for God as an act of worship (verses 1–2). God turned the tables by denying David’s request and making several promises of His own. Specifically, the Davidic covenant established in that chapter includes God’s promise to:

- Plant the people of Israel in the promised land as an eternal inheritance (verse 10).
- Protect the Israelites from their enemies (verse 10).
- Provide a way for David’s lineage to continue forever through the coming of the Messiah (verse 12).
- Provide a way for David’s rule (his throne) to continue as well (verse 16).

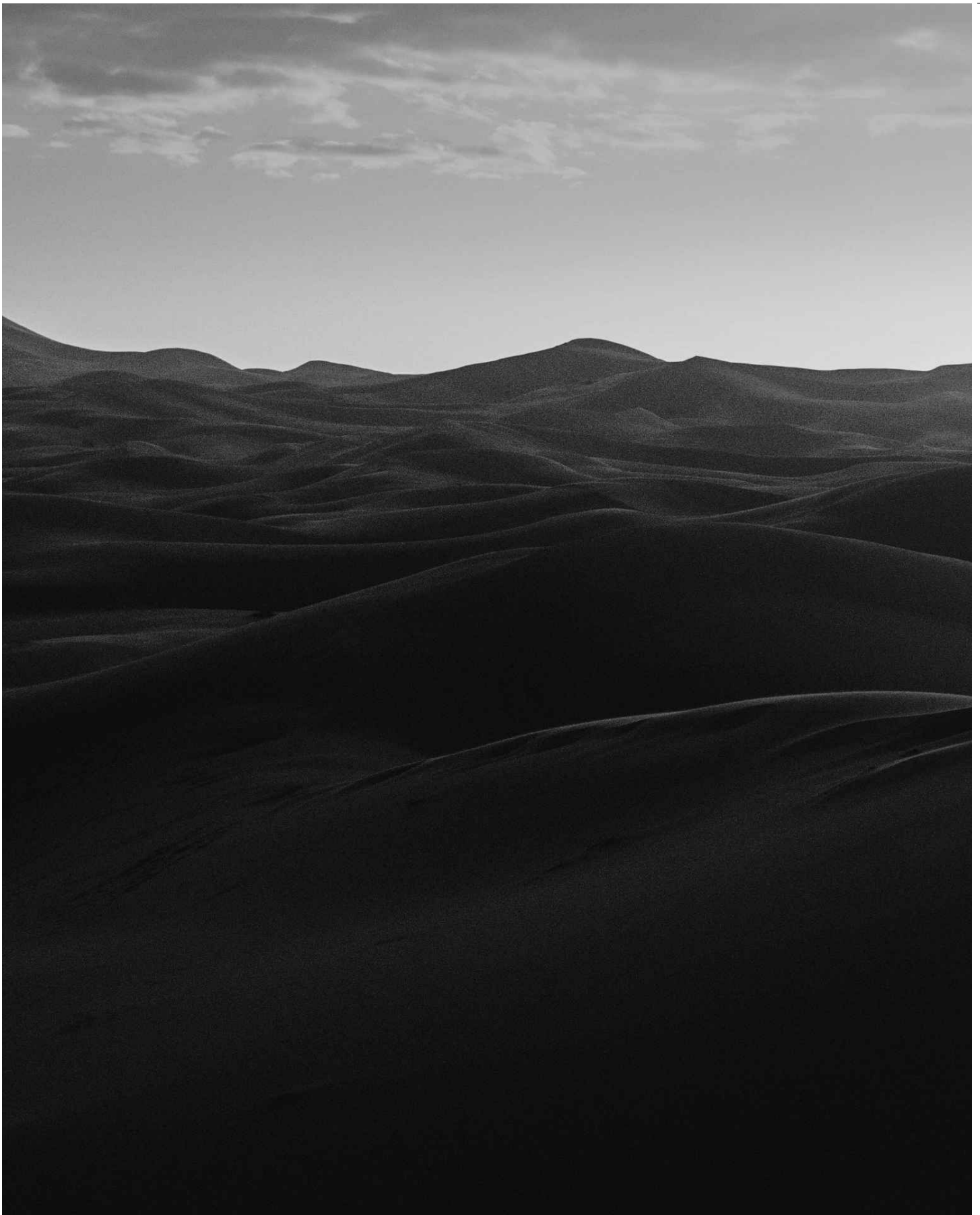
As you might imagine, David was overwhelmed by the generosity of these incredible promises. He declared, “Now, O LORD God, the word which You have spoken concerning Your servant and concerning his house, establish it forever and do as You have said. So let Your name be magnified forever, saying, ‘The LORD of hosts is the God over Israel.’ And let the house of Your servant David be established before You. For You, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, have revealed this to Your servant, saying, ‘I will build you a house.’ Therefore Your servant has found it in his heart to pray this prayer to You” (verses 25–27).

David accepted God’s gifts with gratitude, with thanksgiving, and with praise. May we always do the same.

“I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.”

2 SAMUEL 7:12

The prophetic promises God made to David are significant hinges on which human history bends and turns.





DAY 3

A CHILD IS BORN

*For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

ISAIAH 9:6

CONTEXT

Here is one of the most important principles we can learn when studying Scripture: Biblical prophecy often contains layers. What I mean is that prophetic passages are usually packed with several different layers of meaning and/or application.

The Messianic prophecies of Isaiah offer a good example of this layering effect. One of the most famous of those prophecies (especially around the Christmas season) can be found in Isaiah 7:

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings. The LORD will bring the king of Assyria upon you and your people and your father’s house—days that have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah” (verses 14–17).

First, we need to check the immediate context of this passage. In Isaiah 7, the prophet was speaking to King Ahaz of Judah. At the time, the people of Judah were under threat from the armies of Syria and Israel (described as “Ephraim” throughout the chapter). Isaiah encouraged Ahaz to ask God for a sign of coming salvation, but Ahaz refused—apparently in an attempt to be seen as humble.

Frustrated, Isaiah declared that God Himself would provide a sign for Judah’s salvation in the form of Isaiah’s own son (8:3). Before that son was old enough “to refuse the evil and choose the good” (7:15), the might of Assyria would attack and destroy Judah’s enemies, bringing salvation to God’s people.

So, that’s the first layer of the prophecy. But not the only layer. God’s promise spoken through Isaiah also pointed forward to a much more important form of salvation—a spiritual rescue from sin that would be secured when a literal “virgin” conceived and bore a son. That prophecy was fulfilled through the birth of Jesus Christ, who is “Immanuel,” God with us.

As we’ll see, this same principle applies to several key prophetic passages throughout the book of Isaiah, including today’s key text in chapter 9. That entire chapter is packed with promises pertaining to the Messiah. Isaiah starts by describing a people walking in darkness who would see a “great light” (9:2). It ends with a forceful declaration of God’s wrath and judgment against sin. In the middle is a series of promises that brought joy to the people of Isaiah’s day—promises that still bring joy to followers of Jesus in our own day.

Let’s explore those promises together.

REFLECT

1. Read Isaiah 9:6-7. Which of those promises were fulfilled during the life and ministry of Jesus? Which of those promises have yet to be fulfilled?
2. Both in ancient times and today, you can learn a lot about a person by the titles he or she receives. What do we learn about Jesus from the names and titles listed in verse 6?
3. Jesus is the King of kings, and He offers the standard for justice throughout heaven and earth. What are some of the ways Jesus has already established justice for His people? Where do you still see injustice in our world that needs to be corrected?
4. Read Isaiah 35:5-7 to see another example of Messianic prophecy. Where do you see connections between those verses and Jesus' ministry as recorded in the Gospels?

APPLY

5. The reality of layers within biblical prophecy is both exciting and potentially confusing. How should the existence of those layers influence the way we study God's Word?

6. How should the layered nature of biblical prophecy influence the way we apply prophetic passages to our present and our future?

7. King Jesus will establish His kingdom with "justice." Where do you see injustice currently taking place in your community?

8. Where do you have an opportunity right now to take a stand for justice, whether locally or around the world?

AHEAD

Here's a question you may be thinking after exploring Isaiah 9 more deeply: If the prophecies in verses 6–7 have not yet been fulfilled completely, when will that fulfillment occur? In other words, when will Jesus officially take the government of our world onto His shoulders? When will Jesus reclaim the throne of His ancestor David? When will He fully establish justice and peace forever?

The answer that may come to mind is “heaven,” and there's some truth to that response. Jesus is already reigning in heaven as King of the universe, and that reign will never end. Similarly, heaven is a place of perfect justice, perfect peace, and perfect joy.

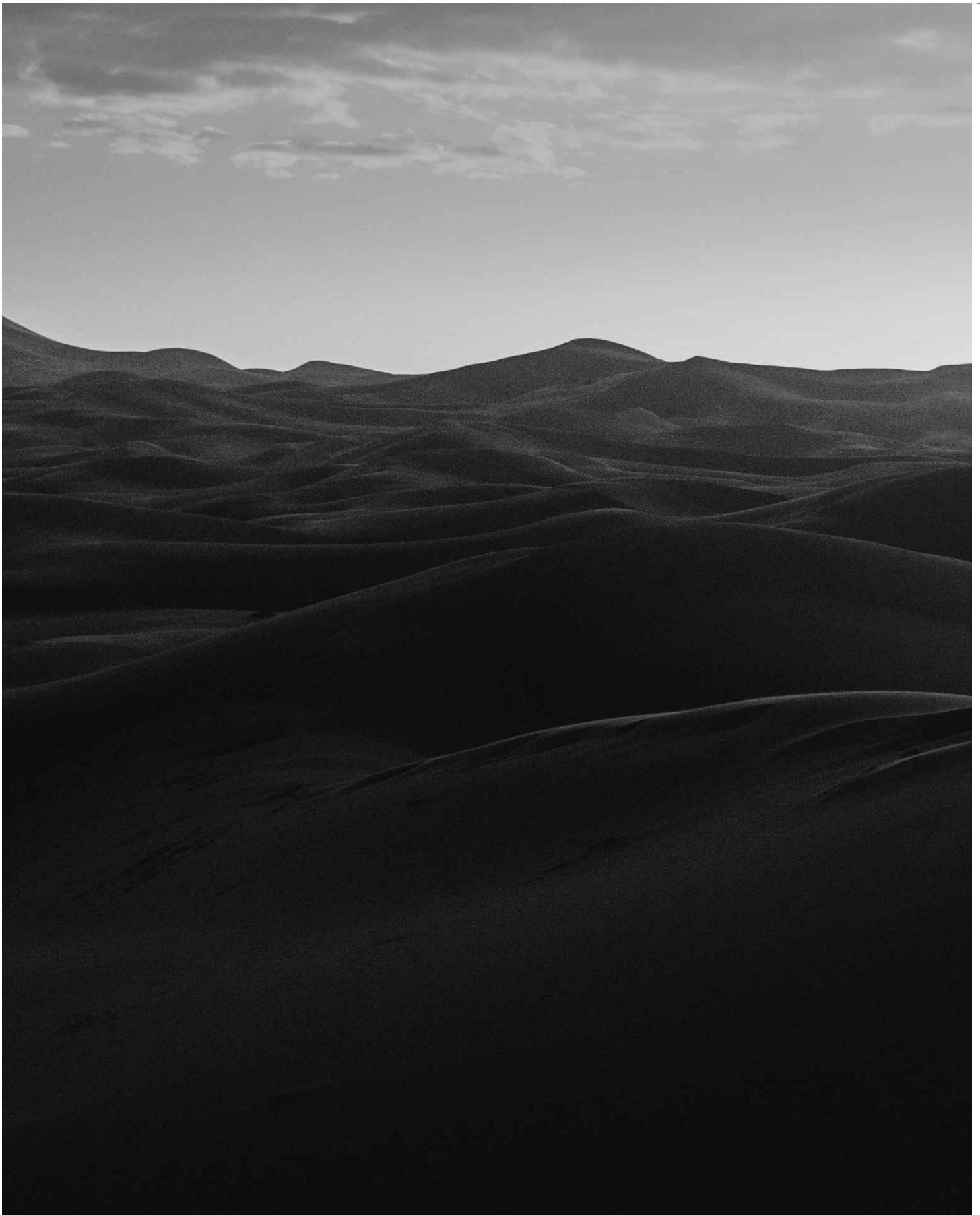
Yet what about the promise that Jesus will reclaim the throne of David? That promise will come true! Specifically, Jesus will return to our world as King, not only of heaven, but also of earth. He will sit on the throne of David in the city of Jerusalem during the thousand-year period of time often described as the Millennium. We'll learn more about that future kingdom as we move through these pages, for many biblical prophecies point forward to that glorious reign.

For now, remember that God's plans for this world are still in process. His promises are still coming true. And the end result of His plan will be an eternal kingdom filled with goodness and justice and peace and joy for all of eternity.

*“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son,
and shall call His name Immanuel.”*

ISAIAH 7:14

*God's promise, spoken through Isaiah, points to a
spiritual rescue from sin that would be secured when a
literal “virgin” conceived and bore a son.*





DAY 4

BY HIS STRIPES WE ARE HEALED

*But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

ISAIAH 53:5-6

CONTEXT

The prophet Isaiah ministered to four separate kings in Jerusalem from approximately 739 to 686 BC—a span of more than fifty years. It makes sense, then, that the book bearing Isaiah’s name includes some of the most significant prophecies in the Old Testament. As we’ve already seen, several of those prophecies pointed forward to the birth of the Messiah, which took place almost seven hundred years after Isaiah’s death. But Isaiah also prophesied about the Messiah’s life and public ministry. And His crucifixion.

Specifically, the book of Isaiah contains four poetic passages that scholars often refer to as “Servant Songs” because they point forward to the ministry of the Messiah as God’s divine Servant. The first of these songs is found in Isaiah 42:1–9, and it declares the Messiah’s focus on restoring justice across the earth. The second song comes in 49:1–13 and describes the Messiah’s mission of salvation. The third song is found in 50:4–11, which speaks of the Messiah’s obedience to the Father even in the midst of persecution.

The fourth Servant Song is the longest. It officially begins in Isaiah 52:13 and continues through 53:12. This is the most famous of the four songs because it predicts, in startling and even graphic detail, the willing sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. For example: “He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him” (53:3).

The level of detail really is startling. According to Isaiah, the Messiah:

- Would have his face marred so badly that people would be astonished to see it (52:14).
- Would be raised in lowly conditions with nothing special about His lineage (53:2).
- Would be despised and rejected by men (53:3).
- Would be wounded in a way that produced “stripes” (53:5).
- Would spend time as a prisoner (53:8).
- Would be buried in the grave of someone who is “rich” (53:9).
- Would be “numbered with the transgressors”—lumped in with the other criminals of His day (53:12).

Remember, each of these biblical prophecies was written seven hundred years before Jesus launched His public ministry or set foot in Jerusalem. They offer proof that God is sovereign over the past, present, and future. They also offer proof that Jesus alone is the Messiah about which so many prophecies were written throughout the Old Testament. They are a powerful proof of the truth of God’s Word.

I hope you’ll be open to the wonder of that truth as we further explore these passages.

REFLECT

1. Isaiah's fourth "Servant Song" begins with 52:13-15. What did the prophet communicate about the future Messiah in those verses?
2. Make it a point to read Isaiah 53:1-12 out loud. As you do so, write down the specific connections you notice between Isaiah's prophecy and Jesus' life, ministry, and death. Which of those connections feel most important to you? Why?
3. It's a mistake to think that we can learn about Jesus only through the Gospels of the New Testament. The reality is all Scripture is focused on Christ. What can we learn about Jesus' nature, character, and mission from Isaiah 53?
4. The timing of Isaiah's prophecy is critical. Even secular scholars don't dispute that Isaiah wrote his book long before Jesus' life and crucifixion. Given that reality, how does this passage expand your understanding of the nature and purpose of biblical prophecy?

AHEAD

If you've spent much time in the church, you've likely come across the idea that God functions one way in the Old Testament and a totally different way in the New Testament. According to this way of thinking, God primarily operates out of wrath and judgment in His dealings with people in the Old Testament but switches to become more focused on love and grace throughout the New Testament.

This division of God's nature and character is a mistake. At best, it's a well-meaning misconception. At worst, it is an effort to twist reality (and affect our theology) by ignoring the teaching of Scripture.

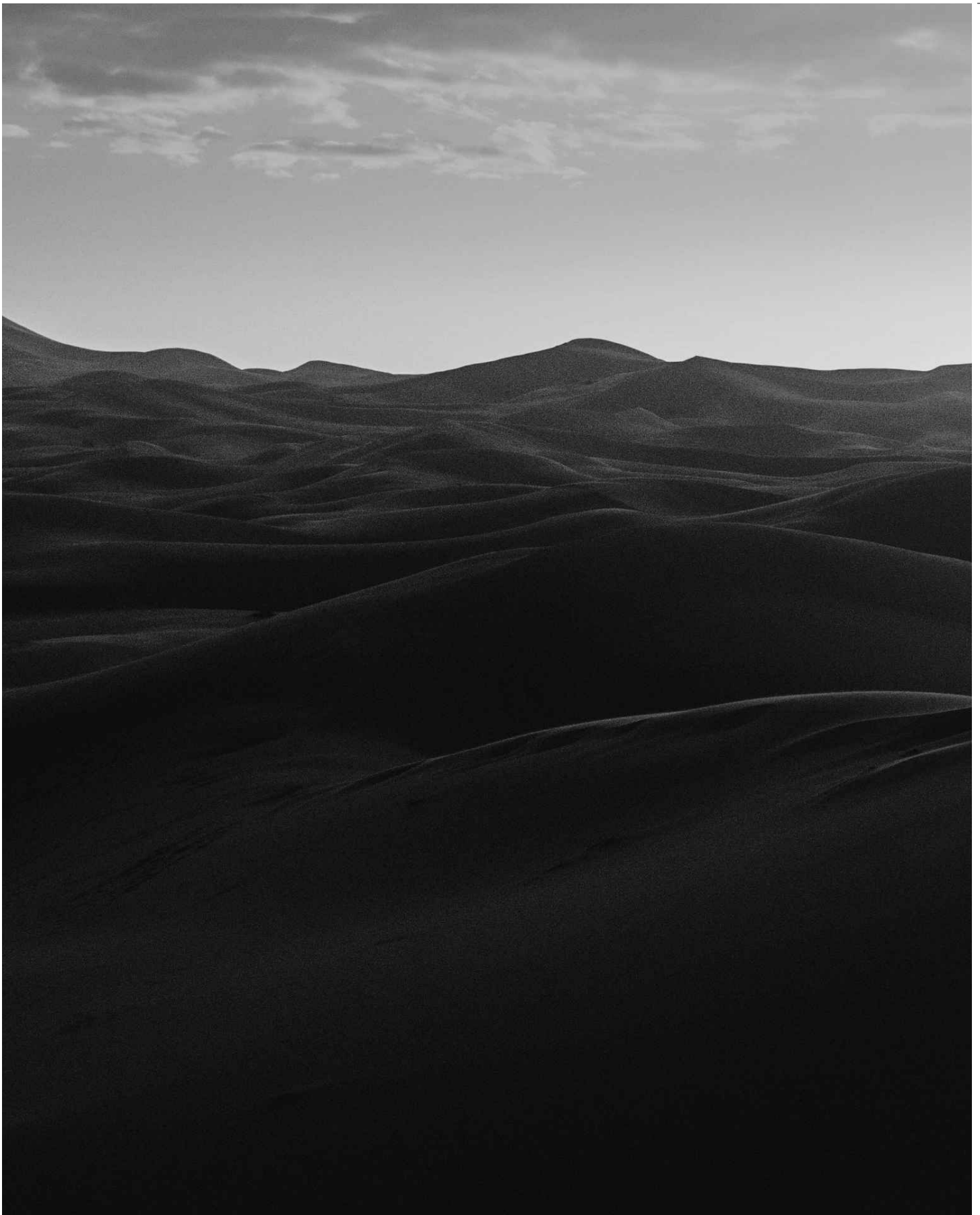
Isaiah 53 offers excellent proof that God's nature does not change. That's because this chapter offers some of the most loving and love-saturated passages in all of Scripture. Consider verse 5: "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed."

What a wonderful distillation of the gospel found smack in the middle of the Old Testament! What a testament to God's unfailing love!

*He is despised and rejected by men,
a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.*

ISAIAH 53:3

*Biblical prophecy reveals that God is sovereign
over the past, the present, and the future—and offers
astounding proof that Jesus alone is the Messiah.*





DAY 5

A NEW COVENANT

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. . . . This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

JEREMIAH 31:31, 33–34

CONTEXT

One thing that becomes abundantly clear whenever we read through the Bible is that God is a fan of covenants. At several stages of biblical history, God made a concerted effort to establish a covenant with His people and then to deal with those people according to the provisions of those covenants.

This process goes all the way back to the beginning with Adam and Eve: “Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘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’” (Genesis 2:15–17).

This covenant was relatively simple: God established Adam and Eve (and their descendants) as stewards of Eden, and by extension stewards of all the earth. That was an incredible blessing, and it came with a single prohibition: not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. We all know how that turned out, unfortunately.

God’s second covenant was with Noah. After the flood, God once again commanded humanity to be fruitful and multiply as stewards over the earth. This time, God also promised never to flood the earth again, offering the rainbow as a “sign” of that covenant (Genesis 9).

Next came God’s covenant with Abraham, which we started exploring back on Day 1. That covenant included multiple provisions, but most prominent was God’s promise to turn Abraham’s descendants into a great nation, to bless them, and to one day bring them to a land of their own—a land that they could always call home. The “signing” of that covenant is described in Genesis 15.

The most famous covenant in the Old Testament is the one God established with Moses and the Israelites on Mount Sinai—what we often call the Mosaic covenant. According to this agreement, if the Israelites followed God’s law, including the Ten Commandments, they would receive God’s favor, blessing, and long life in the promised land. If they rebelled against God’s law, they would experience sorrow and poverty, and be removed from the land. Over centuries, God’s people continued to choose the latter path.

Again, what’s notable here is that God prefers to engage with people based on covenants. That’s why these words from the book of Jeremiah are so important: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make *a new covenant* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Jeremiah 31:31, emphasis added).

Let’s explore that new covenant, including some of the ways its provisions impact us today.

REFLECT

1. Read again through the different Old Testament covenants listed above. What did God offer to do or provide in each of those covenants? What did He require His people to do or provide?
2. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34 out loud. Importantly, this new covenant would be made “with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,” although the church has also been incorporated into that covenant through the work of Jesus. Why is it noteworthy that God included the Jewish people in this new covenant?
3. What are the provisions of this new covenant? What did God promise to do or provide, and what does He require of those who participate in that covenant?
4. We can read about the official establishment of this new covenant in Matthew 26:26-29. How do those verses connect with the description of the new covenant from Jeremiah 31? How does that description connect with the broader life and ministry of Jesus?

APPLY

5. The new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah isn't an academic principle or a relic from centuries past. It is active right now. What are some specific ways that covenant applies directly to your life?

6. What are some additional covenants (or contracts) that are important in your life? What steps do you take to show you are serious about honoring those contracts?

7. What are some possible steps you can take as a disciple of Jesus to show that you are serious about honoring the "new covenant" He offered through His death and resurrection?

8. One provision of this new covenant is that we will "know the LORD" (Jeremiah 31:34). How satisfied do you feel right now in your relationship with God? Meaning, how satisfied do you feel in terms of knowing God and being known by Him?

AHEAD

Prophecy has layers, as we've seen, and that is the case with Jeremiah's prophetic passage announcing the "new covenant" between God and humanity. It's easy to believe that prophecy has already been fulfilled completely—that Jesus' death and resurrection have opened the door for God's law to be written on our hearts, for our sins to be forgiven, and for each of us from the least to the greatest to know God in a personal way.

All of that is true at this moment. But does that mean the prophecy has been completely fulfilled? No.

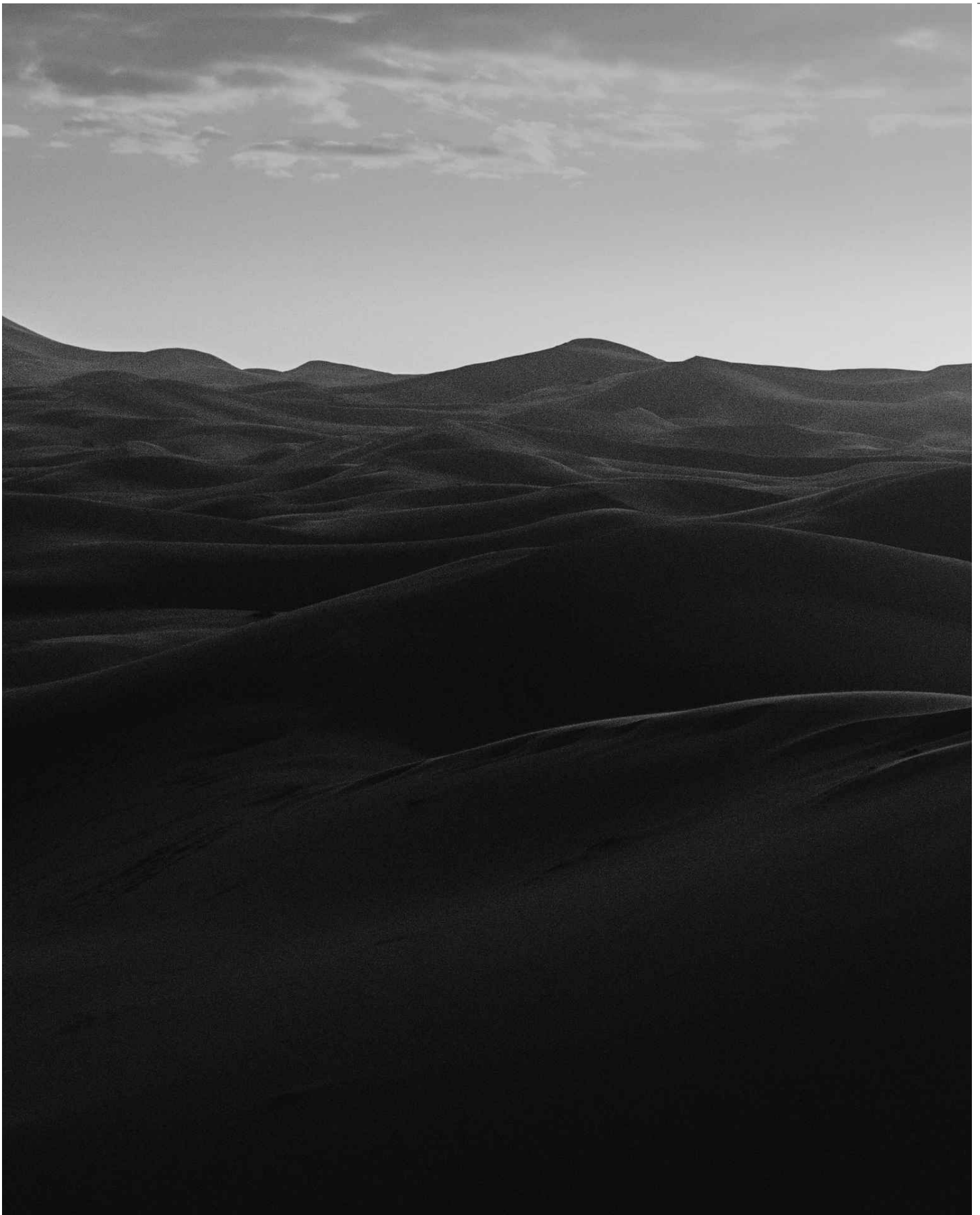
Remember that Jeremiah was speaking to "the house of Israel" and "the house of Judah." God said, "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," which means Jeremiah's prophecy will not be complete until the Jewish people return to God and recognize Jesus as their Messiah. That moment won't occur until the Tribulation, when the hate and cruelty of the Antichrist drives God's chosen people back to Him.

Until then, as the church, we can celebrate our inclusion in this new covenant. And we can pray for the final redemption of all of God's people.

"Behold, the days are coming . . . when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."

J E R E M I A H 3 1 : 3 1

We, the church, can celebrate our inclusion in this new covenant—and we can pray for the final redemption of all God's people when they recognize Jesus as their Messiah.





DAY 6

DRY BONES LIVE

Again He said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: "Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the LORD."'"

EZEKIEL 37:4-6

CONTEXT

Ezekiel was twenty-five years old when the armies of Babylon surrounded Jerusalem in 597 BC. Those armies did not destroy Jerusalem—not yet. But they did take ten thousand captives from among the youngest and most educated members of Jewish society. This was a common tactic used by empires in the ancient world, designed to ensure that a potentially rebellious nation would choose to behave itself rather than risk harm to the captives. Meanwhile, those captives were incorporated into Babylonian society, which strengthened the empire.

Five years after Ezekiel's captivity, God called Ezekiel to serve as a prophet. Unfortunately, the job description was less than encouraging: "Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. For they are impudent and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD'" (Ezekiel 2:3-4).

God called Ezekiel to deliver many messages to the Jewish captives living in Babylon, and most of them were bad news. Ezekiel declared that the armies of Babylon would again surround Jerusalem and lay siege to the Holy City. Worse, that siege would result in the destruction of both Jerusalem and the temple.

For years, Ezekiel pleaded with the Jewish people, both in Babylon and those still in Jerusalem, to repent of their idolatry and return to the Lord. But for years the people refused to listen. They believed God would never allow His favorite city to be destroyed—and certainly not the temple where His name dwelt. So they continued living as they had always lived, ignoring the warnings of God. Of course, the Babylonians did eventually lay siege to Jerusalem. Then they destroyed it, along with the temple. God's word spoken through Ezekiel came true.

Then something incredible happened. In that moment of deep despair, God gave Ezekiel a vision of Israel's future—a vision that radiated with hope. It started with a vision of a valley filled with dry bones, which represented the nation of Israel. As Ezekiel watched, the bones began to stir, then knit themselves together with sinew and flesh until a great multitude of people filled the valley. The dry bones lived! As God later explained, those bones represented the house of Israel, which was currently in ruins but would one day be restored.

Later, Ezekiel received a similar vision in which God commanded him to take two sticks and connect them with his hands to form a single, unified branch. That image represented the two kingdoms of God's people—Israel in the north and Judah in the south—which would be reunified at a future point. In short, during one of the darkest seasons of Israel's history—when many of God's chosen people were convinced Israel had no more history—the Lord stepped in to offer the light of hope for the future. Let's explore that hope in greater detail.

REFLECT

1. Read the full picture of Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones in 37:1-14. What specific promises did God make to Israel within that prophecy?
2. Given the context, there's no question that this vision primarily speaks to the eventual restoration of the Jewish nation. But in what ways does this vision provide a preview of the gospel message? Of the doctrine we call salvation?
3. Look also at Ezekiel's vision of the two sticks in 37:15-28. How would you summarize or describe the primary message of that vision?
4. What specific promises did God make in verses 15-28? Which of those promises have already come true, and which have not?

AHEAD

Ezekiel 37 presents two visions, both of which point forward to a moment of restoration for God's people. Interestingly, both of those visions have a strong connection to the physical land of Israel.

In the vision of the dry bones, God promised, "I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land" (verse 14). In the vision of the two sticks, He added, "Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again" (verses 21–22).

These visions have always been significant, both to the children of Israel and to the church. But they became even more significant on May 14, 1948. That's when Israel was restored as a nation after World War II. Since that time, millions of Jews have left the nations in which they were scattered and returned to the promised land—just as God promised.

Once again, these events place an exclamation point on God's sovereign power over all things, including the ins and outs of human history. We can be sure that whatever He says will happen—will happen!

"O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel."

EZEKIEL 37:12

During one of the darkest seasons of Israel's history, the Lord stepped in to offer His people the light of hope for the future.

