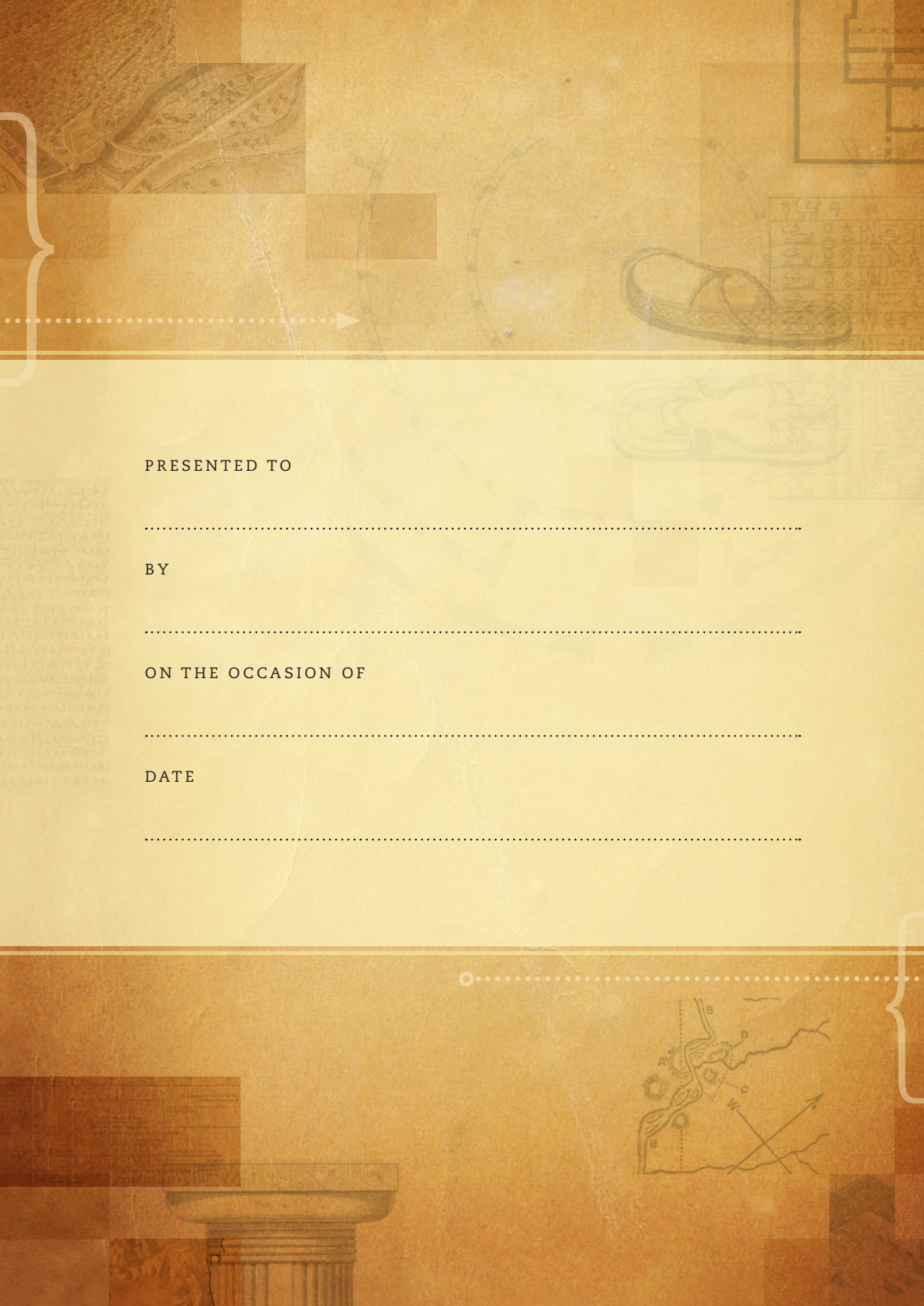




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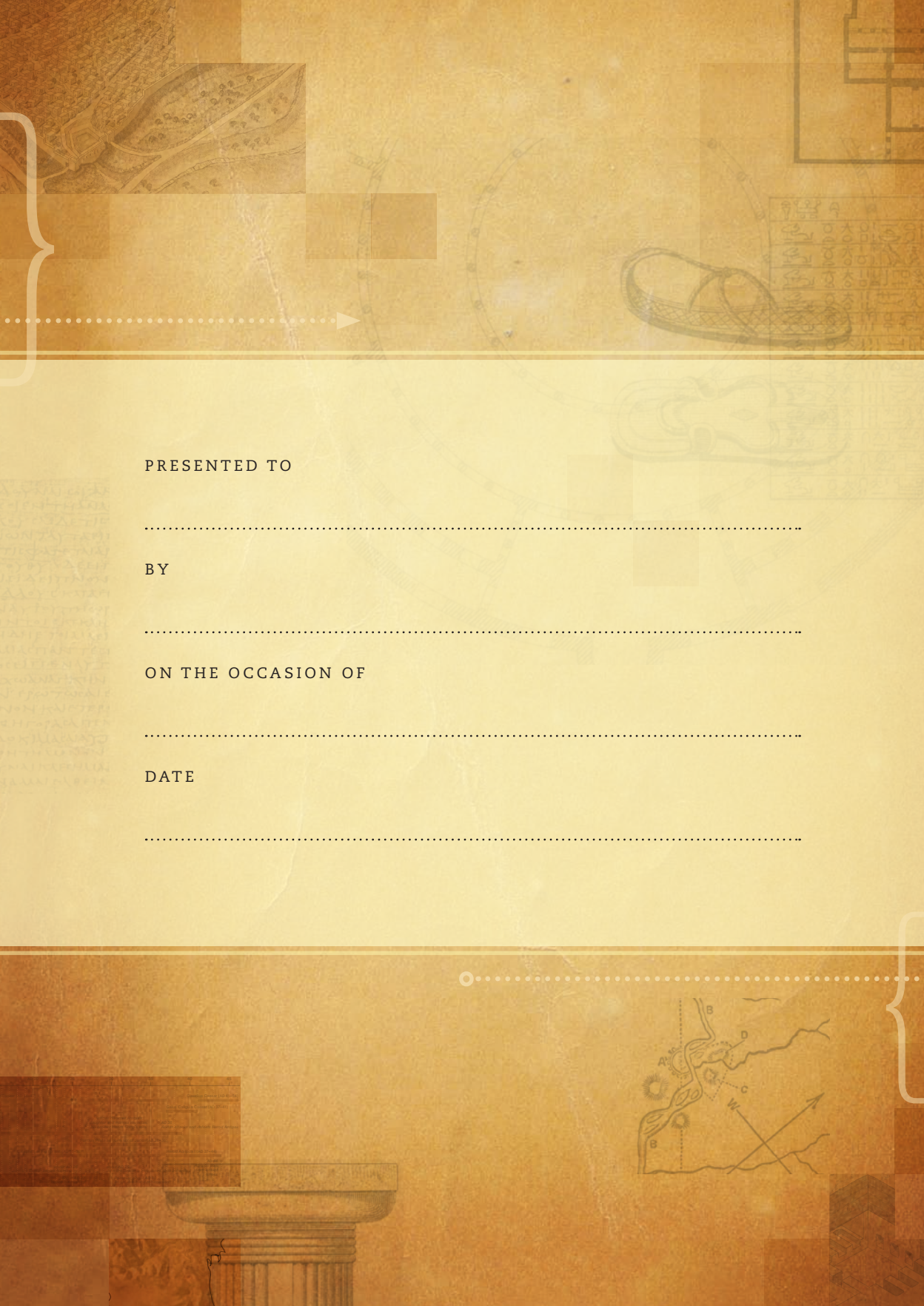
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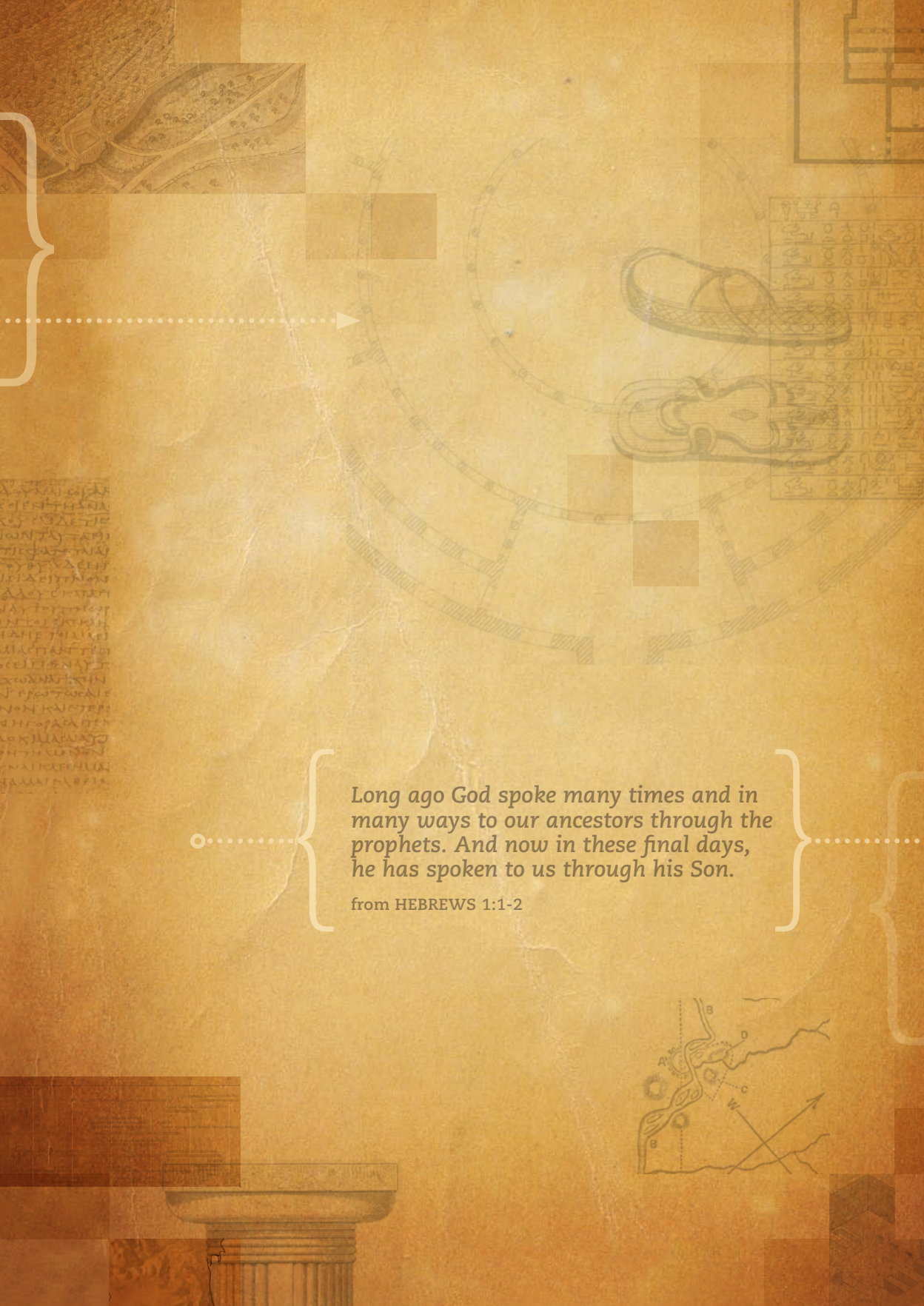
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Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son.

from HEBREWS 1:1-2

Chronological
Life Application
Study Bible

Chronological **Life Application**[®] Study Bible



New Living
Translation[®]
SECOND EDITION

Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
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..... INTRODUCTION TO THE CHRONOLOGICAL LIFE APPLICATION STUDY BIBLE

WHY THE CHRONOLOGICAL LIFE APPLICATION STUDY BIBLE IS UNIQUE

Have you ever opened your Bible and asked the following:

- What does this passage really mean?
- How does it apply to my life?
- Why does some of the Bible seem irrelevant?
- What do these ancient cultures have to do with today?
- I love God; why can't I understand what he is saying to me through his Word?
- What's going on in the lives of these Bible people?

Many Christians do not read the Bible regularly. Why? Because in the pressures of daily living, they cannot find a connection between the timeless principles of Scripture and the ever-present problems of day-by-day living.

God urges us to apply his Word (Isa 42:23; 1 Cor 10:11; 2 Thes 3:4), but too often we stop at accumulating Bible knowledge. This is why the *Life Application Study Bible* was originally developed—to show how to put into practice what we have learned.

Applying God's Word is a vital part of one's relationship with God; it is the evidence that we are obeying him. The difficulty in applying the Bible is not with the Bible itself but with the reader's inability to bridge the gap between the past and present, the conceptual and practical. When we don't or can't do this, spiritual dryness, shallowness, and indifference are the results.

The words of Scripture itself cry out to us, "Don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves" (Jas 1:22). The *Life Application Study Bible* does just that. It helps you understand the context of a passage, gives important background and historical information, explains difficult words and phrases, and helps you see the interrelationships within Scripture. But it does much more. The *Life Application Study Bible* goes deeper into God's Word, helping you discover the timeless truths being communicated, see the relevance for your life, and make a personal application. The notes answer the questions, "So what?" and "What does this passage mean to me, my family, my friends, my job, my neighborhood, my church, my country?"

Developed by an interdenominational team of pastors, scholars, family counselors, and a national organization dedicated to promoting God's Word and spreading the gospel, the *Life Application Study Bible* took many years to complete, and all the work was reviewed by renowned theologians.

This edition is the *Chronological Life Application Study Bible*, and it goes even further in helping you to understand the Bible and apply it to your life. Instead of the traditional canonical arrangement, this Bible is arranged so events appear in the order in which they occurred. Although it contains every word of the 66 books of the Bible, this Bible is divided into 10 eras of biblical history, with the books intermingled to help you see how the story actually unfolded. The *Chronological Life Application Study Bible* retains all the features that make the *Life Application Study Bible* so useful, and it adds more features for even greater depth in studying the Bible.

Imagine reading a familiar passage of Scripture and gaining fresh insight, as if it were the first time you had ever read it. How much richer would your life be if you left each Bible reading with a new perspective and a small change for the better? A small change every day adds up to a changed life—and that is the very purpose of Scripture.

WHAT IS APPLICATION?

The best way to define *application* is to first determine what it is *not*. Application is *not* just accumulating knowledge. Knowledge helps us discover and understand facts and concepts, but it stops there. History is filled with philosophers who knew what the Bible said but failed to apply it to their lives, keeping them from believing and changing. Many think that understanding is the end goal of Bible study, but it is really only the beginning.

Application is *not* just illustration. Illustration only tells us how someone else handled a similar situation. While we may empathize with that person, we still have little direction for our personal situation.

Application is *not* just making a passage “relevant.” Making the Bible relevant only helps us to see that the same lessons that were true in Bible times are true today; it does not show us how to apply them to the problems and pressures of our individual lives.

What, then, is application? Application *begins* by knowing and understanding God’s Word and goes further. It focuses on the truth of the particular Scripture text, shows us what to do about what we’re reading, and motivates us to respond to what God is teaching. All three are essential.

Application is putting into practice what we already know (see Mark 4:24; Heb 5:14). It answers our question “So what?” by confronting us with the right questions and motivating us to take action (see 1 Jn 2:5-6; Jas 2:17). Application is unique for each individual. It is making a relevant truth a personal truth, and it involves developing a strategy and action plan to live our lives in harmony with the Bible. It is the biblical “how to” of life.

You may ask, “How can your application notes be relevant to *my* life?” Each application note has three parts: (1) an *explanation* that ties the note directly to the Scripture passage and sets up the truth that is being taught, (2) the *bridge* that explains the truth and makes it relevant for today, and (3) the *application* that shows you how to take that truth and apply it to your personal situation. No note, by itself, can apply Scripture directly to your life. It can only teach, direct, lead, guide, inspire, recommend, and urge. It can give you the resources and direction you need to apply the Bible; but only *you* can take these resources and put them into practice.

A good note, therefore, should not only give you knowledge and understanding, but point you to application. Before you buy any kind of resource Bible, you should evaluate the notes and ask the following questions: (1) Does the note contain enough information to help me understand the point of the Scripture passage? (2) Does the note assume I know too much? (3) Does the note avoid denominational bias? (4) Do the notes touch most of life’s experiences? (5) Does the note help me *apply* God’s Word?

WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT
A CHRONOLOGICAL BIBLE?

The Bible does not proceed in chronological order from beginning to end. Indeed, the 66 books of the Bible do tell a unified story that begins at Genesis 1:1 and ends at Revelation 22:21, but the books are essentially organized by grouping similar kinds of books together (prophets, letters, etc.) rather than proceeding in chronological order. Some books cover the exact same events from different perspectives, like the books of Kings and Chronicles. Others, like the Psalms, are spread over hundreds of years by many different authors. It is often difficult for ordinary readers to put together the little clues throughout the Bible that show how a particular book or chapter fits into the larger story of the Bible. But seeing that larger story is often the key that unlocks understanding for some parts of the Bible that seem obscure.

The *Chronological Life Application Study Bible* helps the reader see the larger story by breaking up the traditional books of the Bible into 10 major eras of biblical history, intermingling the Scriptures into a single, unified story from Creation to the end. This provides readers with a unique viewpoint on the biblical story, and it can give fresh and

exciting insight into books of the Bible that might have been difficult to understand apart from knowing where they fall chronologically. For example, see the way the prophets Haggai and Zechariah are interacting with what is happening in the book of Ezra (pp. 1162-1181). Intermingling the prophets with the historical books can give us a new perspective on the issues they were dealing with. In this case, it shows how the people responded to God's call on their life through the prophets: The Temple was rebuilt and proper worship in Jerusalem was restored! This is only one of many examples. In the *Chronological Life Application Study Bible*, you will notice that the prophets are an integral part of the story of Israel, and their writings will pop up right in the middle of the story when they confronted a king or the people. You will read Paul's letters to the Thessalonians right when he wrote them, during a stay in Corinth a few months after his visit to Thessalonica. This new view on the text of Scripture will give you surprising and valuable insights.

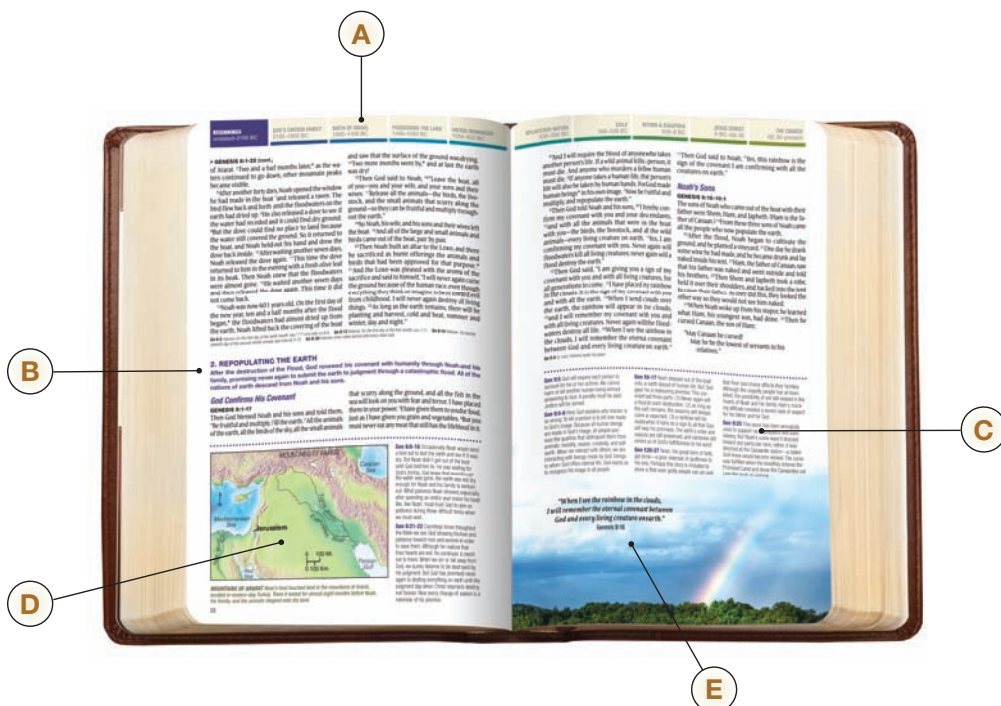
Although a chronological Bible gives us a new and exciting outlook on the message of Scripture, we do need to remember that the Bible was not written as a single story. God gave us the Bible as a collection of 66 individual books, not a chronological rearrangement of those books. While helpful as a tool for gaining insight into the meaning, message, and significance of Scripture, a chronological Bible is not a substitute for a traditional Bible. The *Chronological Life Application Study Bible* does contain every word of the Bible, but because it is rearranged and books are often presented out of canonical order or broken up into smaller pieces, we should remember that the books of the Bible are intended to be read as whole books. It is helpful to see the Gospels mingled together in one common narrative, with parallel passages together, but it is not a substitute for reading the book of Matthew as a whole, unbroken story about Jesus' life and his significance. With that in mind, it is our hope that the *Chronological Life Application Study Bible* will be a vital tool in helping you understand the Bible, but it should not replace a traditional Bible in any sense.

Organizing the Bible into chronological order is sometimes tricky, and excellent Christian scholars do not always agree on the order of certain books or passages. The editors of the *Chronological Life Application Study Bible* created the chronological arrangement by consulting several scholarly resources, but it should not be considered the only legitimate way to organize the Bible chronologically. Some books, such as the book of the prophet Joel, are very difficult to place chronologically. In cases like that, we used our best judgment, but ultimately certainty eludes us. In many places, the study notes will mention the possibility of alternative chronologies. We encourage readers to question our decisions and consider alternatives to the arrangement we have provided—the text of Scripture is infallible, but our arrangement of it in this Bible certainly is not!

FEATURES OF THE CHRONOLOGICAL LIFE APPLICATION STUDY BIBLE

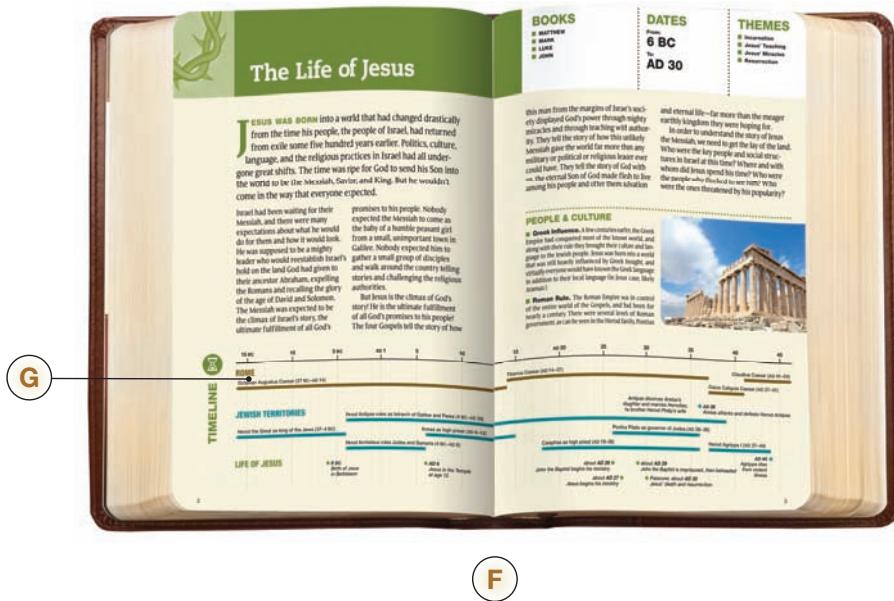
Front matter features

- **Canonical Table of Contents** A table of contents listing each passage of Scripture in its canonical order was created in order to give you a quick way to find any passage in this Bible based just on the reference, even if you have no idea what place that book or verse has in the chronological story.
- **Chronological Survey of the Bible** To help you understand the Old and New Testaments from their chronological viewpoint, a quick overview of the whole story, including gaps like the intertestamental period, begins on p. A23.



Interior features

- A. Chronological Header System** You'll never be at a loss for where you are in the story of the Bible. Every page shows the entirety of the historical eras covered with the current era highlighted for quick recognition of where you are in God's story.
- B. Outline** The *Chronological Life Application Study Bible* has a new, custom-made outline that was designed specifically from an application point of view. Several unique features should be noted:
 1. To avoid confusion, each section outline has only three levels of headings. Main outline heads are marked with a capital letter. Subheads are marked by a number. Minor explanatory heads have no letter or number.
 2. Brief paragraphs below each main head and subhead summarize the content of the following Bible text and offer important contextual information.
- C. Notes** In addition to providing the reader with many application notes, the *Chronological Life Application Study Bible* also offers several kinds of explanatory notes that help you understand culture, history, context, difficult-to-understand passages, background, places, theological concepts, and the relationship of various passages in Scripture to other passages. Maps, charts, and diagrams are also found on the same page as the passages to which they relate. For an example of an application note, see the note on John 20:23 (p. 1495). For an example of an explanatory note, see the note on Mark 11:1-2 (p. 1430). The abbreviation ff appears in some notes to indicate that the comments apply not only to the verse referenced but to the following passage as well.
- D. Maps** The *Chronological Life Application Study Bible* has more maps than any other Bible. A thorough and comprehensive Bible atlas is built right into each Bible section. There are two kinds of maps: (1) A section introduction map, telling the story of that section of Bible history. (2) Thumbnail maps in the notes, plotting most geographic movements in the Bible. In addition to these numerous full-color maps, there is a comprehensive set of color maps and diagrams at the back of this Bible.



E. Illustrated Verses Many photos appear throughout this Bible that illustrate important verses and bring the Bible to life.

F. Section Introductions The Section Introductions are divided into several easy-to-find parts:

Overview. This is a summary with general lessons and applications that can be drawn from the section as a whole.

Timeline. This puts the Bible books or passages of that section's era into their historical setting. It lists the key events of that era and the dates when they occurred.

People and Culture. This is an overview of the important people and cultural issues that provide background for what is happening historically during that time.

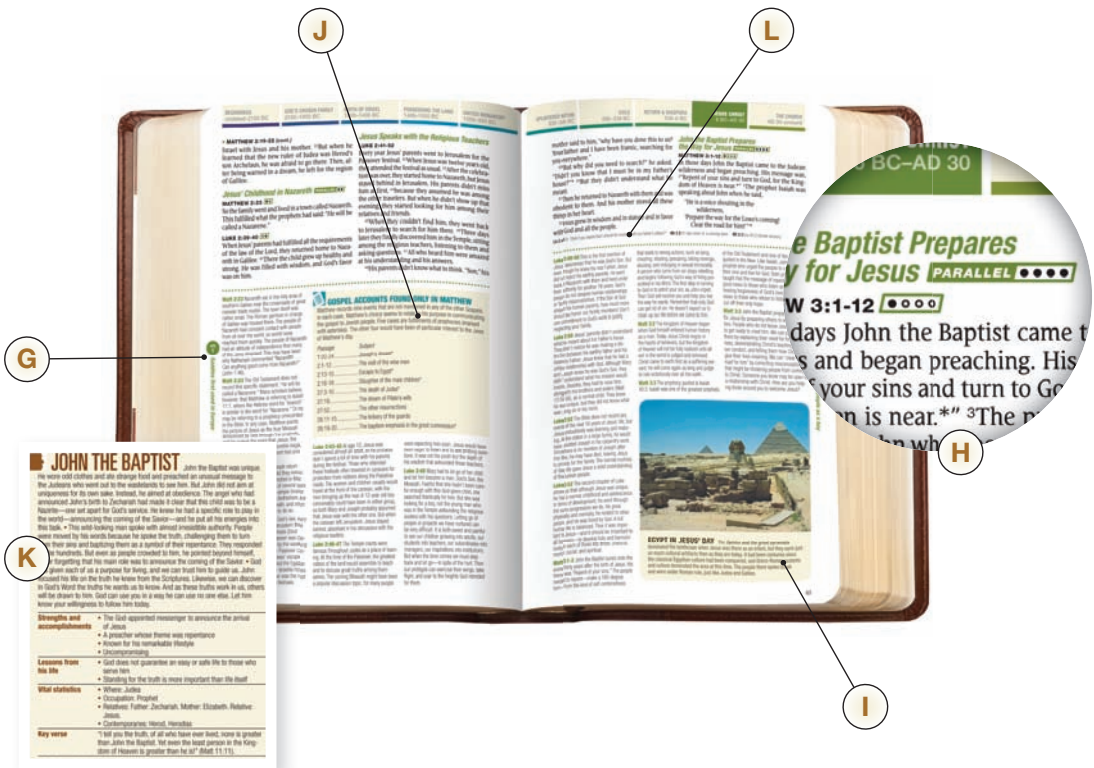
Books in this Section. This is a list of straight facts about each book in the section—those pieces of information you need to know at a glance.

Article. Some introductions include an article that explains an important biblical or theological concept to help in understanding that section.

Megathemes. This feature gives the main themes of the section, explains their significance, and then tells why they are still important for us today.

Map. This shows the key places found in the section and retells the story of the section from a geographical point of view.

G. Timeline Three types of timelines appear in this Bible. There is a master timeline listing all the events that are recorded throughout the Bible (p. A34). There are also more detailed timelines at the beginning of each era of biblical history, showing the events of that section in the context of other major world powers and events. Finally, there is a running timeline of key dates in the margins of the text to indicate when in history that passage took place.



H. Parallel Passage Indicator Parallel passages are placed one after another. Each is identified by a bar signifying that it is part of a parallel section. Markers identify how many passages—two, three, or four—are in the parallel. The parallel passages are also marked to indicate which one it is in the parallel: first, second, third, or fourth.

I. Archaeological Notes These notes feature full-color images and highlight important places, archaeological discoveries, and historical artifacts that put the Bible into real historical context.

J. Charts and Diagrams Hundreds of charts and diagrams are included to help the reader better visualize difficult concepts or relationships. Most charts not only present the needed information but show its significance as well.

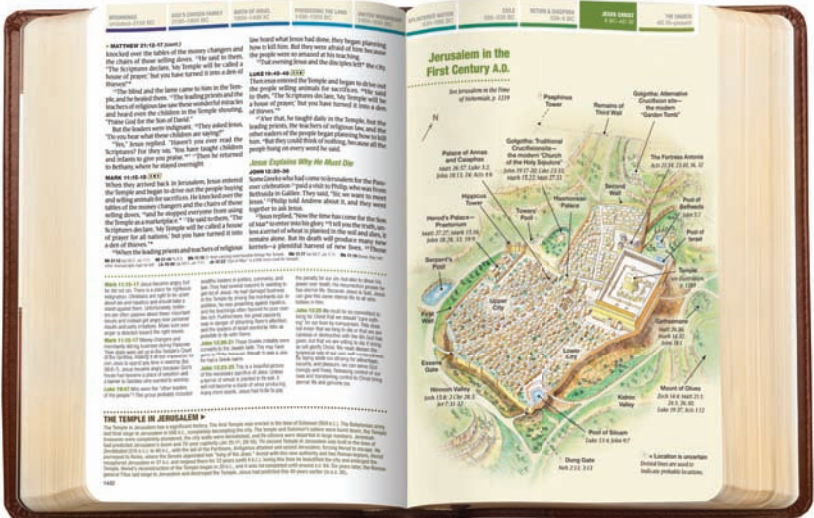
K. Personality Profiles Another unique feature of this Bible is a collection of profiles of many Bible people, including their strengths and weaknesses, greatest accomplishments and mistakes, and key lessons from their lives.

L. Textual Notes and Sectional Headings Directly related to the New Living Translation text, the textual notes examine such things as alternate translations, meaning of Hebrew and Greek terms, Old Testament quotations, and variant readings in the ancient biblical manuscripts. The NLT text also contains sectional headings in order to help you more easily understand the subject and content of each section; these headings appear as the third level of the three-level header system described above.



M

M. Harmony of the Gospels. A visual harmony of the Gospels was developed specifically for this Bible. It is located on p. 1260 and explained in detail there.



N

N. New Full-Color Illustrations. Eight full-color illustrations were commissioned specifically for the *Chronological Life Application Study Bible*, including four drawings of Jerusalem from various periods in history and detailed illustrations of the Tabernacle and Temple.

Back matter features

- **A Christian Worker's Resource** The Christian Worker's Resource is a special supplement written with you in mind. It includes five articles that you will find useful in your ministry: (1) "How to Become a Christian" includes the basic steps of becoming a believer, along with Bible verses you can use to guide someone to faith. (2) "How to Follow Up with a New Believer" gives you 14 discussion points to walk through with a new believer over the course of several weeks. These will help in understanding the basics of the Christian faith. (3) "Mining the Treasures of the *Chronological Life Application Study Bible*" gives you a taste of the depth of the study notes by citing often-asked questions (that you probably have been asked from time to time) and sending you to life application notes that help to answer those questions. (4) "So You've Been Asked to Speak" walks you through the process of preparing a talk or Bible study using the many features of the *Chronological Life Application Study Bible*. (5) Finally, "Taking the Step to Application" teaches you how to make application a natural part of your personal study as well as a part of Bible studies you lead or talks you give.
- **The Bible Book-by-Book** Since the *Chronological Life Application Study Bible* is arranged chronologically in 10 sections rather than canonically in 66 books, the traditional book introductions from the *Life Application Study Bible* are gathered together here so that you can still get an overview of the meaning and message of each individual book of the Bible.
- **Master Index** This Bible contains a complete master index to all the notes, charts, maps, archaeological notes, illustrations, and personality profiles, as well as separate indexes for each of these.
- **Dictionary/Concordance** A concise concordance identifies terms and proper names of special interest and points to the important occurrences in context. Each word is followed by a brief definition or description.

A CHRONOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE BIBLE

Biblical history spans the entire course of time from the creation of the world to the era of the early Christian church in the late first century A.D. At its most basic level, it is simply the story of God fashioning a people for himself and redemptively interacting with them throughout history. From the creation of the world and the first human beings to the fall of humanity; to the calling of Abraham and the rise of Israel; to the return of Judah from exile in Babylon; to the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; and finally to the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in all believers—God continually works to redeem a people for himself, a people he can lovingly bless with good things as they seek him and find their hope in him, the source of all good things.

■ **Beginnings: Creation–2100 B.C.** The story begins with the very creation of the world, when God formed the heavens and earth and then all living things to inhabit them. All that he created was “good,” but God distinguished human beings from the rest of creation by creating them in his very own image. He abundantly provided for Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, by placing them in a specially prepared garden, and he enjoyed unbroken fellowship with them. But this perfect world was soon poisoned by sin when Adam and Eve sought to be their own masters and disobeyed God. Instead of trusting and obeying God, they swallowed the lie of the serpent, who told them they could be like God. Because of their sin, Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden and from then on suffered pain, sorrow, hardship, and even death. But thankfully, the story of God’s people did not end there. In fact, that was just the beginning.

Sadly, the curse of sin brought into the world by Adam and Eve was passed down to all their descendants as well. Every human being is “bent,” so to speak, just like their ancestors. This can be seen as early as their first child: Cain killed his brother out of jealousy. The curse of sin continued until the whole world was so wicked that God chose to wipe it all out and start over, in a sense, with a new people, a people descended from a righteous man named Noah.

God instructed Noah to build a giant boat

to save his family and pairs of every kind of animal living on the earth. Then God made it rain for 40 days until the whole earth was covered with water, and every living thing that was not on the boat—including human beings—died. After the floodwaters subsided, Noah and his family left the boat to start a new humanity. God told them to multiply and fill the earth, and he promised never again to destroy the earth with a flood.

Noah’s descendants multiplied. Everyone spoke a single language, enabling them to easily work together. So they decided to build a great tower to the heavens, a testimony to their own greatness. But God chose to confuse them with different

languages, making it virtually impossible for them to continue with their great project, since they could no longer understand each other. As a result, the people soon dispersed and spread out over all the earth, which is what God had commanded them to do in the first place.

■ **God’s Chosen Family: 2100–1800 B.C.**

It appears that with each generation after Noah, people drifted further and further from God. God chose once again to create a new people for himself *within* the rest of humanity—this time through a man named Abram (eventually renamed Abraham). Through this chosen people, God would ultimately bless all of humanity. Interestingly, the Bible does not mention why God chose Abram. It simply says God told him to leave his family and his home country and go to a new land that God would show him. God promised to bless Abraham and make a great nation from his descendants. And Abraham obeyed God. Thus begins the rest of the story of the Old Testament—the story of God’s chosen people.



In obedience and faith, Abraham left his home and traveled to the land of Canaan. God told Abraham that this was the land he was going to give him, and he sealed his promise with a solemn covenant ceremony. God also reaffirmed his promise to give Abraham many descendants. After an agonizing wait, God finally gave Abraham and his wife, Sarah, a son, Isaac. Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 91. Then God

tested Abraham's faith by telling him to sacrifice Isaac. This was the ultimate demonstration of Abraham's faithful trust in God since Isaac was the only son born to Abraham and Sarah, the only visible hope that God would fulfill his promise to bless Abraham with many descendants.

Abraham obeyed, and God spared Isaac's life.

Isaac lived much like his father, sojourning in various places in Canaan. Isaac's wife, Rebekah, gave birth to twin boys, Esau and Jacob. Esau was older, but he sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew, and Jacob then tricked his father into granting him the blessings that belonged to Esau. So Esau became very angry with Jacob, and Jacob fled to the homeland of his ancestors, where he lived with his uncle Laban for many years. While working for Laban, Jacob married his daughters Leah and Rachel and began to raise a family. He eventually returned to Canaan and reconciled with Esau. God changed Jacob's name to Israel. His 12 sons became the ancestors of the 12 tribes of Israel. God also reaffirmed to Jacob the covenant he had made with his father, Isaac, and his grandfather Abraham.

One of Jacob's 12 sons was named Joseph, clearly Jacob's favorite. Though one of the youngest, Joseph had dreams (literally) of one day becoming master over his brothers. His brothers became very angry with him because of this and sold him to slave traders headed to Egypt. Yet God blessed Joseph even while a slave in Egypt. Through a complicated interplay of circumstances, Joseph was eventually brought before Pharaoh himself to interpret Pharaoh's dream. God gave Joseph wisdom to understand that the dream foretold of a coming worldwide famine. As a result, Pharaoh made him second in command of all of Egypt in order to prepare. During the famine, Joseph's brothers were forced to

travel to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, though they did not know he was their long-lost brother. Eventually Joseph revealed his identity to them, and they were reconciled. Joseph convinced his entire family, including his father, Jacob, to move to Egypt. And there Jacob's descendants flourished and multiplied.

■ **The Birth of Israel: 1800–1406 B.C.** Many years later, a new leader arose in Egypt who did not know of all that Joseph had done, and he began to oppress the Israelites for fear that they might rebel against him. The Israelites were made slaves, and eventually Pharaoh even ordered all Israelite baby boys to be thrown into the Nile River. One Israelite couple, however, hid their baby boy in a basket in the river to keep him from being killed. Pharaoh's daughter found the baby and adopted him, calling him Moses.

Moses grew up in the Egyptian royal court. One day, he witnessed an Egyptian beating an Israelite, so Moses killed the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand. When Pharaoh found out, Moses fled to the land of Midian. There God spoke to Moses from a burning bush, revealing his name—the LORD—and telling him to go back to Egypt and lead his people out of slavery to the land that God was giving them. Moses was reluctant to go, but the Lord assured him that he would be with him and would give him power to do amazing miracles before Pharaoh. God also sent Moses' brother, Aaron, along with him to Egypt.

When Moses arrived in Egypt, he spoke to Pharaoh, telling him God's command to let the Israelites go out into the wilderness to worship God. Pharaoh refused and then treated the Israelites even more harshly. This set in motion a series of 10 plagues that God inflicted on Egypt. Each plague cycle followed essentially the same pattern: Moses told Pharaoh to let God's people go; Pharaoh refused; the plague was unleashed; Pharaoh recanted and agreed to let the Israelites

go; Moses prayed for the plague to be stopped; Pharaoh then changed his mind and refused to let the Israelites go. The final plague was a curse upon the firstborn of all people and animals in Egypt. All homes without the blood of a lamb smeared on the doorframe would be visited by the angel of



death. The firstborn sons of Egypt were killed by the angel that night, including Pharaoh's own son. The annual feast of Passover commemorates this momentous event.

After this 10th plague, Pharaoh allowed the Israelites to leave Egypt; but once they had left, he again changed his mind and set out in pursuit of them. Just as Pharaoh's army was closing in on the Israelites, who were blocked by the Red Sea, the Lord miraculously parted the sea and allowed the Israelites to pass through on dry land. When the Egyptians tried to follow them, the sea closed over them and they drowned. This whole event, the Exodus, became a defining moment in the history of the nation of Israel, when God decisively rescued and redeemed his people for himself. Repeatedly throughout the Old Testament, God would refer to himself as the one who led the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt with strength and miraculous signs.

With the threat of the Egyptians behind them, the Israelites were now free to journey to the place where God wanted them to worship him. They began to grumble for food, so God provided quail for meat, and each morning manna, mysterious bread-like flakes, fell from heaven. At times, God also provided water from a rock.

Finally the Israelites came to Mount Sinai, and God met with Moses there. God gave him the Ten Commandments and other instructions to give to the people. These essentially defined what it meant to live as the people of God. While the Israelites were at Sinai, God also gave Moses instructions for building the Tabernacle, which would serve as a sort of portable temple as the Israelites moved from place to place on their way to the land that God had promised to their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Even while Moses was receiving God's laws, however, the people demonstrated their persistent unfaithfulness by constructing an idol and worshipping it! And Moses' brother Aaron, who had just been appointed high priest over the Israelites, was the one who instructed them to build it!

After the Israelites had camped at the foot of Mount Sinai for a year, God directed them to begin making their way to the Promised Land. God told Moses to send 12 scouts into Canaan. All but Joshua and Caleb reported that the land was good but that the inhabitants were stronger than them. So the Israelites refused to take possession of the land. Because they failed to trust in God for victory, he condemned them to wander in the wilderness for 40 years until that entire generation had died, except for Joshua and Caleb. God continued to provide for his people during those forty years, despite their repeated instances of grumbling and unfaithfulness to him. At the end of 40 years,

the new generation of Israelites came to Kadesh-barnea, and then they began making their way to the Promised Land once again. They set up camp on the plains of Moab. The Promised Land lay just across the Jordan River to the west. Moses reviewed the history of God's dealings with them up to that point and exhorted them to be faithful to God after they conquered the land. Moses died just before the Israelites entered the land, leaving his assistant Joshua to lead the conquest.

■ Possessing the Land: 1406–1050 B.C.

The first city to be taken was the imposing city of Jericho, which stood just across the Jordan River in Canaan. But the Israelites did not even have to lay siege to the city or attack its gates to capture it, because God miraculously caused the walls of the city to fall down.

Joshua then led the Israelites to capture towns throughout the Promised Land. The entire conquest of the land occurred over many years, but they never fully completed it. God had commanded the Israelites to completely drive out the Canaanites,

but they were satisfied to simply live alongside the inhabitants. Several areas within the land continued to be controlled by Canaanites even after the conquest period was over, and their idolatry was a snare to the Israelites for centuries to come.

After Joshua died, God repeatedly raised up leaders, called judges, to deliver his people from oppression. This oppression was typically a direct result of the Israelites' sin. This cycle of sin, oppression, and deliverance occurred throughout the period of the judges. During this time the Israelites also experienced conflict among themselves as the tribe of Benjamin was almost completely wiped out by the other tribes in a bloody civil war. The period of the judges was a spiritually dark, chaotic time for Israel, all the people doing whatever seemed right in their own eyes.

■ The United Monarchy: 1050–930 B.C.

The Israelites asked Samuel, the last of the judges, for a king to rule over them like the kings of the nations around them. God told Samuel to agree



to their request but to warn them of the hardships a king would bring upon them. God had been their king, but they had rejected his leadership in favor of being more like the other nations.

God led Samuel to anoint Saul from the tribe of Benjamin as the first king (c. 1050 B.C.). Saul was tall and handsome. He also proved to be an able

military leader in many ways. But his spiritual character was lacking. On various occasions, he sacrificed God's ways to ensure military success or personal gain. For these reasons, God rejected Saul as king and chose a man after his own heart to replace him: David.

David was an unlikely choice. The youngest of eight brothers, he was not even considered at first. But soon after Samuel anointed David to be the next king, David demonstrated that he was indeed specially chosen by God; for he slew the Philistine giant Goliath when all Israel's soldiers, including his brothers, were too afraid to face the giant in battle.

David joined Saul's warriors at his palace and became close friends with Saul's son Jonathan. David quickly proved himself to be a very able military leader and gained the favor of the Israelite people. This incited Saul's bitter jealousy, and Saul began trying to kill David. David fled, moving from place to place, at times narrowly escaping Saul and his men. When David heard that Saul and his sons had been killed in a battle with the Philistines, he moved to Hebron and was proclaimed king over Judah. But the commander of Saul's army proclaimed Ishbosheth, one of Saul's sons, king over Israel. Eventually Ishbosheth was assassinated by his own men, and David was proclaimed king over all the Israelite tribes.

After becoming king over all Israel around 1000 B.C., David captured the fortified city of Jerusalem from the Jebusites and moved his capital there. David was extremely successful in battle against virtually all the surrounding nations. He established a treaty with the powerful and wealthy city-state of Tyre. The king of Tyre supplied David with stonemasons and coveted cedar, and David built himself a palace and stockpiled materials for building the Temple.

The high point of David's reign was when God chose to establish a permanent covenant with David and his descendants. David wanted to build

a permanent Temple for the Lord in Jerusalem but the Lord had a different plan: God was going to build *David* a "house," that is, he was going to establish David's family line as the ruling dynasty over Israel forever.

Unfortunately, David's reign as king was not without trouble. David himself committed adultery with the wife of Uriah, one of his most valiant warriors, and she became pregnant. Then David sought to cover up his sin by arranging Uriah's death on the battlefield. Later in his reign, David brought a plague upon all Israel because he ordered a census to be taken of all men of military age. Several of David's children brought heartache to him as well. David's son Amnon raped his own half-sister Tamar, and then her full brother Absalom killed Amnon in revenge. Absalom then fled into exile. Years later Absalom returned, but he mounted a rebellion against his father and proclaimed himself king. David was forced to flee Jerusalem for a time and set up his capital in Mahanaim. David's men fought against Absalom's men, and Absalom was killed, so David returned to Jerusalem.

Just before David died in 970 B.C., he appointed his son Solomon as king over Israel. Having received an extensive and powerful kingdom, Solomon was able to focus on tasks such as building a beautiful royal palace and the Temple for the Lord in Jerusalem. At the same time, Solomon capitalized on Israel's strategic position as a land bridge between Egypt and the other major powers of the ancient Near East. Solomon exacted lucrative tolls from those traveling through Israel, and he even engaged in arms dealing, buying horses and chariots from various nations and selling them to others. Solomon expanded his kingdom until it reached as far as the Euphrates River. Solomon's wisdom and riches were renowned throughout the ancient Near East.

However, Solomon's reign was not entirely a success story. He married literally hundreds of wives, primarily to seal political alliances with other nations, and this led to the spread of idolatry in Israel as these wives brought their idolatrous ways with them. Solomon even funded the building of pagan shrines for his wives on the hill across from the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. Solomon's extravagant royal court also placed a huge tax burden on the people of Israel, a burden that became difficult to bear.

■ **Splintered Nation: 930–586 B.C.** These cracks in Solomon's kingdom eventually led to outright rebellion. When his son Rehoboam became king in 930 B.C., the people of Israel demanded that he grant some reprieve from the



heavy tax burden placed on them by his father. Rehoboam foolishly vowed instead to tax the people even more. So 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel refused to submit to Rehoboam, and they set up their own king instead. Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained loyal. From then on, the kingdom established by the 10 northern tribes was called Israel, and the kingdom in the south that continued to be ruled by Davidic kings was called Judah. The division between these two kingdoms was very real, and they often fought wars against each other.

The northern tribes installed a man named Jeroboam as their king, and he immediately set a wicked precedent of idolatry for Israel. In order to keep his people from traveling to Jerusalem (in Judah) to worship at the Temple, Jeroboam set up calf idols at the northern and southern extremes of his kingdom and encouraged the people to worship there instead. He also appointed priests who were not Levites. His wickedness was so renowned that later wicked kings were said to follow the example of Jeroboam, who led Israel into sin.

The people of Judah continued to worship at the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, and their priests were descended from Aaron, as the law of Moses stipulated. Not that idolatry was never a problem in Judah, but for most of Judah's existence, idolatry did not typically receive the same degree of royal backing and widespread acceptance as it did in the northern kingdom.

Another distinction between the two kingdoms was the frequency with which royal dynasties changed. The northern kingdom experienced numerous assassinations and coups, which led to new dynasties taking power. But the southern kingdom always remained loyal to the Davidic dynasty.

Perhaps one of the most significant kings of Israel was Ahab, who took the throne in 874 B.C. Ahab was a skilled military leader. Spiritually, however, Ahab was very wicked, leading the Israelites into idolatry and other sins. Much of his wickedness was due to the influence of his wife Jezebel, the daughter of a pagan king. Jezebel promoted idolatry throughout the land, and she and Ahab were often condemned by the prophet Elijah.

Around this time a number of prophets gained prominence in Israel and Judah, and they spoke out against many sins that had grown rampant in society, including social injustice, idolatry, and general unfaithfulness to the Lord. They also foretold of a day when God would send his deliverer to Israel, a divine ruler who would set all things right once again. This deliverer is sometimes referred to as the Messiah ("anointed one"). The writings of several of these prophets became part of the Old Testament.

Over time, Assyria regained strength and absorbed nation after nation into its vast empire. Israel's territory was repeatedly reduced by Assyrian attacks until it was less than half its original size. Finally in 722 B.C., Israel's capital city of Samaria fell to the Assyrians, and the northern kingdom came to an end. Many Israelites were exiled to faraway lands, and other foreign peoples were brought in to diffuse the possibility of unified revolt. The Bible makes it clear that this exile was a direct result of the wickedness and idolatry of the people of Israel. Long ago when God gave his laws to Moses, he had forewarned the people that they, too, would be cast out of the Promised Land if they became like the wicked Canaanites. Now the day of reckoning had finally come for Israel's many sins of idolatry and injustice.



Several kings of Judah stand out. Jehoshaphat was regarded as a righteous king by the writers of Scripture, and he earnestly sought the Lord when foreign armies threatened Judah. However, he formed an alliance with wicked King Ahab of Israel, which had consequences later.

King Ahaz of Judah was deemed a wicked king by the writers of Scripture. When the northern kingdom of Israel teamed up with the Arameans to attack Judah (733 B.C.), Ahaz made the fateful decision to appeal to Assyria for help, essentially making Judah a vassal (subservient) kingdom to Assyria. He also replaced the altar of the Lord with a replica of a pagan one he saw in Damascus, and he got rid of many other sacred Temple items. Eventually he closed up the Temple entirely and allowed idolatry to flourish in Judah.

Ironically, Ahaz's son Hezekiah was one of the most righteous kings of Israel, and he was also a successful military leader. Hezekiah knew that the Assyrians would soon attempt to conquer Judah. Hezekiah prepared the city for this attack, which kept it from falling for a long time. Finally God sent a plague throughout the Assyrian camp, and the few who survived broke off the siege and returned to Assyria. Hezekiah also restored and purified the Temple and the worship of the Lord, purged idolatry from the land, and reinstituted the festival of Passover.

Just as quickly as Hezekiah had restored

proper worship of the Lord, his wicked son Manasseh corrupted it all once again. Manasseh promoted idolatry throughout Judah like no one else before him. He placed a pagan idol in the Temple of the Lord and even sacrificed his own sons by fire just outside the walls of Jerusalem. Near the end of his life, Manasseh was taken away into exile in Babylon, and he repented of all that he had done. After he was allowed to return to Judah, he strove to undo all the evil that he had done, tearing down pagan altars and restoring worship of the Lord.

By the time Manasseh's grandson Josiah became king of Judah (640 B.C.), Assyria was in decline, and the Babylonians were on the rise in the ancient Near East. Josiah capitalized on the situation, expanding the borders of Judah to include nearly all of the northern kingdom of Israel, whose people had by this time been carried away into exile. Josiah then strove to purge the land of idolatry and restore proper worship of the Lord. He also arranged for extensive repairs to be made to the Temple. Josiah died in 609 B.C. while trying to stop the Egyptians from passing through Judah and Israel to help the Assyrians, who were on the run from the Babylonians and the Medes in the far north.

After Josiah died, the Babylonians essentially took over Judah, installing and quickly deposing several of Josiah's sons as kings of Judah. They also exiled the upper echelon of society to Babylon in several waves (605 B.C., 597 B.C., and 586 B.C.) until finally in 586 B.C. the Babylonians attacked the city of Jerusalem and completely destroyed the Temple, leaving the once-proud nation in ruins.

■ **Exile: 586–538 B.C.** Unlike the experience of the northern kingdom of Israel, the Judeans were, for the most part, allowed to maintain their

cultural and religious distinctiveness even in exile, and no large-scale effort was made to repopulate the land of Judah with foreigners. It was during the Exile that the people of Judah first came to be referred to as Jews (from the term *Judeans*).

This time of exile had a massive impact on virtually every aspect of Israelite life. Only the poor were left in Judah, and the ritual

sacrificial system had essentially ceased. At the same time, many of those taken into exile became somewhat prosperous and even occupied positions of significant political power in the governments of their captors. Daniel and his friends were groomed to be part of the royal court, and Daniel was a close adviser to several Babylonian and Persian rulers.

The Babylonian empire were the ones who conquered Judah and took them off into exile, but the Babylonians soon faced a military threat themselves. The mighty Persian empire from the north was growing, and they eventually conquered Babylon and nearly everything else in the known world at the time. Persia had a different stance towards conquered peoples than Babylon had, which led to the end of this period of exile for the Jews.

■ **Return and Diaspora: 538–6 B.C.** King Cyrus of Persia captured Babylon in 539 B.C. and absorbed the Babylonian empire into his vast domain. In order to foster gratitude and loyalty among his subjects, Cyrus quickly decreed that those held captive in Babylon were free to return to their native lands. So around 538 B.C., a small contingent of Jews returned home to the land of Israel and reestablished a semiautonomous state under the dominion of Persia. They repaired the altar, reinstituted the daily sacrifices, and rebuilt the Temple as well. As the memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah attest, Israel continued to enjoy relative religious freedom under the Persians throughout the remainder of the Old Testament period, despite occasional periods of oppression.

Not all of the Jews returned to the Promised Land, however. Over the decades in exile, many had largely integrated with the societies in which they were living and had built lives for themselves there. Over time the Hebrew language came to be replaced by Aramaic (the dominant language of the land of their exile) as the primary spoken language among Jews, and many Jews began to intermarry with the local foreign peoples and to regard their place of exile as their permanent home. This large population of Jews living permanently outside of the Promised Land while maintaining some degree of religious and cultural



distinctiveness is often referred as the *Diaspora* ("scattering"). Some, like Daniel, Mordecai, and Esther continued to serve God faithfully even in prominent positions while far from the land of Israel. Over time, more and more of the Jews chose to return home, even leaving important positions to do so, such as Nehemiah, who was cup-bearer to the king.

The Intertestamental Period

The time between the last recorded events of the Old Testament and the first recorded events of the New Testament are sometimes referred to as the intertestamental period. Christians often think of this period as shrouded in mystery and darkness. In reality, quite a bit is known about this very formative period of biblical history, and understanding these events can help us better understand the New Testament. In a real way, the intertestamental period set the scene for the life and ministry of Jesus and his followers. For example, the Pharisees and Sadducees didn't even exist during Old Testament times; but by the time of Jesus, these two groups were key players in the political and religious life of Israel—so much so that Jesus spent considerable time and energy condemning them and instructing his disciples not to follow their example.

A brief review of a few events from the Old Testament will help us better understand the events that came after them. When the Assyrians exiled the northern kingdom *out* of the land, they brought foreign peoples from other lands *into* Israel in order to diffuse the possibility of unified revolt. Intermarriage among these foreigners and Israelites in Palestine gave rise to a group of people known as Samaritans, who were characterized by their syncretistic blend of Judaism and pagan religious practices. When Babylon conquered and exiled the southern kingdom of Judah, they destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem, bringing a halt to the ritual sacrificial system of Israel. This crisis led to a shift in focus away from the Temple and its rituals to the written word of Scripture, which was still accessible even in exile. Thus, it is likely during this time that synagogues and scribes became more widespread in Israelite society.

It is roughly at this point that we quietly exit the period of the Old Testament and enter the time known as the intertestamental period. Perhaps the single most significant event that occurred during this period was the rise of Alexander the Great. After ascending to the throne at the age of 20 (336 B.C.) and securing his grip over Macedonia and the Greek peninsula, young Alexander launched a series of stunning victories over the Persians that eventually

culminated in his complete dominion over virtually all former Persian territory. Just as quickly as he rose to power, however, Alexander succumbed to illness and died in 323 B.C. at the age of 32.

One major effect of Alexander's conquest relates to his promotion of the Greek language and culture throughout his conquered lands. Greek soon came to function as a near universal means of communication and understanding throughout the ancient Near East. The pervasiveness and lasting influence of the Greek language can be seen most clearly in the fact that every single book of the New Testament, over 300 years after Alexander's death, was written in Greek.

Upon Alexander's death, his kingdom was broken up among his generals and other successors. A series of wars followed, with each successor vying for territory controlled by another. In time (around 220 B.C.), the Near East came to be dominated by three primary Greek powers: the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt; the Seleucid dynasty in much of Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and Persia; and the Antigonid dynasty in Macedonia. The land of Israel was initially part of the Ptolemaic realm, and Jews typically enjoyed a great deal of religious freedom and even favor at times. During this time a large number of Jews moved to Alexandria

in northern Egypt, where they became relatively prosperous and influential. It was in Alexandria that a group of Jewish biblical scholars translated the Old Testament into Greek to make it more accessible to the increasing number of Jews who no longer spoke Hebrew. The translation, known as the Septuagint, would later become the Bible of the early Christian church, and most Old Testament quotations found in the New Testament are drawn from it.

In 198 B.C., the Seleucid ruler Antiochus III seized the land of Israel from the Ptolemies. When his son Antiochus IV Epiphanes took the throne in 175 B.C., everything changed for the Jews. Antiochus held ambitions of conquering the Ptolemaic kingdom in Egypt. In order to shore up his defenses and to prepare for his Egyptian campaign, Antiochus imposed a strict policy of Hellenization upon his subjects, most notably the Jews in Palestine. Compliance was regarded as



loyalty, and refusal was interpreted as rebellion. Jews were required to adopt the beliefs and practices of the Greeks (often abhorrent to pious Jews), and they were forbidden to practice many distinctly Jewish rituals and customs, such as circumcision, observance of the Sabbath, and ritual food laws. Copies of the law of Moses were burned. A pagan idol of Zeus was even placed in the Temple in Jerusalem. Antiochus sold the office of high priest in Israel, restricted to the line of Aaron by Mosaic law, to the highest bidder who would promote Antiochus's policies. Unsurprisingly, these policies caused a crisis of conscience for many Jews. The crisis became even more pronounced in 167 B.C. after Antiochus was forced by the Romans to turn back from certain defeat. He vented his anger mercilessly upon many Jews who refused to give up their religious beliefs, and he banned Judaism altogether. The situation was growing ripe for revolt.

Open revolt by the Jews finally broke out under the leadership of a priest named Mattathias and his five sons, who are often referred to as the Maccabees (meaning "hammers"). By 164 B.C. they had recaptured the Temple and ritually purified and restored it (the event commemorated by Hannukah, the Feast of Dedication). The next several decades were characterized by armed resistance against the Seleucid rulers, and several of Mattathias's sons lost their lives. Over time, they established their dynasty as the permanent political leaders of Israel. They were also granted the office of the high priesthood. This concentration of political and religious power in a single family led to various abuses. Ironically, each succeeding Maccabean ruler also became increasingly enamored with the Hellenistic way of life. All this led to dissension among the Jews, and various sects and parties arose with different views on these issues. The Pharisees largely opposed Hellenization and the singular power of the ruler. The Sadducees favored both. Still others, such as the Qumran community, wholly rejected the Maccabean dynasty and the Temple system as completely corrupt and withdrew into their own communities.

Maccabean rule over Israel continued until 63 B.C., when the rising Roman Empire finally engulfed Israel and Jewish independence came to an end. Around 39 B.C., a young Idumean named Herod was named king of Judea by the Roman Senate. Herod the Great proved to be an extremely shrewd leader, an able builder (including completely refurbishing the Temple in Jerusalem), but fiercely brutal against those who opposed him.

By the end of the intertestamental period, distinct Jewish communities could be found throughout the known world, and each one would

have been forced to reconcile how God's people were to continue to live in faithful obedience to God's laws in the midst of their unique cultural setting. In all of this, there also continued to be an ever evolving hope in a Messiah, the anointed one, God's chosen instrument of deliverance and restoration for his people. Various Old Testament passages laid the foundation for this hope, but exactly who the Messiah would be and what he would do were open to about as many interpretations as there were communities of God's people.

■ **Jesus Christ: 6 B.C.–A.D. 30** In the midst of this incredibly complex interplay of religion, political struggle, and social change, God did indeed send his Messiah, the long awaited hope of his people. But God's Messiah would not be quite like any conceived by human minds. The story of the New Testament opens with the shockingly humble birth of the King of kings.

The birth of the Messiah (called the *Christ* in Greek) took place in the final years of Herod the Great, probably around 6 or 5 B.C. (The odd phenomenon of Jesus being born "B.C." is due to a miscalculation by church scholars about 500 years after Jesus' death.) The angel Gabriel appeared to a virgin named Mary and foretold that she



would conceive and bear a son by the power of the Holy Spirit and that he would be the Son of God and was to be called Jesus. Her fiancé, Joseph, was also told by an angel that Mary would give birth to the Messiah. Caesar Augustus ordered a census of the entire Roman world, so Joseph traveled with Mary to Bethlehem, the town of his ancestors. There Mary gave birth to Jesus, fulfilling prophecies that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Shepherds came to worship him, as did wise men (royal astrologers) from the East, perhaps as much as two years later.

Herod the Great attempted to eliminate this newborn threat to his reign by killing all baby boys in Bethlehem. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus escaped to Egypt and then returned after an angel informed them of Herod's death. They resettled in Nazareth, and Joseph took up work as a carpenter or perhaps a stone mason. The Bible tells nothing more of Jesus' childhood until he was 12, when he amazed the scribes and teachers

of the law with his understanding. As Jesus grew into adulthood, it is likely that he took up Joseph's trade.

At about the age of 30, Jesus began his public ministry. John the Baptist had been drawing great crowds throughout Israel with his declaration that "the Kingdom of Heaven is near" and his baptism of repentance. Jesus was baptized by John, after which God the Father verbally affirmed Jesus' Sonship and the Holy Spirit descended upon him. Soon after this, Jesus also began to preach that "the Kingdom of Heaven is near," a key theme in his teaching and parables. Some of John's own followers began to follow Jesus, apparently with the blessing of John himself, who saw his role as preparing the way for the coming of the Messiah, who had now arrived in the person of Jesus.

Early in his ministry, Jesus based his work in Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. Using figurative and even somewhat cryptic stories called parables, Jesus captured people's interest and taught them about the Kingdom of Heaven. He also healed many sick people, cast out demons, and performed other miracles that demonstrated his divine power and provided a foretaste of life in the Kingdom of Heaven. He began to draw large crowds of followers. Jesus selected a special group of 12 disciples to follow him everywhere he went. Several of these men were previously fishermen, including Peter, Andrew, James, and John. These men would remain with Jesus throughout his ministry and became privy to his most intimate teaching and deeds.

Jesus' ministry likely lasted at least three years, the initial years marked by increasing popularity, the final year marked by increasing dissent and even animosity. Throughout his ministry, Jesus consistently condemned two particular groups of religious leaders: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. These two groups had very differing views from each other on both religion and politics. Jesus repeatedly castigated the Pharisees for their legalistic adherence to the law of Moses that lacked real love for God and people. Jesus exposed the Sadducees' faulty understanding of Scripture and of God's power. Sometimes he lumped the two groups together in his condemnations. At the same time, Jesus often praised prostitutes, tax collectors, and other "sinners" who repented of their sins and followed him. Over time, the combination of Jesus' growing popularity, his condemnation of the religious leaders, and his claims to be the Son of God proved more than the leaders could stomach, and a plot was hatched to end his life.

By the end of his ministry, Jesus began another journey from Galilee in northern Israel to Jerusalem in the south to celebrate the Passover

with his disciples. By now Jesus was extremely well known throughout Israel, and many believed him to be—or at least wondered if he *might* be—the Messiah, as he claimed. No doubt many were hoping for the overthrow of the hated Roman rule. News of Jesus' impending arrival in Jerusalem went ahead of him, and people laid palm branches and cloaks on the road to receive him as king. Jesus, in turn, chose to enter the city on a donkey just as the Old Testament prophet Zechariah had foretold, apparently in recognition of his role as Messiah. Thus, the city was ripe with expectation for the upcoming week of Passover, when Jews celebrated their deliverance from slavery in Egypt many centuries before.

Immediately upon entering the city in triumph, Jesus went up to the Temple and threw out the money changers and merchants, declaring that his Father's house was to be a house of prayer. His actions angered many of the religious leaders, some of whom received a cut of the profits from the Temple sales.

Jesus spent much of the week of Passover teaching in the Temple area and debating with the Pharisees and Sadducees. He also foretold of events to come, including the destruction of the Temple and his eventual return to earth to gather his people. At some point in the week, Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' 12 closest disciples, agreed to betray Jesus to the religious leaders for 30 pieces of silver.

On Thursday of that week, Jesus shared the Passover meal with his 12 disciples. Judas Iscariot left during the meal to carry out his act of betrayal. Afterward, Jesus and his disciples went just outside the city to Gethsemane, an olive garden where they often relaxed from the busy events of the day in Jerusalem. There Judas carried out his betrayal. The guards arrested Jesus, and most of his disciples fled.

Jesus was interrogated throughout the night in order to find him guilty of a crime worthy of death. Various accusations were made, but none held up to close scrutiny. By morning, they settled on Jesus' own claim to be the Messiah in order to accuse him of treason against Rome. They led him to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor,



who held ultimate power to sentence someone to death, and they accused Jesus of treason. Pilate knew the leaders' true motives had nothing to do with loyalty to Rome, but in the end he acquiesced and condemned Jesus to death by crucifixion.

After Jesus was subjected to various abuses, beatings, and ridicule by Roman soldiers, he was nailed to a cross and put on public display as a deterrent to all who might consider committing the same crime of treason against Rome. Jesus' charge was posted: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Jesus continued to suffer on the cross until about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, when he cried with a loud voice, "It is finished," and he died.

Pilate granted permission to a rich man named Joseph of Arimathea to bury Jesus' body in his own nearby tomb. Because the Sabbath was fast approaching, Jesus' body was quickly placed in the tomb without being treated with burial spices.

On Sunday, some women who had followed Jesus and cared for his needs

went to Jesus' tomb to finish preparing his body for burial. When they reached the tomb, however, they discovered that Jesus' body was gone! Angels at the tomb then told them that Jesus had risen from the dead! The women ran back to tell the other disciples the news. Jesus was alive!

During the 40 days following his resurrection, Jesus appeared to various disciples on different occasions, confirming that he had been raised from the dead, giving them further instructions and teaching, and commanding them to go out and be his witnesses, telling people everywhere about him. He told his disciples to remain in Jerusalem (not their home area of Galilee) until the Holy Spirit came and filled them with power. He then ascended to heaven as his disciples watched, where he remains until he returns in glory for his people.

■ **The Church: A.D. 30–Present** During the festival of Pentecost, 50 days after Passover, the promised Holy Spirit finally came upon Jesus' disciples, and they began proclaiming the great works of God in languages they did not even know. Peter spoke to the crowd about Jesus and his resurrection and implored his listeners to

repent and follow him. About 3,000 people became believers in Jesus that day, launching the Christian church.

The depth of Jesus' impact upon these new believers became immediately visible by their commitment to love and care for each other. Many believers voluntarily gave their possessions to help provide for the needs of others in the church, and the church made specific arrangements to care for the needs of widows. God also worked many miracles through Peter and the other leaders, confirming their authority and encouraging the believers.

Persecution soon came, however. A believer named Stephen and James, the brother of John, were killed for their faith in Jesus. Many believers fled Jerusalem, but God used even this to spread the Good News across the known world. Eventually new churches were established as far away as Damascus and Antioch in Syria. Some of the leaders in the Jerusalem church moved to Antioch, including a man named Barnabas. James, the brother of Jesus, became a leader in the church in Jerusalem.

One of the persecutors was a zealous young Pharisee named Saul. As Saul was traveling to Damascus from Jerusalem to pursue Christians there, the Lord Jesus appeared to Saul, temporarily blinding him, and asked why he was persecuting him. After this, Saul completed his journey to Damascus, but as a new man: a zealous servant of Jesus Christ. God would eventually use Saul, who became known as Paul, to reach countless others with the message of the gospel.

In the meantime, the church continued to grow, as did the bounds of the gospel itself. What had originally started out essentially as a Jewish sect had expanded to include Samaritans (despised by many Jews as half-breeds), proselytized Jews (Gentiles who had become Jews), and even God-fearing Gentiles. The church received these changes with joy, but they also introduced some questions that would not be fully resolved until several years later at the Jerusalem council.

Over time Barnabas convinced Paul to join him at Antioch, and later they traveled through Cyprus and Galatia preaching the gospel to Jews and Gentiles alike. During this journey, Paul was repeatedly persecuted by Jews, and he eventually decided to begin preaching primarily to Gentiles. This raised a key question: Did these Gentiles need to adhere to the laws of Moses in order to be followers of Jesus? That is, did these Gentiles need to become converts to Judaism (including being circumcised and following strict food laws) before they could become Christians? Soon after Paul and Barnabas returned from their journey,



the leaders of the Jerusalem church held a council to decide the issue. After some discussion, the leaders agreed that Gentile believers did not need to be circumcised and become Jewish converts in order to become Christians. They were full-fledged Christians just as they were.



Soon after this Paul embarked on two more missionary journeys. The great distances traveled were made possible in part by Rome's excellent road system and the relative peace ("Pax Romana") due to Rome's unrivalled power in the region. Along the way Paul established churches throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia,

and Achaia, and several of his letters to these churches have become part of the canon of the New Testament.

At the end of his third missionary journey, Paul's work among the Gentiles fostered rumor and anger among many Jews who were zealous for the law of Moses. They accused Paul of teaching Gentiles to flout the laws of Moses, and they mistakenly thought he had brought a Gentile into the Jewish section of the Temple courts. A riot erupted, and the Roman commander took Paul into custody for his safety. Paul was then transferred to Caesarea on the coast. He remained in custody for nearly two years until finally he

invoked his right as a Roman citizen to appeal his case to Caesar himself. So Paul was sent under guard to Rome.

Paul's journey to Rome proved difficult, as Paul suffered shipwreck off the island of Malta near Sicily. Eventually Paul made it safely to Rome, however, and as he awaited trial in Rome under house arrest, he continued to minister to believers there and probably wrote several other letters of the New Testament. It is not certain exactly what happened to Paul after this, but it appears that he was soon released and embarked on at least one other journey before he was arrested again. Church tradition holds that Paul was finally executed under the emperor Nero.

During these years, other changes were taking place in the church as well. Apparently the apostle Peter moved to Rome, where he, too, suffered martyrdom under Nero. According to tradition, Barnabas's relative John Mark recorded Peter's stories and teachings from Jesus' life and ministry (the Gospel of Mark). Likewise, the apostle John moved to Ephesus (probably along with Mary, the mother of Jesus), where he served as a prominent leader for several churches that had been established in western Asia Minor. John also recorded many stories and teachings of Jesus in the Gospel of John. Eventually John was exiled to the island of Patmos (not far from Ephesus), where he recorded the revelation from Jesus concerning the end of the world. According to church tradition, John died on Patmos. The Gospels of Matthew (another apostle) and Luke (a Gentile companion of Paul's) were also compiled from the testimonies of those who had been eyewitnesses to Jesus' life and ministry.

COMPLETE BIBLICAL TIMELINE

Catch a glimpse of the whole sweep of biblical history. The ten historical eras outlined in the *Chronological Life Application Study Bible*, along with the books of the Bible you will find in each, are in the center bar. Significant world events are above the bar, and biblical events are below it.



Beginnings

undated–2100 BC

GENESIS, undated–1805 BC

BIBLICAL EVENTS

undated
Creation

undated
Noah builds the ark



2166 BC
Abraham is born

2091 BC
Abraham travels to Canaan

▲ Early Accounts of Creation and the Flood

Several ancient civilizations wrote down their own stories about origins. These tablets from Babylon record a creation myth and a story about an ancient flood.



Stonehenge
erected in England
estimated
2000 BC



Mexican Sun
Pyramid built
1500 BC

2000 BC

1900 BC

1800 BC

1700 BC

1600 BC

1500 BC

1400 BC

Spoked wheels
invented
estimated
1900 BC

Hammurabi of
Babylon provides
first written law
code *estimated*
1750 BC

First metal-
working
in South
America
1440 BC

God's Chosen Family

2100 BC–1800 BC

- **JOB,**
around
1900 BC

The Birth of Israel

1800 BC–1406 BC

EXODUS, 1500–1445 BC

LEVITICUS, 1445–1444 BC

NUMBERS, 1445–1406 BC

DEUTERONOMY, 1406 BC

2066 BC
Isaac is
born

1929 BC
Jacob flees
to Haran

1876 BC
Jacob moves
to Egypt

1805 BC
Joseph dies

2006 BC
Jacob and
Esau are born

1898 BC
Joseph sold
into slavery

1915 BC
Joseph is born

1885 BC
Joseph rules
Egypt

around 1800–1446 BC
 Slavery in Egypt

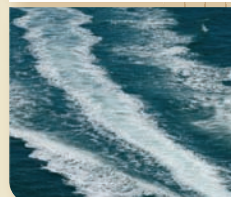


1526 BC
Moses is
born

1406 BC
Moses dies

1443 BC
Israel refuses to
enter Canaan

1446 BC
 The Exodus



1445 BC
Ten Command-
ments given

1445 BC
The second
Passover



 King Tutankhamen is buried in Egypt amidst great treasure
1358 BC

Water clock invented in Egypt

1400 BC

Palace of Knossos on island of Crete destroyed by earthquake

1380 BC

Silk fabrics manufactured in China

1250 BC

Destruction of Troy during Trojan War
1183 BC

▼ *Trojan Horse*
Replica in Troy, Turkey

First Chinese dictionary
1200 BC



 **WORLD EVENTS**

Possessing the Land

1406 BC–1050 BC

JOSHUA, 1406–1376 BC

JUDGES, 1376–1100 BC



BIBICAL EVENTS

1376 BC

Judges begin to rule in Israel

1406 BC

 Joshua leads Israel into Canaan



Israel Stele 1213 BC ▲

This monument honoring Pharaoh Merneptah is the earliest evidence for the existence of the nation of Israel outside the Bible.

1162 BC

Gideon becomes Israel's judge

1020 BC

 Philistines land on coast of Canaan



1209 BC

 Deborah becomes Israel's judge





 Mayans settle in the Yucatan peninsula
1000 BC



 Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* written down
800 BC

Celts invade Britain
900 BC

Evidence of highly developed metal and stone sculptures in Africa
850 BC

Founding of Carthage
814 BC

Native Americans in California build wood-reed houses
1000 BC

Gold vessels and jewelry popular in Northern Europe
950 BC

1100 BC

1000 BC

900 BC

800 BC

United Monarchy

1050 BC–930 BC

1 SAMUEL,
1105–1010 BC

**2 SAMUEL &
1 CHRONICLES,**
1010–970 BC

**SONG OF SONGS
& ECCLESIASTES,**
around 950 BC

RUTH,
around
1100 BC

Splintered Nation

930 BC–586 BC

1 KINGS, 970–853 BC

2 CHRONICLES, 970–538 BC

2 KINGS, 853–561 BC

1105 BC
Samuel is born

1050 BC
Saul becomes king

1075 BC
Samuel becomes Israel's final judge

1025 BC
David anointed as king

1010 BC
David becomes king in Judah

997 BC
David sins with Bathsheba

1003 BC
David becomes king over all Israel

930 BC
Israel divides into two nations

970 BC
Solomon begins building the Temple

885 BC
Omri begins to rule in Israel

910 BC
Asa begins to rule in Judah

875 BC
Elijah begins his ministry

853 BC
Ahab dies in battle

835 BC
Joash begins to rule in Judah

848 BC
Elisha's ministry begins

1020 BC
 David defeats Goliath



970 BC
Solomon becomes king

960 BC
 The Temple is completed





First known Olympics occurs
776 BC

Earliest musical notation in Greece

750 BC

First known lock and key in the palace in Assyria

710 BC

False teeth invented in Italy

700 BC

Shedu ▼

Assyrian statue, limestone, 8th century BC

Legendary date for founding of Rome

753 BC



800 BC

750 BC

700 BC

WORLD EVENTS

Splintered Nation

930 BC–586 BC

2 CHRONICLES, 970–538 BC

2 KINGS, 853–561 BC

JONAH, 793–753 BC

MICAH, 742–687 BC

AMOS, 760–750 BC

ISAIAH, 740–681 BC

HOSEA, 753–715 BC

BIBLICAL EVENTS

793 BC

Jonah begins his ministry



760 BC

Amos begins his ministry

722 BC

Assyria destroys Samaria

701 BC

Sennacherib taunts Hezekiah

740 BC

Isaiah begins his ministry





 Japan founded as a nation
660 BC

Soldering of iron invented
650 BC

Horse racing first held at 33rd Olympics
648 BC

Nineveh destroyed
612 BC

The Temple of Artemis is constructed in Ephesus
600 BC

Pythagoras, Greek philosopher and mathematician, is born
582 BC

Greek astronomer Thales predicts an eclipse
585 BC



 Aesop writes his fables
560 BC

Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, is born in India
563 BC

Confucius is born in China
551 BC

Cyrus the Great conquers the Medes, founding the Persian Empire
550 BC

Horseback postal service in the Persian Empire
540 BC

Babylon overthrown by Cyrus of Persia
539 BC

Exile

586 BC–538 BC

2 CHRONICLES, 970–538 BC

2 KINGS, 853–561 BC

ZEPHANIAH, 640–621 BC

JEREMIAH, 627–585 BC

HABAKKUK, 612–589 BC

NAHUM, 663–654 BC

DANIEL, 605–536 BC

EZEKIEL, 597–571 BC

LAMENTATIONS, 586 BC;
OBADIAH, around 586 BC

627 BC
Jeremiah begins his ministry

605 BC
First captivity; Daniel taken to Babylon

573 BC
Ezekiel's vision of a restored Temple

553 BC
Daniel's first vision

538 BC
Daniel prays for his people

622 BC
 Law scroll found in the Temple



597 BC
Second captivity; Ezekiel taken to Babylon

609 BC
Neco kills Josiah in battle

586 BC
 Babylon destroys Jerusalem



562 BC
King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon dies



Earliest copies of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*
500 BC



The Parthenon is built in Athens, Greece
448 BC

Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, is born
460 BC

Greeks repel Persia in the Battle of Marathon
490 BC

Socrates, famous philosopher, is born
469 BC

The Golden Age begins in Athens, Greece
457 BC

Plato, famous philosopher, is born
429 BC

Socrates condemned to death
399 BC

Aristotle is born
384 BC

Plato writes *The Republic*
370 BC

Alexander the Great defeats the Persian Empire
330 BC

Romans build first paved road, the "Appian Way"
312 BC

Polo played as a sport in Persia
525 BC

Rome becomes a republic
509 BC

Public libraries open in Athens, Greece
520 BC

WORLD EVENTS

Return & Diaspora

538 BC–6 BC

EZRA, 538–450 BC

• **HAGGAI, 520 BC**

• **ZECHARIAH, 520–518 BC**

MALACHI, 430s BC

ESTHER, 483–473 BC

NEHEMIAH, 446–432 BC

538 BC

Cyrus allows exiles to return to Jerusalem

520 BC

Haggai and Zechariah serve as prophets

473 BC

Festival of Purim originates

458 BC

Ezra leads another group of returning exiles to Jerusalem

445 BC

Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem

538 BC

Zerubbabel leads 50,000 people back to Jerusalem

515 BC

Second Temple completed in Jerusalem



479 BC

Esther becomes queen of Persia



BIBLICAL EVENTS



 Great Wall of China built
215 BC

Romans conquer Sicily
241 BC

250 BC

Antiochus IV plunders Jerusalem Temple
169 BC

200 BC

Judas Maccabeus begins a revolt against Antiochus IV
165 BC

150 BC

Jews and astrologers banished from Rome
139 BC

First Chinese ships reach east coast of India
102 BC

Julius Caesar, first emperor of Rome, is born
100 BC

100 BC

Romans conquer England
55 BC

Julius Caesar becomes dictator for life, assassinated 2 years later
46 BC

50 BC

Herod the Great begins remodeling Temple in Jerusalem
20 BC

Sumo wrestling in Japan
23 BC

AD 1

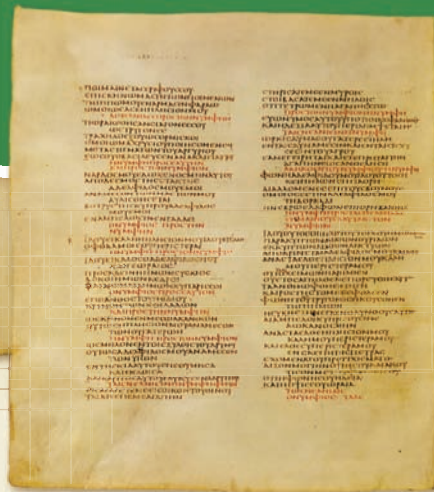
Romans make Herod the Great king of Judea
37 BC

Cleopatra and Marc Antony commit suicide
30 BC



 Cleopatra becomes last independent Egyptian ruler
51 BC

INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD



around 255 BC
Hebrew Old Testament begins to be translated into Greek (Septuagint)

20? BC
Mary, Jesus' mother, is born

▲ The Septuagint

Jesus and the apostles apparently referred to the Old Testament in translation quite often. This 4th century AD manuscript is particularly well preserved.



Saddles first used in Europe
AD 1

Judea becomes a Roman province
AD 6

Zealots in Judea rebel against Rome
AD 7

Tiberius succeeds Caesar Augustus as Roman emperor
AD 14

Caligula becomes the Roman emperor
AD 37

Herod Agrippa appointed king of Judea
AD 40

Claudius becomes the Roman emperor
AD 41



London is founded
AD 43

AD 1

AD 10

AD 20
 WORLD EVENTS

AD 30

AD 40

Jesus Christ

6 BC–AD 30

MATTHEW, 6 BC–AD 30

LUKE, 6 BC–AD 30

MARK, AD 26–30

JOHN, AD 26–30

The Church

AD 30–present

ACTS, AD 30–60

BIBLICAL EVENTS

4 BC
Herod the Great dies

AD 5?
Paul is born

6 BC
 Jesus is born



AD 6
Jesus visits Temple as a boy

AD 26
John the Baptist begins his ministry

AD 27
Jesus begins his ministry

AD 29
John the Baptist is beheaded

AD 30
 Jesus is crucified

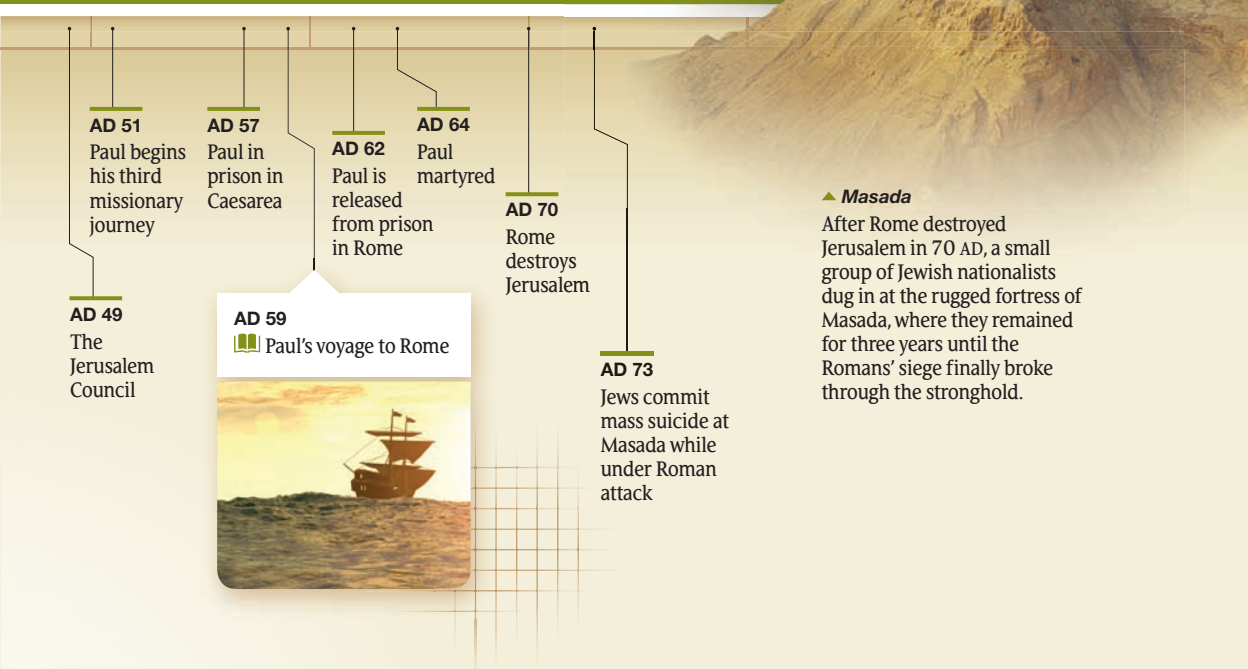
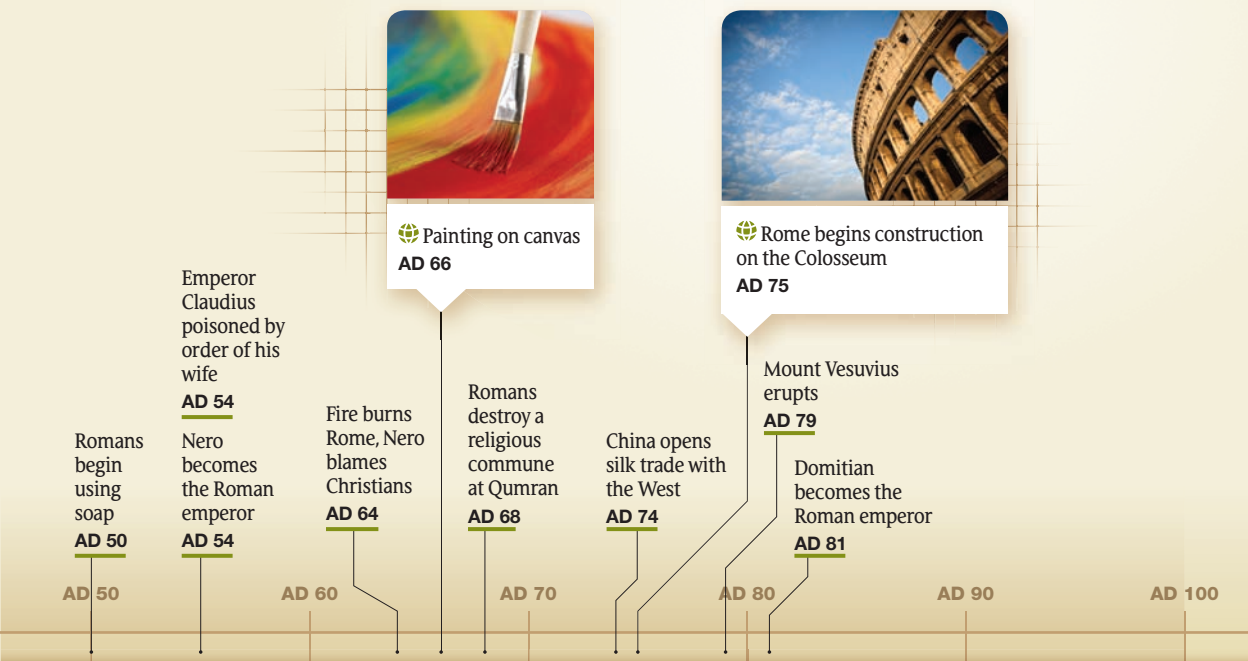


AD 30
The Holy Spirit descends on Pentecost

AD 35
Saul's conversion on the Damascus road

AD 40
The conversion of Cornelius

AD 46
Paul begins his first missionary journey



▲ **Masada**
After Rome destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD, a small group of Jewish nationalists dug in at the rugged fortress of Masada, where they remained for three years until the Romans' siege finally broke through the stronghold.



A NOTE TO READERS

The *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, was first published in 1996. It quickly became one of the most popular Bible translations in the English-speaking world. While the NLT's influence was rapidly growing, the Bible Translation Committee determined that an additional investment in scholarly review and text refinement could make it even better. So shortly after its initial publication, the committee began an eight-year process with the purpose of increasing the level of the NLT's precision without sacrificing its easy-to-understand quality. This second-generation text was completed in 2004, with minor changes subsequently introduced in 2007.

The goal of any Bible translation is to convey the meaning and content of the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts as accurately as possible to contemporary readers. The challenge for our translators was to create a text that would communicate as clearly and powerfully to today's readers as the original texts did to readers and listeners in the ancient biblical world. The resulting translation is easy to read and understand, while also accurately communicating the meaning and content of the original biblical texts. The NLT is a general-purpose text especially good for study, devotional reading, and reading aloud in worship services.

We believe that the New Living Translation—which combines the latest biblical scholarship with a clear, dynamic writing style—will communicate God's word powerfully to all who read it. We publish it with the prayer that God will use it to speak his timeless truth to the church and the world in a fresh, new way.

The Publishers, October 2007

INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW LIVING TRANSLATION

Translation Philosophy and Methodology

English Bible translations tend to be governed by one of two general translation theories. The first theory has been called “formal-equivalence,” “literal,” or “word-for-word” translation. According to this theory, the translator attempts to render each word of the original language into English and seeks to preserve the original syntax and sentence structure as much as possible in translation. The second theory has been called “dynamic-equivalence,” “functional-equivalence,” or “thought-for-thought” translation. The goal of this translation theory is to produce in English the closest natural equivalent of the message expressed by the original-language text, both in meaning and in style.

Both of these translation theories have their strengths. A formal-equivalence translation preserves aspects of the original text—including ancient idioms, term consistency, and original-language syntax—that are valuable for scholars and professional study. It allows a reader to trace formal elements of the original-language text through the English translation. A dynamic-equivalence translation, on the other hand, focuses on translating the message of the original-language text. It ensures that the meaning of the text is readily apparent to the contemporary reader. This allows the message to come through with immediacy, without requiring the reader to struggle with foreign idioms and awkward syntax. It also facilitates serious study of the text’s message and clarity in both devotional and public reading.

The pure application of either of these translation philosophies would create translations at opposite ends of the translation spectrum. But in reality, all translations contain a mixture of these two philosophies. A purely formal-equivalence translation would be unintelligible in English, and a purely dynamic-equivalence translation would risk being unfaithful to the original. That is why translations shaped by dynamic-equivalence theory are usually quite literal when the original text is relatively clear, and the translations shaped by formal-equivalence theory are sometimes quite dynamic when the original text is obscure.

The translators of the New Living Translation set out to render the message of the original texts of Scripture into clear, contemporary English. As they did so, they kept the concerns of both formal-equivalence and dynamic-equivalence in mind. On the one hand, they translated as simply and literally as possible when that approach yielded an accurate, clear, and natural English text. Many words and phrases were rendered literally and consistently into English, preserving essential lit-

erary and rhetorical devices, ancient metaphors, and word choices that give structure to the text and provide echoes of meaning from one passage to the next.

On the other hand, the translators rendered the message more dynamically when the literal rendering was hard to understand, was misleading, or yielded archaic or foreign wording. They clarified difficult metaphors and terms to aid in the reader’s understanding. The translators first struggled with the meaning of the words and phrases in the ancient context; then they rendered the message into clear, natural English. Their goal was to be both faithful to the ancient texts and eminently readable. The result is a translation that is both exegetically accurate and idiomatically powerful.

Translation Process and Team

To produce an accurate translation of the Bible into contemporary English, the translation team needed the skills necessary to enter into the thought patterns of the ancient authors and then to render their ideas, connotations, and effects into clear, contemporary English. To begin this process, qualified biblical scholars were needed to interpret the meaning of the original text and to check it against our base English translation. In order to guard against personal and theological biases, the scholars needed to represent a diverse group of evangelicals who would employ the best exegetical tools. Then to work alongside the scholars, skilled English stylists were needed to shape the text into clear, contemporary English.

With these concerns in mind, the Bible Translation Committee recruited teams of scholars that represented a broad spectrum of denominations, theological perspectives, and backgrounds within the worldwide evangelical community. (These scholars are listed at the end of this introduction.) Each book of the Bible was assigned to three different scholars with proven expertise in the book or group of books to be reviewed. Each of these scholars made a thorough review of a base translation and submitted suggested revisions to the appropriate Senior Translator. The Senior Translator then reviewed and summarized these suggestions and proposed a first-draft revision of the base text. This draft served as the basis for several additional phases of exegetical and stylistic committee review. Then the Bible Translation Committee jointly reviewed and approved every verse of the final translation.

Throughout the translation and editing process, the Senior Translators and their scholar teams were given a chance to review the editing done by the team of

stylists. This ensured that exegetical errors would not be introduced late in the process and that the entire Bible Translation Committee was happy with the final result. By choosing a team of qualified scholars and skilled stylists and by setting up a process that allowed their interaction throughout the process, the New Living Translation has been refined to preserve the essential formal elements of the original biblical texts, while also creating a clear, understandable English text.

The New Living Translation was first published in 1996. Shortly after its initial publication, the Bible Translation Committee began a process of further committee review and translation refinement. The purpose of this continued revision was to increase the level of precision without sacrificing the text's easy-to-understand quality. This second-edition text was completed in 2004, with minor changes subsequently introduced in 2007.

Written to Be Read Aloud

It is evident in Scripture that the biblical documents were written to be read aloud, often in public worship (see Nehemiah 8; Luke 4:16-20; 1 Timothy 4:13; Revelation 1:3). It is still the case today that more people will hear the Bible read aloud in church than are likely to read it for themselves. Therefore, a new translation must communicate with clarity and power when it is read publicly. Clarity was a primary goal for the NLT translators, not only to facilitate private reading and understanding, but also to ensure that it would be excellent for public reading and make an immediate and powerful impact on any listener.

The Texts behind the New Living Translation

The Old Testament translators used the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible as represented in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (1977), with its extensive system of textual notes; this is an update of Rudolf Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica* (Stuttgart, 1937). The translators also further compared the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint and other Greek manuscripts, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Syriac Peshitta, the Latin Vulgate, and any other versions or manuscripts that shed light on the meaning of difficult passages.

The New Testament translators used the two standard editions of the Greek New Testament: the *Greek New Testament*, published by the United Bible Societies (UBS, fourth revised edition, 1993), and *Novum Testamentum Graece*, edited by Nestle and Aland (NA, twenty-seventh edition, 1993). These two editions, which have the same text but differ in punctuation and textual notes, represent, for the most part, the best in modern textual scholarship. However, in cases where strong textual or other scholarly evidence supported the decision, the translators sometimes chose to differ from the UBS and NA Greek texts and followed variant readings found in other ancient witnesses. Significant textual variants of this sort are always noted in the textual notes of the New Living Translation.

Translation Issues

The translators have made a conscious effort to provide a text that can be easily understood by the typical reader of modern English. To this end, we sought to use only vocabulary and language structures in common use today. We avoided using language likely to become quickly dated or that reflects only a narrow subdialect of English, with the goal of making the New Living Translation as broadly useful and timeless as possible.

But our concern for readability goes beyond the concerns of vocabulary and sentence structure. We are also concerned about historical and cultural barriers to understanding the Bible, and we have sought to translate terms shrouded in history and culture in ways that can be immediately understood. To this end:

- We have converted ancient weights and measures (for example, "ephah" [a unit of dry volume] or "cubit" [a unit of length]) to modern English (American) equivalents, since the ancient measures are not generally meaningful to today's readers. Then in the textual footnotes we offer the literal Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek measures, along with modern metric equivalents.
- Instead of translating ancient currency values literally, we have expressed them in common terms that communicate the message. For example, in the Old Testament, "ten shekels of silver" becomes "ten pieces of silver" to convey the intended message. In the New Testament, we have often translated the "denarius" as "the normal daily wage" to facilitate understanding. Then a footnote offers: "Greek a *denarius*, the payment for a full day's wage." In general, we give a clear English rendering and then state the literal Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek in a textual footnote.
- Since the names of Hebrew months are unknown to most contemporary readers, and since the Hebrew lunar calendar fluctuates from year to year in relation to the solar calendar used today, we have looked for clear ways to communicate the time of year the Hebrew months (such as Abib) refer to. When an expanded or interpretive rendering is given in the text, a textual note gives the literal rendering. Where it is possible to define a specific ancient date in terms of our modern calendar, we use modern dates in the text. A textual footnote then gives the literal Hebrew date and states the rationale for our rendering. For example, Ezra 6:15 pinpoints the date when the postexilic Temple was completed in Jerusalem: "the third day of the month Adar." This was during the sixth year of King Darius's reign (that is, 515 B.C.). We have translated that date as March 12, with a footnote giving the Hebrew and identifying the year as 515 B.C.
- Since ancient references to the time of day differ from our modern methods of denoting

time, we have used renderings that are instantly understandable to the modern reader. Accordingly, we have rendered specific times of day by using approximate equivalents in terms of our common “o’clock” system. On occasion, translations such as “at dawn the next morning” or “as the sun was setting” have been used when the biblical reference is more general.

- When the meaning of a proper name (or a wordplay inherent in a proper name) is relevant to the message of the text, its meaning is often illuminated with a textual footnote. For example, in Exodus 2:10 the text reads: “The princess named him Moses, for she explained, ‘I lifted him out of the water.’” The accompanying footnote reads: “*Moses* sounds like a Hebrew term that means ‘to lift out.’”

Sometimes, when the actual meaning of a name is clear, that meaning is included in parentheses within the text itself. For example, the text at Genesis 16:11 reads: “You are to name him Ishmael (*which means ‘God hears’*), for the LORD has heard your cry of distress.” Since the original hearers and readers would have instantly understood the meaning of the name “Ishmael,” we have provided modern readers with the same information so they can experience the text in a similar way.

- Many words and phrases carry a great deal of cultural meaning that was obvious to the original readers but needs explanation in our own culture. For example, the phrase “they beat their breasts” (Luke 23:48) in ancient times meant that people were very upset, often in mourning. In our translation we chose to translate this phrase dynamically for clarity: “They went home *in deep sorrow*.” Then we included a footnote with the literal Greek, which reads: “Greek *went home beating their breasts*.” In other similar cases, however, we have sometimes chosen to illuminate the existing literal expression to make it immediately understandable. For example, here we might have expanded the literal Greek phrase to read: “They went home beating their breasts *in sorrow*.” If we had done this, we would not have included a textual footnote, since the literal Greek clearly appears in translation.
- Metaphorical language is sometimes difficult for contemporary readers to understand, so at times we have chosen to translate or illuminate the meaning of a metaphor. For example, the ancient poet writes, “Your neck is *like* the tower of David” (Song of Songs 4:4). We have rendered it “Your neck is *as beautiful as* the tower of David” to clarify the intended positive meaning of the simile. Another example comes in Ecclesiastes 12:3, which can be literally rendered: “Remember him . . . when the grinding women cease because

they are few, and the women who look through the windows see dimly.” We have rendered it: “Remember him before your teeth—your few remaining servants—stop grinding; and before your eyes—the women looking through the windows—see dimly.” We clarified such metaphors only when we believed a typical reader might be confused by the literal text.

- When the content of the original language text is poetic in character, we have rendered it in English poetic form. We sought to break lines in ways that clarify and highlight the relationships between phrases of the text. Hebrew poetry often uses parallelism, a literary form where a second phrase (or in some instances a third or fourth) echoes the initial phrase in some way. In Hebrew parallelism, the subsequent parallel phrases continue, while also furthering and sharpening, the thought expressed in the initial line or phrase. Whenever possible, we sought to represent these parallel phrases in natural poetic English.
- The Greek term *hoi Ioudaioi* is literally translated “the Jews” in many English translations. In the Gospel of John, however, this term doesn’t always refer to the Jewish people generally. In some contexts, it refers more particularly to the Jewish religious leaders. We have attempted to capture the meaning in these different contexts by using terms such as “the people” (with a footnote: Greek *the Jewish people*) or “the religious leaders,” where appropriate.
- One challenge we faced was how to translate accurately the ancient biblical text that was originally written in a context where male-oriented terms were used to refer to humanity generally. We needed to respect the nature of the ancient context while also trying to make the translation clear to a modern audience that tends to read male-oriented language as applying only to males. Often the original text, though using masculine nouns and pronouns, clearly intends that the message be applied to both men and women. A typical example is found in the New Testament letters, where the believers are called “brothers” (*adelphoi*). Yet it is clear from the content of these letters that they were addressed to all the believers—male and female. Thus, we have usually translated this Greek word as “brothers and sisters” in order to represent the historical situation more accurately.

We have also been sensitive to passages where the text applies generally to human beings or to the human condition. In some instances we have used plural pronouns (they, them) in place of the masculine singular (he, him). For example, a traditional rendering of Proverbs 22:6 is: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” We have

rendered it: "Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it." At times, we have also replaced third person pronouns with the second person to ensure clarity. A traditional rendering of Proverbs 26:27 is: "He who digs a pit will fall into it, and he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him." We have rendered it: "If you set a trap for others, you will get caught in it yourself. If you roll a boulder down on others, it will crush you instead."

We should emphasize, however, that all masculine nouns and pronouns used to represent God (for example, "Father") have been maintained without exception. All decisions of this kind have been driven by the concern to reflect accurately the intended meaning of the original texts of Scripture.

Lexical Consistency in Terminology

For the sake of clarity, we have translated certain original-language terms consistently, especially within synoptic passages and for commonly repeated rhetorical phrases, and within certain word categories such as divine names and non-theological technical terminology (e.g., liturgical, legal, cultural, zoological, and botanical terms). For theological terms, we have allowed a greater semantic range of acceptable English words or phrases for a single Hebrew or Greek word. We have avoided some theological terms that are not readily understood by many modern readers. For example, we avoided using words such as "justification" and "sanctification," which are carryovers from Latin translations. In place of these words, we have provided renderings such as "made right with God" and "made holy."

The Spelling of Proper Names

Many individuals in the Bible, especially the Old Testament, are known by more than one name (e.g., Uzziah/Azariah). For the sake of clarity, we have tried to use a single spelling for any one individual, footnoting the literal spelling whenever we differ from it. This is especially helpful in delineating the kings of Israel and Judah. King Joash/Jehoash of Israel has been consistently called Jehoash, while King Joash/Jehoash of Judah is called Joash. A similar distinction has been used to distinguish between Joram/Jehoram of Israel and Joram/Jehoram of Judah. All such decisions were made with the goal of clarifying the text for the reader. When the ancient biblical writers clearly had a theological purpose in their choice of a variant name (e.g., Esh-baal/Ishbosheth), the different names have been maintained with an explanatory footnote.

For the names Jacob and Israel, which are used interchangeably for both the individual patriarch and the nation, we generally render it "Israel" when it refers to the nation and "Jacob" when it refers to the individual. When our rendering of the name differs from the underlying Hebrew text, we provide a textual footnote, which includes this explanation: "The names 'Jacob'

and 'Israel' are often interchanged throughout the Old Testament, referring sometimes to the individual patriarch and sometimes to the nation."

The Rendering of Divine Names

In the Old Testament, all appearances of 'el, 'elohim, or 'eloah have been translated "God," except where the context demands the translation "god(s)." We have generally rendered the tetragrammaton (YHWH) consistently as "the LORD," utilizing a form with small capitals that is common among English translations. This will distinguish it from the name 'adonai, which we render "Lord." When 'adonai and YHWH appear together, we have rendered it "Sovereign LORD." When 'elohim and YHWH appear together, we have rendered it "LORD God." When YH (the short form of YHWH) and YHWH appear together, we have rendered it "LORD God." When YHWH appears with the term *tseba'oth*, we have rendered it "LORD of Heaven's Armies" to translate the meaning of the name. In a few cases, we have utilized the transliteration, *Yahweh*, when the personal character of the name is being invoked in contrast to another divine name or the name of some other god (for example, see Exodus 3:15; 6:2-3).

In the Gospels and Acts, the Greek word *christos* has been translated as "Messiah" when the context assumes a Jewish audience. When a Gentile audience can be assumed (which is consistently the case for the Epistles and Revelation), *christos* has been translated as "Christ." The Greek word *kurios* is consistently translated "Lord," except that it is translated "LORD" wherever the New Testament text explicitly quotes from the Old Testament, and the text there has it in small capitals.

Textual Footnotes

The New Living Translation provides several kinds of textual footnotes, all designated in the text with an asterisk:

- When for the sake of clarity the NLT renders a difficult or potentially confusing phrase dynamically, we generally give the literal rendering in a textual footnote. This allows the reader to see the literal source of our dynamic rendering and how our translation relates to other more literal translations. These notes are prefaced with "Hebrew," "Aramaic," or "Greek," identifying the language of the underlying source text. For example, in Acts 2:42 we translated the literal "breaking of bread" (from the Greek) as "the Lord's Supper" to clarify that this verse refers to the ceremonial practice of the church rather than just an ordinary meal. Then we attached a footnote to "the Lord's Supper," which reads: "Greek *the breaking of bread*."
- Textual footnotes are also used to show alternative renderings, prefaced with the word "Or." These normally occur for passages where an aspect of the meaning is debated. On occasion, we also

provide notes on words or phrases that represent a departure from long-standing tradition. These notes are prefaced with "Traditionally rendered." For example, the footnote to the translation "serious skin disease" at Leviticus 13:2 says:

"Traditionally rendered *leprosy*. The Hebrew word used throughout this passage is used to describe various skin diseases."

- When our translators follow a textual variant that differs significantly from our standard Hebrew or Greek texts (listed earlier), we document that difference with a footnote. We also footnote cases when the NLT excludes a passage that is included in the Greek text known as the *Textus Receptus* (and familiar to readers through its translation in the King James Version). In such cases, we offer a translation of the excluded text in a footnote, even though it is generally recognized as a later addition to the Greek text and not part of the original Greek New Testament.
- All Old Testament passages that are quoted in the New Testament are identified by a textual footnote at the New Testament location. When the New Testament clearly quotes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and when it differs significantly in wording from the Hebrew text, we also place a textual footnote at the Old Testament location. This note includes a rendering of the Greek version, along with a cross-reference to the New Testament passage(s) where it is cited (for example, see notes on Psalms 8:2; 53:3; Proverbs 3:12).
- Some textual footnotes provide cultural and historical information on places, things, and people in the Bible that are probably obscure to modern readers. Such notes should aid the reader in understanding the message of the text. For example, in Acts 12:1, "King Herod" is named in this translation as "King Herod Agrippa" and is identified in a footnote as being "the nephew of Herod Antipas and a grandson of Herod the Great."
- When the meaning of a proper name (or a word-play inherent in a proper name) is relevant to the meaning of the text, it is either illuminated with a textual footnote or included within parentheses in the text itself. For example, the footnote concerning the name "Eve" at Genesis 3:20 reads: "*Eve* sounds like a Hebrew term that means 'to give life.'" This wordplay in the Hebrew illuminates the meaning of the text, which goes on to say that Eve "would be the mother of all who live."

Cross-References

There are a number of different cross-referencing tools that appear in New Living Translation Bibles, and each

offers a different level of help. All straight-text Bibles have the standard set of textual footnotes that include cross-references connecting New Testament texts to their related Old Testament sources. (See more on this above.)

Many NLT Bibles include an additional concise cross-reference system that places key cross-references at the ends of paragraphs, linking them to the associated verse or verses with a cross symbol within each paragraph. This space-efficient system, while not being obtrusive, offers many important key connections.

Larger study editions include a full-column cross-reference system, which allows space for a more comprehensive listing of cross-references. In this larger system, symbols differentiate between various kinds of cross-references. The parallel marker (/) designates a cross-referenced passage that is parallel in nature to the passage at hand. The asterisk (*) designates a cross-reference whose connection involves a direct quote from the other testament. Standard cross-references in this system appear unmarked.

In some study editions, we utilize an expanded full-column cross-reference system that has been enhanced by adding a system of Hebrew and Greek word studies. This tool, which takes 100 of the most significant Hebrew words in the Old Testament and 100 Greek words from the New Testament, creates a chain reference which points to key instances of these words so they can be studied in context. In the cross-reference system, each word is attached to a modified Strong's number, which points to a helpful key-word glossary at the back of the Bible.

As we submit this translation for publication, we recognize that any translation of the Scriptures is subject to limitations and imperfections. Anyone who has attempted to communicate the richness of God's Word into another language will realize it is impossible to make a perfect translation. Recognizing these limitations, we sought God's guidance and wisdom throughout this project. Now we pray that he will accept our efforts and use this translation for the benefit of the church and of all people.

We pray that the New Living Translation will overcome some of the barriers of history, culture, and language that have kept people from reading and understanding God's Word. We hope that readers unfamiliar with the Bible will find the words clear and easy to understand and that readers well versed in the Scriptures will gain a fresh perspective. We pray that readers will gain insight and wisdom for living, but most of all that they will meet the God of the Bible and be forever changed by knowing him.

The Bible Translation Committee
October 2007

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A sepia-toned photograph of a cave entrance. The cave walls are rough and textured, with a bright light shining through the opening, creating a strong contrast and illuminating the interior of the cave. The light source is positioned in the upper right, casting a glow across the cave's interior.

Old Testament

Beginnings

EVERY STORY has a beginning. The Bible begins with God. At the very beginning of this story, God created the universe and put everything in order, forming all of the planets, stars, and galaxies and setting them in motion. On earth, he created abundant varieties of living creatures. And he made the crown of his creation in his own image, his vice-regents: humans.

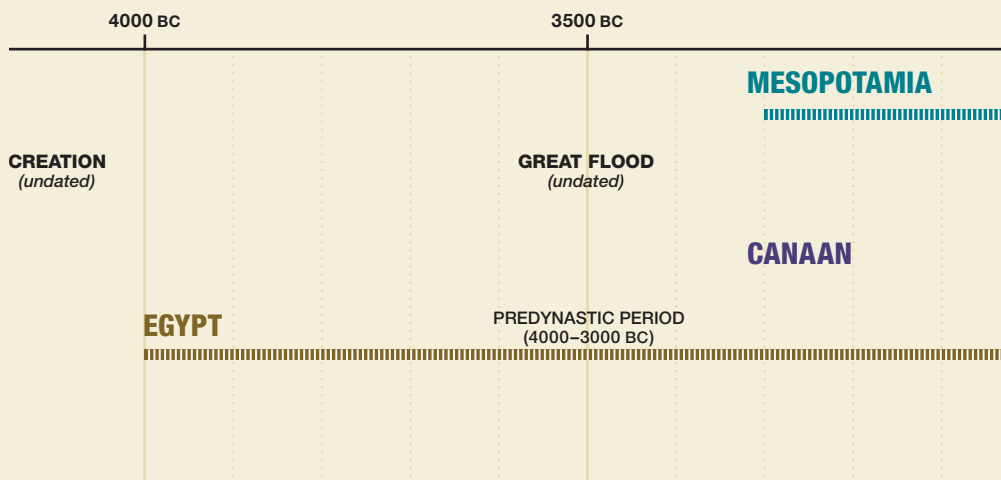
Creation isn't the only beginning recorded in the Bible, though. There is also the more tragic story of the beginning of sin and death. Adam and Eve, the humans whom God placed over his creation, chose to disobey him and shattered its perfection. This tragedy soon led to others, such as Cain murdering his brother Abel in a jealous rage. And ultimately, sin became so rampant and pervasive that God decided to

begin once again. He chose Noah, the only righteous man left on earth, to be the patriarch of a fresh beginning for humanity. But even Noah was vulnerable to sin, and his descendants showed that the sin problem was still very real and in need of a solution.

How would God continue his rescue plan for humanity? Would he need to begin again after the tower of Babel?



TIMELINE



BOOKS

■ GENESIS

DATES

FROM:

Undated

TO:

2100 BC

THEMES

- Creation
- Sin
- Redemption

PEOPLE & CULTURE

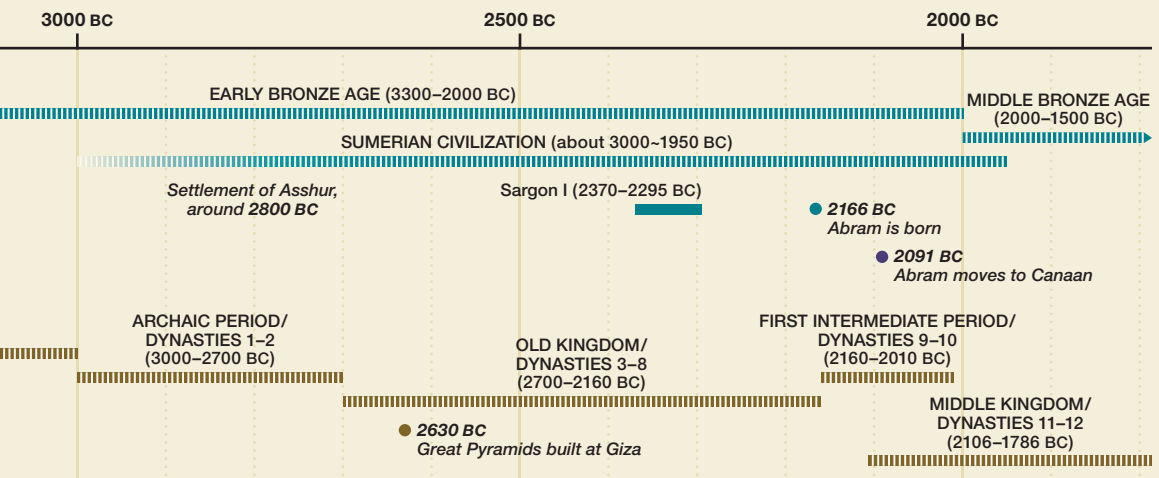
■ **Adam and Eve.** God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden to rule on his behalf. They worked hard at cultivating the ground and managing the affairs of the Garden, and they enjoyed communion with God there. But they chose to disobey God's one command, and through them sin entered the world. They were banished from the Garden, and their fellowship with God was broken. But God immediately set into motion his plan to bring humanity back into fellowship with him—this is the story of the entire Bible.

■ **Noah.** By the time of Noah, sin and wickedness were so rampant that God was actually sorry he had ever created humans (Gen 6:7). But Noah was a righteous man, and God chose to save him from the destruction that was planned for the rest of humanity. Noah and his family became a new beginning for humanity.

■ **Language and Culture.** After Noah's sons populated the earth again, there was a unified language and culture throughout the world. But this unity led to pride and a sense that humans didn't need God. As a result, God caused them to be divided by different languages and to be scattered around the world. Different cultures began to emerge from the different language groups and regions.



Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, by Wenzel Peter



MAP

1 Garden of Eden God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when he made them in his image. The Bible doesn't tell us exactly where Eden was located, except for a few clues that are difficult to decipher in Genesis 2:10-14.

2 Mountains of Ararat Noah's boat came to rest on the mountains of Ararat, in modern-day Turkey (Gen

8:4). From here his sons and their descendants spread out to build new nations.

3 Babel The tower of Babel was built in the fertile area between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, in modern-day Iraq.



MEGATHEMES

■ **Beginnings.** Here we find the beginnings of the universe, the earth, humanity, sin, and God's plan of salvation. Genesis teaches us that the earth is well-made and good; people are special to God and unique; God creates and sustains all life; and God deals with sin swiftly and with justice.

■ **Sin.** When people choose to disobey God's plan for living, they are choosing to sin. And sin ruins people's lives. Genesis shows that living God's way can be rewarding and makes life fulfilling.

■ **Promises.** God has promised to help and protect his people. He made a covenant with Noah that he would never again destroy the earth with a flood and gave a wonderful sign for us to remember his promise: the rainbow. God always keeps his promises.

BOOKS IN THIS SECTION



GENESIS

AUTHOR: Moses

AUDIENCE: The people of Israel

PURPOSE: To record God's creation of the world and his desire to have people worship him

DATE WRITTEN: Approximately 1450–1410 B.C.

WHERE WRITTEN: In the wilderness during Israel's wanderings, somewhere in the Sinai Peninsula

A vibrant cosmic scene featuring a large, glowing orange and yellow nebula in the center, surrounded by various other nebulae in shades of green, blue, and red. Numerous stars of different colors (blue, white, red) are scattered throughout the dark space.

*And God saw that the light was good.
Then he separated the light from the darkness.*
Genesis 1:4

A. The Beginning of Creation

We sometimes wonder how our world came to be. But here we find the answer. God created the earth and everything in it, and made humans like himself. Although we may not understand the complexity of just how he did it, it is clear that God did create all life. This shows not only God's authority over humanity, but his deep love for all creation.

The Account of Creation

GENESIS 1:1–2:4a

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*²The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

³Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good. Then

he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light "day" and the darkness "night."

And evening passed and morning came, marking the first day.

⁶Then God said, "Let there be a space between the waters, to separate the waters of the heavens from the waters of the earth." ⁷And that is what happened. God made this space to separate

Gn 1:1 Or In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, . . . Or When God began to create the heavens and the earth, . . .

Gen 1:1 The simple statement "God created the heavens and the earth" is one of the most challenging concepts confronting the modern mind. The vast galaxy we live in is spinning at the incredible speed of 490,000 miles per hour. But even at this breakneck speed, our galaxy still needs 200 million years to make one rotation. And there are over one billion other galaxies just like ours in the universe.

Some scientists say that the number of stars in creation is equal to all the grains of sand on all the beaches of the world. Yet this complex sea of spinning stars functions with remarkable order and efficiency. To say that the universe "just happened" or "evolved" requires more faith than to believe that God is behind these amazing statistics. God truly did create a wonderful universe.

God did not *need* to create the universe; he *chose* to create it. Why? God is love, and love is best expressed toward something or someone else—so God created the world and people as an expression of his love. We should avoid reducing God's creation to merely scientific terms. Remember that God created the universe because of love.

Gen 1:1ff The creation story teaches us much about God and ourselves. First, we learn about God: (1) He is creative; (2) as the Creator, he is distinct from his creation; (3) he is eternal and in control of the world. We also learn about ourselves: (1) Since God chose to create us, we are valuable in his eyes; (2) we are more important than the animals. (See Gen 1:28 for more on our role in the created order.)

Gen 1:1ff Just how did God create the earth? This is still a subject of great debate. Some say that with a sudden explosion, the universe appeared. Others say God started the process and then the universe evolved over billions of years. Almost every ancient religion has its own story to explain how the earth came to be. And almost every scientist has an opinion on the origin of the universe. But only the Bible shows one supreme God creating the earth out of his great love and giving all people a special place in it. We may never know exactly how God created



ORIGIN OF THE UNIVERSE

The Bible does not discuss the subject of evolution, but its worldview assumes God created the world. The biblical view of creation is not in conflict with science; rather, it is in conflict with any worldview that starts without a creator.

Equally committed and sincere Christians have struggled with the subject of beginnings and come to **differing conclusions**. This is to be expected because the evidence is very old and quite fragmented, due to the ravages of the ages. Polarizations and black-and-white thinking should be avoided. Students of the Bible must be careful not to make the Bible say what it doesn't say, and students of science must not make science say what it doesn't say.

The most important aspect of the continuing discussion is not the process of creation, but the origin of creation. **The world is not a product of blind chance and probability; God created it.**

The Bible not only tells us that the world was created by God, but more importantly, it tells us who this God is. It reveals God's personality, his character, and his plan for his creation. It also reveals God's deepest desire—to relate to and fellowship with the people he created. God took the ultimate step toward fellowship with us through his historic visit to this planet in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. **We can know in a very personal way this God who created the universe.**

The book of Genesis begins with "God created the heavens and the earth." The heavens and the earth are here. We are here. God created all that we see and experience. Here we begin the most exciting and fulfilling journey imaginable.

the earth, but the Bible tells us that God did create it. That fact alone gives worth and dignity to all people.

Gen 1:2 Who created God? To ask that question is to assume there was another creator before God. At some time, however, we are forced to stop asking that question and realize that there has to be something that has always existed. God is that infinite Being who has always been and who was created by no one. This is difficult to understand because finite minds cannot comprehend the infinite. For example, we can try to think of the highest number, but we can't do it. Likewise, we must not limit the infinite God by our finite understanding.

Gen 1:2 The statement "the earth was formless and empty" provides the setting for the creation narrative that follows. During

the second and third days of creation, God gave form to the universe; during days four through six, God filled the earth with living beings. The "darkness" was dispelled on the first day, when God created light.

Gen 1:2 The image of the Spirit of God hovering over the surface of the water is similar to a mother bird caring for and protecting its young (see Deut 32:11–12; Isa 31:5). God's Spirit was actively involved in the creation of the world (see Job 33:4; Ps 104:30). God's care and protection are still active.

Gen 1:3–2:7 How long did it take God to create the world? There are two basic views about the days of creation: (1) Each day was a literal 24-hour period; (2) each day represents an indefinite period of time (even millions of years).

SPLINTERED NATION 930–586 BC	EXILE 586–538 BC	RETURN & DIASPORA 538–6 BC	JESUS CHRIST 6 BC–AD 30	THE CHURCH AD 30–present
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the waters of the earth from the waters of the heavens. ⁸God called the space “sky.”

And evening passed and morning came, marking the second day.

⁹Then God said, “Let the waters beneath the sky flow together into one place, so dry ground may appear.” And that is what happened. ¹⁰God called the dry ground “land” and the waters “seas.” And God saw that it was good. ¹¹Then God said, “Let the land sprout with vegetation—every sort of seed-bearing plant, and trees that grow seed-bearing fruit. These seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came.” And that is what happened. ¹²The land produced vegetation—all sorts of seed-bearing plants, and trees with seed-bearing fruit. Their seeds produced plants and trees of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

¹³And evening passed and morning came, marking the third day.

¹⁴Then God said, “Let lights appear in the sky to separate the day from the night. Let them be signs to mark the seasons, days, and years. ¹⁵Let these lights in the sky shine down on the earth.” And that is what happened. ¹⁶God made two great lights—the larger one to govern the day, and the

smaller one to govern the night. He also made the stars. ¹⁷God set these lights in the sky to light the earth, ¹⁸to govern the day and night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

¹⁹And evening passed and morning came, marking the fourth day.

²⁰Then God said, “Let the waters swarm with fish and other life. Let the skies be filled with birds of every kind.” ²¹So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that scurries and swarms in the water, and every sort of bird—each producing offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good. ²²Then God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply. Let the fish fill the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth.”

²³And evening passed and morning came, marking the fifth day.

²⁴Then God said, “Let the earth produce every sort of animal, each producing offspring of the same kind—livestock, small animals that scurry along the ground, and wild animals.” And that is what happened. ²⁵God made all sorts of wild animals, livestock, and small animals, each able to produce offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

The Bible does not say how long these days were. The real question, however, is not how long God took, but how he did it. God created the earth in an orderly fashion (he did not make plants before light), and he created men and women as unique beings capable of communication with him. No other part of creation can claim that remarkable

privilege. It is not important how long it took God to create the world, whether a few days or a few billion years, but that he created it just the way he wanted it.

Gen 1:6 The “space between the waters” was a separation between the sea and the mists of the skies.

Gen 1:25 God saw that his work was good. People sometimes feel guilty for feeling good about an accomplishment. This need not be so. Just as God felt good about his work, we can be pleased with our work when it is well-done. However, we should not feel good about our work if God would not be pleased with it. What are you doing that pleases both you and God?

Animals

Animals are mentioned throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Animals figured into many important biblical events, including the Creation, the fall of man, the Flood, the ten plagues in Egypt, and the life of Jesus Christ. The people of both the Old and New Testaments lived close to the land and were well acquainted with various animals, which explains why the Scripture writers and Jesus himself frequently used animals as object lessons.

Present-day biologists classify animals based on internal and external structures, but in the creation account animals are classified by habitat. Thus, Genesis 1 speaks of water and air animals (Gen 1:20-21); cattle or domesticated animals—that is, animals that live with humans (Gen 1:24); animals that scurry along the ground (Gen 1:24); and wild animals (Gen 1:24). When God made animals, they became living souls (having nephesh—the Hebrew word translated “life” in Gen 1:20, 30). The same word is used in Genesis 2:7 to describe the human being God made; that is, the man became a living soul (nephesh). Both animals and humans are nephesh—that is, they are living souls. Human beings are different from animals in the sense that we have “spirit” (ruach) and we bear the image of God (Gen 1:27).



► **GENESIS 1:1–2:4a (cont.)**

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make human beings* in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.”

²⁷ So God created human beings* in his own image.

Gn 1:26 Or *man*; Hebrew reads *adam*. **Gn 1:27** Or *the man*; Hebrew reads *ha-adam*.

In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

²⁸Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”

²⁹Then God said, “Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all



ADAM

We can hardly imagine what it must have been like to be the first and only person on earth. Adam had to learn to be human on his own. Fortunately, God didn't let him struggle too long before presenting him with an ideal companion and mate, Eve. Theirs was a complete, innocent, and open oneness, without a hint of shame. • One of Adam's first conversations with his delightful new companion must have been about the rules of the garden. They had complete freedom in the garden, with the responsibility to tend and care for it. But one tree was off-limits, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam would have told Eve all about this. She knew that the tree's fruit was not to be eaten. However, she decided to eat the forbidden fruit. Then she offered some to Adam, and he didn't pause to consider the consequences. He went ahead and ate. • In that moment of rebellion something large, beautiful, and free was shattered . . . God's perfect creation. Adam was separated from God by his desire to act on his own. The effect on a plate-glass window is the same whether a pebble or a boulder is hurled at it—the thousands of fragments can never be regathered. • In the case of Adam's sin, however, God already had a plan in motion to overcome the effects of the rebellion. The entire Bible is the story of how that plan unfolds, ultimately leading to God's own visit to earth through his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus' sinless life and death made it possible for God to offer forgiveness to all. Our own acts of rebellion—both large and small—prove that we are descendants of Adam. Only by asking forgiveness of Jesus Christ can we become children of God.

Strengths and accomplishments	• First zoologist—named the animals • First landscape architect, placed in the garden to care for it • Father of the human race • First person made in the image of God, and the first human to share an intimate personal relationship with God
Weaknesses and mistakes	• Avoided responsibility and blamed others; chose to hide rather than to confront; made excuses rather than admitting the truth • Greatest mistake: together with Eve, brought sin into the world
Lessons from his life	• As Adam's descendants, we all reflect the image of God • God wants people who, though free to do wrong, choose instead to love him • We should not blame others for our faults • We cannot hide from God
Vital statistics	• Where: Garden of Eden • Occupation: Caretaker, gardener, farmer • Relatives: Wife: Eve. Sons: Cain, Abel, Seth. Numerous other children. The only man who never had an earthly mother or father.
Key verses	“It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it” (Gen 3:12). “Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life” (1 Cor 15:22).

Adam's story is told in Genesis 1:26–5:5. He is also mentioned in Luke 3:38; Romans 5:14; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45; 1 Timothy 2:13–14.

Gen 1:26 Why does God use the plural form, “Let *us* make human beings in *our* image”? One view says this is a reference to the Trinity—God the Father, Jesus Christ his Son, and the Holy Spirit—all of whom are God. Another view is that the plural wording is used to denote majesty; kings traditionally used the plural form in speaking of themselves. The grammar doesn't decide the matter for us, but in either case it is God who created humans in his image, and God has revealed himself to us as a Trinity clearly through the whole of the Scriptures.

Gen 1:26 In what ways are we made in God's image? God obviously did not create us exactly like himself because God has no physical body. Instead, we are a reflection of God's glory. Some feel that the image of God can be found in one or more of the uniquely human capacities for reason, creativity, speech, or self-determination. More likely, the image of God is something that describes our entire being as humans, not just one aspect. God made humans to be in a special relationship with him and to reign over creation as his ambassadors and administrators on earth. We ought to reflect his character in our love, patience, forgiveness, kindness, and faithfulness.

Knowing that we are made in God's image provides a solid basis for self-worth. Human worth is not based on possessions, achievements, physical attractiveness, or public acclaim. Instead, it is based on being made in God's image. Because we bear God's image, we can feel positive about ourselves. Criticizing or downgrading ourselves is criticizing what God has made and the abilities he has given us. Knowing that you are a person of worth helps you love God, know him personally, and make a valuable contribution to those around you.

Gen 1:27 God made both man and woman in his image. Neither one is made more in the image of God than the other. From the beginning the Bible places both man and woman at the pinnacle of God's creation. Neither gender is exalted over the other nor depreciated.

Gen 1:28 To “reign over” something is to have absolute authority and control over it. God has ultimate rule over the earth, and he exercises his authority with loving care. When God delegated some of his authority to the human race, he expected us to take responsibility for the environment and the other creatures that share our planet. We must not be careless

the fruit trees for your food. ³⁰And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life.” And that is what happened.

³¹Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!

And evening passed and morning came, marking the sixth day.

Gn 2:2 Or *ceased*; also in 2:3.

^{2:1}So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. ²On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested* from all his work. ³And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation.

⁴This is the account of the creation of the heavens and the earth.

B. The Beginning of Humanity

Learning about our ancestors often helps us understand ourselves. The stories of Adam and Eve in the Garden, followed by the tragic story of their two sons Cain and Abel, explain the sin and suffering in our world and help us to live our lives in reliance on God and his promises.

1. ADAM AND EVE

Adam and Eve, our first ancestors, were the climax of God’s creation—the very reason God made the world. But they didn’t always live the way God intended. Through their mistakes, we can learn important lessons about the way God wants us to live. Adam and Eve teach us much about the nature of sin and its consequences.

The Man and Woman in the Garden

GENESIS 2:4b–25

When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, ⁵neither wild plants nor grains were growing on the earth. For the LORD God had not yet sent rain to water the earth, and there were no people to cultivate the soil. ⁶Instead, springs* came up from the ground

Gn 2:6 Or *mist*.

and watered all the land. ⁷Then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man’s nostrils, and the man became a living person.

⁸Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he placed the man he had made.

⁹The LORD God made all sorts of trees grow up from



DAYS OF CREATION

First Day	Light (so there was light and darkness)
Second Day	Sky and water (waters separated)
Third Day	Land and seas (waters gathered); vegetation
Fourth Day	Sun, moon, and stars (to govern the day and the night and to mark seasons, days, and years)
Fifth Day	Fish and birds (to fill the waters and the sky)
Sixth Day	Animals (to fill the earth) Man and woman (to care for the earth and to commune with God)
Seventh Day	God rested and declared all he had made to be very good

and wasteful as we fulfill this charge. God was careful how he made this earth. We must not be careless about how we take care of it.

Gen 1:31 God saw that all he had created was excellent in every way. You are part of God’s creation, and he is pleased with how he made you. If at times you feel worthless, remember that God made you for a good reason. You are valuable to him.

Gen 2:2–3 We live in an action-oriented world! There always seems to be something to do and no time to rest. Yet God demon-

strated that rest is appropriate and right. If God himself rested from his work, we should not be surprised that we also need rest. Jesus demonstrated this principle when he and his disciples left in a boat to get away from the crowds (see Mark 6:31–32). Our times of rest refresh us for times of service.

Gen 2:3 That God blessed the seventh day means that he set it apart for holy use. The Ten Commandments emphasize this distinction by commanding the observance of the Sabbath (Exod 20:8–11).

Gen 2:7 “From the dust of the ground” implies that there is nothing fancy about the chemical elements making up our bodies. The body is a lifeless shell until God brings it to life with his “breath of life.” When God removes his life-giving breath, our bodies once again return to dust. Our life and worth, therefore, come from God’s Spirit. Many boast of their achievements and abilities as though they were the originators of their own strengths. Others feel worthless because their abilities do not stand out. In reality, our worth comes not from our achievements but from the God of the universe, who chooses to give us the mysterious and miraculous gift of life. Value life, as he does.

Gen 2:9, 16–17 Were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil real trees? Two views are often expressed: (1) *The trees were real, but symbolic.* Eternal life with God was pictured as eating from the tree of life. (2) *The trees were real, possessing special properties.* By eating the fruit from the tree of life, Adam and Eve could have had eternal life, enjoying a permanent relationship as God’s children.

In either case, Adam and Eve’s sin separated them from the tree of life and thus kept them from obtaining eternal life. Interestingly,

► **GENESIS 2:4b-25 (cont.)**

the ground—trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit. In the middle of the garden he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰A river flowed from the land of Eden, watering the garden and then dividing into four branches. ¹¹The first branch, called the Pishon, flowed around the entire land of Havilah, where gold is found. ¹²The gold of that land is exceptionally pure; aromatic resin and onyx stone are also found there. ¹³The second branch, called the Gihon, flowed around the entire land of Cush. ¹⁴The third branch, called the Tigris, flowed east of the land of Asshur. The fourth branch is called the Euphrates.

¹⁵The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. ¹⁶But the LORD God warned him, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—¹⁷except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.”

Gn 2:19 Or *Adam*, and so throughout the chapter. **Gn 2:21** Or *took a part of the man's side*.

the tree of life again appears in a description in Revelation 22 of people enjoying eternal life with God.

Gen 2:15-17 God gave Adam responsibility for the garden and told him not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Rather than physically preventing him from eating, God gave Adam a choice and, thus, the possibility of choosing wrongly. God still gives us choices, and we, too, often choose wrongly. These wrong choices may cause us pain, but they can help us learn and grow and make better choices in the future. Living with the consequences of our choices teaches us to think and choose more carefully.

Gen 2:16-17 Why would God place a tree in the garden and then forbid Adam to eat from it? God wanted Adam to obey, but God gave Adam the freedom to choose. Without choice, Adam would have been like a prisoner, and his obedience would have been hollow. The two trees provided an exercise in choice with rewards for choosing to obey and sad consequences for choosing to disobey. When you are faced with a choice, always choose to obey God.

Gen 2:18-24 God’s creative work was not complete until he made woman. He could have made her from the dust of the ground, as he had made man. But God chose to make her from the man’s flesh and bone. In so doing, he illustrated for us that in marriage man and woman symbolically are united into one. This is a mystical union of the couple’s hearts and lives. Throughout the Bible, God treats this special partnership seriously. If you are married or planning to be married, are you willing to keep the commitment that makes the two of you one? The goal in marriage should be more than friendship; it should be oneness.

Gen 2:21-23 God forms and equips men and women for various tasks, but all these tasks lead to the same goal—honoring God.

¹⁸Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him.” ¹⁹So the LORD God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man* to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one. ²⁰He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him.

²¹So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the LORD God took out one of the man’s ribs* and closed up the opening. ²²Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man.

²³“At last!” the man exclaimed.

“This one is bone from my bone,
and flesh from my flesh!
She will be called ‘woman,’
because she was taken from ‘man.’”



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT MARRIAGE

Gen 2:18-24	Marriage is God’s idea
Gen 24:58-60	Commitment is essential to a successful marriage
Prov 5:18	Marriage holds times of great joy
Song 4:9-10	Romance is important
Mal 2:14-15	Marriage creates the best environment for raising children
Matt 5:32	Unfaithfulness breaks the bond of trust, the foundation of all relationships
Matt 19:6	Marriage is permanent
Rom 7:2-3	Only death should dissolve marriage
Eph 5:21-33	Marriage is based on the principled practice of love, not on feelings
Eph 5:23-32	Marriage is a living symbol of Christ and the church
Heb 13:4	Marriage is good and honorable

There is no room for thinking that one gender is superior to the other.

Gen 2:24 God gave marriage as a gift to Adam and Eve. They were created perfect for each other. Marriage was not just for convenience, nor was it brought about by any particular culture. It was instituted by God and has three basic aspects: (1) The man leaves his parents and, in a public act, promises himself to his wife; (2) the man and woman are joined together by taking responsibility for each other’s welfare and by loving each other above all others; (3) the two are united into one in the intimacy and commitment of sexual union that is reserved for marriage. Strong marriages include all three of these aspects.

Gen 2:25 Have you ever noticed how a little child can run naked through a room full of strangers without embarrassment? He is not aware of his nakedness, just as Adam and Eve were not embarrassed in their innocence.

But after Adam and Eve sinned, shame and awkwardness followed, creating barriers between themselves and God. We often experience these same barriers in marriage. Ideally a husband and wife have no barriers, feeling no embarrassment in exposing themselves to each other or to God. But like Adam and Eve we put on fig leaves (barriers) because we have areas we don’t want our spouse, or God, to know about (Gen 3:7). Then we hide, just as Adam and Eve hid from God. In marriage, lack of spiritual, emotional, and intellectual intimacy usually precedes a breakdown of physical intimacy. In the same way, when we fail to expose our secret thoughts to God, we break our lines of communication with him.

Gen 3:1 Disguised as a shrewd serpent, Satan came to tempt Eve. At one time, Satan had been a glorious angel. But in pride, he rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven. As a created being, Satan has definite limitations. Although he is trying to tempt

²⁴This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.

²⁵Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame.

The Man and Woman Sin

GENESIS 3:1-19

The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the LORD God had made. One day he asked the woman, “Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?”

²⁶“Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,” the woman replied. ²⁷“It’s only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, ‘You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.’”

²⁸“You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman. ²⁹“God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”

³⁰The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took

everyone away from God, he will not be the final victor. In Genesis 3:14-15, God promises that Satan will be crushed by one of the woman’s offspring, the Messiah.

Gen 3:1-6 Why does Satan tempt us? Temptation is Satan’s invitation to give in to his kind of life and give up on God’s kind of life. Satan tempted Eve and succeeded in getting her to sin. Ever since then, he’s been busy trying to get people to sin. He even tempted Jesus (Matt 4:1-11), but Jesus did not sin!

How could Eve have resisted temptation? By following the same guidelines we can follow. First, we must realize that *being tempted* is not a sin. We have not sinned until we *give in* to the temptation. Second, to resist temptation, we must pray for strength to resist, run from it (sometimes literally), and say no when confronted with what we know is wrong. James 1:12 tells of the blessings and rewards for those who don’t give in when tempted.

Gen 3:1-6 The serpent, Satan, tempted Eve by getting her to doubt God’s goodness. He implied that God was strict, stingy, and selfish for not wanting Eve to share his knowledge of good and evil. Satan made Eve forget all that God had given her and, instead, focus on what God had forbidden. We fall into trouble, too, when we dwell on what God forbids rather than on the countless blessings and promises God has given us. The next time you are feeling sorry for yourself because of what you don’t have, consider all that you *do* have and thank God. Then your doubts won’t lead you into sin.

Gen 3:5 Adam and Eve got what they wanted: an intimate knowledge of both good and evil. But they got it by disobeying God, and the results were disastrous. Sometimes we have the illusion that freedom is doing anything we want. But God says that true freedom comes from obedience and knowing what *not* to do. The restrictions he gives us are for our good, helping us avoid evil. We have the freedom to walk in front of a speeding car, but we don’t need to be hit to realize it would be foolish to do so. Don’t listen to Satan’s temptations. You don’t have to do evil to gain more experience and learn more about life.

Gen 3:5 Satan used a sincere motive to tempt Eve: “You will be like God.” It wasn’t wrong of Eve to want to be like God. To become more like God is humanity’s highest goal. It is what we are supposed to do. But

Creation Stories

Several ancient civilizations wrote down their own accounts of how the world was created. The best known of these extra-biblical creation myths is a Babylonian adaptation of the Sumerian story called *Enuma Elish*. The gods Tiamat and Apsu existed from the beginning, but after other gods were born Apsu tried to do away with them. One of the gods, Ea, killed Apsu; then Tiamat was herself killed by Ea’s son Marduk, the god of Babylon in whose honor the poem was composed. Marduk used the two halves of Tiamat’s body to create the foundation for both heaven and earth. He then set in order the stars, sun, and moon. Lastly, to free the gods from menial tasks, with Ea’s help he created mankind from clay mingled with the blood of Kingu, the rebel god who had led Tiamat’s forces. Other creation stories are found in Babylonian records. The Epic of Atrahasis describes the creation of man as a solution to relieve the gods of the work of cultivating the land.

In contrast to these stories from the surrounding cultures, Israel’s creation story shows that God is completely in control. He is not one of many gods, and his creation of humanity was not a matter of convenience but an act of love. God created humans to rule his creation and have relationship with him, not simply to do the hard work that he didn’t want to do.



Satan misled Eve concerning the right way to accomplish this goal. He told her that she could become more like God by defying God’s authority, by taking God’s place and deciding for herself what was best for her life. In effect, he told her to become her own god.

To become like God is not the same as trying to become God. Rather, it is to reflect his characteristics and to recognize his authority over our lives. Like Eve, we often have a worthy goal but try to achieve it the wrong way. We act like a political candidate who pays off an election judge to be “voted” into office; serving the people is no longer his highest goal.

Self-exaltation leads to rebellion against God. As soon as we begin to leave God out of our plans, we are placing ourselves above him. This is exactly what Satan wants us to do.

Gen 3:6 Satan tried to make Eve think that sin is good, pleasant, and desirable. A knowledge of both good and evil seemed harmless to her. People usually choose wrong things because they have become convinced that those things are good, at least for themselves.

Our sins do not always appear ugly to us, and the pleasant sins are the hardest to avoid. So prepare yourself for the attractive temptations that may come your way. We cannot always prevent temptation, but there is always a way of escape (1 Cor 10:13). Use God’s Word and God’s people to help you stand against it.

Gen 3:6-7 Notice what Eve did: She looked, she took, she ate, and she gave. The battle is often lost at the first look. Temptation often begins by simply seeing something you want. Are you struggling with temptation because you have not learned that looking is the first step toward sin? You would win over temptation more often if you followed Paul’s advice to run from those things that produce evil thoughts (2 Tim 2:22).

Gen 3:6-7 One of the realities of sin is that its effects spread. After Eve sinned, she involved Adam in her wrongdoing. When we do something wrong, often we try to relieve our guilt by involving someone else. Like toxic waste spilled into a river, sin swiftly spreads. Recognize and confess your sin to God before you are tempted to pollute those around you.

► **GENESIS 3:1-19** (*cont.*)

some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. ⁷At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

⁸When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man* and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees. ⁹Then the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

Gen 3:8 Or *Adam*, and so throughout the chapter.

Gen 3:7-8 After sinning, Adam and Eve felt guilt and embarrassment over their nakedness. Their guilty feelings made them try to hide from God. A guilty conscience is a warning signal God has placed inside of you that goes off when you’ve done wrong. The worst step you can take is to try to stifle or eliminate those guilty feelings without eliminating the cause. That would be like using a painkiller but not treating the disease that is causing the pain. Be glad those guilty feelings are there. They make you aware of your sin so you can ask God’s forgiveness and then correct your wrongdoing.

Gen 3:8 The thought of two humans covered with fig leaves trying to hide from the all-seeing, all-knowing God is humorous. How could they be so silly as to think they could actually hide? Yet we do the same, acting as though God doesn’t know what we’re doing. Have the courage to share all you do and think with him. And don’t try to hide—it can’t be done. Honesty will strengthen your relationship with God.

Gen 3:8-9 These verses show God’s desire to have fellowship with us. They also show why we are afraid to have fellowship with him. Adam and Eve hid from God when they heard him approaching. God wanted to be with them, but because of their sin, they were afraid to show themselves. Sin had broken their close relationship with God, just as it has broken ours. But Jesus Christ, God’s Son, opens the way for us to renew our fellowship with him. God longs to be with us. He actively offers us his unconditional love. Our natural response is fear because we feel we can’t live up to his standards. But understanding that he loves us, regardless of our faults, can help remove that dread.

Gen 3:11-13 Adam and Eve failed to heed God’s warning recorded in Genesis 2:16-17. They did not understand the reasons for his command, so they chose to act in another way that looked better to them. All of God’s commands are for our own good, but we may not always understand the reasons behind them. People who trust God will obey because God asks them to, whether or not they understand why God commands it.

¹⁰He replied, “I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked.”

¹¹“Who told you that you were naked?” the LORD God asked. “Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?”

¹²The man replied, “It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.”

¹³Then the LORD God asked the woman, “What have you done?”

“The serpent deceived me,” she replied. “That’s why I ate it.”



EVE

We know very little about Eve, yet she is the mother of us all. She was the final piece in the intricate and amazing puzzle of God’s creation. Adam now had another human being with whom to fellowship—someone equally made in God’s image. Here was someone alike enough for companionship, yet different enough for relationship. Together they were greater than either could have been alone. • Satan approached Eve in the Garden of Eden, where she and Adam lived. He questioned her contentment. How could she be happy when she was not allowed to eat from one of the fruit trees? Satan helped Eve shift her focus from all that God had done and given to the one thing he had withheld. And Eve was willing to accept Satan’s viewpoint without checking with God. • Sound familiar? How often is our attention drawn from all that is ours to the little that isn’t? We get that “I’ve got to have it” feeling. Eve was typical of us all, and we consistently show we are her descendants by repeating her mistakes. Our desires, like Eve’s, can be quite easily manipulated. They are not the best basis for actions. We need to keep God central in our decision-making process. His Word, the Bible, is our guidebook in decision making.

Strengths and accomplishments	- First wife and mother - First female. As such she shared a special relationship with God, had coreponsibility with Adam over creation, and displayed certain characteristics of God
Weaknesses and mistakes	- Allowed her contentment to be undermined by Satan - Acted impulsively without talking either to God or to her mate - Not only sinned, but shared her sin with Adam - When confronted, blamed others
Lessons from her life	- Women bear the image of God fully - The necessary ingredients for a strong marriage are commitment to each other, companionship with each other, complete oneness, absence of shame (Gen 2:24-25) - The basic human tendency to sin goes back to the beginning of the human race
Vital statistics	- Where: Garden of Eden - Occupation: Wife, companion, co-manager of Eden - Relatives: Husband: Adam. Sons: Cain, Abel, Seth. Numerous other children.
Key verse	“At last!” the man exclaimed. “This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called “woman,” because she was taken from “man”” (Gen 2:23).

Eve’s story is told in Genesis 2:18–4:26. Her death is not mentioned in Scripture.

Gen 3:11-13 When God asked Adam about his sin, Adam blamed Eve. Then Eve blamed the serpent. How easy it is to excuse our sins by blaming someone else or our circumstances. But God knows

the truth, and he holds each of us responsible for what we do (see Gen 3:14-19). Admit your wrong attitudes and actions to God. Don’t try to get away with sin by placing blame.

¹⁴Then the LORD God said to the serpent,
“Because you have done this, you are cursed
more than all animals, domestic
and wild.
You will crawl on your belly,
groveling in the dust as long as you live.
¹⁵And I will cause hostility between you and
the woman,
and between your offspring and her
offspring.
He will strike* your head,
and you will strike his heel.”

¹⁶Then he said to the woman,
“I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy,
and in pain you will give birth.
And you will desire to control your husband,
but he will rule over you.*”

¹⁷And to the man he said,
“Since you listened to your wife and ate
from the tree
whose fruit I commanded you not to eat,
the ground is cursed because of you.
All your life you will struggle to scratch
a living from it.

¹⁸It will grow thorns and thistles for you,
though you will eat of its grains.
¹⁹By the sweat of your brow
will you have food to eat
until you return to the ground
from which you were made.
For you were made from dust,
and to dust you will return.”

Paradise Lost: God’s Judgment

GENESIS 3:20-24
Then the man—Adam—named his wife Eve, because
she would be the mother of all who live.* ²¹And the
LORD God made clothing from animal skins for Adam
and his wife.
²²Then the LORD God said, “Look, the human be-
ings* have become like us, knowing both good and
evil. What if they reach out, take fruit from the tree
of life, and eat it? Then they will live forever!” ²³So the
LORD God banished them from the Garden of Eden,
and he sent Adam out to cultivate the ground from
which he had been made. ²⁴After sending them out,
the LORD God stationed mighty cherubim to the east
of the Garden of Eden. And he placed a flaming sword
that flashed back and forth to guard the way to the
tree of life.

Gn 3:15 Or *bruise*; also in 3:15b. Gn 3:16 Or *And though you will have desire for your husband, / he will rule over you.* Gn 3:20 *Eve* sounds like a Hebrew term that means “to give life.” Gn 3:22 Or *the man*; Hebrew reads *ha-adam*.



SATAN’S PLAN AGAINST US

Doubt	Makes you question God’s Word and his goodness
Discouragement	Makes you look at your problems rather than at God
Diversion	Makes the wrong things seem attractive so that you will want them more than the right things
Defeat	Makes you feel like a failure so that you don’t even try
Delay	Makes you put off doing something so that it never gets done

Gen 3:14ff Adam and Eve chose their course of action (disobedience), and then God chose his. As a holy God, he could only respond in a way consistent with his perfect moral nature. He could not allow sin to go unchecked; he had to punish it. If the consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin seem extreme, remember that their sin set in motion the world’s tendency toward disobeying God. That is why we sin today. Every human being ever born, with the exception of Jesus, has inherited the sinful nature of Adam and Eve (Rom 5:12-21). Adam and Eve’s punishment reflects how seriously God views sin of any kind.
Gen 3:14-19 Adam and Eve learned by painful experience that because God is holy and hates sin, he must punish sinners. The rest of the book of Genesis recounts painful stories of lives ruined as a result of the Fall.

Disobedience is sin, and it breaks our fellowship with God. But fortunately, God is willing to forgive us and to restore our relationship with him when we admit our sin.
Gen 3:15 Satan is our enemy. He will do anything he can to get us to follow his evil, deadly path. The phrase “you will strike his heel” refers to Satan’s repeated attempts to defeat Christ during his life on earth. “He will strike your head” foreshadows Satan’s defeat when Christ rose from the dead. A strike on the heel is not deadly, but a blow to the head is. Already God was revealing his plan to defeat Satan and offer salvation to the world through his Son, Jesus Christ.
Gen 3:17-19 Adam and Eve’s disobedience and fall from God’s gracious presence affected all creation, including the environment. Years ago people thought nothing of polluting streams and rivers with chemical

waste and garbage. The amount dumped seemed so insignificant, so small compared to these large water sources. Now we know that just two or three parts per million of certain chemicals can damage human health. Sin in our lives is similar to pollution in streams. Even small amounts are deadly, and the consequences reach far beyond ourselves.
Gen 3:22-24 Life in the Garden of Eden was perfect, and if Adam and Eve had obeyed God, they could have lived there forever. But after disobeying, Adam and Eve no longer deserved paradise, and God told them to leave. If they had continued to live in the garden and eat from the tree of life, they would have lived forever. But eternal life in a state of sin would mean forever trying to hide from God. Like Adam and Eve, all of us have sinned and are separated from fellowship with God. But we do not have to stay separated. And God is also preparing a new earth as an eternal paradise for his people (see Rev 21–22).
Gen 3:24 This is how Adam and Eve broke their relationship with God: (1) They became convinced their way was better than God’s and acted on that choice; (2) they became self-conscious and hid; and (3) they tried to excuse and defend themselves. To build a relationship with God we must reverse those steps: (1) We must drop our excuses and self-defenses; (2) we must stop trying to hide from God; (3) we must become convinced that God’s way is better than our way.

2. CAIN AND ABEL

The tragic story of Cain and Abel shows how dramatically sin had affected humanity. Less than a generation after being banished from the Garden of Eden, jealousy leads to murder.

Cain Murders Abel

GENESIS 4:1-16

Now Adam* had sexual relations with his wife, Eve, and she became pregnant. When she gave birth to Cain, she said, “With the LORD’s help, I have produced* a man!”^a Later she gave birth to his brother and named him Abel.

When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd, while Cain cultivated the ground.³ When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the LORD.⁴ Abel also brought a gift—the best

Gen 4:1a Or the man; also in 4:25. **Gen 4:1b** Or I have acquired. Cain sounds like a Hebrew term that can mean “produce” or “acquire.”

of the firstborn lambs from his flock. The LORD accepted Abel and his gift,⁵ but he did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected.

⁶“Why are you so angry?” the LORD asked Cain. “Why do you look so dejected? ⁷You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.”

⁸One day Cain suggested to his brother, “Let’s go out

ABEL Abel was the second child born into the world, but the first one to obey God. All we know about this man is that his parents were Adam and Eve, he was a shepherd, he presented pleasing offerings to God, and his life was ended at the hands of his jealous older brother, Cain. • The Bible doesn’t tell us why God liked Abel’s gift and disliked Cain’s, but both Cain and Abel knew what God expected. Only Abel obeyed. Throughout history, Abel is remembered for his obedience and faith (Heb 11:4), and he is called “righteous” (Matt 23:35). • The Bible is filled with God’s general guidelines and expectations for our lives. It is also filled with more specific directions. Like Abel, we must obey regardless of the cost and trust God to make things right.

Strengths and accomplishments

- Mentioned in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11
- First shepherd
- First martyr for truth (Matt 23:35)

Lessons from his life

- God hears those who come to him
- God recognizes the innocent person and sooner or later punishes the guilty

Vital statistics

- Where: Just outside of Eden
- Occupation: Shepherd
- Relatives: Parents: Adam and Eve. Brother: Cain.

Key verse

“It was by faith that Abel brought a more acceptable offering to God than Cain did. Abel’s offering gave evidence that he was a righteous man, and God showed his approval of his gifts. Although Abel is long dead, he still speaks to us by his example of faith” (Heb 11:4).

Abel’s story is told in Genesis 4:1-8. He is also mentioned in Matthew 23:35; Luke 11:51; Hebrews 11:4; 12:24.

because of what we are able to give. We should not worry about how much we are giving up, for all things are God’s in the first place. Instead, we should joyfully give to God our best in time, money, possessions, and talents.

Gen 4:6-7 How do you react when someone suggests you have done something wrong? Do you move to correct the mistake or deny that you need to correct it? After Cain’s gift was rejected, God gave him the chance to right his wrong and try again. God even encouraged him to do this! But Cain refused, and the rest of his life is a startling example of what happens to those who refuse to admit their mistakes. The next time someone suggests you are wrong, take an honest look at yourself and choose God’s way instead of Cain’s.

Gen 4:7 For Cain to subdue the sin that was waiting to attack and destroy him, he would have to give up his jealous anger so that sin would not find a foothold in his life. Sin is still waiting to attack and destroy us today. Like Cain, we will be victims of sin if we do not master it. But we cannot master sin in our own strength. Instead, we must turn to God to receive faith for ourselves and turn to other believers to receive encouragement and strength. The Holy Spirit will help us master sin. This will be a lifelong battle, but it will be over when we are face to face with Christ.

Gen 4:8-10 This is the first murder—taking a life by shedding human blood. Blood represents life (Lev 17:10-14). If blood is removed from a living creature, it will die. Because God created human life in his image, only God should take life away.

Gen 4:8-10 Adam and Eve’s disobedience brought sin into the human race. They may have thought their sin—eating a piece of fruit—wasn’t very bad, but notice how quickly their sinful nature developed in their children. Simple disobedience quickly degenerated into outright murder. Adam and Eve acted only against God, but Cain acted against both God and other people. A small

Gen 4:1 Sexual union means oneness and total knowledge of the other person. Sexual intercourse is the most intimate of acts, sealing a social, physical, and spiritual relationship. That is why God has reserved it for marriage alone.

Gen 4:2 No longer was everything provided for Adam and Eve as it had been in the Garden of Eden, where their daily tasks were refreshing and delightful. Now they had to struggle against the elements in order to provide food, clothing, and shelter for themselves and their family. Cain became a farmer, while Abel became

a shepherd. In parts of the Middle East today, these ancient occupations are still practiced much as they were in Cain and Abel’s time.

Gen 4:3-5 The Bible doesn’t say why God did not accept Cain’s gift. Perhaps Cain’s attitude was improper, or perhaps his gift was not up to God’s standards. Proverbs 21:27 says, “The sacrifice of an evil person is detestable, especially when it is offered with wrong motives.” God evaluates both our motives and the quality of what we offer him. When we give to God and others, we should have a joyful heart

into the fields.”* And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother, Abel, and killed him.

⁹Afterward the LORD asked Cain, “Where is your brother? Where is Abel?”

“I don’t know,” Cain responded. “Am I my brother’s guardian?”

¹⁰But the LORD said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground!

¹¹Now you are cursed and banished from the ground, which has swallowed your brother’s blood. ¹²No longer will the ground yield good crops for you, no matter how hard you work! From now on you will be a homeless wanderer on the earth.”

¹³Cain replied to the LORD, “My punishment* is too great for me to bear! ¹⁴You have banished me from the land and from your presence; you have made me a homeless wanderer. Anyone who finds me will kill me!”

Gn 4:8 As in Samaritan Pentateuch, Greek and Syriac versions, and Latin Vulgate; Masoretic Text lacks “Let’s go out into the fields.” **Gn 4:13** Or *My sin*. **Gn 4:16** *Nod* means “wandering.” **Gn 4:18** Or *the ancestor of*, and so throughout the verse.

¹⁵The LORD replied, “No, for I will give a sevenfold punishment to anyone who kills you.” Then the LORD put a mark on Cain to warn anyone who might try to kill him. ¹⁶So Cain left the LORD’s presence and settled in the land of Nod,* east of Eden.

The Descendants of Cain

GENESIS 4:17-24

Cain had sexual relations with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Then Cain founded a city, which he named Enoch, after his son. ¹⁸Enoch had a son named Irad. Irad became the father of* Mehujael. Mehujael became the father of Methushael. Methushael became the father of Lamech.

¹⁹Lamech married two women. The first was named Adah, and the second was Zillah. ²⁰Adah gave birth to

sin has a way of growing out of control. Let God help you with your “little” sins before they turn into tragedies.

Gen 4:11-15 Cain was severely punished for this murder. God judges all sins and punishes appropriately, not out of vengeance, but because he desires to correct us and restore our fellowship with him. When you’re corrected, don’t resent it. Instead, renew your fellowship with God.

Gen 4:14 We have heard about only four people so far—Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel. Two questions arise: Why was Cain worried about being killed by others, and where did he get his wife (see Gen 4:17)?

Adam and Eve had numerous children; they had been told to “fill the earth” (Gen 1:28). Cain’s guilt and fear over killing his brother was heavy, and he probably feared repercussions from his family. If he was capable of murder, so were they. The wife Cain chose may have been one of his sisters or a niece. The human race was still genetically pure, and there was no fear of side effects from marrying relatives.

Gen 4:15 The expression “sevenfold punishment” means that the person’s punishment would be complete, thorough, and much worse than that received by Cain for his sin.

Gen 4:19-26 Unfortunately, when left to themselves, people tend to get worse instead of better. This short summary of Lamech’s family shows us the variety of talent and ability God gives humans. It also presents the continuous development of sin as time passes. Another killing occurred, presumably in self-defense. Violence was on the rise. Two distinct groups were emerging: those who showed indifference to sin and evil, and those who worshiped the Lord—the descendants of Seth (Gen 4:26). Seth would take Abel’s place as leader of a line of God’s faithful people.



CAIN

In spite of parents’ efforts and worries, conflicts between children in a family seem inevitable. Sibling relationships allow both competition and cooperation. In most cases, the mixture of loving and fighting eventually creates a strong bond between brothers and sisters. But for Cain, the conflict and jealousy overcame whatever love he had for Abel. And while we don’t know many details of this first child’s life, his story can still teach us. • Cain was angry. Furious. Both he and his brother Abel had given offerings to God, and his had been rejected. Cain’s reaction gives us a clue that his attitude was probably wrong from the start. Cain had a choice to make. He could correct his attitude about his offering to God, or he could take his anger out on his brother. His decision is a clear reminder of how often we are aware of opposite choices, yet choose the wrong one. We may not be choosing to murder, but we are still intentionally choosing what we shouldn’t. • The feelings motivating our behavior can’t always be changed by simple thought-power. But here we can begin to experience God’s willingness to help. Asking for his help to do what is right can prevent us from setting into motion actions that we will later regret.

Strengths and accomplishments	• First human child • First to follow in father’s profession, farming
Weaknesses and mistakes	• When disappointed, reacted in anger • Took the negative option even when a positive possibility was offered • Was the first murderer
Lessons from his life	• Anger is not necessarily a sin, but actions motivated by anger can be sinful. Anger should be the energy behind good action, not evil action • What we offer to God must be from the heart—the best we are and have • The consequences of sin may last a lifetime
Vital statistics	• Where: Near Eden • Occupation: Farmer, then wanderer • Relatives: Parents: Adam and Eve. Brothers: Abel, Seth, and others not mentioned by name.
Key verse	“You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master” (Gen 4:7).

Cain’s story is told in Genesis 4:1-17. He is also mentioned in Hebrews 11:4; 1 John 3:12; Jude 1:11.

► **GENESIS 4:17-24 (cont.)**

Jabal, who was the first of those who raise livestock and live in tents. ²¹His brother's name was Jubal, the first of all who play the harp and flute. ²²Lamech's other wife, Zillah, gave birth to a son named Tubal-cain. He became an expert in forging tools of bronze and iron. Tubal-cain had a sister named Naamah.

²³One day Lamech said to his wives,

"Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
listen to me, you wives of Lamech.
I have killed a man who attacked me,
a young man who wounded me.

Gn 4:25 *Seth probably means "granted"; the name may also mean "appointed."*

²⁴ If someone who kills Cain is punished seven times,
then the one who kills me will be punished seventy-seven times!"

The Birth of Seth

GENESIS 4:25-26

Adam had sexual relations with his wife again, and she gave birth to another son. She named him Seth,* for she said, "God has granted me another son in place of Abel, whom Cain killed." ²⁶When Seth grew up, he had a son and named him Enosh. At that time people first began to worship the LORD by name.

3. ADAM'S DESCENDANTS

Beginning with Adam and Eve, humanity grew to become independent families and tribes.

From Adam to Noah

GENESIS 5:1-32

This is the written account of the descendants of Adam. When God created human beings,* he made them to be like himself. ²He created them male and female, and he blessed them and called them "human."

³When Adam was 130 years old, he became the father of a son who was just like him—in his very image. He named his son Seth. ⁴After the birth of Seth, Adam lived another 800 years, and he had other sons and daughters. ⁵Adam lived 930 years, and then he died.

⁶When Seth was 105 years old, he became the father of* Enosh. ⁷After the birth of* Enosh, Seth lived another 807 years, and he had other sons and daughters. ⁸Seth lived 912 years, and then he died.

⁹When Enosh was 90 years old, he became the father of Kenan. ¹⁰After the birth of Kenan, Enosh lived another 815 years, and he had other sons and daughters. ¹¹Enosh lived 905 years, and then he died.

¹²When Kenan was 70 years old, he became the father of Mahalalel. ¹³After the birth of Mahalalel,

Kenan lived another 840 years, and he had other sons and daughters. ¹⁴Kenan lived 910 years, and then he died.

¹⁵When Mahalalel was 65 years old, he became the father of Jared. ¹⁶After the birth of Jared, Mahalalel lived another 830 years, and he had other sons and daughters. ¹⁷Mahalalel lived 895 years, and then he died.

¹⁸When Jared was 162 years old, he became the father of Enoch. ¹⁹After the birth of Enoch, Jared lived another 800 years, and he had other sons and daughters. ²⁰Jared lived 962 years, and then he died.

²¹When Enoch was 65 years old, he became the father of Methuselah. ²²After the birth of Methuselah, Enoch lived in close fellowship with God for another 300 years, and he had other sons and daughters. ²³Enoch lived 365 years, ²⁴walking in close fellowship with God. Then one day he disappeared, because God took him.

²⁵When Methuselah was 187 years old, he became the father of Lamech. ²⁶After the birth of Lamech, Methuselah lived another 782 years, and he had other sons and daughters. ²⁷Methuselah lived 969 years, and then he died.

Gn 5:1 *Or man; Hebrew reads adam; similarly in 5:2.* **Gn 5:6** *Or the ancestor of; also in 5:9, 12, 15, 18, 21, 25.* **Gn 5:7** *Or the birth of this ancestor of; also in 5:10, 13, 16, 19, 22, 26.*

Gen 5:1ff The Bible contains several lists of ancestors, called genealogies. They are not intended to be exhaustive and may include only famous people or the heads of families. "He became the father of" could refer not just to a son, but also to a more distant descendant.

Why are genealogies included in the Bible? The Hebrew people passed on their beliefs through oral tradition. For many years in many places, writing was primitive or nonexistent. Stories were told to children who passed them on to their children. Genealogies gave a skeletal outline that helped people remember

the stories. For centuries these genealogies were added to and passed down from family to family. Even more important than preserving family tradition, genealogies were included to confirm the Bible's promise that the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, would be born into the line of Abraham.

Genealogies point out that people are important to God as individuals. Therefore, God refers to people by name, mentioning their life span and descendants. The next time you feel overwhelmed in a vast crowd, remember that the focus of God's attention and love is on the individual—on you!

Gen 5:3-5 All human beings are related, going back to Adam and Eve. All people form a family that shares one flesh and blood. Remember this when prejudice enters your mind or hatred invades your feelings. Each person is a valuable and unique creation of God.

Gen 5:25-27 How did these people live so long? Some believe that the ages listed here were lengths of family dynasties rather than ages of individual men. Those who think these were actual ages offer three explanations: (1) The human race was more

SPLINTERED NATION 930–586 BC	EXILE 586–538 BC	RETURN & DIASPORA 538–6 BC	JESUS CHRIST 6 BC–AD 30	THE CHURCH AD 30–present
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²⁸When Lamech was 182 years old, he became the father of a son. ²⁹Lamech named his son Noah, for he said, “May he bring us relief* from our work and the painful labor of farming this ground that the LORD has cursed.” ³⁰After the

Gn 5:29 *Noah sounds like a Hebrew term that can mean “relief” or “comfort.”*

birth of Noah, Lamech lived another 595 years, and he had other sons and daughters. ³¹Lamech lived 777 years, and then he died. ³²By the time Noah was 500 years old, he was the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

C. A New Beginning for Humanity

Earth was no longer the perfect paradise that God had intended. It is frightening to see how quickly all of humanity forgot about God. Incredibly, in all the world, only one man and his family still worshiped God. That man was Noah. Because of his faithfulness and obedience, God saved him and his family from a vast flood that destroyed every other human being on earth. This section shows us how God hates sin and judges those who enjoy it.

1. THE FLOOD

The Flood was God’s judgment of the world’s pervasive sin, cleansing his creation and creating a new beginning with Noah and his family.

A World Gone Wrong

GENESIS 6:1-8

Then the people began to multiply on the earth, and daughters were born to them. ²The sons of God saw the beautiful women* and took any they wanted as their wives. ³Then the LORD said, “My Spirit will not put up with* humans for such a long time, for they are only mortal flesh. In the future, their normal lifespan will be no more than 120 years.”

⁴In those days, and for some time after, giant Nephilites lived on the earth, for whenever the sons of God had intercourse with women, they gave birth to children who became the heroes and famous warriors of ancient times.

⁵The LORD observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil.

Gn 6:2 *Hebrew daughters of men; also in 6:4. Gn 6:3* *Greek version reads will not remain in.*

genetically pure in this early time period with less disease to shorten life spans; (2) no rain had yet fallen on the earth, and the expanse of “the waters of the heavens” (Gen 1:7) kept out harmful cosmic rays and shielded people from environmental factors that hasten aging; (3) God gave people longer lives so they would have time to “fill the earth” (Gen 1:28).

Gen 6:1-4 Some people have thought that the “sons of God” were fallen angels. But the “sons of God” were probably not angels because angels do not marry or reproduce (Matt 22:30; Mark 12:25). Some scholars believe this phrase refers to the descendants of Seth who intermarried with Cain’s evil descendants. This would have weakened the good influence of the faithful and increased moral depravity in the world, resulting in an explosion of evil.

Gen 6:3 “Their normal lifespan will be no more than 120 years” has been interpreted by some commentators to mean that God

was allowing the people of Noah’s day 120 years to change their sinful ways. God shows his great patience with us as well (2 Pet 3:8-9). He is giving us time to quit living our way and begin living his way, the way he shows us in his Word. While 120 years may seem like a long time, eventually the time ran out, and the floodwaters swept across the earth. Your time also may be running out (2 Pet 3:10-14). Turn to God to forgive your sins. You don’t know how much time God will give you to turn to him, and once that time comes there will be no more opportunities.

Gen 6:4 These “giant Nephilites” were people probably nine or ten feet tall. This same Hebrew term was used to name a tall race of people in Numbers 13:33. Goliath, who was nine feet tall, appears in 1 Samuel 17. The giants used their physical advantage to oppress the people around them.

Gen 6:6-7 Does this mean that God regretted creating humanity? Was he admitting he

⁶So the LORD was sorry he had ever made them and put them on the earth. It broke his heart. ⁷And the LORD said, “I will wipe this human race I have created from the face of the earth. Yes, and I will destroy every living thing—all the people, the large animals, the small animals that scurry along the ground, and even the birds of the sky. I am sorry I ever made them.” ⁸But Noah found favor with the LORD.

The Story of Noah

GENESIS 6:9-22

This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, the only blameless person living on earth at the time, and he walked in close fellowship with God. ¹⁰Noah was the father of three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

¹¹Now God saw that the earth had become corrupt

made a mistake? No, God does not change his mind (1 Sam 15:29). Instead, he was expressing sorrow for what the people had done to themselves, as a parent might express sorrow over a rebellious child. God was sorry that the people chose sin and death instead of a relationship with him.

Gen 6:6-8 The people’s sin grieved God. Our sins break God’s heart as much as sin did in Noah’s day. Noah, however, pleased God, although he was far from perfect. We can follow Noah’s example and find “favor with the LORD” in spite of the sin that surrounds us.

Gen 6:9 Saying that Noah was “righteous” and “blameless” does not mean that he never sinned (the Bible records one of his sins in Gen 9:20ff). Rather, it means that Noah wholeheartedly loved and obeyed God. For a lifetime he walked step by step in faith as a living example to his generation. Like Noah, we live in a world filled with evil. Are we influencing others or being influenced by them?

► **GENESIS 6:9-22 (cont.)**

and was filled with violence. ¹²God observed all this corruption in the world, for everyone on earth was corrupt. ¹³So God said to Noah, “I have decided to destroy all living creatures, for they have filled the earth with violence. Yes, I will wipe them all out along with the earth!

¹⁴“Build a large boat* from cypress wood* and waterproof it with tar, inside and out. Then construct decks and stalls throughout its interior. ¹⁵Make the boat 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high.* ¹⁶Leave an 18-inch opening* below the roof all the way around the boat. Put the door on the side, and build three decks inside the boat—lower, middle, and upper.

¹⁷“Look! I am about to cover the earth with a flood that will destroy every living thing that breathes. Everything on earth will die. ¹⁸But I will confirm my covenant with you. So enter the boat—you and your wife and your sons and their wives. ¹⁹Bring a pair of every kind of animal—a male and a female—into the boat with you to keep them alive during the flood. ²⁰Pairs of every kind of bird, and every kind of animal, and every kind of small animal that scurries along the ground, will come to you to be kept alive. ²¹And be sure to take on board enough food for your family and for all the animals.”

²²So Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him.

Gn 6:14a Traditionally rendered an ark. **Gn 6:14b** Or gopher wood. **Gn 6:15** Hebrew 300 cubits [138 meters] long, 50 cubits [23 meters] wide, and 30 cubits [13.8 meters] high. **Gn 6:16** Hebrew an opening of 1 cubit [46 centimeters]. **Gn 7:2** Hebrew of each clean animal; similarly in 7:8.

The Flood Covers the Earth

GENESIS 7:1-24

When everything was ready, the LORD said to Noah, “Go into the boat with all your family, for among all the people of the earth, I can see that you alone are righteous. ²Take with you seven pairs—male and female—of each animal I have approved for eating and for sacrifice,* and take one pair of each of the others. ³Also take seven pairs of every kind of bird. There must be a male and a female in each pair to ensure that all life will survive on the earth after the flood. “Seven days from now I will make the rains pour down on the earth. And it will rain for forty days and forty nights, until I have wiped from the earth all the living things I have created.”

⁵So Noah did everything as the LORD commanded him.

⁶Noah was 600 years old when the flood covered the earth. ⁷He went on board the boat to escape the flood—he and his wife and his sons and their wives. ⁸With them were all the various kinds of animals—those approved for eating and for sacrifice and those that were not—along with all the birds and the small animals that scurry along the ground. ⁹They entered the boat in pairs, male and female, just as God had commanded Noah. ¹⁰After seven days, the waters of the flood came and covered the earth.

Epic of Gilgamesh

The Bible isn't the only ancient document that tells about a great flood with a lone surviving family and pairs of animals on board; in fact, there are several flood stories from many different cultures that have strikingly similar details to Noah's story in Genesis. A Sumerian story called Eridu Genesis tells how king Ziusudra was warned that the gods had decreed a deluge to destroy mankind and was told to build a great boat in which to escape. An Akkadian story called the Atrahasis Epic describes a flood sent by the gods to destroy humanity after earlier attempts to control them had failed. The pious Atrahasis was warned by the creator god Ea to build a boat and escape with his family, treasure, and animals. The most famous of these flood stories is the Babylonian Story of the Flood, which is pictured on tablet 11 of the longer Epic of Gilgamesh. This story, focused on the hero Gilgamesh, tells of the boat coming to rest on a mountain and the dispatch in succession of a dove, a swallow, and a raven—the occupants of the boat disembarking when the raven did not return.

The fact that all of these different cultures trace their lineage back to a great hero who survived a great flood in a boat filled with animals, and who left only after sending birds out from the top of a mountain, is interesting confirmation of the claim in Genesis 6–9 that there was indeed a great flood in ancient times.

Gen 6:15 The boat Noah built was no canoe! Picture yourself building a boat the length of one and a half football fields and as high as a four-story building. The boat was exactly six times longer than it was wide—the same ratio used by modern shipbuilders. This huge boat was probably built miles from any body of water, but Noah was motivated by God's promises and obeyed his commands.

Gen 6:18 When God said, “I will confirm my covenant,” he was making a promise. This is a familiar theme in Scripture—God making covenants with his people. How reassuring it is to know God's covenant is established with us. He is still our salvation, and we are kept safe through our relationship with him. (For more on covenants, see Gen 9:8-17; 12:1-3; 15:17-21.)

Gen 6:22 Noah got right to work when God told him to build the huge boat. Other people must have been warned by Noah about the coming disaster (2 Pet 2:5), but apparently they did not expect it to happen. Things haven't changed much. Each day thousands of people are warned of God's inevitable judgment, yet most of them don't really believe it will happen. Don't expect people to welcome or accept your message of God's coming judgment on sin. Those who don't believe in God will deny his judgment and try to get you to deny God as well. But

¹¹When Noah was 600 years old, on the seventeenth day of the second month, all the underground waters erupted from the earth, and the rain fell in mighty torrents from the sky. ¹²The rain continued to fall for forty days and forty nights.

¹³That very day Noah had gone into the boat with his wife and his sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth—and their wives. ¹⁴With them in the boat were pairs of every kind of animal—domestic and wild, large and small—along with birds of every kind. ¹⁵Two by two they came into the boat, representing every living thing that breathes. ¹⁶A male and female of each kind entered, just as God had commanded Noah. Then the LORD closed the door behind them.

¹⁷For forty days the floodwaters grew deeper, covering the ground and lifting the boat high above the earth. ¹⁸As the waters rose higher and higher above the ground, the boat floated safely on the surface. ¹⁹Finally, the water covered even the highest mountains on the earth, ²⁰rising more than twenty-two feet* above the highest peaks. ²¹All the

living things on earth died—birds, domestic animals, wild animals, small animals that scurry along the ground, and all the people. ²²Everything that breathed and lived on dry land died. ²³God wiped out every living thing on the earth—people, livestock, small animals that scurry along the ground, and the birds of the sky. All were destroyed. The only people who survived were Noah and those with him in the boat. ²⁴And the floodwaters covered the earth for 150 days.

The Flood Recedes

GENESIS 8:1-22

But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and livestock with him in the boat. He sent a wind to blow across the earth, and the floodwaters began to recede. ²The underground waters stopped flowing, and the torrential rains from the sky were stopped. ³So the floodwaters gradually receded from the earth. After 150 days, ⁴exactly five months from the time the flood began,* the boat came to rest on the mountains

Gn 7:20 Hebrew 15 cubits [6.9 meters]. Gn 8:4 Hebrew on the seventeenth day of the seventh month; see 7:11.



NOAH

The story of Noah's life involves not one but two great and tragic floods. The world in Noah's day was flooded with evil. The number of those who remembered the God of creation, perfection, and love had dwindled to one. Only Noah still worshiped God. God's response to the severe situation was a 120-year-long last chance, during which he had Noah build a graphic illustration of the message of his life. Nothing like a huge boat on dry land to make a point! For Noah, obedience meant a long-term commitment to a project. • Many of us have trouble sticking to any project, whether or not it is directed by God. It is interesting that the length of Noah's obedience was greater than the life span of people today. The only comparable long-term project is our very lives. But perhaps this is one great challenge Noah's life gives us—to live, in acceptance of God's grace, an entire lifetime of obedience and gratitude.

Strengths and accomplishments	• Only follower of God left in his generation • Second father of the human race • Man of patience, consistency, and obedience
Weakness and mistake	• Got drunk and embarrassed himself in front of his sons
Lessons from his life	• God is faithful to those who obey him • God does not always protect us from trouble, but cares for us in spite of trouble • Obedience is a long-term commitment • We may be faithful, but our sinful nature always travels with us
Vital statistics	• Where: We're not told how far from the Garden of Eden people had settled • Occupation: Farmer, shipbuilder, preacher • Relatives: Grandfather: Methuselah. Father: Lamech. Sons: Ham, Shem, and Japheth.
Key verse	"So Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him" (Gen 6:22).

Noah's story is told in Genesis 5:28–10:32. He is also mentioned in Isaiah 54:9; Ezekiel 14:14, 20; Matthew 24:37–38; Luke 3:36; 17:26–27; Hebrews 11:7; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5.

remember God's promise to Noah to keep him safe. This can inspire you to trust God for deliverance in the judgment that is sure to come.

Gen 7:1f Pairs of every animal joined Noah in the boat; seven pairs were taken of those animals used for sacrifice. It has been estimated that almost 45,000 animals could have fit into the boat.

Gen 7:16 Many have wondered how this animal-kingdom roundup happened. Did Noah and his sons spend years collecting all the animals? But the Creation, along with Noah, was doing just as God had commanded. There seemed to be no problem gathering the animals—God took care of the details of that job while Noah was doing his part by building the boat. Often we do just the opposite of Noah. We worry about details over which we have no control, while neglecting specific areas (such as attitudes, relationships, responsibilities) that *are* under our control. Like Noah, concentrate on what God has given you to do, and leave the rest to God.

Gen 7:17–24 Was the Flood a local event, or did it cover the entire earth? A universal flood was certainly possible. Enough water exists in the oceans to cover all dry land (the earth began that way; see Gen 1:9–10). Afterward God promised never again to destroy the earth with a flood. Thus, this flood must have either covered the entire earth or destroyed all the inhabitants of the earth. Remember, God's reason for sending the Flood was to destroy all the earth's wickedness. It would have taken a major flood to accomplish this.

► **GENESIS 8:1-22 (cont.)**

of Ararat. ⁵Two and a half months later,* as the waters continued to go down, other mountain peaks became visible.

⁶After another forty days, Noah opened the window he had made in the boat ⁷and released a raven. The bird flew back and forth until the floodwaters on the earth had dried up. ⁸He also released a dove to see if the water had receded and it could find dry ground. ⁹But the dove could find no place to land because the water still covered the ground. So it returned to the boat, and Noah held out his hand and drew the dove back inside. ¹⁰After waiting another seven days, Noah released the dove again. ¹¹This time the dove returned to him in the evening with a fresh olive leaf in its beak. Then Noah knew that the floodwaters were almost gone. ¹²He waited another seven days and then released the dove again. This time it did not come back.

¹³Noah was now 601 years old. On the first day of the new year, ten and a half months after the flood began,* the floodwaters had almost dried up from the earth. Noah lifted back the covering of the boat

and saw that the surface of the ground was drying. ¹⁴Two more months went by,* and at last the earth was dry!

¹⁵Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶“Leave the boat, all of you—you and your wife, and your sons and their wives. ¹⁷Release all the animals—the birds, the livestock, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—so they can be fruitful and multiply throughout the earth.”

¹⁸So Noah, his wife, and his sons and their wives left the boat. ¹⁹And all of the large and small animals and birds came out of the boat, pair by pair.

²⁰Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and there he sacrificed as burnt offerings the animals and birds that had been approved for that purpose.*

²¹And the LORD was pleased with the aroma of the sacrifice and said to himself, “I will never again curse the ground because of the human race, even though everything they think or imagine is bent toward evil from childhood. I will never again destroy all living things. ²²As long as the earth remains, there will be planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night.”

Gn 8:5 Hebrew *On the first day of the tenth month; see 7:11 and note on 8:4.* **Gn 8:13** Hebrew *On the first day of the first month; see 7:11.* **Gn 8:14** Hebrew *The twenty-seventh day of the second month arrived; see note on 8:13.* **Gn 8:20** Hebrew *every clean animal and every clean bird.*

2. REPOPULATING THE EARTH

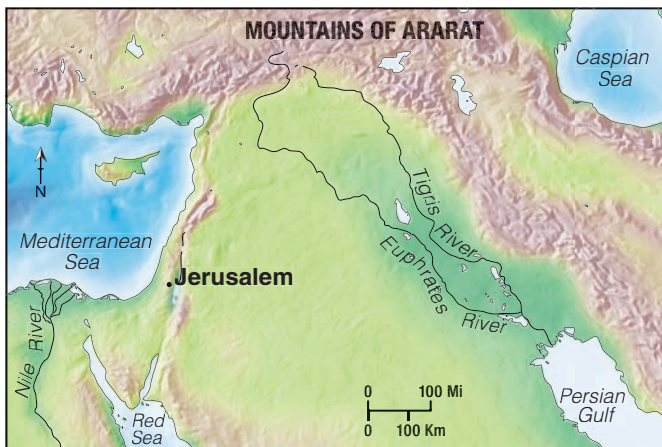
After the destruction of the Flood, God renewed his covenant with humanity through Noah and his family, promising never again to submit the earth to judgment through a catastrophic flood. All of the nations of earth descend from Noah and his sons.

God Confirms His Covenant

GENESIS 9:1-17

Then God blessed Noah and his sons and told them, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth. ²All the animals of the earth, all the birds of the sky, all the small animals

that scurry along the ground, and all the fish in the sea will look on you with fear and terror. I have placed them in your power. ³I have given them to you for food, just as I have given you grain and vegetables. ⁴But you must never eat any meat that still has the lifeblood in it.



MOUNTAINS OF ARARAT Noah's boat touched land in the mountains of Ararat, located in modern-day Turkey. There it rested for almost eight months before Noah, his family, and the animals stepped onto dry land.

Gen 8:6-16 Occasionally Noah would send a bird out to test the earth and see if it was dry. But Noah didn't get out of the boat until God told him to. He was waiting for God's timing. God knew that even though the water was gone, the earth was not dry enough for Noah and his family to venture out. What patience Noah showed, especially after spending an entire year inside his boat! We, like Noah, must trust God to give us patience during those difficult times when we must wait.

Gen 8:21-22 Countless times throughout the Bible we see God showing his love and patience toward men and women in order to save them. Although he realizes that their hearts are evil, he continues to reach out to them. When we sin or fall away from God, we surely deserve to be destroyed by his judgment. But God has promised never again to destroy everything on earth until the judgment day when Christ returns to destroy evil forever. Now every change of season is a reminder of his promise.

SPLINTERED NATION 930–586 BC	EXILE 586–538 BC	RETURN & DIASPORA 538–6 BC	JESUS CHRIST 6 BC–AD 30	THE CHURCH AD 30–present
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⁵“And I will require the blood of anyone who takes another person’s life. If a wild animal kills a person, it must die. And anyone who murders a fellow human must die. ⁶If anyone takes a human life, that person’s life will also be taken by human hands. For God made human beings* in his own image. ⁷Now be fruitful and multiply, and repopulate the earth.”

⁸Then God told Noah and his sons, ⁹“I hereby confirm my covenant with you and your descendants, ¹⁰and with all the animals that were on the boat with you—the birds, the livestock, and all the wild animals—every living creature on earth. ¹¹Yes, I am confirming my covenant with you. Never again will floodwaters kill all living creatures; never again will a flood destroy the earth.”

¹²Then God said, “I am giving you a sign of my covenant with you and with all living creatures, for all generations to come. ¹³I have placed my rainbow in the clouds. It is the sign of my covenant with you and with all the earth. ¹⁴When I send clouds over the earth, the rainbow will appear in the clouds, ¹⁵and I will remember my covenant with you and with all living creatures. Never again will the floodwaters destroy all life. ¹⁶When I see the rainbow in the clouds, I will remember the eternal covenant between God and every living creature on earth.”

Gn 9:6 Or *man*; Hebrew reads *ha-adam*.

Gen 9:5 God will require each person to account for his or her actions. We cannot harm or kill another human being without answering to God. A penalty must be paid. Justice will be served.

Gen 9:5-6 Here God explains why murder is so wrong: To kill a person is to kill one made in God’s image. Because all human beings are made in God’s image, all people possess the qualities that distinguish them from animals: morality, reason, creativity, and self-worth. When we interact with others, we are interacting with beings made by God, beings to whom God offers eternal life. God wants us to recognize his image in all people.

Gen 9:8-17 Noah stepped out of the boat onto an earth devoid of human life. But God gave him a reassuring promise. This covenant had three parts: (1) Never again will a flood do such destruction; (2) as long as the earth remains, the seasons will always come as expected; (3) a rainbow will be visible when it rains as a sign to all that God will keep his promises. The earth’s order and seasons are still preserved, and rainbows still remind us of God’s faithfulness to his word.

Gen 9:20-27 Noah, the great hero of faith, got drunk—a poor example of godliness to his sons. Perhaps this story is included to show us that even godly people can sin and

that their bad choice affects their families. Although the ungodly people had all been killed, the possibility of evil still existed in the hearts of Noah and his family. Ham’s mocking attitude revealed a severe lack of respect for his father and for God.

Gen 9:25 This verse has been wrongfully used to support racial prejudice and even slavery. But Noah’s curse wasn’t directed toward any particular race; rather, it was directed at the Canaanite nation—a nation God knew would become wicked. The curse was fulfilled when the Israelites entered the Promised Land and drove the Canaanites out (see the book of Joshua).

¹⁷Then God said to Noah, “Yes, this rainbow is the sign of the covenant I am confirming with all the creatures on earth.”

Noah’s Sons

GENESIS 9:18–10:1

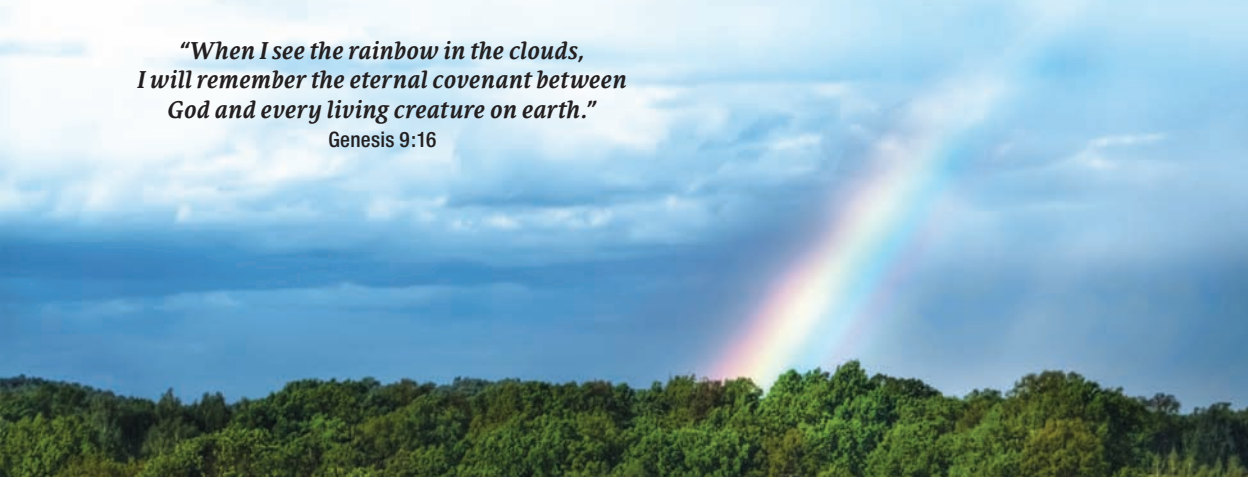
The sons of Noah who came out of the boat with their father were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham is the father of Canaan.) ¹⁹From these three sons of Noah came all the people who now populate the earth.

²⁰After the flood, Noah began to cultivate the ground, and he planted a vineyard. ²¹One day he drank some wine he had made, and he became drunk and lay naked inside his tent. ²²Ham, the father of Canaan, saw that his father was naked and went outside and told his brothers. ²³Then Shem and Japheth took a robe, held it over their shoulders, and backed into the tent to cover their father. As they did this, they looked the other way so they would not see him naked.

²⁴When Noah woke up from his stupor, he learned what Ham, his youngest son, had done. ²⁵Then he cursed Canaan, the son of Ham:

“May Canaan be cursed!
May he be the lowest of servants to his
relatives.”

*“When I see the rainbow in the clouds,
I will remember the eternal covenant between
God and every living creature on earth.”*
Genesis 9:16



► **GENESIS 9:18–10:1 (cont.)**

²⁶Then Noah said,

“May the LORD, the God of Shem, be blessed,
and may Canaan be his servant!

²⁷ May God expand the territory of Japheth!
May Japheth share the prosperity of Shem,*
and may Canaan be his servant.”

²⁸Noah lived another 350 years after the great flood. ²⁹He lived 950 years, and then he died.

10:1 This is the account of the families of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the three sons of Noah. Many children were born to them after the great flood.

Descendants of Japheth

GENESIS 10:2-5

²The descendants of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras.

³The descendants of Gomer were Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah.

⁴The descendants of Javan were Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Rodanim.* ⁵Their descendants became the seafaring peoples that spread out to various lands, each identified by its own language, clan, and national identity.

Descendants of Ham

GENESIS 10:6-20

⁶The descendants of Ham were Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan.

⁷The descendants of Cush were Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The descendants of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan.

⁸Cush was also the ancestor of Nimrod, who was the first heroic warrior on earth. ⁹Since he was the greatest hunter in the world,* his name became proverbial. People would say, “This man is like Nimrod, the greatest hunter in the world.” ¹⁰He built his kingdom in the land of Babylonia,* with the cities of Babylon,

Erech, Akkad, and Calneh. ¹¹From there he expanded his territory to Assyria,* building the cities of Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah, ¹²and Resen (the great city located between Nineveh and Calah).

¹³Mizraim was the ancestor of the Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naphtuhites, ¹⁴Pathrusites, Casluhites, and the Caphtorites, from whom the Philistines came.*

¹⁵Canaan’s oldest son was Sidon, the ancestor of the Sidonians. Canaan was also the ancestor of the Hittites,* ¹⁶Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, ¹⁷Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, ¹⁸Arvadites, Zemarites, and Hamathites. The Canaanite clans eventually spread out, ¹⁹and the territory of Canaan extended from Sidon in the north to Gerar and Gaza in the south, and east as far as Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, near Lasha.

²⁰These were the descendants of Ham, identified by clan, language, territory, and national identity.

Descendants of Shem

GENESIS 10:21-31

²¹Sons were also born to Shem, the older brother of Japheth.* Shem was the ancestor of all the descendants of Eber.

²²The descendants of Shem were Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram.

²³The descendants of Aram were Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash.

²⁴Arphaxad was the father of Shelah,* and Shelah was the father of Eber.

²⁵Eber had two sons. The first was named Peleg (which means “division”), for during his lifetime the people of the world were divided into different language groups. His brother’s name was Joktan.

²⁶Joktan was the ancestor of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, ²⁷Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, ²⁸Obal, Abimael, Sheba, ²⁹Ophir, Havilah, and

Gn 9:27 Hebrew *May he live in the tents of Shem.* **Gn 10:4** As in some Hebrew manuscripts and Greek version (see also 1 Chr 1:7); most Hebrew manuscripts read *Dodanim*. **Gn 10:9** Hebrew *a great hunter before the LORD*; also in 10:9b. **Gn 10:10** Hebrew *Shinar*. **Gn 10:11** Or *From that land Assyria went out*. **Gn 10:14** Hebrew *Casluhites, from whom the Philistines came, and Caphtorites*. Compare Jer 47:4; Amos 9:7. **Gn 10:15** Hebrew *ancestor of Heth*. **Gn 10:21** Or *Shem, whose older brother was Japheth*. **Gn 10:24** Greek version reads *Arphaxad was the father of Cainan, Cainan was the father of Shelah*. Compare Luke 3:36.

Gen 10:8-9 Who was Nimrod? Not much is known about him except that he was a heroic warrior. But people with great gifts can become proud, and that is probably what happened to Nimrod. Some consider him the founder of the great, godless Babylonian Empire.



BIBLE NATIONS DESCENDED FROM NOAH'S SONS

Shem’s descendants were called Semites. Abraham, David, and Jesus descended from Shem. Ham’s descendants settled in Canaan, Egypt, and the rest of Africa. Japheth’s descendants settled for the most part in Europe and Asia Minor.

<i>Shem</i>	<i>Ham</i>	<i>Japheth</i>
Hebrews	Canaanites	Greeks
Chaldeans	Egyptians	Thracians
Assyrians	Philistines	Scythians
Persians	Hittites	
Arameans (Syrians)	Amorites	

Jobab. All these were descendants of Joktan.

³⁰The territory they occupied extended from Mesha all the way to Sephar in the eastern mountains.

³¹These were the descendants of Shem, identified by clan, language, territory, and national identity.

3. SCATTERING THE PEOPLE

People continued to rebel against God, but their efforts were thwarted by the confusion of their languages. This marks the beginning of different languages and cultures as the people scattered all over the world and began to develop their own customs.

The Tower of Babel

GENESIS 11:1-9

At one time all the people of the world spoke the same language and used the same words. ²As the people migrated to the east, they found a plain in the land of Babylonia* and settled there.

³They began saying to each other, “Let’s make bricks and harden them with fire.” (In this region bricks were used instead of stone, and tar was used for mortar.) ⁴Then they said, “Come, let’s build a great city for ourselves with a tower that reaches into the sky. This will make us famous and keep us from being scattered all over the world.”

⁵But the LORD came down to look at the city and the tower the people were building. ⁶“Look!” he said. “The people are united, and they all speak the same language. After this, nothing they set out to do will be impossible for them! ⁷Come, let’s go down and confuse the people with different

Gn 11:2 Hebrew *Shinar*. **Gn 11:9** Or *Babylon*. *Babel* sounds like a Hebrew term that means “confusion.” **Gn 11:10** Or *the ancestor of*; also in 11:12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24. **Gn 11:11** Or *the birth of this ancestor of*; also in 11:13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25.

Conclusion

GENESIS 10:32

These are the clans that descended from Noah’s sons, arranged by nation according to their lines of descent. All the nations of the earth descended from these clans after the great flood.

languages. Then they won’t be able to understand each other.”

⁸In that way, the LORD scattered them all over the world, and they stopped building the city. ⁹That is why the city was called Babel,* because that is where the LORD confused the people with different languages. In this way he scattered them all over the world.

From Shem to Abram

GENESIS 11:10-26

This is the account of Shem’s family.

Two years after the great flood, when Shem was 100 years old, he became the father of* Arphaxad. ¹¹After the birth of* Arphaxad, Shem lived another 500 years and had other sons and daughters.

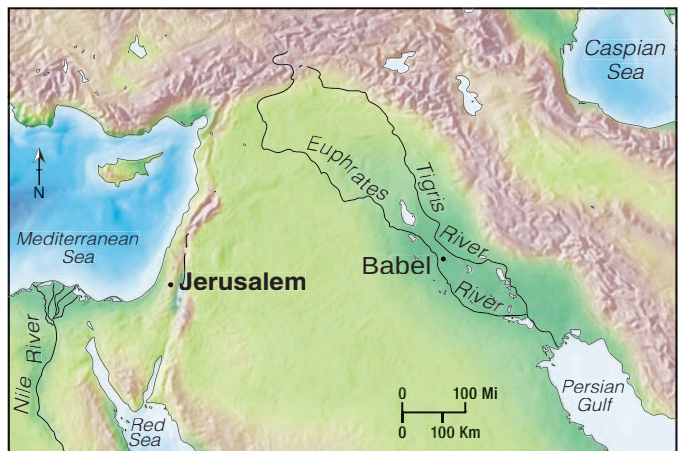
¹²When Arphaxad was 35 years old, he became the father of Shelah. ¹³After the birth of Shelah,

Gen 11:3 The brick used to build this tower was man-made and not as hard as stone.

Gen 11:3-4 The tower of Babel was most likely a ziggurat, a common structure in Babylonia at this time. Most often built as temples, ziggurats looked like pyramids with steps or ramps leading up the sides. Ziggurats stood as high as 300 feet and were often just as wide; thus they were the focal point of the city. The people in this story built their tower as a monument to their own greatness, something for the whole world to see.

Gen 11:4 The tower of Babel was a great human achievement, a wonder of the world. But it was a monument to the people themselves rather than to God. We may build monuments to ourselves (expensive clothes, big house, fancy car, important job) to call attention to our achievements. These may not be wrong in themselves, but when we use them to give ourselves identity and self-worth, they take God’s place in our lives. We are free to develop in many areas, but we are not free to think we have replaced God. What “towers” have you built in your life?

Gen 11:10-27 Here, and in Genesis 10:22-31, appears a list of Shem’s descen-



THE TOWER OF BABEL The plain between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers offered a perfect location for the city and tower “that reaches into the sky” (Gen 11:4).

dants, who were blessed (Gen 9:26). Because of that blessing, from Shem’s line came Abram and the entire Jewish nation,

which would eventually conquer the land of Canaan in the days of Joshua.

► **GENESIS 11:10-26 (cont.)**

Arphaxad lived another 403 years and had other sons and daughters.*

¹⁴When Shelah was 30 years old, he became the father of Eber. ¹⁵After the birth of Eber, Shelah lived another 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

¹⁶When Eber was 34 years old, he became the father of Peleg. ¹⁷After the birth of Peleg, Eber lived another 430 years and had other sons and daughters.

¹⁸When Peleg was 30 years old, he became the father of Reu. ¹⁹After the birth of Reu, Peleg lived another 209 years and had other sons and daughters.

²⁰When Reu was 32 years old, he became the father of Serug. ²¹After the birth of Serug, Reu lived another 207 years and had other sons and daughters.

²²When Serug was 30 years old, he became the father of Nahor. ²³After the birth of Nahor, Serug lived another 200 years and had other sons and daughters.

²⁴When Nahor was 29 years old, he became the

father of Terah. ²⁵After the birth of Terah, Nahor lived another 119 years and had other sons and daughters.

²⁶After Terah was 70 years old, he became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

The Family of Terah

GENESIS 11:27-32

This is the account of Terah's family. Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran was the father of Lot. ²⁸But Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, the land of his birth, while his father, Terah, was still living. ²⁹Meanwhile, Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah. (Milcah and her sister Iscah were daughters of Nahor's brother Haran.) ³⁰But Sarai was unable to become pregnant and had no children.

³¹One day Terah took his son Abram, his daughter-in-law Sarai (his son Abram's wife), and his grandson Lot (his son Haran's child) and moved away from Ur of the Chaldeans. He was headed for the land of Canaan, but they stopped at Haran and settled there. ³²Terah lived for 205 years* and died while still in Haran.

Gn 11:12-13 Greek version reads ¹²When Arphaxad was 135 years old, he became the father of Cainan. ¹³After the birth of Cainan, Arphaxad lived another 430 years and had other sons and daughters, and then he died. When Cainan was 130 years old, he became the father of Shelah. After the birth of Shelah, Cainan lived another 330 years and had other sons and daughters, and then he died. Compare Luke 3:35-36. **Gn 11:32** Some ancient versions read 145 years; compare 11:26 and 12:4.

Gen 11:27-28 Abram grew up in Ur of the Chaldeans, an important city in the ancient world. Archaeologists have discovered evidence of a flourishing civilization there in Abram's day. The city carried on an extensive trade with its neighbors and had a vast library. Growing up in Ur, Abram was probably well educated.

Gen 11:31 Terah left Ur to go to Canaan but settled in Haran instead. Why did he stop halfway? It may have been his health, the climate, or even fear. But this did not change Abram's calling ("the LORD had said to Abram," Gen 12:1). He had respect for his father's leadership, but when Terah died, Abram moved on to Canaan. God's will may

come in stages. Just as the time in Haran was a transition period for Abram, so God may give us transition periods and times of waiting to help us depend on him and trust his timing. If we patiently do his will during the transition times, we will be better prepared to serve him as we should when he calls us.



Ziggurat

A ziggurat was similar to the step pyramid of Egypt and was used for worship. Ziggurats were often built in the major cities of ancient Mesopotamia. The tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9) is thought to have been a particularly prominent ziggurat. It was widely believed that deities dwelt above, in high places. Therefore, worship was more appropriate on hills or mountains. There are no hills in Mesopotamia, so the people there built ziggurats to provide high places to worship. Like the pyramids of Egypt, these temple towers were square. Instead of having sloping sides, there was a succession of terraces, each smaller than the one below. Access to each level was by stairways or ramps. The shrine or altar was at the top, where the priests would officiate at sacrifices, incantations, and prayers.

The tower of Babel, however, was built as a monument to the greatness of the people who were building it rather than to worship God. It is easy to turn something that is supposed to be about God into a celebration of ourselves. How can we ensure that we are truly worshiping God rather than doing great things for our own glory?



NAMES OF GOD

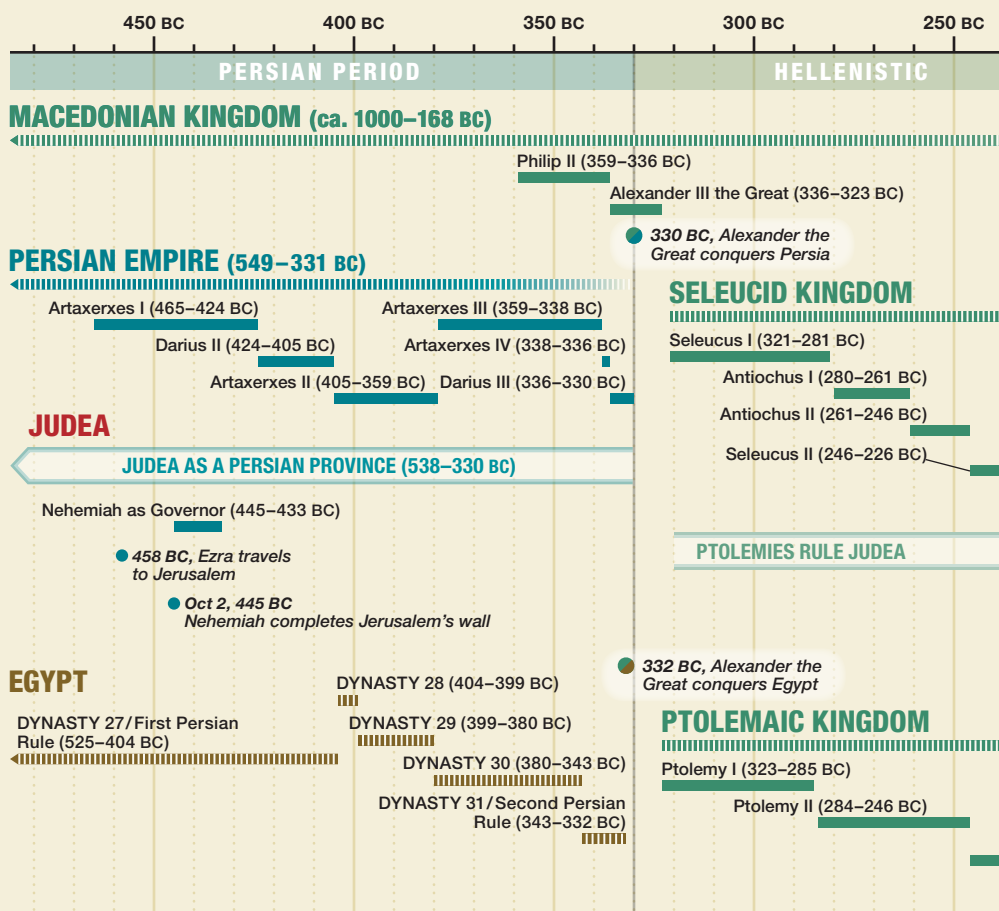
<i>Name of God</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Elohim	God	Gen 1:1; Num 23:19; Ps 19:1	Refers to God's power and might. He is the only supreme and true God.
Yahweh	The LORD	Gen 2:4; Exod 6:2-3	The proper name of the divine person.
El Elyon	God Most High	Gen 14:17-20; Num 24:16; Ps 7:17; Isa 14:13-14	He is above all gods; nothing in life is more sacred.
El Roi	God Who Sees	Gen 16:13	God oversees all creation and the affairs of people.
El Shaddai	God Almighty	Gen 17:1; Ps 91:1	God is all-powerful.
Yahweh Yireh	The LORD Will Provide	Gen 22:13-14	God will provide our real needs.
Yahweh Nissi	The LORD Is My Banner	Exod 17:15	We should remember God for helping us.
Adonai	Lord	Gen 18:27	God alone is the head over all.
Yahweh Elohe Yisrael	LORD God of Israel	Judg 5:3; Ps 59:5; Isa 17:6; Zeph 2:9	He is the God of the nation.
Yahweh Shalom	The LORD Is Peace	Judg 6:24	God gives us peace so we need not fear.
Qedosh Yisrael	Holy One of Israel	Isa 1:4	God is morally perfect.
Yahweh Sabaoth	LORD of Hosts (<i>Hosts</i> refers to armies but also to all the heavenly powers.)	1 Sam 1:3; Isa 6:1-3	God is our savior and protector.
El Olam	The Everlasting God	Isa 40:28-31	God is eternal. He will never die.
Yahweh Tsidkenu	The LORD Our Righteousness	Jer 23:6; 33:16	God is our standard for right behavior. He alone can make us righteous.
Yahweh Shammah	The LORD Is There	Ezek 48:35	God is always present with us.
Attiq Yomin	Ancient of Days	Dan 7:9, 13	God is the ultimate authority. He will one day judge all nations.

The Time Between the Old & New Testaments

THE ERA OF THE RETURN & DIASPORA doesn't end with the book of Malachi. It actually continues through the 400 years that are sometimes referred to as the inter-testamental period. Many people mistakenly assume that because there was no Scripture written during this time, that nothing significant was going on with God's people. In fact, there was a great deal going on in Judea and throughout the world. Jewish communities in Judea grew and spread throughout the region,



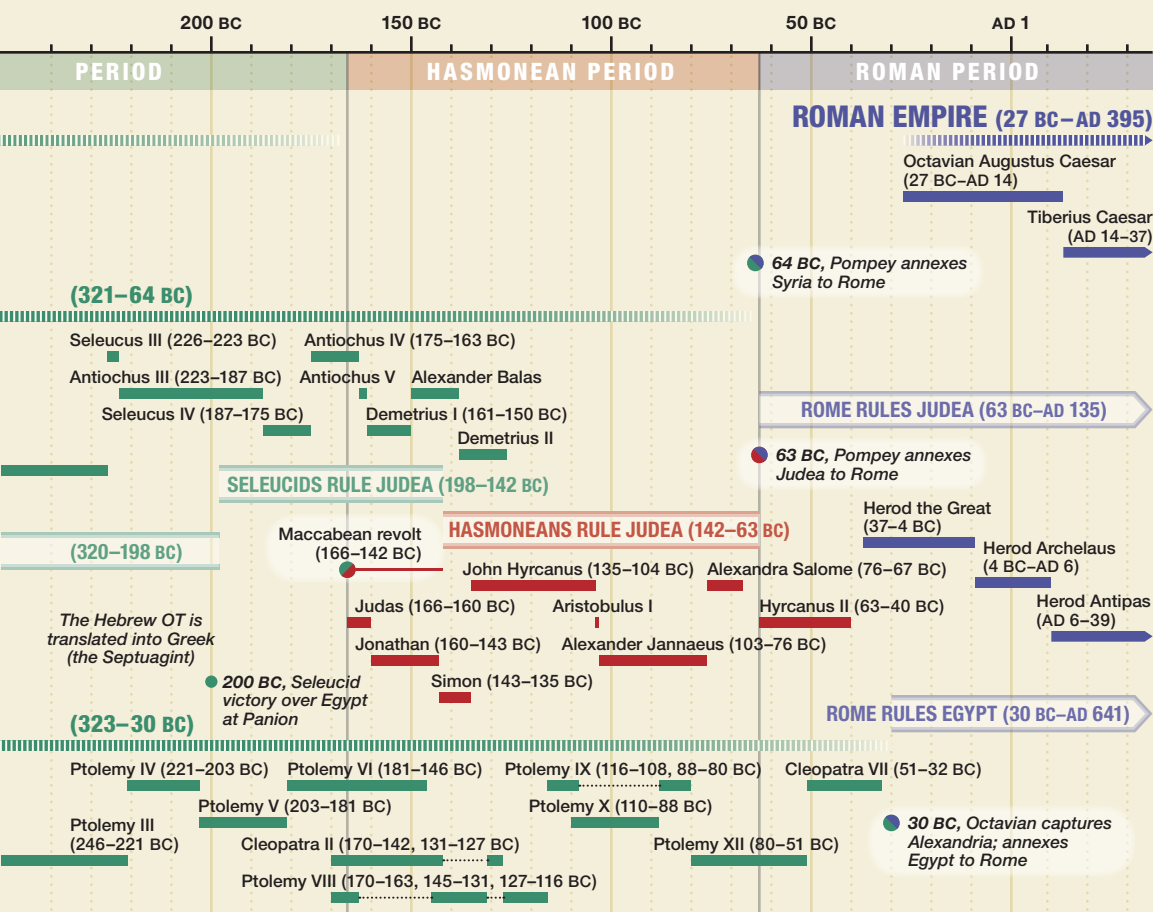
TIMELINE



extending north to Galilee and beyond. Meanwhile, Jewish communities were also thriving throughout the known world—Rome, Egypt, Greece, Turkey, Arabia, Libya, and beyond. The Jews who returned to Judea and those in the Diaspora experienced both prosperity and suffering during this turbulent time when world power shifted drastically several times.



Alexander the Great in the Temple of Jerusalem, by Sebastiano Conca



■ **The Persian Period (539–330 B.C.).** When the Persians wrested the position of world dominance from the Babylonians, they encouraged the Jews to return home to Judea and rebuild their Temple. The Jews dwelt in relative peace. However, several key developments began to reshape their practice of religion. Likely as a result of their many years in exile, the Jews had begun to worship in local synagogues spread throughout the Persian Empire. They continued this new practice in their own land, even after the Temple was rebuilt. Worship in the synagogues centered on the study of the Law, and teachers of religious law became the influential preservers and interpreters of the law.

During this time, the Israelites also came into contact with the Samaritans. Descendants of Israelites who had been left behind during the Babylonian exile, the Samaritans had intermarried with Babylonians, Syrians, and others. Their worship was syncretistic, incorporating elements of pagan religions with worship of Yahweh, the God of Israel. While the Jews rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem, the Samaritans built a rival temple in the north.

■ **The Hellenistic Period (330–165 B.C.).** With the fall of Persia to Alexander the Great, the Greek Empire became the largest the world had ever seen, extending even into western India. When Alexander the Great died young amidst suspicious circumstances, his empire continued under the rule of his generals, who split it into four sections. Ptolemy Soter claimed both Egypt and Israel.

Politically, little changed for the Jews under Greek and Ptolemaic rule. Culturally, however, they became more and

more influenced by Greek (Hellenistic) civilization. The Ptolemaic dynasty promoted Greek thought and language by all possible means in order to preserve and strengthen their empire culturally. Thousands of Jews were forcibly resettled in Alexandria, Egypt. Although Jews both at home and abroad resisted adapting to Greek religion, they couldn't escape all aspects of Hellenistic influence. They soon began to speak Greek, the trade language of the empire. More significantly, a group of Jewish scholars during this time began to translate the Old Testament from its original Hebrew into Greek. Called the Septuagint, this Greek translation came to be widely used by Jews everywhere.

In 198 B.C., the Seleucid section of the empire overthrew the Ptolemies in Judea. For the first time, Israel came under the rule of a leader who tried to stamp out Judaism completely. Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the Temple, forbade sacrifices to Yahweh, outlawed circumcision, forced Jews to eat pork, and canceled Sabbaths and feast days. Some Jews attempted to conciliate Antiochus and cooperate with his demands; others resisted. These two groups were known as the Hellenists and the Hasidim. The Hellenists embraced and promoted Greek culture. The Hasidim (meaning, "pious ones") closely practiced Jewish law and were the forerunners of the Pharisees. Another group loyal to the high priest also emerged, the precursors of the Sadducees.

The conflict in Israel finally reached a boiling point when an elderly priest named Mattathias refused to offer a required pagan sacrifice. Mattathias killed a Seleucid officer and a reprobate Jew, fled to the hills, and called faithful Jews everywhere to join him in rebellion. During the ensuing guerrilla war, Mattathias's son, Judas Maccabeus, eventually overcame the Seleucids and achieved independence for Israel.

■ **The Hasmonean Period (165–63 B.C.).** Independence proved to be both short-lived and disastrous. As the political dynasty of the Maccabees, also called the Hasmoneans, assumed both the throne and the office of high priest, the nation became beset by infighting. The Sadducees supported Hasmonean rulers as both kings and priests, whereas the Pharisees insisted that a true king could only be a descendant of David and a priest could only be a descendant of Aaron. Other groups became separatists and fled to the wilderness to form independent communities, like the one at Qumran (where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found).

■ **The Roman Period (63 B.C.–A.D. 135).** The various Israelite factions turned to mercenaries and outside nations for support. By the time the growing Roman Empire turned its attention toward Israel, the nation could offer little resistance. In 63 B.C., Pompey sacked Jerusalem. Soon the Jews were once again under the command of a foreign ruler, in this case an Idumean named Antipater who had been installed by Rome. Antipater's son, Herod the Great, followed him as king of the Jews, and it was under his rule that Jesus was born—ushering in a new era in biblical history.



Tomb of Mattathias ben Johanan, Israel



New Testament



Jesus Christ

JESUS WAS BORN into a world that had changed drastically from the time his people, the people of Israel, had returned from exile some five hundred years earlier. Politics, culture, language, and the religious practices in Israel had all undergone great shifts. The time was ripe for God to send his Son into the world to be the Messiah, Savior, and King. But he wouldn't come in the way that everyone expected.

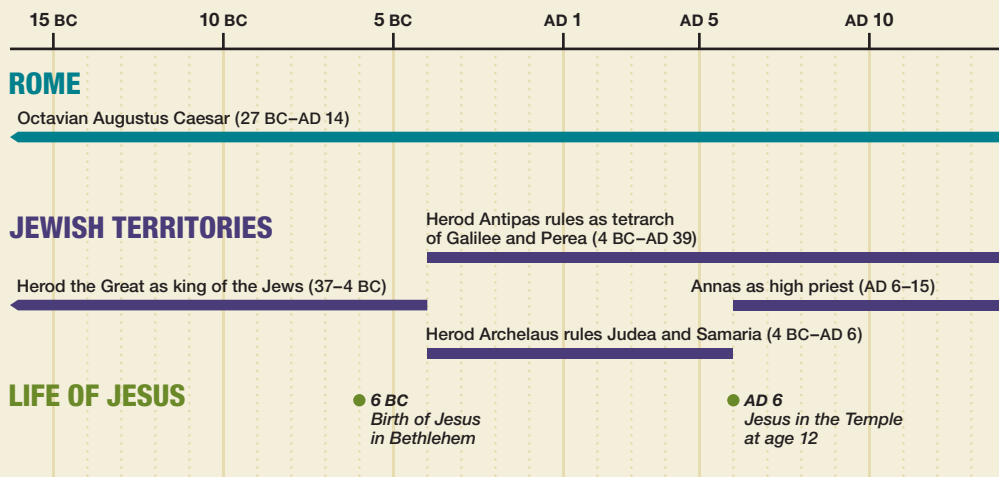
Israel had been waiting for their Messiah, and there were many expectations about what he would do for them and how it would look. He was supposed to be a mighty leader who would reestablish Israel's hold on the land God had given to their ancestor Abraham, expelling the Romans and recalling the glory of the age of David and Solomon. The Messiah was expected to be the climax of Israel's story, the ultimate fulfillment of all God's

promises to his people. Nobody expected the Messiah to come as the baby of a humble peasant girl from a small, unimportant town in Galilee. Nobody expected him to gather a small group of disciples and walk around the country telling stories and challenging the religious authorities.

But Jesus is the climax of God's story! He is the ultimate fulfillment of all God's promises to his people! The four Gospels tell the story of how



TIMELINE



BOOKS

- MATTHEW
- MARK
- LUKE
- JOHN
- ACTS

DATES

FROM:

6 BC

TO:

AD 30

THEMES

- Incarnation
- Jesus' Teaching
- Jesus' Miracles
- Resurrection

this man from the margins of Israel's society displayed God's power through mighty miracles and through teaching with authority. They tell the story of how this unlikely Messiah gave the world far more than any military or political or religious leader ever could have. They tell the story of God with us, the eternal Son of God made flesh to live among his people and offer them salvation

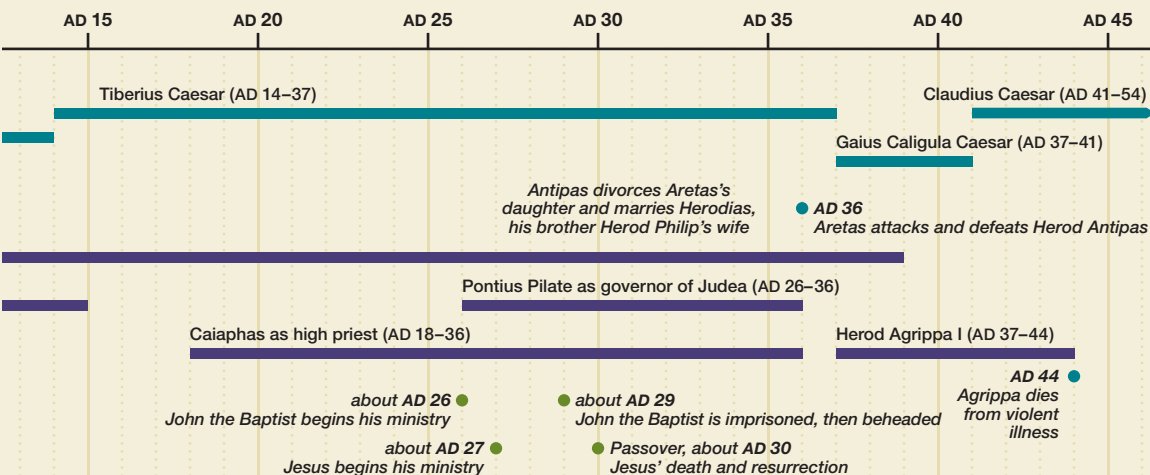
and eternal life—far more than the meager earthly kingdom they were hoping for.

In order to understand the story of Jesus the Messiah, we need to get the lay of the land. Who were the key people and social structures in Israel at this time? Where and with whom did Jesus spend his time? Who were the people who flocked to see him? Who were the ones threatened by his popularity?

PEOPLE & CULTURE

■ **Greek Influence.** A few centuries earlier, the Greek Empire had conquered most of the known world, and along with their rule they brought their culture and language to the Jewish people. Jesus was born into a world that was still heavily influenced by Greek thought, and virtually everyone would have known the Greek language in addition to their local language (in Jesus' case, likely Aramaic).

■ **Roman Rule.** The Roman Empire was in control of the entire world of the Gospels, and had been for nearly a century. There were several levels of Roman government, as can be seen in the Herod family, Pontius



Pilate, and the Roman soldiers who make appearances throughout the Gospels. Rome collected taxes, enforced peace (sometimes with brutal violence), and allowed many religious freedoms that were not always permitted under Greek rule.

■ **Jewish Groups.** There were several prominent Jewish groups during this period in history. The Pharisees and Sadducees bridged political and religious leadership, the teachers of religious law and priests were primarily responsible for the religious life of the people, and other groups such as the Zealots and the Essenes were radicals—though in very different ways. Zealots wanted to take political power by force, while Essenes separated themselves from the world in an effort to live pure lives marked by ritual holiness. Ordinary Jewish people were able to worship regularly in local synagogues, led by the mainstream religious leaders in their community. They would journey to Jerusalem

only to worship in the Temple for special life events and religious festivals.

■ **John the Baptist.** John didn't really fit into any of the major Jewish groups of his day. He was a herald of the coming Kingdom of God, calling everyone to repentance and preparing the way for Jesus and his ministry. Many people traveled into the wilderness to hear his message and be baptized, including a number of people who would eventually follow Jesus.

■ **Jesus and the Disciples.** Jesus was born into an ordinary family and grew up in an ordinary town, but his life was far from ordinary. He chose a very diverse group of disciples—some followers of John the Baptist, at least one Zealot, a man who collected taxes for Rome, and a handful of uneducated fishermen. Jesus taught these disciples what it meant to follow him and prepared them to be his ambassadors on earth after his resurrection and ascension.

“Life of Jesus” versus “Gospels”

We need to remember that the story of Jesus' life is given to us in four canonical Gospels—literally accounts of the “Good News.” As important as it is to understand the events of Jesus' life and see them in chronological order, ultimately God gave us the Gospels so that we would be able to hear his Good News with clarity. Rearranging the Gospels into chronological order can sometimes highlight places where individual Gospel writers have placed a particular story out of chronological order to highlight

a theological truth about Jesus and his purposes. So pay attention to parts that seem to be located differently in one Gospel compared to another. It may indicate something about the different Gospel writers' goals.

You also might notice some differences in the way a particular story from Jesus' life is told, especially when the accounts from different Gospels are placed together as they are in the *Chronological Life Application Study Bible*. Several things should be kept in mind as you notice the differences: (1) Different people often notice different details when witnessing the same event; that doesn't mean either account is wrong. (2) Jesus' ministry covered over 1,000 days, and he probably repeated his teachings at multiple times in various locations. It is possible that what has been identified as a parallel between two Gospels is actually a case where two Gospels actually record only similar events or teachings. (3) The order of events (and the identification of their parallels) reflects the decisions of our editors and is not inspired, unlike the text of the Gospels. Feel free to question our decisions and compare them with other options and possibilities.





BOOKS IN THIS SECTION



MATTHEW

AUTHOR: Matthew (Levi), a former tax collector who became one of Jesus' 12 disciples

AUDIENCE: Jews

PURPOSE: To prove that Jesus is the Messiah, the eternal King

DATE WRITTEN: Approximately A.D. 60–65

SPECIAL FEATURES: Matthew is filled with messianic language ("Son of David" is used throughout) and Old Testament references (53 quotes and 76 other references). This Gospel's purpose was to present the clear evidence that Jesus is the predicted Messiah, the Savior.



LUKE

AUTHOR: Luke, a doctor (Col 4:14), a Greek (Gentile) Christian. He is the only known Gentile (non-Jewish) author in the New Testament. Luke was a close friend and companion of Paul. He also wrote Acts, and the two books go together.

AUDIENCE: Theophilus and other Gentiles

PURPOSE: To present an accurate account of the life of Christ, and to present Christ as the perfect human and Savior

DATE WRITTEN: About A.D. 60

SPECIAL FEATURES: This is the most comprehensive of the Gospels. The general vocabulary and writing style show that the author was educated. He makes frequent references to illnesses and diagnoses. Luke stresses Jesus' relationship with people; emphasizes prayer, miracles, and angels; records inspired hymns of praise; gives a prominent place to women.



MARK

AUTHOR: John Mark. He was not one of the 12 disciples, but he accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:13) and is traditionally associated with Peter.

AUDIENCE: Christians in Rome, where the Gospel was written

PURPOSE: To present the person, work, and teachings of Jesus

DATE WRITTEN: Approximately A.D. 55–60

SPECIAL FEATURES: Mark was probably the first Gospel written. The other Gospels quote all but 31 verses of Mark. Mark records more miracles than any other Gospel.



JOHN

AUTHOR: John the apostle, son of Zebedee, brother of James, called a "Son of Thunder"

AUDIENCE: New Christians and searching non-Christians

PURPOSE: To prove conclusively that Jesus is the Son of God and that all who believe in him will have eternal life

DATE WRITTEN: Probably A.D. 85–90

SPECIAL FEATURES: Of the eight miracles recorded, six are unique (among the Gospels) to John, as is the "Upper Room Discourse" (John 14–17). Over 90 percent of John is unique to his Gospel—John does not contain a genealogy or any record of Jesus' birth, childhood, temptation, transfiguration, appointment of the disciples, nor any account of Jesus' parables, ascension, or great commission.

For book information on **ACTS**, see the introduction to The Church, p. 1505.

MEGATHEMES

■ **Jesus Christ: King, Messiah, Servant, Savior, Son of God.** In each of the four Gospels, Jesus Christ is the central focus, but each Gospel highlights a slightly different aspect of his significance. Matthew presents Jesus as the King of kings and the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. Mark presents Jesus as the Servant of God. Luke presents Jesus as the Savior of the entire world, and John presents Jesus as the unique Son of God who reveals the Father to us. All of these portraits of Jesus are important (and true), and the differences between the Gospel accounts can be attributed to the different elements of Jesus' character and ministry that they are highlighting.

■ **Jesus' Teachings.** In addition to learning about who Jesus is, the four Gospels give us direct access to what Jesus taught throughout his ministry. Jesus spoke often about the Kingdom of God (or Kingdom of Heaven), and how it differs from the kingdom of this world. He often taught using parables, giving profound truths through ordinary stories. He taught his disciples about the Holy Spirit, who would come to indwell and empower them after his death and resurrection. His teachings form an important foundation for the things his followers would write in the rest of the New Testament. The teachings of Jesus are alternatively challenging and comforting; make sure that you allow all of what he taught to penetrate your heart and life.

■ **Jesus' Miracles.** Jesus demonstrated power over sickness, nature, demons, and even death many times

in his ministry. But this wasn't just a way to show everyone how powerful he was, or a flashy way to gain more followers—Jesus' miracles show his profound love and compassion for people. Certainly his miracles are proof that he is the Son of God, but they also prove that he sees the needs of his people and has both the power and the will to help them. This is no less true today—become a person of prayer and watch God transform you and the world around you through his power.

■ **Spreading the Gospel.** Jesus went all over the land of Israel spreading the message of the Kingdom of God, but even that wasn't enough. Several times, Jesus went beyond the borders of his nation to share the Good News with Gentiles and even the hated Samaritans. And his message was given to all sorts of people—blind beggars, wealthy merchants, social outcasts, powerful religious leaders, fishermen, Roman soldiers, widows, children, immoral people, and scrupulous Pharisees. The Good News is for all people, and eternal life is offered to all who will believe in the Son and the Father who sent him. What part can you play in spreading this Good News to all people?

■ **Resurrection.** The story of Jesus' life doesn't end with his death—in many ways it only begins there. His resurrection shouts loudly about the power of God and the Good News that our sins have been forgiven, and death has been defeated. Allow the truth of the Resurrection to penetrate your life, and see what God will do in and through you as you follow Jesus.

MAP ►

1 Bethlehem Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a village just a few miles south of Jerusalem in Judea (Luke 2:1-38; Matt 2:1-22).

2 Nazareth Jesus grew up in Nazareth (Matt 2:23; Luke 2:39-40), a small village in the southern part of Galilee, 65 miles north of Jerusalem. When he began his ministry, he preached here but was rejected in his hometown (Matt 13:53-58; Mark 6:1-6; Luke 4:16-30).

3 Jordan River Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River (Matt 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 4:1-13).

4 Cana Jesus' first recorded miracle was at a wedding in this Galilean village (John 2:1-12).

5 Jerusalem Jesus traveled to Jerusalem right at the beginning of his ministry (John 2:13-4:3), and he concluded his ministry here as well. Jerusalem was the center of religious and political power in the region, as it was home to the Jewish Temple and the Roman governor. Many of the most important events in Jesus' life happened in and around Jerusalem, including his crucifixion and resurrection. His last week was all spent in this area,

with some time spent in Bethany, Bethphage, and the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives.

6 Samaria Instead of shunning this region, as most Jews at this time did, Jesus chose to travel through Samaria and minister to the people he met there (John 4:4-42). Many people in Sychar believed in him as a result of his ministry. The people of Samaria were half Jewish, the result of intentional mixing of peoples when they were exiled centuries earlier, and their worship practices were different from the Jews even though they were also based on the Pentateuch (Genesis—Deuteronomy).

7 Galilee Jesus spent most of his time during his ministry traveling throughout the region of Galilee. He spent a lot of time preaching in towns around the Sea of Galilee, including Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Korazin. He performed many miracles in Galilee, including the calming of the storm (Matt 8:23-27; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16) and raising a widow's son from the dead (Luke 7:11-17). He also delivered the Sermon on the Mount in Galilee (Matt 5:1-7:29). While there were synagogues in every town and a large Jewish population, there were

also many Gentiles and Roman military personnel in this region, which was at Israel's northern border.

8 Beyond Israel Jesus didn't limit his ministry to the borders of Israel. He ventured out into Phoenicia, visiting Tyre (Matt 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30) and Sidon (Matt

15:29-31; Mark 8:1-10). He also went to the Decapolis region west of Galilee, where he fed 4,000 people (Matt 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-10).



250 EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST

A Harmony of the Gospels

All four books in the Bible that tell the story of Jesus Christ—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—stand alone, emphasizing a unique aspect of Jesus’ life. When these are blended into one complete account, as we have done in the *Chronological Life Application Study Bible*, we can see how these different accounts relate to one another and notice similarities and differences between how the four Gospel writers have told Jesus’ story.

The *Chronological Life Application Study Bible* combines the four Gospels into a single chronological account of Christ’s life on earth. It includes every chapter and verse of each Gospel, leaving nothing out.

The Gospel accounts are divided into 250 events. The title of each event is identical to the title found in the Bible text. You can use this chart to quickly see which accounts appear in all four Gospels, and which might only be told through only one of the Gospels. Look for patterns, such as the kind of stories John tells that other Gospels don’t, and you can gain fresh insight into the special emphasis of the individual Gospels—and learn more about Jesus in the process.

You can also get a feel for which stories take up a lot of space, and which are shorter, by glancing at the dots next to the references. These dots can give you a quick handle on when one Gospel is spending more space on a particular story than others. There are three sizes of dots, representing sections that are one to five verses, those between six and twelve verses, and the largest dots for sections that cover thirteen or more verses.

This harmony will help you to get a quick, at-a-glance overview of the story of Jesus’ life. It will help you to better visualize the travels of Jesus, study the four Gospels comparatively, and appreciate the unity of their message.

	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
1. The nature of a Gospel		● 1:1a	● 1:1-4	
2. God became a human				● 1:1-18
3. An angel promises the birth of John to Zechariah			● 1:5-25	
4. An angel promises the Birth of Jesus to Mary			● 1:26-38	
5. Mary visits Elizabeth			● 1:39-45	
6. The Magnificat: Mary's Song of Praise			● 1:46-56	
7. John the Baptist is born			● 1:57-66	
8. Zechariah's prophecy			● 1:67-80	
9. An angel appears to Joseph	● 1:18-25			
10. The record of Jesus' ancestors	● 1:1-17		● 3:23-38	
11. Jesus is born in Bethlehem			● 2:1-7	
12. Shepherds visit Jesus			● 2:8-20	
13. Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the Temple			● 2:21-24	
14. The prophecy of Simeon			● 2:25-35	
15. The prophecy of Anna			● 2:36-38	

● 1-5 verses

● 6-12 verses

● 13+ verses

	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
16. Visitors arrive from Eastern lands	● 2:1-12			
17. The escape to Egypt	● 2:13-18			
18. The Return from Egypt	● 2:19-22			
19. Jesus' Childhood in Nazareth	● 2:23		● 2:39-40	
20. Jesus speaks with the religious teachers			● 2:41-52	
21. John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus	● 3:1-12	● 1:1b-8	● 3:1-18	● 1:19-28
22. The baptism of Jesus	● 3:13-17	● 1:9-11	● 3:21-22	
23. Satan tempts Jesus in the wilderness	● 4:1-11	● 1:12-13	● 4:1-13	
24. John the Baptist proclaims Jesus as the Messiah				● 1:29-34
25. The first disciples follow Jesus				● 1:35-51
26. Jesus turns water into wine				● 2:1-12

B. MESSAGE AND MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Begins His Ministry in Jerusalem

27. Jesus clears the Temple				● 2:13-22
28. Nicodemus visits Jesus at night				● 2:23–3:21
29. John the Baptist tells more about Jesus				● 3:22-36
30. Herod puts John in prison			● 3:19-20	
31. Jesus leaves Judea	● 4:12	● 1:14		● 4:1-3

Jesus Ministers in Samaria

32. Jesus talks to a woman at the well				● 4:4-26
33. Jesus tells about the spiritual harvest				● 4:27-38
34. Many Samaritans believe in Jesus				● 4:39-42

Jesus Ministers in Galilee

35. Jesus preaches in Galilee	● 4:13-17	● 1:15	● 4:14-15	● 4:43-45
36. Jesus heals a government official's son				● 4:46-54
37. Four fishermen follow Jesus	● 4:18-22	● 1:16-20	● 5:1-11	
38. Jesus teaches with authority		● 1:21-28	● 4:31-37	
39. Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law and many others	● 8:14-17	● 1:29-34	● 4:38-41	
40. Jesus preaches throughout Galilee	● 4:23-25	● 1:35-39	● 4:42-44	
41. Jesus heals a man with leprosy	● 8:1-4	● 1:40-45	● 5:12-16	
42. Jesus heals a paralyzed man	● 9:1-8	● 2:1-12	● 5:17-26	

	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
43. Jesus eats with sinners at Matthew's house	● 9:9-13	● 2:13-17	● 5:27-32	
44. Religious leaders ask Jesus about fasting	● 9:14-17	● 2:18-22	● 5:33-39	
45. Jesus heals a lame man by a pool				● 5:1-15
46. Jesus claims to be the Son of God				● 5:16-30
47. Jesus supports his claim				● 5:31-47
48. The disciples pick wheat on the Sabbath	● 12:1-8	● 2:23-28	● 6:1-5	
49. Jesus heals a man's hand on the Sabbath	● 12:9-14	● 3:1-6	● 6:6-11	
50. Large crowds follow Jesus	● 12:15-21	● 3:7-12	● 6:17-19	
51. Jesus chooses the twelve disciples		● 3:13-19	● 6:12-16	
52. Jesus gives the Beatitudes	● 5:1-12		● 6:20-26	
53. Jesus teaches about salt and light	● 5:13-16			
54. Jesus teaches about the law	● 5:17-20			
55. Jesus teaches about anger	● 5:21-26			
56. Jesus teaches about lust	● 5:27-30			
57. Jesus teaches about divorce	● 5:31-32			
58. Jesus teaches about vows	● 5:33-37			
59. Jesus teaches about revenge	● 5:38-42			
60. Jesus teaches about loving enemies	● 5:43-48		● 6:27-36	
61. Jesus teaches about giving to the needy	● 6:1-4			
62. Jesus teaches about prayer	● 6:5-15			
63. Jesus teaches about fasting	● 6:16-18			
64. Jesus teaches about money	● 6:19-24			
65. Jesus teaches about worry	● 6:25-34			
66. Jesus teaches about judging others	● 7:1-6		● 6:37-42	
67. Jesus teaches about asking, seeking, knocking	● 7:7-11			
68. The golden rule	● 7:12			
69. Jesus teaches about the way to heaven	● 7:13-14			
70. Jesus teaches about fruit of people's lives	● 7:15-29		● 6:43-49	
71. A Roman officer demonstrates faith	● 8:5-13		● 7:1-10	
72. Jesus raises a widow's son from the dead			● 7:11-17	
73. Jesus eases John's doubt	● 11:1-19		● 7:18-35	

● 1-5 verses

● 6-12 verses

● 13+ verses

	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
74. Jesus promises rest for the soul	● 11:20-30			
75. A sinful woman anoints Jesus			● 7:36-50	
76. Women accompany Jesus and the disciples			● 8:1-3	
77. Religious leaders accuse Jesus of getting his power from Satan	● 12:22-37	● 3:20-30	● 11:14-23	
78. Religious leaders ask Jesus for a miraculous sign	● 12:38-45		● 11:24-32	
79. Jesus describes his true family	● 12:46-50	● 3:31-35	● 8:19-21	
80. The parable of the four soils	● 13:1-23	● 4:1-20	● 8:4-15	
81. Parable of the lamp		● 4:21-25	● 8:16-18	
82. Jesus tells the parable of the growing seed		● 4:26-29		
83. Jesus tells the parable of the weeds	● 13:24-30			
84. Jesus tells the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast	● 13:31-33	● 4:30-32	● 13:18-21	
85. Why Jesus taught using parables	● 13:34-35	● 4:33-34		
86. Jesus explains the parable of the weeds	● 13:36-43			
87. Jesus tells the parable of hidden treasure	● 13:44			
88. Jesus tells the parable of the pearl merchant	● 13:45-46			
89. Jesus tells the parable of the fishing net	● 13:47-52			
90. Jesus calms a storm	● 8:23-27	● 4:35-41	● 8:22-25	
91. Jesus sends demons into a herd of pigs	● 8:28-34	● 5:1-20	● 8:26-39	
92. Jesus heals a bleeding woman and restores a girl to life	● 9:18-26	● 5:21-43	● 8:40-56	
93. Jesus heals the blind and mute	● 9:27-34			
94. Jesus is rejected in Nazareth	● 13:53-58	● 6:1-6a	● 4:16-30	
95. Jesus urges the disciples to pray for workers	● 9:35-38			
96. Jesus sends out the twelve disciples	● 10:1-15	● 6:6b-13	● 9:1-6	
97. Jesus prepares the disciples for persecution	● 10:16-42			
98. Herod kills John the Baptist	● 14:3-12	● 6:17-29		
99. Herod mistakes Jesus for John the Baptist back from the dead	● 14:1-2	● 6:14-16	● 9:7-9	
100. Jesus feeds five thousand	● 14:13-21	● 6:30-44	● 9:10-17	● 6:1-15
101. Jesus walks on water	● 14:22-33	● 6:45-52		● 6:16-21
102. Jesus heals all who touch him	● 14:34-36	● 6:53-56		
103. Jesus is the true bread from heaven				● 6:22-40
104. The people disagree that Jesus is from heaven				● 6:41-59

	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
105. Many disciples desert Jesus				● 6:60-71
106. Jesus teaches about inner purity	● 15:1-20	● 7:1-23		
<i>Jesus' Ministry Beyond Galilee</i>				
107. Jesus sends a demon out of a girl	● 15:21-28	● 7:24-30		
108. Jesus heals many people	● 15:29-31	● 7:31-37		
109. Jesus feeds four thousand	● 15:32-39	● 8:1-10		
<i>Jesus Resumes His Ministry in Galilee</i>				
110. Leaders demand a miraculous sign	● 16:1-4	● 8:11-13		
111. Jesus warns against wrong teaching	● 16:5-12	● 8:14-21		
112. Jesus restores sight to a blind man		● 8:22-26		
113. Peter says Jesus is the Messiah	● 16:13-20	● 8:27-30	● 9:18-21	
114. Jesus predicts his death for the first time	● 16:21-28	● 8:31-9:1	● 9:22-27	
115. Jesus is transfigured on the mountain	● 17:1-13	● 9:2-13	● 9:28-36	
116. Jesus heals a demon-possessed boy	● 17:14-20	● 9:14-29	● 9:37-43a	
117. Jesus predicts his death the second time	● 17:22-23	● 9:30-32	● 9:43b-45	
118. Peter finds the coin in the fish's mouth	● 17:24-27			
119. The disciples argue about who would be the greatest	● 18:1-5	● 9:33-37	● 9:46-48	
120. The disciples forbid another to use Jesus' name		● 9:38-41	● 9:49-50	
121. Warning against causing sin	● 18:6-10	● 9:42-50		
122. Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep	● 18:12-14			
123. Jesus teaches how to treat a believer who sins	● 18:15-20			
124. Jesus tells the parable of the unforgiving debtor	● 18:21-35			
125. Jesus' brothers ridicule him				● 7:1-9
<i>Jesus Turns Toward Jerusalem</i>				
126. Jesus travels to Judea	● 19:1-2	● 10:1	● 9:51	
127. Jesus passes through Samaria			● 9:52-56	
128. Jesus teaches about the cost of following him	● 8:18-22		● 9:57-62	
129. Jesus teaches openly at the Temple				● 7:10-31
130. Religious leaders attempt to arrest Jesus				● 7:32-53
131. Jesus forgives an adulterous woman				● 8:1-11
132. Jesus is the light of the world				● 8:12-20
● 1-5 verses ● 6-12 verses ● 13+ verses				

	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
133. Jesus warns of coming judgment				● 8:21-30
134. Jesus speaks about God's true children				● 8:31-47
135. Jesus states he is eternal				● 8:48-59
136. Jesus sends out seventy-two messengers			● 10:1-16	
137. The seventy-two messengers return			● 10:17-24	
138. Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan			● 10:25-37	
139. Jesus visits Martha and Mary			● 10:38-42	
140. Jesus teaches his disciples about prayer			● 11:1-13	
141. Jesus teaches about the light within			● 11:33-36	
142. Jesus criticizes the religious leaders			● 11:37-54	
143. Jesus speaks against hypocrisy			● 12:1-12	
144. Jesus tells the parable of the rich fool			● 12:13-21	
145. Jesus warns about worry			● 12:22-34	
146. Jesus warns about preparing for his coming			● 12:35-48	
147. Jesus warns about coming division			● 12:49-53	
148. Jesus warns about the future crisis			● 12:54-59	
149. Jesus calls the people to repent			● 13:1-9	
150. Jesus heals the crippled woman			● 13:10-17	
151. Jesus heals the man who was born blind				● 9:1-12
152. Religious leaders question the blind man				● 9:13-34
153. Jesus teaches about spiritual blindness				● 9:35-41
154. Jesus is the good shepherd				● 10:1-21
155. Religious leaders surround Jesus at the Temple				● 10:22-42
156. Jesus teaches about entering the Kingdom			● 13:22-30	
157. Jesus grieves over Jerusalem	● 23:37-39		● 13:31-35	
158. Jesus heals a man with swollen limbs			● 14:1-6	
159. Jesus teaches about humility			● 14:7-14	
160. Jesus tells the parable of the great feast			● 14:15-24	
161. Jesus teaches about the cost of being a disciple			● 14:25-35	
162. Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep			● 15:1-7	
163. Jesus tells the parable of the lost coin			● 15:8-10	

	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
164. Jesus tells the parable of the lost son			● 15:11-32	
165. Jesus tells the parable of the shrewd manager			● 16:1-18	
166. Jesus tells about the rich man and the beggar			● 16:19-31	
167. Jesus tells about forgiveness and faith			● 17:1-10	
168. Lazarus becomes sick and dies				● 11:1-16
169. Jesus comforts Mary and Martha				● 11:17-37
170. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead				● 11:38-44
171. Religious leaders plot to kill Jesus				● 11:45-57
172. Jesus heals ten men with leprosy			● 17:11-19	
173. Jesus teaches about the coming of the Kingdom of God			● 17:20-37	
174. Jesus tells the parable of the persistent widow			● 18:1-8	
175. Jesus tells the parable of two men who prayed			● 18:9-14	
176. Jesus teaches about marriage and divorce	● 19:3-12	● 10:2-12		
177. Jesus blesses the children	● 19:13-15	● 10:13-16	● 18:15-17	
178. Jesus speaks to the rich young man	● 19:16-30	● 10:17-31	● 18:18-30	
179. Jesus tells the parable of the vineyard workers	● 20:1-16			
180. Jesus predicts his death the third time	● 20:17-19	● 10:32-34	● 18:31-34	
181. Jesus teaches about serving others	● 20:20-28	● 10:35-45		
182. Jesus heals two blind beggars	● 20:29-34	● 10:46-52	● 18:35-43	
183. Jesus brings salvation to Zacchaeus's home			● 19:1-10	
184. Jesus tells the parable of the king's ten servants			● 19:11-27	
185. A woman anoints Jesus with perfume	● 26:6-13	● 14:3-9		● 12:1-11
Jesus' Ministry in Jerusalem				
186. Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey	● 21:1-11	● 11:1-11	● 19:28-40	● 12:12-19
187. Jesus grieves over Jerusalem again			● 19:41-44	
188. Jesus clears the Temple again	● 21:12-17	● 11:15-19	● 19:45-48	
189. Jesus explains why he must die				● 12:20-36
190. Most of the people do not believe in Jesus				● 12:37-43
191. Jesus summarizes his message				● 12:44-50
192. Jesus curses a fig tree	● 21:18-22	● 11:12-14, 20-25		
193. Religious leaders challenge Jesus' authority	● 21:23-27	● 11:27-33	● 20:1-8	

● 1-5 verses

● 6-12 verses

● 13+ verses

	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
194. Jesus tells the parable of the two sons	● 21:28-32			
195. Jesus tells the parable of the evil farmers	● 21:33-46	● 12:1-12	● 20:9-19	
196. Jesus tells the parable of the wedding dinner	● 22:1-14			
197. Religious leaders question Jesus about paying taxes	● 22:15-22	● 12:13-17	● 20:20-26	
198. Religious leaders question Jesus about the Resurrection	● 22:23-33	● 12:18-27	● 20:27-40	
199. Religious leaders question Jesus about the greatest commandment	● 22:34-40	● 12:28-34		
200. Religious leaders cannot answer Jesus' question	● 22:41-46	● 12:35-37	● 20:41-44	
201. Jesus warns against the religious leaders	● 23:1-12	● 12:38-40	● 20:45-47	
202. Jesus condemns the religious leaders	● 23:13-36			
203. A poor widow gives all she has		● 12:41-44	● 21:1-4	
204. Jesus teaches about being watchful for his return	● 24:1-51	● 13:1-37	● 21:5-38	
205. Jesus tells the parable of the ten bridesmaids	● 25:1-13			
206. Jesus tells the parable of the loaned money	● 25:14-30			
207. Jesus tells about the final judgment	● 25:31-46			

III. THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS

208. Religious leaders plot to kill Jesus	● 26:1-5	● 14:1-2	● 22:1-2	
209. Judas agrees to betray Jesus	● 26:14-16	● 14:10-11	● 22:3-6	
210. The disciples prepare for the Passover	● 26:17-19	● 14:12-16	● 22:7-13	
211. Jesus washes the disciples' feet				● 13:1-20
212. Jesus and the disciples share the Last Supper	● 26:20-30	● 14:17-26	● 22:14-30	● 13:21-30
213. Jesus predicts Peter's denial	● 26:31-35	● 14:27-31	● 22:31-38	● 13:31-38
214. Jesus is the way to the Father				● 14:1-14
215. Jesus promises the Holy Spirit				● 14:15-31
216. Jesus teaches about the vine and the branches				● 15:1-17
217. Jesus warns about the world's hatred				● 15:18–16:4
218. Jesus teaches about the Holy Spirit				● 16:5-15
219. Jesus teaches about using his name in prayer				● 16:16-33
220. Jesus prays for himself				● 17:1-5
221. Jesus prays for his disciples				● 17:6-19
222. Jesus prays for future believers				● 17:20-26
223. Jesus agonizes in the garden	● 26:36-46	● 14:32-42	● 22:39-46	

	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
224. Jesus is betrayed and arrested	● 26:47-56	● 14:43-52	● 22:47-53	● 18:1-11
225. Annas questions Jesus				● 18:12-24
226. Caiaphas questions Jesus	● 26:57-68	● 14:53-65	● 22:54a, 63-65	
227. Peter denies knowing Jesus	● 26:69-75	● 14:66-72	● 22:54b-62	● 18:25-27
228. The council of religious leaders condemns Jesus	● 27:1-2	● 15:1	● 22:66-71	
229. Judas hangs himself	● 27:3-10			
230. Jesus stands trial before Pilate	● 27:11-14	● 15:2-5	● 23:1-7	● 18:28-37
231. Jesus stands trial before Herod			● 23:8-12	
232. Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified	● 27:15-26	● 15:6-15	● 23:13-25	● 18:38–19:16
233. Roman soldiers mock Jesus	● 27:27-31	● 15:16-20		
234. Jesus is led away to be crucified	● 27:32	● 15:21	● 23:26-31	
235. Jesus is placed on the cross	● 27:33-44	● 15:22-32	● 23:32-43	● 19:17-27
236. Jesus dies on the cross	● 27:45-56	● 15:33-41	● 23:44-49	● 19:28-37
237. Jesus is laid in the tomb	● 27:57-61	● 15:42-47	● 23:50-56	● 19:38-42
238. Guards are posted at the tomb	● 27:62-66			
239. Jesus rises from the dead	● 28:1-8	● 16:1-8	● 24:1-11	● 20:1-2
240. Peter and John run to the tomb			● 24:12	● 20:3-10
241. Jesus appears to the women	● 28:9-10	● 16:9-11		● 20:11-18
242. Religious leaders bribe the guards	● 28:11-15			
243. Jesus appears to two believers traveling on the road		● 16:12-13	● 24:13-35	
244. Jesus appears to his disciples		● 16:14	● 24:36-43	● 20:19-23
245. Jesus appears to Thomas				● 20:24-31
246. Jesus appears to seven disciples				● 21:1-14
247. Jesus challenges Peter				● 21:15-25
248. Jesus gives the great commission	● 28:16-20	● 16:15-18		
249. Jesus appears to the disciples in Jerusalem			● 24:44-49	
250. Jesus ascends into heaven		● 16:19-20	● 24:50-53	

● 1-5 verses

● 6-12 verses

● 13+ verses

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THE PARABLES OF JESUS

I. Teaching Parables

A. About the Kingdom of God

- 1. The Four Soils (Matt 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15)
- 2. The Lamp (Mark 4:21-25; Luke 8:16-18)
- 3. The Growing Seed (Mark 4:26-29)
- 4. The Weeds (Matt 13:24-30)
- 5. The Mustard Seed and the Yeast (Matt 13:31-33; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-21)
- 6. The Hidden Treasure (Matt 13:44)
- 7. The Pearl Merchant (Matt 13:45-46)
- 8. The Fishing Net (Matt 13:47-52)

B. About Service and Obedience

- 1. The Servant's Role (Luke 17:7-10)
- 2. The Vineyard Workers (Matt 20:1-16)
- 3. The King's Ten Servants (Luke 19:11-27)
- 4. The Loaned Money (Matt 25:14-30)

C. About Prayer

- 1. The Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:5-8)
- 2. The Persistent Widow (Luke 18:1-8)

D. About Neighbors

- 1. The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

E. About Humility

- 1. The Wedding Feast (Luke 14:7-11)
- 2. Two Men Who Prayed (Luke 18:9-14)

F. About Wealth

- 1. The Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21)
- 2. The Great Feast (Luke 14:15-24)
- 3. The Shrewd Manager (Luke 16:1-18)

II. Gospel Parables

A. About God's Love

- 1. The Lost Sheep (Matt 18:12-14; Luke 15:1-7)
- 2. The Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10)
- 3. The Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32)

B. About Thankfulness

- 1. The Forgiven Debts (Luke 7:41-43)

III. Parables of Judgment and the Future

A. About Christ's Return

- 1. The Wise and Faithful Servants (Matt 24:45-51; Luke 12:42-48)
- 2. The Traveling Owner of the House (Mark 13:34-37)
- 3. The Ten Bridesmaids (Matt 25:1-13)

B. About God's Values

- 1. The Unforgiving Debtor (Matt 18:21-35)
- 2. The Unproductive Fig Tree (Luke 13:6-9)
- 3. The Two Sons (Matt 21:28-32)
- 4. The Evil Farmers (Matt 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19)
- 5. The Wedding Dinner (Matt 22:1-14)

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COMPARISON OF THE FOUR GOSPELS

All four Gospels present the life and teachings of Jesus. Each book, however, focuses on a unique facet of Jesus and his character. To understand more about the specific characteristics of Jesus, read any one of the four Gospels.

	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
<i>Jesus is . . .</i>	The promised King	The Servant of God	The Son of Man	The Son of God
<i>The original readers were . . .</i>	Jews	Gentiles, Romans	Greeks	Christians throughout the world
<i>Significant themes . . .</i>	Jesus is the Messiah because he fulfilled Old Testament prophecy	Jesus backed up his words with action	Jesus was fully God but also fully human	Belief in Jesus is required for salvation
<i>Character of the writer . . .</i>	Teacher	Storyteller	Historian	Theologian
<i>Greatest emphasis is on . . .</i>	Jesus' sermons and words	Jesus' miracles and actions	Jesus' humanity	The principles of Jesus' teaching

A. The Birth and Preparation of Jesus Christ

Jesus is the eternal Son of God, and yet he chose to be born as a human. The nation of Israel had been waiting for centuries for their Messiah, but when he arrived as an infant, very few recognized him. The King of Israel, the Servant Savior, the God of the universe was born as a humble infant, grew up in the small village of Nazareth, and began his ministry by submitting to the baptism of John.

The Nature of a Gospel **PARALLEL**

MARK 1:1a

This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.*

LUKE 1:1-4

Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us.² They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples.*³ Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write a careful account for you, most honorable Theophilus,

Mk 1:1 Some manuscripts do not include *the Son of God*. **Lk 1:2** Greek from those who from the beginning were servants of the word.

⁴so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught.

God Became a Human

JOHN 1:1-18

¹ In the beginning the Word already existed.

The Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

² He existed in the beginning with God.

³ God created everything through him,
and nothing was created except
through him.

Mark 1:1 When you experience the excitement of a big event, you naturally want to tell someone. Telling the story can bring back that original thrill as you relive the experience. Reading Mark's first words, you can sense his excitement. Picture yourself in the crowd as Jesus heals and teaches. Imagine yourself as one of the disciples. Respond to his words of love and encouragement. And remember that Jesus came for us who live today as well as for those who lived 2,000 years ago.

Mark 1:1 Mark was not one of the 12 disciples of Jesus, but he probably knew Jesus personally. Mark wrote his Gospel in the form of a fast-paced story, like a popular novel. The book portrays Jesus as a man who backed up his words with action that constantly proved who he is—the Son of God. Because Mark wrote his Gospel for Christians in Rome, where many gods were worshiped, he wanted his readers to know that Jesus is the one true Son of God.

Mark gave the “punch line” of his Gospel in the very first verse, but both Jesus' enemies and his disciples would not get it until Jesus' resurrection. For us who read Mark today, the message is clear that we must not ignore or reject Jesus Christ.

Luke 1:1-2 Luke tells Jesus' story from the unique perspective of a Gentile, a physician, and the first historian of the early church. Though not an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry, Luke nevertheless was concerned that eyewitness accounts be preserved accurately and that the foundations of Christian belief be transmitted intact to the next generation. Many of Jesus' parables are found in Luke. In addition, more than any other Gospel, it gives specific instances of Jesus' concern for women.

Luke 1:1-4 There was a lot of interest in Jesus, and many people had written firsthand accounts about him. Luke used these accounts and all other available resources

as material for an accurate and complete account of Jesus' life, teachings, and ministry. Because truth was important to Luke, he relied heavily on eyewitness accounts. Christianity doesn't say, “Close your eyes and believe,” but rather, “Check it out for yourself.” The Bible encourages you to investigate its claims thoroughly (John 1:46; 21:24; Acts 17:11) because your conclusion about Jesus is a life-and-death matter.

Luke 1:1-4 The book of Acts, also written by Luke, is likewise addressed to Theophilus. Theophilus means “one who loves God,” so this preface may be a general dedication to all Christian readers. Or, Theophilus may have been Luke's patron, who helped to finance the book's writing. More likely, Theophilus was a Roman acquaintance of Luke's with a strong interest in the new Christian religion.

Luke 1:3-4 As a medical doctor, Luke knew the importance of being thorough. He used his skills in observation and analysis to thoroughly investigate the stories about Jesus. You can read Luke's account of Jesus' life with confidence that it was written by a clear thinker and a thoughtful researcher. Because the Good News is founded on historical truth, our spiritual growth must involve careful, disciplined, and thorough investigation of God's Word so that we can understand how God has acted in history. If this kind of study is not part of your life, find a pastor, teacher, or even a book to help you get started and to guide you in this important part of Christian growth.

John 1:1 What Jesus taught and what he did are tied inseparably to who he is. John shows Jesus as fully human and fully God. Although Jesus took upon himself full humanity and lived as a man, he never ceased to be the eternal God who has always existed, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, and the source of eternal life. This is the truth about Jesus, and the foundation of all truth. If we cannot or do not believe this basic truth, we

will not have enough faith to trust our eternal destiny to him. That is why John wrote this Gospel—to build faith and confidence in Jesus Christ so that we may believe that he truly was and is the Son of God (John 20:30-31).

John 1:1 John wrote to believers everywhere, both Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles). As one of Jesus' 12 disciples, John writes with credibility and the details of an eyewitness. His book is not a biography (like the book of Luke); it is a thematic presentation of Jesus' life. Many in John's original audience had a Greek background. Greek culture encouraged worship of many mythological gods, whose supernatural characteristics were as important to Greeks as genealogies were to Jews. John shows that Jesus is not only different from but superior to these gods of mythology.

John 1:1ff What does John mean by “the Word”? The Word was a term used by theologians and philosophers, both Jews and Greeks, in many different ways. In Hebrew Scripture, the Word was an agent of creation (Ps 33:6), the source of God's message to his people through the prophets (Hos 4:1), and God's law, his standard of holiness (Ps 119:11). In Greek philosophy, the Word was the principle of reason that governed the world, or the thought still in the mind, while in Hebrew thought, the Word was another expression for God. John's description shows clearly that he is speaking of Jesus (see especially John 1:14)—a human being he knew and loved, but at the same time the Creator of the universe, the ultimate revelation of God, the living picture of God's holiness, the one who “holds all creation together” (Col 1:17). To Jewish readers, to say this man Jesus “was God” was blasphemous. To Greek readers, “the Word became human” (John 1:14) was unthinkable. To John, this new understanding of the Word was the Good News of Jesus Christ.

- ⁴ The Word gave life to everything that was created,*
and his life brought light to everyone.
⁵ The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness can never extinguish it.*

⁶God sent a man, John the Baptist,* ⁷to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. ⁸John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. ⁹The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. ¹¹He came to his own

people, and even they rejected him. ¹²But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. ¹³They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

¹⁴So the Word became human* and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness.* And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

¹⁵John testified about him when he shouted to the crowds, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.'"

Jn 1:3-4 Or and nothing that was created was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything. **Jn 1:5** Or and the darkness has not understood it.
Jn 1:6 Greek a man named John. **Jn 1:14a** Greek became flesh. **Jn 1:14b** Or grace and truth; also in 1:17.

John 1:3 When God created, he made something from nothing. Because we are created beings, we have no basis for pride. Remember that you exist only because God made you, and you have special gifts only because God gave them to you. With God you are something valuable and unique; apart from God you are nothing, and if you try to live without him, you will be abandoning the purpose for which you were made.

John 1:3-5 Do you ever feel that your life is too complex for God to understand? Remember, God created the entire universe, and nothing is too difficult for him. God created you; he is alive today, and his love is bigger than any problem you may face.

John 1:4-5 "The darkness can never extinguish it" means the darkness of evil never has and never will overcome God's light. Jesus Christ is the Creator of life, and his life brings light to humankind. In his light, we see ourselves as we really are (sinners in need of a Savior). When we follow Jesus, the true Light, we can avoid walking blindly and falling into sin. He lights the path ahead of us so we can see how to live. He removes the darkness of sin from our lives. In what ways have you allowed the light of Christ to shine into your life? Let Christ guide your life, and you'll never need to stumble in darkness.

John 1:6-8 For more information on John the Baptist, see his Profile on p. 1292.

John 1:8 We, like John the Baptist, are not the source of God's light; we merely reflect that light. Jesus Christ is the true Light; he helps us see our way to God and shows us how to walk along that way. We are never to present ourselves as the light to others, but are always to point them to Jesus, the Light.

John 1:10-11 Although Jesus created the world, the people he created didn't recognize him. Even the people chosen by God to prepare the rest of the world for the Messiah rejected him, although the entire Old Testament pointed to his coming.

John 1:12-13 All who welcome Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives are reborn spiritually, receiving new life from God. Through faith in

One and Only God

The most exciting and significant discovery of biblical manuscripts since the Dead Sea Scrolls was discovered in the Dishna Plain, east of the Nile River in Egypt. Several of these manuscripts are known as the Bodmer biblical papyri, which include two *early manuscripts of John's Gospel* (P66 and P75).

John 1:18 is an important verse in showing that Jesus was called "God" in Scripture, but there is a difference in the Greek manuscripts of this verse. The Greek *monogenes theos* (one and only God) was attested in some early manuscripts, but many later manuscripts read *monogenes huios* (one and only Son) instead. However, the discovery of two second-century papyri, P66 and P75, both of which read *theos*, tipped the balance. It is now clear that *monogenes theos* is the earlier reading and most likely to be original. This is translated as "the unique One, who is himself God" in the NLT.

Jesus, this new birth changes us from the inside out—rearranging our attitudes, desires, and motives. Being born makes you physically alive and places you in your parents' family. Being born of God makes you spiritually alive and puts you in God's family. Have you asked Jesus to make you a new person? This fresh start in life is available to all who believe in him.

John 1:14 "The Word became human." By doing so, Jesus became (1) the perfect teacher—in Jesus' life we see how God thinks and therefore how we should think (Phil 2:5-11); (2) the perfect example—as a model of what we are to become, he shows us how to live and gives us the power to live that way (1 Pet 2:21); (3) the perfect sacrifice—Jesus came as a sacrifice for all sins, and his death

satisfied God's requirements for the removal of sin (Col 1:15-22).

John 1:14 "The Father's one and only Son" emphasizes Jesus' uniqueness. He is unlike believers, who are all called "children of God." Jesus is one of a kind and enjoys a unique relationship with God.

John 1:14 When Jesus was conceived, God became a man. He was not part man and part God; he was completely human and completely divine (Col 2:9). Jesus is the perfect expression of God in human form. The two most common errors people make about Jesus are to minimize his humanity or to minimize his divinity. Jesus is both God and man.



► **JOHN 1:1-18 (cont.)**

¹⁶From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another.* ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses, but God’s unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God,* is near to the Father’s heart. He has revealed God to us.

An Angel Promises the Birth of John to Zechariah

LUKE 1:5-25

When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the

priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. ⁸Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God’s eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord’s commandments and regulations. ⁷They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old.

⁸One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. ⁹As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying.

¹¹While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right

Jn 1:16 Or *received the grace of Christ rather than the grace of the law*; Greek reads *received grace upon grace*. **Jn 1:18** Some manuscripts read *But the one and only Son*.

John 1:17 Law and grace (the combination of “God’s unfailing love and faithfulness”) are both aspects of God’s nature that he uses in dealing with us. Moses emphasized God’s law and justice, while Jesus Christ came to highlight God’s mercy, love, faithfulness, and forgiveness. Moses could only be the giver of the law, while Jesus came to fulfill the law (Matt 5:17). The nature and will of God were revealed in the law; now the nature and will of God are revealed in Jesus Christ. Rather than coming through cold stone tablets, God’s revelation now comes through a person. As we get to know Jesus better, our understanding of God will increase.

John 1:18 God communicated through various people in the Old Testament, usually prophets who were told to give specific messages. But no one ever saw God. Jesus is both God and the Father’s unique Son. In Jesus, God revealed his nature and essence in a way that could be seen and touched. In Jesus, God became a man who lived on earth.

Luke 1:5 This was Herod the Great, confirmed by the Roman Senate as king of the Jews. Only half-Jewish himself and eager to please his Roman superiors, Herod expanded and beautified the Jerusalem Temple—but he placed a Roman eagle over the entrance. When he helped the Jews, it was for political purposes and not because he cared about their God. Later, Herod the Great would order a massacre of infants in a futile attempt to kill the infant Jesus, whom some were calling the new “king of the Jews” (Matt 2:2).

Luke 1:5 A Jewish priest was a minister of God who worked at the Temple managing its upkeep, teaching the people the Scriptures, and directing the worship services. At this time there were about 20,000 priests throughout the country—far too many to minister in the Temple at one time. Therefore the priests were divided into 24 separate groups of about 1,000 each, according to David’s instructions (1 Chr 24:3-19).

Zechariah was a member of the order of Abijah, on duty this particular week. Each morning a priest was to enter the Holy Place in the Temple and burn incense. The priests would cast lots to decide who would

 **ZECHARIAH**

Zechariah, a Jewish priest, was told before anyone else that God was setting in motion his own visit to earth. Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, shared the pain of not having children, and in Jewish culture this was considered not having God’s blessing. Zechariah and Elizabeth were old, and they had stopped even asking for children. • One day while on duty at the Temple in Jerusalem, Zechariah was chosen to enter the Holy Place to offer incense to God for the people. Suddenly, much to his surprise and terror, an angel appeared and promised him a son. But this good news was eclipsed by his doubts. He feared he was too old to father the child the angel had promised. As a result, God prevented Zechariah from speaking until his son, John, was born. • Like so many of God’s most faithful servants, he passed quietly from the scene once his part was done. He becomes our hero for those times when we doubt God and yet are willing to obey. We gain hope from Zechariah’s story that God can do great things through anyone who is available to him.

Strengths and accomplishments	• Known as a righteous man • Was a priest of God • One of the few people directly addressed by an angel • Fathered John the Baptist
Weakness and mistake	• Momentarily doubted the angel’s promise of a son because of his own old age
Lessons from his life	• Physical limitations do not limit God • God accomplishes his will, often in unexpected ways
Vital statistics	• Occupation: Priest • Relatives: Wife: Elizabeth. Son: John the Baptist.
Key verses	“Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God’s eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord’s commandments and regulations. They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old” (Luke 1:6-7).

Zechariah’s story is told in Luke 1.

enter the inner sanctuary, and one day the lot fell to Zechariah. But it was not by chance that Zechariah was on duty and that he was chosen that day to enter the Holy Place—perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. God was guiding the events of history to prepare the way for Jesus to come to earth.

Luke 1:6 Zechariah and Elizabeth didn’t merely go through the motions in following God’s laws; they backed up their outward compliance with inward obedience. Unlike the religious leaders whom Jesus called

hypocrites, Zechariah and Elizabeth did not stop with the letter of the law. Their obedience was from the heart, and that is why they are called “righteous in God’s eyes.”

Luke 1:7 God answers prayer in his own way and in his own time. He worked in an “impossible” situation—Elizabeth’s age and barrenness—to bring about the fulfillment of all the prophecies concerning the Messiah. When you pray, be open to what God can do in impossible situations. And you must wait for God to work in his way and in his time.

of the incense altar. ¹²Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. ¹³But the angel said, “Don’t be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. ¹⁴You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth.* ¹⁶And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. ¹⁷He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children,* and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly.”

¹⁸Zechariah said to the angel, “How can I be sure this will happen? I’m an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years.”

Lk 1:15 Or even from birth. Lk 1:17 See Mal 4:5-6.

Luke 1:9 Incense was burned in the Temple twice daily (Exod 30:7-8). When the people saw the smoke from the burning incense, they prayed. The smoke drifting heavenward symbolized their prayers ascending to God’s throne.

Luke 1:11-12 Angels are spirit beings who live in God’s presence and do his will. Only two angels are mentioned by name in Scripture—Michael and Gabriel—but there are many who act as God’s messengers. Here, Gabriel (Luke 1:19) delivered a special message to Zechariah. This was not a dream or a vision. The angel appeared in visible form and spoke audible words to the priest.

Luke 1:13 While burning incense on the altar, Zechariah was also praying, most likely for the coming of the Messiah to his people. How odd it must have seemed that the angel would say that his prayer was answered and Zechariah would soon have a son. Yet the greatest desire of Zechariah’s heart—to have a son—would come true.

¹⁹Then the angel said, “I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news! ²⁰But now, since you didn’t believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time.”

²¹Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah to come out of the sanctuary, wondering why he was taking so long. ²²When he finally did come out, he couldn’t speak to them. Then they realized from his gestures and his silence that he must have seen a vision in the sanctuary.

²³When Zechariah’s week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home. ²⁴Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. ²⁵“How kind the Lord is!” she exclaimed. “He has taken away my disgrace of having no children.”

At the same time, the answer to the nation’s prayer for the Messiah would also come true. Zechariah’s son would grow up to prepare the way for the Messiah.

Luke 1:13 John means “the LORD is gracious,” and Jesus means “the LORD saves.” Both names were prescribed by God, not chosen by human parents. Throughout the Gospels, God acts graciously and saves his people. He will not withhold salvation from anyone who sincerely comes to him.

Luke 1:15 John was set apart for special service to God. He may have been forbidden to drink wine as part of the Nazirite vow, an ancient vow of consecration to God (see Num 6:1-8). Samson (Judg 13) was under the Nazirite vow, and Samuel may have been also (1 Sam 1:11).

Luke 1:15 This is Luke’s first mention of the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity; Luke refers to the Holy Spirit more than any other Gospel writer. Because Luke also wrote

the book of Acts, we know he was thoroughly informed about the work of the Holy Spirit. Luke recognized and emphasized the Holy Spirit’s work in directing the beginnings of Christianity and in guiding the early church. The presence of the Spirit was God’s gift to the entire church at Pentecost. Prior to that, God’s Spirit was given to the faithful for special tasks. We need the Holy Spirit’s help to do God’s work effectively.

Luke 1:17 John’s role was to be almost identical to that of an Old Testament prophet: to encourage people to turn away from sin and back to God. John is often compared to the great prophet Elijah, who was known for standing up to evil rulers (Mal 4:5; Matt 11:14; 17:10-13). See Elijah’s Profile on p. 719.

Luke 1:18-20 When told he would have a son, Zechariah doubted the angel’s word. From Zechariah’s human perspective, his doubts were understandable—but with God, anything is possible. What God promises, he delivers. And God delivers on time! You can have complete confidence that God will keep his promises. Their fulfillment may not be the next day, but they will be “at the proper time.” If you are waiting for God to answer some request or to fill some need, remain patient.

Luke 1:21 The people were waiting outside for Zechariah to come out and pronounce the customary blessing upon them as found in Numbers 6:24-26.

Luke 1:25 Zechariah and Elizabeth were both godly people, yet they were suffering. Children were considered a blessing, and childlessness was seen as a curse. Zechariah and Elizabeth had been childless for many years, and at this time they were too old to expect any change in their situation. They felt humiliated and hopeless. But God was waiting for the right time to encourage them and take away their disgrace.

DOUBTERS IN THE BIBLE

Many of the people God used to accomplish great things started out as real doubters. With all of them, God showed great patience. Honest doubt was not a bad starting point as long as they didn’t stay there. How great a part does doubt have in your willingness to trust God?

Doubter	Doubtful Moment	Reference
Abraham	When told he would be a father in old age	Gen 17:17
Sarah	When she heard she would be a mother in old age	Gen 18:12
Moses	When told to return to Egypt to lead the people	Exod 3:10-15
Israelites	Whenever they faced difficulties in the wilderness	Exod 16:1-3
Gideon	When told he would be a judge and leader	Judg 6:14-23
Zechariah	When told he would be a father in old age	Luke 1:18
Thomas	When told Jesus had risen from the dead	John 20:24-25

An Angel Promises the Birth of Jesus to Mary

LUKE 1:26-38

In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, ²⁷to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. ²⁸Gabriel appeared to her and said, “Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!”

²⁹Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. ³⁰“Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! ³¹You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be very great and will

be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³And he will reign over Israel* forever; his Kingdom will never end!”

³⁴Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.”

³⁵The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. ³⁶What’s more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. ³⁷For nothing is impossible with God.*”

Lk 1:28 Some manuscripts add *Blessed are you among women.* Lk 1:33 Greek over the house of Jacob. Lk 1:37 Some manuscripts read *For the word of God will never fail.*

Luke 1:26 Gabriel appeared not only to Zechariah and to Mary but also to the prophet Daniel more than 500 years earlier (Dan 8:15-17; 9:21). Each time Gabriel appeared, he brought important messages from God.

Luke 1:26 Nazareth, Joseph and Mary’s hometown, was a long way from Jerusalem, the center of Jewish life and worship. Located on a major trade route, Nazareth was frequently visited by Gentile merchants and Roman soldiers. It was known for its independent and aloof attitude. Jesus was born in Bethlehem but grew up in Nazareth. Nevertheless, the people of Nazareth would reject him as the Messiah (Luke 4:22-30).

Luke 1:27-28 Mary was young, poor, and female—all characteristics that, to the people of her day, would make her seem unusable by God for any major task. But God chose Mary for one of the most important acts of obedience he has ever demanded of anyone. You may feel that your ability, experience, or education makes you an unlikely candidate for God’s service. Don’t limit God’s choices. He can use you if you trust him.

Luke 1:30-31 God’s favor does not automatically bring instant success or fame. His blessing on Mary, the honor of being the mother of the Messiah, would lead to much pain: her peers would ridicule her; her fiancé would come close to leaving her; her son would be rejected and murdered. But through her son would come the world’s only hope, and this is why Mary has been praised by countless generations. Her submission was part of God’s plan to bring about our salvation. If sorrow weighs you down and dims your hope, think of Mary and wait patiently for God to finish working out his plan.

Luke 1:31 Jesus, a Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, was a common name meaning “the LORD saves.” Just as Joshua had led Israel into the Promised Land (see Josh 1:1-2), so Jesus would lead his people into eternal life. The symbolism of his name was not lost on the people of his day, who took names seriously and saw them as a source of power. In Jesus’ name, people

were healed, demons were banished, and sins were forgiven.

Luke 1:32-33 Centuries earlier, God had promised David that David’s kingdom would last forever (2 Sam 7:16). This promise was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus, a direct descendant of David, whose Kingdom will never end.

Luke 1:34 The birth of Jesus to a virgin is a miracle that many people find hard to believe. These three facts can aid our faith: (1) Luke was a medical doctor, and he knew perfectly well how babies are made. It would have been just as hard for him to believe in a virgin birth as it is for us, yet he reports it as fact. (2) Luke was a painstaking researcher who based his Gospel on eyewitness accounts. Tradition holds that he talked with Mary about the events he recorded in the first two chapters. This is Mary’s story, not a fictional invention. (3) Christians and Jews, who worship

God as the Creator of the universe, should have no doubts that God has the power to create a child in a virgin’s womb.

Luke 1:35 Why is the Virgin Birth important to the Christian faith? Jesus was born without the sin that entered the world through Adam. He was born holy, just as Adam was created sinless. In contrast to Adam, who disobeyed God, Jesus obeyed God and was thus able to face sin’s consequences in our place and make us acceptable to God (Rom 5:14-19). Jesus Christ, God’s Son, had to be free from the sinful nature passed on to all other human beings by Adam. Because Jesus was born of a woman, he was a human being; but as the Son of God, Jesus was born without any trace of human sin. Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. Because Jesus lived as a man, human beings know that he fully understands their experiences and struggles (Heb 4:15-16). Because he is God, he has



GOD’S UNUSUAL METHODS OF COMMUNICATING

One of the best ways to understand God’s willingness to communicate to people is to note the various methods, some of them quite unexpected, that he has used to give his message.

Person/Group	Method	Reference
Jacob, Zechariah, Mary, shepherds	Angels	Gen 32:22-32; Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10
Jacob, Joseph, a baker, a cup-bearer, Pharaoh, Isaiah, Joseph, the wise men	Dreams	Gen 28:10-22; 37:5-10; 40:5; 41:7-8; Isa 1:1; Matt 1:20; 2:12-13
Belshazzar	Writing on the wall	Dan 5:5-9
Balaam	Talking donkey	Num 22:21-35
People of Israel	Pillars of cloud and fire	Exod 13:21-22
Jonah	Being swallowed by a fish	Jon 2
Abraham, Moses, those present at Jesus’ baptism, Paul	Verbally	Gen 12:1-4; Exod 7:8; Matt 3:13-17; Acts 18:9
Moses	Fire	Exod 3:2
Us	God’s Son	Heb 1:1-2

³⁸Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.” And then the angel left her.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

LUKE 1:39–45

A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town ⁴⁰where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹At the sound of Mary’s greeting, Elizabeth’s child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

⁴²Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, “God has blessed you above all women, and your child

is blessed. ⁴³Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? ⁴⁴When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. ⁴⁵You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said.”

The Magnificat: Mary’s Song of Praise

LUKE 1:46–56

Mary responded,

“Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.

⁴⁷ How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!

⁴⁸ For he took notice of his lowly servant girl,



ELIZABETH

In societies like Israel, in which a woman’s value was largely measured by the children she bore, barrenness often led to personal hardship and public shame. For Elizabeth, a childless old age was a painful and lonely time but still she remained faithful to God. • Both Elizabeth and Zechariah came from priestly families. For two weeks each year, Zechariah went to the Temple in Jerusalem for his priestly duties. After one of those trips, Zechariah returned home excited but speechless. He had to write down his good news: Their faded dream would become an exciting reality! Soon Elizabeth became pregnant, and she knew her child was a long-hoped-for gift from God. • Seventy miles to the north, in Nazareth, Elizabeth’s relative Mary also unexpectedly became pregnant. Within days after hearing that she would bear the Messiah, Mary went to visit Elizabeth. They were instantly bound together by the unique gifts God had given them. • When her baby was born, Elizabeth insisted on his God-given name: John. Things had worked out even better than she could have planned. We, too, need to remember that God is in control of every situation. When did you last pause to recognize God’s timing in the events of your life?

Strengths and accomplishments	- Known as a deeply spiritual woman - Never doubted God’s ability to fulfill his promise - The first woman besides Mary to hear of the coming Savior
Lessons from her life	- God does not forget those who are faithful to him - God’s timetable and methods do not have to conform to what we expect
Vital statistics	- Occupation: Homemaker - Relatives: Husband: Zechariah. Son: John the Baptist. Relative: Mary.
Key verses	“Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy” (Luke 1:43–44).

Elizabeth’s story is told in Luke 1:5–80.

the power and authority to deliver people from sin (Col 2:13–15). People can tell Jesus all their thoughts, feelings, and needs. He has been where they are, and he has the ability to help.

Luke 1:38 A young unmarried girl who became pregnant risked disaster. Unless the father of the child agreed to marry her, she would probably remain unmarried for life. If her own father rejected her, she could be forced into begging or prostitution in order to earn her living. And Mary, with her story about becoming pregnant by the Holy Spirit, risked being considered crazy as well. Still

Mary said, despite the possible risks, “May everything you have said about me come true.” When Mary said that, she didn’t know about the tremendous opportunity she would have. She only knew that God was asking her to serve him, and she willingly obeyed. Don’t wait to see the bottom line before offering your life to God. Offer yourself willingly, even when the outcome seems disastrous.

Luke 1:38 God’s announcement of the birth of a special child was met with various responses throughout Scripture. Sarah, Abraham’s wife, laughed (Gen 18:9–15).

Zechariah doubted (Luke 1:18). By contrast, Mary graciously submitted. She believed the angel’s words and agreed to bear the child, even under humanly impossible circumstances. God is able to do the impossible. Our response to his demands should not be laughter or doubt but willing acceptance.

Luke 1:41–43 Apparently the Holy Spirit told Elizabeth that Mary’s child was the Messiah, because Elizabeth called her young relative “the mother of my Lord” as she greeted her. As Mary rushed off to visit her relative, she must have been wondering if the events of the last few days had been real. Elizabeth’s greeting must have strengthened her faith. Mary’s pregnancy may have seemed impossible, but her wise relative believed in the Lord’s faithfulness and rejoiced in Mary’s blessed condition.

Luke 1:42–43 Even though she herself was pregnant with a long-awaited son, Elizabeth could have envied Mary, whose son would be even greater than her own. Instead, she was filled with joy that the mother of her Lord would visit her. Have you ever envied people whom God has apparently singled out for special blessing? A cure for jealousy is to rejoice with those individuals, realizing that God uses his people in ways best suited to his purpose.

Luke 1:46–55 This song is often called the Magnificat, the first word in the Latin translation of this passage. Mary’s song has often been used as the basis for choral music and hymns. Like Hannah, the mother of Samuel (1 Sam 2:1–10), Mary glorified God in song for what he was going to do for the world through her. Notice that in both songs, God is pictured as a champion of the poor, the oppressed, and the despised.

Luke 1:48 When Mary said, “From now on all generations will call me blessed,” was she being proud? No, she was recognizing and accepting the gift God had given her. Pride is refusing to accept God’s gifts or taking credit for what God has done; humility is accepting the gifts and using them to praise and serve God. Don’t deny, belittle, or ignore your gifts. Thank God for them and use them to his glory.

BEGINNINGS undated–2100 BC	GOD'S CHOSEN FAMILY 2100–1800 BC	BIRTH OF ISRAEL 1800–1406 BC	POSSESSING THE LAND 1406–1050 BC	UNITED MONARCHY 1050–930 BC
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► **LUKE 1:46-56** (cont.)

- and from now on all generations will call me blessed.
- ⁴⁹ For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me.
- ⁵⁰ He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him.
- ⁵¹ His mighty arm has done tremendous things! He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.
- ⁵² He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble.
- ⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands.
- ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful.
- ⁵⁵ For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children forever.”

⁵⁶ Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back to her own home.

John the Baptist Is Born

LUKE 1:57-66

When it was time for Elizabeth's baby to be born, she gave birth to a son. ⁵⁸And when her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had been very merciful to her, everyone rejoiced with her.

⁵⁹When the baby was eight days old, they all came for the circumcision ceremony. They wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father. ⁶⁰But Elizabeth said, “No! His name is John!”

⁶¹“What?” they exclaimed. “There is no one in all your family by that name.” ⁶²So they used gestures to ask the baby's father what he wanted to name him. ⁶³He motioned for a writing tablet, and to everyone's surprise he wrote, “His name is John.” ⁶⁴Instantly Zechariah could speak again, and he began praising God.

Lk 1:69 Greek *has raised up a horn of salvation for us.* **Lk 1:78** Or *the Morning Light from Heaven is about to visit us.*

⁶⁵Awe fell upon the whole neighborhood, and the news of what had happened spread throughout the Judean hills. ⁶⁶Everyone who heard about it reflected on these events and asked, “What will this child turn out to be?” For the hand of the Lord was surely upon him in a special way.

Zechariah's Prophecy

LUKE 1:67-80

Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy:

- ⁶⁸ “Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and redeemed his people.
- ⁶⁹ He has sent us a mighty Savior* from the royal line of his servant David,
- ⁷⁰ just as he promised through his holy prophets long ago.
- ⁷¹ Now we will be saved from our enemies and from all who hate us.
- ⁷² He has been merciful to our ancestors by remembering his sacred covenant—
- ⁷³ the covenant he swore with an oath to our ancestor Abraham.
- ⁷⁴ We have been rescued from our enemies so we can serve God without fear,
- ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness for as long as we live.
- ⁷⁶ “And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord.
- ⁷⁷ You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins.
- ⁷⁸ Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us,*

Luke 1:54-55 God kept his promise to Abraham to be merciful to God's people forever (Gen 22:16-18). Christ's birth fulfilled the promise, and Mary understood this. She was not surprised when her special son eventually announced that he was the Messiah. She had known Jesus' mission from before his birth.

Luke 1:56 Because travel was difficult, long visits were customary. Mary must have been a great help to Elizabeth, who was experiencing the discomforts of a first pregnancy in old age.

Luke 1:59 The circumcision ceremony was an important event to the family of a Jewish baby boy. God commanded circumcision when he was beginning to form his holy nation (Gen 17:4-14), and he had reaffirmed it through Moses (Lev 12:1-3). This ceremony was a time of joy when friends and family members would celebrate the baby's becoming part of God's covenant nation.

Luke 1:59 Family lines and family names were important to the Jews. The people naturally assumed the child would receive Zechariah's name or at least a family name. They were surprised, therefore, that both Elizabeth and Zechariah wanted to name the boy John. This was the name the angel had given them (see Luke 1:13).

Luke 1:62 Zechariah's relatives talked to him by gestures because he was apparently deaf as well as speechless and had not heard what his wife had said.

Luke 1:67-79 Zechariah praised God with his first words after months of silence. In a song that is often called the Benedictus after the first words in the Latin translation of this passage, Zechariah prophesied the coming of a Savior who would redeem his people and predicted that his son, John, would prepare the Messiah's way. All the Old Testament prophecies were coming true—no wonder Zechariah praised God!

Luke 1:72-73 This was God's promise to Abraham to bless all peoples through him (see Gen 12:3). It would be fulfilled through the Messiah, Abraham's descendant.

Luke 1:76 Zechariah had just recalled hundreds of years of God's sovereign work in history, beginning with Abraham and going on into eternity. Then, in tender contrast, he personalized the story. His son had been chosen for a key role in the drama of the ages. Although God has unlimited power, he chooses to work through frail humans who begin as helpless babies. Don't minimize what God can do through those who are faithful to him.

Luke 1:80 Why did John live out in the wilderness? Prophets used the isolation of the uninhabited wilderness to enhance their spiritual growth and to focus their message on God. By being in the wilderness, John remained separate from the economic and political powers so that he

⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace.”

⁸⁰ John grew up and became strong in spirit. And he lived in the wilderness until he began his public ministry to Israel.

An Angel Appears to Joseph

MATTHEW 1:18–25
This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before

Mt 1:19 Greek to divorce her. **Mt 1:21** Jesus means “The LORD saves.”

JOSEPH The strength of what we believe is measured by how much we are willing to suffer for those beliefs. Joseph was a man with strong beliefs. He was prepared to do what was right, despite the pain he knew it would cause. But Joseph not only tried to do what was right, he also tried to do it in the right way. • When Mary told Joseph about her pregnancy, Joseph knew the child was not his. Joseph decided he had to break the engagement, but he was determined to do it in a way that would not cause public shame to Mary. He intended to act with justice and love. • At this point, God sent a messenger to Joseph to confirm Mary’s story and open another way of obedience for Joseph—to take Mary as his wife. Joseph obeyed God, married Mary, and honored her virginity until the baby was born. • We do not know how long Joseph lived his role as Jesus’ earthly father—he is last mentioned when Jesus was 12 years old. But Joseph trained his son in the trade of carpentry and took the whole family on the yearly trip to Jerusalem for the Passover, providing good spiritual leadership for his family. • Joseph knew Jesus was someone special from the moment he heard the angel’s words. His strong belief in that fact and his willingness to follow God’s leading empowered him to be Jesus’ chosen earthly father.

Strengths and accomplishments	• A man of integrity • Jesus’ legal and earthly father • Sensitive to God’s guidance and ready to do God’s will
Lessons from his life	• God honors integrity • Being obedient to God leads to more guidance from him • Feelings are not accurate measures of the rightness or wrongness of an action
Vital statistics	• Where: Nazareth, Bethlehem • Occupation: Carpenter • Relatives: Wife: Mary. Children: Jesus, James, Joses, Judas, Simon, and daughters.
Key verse	“Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly” (Matt 1:19).

Joseph’s story is told in Matthew 1:16–2:23; Luke 1:26–2:52.

could aim his message against them. He also remained separate from the hypocritical religious leaders of his day. His message was different from theirs, and his life proved it.

Matt 1:18 Jewish marriage involved three basic steps. First, the two families agreed to the union. Second, a public announcement was made. At this point, the couple was “engaged.” This was similar to engagement today except that their relationship could be broken only through death or divorce (even though sexual relations were not

yet permitted). Third, the couple was married and began living together. Because Mary and Joseph were engaged, Mary’s apparent unfaithfulness carried a severe social stigma. According to Jewish civil law, Joseph had a right to divorce her, and the Jewish authorities could have had her stoned to death (Deut 22:23–24). On the importance of the Virgin Birth, see note on Luke 1:35, p. 1274.

Matt 1:19 Joseph was faced with a difficult choice after discovering that Mary was pregnant. Perhaps Joseph thought he

the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement* quietly. ²⁰As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. ²¹And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus,* for he will save his people from their sins.”

had only two options: divorce Mary quietly or have her stoned. But God gave a third option—marry her (Matt 1:20–23). In view of the circumstances, this had not occurred to Joseph. But God often shows us that there are more options available than we think. Although Joseph seemed to be doing the right thing by breaking the engagement, only God’s guidance helped him make the best decision. But that did not make it an easy decision. Consenting to marry Mary surely cast doubt on his own innocence regarding the pregnancy, as well as leaving them both with a social stigma they would carry for the rest of their lives. Yet Joseph chose to obey the angel’s command (Matt 1:24). When our decisions affect the lives of others, we must always seek God’s wisdom and then be willing to follow through no matter how difficult it may be.

Matt 1:20 The conception and birth of Jesus Christ are supernatural events beyond human logic or reasoning. Because of this, God sent angels to help certain people understand the significance of what was happening (see Matt 2:13, 19; Luke 1:11, 26; 2:9).

Angels are spiritual beings created by God who help carry out his work on earth. They bring God’s messages to people (Luke 1:26), protect God’s people (Dan 6:22), offer encouragement (Gen 16:7ff), give guidance (Exod 14:19), carry out punishment (2 Sam 24:16), patrol the earth (Zech 1:9–14), and fight the forces of evil (2 Kgs 6:16–18; Rev 20:1–2). There are both good and bad angels (Rev 12:7), but because bad angels are allied with the devil, or Satan, they have considerably less power and authority than good angels. Eventually the main role of angels will be to offer continuous praise to God (Rev 7:11–12).

Matt 1:20–23 The angel declared to Joseph that Mary’s child was conceived by the Holy Spirit and would be a son. This reveals an important truth about Jesus—he is both God and human. The infinite, unlimited God took on the limitations of humanity so he could live and die for the salvation of all who would believe in him.

Jesus means “the LORD saves.” Jesus came to earth to save us because we can’t save ourselves from sin and its consequences. No matter how good we are, we can’t eliminate the sinful nature present in all of us. Only Jesus can do that. Jesus

► **MATTHEW 1:18-25 (cont.)**

²²All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet:

²³ "Look! The virgin will conceive a child!
She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel,*
which means 'God is with us.'"

²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. ²⁵But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.

The Record of Jesus' Ancestors PARALLEL

MATTHEW 1:1-17 OO

This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David* and of Abraham:

- ² Abraham was the father of Isaac.
Isaac was the father of Jacob.
Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers.
- ³ Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (whose mother was Tamar).
Perez was the father of Hezron.
Hezron was the father of Ram.*
- ⁴ Ram was the father of Amminadab.
Amminadab was the father of Nahshon.

Mt 1:23 Isa 7:14; 8:8, 10 (Greek version). **Mt 1:1** Greek *Jesus the Messiah, son of David*. **Mt 1:3** Greek *Aram*, a variant spelling of Ram; also in 1:4. See 1 Chr 2:9-10. **Mt 1:7** Greek *Asaph*, a variant spelling of Asa; also in 1:8. See 1 Chr 3:10. **Mt 1:8a** Greek *Joram*, a variant spelling of Jehoram; also in 1:8b. See 1 Kgs 22:50 and note at 1 Chr 3:11. **Mt 1:8b** Or *ancestor*; also in 1:11. **Mt 1:10** Greek *Amos*, a variant spelling of Amon; also in 1:10b. See 1 Chr 3:14. **Mt 1:11** Greek *Jecooniah*, a variant spelling of Jehoiachin; also in 1:12. See 2 Kgs 24:6 and note at 1 Chr 3:16.

Nahshon was the father of Salmon.

- ⁵ Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab).
Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth).
Obed was the father of Jesse.
- ⁶ Jesse was the father of King David.
David was the father of Solomon (whose mother was Bathsheba, the widow of Uriah).
- ⁷ Solomon was the father of Rehoboam.
Rehoboam was the father of Abijah.
Abijah was the father of Asa.*
- ⁸ Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat.
Jehoshaphat was the father of Jehoram.*
Jehoram was the father* of Uzziah.
- ⁹ Uzziah was the father of Jotham.
Jotham was the father of Ahaz.
Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah.
- ¹⁰ Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh.
Manasseh was the father of Amon.*
Amon was the father of Josiah.
- ¹¹ Josiah was the father of Jehoiachin* and his brothers (born at the time of the exile to Babylon).
- ¹² After the Babylonian exile:
Jehoiachin was the father of Shealtiel.
Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel.

didn't come to help people save themselves; he came to be their Savior from the power and penalty of sin. Thank Jesus for his death on the cross for your sin, and then ask him to take control of your life. Your new life begins at that moment.

Jesus would fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah, for he would be Immanuel ("God is with us," see Isa 7:14). Jesus was God in the flesh; thus, God was literally among us, "with us." Through the Holy Spirit, Christ is present today in the life of every believer. Perhaps not even Isaiah understood how far-reaching the meaning of Immanuel would be.

Matt 1:24 Jesus changed his plans quickly after learning that Mary had not been unfaithful to him (Matt 1:19). He obeyed God and proceeded with the marriage plans. Although others may have disapproved of his decision, Joseph went ahead with what he knew was right. Sometimes we avoid doing what is right because of what others might think. Like Joseph, we must choose to obey God rather than seek the approval of others.

Matt 1:1 Presenting this record of ancestors (called a genealogy) was one of the most interesting ways that Matthew could begin a book for a Jewish audience. Because a person's family line proved his or her standing as one of God's chosen people, Matthew began by showing that Jesus was a descen-

dant of Abraham, the father of all Jews, and a direct descendant of David, fulfilling Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah's line. The facts of this ancestry were carefully preserved. This is the first of many proofs recorded by Matthew to show that Jesus is the true Messiah.

Matt 1:1ff More than 400 years had passed since the last Old Testament prophecies, and faithful Jews all over the world were still waiting for the Messiah (Luke 3:15). Matthew wrote this book to Jews to present Jesus as King and Messiah, the promised descendant of David who would reign forever (Isa 11:1-5). The Gospel of Matthew links the Old and New Testaments and contains many references that show how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy.

Matt 1:1ff Jesus entered human history when the land of Palestine was controlled by Rome and considered an insignificant outpost of the vast and mighty Roman Empire. The presence of Roman soldiers in Israel gave the Jews military peace, but at the price of oppression, slavery, injustice, and immorality. Into this kind of world came the promised Messiah.

Matt 1:1-17 In the first 17 verses we meet 46 people whose lifetimes span 2,000 years. All were ancestors of Jesus, but they varied considerably in personality, spirituality, and experience. Some were heroes of faith—like

Abraham, Isaac, Ruth, and David. Some had shady reputations—like Rahab and Tamar. Many were very ordinary—like Hezron, Ram, Nahshon, and Akim. And others were evil—like Manasseh and Abijah. God's work in history is not limited by human failures or sins, and he works through ordinary people. Just as God used all kinds of people to bring his Son into the world, he uses all kinds today to accomplish his will. And God wants to use you.

Matt 1:3-6 Matthew's inclusion of four particular women (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba) reveals his concern to do more than relay historical data. These women raise both ethnic and ethical questions. At least two of them were not Israelites by birth and all four of them had reputations that could have made them unmentionable in an ancestral tree. Yet this was the line into which God's Son was born. Jesus' genealogy makes it clear, not that there were a few disreputable people in his family, but that all of them were sinners. God sent his Son as Savior of all people—Jews, Gentiles, men, and women. No matter what the sins of the people, God's plan was never thwarted. It continues to unfold. That plan includes you.

Matt 1:11 The exile to Babylon occurred in 586 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, conquered Judah, destroyed Jerusalem, and took thousands of people captive.

- ¹³ Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud.
Abiud was the father of Eliakim.
Eliakim was the father of Azor.
¹⁴ Azor was the father of Zadok.
Zadok was the father of Akim.
Akim was the father of Eliud.
¹⁵ Eliud was the father of Eleazar.
Eleazar was the father of Matthan.
Matthan was the father of Jacob.
¹⁶ Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband
of Mary.
Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah.
¹⁷ All those listed above include fourteen generations
from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the
Babylonian exile, and fourteen from the Babylonian
exile to the Messiah.

LUKE 3:23-38 [O O]

Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his
public ministry.

- Jesus was known as the son of Joseph.
Joseph was the son of Heli.
²⁴ Heli was the son of Matthat.
Matthat was the son of Levi.
Levi was the son of Melki.
Melki was the son of Jannai.
Jannai was the son of Joseph.

- ²⁵ Joseph was the son of Mattathias.
Mattathias was the son of Amos.
Amos was the son of Nahum.
Nahum was the son of Esli.
Esli was the son of Naggai.
²⁶ Naggai was the son of Maath.
Maath was the son of Mattathias.
Mattathias was the son of Semein.
Semein was the son of Josech.
Josech was the son of Joda.
²⁷ Joda was the son of Joanan.
Joanan was the son of Rhesa.
Rhesa was the son of Zerubbabel.
Zerubbabel was the son of Shealtiel.
Shealtiel was the son of Neri.
²⁸ Neri was the son of Melki.
Melki was the son of Addi.
Addi was the son of Cosam.
Cosam was the son of Elmadam.
Elmadam was the son of Er.
²⁹ Er was the son of Joshua.
Joshua was the son of Eliezer.
Eliezer was the son of Jorim.
Jorim was the son of Matthat.
Matthat was the son of Levi.
³⁰ Levi was the son of Simeon.
Simeon was the son of Judah.

Matt 1:16 Because Mary was a virgin when she became pregnant, Matthew lists Joseph only as the husband of Mary, not the father of Jesus. Matthew's genealogy gives Jesus' legal (or royal) lineage through Joseph. Mary's ancestral line is recorded in Luke 3:23-38. Both Mary and Joseph were direct descendants of David.

Matthew traced the genealogy back to Abraham, while Luke traced it back to Adam. Matthew wrote to the Jews, so Jesus was shown as a descendant of their father, Abraham. Luke wrote to the Gentiles, so he emphasized Jesus as the Savior of all people.

Matt 1:17 Matthew breaks Israel's history into three sets of 14 generations, but there were probably more generations than those listed here. Genealogies often compressed history, meaning that not every generation of ancestors was specifically listed. Thus, the phrase "the father of" can also be translated "the ancestor of."

Luke 3:23 Imagine the Savior of the world working in a small-town carpenter's shop until he was 30 years old! It seems incredible that Jesus would have been content to remain in Nazareth all that time, but he patiently trusted his Father's timing for his life and ministry. Thirty was the prescribed age for priests to begin their ministry (Num 4:3). Joseph was 30 years old when he began serving the king of Egypt (Gen 41:46), and David was 30 years old when he began to reign over Judah (2 Sam 5:4). Age 30,



The Adoration of the Shepherds, by Bartolomé Murillo.

then, was a good time to begin an important task in the Jewish culture. Like Jesus, we need to resist the temptation to jump ahead before receiving the Spirit's direction. Are you waiting and wondering what your next step should be? Don't jump ahead—trust God's timing.

Luke 3:23-38 Matthew's genealogy goes back to Abraham and shows that Jesus was related to all Jews (Matt 1). Luke's genealogy goes back to Adam, showing that Jesus is related to all human beings. This is consistent with Luke's picture of Jesus as the Savior of the whole world.

► **LUKE 3:23-38 (cont.)**

- Judah was the son of Joseph.
Joseph was the son of Jonam.
Jonam was the son of Eliakim.
³¹ Eliakim was the son of Melea.
Melea was the son of Menna.
Menna was the son of Mattatha.
Mattatha was the son of Nathan.
Nathan was the son of David.
³² David was the son of Jesse.
Jesse was the son of Obed.
Obed was the son of Boaz.
Boaz was the son of Salmon.*
Salmon was the son of Nahshon.
³³ Nahshon was the son of Amminadab.
Amminadab was the son of Admin.
Admin was the son of Arni.*
Arni was the son of Hezron.
Hezron was the son of Perez.
Perez was the son of Judah.
³⁴ Judah was the son of Jacob.
Jacob was the son of Isaac.
Isaac was the son of Abraham.
Abraham was the son of Terah.
Terah was the son of Nahor.
³⁵ Nahor was the son of Serug.
Serug was the son of Reu.
Reu was the son of Peleg.
Peleg was the son of Eber.
Eber was the son of Shelah.
³⁶ Shelah was the son of Cainan.

- Cainan was the son of Arphaxad.
Arphaxad was the son of Shem.
Shem was the son of Noah.
Noah was the son of Lamech.
³⁷ Lamech was the son of Methuselah.
Methuselah was the son of Enoch.
Enoch was the son of Jared.
Jared was the son of Mahalalel.
Mahalalel was the son of Kenan.
³⁸ Kenan was the son of Enosh.*
Enosh was the son of Seth.
Seth was the son of Adam.
Adam was the son of God.

Jesus Is Born in Bethlehem

LUKE 2:1-7

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. ²(This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. ⁴And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. ⁵He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was now obviously pregnant.

⁶And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. ⁷She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

Lk 3:32 Greek *Sala*, a variant spelling of Salmon; also in 3:32b. See Ruth 4:20. **Lk 3:33** Some manuscripts read *Amminadab* was the son of *Aram*. *Ami* and *Aram* are alternate spellings of Ram. See 1 Chr 2:9-10. **Lk 3:38** Greek *Enos*, a variant spelling of Enosh; also in 3:38b. See Gen 5:6.



THE JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM Caesar's decree for a census of the entire Roman Empire made it necessary for Joseph and Mary to leave their hometown, Nazareth, and journey the 70 miles to the Judean village of Bethlehem.

Luke 2:1 Luke is the only Gospel writer who related the events he recorded to world history. His account was addressed to a predominantly Greek audience that would have been interested in and familiar with the political situation. Palestine was under the rule of the Roman Empire with Emperor Caesar Augustus, the first Roman emperor, in charge. The Roman rulers, considered to be like gods, stood in contrast to the tiny baby in a manger who was truly God in the flesh.

Luke 2:1 A Roman census (registration) was taken to aid military conscription or tax collection. The Jews weren't required to serve in the Roman army, but they could not avoid paying taxes. Augustus's decree went out in God's perfect timing and according to God's perfect plan to bring his Son into the world.

Luke 2:1-6 The Romans ruled the civilized world at this time. By contrast, Joseph controlled very little. Against his better judgment and political convictions, he complied with the Roman order to make a long trip just to pay his taxes. His fiancée, who had to go with him, was about to give birth.

The Romans were in control insofar as human authority can get its way by exerting human power. But the Romans did not recog-

nize their limitations. In reality, God controls the world. In all times and places, he works his will. By the decree of Emperor Augustus, Jesus was born in the very town prophesied for his birth (Mic 5:2), even though his parents did not live there. Joseph and Mary were both descendants of David. The Old Testament is filled with prophecies that the Messiah would be born in David's royal line (see, for example, Isa 11:1; Jer 33:15; Ezek 37:24; Hos 3:5). Rome made the decree, just as God intended.

Luke 2:4-5 Sometimes we think to ourselves, "I'm being obedient, so why aren't things going better?" We face discomfort or inconvenience and immediately think either that we have misread God's will or that God has made a mistake. But watch this quiet couple as they head toward Bethlehem. God did not soften Joseph's bumpy road, but strengthened him. God did not provide a luxurious inn for Joseph and Mary, but brought his Son into the world in humble surroundings. When we do God's will, we are not guaranteed comfort and convenience. But we are promised that everything, even discomfort and inconvenience, has meaning in God's plan. He will guide you and provide all you need. Like Joseph, live each day by faith, trusting that God is in charge.

Shepherds Visit Jesus

LUKE 2:8-20

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. ⁹Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, ¹⁰but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. ¹¹The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! ¹²And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

¹³Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom God
is pleased."

¹⁵When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

¹⁶They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. ¹⁷After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. ¹⁸All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, ¹⁹but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. ²⁰The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

Luke 2:7 Strips of cloth were used to keep a baby warm and give him a sense of security. These cloths were believed to protect his internal organs. The custom of wrapping infants this way is still practiced in many Middle Eastern countries.

Luke 2:7 This mention of the manger is the basis for the traditional belief that Jesus was born in a stable. Stables were often caves with feeding troughs (mangers) carved into the rock walls. Despite popular Christmas card pictures, the surroundings were dark and dirty. This was not the atmosphere the Jews expected as the birthplace of the Messiah-King. They thought their promised Messiah would be born in royal surroundings. We should not limit God by our expectations. He is at work wherever he is needed in our sin-darkened and dirty world.

Luke 2:7 Although our first picture of Jesus is as a baby in a manger, it must not be our last. The Christ child in the manger is the subject of a beautiful Christmas scene, but we must not leave him there. This tiny, helpless baby lived an amazing life, died for us, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, and will return to earth as King of kings. Christ will rule the world and judge all people according to their decisions about him. Do you still picture Jesus as a baby in a manger—or is he your Lord? Make sure you don't underestimate Jesus. Let him grow up in your life.

Luke 2:8 God continued to reveal the news about his Son, but not to those we might expect. Luke records that Jesus' birth was announced to shepherds in the fields. These

may have been the shepherds who supplied the lambs for the Temple sacrifices that were performed for the forgiveness of sin. Here the angels invited these shepherds to greet the Lamb of God (John 1:36), who would take away the sins of the world forever.

Luke 2:8-15 What a birth announcement! The shepherds were terrified, but their fear turned to joy as the angels announced the Messiah's birth. First the shepherds ran to see the baby; then they spread the word. Jesus is your Messiah, your Savior. Do you look forward to meeting him in prayer and in his Word each day? Have you discovered a Lord so wonderful that you can't help sharing your joy with your friends?

Luke 2:9-10 The greatest event in history had just happened! The Messiah had been born! For ages the Jews had waited for this, and when it finally occurred, the announcement came to humble shepherds. The Good News about Jesus is that he comes to all, including the plain and the ordinary. He comes to anyone with a heart humble enough to accept him. Whoever you are, whatever you do, you can have Jesus in your life. Don't think you need extraordinary qualifications—he accepts you as you are.

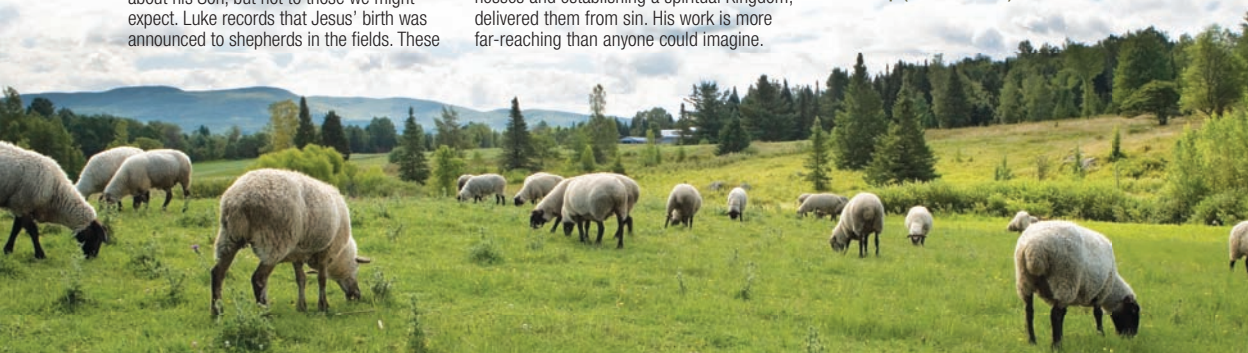
Luke 2:11-14 Some of the Jews were waiting for a savior to deliver them from Roman rule; others hoped the Christ (Messiah) would deliver them from physical ailments. But Jesus, while healing their illnesses and establishing a spiritual Kingdom, delivered them from sin. His work is more far-reaching than anyone could imagine.

Christ paid the price for sin and opened the way to peace with God. He offers us more than temporary political or physical changes—he offers us new hearts that will last for eternity.

Luke 2:14 The story of Jesus' birth resounds with music that has inspired composers for 2,000 years. The angels' song, often called the Gloria after its first word in the Latin translation, is the basis for many modern choral works, traditional Christmas carols, and ancient liturgical chants.

Shepherds and Sheep

Shepherds played an important role in the world of Israel. Their work was to find grass and water for the sheep and to protect them from wild animals and tend to their sicknesses and wounds. It required them to spend long hours exposed to the natural elements. It was not an easy life. It was to the shepherds that the angels first announced the birth of Jesus. This was especially appropriate since Jesus' famous ancestor, David, had centuries earlier watched his family's sheep in those same fields near Bethlehem. It also reminds us that the coming of Jesus was good news for all people, not just for those already privileged by wealth and power. The important role of the shepherd is used often in the New Testament to teach us about Jesus. He is the Good Shepherd who gives his life for the sheep (John 10:1-18).



Mary and Joseph Bring Jesus to the Temple

LUKE 2:21-24

Eight days later, when the baby was circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel even before he was conceived.

²²Then it was time for their purification offering, as required by the law of Moses after the birth of a child; so his parents took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. ²³The law of the Lord says, “If a woman’s first child is a boy, he must be dedicated to the Lord.”*

²⁴So they offered the sacrifice required in the law of the Lord—“either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”*

The Prophecy of Simeon

LUKE 2:25-35

At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him ²⁶and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. ²⁷That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus

Lk 2:23 Exod 13:2. **Lk 2:24** Lev 12:8.

to the Lord as the law required, ²⁸Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹ “Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised.

³⁰ I have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared for all people.

³² He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!”

³³Jesus’ parents were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby’s mother, “This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, but he will be a joy to many others. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. ³⁵As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul.”

The Prophecy of Anna

LUKE 2:36-38

Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years. ³⁷Then she lived

Luke 2:21-24 Jewish families went through several ceremonies soon after a baby’s birth: (1) Circumcision. Every boy was circumcised and named on the eighth day after birth (Lev 12:3; Luke 1:59-60). Circumcision symbolized the Jews’ separation from Gentiles and their unique relationship with God (see the note on Luke 1:59). (2) Redemption of the firstborn. A firstborn son was presented to God one month after birth (Exod 13:2, 11-16; Num 18:15-16). The ceremony included buying back—“redeeming”—the child from God through an offering. This way, the parents acknowledged that the child belonged to God, who alone has the power to give life. (3) Purification of the mother. For 40 days after the birth of a son and 80 days after the birth of a daughter, the mother was ceremonially unclean and could not enter the Temple. At the end of her time of separation, the parents were to bring a lamb for a burnt offering and a dove or pigeon for a sin offering. The priest would sacrifice these animals and declare her to be clean. If a lamb was too expensive, the parents could bring a second dove or pigeon instead. This is what Mary and Joseph did.

Jesus was God’s Son, but his family carried out these ceremonies according to God’s law. Jesus was not born above the law; instead, he fulfilled it perfectly.

Luke 2:28-32 When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple to be dedicated to God, they met an old man who told them what their child would become. Simeon’s song is often called the *Nunc Dimittis*, from the first words of its Latin translation. Simeon could die in peace because he had seen the Messiah.



TO FEAR OR NOT TO FEAR

People in the Bible who were confronted by God or his angels all had one consistent response—fear. To each of them, God’s response was always the same—don’t be afraid. As soon as they sensed that God accepted them and wanted to communicate with them, their fear subsided.

Person	Reference	Person	Reference
Abraham	Gen 15:1	Zechariah	Luke 1:13
Moses	Num 21:34 Deut 3:2	Mary	Luke 1:30
Joshua	Josh 8:1	Shepherds	Luke 2:10
Jeremiah	Lam 3:57	Peter	Luke 5:10
Daniel	Dan 10:12, 19	Paul	Acts 27:23-24
		John	Rev 1:17-18

Luke 2:32 The Jews were well acquainted with the Old Testament prophecies that spoke of the Messiah’s blessings to their nation. They did not always give equal attention to the prophecies stating that he would bring salvation to the entire world, not just the Jews (see, for example, Isa 49:6). Many thought that Christ had come to save only his own people. Luke made sure his Greek audience understood that Christ had come to save all who believe, Gentiles as well as Jews.

Luke 2:33 Joseph and Mary were amazed when this old man took their son into his arms and spoke such stunning words. Simeon said that Jesus was a gift from God, and he recognized Jesus as the Messiah who would be a light to the entire world. This was at least the second time that Mary had been greeted

with a prophecy about her son; the first time was when Elizabeth had welcomed her as the mother of her Lord (Luke 1:42-45).

Luke 2:34-35 Simeon prophesied that Jesus would have a paradoxical effect on Israel. Some would fall because of him (see Isa 8:14-15), while others would rise (see Mal 4:2). With Jesus, there would be no neutral ground: People would either joyfully accept him or totally reject him. As Jesus’ mother, Mary would be grieved by the widespread rejection he would face. This is the first note of sorrow in Luke’s Gospel.

Luke 2:36 Although Simeon and Anna were very old, they had never lost their hope that they would see the Messiah. Led by the Holy Spirit, they were among the first to bear witness to Jesus. In the Jewish culture, elders

as a widow to the age of eighty-four.* She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshipping God with fasting and prayer. ³⁸She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem.

Lk 2:37 Or She had been a widow for eighty-four years. Mt 2:1 Or royal astrologers; Greek reads magi; also in 2:7, 16. Mt 2:2 Or star in the east.

Visitors Arrive from Eastern Lands

MATTHEW 2:1-12

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men* from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, ²“Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose,* and we have come to worship him.”



MARY

Motherhood is a painful privilege. Young Mary of Nazareth had the unique privilege of being mother to the very Son of God. Mary was the only human present at Jesus’ birth who also witnessed his death. She saw him arrive as her baby son, and she watched him die as her Savior. • Mary found Gabriel’s unexpected visit to be both puzzling and frightening at first, but what she heard next was the most amazing news: Her child would be the Messiah, God’s promised Savior. Mary did not doubt the message but rather asked how pregnancy would be possible. Gabriel told her the baby would be God’s Son. Her answer was perfect: “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true” (Luke 1:38). Later her song of joy shows us how well she knew God, for her thoughts were filled with his words from the Old Testament. • When Mary took the eight-day-old Jesus to the Temple to be dedicated to God, she was met by two devout people, Simeon and Anna, who recognized the child as the Messiah and praised God. Simeon directed some words to Mary that must have come to her mind many times in the years that followed: “A sword will pierce your very soul” (Luke 2:35). A big part of her painful privilege of motherhood would be to see her son rejected and crucified by the people he came to save. • We can imagine that even if she had known all she would suffer as Jesus’ mother, Mary would still have given the same response. Are you, like Mary, available to be used by God?

Strengths and accomplishments	• The mother of Jesus, the Messiah • Willing to be available to God • Knew and applied Old Testament Scriptures
Lessons from her life	• God’s best servants are often ordinary people who make themselves available to him • A person’s character is revealed by his or her response to the unexpected
Vital statistics	• Where: Nazareth, Bethlehem • Occupation: Homemaker • Relatives: Husband: Joseph. Relatives: Zechariah and Elizabeth. Children: Jesus, James, Joseph, Judas, Simon, and daughters.
Key verse	“Mary responded, ‘I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.’” (Luke 1:38).

Mary’s story is told throughout the Gospels. She is also mentioned in Acts 1:14.

were respected; thus, because of Simeon’s and Anna’s ages, their prophecies carried extra weight. In contrast, our society values youthfulness over wisdom, and contributions by the elderly are often ignored. As Christians, we should reverse those values wherever we can. Encourage older people to share their wisdom and experience. Listen carefully when they speak. Offer them your friendship, and help them find ways to continue to serve God.

Luke 2:36-37 Anna was called a prophet, indicating that she was unusually close to God. Prophets did not necessarily predict the future. Their main role was to speak for God, proclaiming his truth.

Matt 2:1 Bethlehem is a small town five miles south of Jerusalem. It sits on a high ridge more than 2,000 feet above sea level. It is mentioned in more detail in the Gospel of Luke. Luke also explains why Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem when Jesus was born, rather than in Nazareth, their hometown.

Matt 2:1 The land of Israel was divided into four political districts and several lesser territories. Judea was to the south, Samaria in the middle, Galilee to the north, and Idumea to the southwest. Bethlehem of Judea (also called Judah, Matt 2:6) had been prophesied as the Messiah’s birthplace (Mic 5:2).

Jerusalem was also in Judea and was the seat of government for Herod the Great, king over all four political districts. After Herod’s death, the districts were divided among three separate rulers (see the note on Matt 2:19-22). Although he was a ruthless, evil man who murdered many in his own family, Herod the Great supervised the renovation of the Temple, making it much larger and more beautiful. This made him popular with many Jews. Jesus would visit Jerusalem many times because the great Jewish festivals were held there.

Matt 2:1-2 Not much is known about these “wise men.” We don’t know where they came from or how many there were. Tradition says they were men of high position from Parthia, near the site of ancient Babylon. How did they know that the star represented the Messiah? (1) They could have been Jews who remained in Babylon after the Exile and knew the Old Testament predictions of the Messiah’s coming. (2) They may have been eastern astrologers who studied ancient manuscripts from around the world. Because of the Jewish exile centuries earlier, they would have had copies of the Old Testament in their land. (3) They may have had a special message from God directing them to the Messiah. Some scholars say these wise men were each from a different land, representing the entire world bowing before Jesus. These men from far-away lands recognized Jesus as the Messiah when most of God’s chosen people in Israel did not. Matthew pictures Jesus as the King over the whole world, not just Judea.

Matt 2:1-2 The wise men traveled thousands of miles to see the king of the Jews. When they finally found him, they responded with joy, worship, and gifts. This is so different from the approach people often take today. We expect God to come looking for us, to explain himself, prove who he is, and give us gifts. But those who are wise still seek and worship Jesus today, not for what they can get, but for who he is.

Matt 2:2 The wise men said they saw Jesus’ star. Balaam referred to a coming “star . . . from Jacob” (Num 24:17). Some say this star may have been a conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars in 6 B.C., and others offer other explanations. But couldn’t God, who created the heavens, have created a special star to signal the arrival of his Son? Whatever the nature of the star, these wise men traveled thousands of miles searching for a king, and they found him.

► **MATTHEW 2:1-12 (cont.)**

³King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. ⁴He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?”

⁵“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote:

⁶ ‘And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities* of Judah, for a ruler will come from you

Mt 2:6a Greek *the rulers*. **Mt 2:6b** Mic 5:2; 2 Sam 5:2.

Matt 2:3 Herod the Great was quite disturbed when the wise men asked about a newborn king of the Jews because (1) Herod was not the rightful heir to the throne of David; therefore, many Jews hated him as a usurper. If Jesus really was an heir, trouble would arise. (2) Herod was ruthless, and because of his many enemies, he was suspicious that someone would try to overthrow him. (3) Herod didn’t want the Jews, a religious people, to unite around a religious figure. (4) If these wise men were of Jewish descent and from Parthia (the most powerful region next to Rome), they would have welcomed a Jewish king who could swing the balance of power away from Rome. The land of Israel, far from Rome, would have been easy prey for a nation trying to gain more control.

The text tells us that not only was Herod disturbed, but so was everyone in Jerusalem. When Jesus was born into the world, people immediately began to react. His presence did not soothe and comfort most people; instead, it startled and disturbed them. In some he awakened spiritual longings; in others, fear and insecurity. Things have not changed that much. Jesus still disturbs people. If it is true that God entered our world when Jesus was born, we dare not sit idly by ignoring and rationalizing our inaction. We must acknowledge Jesus as the rightful King of our lives.

Matt 2:4-6 The leading priests and teachers of religious law were aware of Micah 5:2 and other prophecies about the Messiah. Matthew repeatedly highlighted their knowledge and unbelief. The wise men’s news troubled Herod because he knew that the Jewish people expected the Messiah to come soon (Luke 3:15). Most Jews expected the Messiah to be a great military and political deliverer, like Alexander the Great. Herod’s counselors would have told Herod this. No wonder this ruthless man took no chances and ordered all the baby boys in Bethlehem killed (Matt 2:16)!

Matt 2:6 Most religious leaders believed in a literal fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecy; therefore, they believed the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem as foreseen by the prophet Micah seven centuries earlier (Mic 5:2). Ironically, when Jesus was born, these same religious leaders became his

who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.’**

⁷Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. ⁸Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!”

⁹After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the



HEROD

Herod the Great was the father of the Herodian family and is remembered as a builder of cities and the lavish rebuild-er of the Temple in Jerusalem. But he also destroyed people. He showed little greatness in either his personal actions or his character. He was ruthless in ruling his territory. His suspicions and jealousy led to the murder of several of his children and the death of his wife Mari-amne. • Herod’s title, king of the Jews, was granted by Rome but never accepted by the Jewish people. He was only partly Jewish, and although Israel benefited from Herod’s lavish efforts to repair the Temple in Jerusalem, he also rebuilt various pagan temples. Herod’s costly attempt to gain the loyalty of the people failed because it was superficial. His only loyalty was to himself. • Herod was constantly worried about losing his position. His actions when hearing from the wise men about their search for the new king are consistent with his character. He planned to locate and kill the child before he could become a threat. The murder of innocent children that followed is a tragic lesson in what can happen when actions are motivated by selfishness.

Strengths and accomplishments	• Rome appointed him king of the Jews • Was an effective, though ruthless, ruler for 30 years • Sponsored a great variety of large building projects
Weaknesses and mistakes	• Treated those around him with fear, suspicion, and jealousy • Had several of his children and at least one wife killed • Ordered the killing of the baby boys in Bethlehem
Lessons from his life	• Great power brings neither peace nor security • No one can prevent God’s plans from being carried out • Superficial loyalty does not impress people or God
Vital statistics	• Occupation: King of Judea from 37 to 4 B.C. • Relatives: Father: Antipater. Sons: Archelaus, Antipater, Antipas, Philip, and others. Wives: Doris, Mariamne, and others. • Contemporaries: Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, Mark Antony, Augustus
Key verse	“Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under” (Matt 2:16).

Herod the Great is mentioned in Matthew 2:1-22 and Luke 1:5.

greatest enemies. When the Messiah for whom they had been waiting finally came, they didn’t recognize him.

Matt 2:8 Herod did not want to worship Christ—he was lying. This was a trick to get the wise men to return to him and reveal the whereabouts of the newborn king. Herod’s plan was to kill Jesus.

Matt 2:11 Jesus was probably one or two years old when the wise men found him. By this time, Mary and Joseph were married, living in a house, and intending to stay in Bethlehem for a while. For more on Joseph and Mary’s stay there, see the note on Luke 2:39, p. 1286.

star, they were filled with joy! ¹¹They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

¹²When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

The Escape to Egypt

MATTHEW 2:13-18

After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother,” the angel said. “Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

¹⁴That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, ¹⁵and they stayed there until Herod’s death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: “I called my Son out of Egypt.”*

¹⁶Herod was furious when he realized that the

Mt 2:15 Hos 11:1. **Mt 2:18** Jer 31:15.

wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men’s report of the star’s first appearance. ¹⁷Herod’s brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸ “A cry was heard in Ramah—
weeping and great mourning.
Rachel weeps for her children,
refusing to be comforted,
for they are dead.”*

The Return from Egypt

MATTHEW 2:19-22

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. ²⁰“Get up!” the angel said. “Take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead.”

²¹So Joseph got up and returned to the land of

Matt 2:11 The wise men gave these expensive gifts as worthy acknowledgement for a future king. Bible students have seen in the gifts symbols of Christ’s identity and what he would accomplish. Gold was a gift for royalty; frankincense was a gift for deity; and myrrh was a spice used to anoint a body for burial. These gifts may have provided the financial resources for the trip to Egypt and back.

Matt 2:11 The wise men brought gifts and worshiped Jesus for who he was. This is the essence of true worship—honoring Christ for who he is and being willing to give him what is valuable to you. Worship God because he is the perfect, just, and almighty Creator of the universe, worthy of the best you have to give.

Matt 2:12 After finding Jesus and worshipping him, the wise men were warned by God not to return through Jerusalem as they had intended. Finding Jesus may mean that your life must take a different direction, one that is responsive and obedient to God’s Word. In what ways has Jesus affected the direction of your life?

Matt 2:13 This was the second dream or vision that Joseph received from God. Joseph’s first dream revealed that Mary’s child would be the Messiah (Matt 1:20-21). His second dream told him how to protect the child’s life. Although Joseph was not Jesus’ natural father, he was Jesus’ legal father and was responsible for his safety and well-being. Divine guidance comes only to prepared hearts. Joseph remained receptive to God’s guidance.

Matt 2:14-15 Going to Egypt was not unusual because there were colonies of Jews in several major Egyptian cities. These colonies had developed during the time of

the great captivity (see Jer 43–44). There is an interesting parallel between this flight to Egypt and Israel’s history. As an infant nation, Israel went to Egypt, just as Jesus did as a child. God led Israel out (Hos 11:1); God brought Jesus back. Both events show God working to save his people.

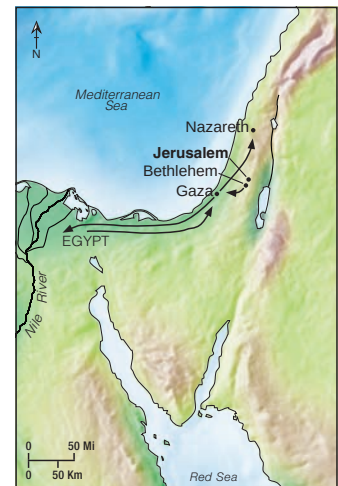
Matt 2:16 Herod, the king of the Jews, killed all the boys under two years of age in an obsessive attempt to kill Jesus, the newborn king. He stained his hands with blood, but he did not harm Jesus. Herod was king by a human appointment; Jesus was King by a divine appointment. No one can thwart God’s plans.

Matt 2:16 Herod was afraid that this newborn king would one day take his throne. He completely misunderstood the reason for Christ’s coming. Jesus didn’t want Herod’s throne; he wanted to be king of Herod’s life. Jesus wanted to give Herod eternal life, not take away his present life. Today people are often afraid that Christ wants to take things away when, in reality, he wants to give them real freedom, peace, and joy. Don’t fear Christ—give him the throne of your life.

Matt 2:17-18 Rachel had been the favored wife of Jacob, one of the great men of God in the Old Testament. As such, she was considered the mother of a nation. From Jacob’s 12 sons had come the 12 tribes of Israel. Rachel was buried near Bethlehem (Gen 35:19). For more about the significance of this verse, see the note on Jeremiah 31:15, p. 1033, from which this verse was quoted.

Matt 2:19-22 Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. of an incurable disease. Rome trusted him but didn’t trust his sons. Herod knew that Rome wouldn’t give his successor as much power, so he divided his kingdom into

three parts, one for each son. Archelaus received Judea, Samaria, and Idumea; Herod Antipas received Galilee and Perea; Herod Philip II received Traconitis. Archelaus, a violent man, began his reign by slaughtering 3,000 influential people. Nine years later, he was banished. God didn’t want Joseph’s family to go into the region of this evil ruler.



THE FLIGHT TO EGYPT Herod planned to kill the baby Jesus, whom he perceived to be a threat to his position. Warned in a dream, Joseph took his family to Egypt until Herod’s death, which occurred a year or two later. Then God led them to return to Nazareth in Galilee.

► **MATTHEW 2:19-22** (cont.)

Israel with Jesus and his mother. ²²But when he learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod's son Archelaus, he was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee.

Jesus' Childhood in Nazareth PARALLEL

MATTHEW 2:23 OO

So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said: "He will be called a Nazarene."

LUKE 2:39-40 OO

When Jesus' parents had fulfilled all the requirements of the law of the Lord, they returned home to Nazareth in Galilee. ⁴⁰There the child grew up healthy and strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him.

Jesus Speaks with the Religious Teachers

LUKE 2:41-52

Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. ⁴²When Jesus was twelve years old, they attended the festival as usual. ⁴³After the celebration was over, they started home to Nazareth, but Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents didn't miss him at first, ⁴⁴because they assumed he was among the other travelers. But when he didn't show up that evening, they started looking for him among their relatives and friends.

⁴⁵When they couldn't find him, they went back to Jerusalem to search for him there. ⁴⁶Three days later they finally discovered him in the Temple, sitting among the religious teachers, listening to them and asking questions. ⁴⁷All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

⁴⁸His parents didn't know what to think. "Son," his

Matt 2:23 Nazareth sat in the hilly area of southern Galilee near the crossroads of great caravan trade routes. The town itself was rather small. The Roman garrison in charge of Galilee was housed there. The people of Nazareth had constant contact with people from all over the world, so world news reached them quickly. The people of Nazareth had an attitude of independence that many of the Jews despised. This may have been why Nathanael commented "Nazareth! . . . Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (John 1:46).

Matt 2:23 The Old Testament does not record this specific statement, "He will be called a Nazarene." Many scholars believe, however, that Matthew is referring to Isaiah 11:1, where the Hebrew word for "branch" is similar to the word for "Nazarene." Or he may be referring to a prophecy unrecorded in the Bible. In any case, Matthew paints the picture of Jesus as the true Messiah announced by God through the prophets; and he makes the point that Jesus, the Messiah, had unexpectedly humble beginnings, just as the Old Testament had predicted (see Mic 5:2).

Luke 2:39 Did Mary and Joseph return immediately to Nazareth, or did they remain in Bethlehem for a time (as implied in Matt 2)? Apparently there is a gap of several years between verses 38 and 39—ample time for them to find a place to live in Bethlehem, flee to Egypt to escape Herod's wrath, and return to Nazareth when it was safe to do so.

Luke 2:41-42 According to God's law, every male was required to go to Jerusalem three times a year for the great festivals (Deut 16:16). In the spring, the Passover was celebrated, followed immediately by the weeklong Festival of Unleavened Bread. Passover commemorated the night of the Jews' escape from Egypt when God had killed the Egyptian firstborn but had passed over Israelite homes (see Exod 12:21-36). Passover was the most important of the three annual festivals.



GOSPEL ACCOUNTS FOUND ONLY IN MATTHEW

Matthew records nine events that are not mentioned in any of the other Gospels. In each case, Matthew's choice seems to relate to his purpose in communicating the gospel to Jewish people. Five cases are fulfillments of prophecies (marked with asterisks). The other four would have been of particular interest to the Jews of Matthew's day.

Passage	Subject
1:20-24	Joseph's dream*
2:1-12	The visit of the wise men
2:13-15	Escape to Egypt*
2:16-18	Slaughter of the male children*
27:3-10	The death of Judas*
27:19.....	The dream of Pilate's wife
27:52.....	The other resurrections
28:11-15	The bribery of the guards
28:19-20	The baptism emphasis in the great commission*

Luke 2:43-45 At age 12, Jesus was considered almost an adult, so he probably didn't spend a lot of time with his parents during the festival. Those who attended these festivals often traveled in caravans for protection from robbers along the Palestine roads. The women and children usually would travel at the front of the caravan, with the men bringing up the rear. A 12-year-old boy conceivably could have been in either group, so both Mary and Joseph probably assumed that Jesus was with the other one. But when the caravan left Jerusalem, Jesus stayed behind, absorbed in his discussion with the religious leaders.

Luke 2:46-47 The Temple courts were famous throughout Judea as a place of learning. At the time of the Passover, the greatest rabbis of the land would assemble to teach and to discuss great truths among themselves. The coming Messiah might have been a popular discussion topic, for many people

were expecting him soon. Jesus would have been eager to listen and to ask probing questions. It was not his youth but the depth of his wisdom that astounded these teachers.

Luke 2:48 Mary had to let go of her child and let him become a man, God's Son, the Messiah. Fearful that she hadn't been careful enough with this God-given child, she searched frantically for him. But she was looking for a boy, not the young man who was in the Temple astounding the religious leaders with his questions. Letting go of people or projects we have nurtured can be very difficult. It is both sweet and painful to see our children growing into adults, our students into teachers, our subordinates into managers, our inspirations into institutions. But when the time comes we must step back and let go—in spite of the hurt. Then our protégés can exercise their wings, take flight, and soar to the heights God intended for them.

mother said to him, “why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been frantic, searching for you everywhere.”

⁴⁹“But why did you need to search?” he asked. “Didn’t you know that I must be in my Father’s house?”* ⁵⁰But they didn’t understand what he meant.

⁵¹Then he returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. And his mother stored all these things in her heart.

⁵²Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and all the people.

Lk 2:49 Or “Didn’t you realize that I should be involved with my Father’s affairs?” **Mt 3:2** Or *has come, or is coming soon.* **Mt 3:3** Isa 40:3 (Greek version).

Luke 2:49–50 This is the first mention of Jesus’ awareness that he was God’s Son. But even though he knew his real Father, Jesus did not reject his earthly parents. He went back to Nazareth with them and lived under their authority for another 18 years. God’s people do not despise human relationships or family responsibilities. If the Son of God obeyed his human parents, how much more should we honor our family members! Don’t use commitment to God’s work to justify neglecting your family.

Luke 2:50 Jesus’ parents didn’t understand what he meant about his Father’s house. They didn’t realize he was making a distinction between his earthly father and his heavenly Father. Jesus knew that he had a unique relationship with God. Although Mary and Joseph knew he was God’s Son, they didn’t understand what his mission would involve. Besides, they had to raise him, along with his brothers and sisters (Matt 13:55–56), as a normal child. They knew he was unique, but they did not know what was going on in his mind.

Luke 2:52 The Bible does not record any events of the next 18 years of Jesus’ life, but Jesus undoubtedly was learning and maturing. As the oldest in a large family, he would have assisted Joseph in his carpentry work. Since there is no mention of Joseph after this time, he may have died, leaving Jesus to provide for the family. The normal routines of daily life gave Jesus a solid understanding of the Judean people.

Luke 2:52 The second chapter of Luke shows us that although Jesus was unique, he had a normal childhood and adolescence. In terms of development, he went through the same progression we do. He grew physically and mentally, he related to other people, and he was loved by God. A full human life is balanced. Thus it was important to Jesus—and it should be important to all believers—to develop fully and harmoniously in each of these key areas: physical, mental, social, and spiritual.

Matt 3:1–2 John the Baptist bursts onto the scene thirty years after the birth of Jesus. His theme was “Repent of your sins.” The people needed to repent—make a 180-degree turn—from the kind of self-centeredness

that leads to wrong actions, such as lying, cheating, stealing, gossiping, taking revenge, abusing, and indulging in sexual immorality. A person who turns from sin stops rebelling and begins following God’s way of living prescribed in his Word. The first step in turning to God is to admit your sin, as John urged. Then God will receive you and help you live the way he wants. Remember that only God can get rid of sin. He doesn’t expect us to clean up our life before we come to him.

Matt 3:2 The Kingdom of Heaven began when God himself entered human history as a man. Today Jesus Christ reigns in the hearts of believers, but the Kingdom of Heaven will not be fully realized until all evil in the world is judged and removed. Christ came to earth first as a suffering servant; he will come again as king and judge to rule victoriously over all the earth.

Matt 3:3 The prophecy quoted is Isaiah 40:3. Isaiah was one of the greatest prophets

John the Baptist Prepares the Way for Jesus PARALLEL

MATTHEW 3:1–12

In those days John the Baptist came to the Judean wilderness and began preaching. His message was, “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.”* The prophet Isaiah was speaking about John when he said,

“He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the LORD’s coming!
Clear the road for him!’”*

of the Old Testament and one of the most quoted in the New. Like Isaiah, John was a prophet who urged the people to confess their sins and live for God. Both prophets taught that the message of repentance is good news to those who listen and seek the healing forgiveness of God’s love, but terrible news to those who refuse to listen and thus cut off their only hope.

Matt 3:3 John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus by preparing others to welcome him. People who do not know Jesus need to get ready to meet him. We can prepare them by explaining their need for forgiveness, demonstrating Christ’s teachings by our conduct, and telling them how Christ can give their lives meaning. We can “clear the road for him” by correcting misconceptions that might be hindering people from coming to Christ. Someone you know may be open to a relationship with Christ. How are you helping those around you to welcome Jesus?



Egypt in Jesus’ Day The Sphinx and the great pyramids dominated the landscape when Jesus was there as an infant, but they were just as much cultural artifacts then as they are today. It had been centuries since the classical Egyptian culture had been conquered, and Greco-Roman customs and culture dominated the area at this time. The people there spoke Greek and were under Roman rule, just like Judea and Galilee.

► **MATTHEW 3:1-12 (cont.)**

⁴John's clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁵People from Jerusalem and from all of Judea and all over the Jordan Valley went out to see and hear John. ⁶And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.

⁷But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees

coming to watch him baptize,* he denounced them. "You brood of snakes!" he exclaimed. "Who warned you to flee God's coming wrath? ⁸Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. ⁹Don't just say to each other, 'We're safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.' That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. ¹⁰Even now the ax of God's judgment

Mt 3:7 Or *coming to be baptized*.

Matt 3:4 John was markedly different from other religious leaders of his day. While many were greedy, selfish, and preoccupied with winning the praise of the people, John was concerned only with the praise of God. Having separated himself from the evil and hypocrisy of his day, John lived differently from other people to show that his message was new. John not only preached God's law, he lived it. Do you practice what you preach? Could people discover what you believe by observing the way you live?

Matt 3:4-6 John must have presented a strange image! Many people came to hear this preacher, who wore odd clothes and ate unusual food. Some probably came simply out of curiosity and ended up turning from their sins as they listened to his powerful message. People may be curious about your Christian lifestyle and values. You can use their simple curiosity as an opener to share how Christ makes a difference in you.

Matt 3:5 Why did John attract so many people? He was a true prophet from God, and he publicly blasted both Herod and the religious leaders, daring words that fascinated the common people. But John also had a strong message for his audience: They, too, were sinners and needed to turn from their sins. His words were powerful and true. The people were expecting a prophet like Elijah (Mal 4:5; Luke 1:17), and John seemed to be the one!

Matt 3:6 When you wash dirty hands, the results are immediately visible. But turning from sins (repentance) happens inside with a cleansing that isn't seen right away. So John used a symbolic action that people could see: baptism. The Jews used baptism to initiate converts, so John's audience was familiar with the rite. Here, baptism was used as a sign of repentance and forgiveness. Turning from sins implies a change in behavior, turning from sin toward God. Have you turned from sin in your life? Can others see the difference it makes in you? A changed life with new and different behavior makes your repentance real and visible.

Matt 3:6 The Jordan River is about 70 miles long, its main section stretching between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. Jerusalem lies about 20 miles west of the Jordan. This river was Israel's eastern border, and many significant events in the nation's history took place there. It was by the Jordan River that the Israelites renewed their covenant with God before entering the Promised Land (Josh 1–2). Here John the Baptist calls them



THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES

The Pharisees and Sadducees were the two major religious leadership groups in Israel at the time of Jesus. The Pharisees were more religiously minded, while the Sadducees were more politically minded. Although the groups disliked and distrusted each other, they became allies in their common hatred for Jesus.

Name	Positive Characteristics	Negative Characteristics
PHARISEES	- Were committed to obeying God's law - Were admired by the people for their piety - Believed in a bodily resurrection and eternal life - Believed in angels and demons	- Behaved as though their own religious rules were just as important as God's law - Their piety was often hypocritical, and they admonished others to live up to standards they themselves could not live up to - Were more concerned with appearing to be good than obeying God
SADDUCEES	- Believed strongly in the Law of Moses and in Levitical purity - Were more practically minded than the Pharisees	- Relied on logic while placing little importance on faith - Did not believe all the Old Testament was God's Word - Did not believe in a bodily resurrection or eternal life - Did not believe in angels or demons - Were willing to compromise their values in order to maintain their status and power

to renew their covenant with God again, this time through baptism.

Matt 3:7 The Jewish religious leaders were divided into several groups. Two of the most prominent groups were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees separated themselves from anything non-Jewish and carefully followed both the Old Testament laws and the oral traditions handed down through the centuries. The Sadducees believed the Pentateuch alone (Genesis—Deuteronomy) to be God's Word. They were descended mainly from priestly nobility, while the Pharisees came from all classes of people. The two groups disliked each other greatly, and both opposed Jesus. John the Baptist criticized the Pharisees for being legalistic and hypocritical, following the letter of the law while ignoring its true intent. He criticized the Sadducees for using religion to advance their

political position. For more information on these two groups, see the chart on p. 1313.

Matt 3:8 John the Baptist called people to more than words or ritual; he told them to change their behavior. "Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins" means that God looks beyond our words and religious activities to see if our conduct backs up what we say, and he judges our words by the actions that accompany them. Do your actions match your words?

Matt 3:9-10 Just as a fruit tree is expected to bear fruit, God's people should produce a crop of good deeds. God has no use for people who call themselves Christians but who live otherwise. Like many people in John's day who were God's people in name only, we are of no value if we are Christians in name only. If others can't see our faith in the way we treat them, we may not be God's people at all.

is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹“I baptize with* water those who repent of their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not worthy even to be his slave and carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.*

¹²He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire.”

Mt 3:11a Or in. **Mt 3:11b** Or in the Holy Spirit and in fire. **Mk 1:2** Mal 3:1. **Mk 1:3** Isa 40:3 (Greek version).

Matt 3:10 God’s message hasn’t changed since the Old Testament: People will be judged for their unproductive lives. God calls us to be active in our obedience. John compared people who claim they believe God but don’t live for God to unproductive trees that will be cut down. To be productive for God, we must obey his teachings, resist temptation, actively serve and help others, and share our faith. How productive are you for God?

Matt 3:11 John baptized people as a sign that they had asked God to forgive their sins and had decided to live as he wanted them to live. Baptism was an outward sign of commitment. To be effective, it had to be accompanied by an inward change of attitude leading to a changed life.

Matt 3:12 A winnowing fork is a pitchfork used to toss wheat in the air to separate grain from chaff. The grain is the part of the plant that is useful; chaff is the worthless outer shell. Because it is useless, chaff is burned; grain, however, is gathered. “Winnowing” is often used as a picture of God’s judgment.

Mark 1:2-3 Isaiah was one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament. The second half of the book of Isaiah is devoted to the promise of salvation. Isaiah wrote about the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and the man who would announce his coming, John the Baptist. John’s call to “clear the road for him” meant that people should give up their selfish way of living, renounce their sins, seek God’s forgiveness, and establish a relationship with God by believing and obeying his words as found in Scripture (Isa 1:18-20; 57:15).

Mark 1:2-3 Mark 1:2-3 is a composite quotation, taken first from Malachi 3:1 and then from Isaiah 40:3.

Mark 1:2-4 Hundreds of years earlier, the prophet Isaiah had predicted that John the Baptist and Jesus would come. Isaiah’s words comforted many people as they looked forward to the Messiah, and knowing that God keeps his promises can comfort you, too. As you read the book of Mark, realize that it is more than just a story; it is part of God’s Word. In it God is revealing to you his plans for human history—and offering the Good News of his salvation to you.

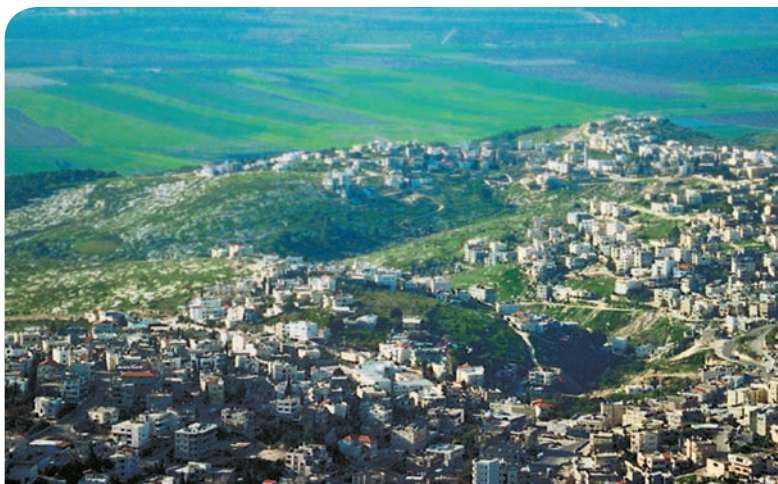
MARK 1:1b-8

It began ²just as the prophet Isaiah had written:

“Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
and he will prepare your way.*

³ He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord’s coming!
Clear the road for him!’**

⁴This messenger was John the Baptist. He was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and



Nazareth Jesus spent his childhood in Nazareth, a village in the southern hills of Galilee about seventy miles from Jerusalem. Though it was close to some roads and major trade routes, the village itself was not on the main road. Nazareth was somewhat outside of the mainstream of Jewish life in that time, providing the background for Nathanael’s remark to Philip, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” (John 1:46).

Mark 1:3 John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus. People who do not know Jesus need to be prepared to meet him. We can “prepare the way” by explaining their need for forgiveness, demonstrating Christ’s teaching by our conduct, and telling them how Christ can give their lives meaning. We can “clear the road for him” by correcting misconceptions that might be hindering people from approaching Christ. Someone you know may be open to a relationship with Christ. What can you do to prepare the way for this person?

Mark 1:4 Why does the Gospel of Mark begin with the story of John the Baptist and not mention the story of Jesus’ birth? Important Roman officials of this day were always preceded by an announcer or herald. When the herald arrived in town, the people knew that someone of prominence would soon arrive. Because Mark’s audience was

primarily Roman Christians, he began his book with John the Baptist, whose mission it was to announce the coming of Jesus, the most important man who ever lived. Roman Christians would have been less interested in Jesus’ birth than in this messenger who prepared the way.

Mark 1:4 In John’s ministry, baptism was a visible sign that a person had decided to change his or her life, giving up a sinful and selfish way of living and turning to God. John took a known custom and gave it new meaning. The Jews often baptized non-Jews who had converted to Judaism. But to baptize a Jew as a sign of repentance was a radical departure from Jewish custom. The early church took baptism a step further, associating it with Jesus’ death and resurrection (see, for example, Rom 6:3-4; 1 Pet 3:21).

BEGINNINGS undated–2100 BC	GOD'S CHOSEN FAMILY 2100–1800 BC	BIRTH OF ISRAEL 1800–1406 BC	POSSESSING THE LAND 1406–1050 BC	UNITED MONARCHY 1050–930 BC
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► **MARK 1:1b-8 (cont.)**

turned to God to be forgiven. ⁵All of Judea, including all the people of Jerusalem, went out to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River. ⁶His clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey.

⁷John announced: “Someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not even worthy to stoop down like a slave and untie the straps of his sandals. ⁸I baptize you with* water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!”

LUKE 3:1-18

It was now the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, the Roman emperor. Pontius Pilate was governor over Judea; Herod Antipas was ruler* over Galilee; his brother Philip was ruler* over Iturea and Traconitis; Lysanias was ruler over Abilene. ²Annas and Caiaphas

Mk 1:8 Or *in*; also in 1:8b. **Lk 3:1a** Greek *Herod was tetrarch*. Herod Antipas was a son of King Herod. **Lk 3:1b** Greek *tetrarch*; also in 3:1c. **Lk 3:4-6** Isa 40:3-5 (Greek version).

were the high priests. At this time a message from God came to John son of Zechariah, who was living in the wilderness. ³Then John went from place to place on both sides of the Jordan River, preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. ⁴Isaiah had spoken of John when he said,

“He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the LORD’s coming!
Clear the road for him!’

⁵ The valleys will be filled,
and the mountains and hills made level.
The curves will be straightened,
and the rough places made smooth.

⁶ And then all people will see
the salvation sent from God.’”*

⁷When the crowds came to John for baptism, he said, “You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee

Mark 1:5 Jesus came at a time in history when the entire civilized world was relatively peaceful under Roman rule, travel was easy, and there was a common language. The news about Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection could spread quickly throughout the vast Roman Empire.

In Israel, people were ready for Jesus, too, and they flocked to hear John, the wilderness preacher. There had been no God-sent prophets for 400 years, since the days of Malachi (who wrote the last book of the Old Testament). Anticipation was growing that a great prophet, or the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament, would soon come (see Luke 3:15).

Mark 1:5 The purpose of John’s preaching was to prepare people to accept Jesus as God’s Son. When John challenged the people to confess sin individually, he signaled the start of a new way to relate to God.

Is change needed in your life before you can hear and understand Jesus’ message? You have to admit that you need forgiveness before you can accept it. To prepare to receive Christ, repent. Turn away from the world’s dead-end attractions, sinful temptations, and harmful attitudes, and turn to God. He can give you a new start.

Mark 1:6 John dressed much like the prophet Elijah (2 Kgs 1:8) in order to distinguish himself from the religious leaders, whose flowing robes reflected their great pride in their position (Mark 12:38). John’s striking appearance reinforced his striking message.

Mark 1:7-8 Although John was the first genuine prophet in 400 years, Jesus the Messiah would be infinitely greater than he. John was pointing out how insignificant he was compared to the one who was coming. John was not even worthy of being his slave. What John began, Jesus finished. What John prepared, Jesus fulfilled.

Mark 1:8 John said Jesus would baptize them with the Holy Spirit, sending the Holy Spirit to live within each believer. John’s baptism with water prepared a person to receive Christ’s message. This baptism demonstrated repentance, humility, and willingness to turn from sin. This was the beginning of the spiritual process. When Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit, the entire person is transformed by the Spirit’s power. Jesus offers to us both forgiveness of sin and the power to live for him.

Luke 3:1 Tiberius, the Roman emperor, ruled from A.D. 14 to 37. Pilate was the Roman governor responsible for the province of Judea; Herod Antipas and Philip were half brothers and sons of the cruel Herod the Great, who had been dead more than 20 years. Antipas, Philip, Pilate, and Lysanias apparently had equal powers in governing their separate territories. All were subject to Rome and responsible for keeping peace in their respective lands.

Luke 3:2 Jewish law provided for only one high priest. He was appointed from Aaron’s line and held his position for life. By this time, however, the religious system had been corrupted, and the Roman government was appointing its own religious leaders to maintain greater control over the Jews. Apparently the Roman authorities had deposed the Jewish-appointed Annas and had replaced him with Annas’s son-in-law, Caiaphas. Nevertheless Annas retained his title (see Acts 4:6) and probably also much of the power it carried. Because the Jews believed the high priest’s position to be for life, they would have continued to call Annas their high priest.

Luke 3:2 Pilate, Herod, and Caiaphas were the most powerful leaders in Palestine, but they were upstaged by a wilderness prophet from rural Judea. God chose to speak through the loner, John the Baptist, who has

gone down in history as greater than any of the rulers of his day. How often people judge others by the superficial standards of power, wealth, and beauty, and miss the truly great people through whom God works! Greatness is measured not by what you have but by your faith in God. Like John, give yourself entirely to God so God’s power can work through you.

Luke 3:3 To turn to God to receive forgiveness from sins implies turning away from sins. We can’t just say we believe and then live any way we choose (see Luke 3:7-8); neither can we simply live a morally correct life without a personal relationship with God because that cannot bring forgiveness from sin. Determine to rid your life of any sins God points out, and then determine to live in a way that pleases him.

Luke 3:4-5 In John’s day, before a king would take a trip, messengers would tell those he was planning to visit to prepare the roads for him. Similarly John told his listeners to make their lives ready so the Lord could come to them. This does not mean that you must get rid of all your sin or wrongdoing before you can accept Christ; rather, when you accept him, he takes care of all your sinfulness. To “prepare the way” means clearing aside the baggage of the past and the doubts of the present in order to let the King come into your life. He’ll take it from there.

Luke 3:6 Luke was written to a non-Jewish audience. The quote from Isaiah shows that salvation is for “all people,” not just the Jews (Isa 40:3-5; 52:10). John the Baptist called everyone to prepare to meet Jesus. That includes you, no matter what your nationality, social standing, religious affiliation, or political position. God is calling to all people. Don’t let feelings of being an outsider cause you to hold back. No one who wants to follow Jesus is an outsider in God’s Kingdom.

God's coming wrath? ⁸Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. Don't just say to each other, 'We're safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.' That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. ⁹Even now the ax of God's judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire."

¹⁰The crowds asked, "What should we do?"

¹¹John replied, "If you have two shirts, give one to

the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry."

¹²Even corrupt tax collectors came to be baptized and asked, "Teacher, what should we do?"

¹³He replied, "Collect no more taxes than the government requires."

¹⁴"What should we do?" asked some soldiers.

John replied, "Don't extort money or make false accusations. And be content with your pay."

¹⁵Everyone was expecting the Messiah to come soon, and they were eager to know whether John

Luke 3:7-9 Some people wanted to be baptized by John so they could escape eternal punishment, but they were not really repenting from sin nor were they willing to change the way they lived. John had harsh words for such people. He knew that God values reformation above ritual. Confession of sins and a changed life are inseparable. Faith without deeds is dead (Jas 2:14-26). Jesus also spoke harsh words to the respectable religious leaders who lacked the willingness to repent. They wanted to be known as religious authorities and they wanted eternal life, but they didn't want to repent of their sins. Thus, their lives were unproductive. Turning from sin must be tied to action. Following Jesus means more than saying the right words; it means acting on what he says.

Luke 3:8 Many of John's hearers were shocked when he said that being Abraham's descendants was not enough to ensure salvation. The religious leaders relied more on family lines than on faith for their standing with God. For them, religion was inherited. But a personal relationship with God cannot be handed down from parents to children. Everyone has to make a personal decision of whether or not to trust Christ. Don't rely on someone else's faith for your salvation. Have you made that personal decision to trust Christ?

Luke 3:11-14 John's message demanded at least three specific responses: (1) Share what you have with those who need it, (2) whatever your job is, do it well and with fairness, and (3) be content with your earnings. John had not been commissioned to

bring comforting messages to those who lived sinful lives; he was calling the people to right living as he prepared the way for their Messiah. What changes can you make in sharing what you have, doing your work honestly and well, and being content?

Luke 3:12 Tax collectors were notorious for their dishonesty. Romans gathered funds for their government by farming out the collection privilege. Tax collectors earned their own living by adding a sizable sum—whatever they could get away with—to the total and keeping this money for themselves. Unless the people revolted and risked Roman retaliation, they had to pay whatever was demanded. Obviously the people hated the tax collectors, who were generally corrupt and greedy. Yet, said John, God would accept even these men; God desires to pour out mercy on those who confess their sins and then to give them strength to live changed lives.

Luke 3:12-14 John's message took root in unexpected places—among the poor, the dishonest, and even the hated occupation army. These people were painfully aware of their needs and they were honestly seeking to know what to do to change their lives. Did anyone follow John's advice? Surely some did, and their softened hearts became ready to receive the message of the One who was to come.

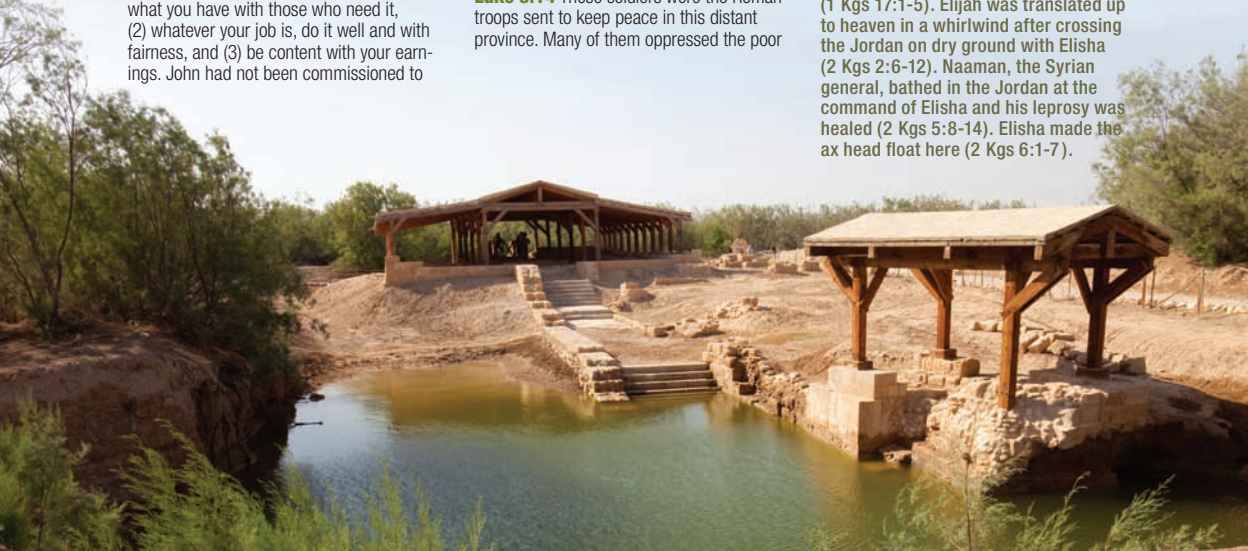
Luke 3:14 These soldiers were the Roman troops sent to keep peace in this distant province. Many of them oppressed the poor

and used their power to take advantage of all the people. John called them to turn from their sins and change their ways.

Luke 3:15 Israel had not seen a prophet for more than 400 years. It was widely believed that when the Messiah would come, prophecy would reappear (Joel 2:28-29; Mal 3:1; 4:5). When John burst onto the scene, the people were excited. He was obviously a great prophet, and they were sure that the eagerly awaited age of the Messiah had come. Some, in fact, thought John himself was the Messiah. John spoke like the prophets of old, saying that the people must turn from their sin to God to avoid punishment and to experience his mercy and approval. This is a message for all times and places, but John spoke it with particular urgency; he was preparing the people for the coming Messiah.

The Jordan River

The Jordan River follows a north-south route, descending gradually from the Huleh Lake to the Dead Sea. Prior to Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, it was already quite important in Israel's history. The Israelites passed across the Jordan upon entry into the Promised Land (Josh 3:14-17). The prophet Elijah sought refuge from Ahab king of Israel by the brook of Kerith east of the Jordan (1 Kgs 17:1-5). Elijah was translated up to heaven in a whirlwind after crossing the Jordan on dry ground with Elisha (2 Kgs 2:6-12). Naaman, the Syrian general, bathed in the Jordan at the command of Elisha and his leprosy was healed (2 Kgs 5:8-14). Elisha made the ax head float here (2 Kgs 6:1-7).



► **LUKE 3:1-18** (cont.)

might be the Messiah. ¹⁶John answered their questions by saying, “I baptize you with* water; but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.* ¹⁷He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire.” ¹⁸John used many such warnings as he announced the Good News to the people.

Lk 3:16a Or in. **Lk 3:16b** Or in the Holy Spirit and in fire. **Jn 1:19** Greek and Levites. **Jn 1:21** Greek Are you the Prophet? See Deut 18:15, 18; Mal 4:5-6.

Luke 3:16 John’s baptism with water symbolized the washing away of sins. His baptism followed his message of repentance and reformation. Jesus’ baptism with fire equips one with power to do God’s will. The baptism with the Holy Spirit was first given at Pentecost (Acts 2) when the Holy Spirit came upon believers in the form of tongues of fire, empowering them to proclaim Jesus’ resurrection in many languages. The baptism with fire also symbolizes the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing God’s judgment on those who refuse to repent.

Luke 3:17 John warned of impending judgment by comparing those who refuse to live for God to chaff, the useless outer husk of the grain. By contrast, John compared those who repent and reform their lives to the nourishing wheat itself. Those who refuse to be used by God will be discarded because they have no value in furthering God’s work. Those who repent and believe, however, hold great value in God’s eyes because they are beginning a new life of productive service for him.

John 1:19 The priests and Temple assistants (also called Levites) were respected religious leaders in Jerusalem. Priests served in the Temple, and Temple assistants helped them. The Pharisees (John 1:24) were a group that both John the Baptist and Jesus often denounced. Many of them outwardly obeyed God’s laws to look pious, while inwardly their hearts were filled with pride and greed. The Pharisees believed that their own oral traditions were just as important as God’s inspired Word.

These leaders came to see John the Baptist for several reasons: (1) Their duty as guardians of the faith included investigating any new teaching or movement (Deut 13:1-5; 18:20-22). (2) They wanted to find out if John had the credentials of a prophet. (3) John had quite a following, and it was growing. They were probably jealous and wanted to see why this man was so popular.

John 1:21-23 In the religious leaders’ minds, there were four options regarding John the Baptist’s identity: He was (1) the Prophet foretold by Moses (Deut 18:15),

JOHN 1:19-28

This was John’s testimony when the Jewish leaders sent priests and Temple assistants* from Jerusalem to ask John, “Who are you?” ²⁰He came right out and said, “I am not the Messiah.”

²¹“Well then, who are you?” they asked. “Are you Elijah?”

“No,” he replied.

“Are you the Prophet we are expecting?”*

“No.”

²²“Then who are you? We need an answer for those who sent us. What do you have to say about yourself?”

JOHN THE BAPTIST John the Baptist was unique.

He wore odd clothes and ate strange food and preached an unusual message to the Judeans who went out to the wastelands to see him. But John did not aim at uniqueness for its own sake. Instead, he aimed at obedience. The angel who had announced John’s birth to Zechariah had made it clear that this child was to be a Nazirite—one set apart for God’s service. He knew he had a specific role to play in the world—announcing the coming of the Savior—and he put all his energies into this task. • This wild-looking man spoke with almost irresistible authority. People were moved by his words because he spoke the truth, challenging them to turn from their sins and baptizing them as a symbol of their repentance. They responded by the hundreds. But even as people crowded to him, he pointed beyond himself, never forgetting that his main role was to announce the coming of the Savior. • God has given each of us a purpose for living, and we can trust him to guide us. John focused his life on the truth he knew from the Scriptures. Likewise, we can discover in God’s Word the truths he wants us to know. And as these truths work in us, others will be drawn to him. God can use you in a way he can use no one else. Let him know your willingness to follow him today.

Strengths and accomplishments	• The God-appointed messenger to announce the arrival of Jesus • A preacher whose theme was repentance • Known for his remarkable lifestyle • Uncompromising
Lessons from his life	• God does not guarantee an easy or safe life to those who serve him • Standing for the truth is more important than life itself
Vital statistics	• Where: Judea • Occupation: Prophet • Relatives: Father: Zechariah. Mother: Elizabeth. Relative: Jesus. • Contemporaries: Herod, Herodias
Key verse	“I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist. Yet even the least person in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he is!” (Matt 11:11).

John’s story is told in all four Gospels. His coming was predicted in Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 4:5; and he is mentioned in Acts 1:5, 22; 10:37; 11:16; 13:24, 25; 18:25; 19:3-4.

(2) Elijah (Mal 4:5), (3) the Messiah, or (4) a false prophet. John denied being the first three personages. Instead, he called himself, in the words of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, “The voice of someone shouting, ‘Clear the way through the wilder-

ness for the LORD!’” (Isa 40:3). The leaders kept pressing John to say who he was because people were expecting the Messiah to come (Luke 3:15). But John emphasized only why he had come—to prepare the way for the Messiah. The Pharisees missed the

²³John replied in the words of the prophet Isaiah:

“I am a voice shouting in the wilderness,
‘Clear the way for the LORD’s coming!’”*

²⁴Then the Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵asked him, “If you aren’t the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet, what right do you have to baptize?”

²⁶John told them, “I baptize with* water, but right here in the crowd is someone you do not recognize.

²⁷Though his ministry follows mine, I’m not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandal.”

²⁸This encounter took place in Bethany, an area east of the Jordan River, where John was baptizing.

Jn 1:23 Isa 40:3. **Jn 1:26** Or in; also in 1:31, 33. **Mt 3:15** Or for we must fulfill all righteousness. **Mt 3:16** Some manuscripts read opened to him.

The Baptism of Jesus PARALLEL ●●●

MATTHEW 3:13-17 POO

Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. ¹⁴But John tried to talk him out of it. “I am the one who needs to be baptized by you,” he said, “so why are you coming to me?”

¹⁵But Jesus said, “It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires.*” So John agreed to baptize him.

¹⁶After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened* and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him.

¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.”

point. They wanted to know who John was, but John wanted to prepare them to recognize who Jesus was.

John 1:25-26 John was baptizing Jews. The Essenes (a strict, monastic sect of Judaism) practiced baptism for purification, but normally only non-Jews (Gentiles) were baptized when they converted to Judaism. When the Pharisees questioned John’s authority to baptize, they were asking who gave John the right to treat God’s chosen people like Gentiles. John said, “I baptize with water”—he was merely helping the people perform a symbolic act of repentance. But soon one would come who would truly forgive sins, something only the Son of God—the Messiah—could do.

John 1:27 John the Baptist said he was not even worthy to be Christ’s slave. But according to Luke 7:28, Jesus said that John was the greatest of all prophets. If such a great person felt inadequate even to be Christ’s slave, how much more should we lay aside our pride to serve him! When we truly understand who Jesus is, our pride and self-importance melt away.

Matt 3:13-15 John had been explaining that Jesus’ baptism would be much greater than his, when suddenly Jesus came to him and asked to be baptized! John felt unqualified. He wanted Jesus to baptize him. Why did Jesus ask to be baptized? It was not for repentance of sin, because Jesus never sinned. “We must carry out all that God requires” refers to accomplishing God’s mission. Jesus saw his baptism as advancing God’s work. Jesus was baptized because (1) he was confessing sin on behalf of the nation, as Nehemiah, Ezra, Moses, and Daniel had done; (2) he was showing support for what John was doing; (3) he was inaugurating his public ministry; (4) he was identifying with the penitent people of God, not with the critical Pharisees who were only watching. Jesus, the perfect man, didn’t need baptism for sin, but he accepted baptism in obedient service to the Father, and God showed his approval.

Matt 3:15 Put yourself in John’s shoes. Your work is going well, people are taking

notice, everything is growing. But you know that the purpose of your work is to prepare the people for Jesus (John 1:35-37). Then Jesus arrives, and his coming tests your integrity. Will you be able to turn your followers over to him? John passed the test by publicly baptizing Jesus. Soon he would say, “He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less” (John 3:30). Can we, like John, put our egos and profitable work aside in order to point others

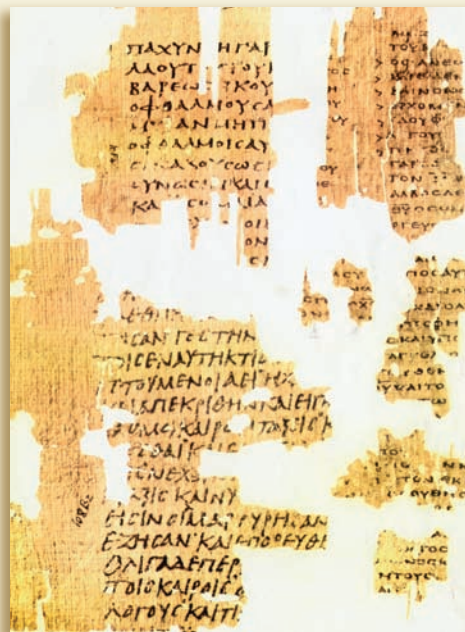
to Jesus? Are we willing to lose some of our status so that everyone will benefit?

Matt 3:16-17 The doctrine of the Trinity, which appeared later in church history, teaches that God is three persons and yet one in essence. In this passage, all three persons of the Trinity are present and active. God the Father speaks; God the Son is baptized; God the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus. God is one, yet in three persons at the same time. This is one of God’s incomprehensible mysteries.

The Heavens Were Opened

Two British archaeologists went to Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, from 1898 to 1913 in search of ancient manuscripts. Among the thousands of manuscripts they unearthed was a manuscript known as P. Oxyrhynchus 405, which became *the earliest available manuscript of Matthew’s record of Jesus’ baptism*.

There is a one-word difference in Matthew 3:16 among the available manuscripts, with some expanding the reading to “were opened to him” in an attempt to harmonize the beginning of the verse to the end, which states that Jesus (not the crowd gathered there) saw God’s Spirit descending upon him. The early manuscript found in Oxyrhynchus confirms the NLT reading in Matthew 3:16, omitting the Greek word for “to him,” and reading simply “the heavens were opened.”



MARK 1:9-11

One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. ¹⁰As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him* like a dove. ¹¹And a voice from heaven said, “You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.”

LUKE 3:21-22

One day when the crowds were being baptized, Jesus himself was baptized. As he was praying, the heavens opened, ²²and the Holy Spirit, in bodily form, descended on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, “You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.*”

Mk 1:10 Or toward him, or into him. **Lk 3:22** Some manuscripts read my Son, and today I have become your Father. **Mt 4:3** Greek the tempter. **Mt 4:4** Deut 8:3.

Satan Tempts Jesus in the Wilderness

MATTHEW 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. ²For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry.

³During that time the devil* came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread.”

⁴But Jesus told him, “No! The Scriptures say,

‘People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’**”

Mark 1:9 Jesus grew up in Nazareth, where he had lived since he was a young boy (Matt 2:22-23). Nazareth was a small town in Galilee, located about halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea. The city was despised and avoided by many Jews (John 1:46). Nazareth was a crossroads for trade routes and had contact with many cultures.

Mark 1:10-11 The Spirit descended like a dove on Jesus, and the voice from heaven proclaimed the Father’s approval of Jesus as his divine Son. Here we see all three members of the Trinity together—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. (See also Matt 28:19; Luke 1:35; John 15:26; Eph 2:18; 1 Thes 1:2-5; 1 Pet 1:2.)

Mark 1:11 The dove and the voice from heaven were signs that Jesus was the Messiah. Many people want something tangible, visible, and “real” before they will believe. So Jesus did healings and other miracles, and God raised him from the dead. Still people doubt.

Will visible signs convince anyone? The “sign” that really brings us to faith is the power of God’s message to answer the cry of the heart. To the confused, God offers a mind enlightened by faith. To the depressed, God offers a reason for joy. To the lonely, God offers eternal companionship. Don’t look for a spectacular visible sign; instead, seek a cleansed and renewed life as evidence of his presence.

Luke 3:21 Luke emphasizes Jesus’ human nature. Jesus was born to humble parents, a birth unannounced except to shepherds and foreigners. This baptism was the first public declaration of Jesus’ ministry. Instead of going to Jerusalem and identifying with the established religious leaders, Jesus went to a river and identified with those who were repenting of sin. When Jesus, at age 12, had visited the Temple, he had understood his mission (Luke 2:49). Eighteen years later, at his baptism, he began carrying it out. And as Jesus prayed, God spoke and confirmed his decision to act. God was breaking into human history through Jesus.

Luke 3:21-22 Theologians have long been troubled by Jesus’ allowing himself to be baptized by John. After all, this baptism was for sinners. Why, then, did Jesus do it? He did it because he is both God and human—he underwent baptism and even death as only a human could; he lived a sinless life and rose from the dead as only God could. This baptism by John in the Jordan River was another step in his identification with us sinful people; and the arrival of the dove signifies God’s approval. Now Jesus would officially begin his ministry as God’s beloved Son walking the dusty roads of Israel. When you are hurting, depressed, broken, remember: You have a Savior who understands your humanity. When you sin, remember: He has paid the price for your disobedience.

Luke 3:21-22 The mystery of the Trinity is on display here—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the traditional words of the church, the one God exists in three persons but one substance, coeternal and coequal. No explanation can adequately portray the power and intricacy of this unique relationship. There are no perfect analogies in nature because there is no other relationship like the Trinity.

Matt 4:1 This time of testing showed that Jesus really was the Son of God, able to overcome the devil and his temptations. A person has not shown true obedience if he or she has never had an opportunity to disobey. We read in Deuteronomy 8:2 that God led Israel into the wilderness to humble and to test them. God wanted to see whether or not his people would really obey him. We, too, will be tested. Because we know that testing will come, we should be alert and ready for it. Remember, your convictions are only strong if they hold up under pressure!

Matt 4:1ff This temptation by the devil shows us that Jesus was human, and it gave Jesus the opportunity to reaffirm God’s plan for his ministry. Jesus’ temptation was an important demonstration of his sinlessness. He could face temptation and not give in.

Matt 4:1ff Jesus wasn’t tempted inside the Temple or at his baptism but in the wilderness, where he was tired, alone, and

hungry, and thus most vulnerable. The devil often tempts us when we are under physical or emotional stress (for example, lonely, tired, weighing big decisions, or faced with uncertainty). But he also likes to tempt us through our strengths, where we are most susceptible to pride (see the note on Luke 4:3ff, p. 1296). We must guard at all times against his attacks.

Matt 4:1-10 The devil’s temptations focused on three crucial areas: (1) physical needs and desires, (2) possessions and power, and (3) pride (see 1 Jn 2:15-16 for a similar list). But Jesus did not give in. Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus “faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin.” He knows firsthand what we are experiencing, and he is willing and able to help us in our struggles. When you are tempted, turn to him for strength.

Matt 4:3-4 Jesus was hungry and weak after fasting for 40 days, but he chose not to use his divine power to satisfy his natural desire for food. Food, hunger, and eating are good, but the timing was wrong. Jesus was in the wilderness to fast, not to eat. We also may be tempted to satisfy a perfectly normal desire in a wrong way or at the wrong time. If we indulge in sex before marriage or if we steal to get food, we are trying to satisfy God-given desires in wrong ways. Remember, many of your desires are normal and good, but God wants you to satisfy them in the right way and at the right time.

Matt 4:3-4 Jesus was able to resist all of the devil’s temptations because he not only knew Scripture, but he also obeyed it. Knowing Bible verses is an important step in helping us resist the devil’s attacks, but we must also obey the Bible. Note that Satan had memorized Scripture, but he failed to obey it. Knowing and obeying the Bible helps us follow God’s desires rather than the devil’s.

Matt 4:5 The Temple was the religious center of the Jewish nation and the place where the people expected the Messiah to arrive (Mal 3:1). Herod the Great had renovated the Temple in the hope of gaining the Jews’

⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, ⁶and said, “If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say,

‘He will order his angels to protect you.
And they will hold you up with their hands
so you won’t even hurt your foot
on a stone.’⁷”

⁷Jesus responded, “The Scriptures also say, ‘You must not test the LORD your God.’⁸”

⁸Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹“I will give it all to you,” he said, “if you will kneel down and worship me.”

MT 4:6 Ps 91:11–12. **MT 4:7** Deut 6:16. **MT 4:10** Deut 6:13.

¹⁰“Get out of here, Satan,” Jesus told him. “For the Scriptures say,

‘You must worship the LORD your God
and serve only him.’¹¹”

¹¹Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.

MARK 1:12–13 ■■■

The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness, ¹³where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. He was out among the wild animals, and angels took care of him.

LUKE 4:1–13 ■■■

Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit in the

confidence. The Temple was the tallest building in the area, and this “highest point” was probably the corner wall that jutted out of the hillsides, overlooking the valley below. From this spot, Jesus could see all of Jerusalem behind him and the country for miles in front of him.

Matt 4:5–7 God is not our magician in the sky ready to perform on request. In response to Satan’s temptations, Jesus said not to test God (Deut 6:16). Maybe you want to ask God to do something to prove his existence or his love for you. Jesus once taught through a parable that people who don’t believe what is written in the Bible won’t believe even if someone were to come back from the dead to warn them (Luke 16:31)! God wants us to live by faith, not by magic. Don’t try to manipulate God by asking for signs.

Matt 4:6 The devil used Scripture to try to convince Jesus to sin! Sometimes friends or associates will present attractive and convincing reasons why you should try something you know is wrong. They may even find Bible verses that seem to support their viewpoint. Study the Bible carefully, especially the broader contexts of specific verses, so that you understand God’s principles for living and what he wants for your life. Only if you really understand what the whole Bible says will you be able to recognize errors of interpretation when people take verses out of context and twist them to say what they want them to say.

Matt 4:8–9 Did the devil have the power to give Jesus the nations of the world? Doesn’t God, the creator of the world, have control over these nations? Yes, but for now, Satan does have a measure of power over the world and he based his offer on this temporary control and free rein over the earth because of humanity’s sinfulness. The temptation before Jesus was to take the world as a political ruler right then, without carrying out his plan to save the world from sin. Satan was trying to distort Jesus’ perspective by making him focus on worldly power and not on God’s plans.

Matt 4:8–10 The devil offered the whole world to Jesus if Jesus would only kneel down and worship him. Today the devil offers us the world by trying to entice us with materialism and power. We can resist temptations the same way Jesus did. If you find yourself craving something that the world offers, quote Jesus’ words to the devil: “You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him.”

Matt 4:11 Angels, like these who waited on Jesus, have a significant role as God’s messengers. These spiritual beings were involved in Jesus’ life on earth by (1) announcing Jesus’ birth to Mary, (2) reassuring Joseph, (3) naming Jesus, (4) announcing Jesus’ birth to the shepherds, (5) protecting Jesus by sending his family to Egypt, and (6) ministering to Jesus in Gethsemane. For more on angels, see the note on Matthew 1:20, p. 1277.

Mark 1:12–13 Satan is an angel who rebelled against God. He is real, not symbolic, and is constantly working against God and those who obey him. Satan tempted Eve in the garden and persuaded her to sin; he tempted Jesus in the wilderness and did not persuade him to fall. To be tempted is not a sin. Tempting others or giving in to temptation is sin. Satan’s temptations are real, and he is always trying to get us to live his way or our way rather than God’s way. When temptations seem especially strong, or when you think you can rationalize giving in, consider whether Satan may be trying to block God’s purposes for your life or for someone else’s life.

Mark 1:12–13 To identify fully with human beings, Jesus had to endure Satan’s temptations. Although Jesus is God, he is also man. And as fully human, he was not exempt from Satan’s attacks. Because Jesus faced temptations and overcame them, he can assist us in two important ways: (1) as an example of how to face temptation without sinning, and (2) as a helper who knows just what we need because he went through the same experience (Heb 4:15).

Luke 4:1 Sometimes we feel that if the Holy Spirit leads us, it will always be “beside peaceful streams” (Ps 23:2). But that is not

necessarily true. He led Jesus into the wilderness for a long and difficult time of testing, and he may also lead us into difficult situations. When facing trials, first make sure you haven’t brought them on yourself through sin or unwise choices. If you find no sin to confess or unwise behavior to change, then ask God to strengthen you for your test. Finally, be careful to follow faithfully wherever the Holy Spirit leads.

Luke 4:1–2 The devil, who tempted Adam and Eve in the garden, also tempted Jesus in the wilderness. Jesus was a prime target for the devil’s temptations. Satan had succeeded with Adam and Eve, and he hoped to succeed with Jesus as well.



JESUS’ TEMPTATION AND RETURN TO GALILEE Satan tempted Jesus in the rough Judean wilderness before returning to his boyhood home, Nazareth. John’s Gospel tells of Jesus’ journeys in Galilee, Samaria, and Judea (see John 1–4) before he moved to Capernaum to set up his base of operations (see Matt 4:12–13).

► **LUKE 4:1-13 (cont.)**

wilderness.* ²where he was tempted by the devil for forty days. Jesus ate nothing all that time and became very hungry.

³Then the devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread.”

⁴But Jesus told him, “No! The Scriptures say, ‘People do not live by bread alone.’”

⁵Then the devil took him up and revealed to him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. ⁶“I will give you the glory of these kingdoms and authority over them,” the devil said, “because they are mine to give to anyone I please. ⁷I will give it all to you if you will worship me.”

⁸Jesus replied, “The Scriptures say,

Lk 4:1 Some manuscripts read *into the wilderness*. **Lk 4:4** Deut 6:3. **Lk 4:8** Deut 6:13. **Lk 4:10-11** Ps 91:11-12. **Lk 4:12** Deut 6:16.

Luke 4:1-13 Knowing and obeying God’s Word is an effective weapon against temptation, the only offensive weapon provided in the Christian’s “armor” (Eph 6:17). Jesus used Scripture to counter Satan’s attacks, and so should we. But to use it effectively, we must have faith in God’s promises because Satan also knows Scripture and is adept at twisting it to suit his purposes. Obeying the Scriptures is more important than simply having a verse to quote, so read them daily and apply them to your life. Then your “sword” will always be sharp.

Luke 4:2 Why was it necessary for Jesus to be tempted? First, temptation is part of the human experience. For Jesus to be fully human, for him to understand us completely, he had to face temptation (see Heb 4:15). Second, Jesus had to undo Adam’s work. Adam, though created perfect, gave in to temptation and passed sin on to the whole human race. Jesus, by contrast, resisted Satan. His victory offers salvation to all of Adam’s descendants (see Rom 5:12-19).

Luke 4:3 Satan may tempt us to doubt Christ’s true identity. He knows that once we begin to question whether or not Jesus is God, it’s far easier to get us to do what he wants. Times of questioning can help us sort out our beliefs and strengthen our faith, but those times can also be dangerous. If you are dealing with doubt, be aware that you are especially vulnerable to temptation. Even as you search for answers, protect yourself by meditating on the unshakable truths of God’s Word.

Luke 4:3 Sometimes what we are tempted to do isn’t wrong in itself. Turning a stone into bread wasn’t necessarily bad. The sin was not in the act but in the reason behind it. The devil was trying to get Jesus to take a shortcut, to solve Jesus’ immediate problem at the expense of his long-range goals, to seek comfort at the sacrifice of his discipline. Satan often works that way—persuading us to take action, even right action, for the wrong reason or at the wrong time. The fact that something is not wrong in itself does not mean that it is good for you at a given time. Many people sin by attempting to fulfill legitimate desires

‘You must worship the **LORD** your God and serve only him.’”

⁹Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, “If you are the Son of God, jump off! ¹⁰For the Scriptures say,

‘He will order his angels to protect and guard you.

¹¹ And they will hold you up with their hands so you won’t even hurt your foot on a stone.’”

¹²Jesus responded, “The Scriptures also say, ‘You must not test the **LORD** your God.’”

¹³When the devil had finished tempting Jesus, he left him until the next opportunity came.

THE TEMPTATIONS

As if going through a final test of preparation, Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Matthew lists three specific parts of the Temptation. They are familiar because we face the same kinds of temptations. Temptation is often the combination of a real need and a possible doubt that creates an inappropriate desire. Jesus demonstrates both the importance and the effectiveness of knowing and applying Scripture to combat temptation.

Temptation	Make bread	Dare God to rescue you (based on misapplied Scripture, Ps 91:11-12)	Worship me! (Satan)
Real needs used as basis for temptation	Physical need: hunger	Emotional need: security	Psychological need: significance, power, achievement
Possible doubts that made the temptations real	Would God provide food?	Would God protect?	Would God rule?
Potential weaknesses Satan sought to exploit	Hunger, impatience, need to “prove his sonship”	Pride, insecurity, need to test God	Desire for quick power, easy solutions, need to prove equality with God
Jesus’ answer	Deut 8:3 “Depend on God” Focus: God’s purpose	Deut 6:16 “Don’t test God” Focus: God’s plan	Deut 6:13 “No compromise with evil” Focus: God’s person

outside of God’s will or ahead of his timetable. First ask: Is the Holy Spirit leading me to do this, or is Satan trying to get me off the track?

Luke 4:3ff Often we are tempted not through our weaknesses but through our strengths. The devil tempted Jesus where he was strong. Jesus had power over stones, the kingdoms of the world, and even angels, and Satan wanted him to use that power without regard for his mission. When we give in to the devil and wrongly use our strengths, we become proud and self-reliant. Trusting in our own powers, we feel little need of God.

To avoid this trap, we must realize that all our strengths are God’s gifts to us, and we must dedicate those strengths to his service.

Luke 4:6-7 The devil arrogantly hoped to succeed in his rebellion against God by diverting Jesus from his mission and winning his worship. “This world is mine, not God’s,” he was saying, “and if you hope to do anything worthwhile here, you’ll need to follow my instructions.” Jesus didn’t argue with Satan about who owns the world, but he refused to validate Satan’s claim by worshipping him. Jesus knew that he would redeem the world through giving

John the Baptist Proclaims Jesus as the Messiah

JOHN 1:29-34

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”³⁰ He is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘A man is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.’³¹ I did not recognize him as the Messiah, but I have been baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel.”

³² Then John testified, “I saw the Holy Spirit descend-

Jn 1:34 Some manuscripts read *the Son of God*.

ing like a dove from heaven and resting upon him.³³ I didn’t know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and rest is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’³⁴ I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Chosen One of God.*”

The First Disciples Follow Jesus

JOHN 1:35-51

The following day John was again standing with two of his disciples.³⁶ As Jesus walked by, John looked at

up his life on the cross, not through making an alliance with a corrupt angel.

Luke 4:9-11 Here the devil misinterpreted Scripture. The intention of Psalm 91 is to show God’s protection of his people, not to incite them to use God’s power for sensational or foolish displays.

Luke 4:13 Christ’s defeat of the devil in the wilderness was decisive but not final. Throughout his ministry, Jesus would confront Satan in many forms. Too often we see temptation as once and for all. In reality, we need to be constantly on guard against the devil’s ongoing attacks. Where are you most susceptible to temptation right now? How are you preparing to withstand it?

Luke 4:13 What would it take for you to “sell out”? What is there in life that would cause you to compromise your faith? Whatever it is—sexual temptation, financial inducement, fear of alienating or offending someone—it will be placed in your path at some point. The enemy wants to destroy believers or at least neutralize them through sin, shame, and guilt. When that temptation rears its seductive head, do what Jesus did: rely on the Word of God and stand fast in your commitment to worship God alone, above all else. No matter the cost or the sacrifice, no matter how appealing the come-on, believers must follow Jesus’ example and stand strong.

John 1:29 Every morning and evening, a lamb was sacrificed in the Temple for the sins of the people (Exod 29:38-42). Isaiah 53:7 prophesied that the Messiah, God’s servant, would be led to the slaughter like a lamb. To pay the penalty for sin, a life had to be given—and God chose to provide the sacrifice himself. The sins of the world were removed when Jesus died as the perfect sacrifice. This is the way our sins are forgiven (1 Cor 5:7). The “sin of the world” means everyone’s sin, the sin of each individual. Jesus paid the price of your sin by his death. You can receive forgiveness by confessing your sin to him and asking for his forgiveness.

John 1:30 Although John the Baptist was a well-known preacher who attracted large crowds, he was content for Jesus to take the higher place. This is true humility, the basis for greatness in preaching, teaching, or any other work we do for Christ. When you are content to do what God wants you to do and

let Jesus Christ be honored for it, God will do great things through you.

John 1:31-34 At Jesus’ baptism, John the Baptist declared Jesus to be the Messiah. At that time God had given John a sign to show him that Jesus truly had been sent from God (John 1:33). John and Jesus were related (see Luke 1:36), so John probably knew who he was. But it wasn’t until Jesus’ baptism that John understood that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus’ baptism is described in Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; and Luke 3:21-22.

John 1:33 John the Baptist’s baptism with water was preparatory because it was for repentance and symbolized the washing away of sins. Jesus, by contrast, would baptize with the Holy Spirit. He would send the Holy Spirit upon all believers, empowering them to live and to teach the message of salvation. This outpouring of the Spirit came after Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven (see John 20:22; Acts 2).

John 1:34 John the Baptist’s job was to point people to Jesus, their long-awaited Messiah. Today people are looking for someone to give them security in an insecure world. Our job is to point them to Christ and to show that he is the one whom they seek.

John 1:35ff These new disciples used several names for Jesus: Lamb of God (John 1:36), Rabbi (John 1:38), Messiah (John 1:41), Son of God (John 1:49), and King of Israel (John 1:49). As they got to know Jesus, their appreciation for him grew. The more time we spend getting to know Christ, the more we will understand and appreciate who he is. We may be drawn to him for his teaching, but we will come to know him as the Son of God. Although these disciples made this verbal shift in a few days, they would not fully understand Jesus until three years later (Acts 2). What they so easily professed had to be worked out in experience. We may find that words of faith come easily, but deep appreciation for Christ comes with living by faith.

Ancient Manuscripts of John

Manuscript discoveries in the past 100 years have shed new light on some verses in the Bible, including John 1:34. Did John the Baptist say about Jesus, “I testify that he is the Son of God” or “I testify that he is the Chosen One of God”? Some manuscripts say one thing, and some say the other. Since not all of the manuscripts agree, translators have to weigh the evidence to consider which reading is likely to be original. The title “Chosen One of God” is more unusual, so perhaps it could be what John originally wrote, which a scribe then accidentally changed to the more usual title “Son of God” when copying the manuscript; but we cannot be certain. Therefore, this is a case where either reading could be original. Two early papyrus manuscripts found in Egypt support “Chosen One of God.” The NLT has “Chosen One of God” in the text, and “the Son of God” in the textual note. Although the manuscripts available to us are often small and fragmentary, God has provided hundreds and hundreds of manuscripts to compare and study, so we can ultimately be certain that the Bible we have today is complete and accurate.



► **JOHN 1:35–51 (cont.)**

him and declared, “Look! There is the Lamb of God!”
³⁷When John’s two disciples heard this, they followed Jesus.

³⁸Jesus looked around and saw them following. “What do you want?” he asked them.

They replied, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?”

³⁹“Come and see,” he said. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place where he was staying, and they remained with him the rest of the day.

⁴⁰Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of these men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus. ⁴¹Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means “Christ”).

⁴²Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus. Looking intently at Simon, Jesus said, “Your name is Simon, son of John—but you will be called Cephas” (which means “Peter”).

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Come, follow me.”

⁴⁴Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter’s hometown.

⁴⁵Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, “We have found the very person Moses* and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.”

⁴⁶“Nazareth!” exclaimed Nathanael. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”

“Come and see for yourself,” Philip replied.

⁴⁷As they approached, Jesus said, “Now here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity.”

⁴⁸“How do you know about me?” Nathanael asked.

Jesus replied, “I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you.”

⁴⁹Then Nathanael exclaimed, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God—the King of Israel!”

⁵⁰Jesus asked him, “Do you believe this just because I told you I had seen you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.” ⁵¹Then he said, “I tell you the truth, you will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth.”

Jn 1:41 *Messiah* (a Hebrew term) and *Christ* (a Greek term) both mean “the anointed one.” **Jn 1:42** The names *Cephas* (from Aramaic) and *Peter* (from Greek) both mean “rock.” **Jn 1:45** Greek *Moses* in the law. **Jn 1:51** Greek *going up and down on the Son of Man*; see Gen 28:10–17. “Son of Man” is a title Jesus used for himself.

John 1:37 One of the two disciples was Andrew (John 1:40). The other probably was John, the writer of this book. Why did these disciples leave John the Baptist? Because that’s what John wanted them to do—he was pointing the way to Jesus, the one John had prepared them to follow.

These were Jesus’ first disciples, along with Simon Peter (John 1:42) and Nathanael (John 1:45).

John 1:38 When the two disciples began to follow Jesus, he asked them, “What do you want?” Following Christ is not enough; we must follow him for the right reasons. To follow Christ for our own purposes would be asking Christ to follow us—to align with us to support and advance our cause, not his. We must examine our motives for following him. Are we seeking his glory or ours?

John 1:40–42 Andrew accepted John the Baptist’s testimony about Jesus and immediately went to tell his brother, Simon, about him. There was no question in Andrew’s mind that Jesus was the Messiah. Not only did he tell his brother, but he was also eager to introduce others to Jesus (see John 12:20–22). How many people in your life have heard you talk about your relationship with Jesus?

John 1:42 Jesus saw not only who Simon was, but who he would become. That is why he gave him a new name—Cephas in Aramaic, Peter in Greek (the name means “a rock”). Peter is not presented as rock-solid throughout the Gospels, but he became a solid rock in the days of the early church, as we learn in the book of Acts. By giving Simon a new name, Jesus introduced a change in character. For more on Simon Peter, see his Profile on p. 1473.

John 1:46 The Jews despised Nazareth because a Roman army garrison was located there. Some have speculated that an aloof attitude or a poor reputation in morals and religion on the part of the people of

Nazareth led to Nathanael’s harsh comment. Nathanael’s hometown was Cana, about four miles from Nazareth.

John 1:46 When Nathanael heard that the Messiah was from Nazareth, he was surprised. Philip responded, “Come and see for yourself.” Fortunately for Nathanael, he went to meet Jesus and became a disciple. If he had stuck to his prejudice without investigating further, he would have missed the Messiah! Don’t let people’s stereotypes about Christ cause them to miss his power and love. Invite them to come and see who Jesus really is.

John 1:47–49 Jesus knew about Nathanael before the two ever met. Jesus also knows what we are really like. An honest person will feel comfortable with the thought that Jesus knows him or her through and through. A dishonest person will feel uncomfortable. You can’t pretend to be something you’re not. God knows the real you and wants you to follow him.

John 1:51 This is a reference to Jacob’s dream recorded in Genesis 28:12. As the unique God-man, Jesus would be the ladder between heaven and earth. Jesus is not saying that this would be a physical experience (seeing the ladder with their eyes) like the Transfiguration, but that they would have spiritual insight into Jesus’ true nature and purpose for coming.

John 2:1–2 Jesus was on a mission to save the world, the greatest mission in the history of humankind. Yet he took time to attend a wedding and take part in its festivities. We may be tempted to think we should not take time out from our “important” work for social



JESUS' FIRST TRAVELS After John baptized him in the Jordan River and Satan tempted him in the wilderness, Jesus returned to Galilee (see “Jesus’ Temptation and Return to Galilee,” p. 1295). He visited Nazareth, Cana, and Capernaum, and then returned to Jerusalem for the Passover.

Jesus Turns Water into Wine

JOHN 2:1-12

The next day* there was a wedding celebration in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there,²and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. ³The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus’ mother told him, “They have no more wine.”

“Dear woman, that’s not our problem,” Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.”

⁵But his mother told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

⁶Standing nearby were six stone water jars, used for Jewish ceremonial washing. Each could hold twenty to thirty gallons.* ⁷Jesus told the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” When the jars had been

Jn 2:1 Greek *On the third day*; see 1:35, 43. **Jn 2:6** Greek *2 or 3 measures* [75 to 113 liters].

B. Message and Ministry of Jesus

For about three years Jesus traveled and ministered to people throughout Israel and the neighboring areas. Jesus spent much of his time teaching, confronting the religious leaders who had distorted God’s laws, and providing new teaching through parables and about himself. He demonstrated his identity as the Son of God and his power over everything through many miracles, healing the sick and casting out demons. Jesus gave people a view of God that they had never seen before—God incarnate, walking and talking among them.

1. JESUS BEGINS HIS MINISTRY IN JERUSALEM

Jesus launched his public ministry by attending the annual Passover celebration in Jerusalem. While there, he immediately came into conflict with the religious leaders of the day, clearing the Temple because of corruption in his Father’s house. But he wasn’t rejected by all the religious leaders—one of them came to visit him at night to learn more about this new teacher.

occasions. But maybe these social occasions are part of our mission. Jesus valued these wedding festivities because they involved people, and he came to be with people. Our mission can often be accomplished in joyous times of celebration with others. Bring balance to your life by inviting Jesus into times of pleasure as well as times of work.

John 2:1-3 Weddings in Jesus’ day were week-long festivals. Banquets would be prepared for many guests, and the week would be spent celebrating the new life of the married couple. Often the whole town was invited, and everybody would come—it was considered an insult to refuse an invitation to a wedding. To accommodate many people, careful planning was needed. To run out of wine was more than embarrassing; it broke the strong, unwritten laws of hospitality. Jesus was about to respond to a heartfelt need.

John 2:4 Mary was probably not asking Jesus to do a miracle; she was simply hoping that her son would help solve this major problem and find some wine. Tradition says that Joseph, Mary’s husband, was dead, so she probably was used to asking for her son’s help in certain situations. Jesus’ answer to Mary is difficult to understand, but maybe that is the point. Although Mary did not understand what Jesus was going to do,

she trusted him to do what was right. Those who believe in Jesus but run into situations they cannot understand must continue to trust that he will work in the best way.

John 2:5 Mary submitted to Jesus’ way of doing things. She recognized that Jesus was more than her human son—he was the Son of God. When we bring our problems to Christ, we may think we know how he should take care of them. But he may have a completely different plan. Like Mary, we should submit and allow him to deal with the problem as he sees best.

John 2:6 The six stone water jars were normally used for ceremonial washing. When full, the pots would hold 20 to 30 gallons. According to the Jews’ ceremonial laws, people became symbolically unclean by touching objects of everyday life. Before eating, the Jews would pour water over their hands to cleanse themselves of any bad influences associated with what they had touched.

John 2:10 People look everywhere but to God for excitement and meaning. For some reason, they expect God to be dull and lifeless. Just as the wine Jesus made was the best, so life in him is better than life on our own. Why wait until everything else runs out before trying God? Why save the best until last?

filled,⁸he said, “Now dip some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies.” So the servants followed his instructions.

⁹When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over. ¹⁰“A host always serves the best wine first,” he said. “Then, when everyone has had a lot to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine. But you have kept the best until now!”

¹¹This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

¹²After the wedding he went to Capernaum for a few days with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples.

John 2:11 When the disciples saw Jesus’ miracle, they believed. The miracle showed his power over nature and revealed the way he would go about his ministry—helping others, speaking with authority, and being in personal touch with people.

Miracles are not merely superhuman events, but events that demonstrate God’s power. Almost every miracle Jesus did was a renewal of fallen Creation—restoring sight, making the lame walk, even restoring life to the dead. Believe in Christ not because he is a superman but because he is the God who continues his creation, even in those of us who are poor, weak, crippled, orphaned, blind, deaf, or have some other desperate need.

John 2:12 Capernaum became Jesus’ home base during his ministry in Galilee. Located on a major trade route, it was an important city in the region, with a Roman garrison and a customs station. At Capernaum, Matthew was called to be a disciple (Matt 9:9). The city was also the home of several other disciples (Matt 4:13-19) and a high-ranking government official (John 4:46). It had at least one major synagogue. Although Jesus made this city his base of operations in Galilee, he condemned it for the people’s unbelief (Matt 11:23; Luke 10:15).

Jesus Clears the Temple

JOHN 2:13-22

It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the Temple area he saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices; he also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money. ¹⁵Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep and cattle, scattered the money changers' coins over the floor, and turned over their tables. ¹⁶Then, going over to the people who sold doves, he told them, "Get these things out of here. Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!"

¹⁷Then his disciples remembered this prophecy from the Scriptures: "Passion for God's house will consume me."^{*}

¹⁸But the Jewish leaders demanded, "What are you doing? If God gave you authority to do this, show us a miraculous sign to prove it."

Jn 2:17 Or "Concern for God's house will be my undoing." Ps 69:9.

¹⁹"All right," Jesus replied. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

²⁰"What!" they exclaimed. "It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you can rebuild it in three days?" ²¹But when Jesus said "this temple," he meant his own body. ²²After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered he had said this, and they believed both the Scriptures and what Jesus had said.

Nicodemus Visits Jesus at Night

JOHN 2:23-3:21

Because of the miraculous signs Jesus did in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration, many began to trust in him. ²⁴But Jesus didn't trust them, because he knew human nature. ²⁵No one needed to tell him what mankind is really like.

3:1 There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. ²After dark one

John 2:13 The Passover celebration took place yearly at the Temple in Jerusalem. Every Jewish male was expected to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem during this time (Deut 16:16). This was a week-long festival—the Passover was one day, and the Festival of Unleavened Bread lasted the rest of the week. The entire week commemorated the freeing of the Jews from slavery in Egypt (Exod 12:1-13).

John 2:13 Jerusalem was both the religious and the political seat of Palestine, and the place where the Messiah was expected to arrive. The Temple was located there, and many Jewish families from all over the world would travel to Jerusalem during the key festivals. The Temple was on an imposing site, a hill overlooking the city. Solomon had built the first Temple on this same site almost 1,000 years earlier (959 B.C.), but his Temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians (2 Kgs 25). The Temple had been rebuilt in 515 B.C., and Herod the Great had enlarged and remodeled it.

John 2:14 The Temple area was always crowded during Passover with thousands of out-of-town visitors. The religious leaders crowded it even further by allowing money changers and merchants to set up booths in the Court of the Gentiles. They rationalized this practice as a convenience for the worshippers and as a way to make money for Temple upkeep. But the religious leaders did not seem to care that the Court of the Gentiles was so full of merchants that foreigners found it difficult to worship. And worship was the main purpose for visiting the Temple. No wonder Jesus was angry!

John 2:14 The Temple tax had to be paid in local currency, so foreigners had to have their money changed. But the money changers often charged exorbitant exchange rates. The people were also required to make sacrifices

for sins. Because of the long journey, many could not bring their own animals. Some who brought animals had them rejected for imperfections. So animal merchants conducted a flourishing business in the Temple courtyard. The price of sacrificial animals was much higher in the Temple area than elsewhere. Jesus was angry at the dishonest, greedy practices of the money changers and merchants, and he particularly disliked their presence on the Temple grounds. They were making a mockery of God's house of worship.

John 2:14ff John records this first clearing, or cleansing, of the Temple. A second clearing occurred at the end of Jesus' ministry, about three years later (see Matt 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48).

John 2:14-16 God's Temple was being misused by people who had turned it into a marketplace. They had forgotten, or didn't care, that God's house is a place of worship, not a place for making a profit. Our attitude toward the church is wrong if we see it as a place for personal contacts or business advantage. Make sure you attend church to worship God.

John 2:15-16 Jesus was obviously angry at the merchants who exploited those who had come to God's house to worship. There is a difference between uncontrolled rage and righteous indignation—yet both are called anger. We must be very careful how we use the powerful emotion of anger. It is right to be angry about injustice and sin; it is wrong to be angry over trivial personal offenses.

John 2:15-16 Jesus made a whip and chased out the money changers. Does his example permit us to use violence against wrongdoers? Certain authority is granted to some, but not to all. For example, the authority to use weapons and restrain people is granted to police officers, but not to the general public. The authority to imprison people

is granted to judges, but not to individual citizens. Jesus had God's authority, something we cannot have. While we want to live like Christ, we should never try to claim his authority where it has not been given to us.

John 2:17 Jesus took the evil acts in the Temple as an insult against God, and thus, he did not deal with them halfheartedly. He was consumed with righteous anger against such flagrant disrespect for God.

John 2:19-20 The Jews understood Jesus to mean the Temple out of which he had just driven the merchants and money changers. This was the Temple Zerubbabel had built over 500 years earlier, but Herod the Great had begun remodeling it, making it much larger and far more beautiful. It had been 46 years since this remodeling had started (20 B.C.), and it still wasn't completely finished. They understood Jesus' words to mean that this imposing building could be torn down and rebuilt in three days, and they were startled.

John 2:21-22 Jesus was not talking about the Temple made of stones, but about his body. His listeners didn't realize it, but Jesus was greater than the Temple (Matt 12:6). His words would take on meaning for his disciples after his resurrection. That Christ so perfectly fulfilled this prediction became the strongest proof for his claims to be God.

John 2:23-25 The Son of God knows all about human nature. Jesus was well aware of the truth of Jeremiah 17:9: "The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?" Jesus was discerning, and he knew that the faith of some followers was superficial. Some of the same people claiming to believe in Jesus at this time would later yell, "Crucify him!" It's easy to believe when it's exciting and everyone else believes the same way. But keep your faith firm even when it isn't popular to follow Christ.

evening, he came to speak with Jesus. “Rabbi,” he said, “we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.”

³Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again,* you cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

⁴“What do you mean?” exclaimed Nicodemus.

Jn 3:3 Or *born from above*; also in 3:7. **Jn 3:5** Or *and spirit*. The Greek word for *Spirit* can also be translated *wind*; see 3:8. **Jn 3:6** Greek *what is born of the Spirit is spirit*. **Jn 3:7** The Greek word for *you* is plural; also in 3:12.

“How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?”

⁵Jesus replied, “I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit.* ⁶Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life.* ⁷So don’t be surprised when I say, ‘You* must be born again.’



NICODEMUS

God specializes in finding and changing people we consider out of reach. It took a while for Nicodemus to come out of the dark, but God was patient with this “undercover” believer. • Afraid of being discovered, Nicodemus made an appointment to see Jesus at night. Daylight conversations between Pharisees and Jesus tended to be antagonistic, but Nicodemus really wanted to learn. He got a lot more than he probably expected—a challenge to a new life! We know very little about Nicodemus, but we know that he left that evening’s encounter a changed man. He came away with a whole new understanding of both God and himself. • Nicodemus next appears as part of the Jewish high council (John 7:50). As the group discussed ways to eliminate Jesus, Nicodemus raised the question of justice. Although his objection was overruled, he had spoken up. He had begun to change. • Our last picture of Nicodemus shows him joining Joseph of Arimathea in asking for Jesus’ body in order to provide for its burial (John 19:39). Nicodemus was making a bold move, risking everything. He was continuing to grow. • God looks for steady growth, not instant perfection. How well does your present level of spiritual growth match up with how long you have known Jesus?

Strengths and accomplishments	• One of the few religious leaders who believed in Jesus • A member of the powerful Jewish high council • A Pharisee who was attracted by Jesus’ character and miracles • Joined with Joseph of Arimathea in burying Jesus
Weakness and mistake	• Limited by his fear of being publicly exposed as Jesus’ follower
Lessons from his life	• Unless we are born again, we can never be part of the Kingdom of God • God is able to change those we might consider unreachable • God is patient, but persistent • If we are available, God can use us
Vital statistics	• Where: Jerusalem • Occupation: Religious leader • Contemporaries: Jesus, Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, Joseph of Arimathea
Key verse	“‘What do you mean?’ exclaimed Nicodemus. ‘How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?’” (John 3:4).

Nicodemus’s story is told in John 3:1-21; 7:50-52; 19:39-40.

John 3:1ff Nicodemus came to Jesus personally, although he could have sent one of his assistants. He wanted to examine Jesus for himself to separate fact from rumor. Perhaps Nicodemus was afraid of what his peers, the Pharisees, would say about his visit, so he came after dark. Later, when he understood that Jesus was truly the Messiah, he spoke up boldly in his defense (John 7:50-51). Like Nicodemus, we must examine Jesus for ourselves—others cannot do it for

us. Then, if we believe he is who he says, we will want to speak up for him. **John 3:1** Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the ruling council (called the high council, or the Sanhedrin). The Pharisees were a group of religious leaders whom Jesus and John the Baptist often criticized for being hypocrites (see note on Matt 3:7, p. 1288, for more on the Pharisees). Most Pharisees were intensely jealous of Jesus because he undermined their authority and

challenged their views. But Nicodemus was searching, and he believed that Jesus had some answers. A learned teacher himself, he came to Jesus to be taught. No matter how intelligent and well educated you are, you must come to Jesus with an open mind and heart so he can teach you the truth about God. **John 3:3** What did Nicodemus know about the Kingdom? From the Bible he knew it would be ruled by God, it would be restored on earth, and it would incorporate God’s people. Jesus revealed to this devout Pharisee that the Kingdom would come to the whole world (John 3:16), not just the Jews, and that Nicodemus wouldn’t be a part of it unless he was personally born again (John 3:5). This was a revolutionary concept: The Kingdom is personal, not national or ethnic, and its entrance requirements are repentance and spiritual rebirth. Jesus later taught that God’s Kingdom has already begun in the hearts of believers (Luke 17:21). It will be fully realized when Jesus returns again to judge the world and abolish evil forever (Rev 21–22). **John 3:5-6** “Being born of water and the Spirit” could refer to (1) the contrast between physical birth (water) and spiritual birth (Spirit), or (2) being regenerated by the Spirit and signifying that rebirth by Christian baptism. The water may also represent the cleansing action of God’s Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). Nicodemus undoubtedly would have been familiar with God’s promise in Ezekiel 36:25-26. Jesus was explaining the importance of a spiritual rebirth, saying that people don’t enter the Kingdom by living a better life, but by being spiritually reborn. **John 3:6** Who is the Holy Spirit? God is three persons in one—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God became a man in Jesus so that Jesus could die for our sins. Jesus rose from the dead to offer salvation to all people through spiritual renewal and rebirth. When Jesus ascended into heaven, his physical presence left the earth, but he promised to send the Holy Spirit so that his spiritual presence would still be among humankind (see Luke 24:49). The Holy Spirit first became available to all believers at Pentecost (Acts 2). Whereas in Old Testament days the Holy Spirit empowered specific individuals for specific purposes, now all believers have the power of the Holy Spirit available to them. For more on the Holy Spirit, read John 14:16-28; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:13; and 2 Corinthians 1:22.

► **JOHN 2:23–3:21** (cont.)

⁸The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

⁹"How are these things possible?" Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰Jesus replied, "You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don't understand these things? ¹¹I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won't believe our testimony. ¹²But if you don't believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man* has come down from heaven. ¹⁴And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.*

¹⁶"For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

¹⁸"There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing

in God's one and only Son. ¹⁹And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. ²⁰All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.*"

John the Baptist Tells More about Jesus

JOHN 3:22–36

Then Jesus and his disciples left Jerusalem and went into the Judean countryside. Jesus spent some time with them there, baptizing people.

²³At this time John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon, near Salim, because there was plenty of water there; and people kept coming to him for baptism. ²⁴(This was before John was thrown into prison.) ²⁵A debate broke out between John's disciples and a certain Jew* over ceremonial cleansing. ²⁶So John's disciples came to him and said, "Rabbi, the man you met on the other side of the Jordan River, the one you identified as the Messiah, is also baptizing people. And everybody is going to him instead of coming to us."

²⁷John replied, "No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven. ²⁸You yourselves know how

Jn 3:13 Some manuscripts add *who lives in heaven*. "Son of Man" is a title Jesus used for himself. **Jn 3:15** Or *everyone who believes will have eternal life in him*.
Jn 3:21 Or *can see God at work in what he is doing*. **Jn 3:25** Some manuscripts read *some Jews*.

John 3:8 Jesus explained that we cannot control the work of the Holy Spirit. He works in ways we cannot predict or understand. Just as you did not control your physical birth, so you cannot control your spiritual birth. It is a gift from God through the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:16; 1 Cor 2:10–12; 1 Thes 1:5–6).

John 3:10–11 This Jewish teacher of the Bible knew the Old Testament thoroughly, but he didn't understand what it said about the Messiah. Knowledge is not salvation. You should know the Bible, but even more important, you should understand the God whom the Bible reveals and the salvation that God offers.

John 3:14–15 When the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, God sent a plague of snakes to punish the people for their rebellious attitudes. Those doomed to die from snakebite could be healed by obeying God's command to look up at the elevated bronze snake and by believing that God would heal them if they did (see Num 21:8–9). Similarly, our salvation happens when we look up to Jesus, believing he will save us. God has provided this way for us to be healed of sin's deadly bite.

John 3:16 The message of the Good News comes to a focus in this verse. God's love is not static or self-centered; it reaches out and draws others in. Here God sets the pattern of true love, the basis for all love relationships:

When you love someone dearly, you are willing to give freely to the point of self-sacrifice. God paid dearly with the life of his Son, the highest price he could pay. Jesus accepted our punishment, paid the price for our sins, and then offered us the new life that he had bought for us. When we share the Good News with others, our love must be like Jesus'—willingly giving up our own comfort and security so that others might join us in receiving God's love.

John 3:16 Some people are repulsed by the idea of eternal life because their lives are miserable. But eternal life is not an extension of a person's miserable, mortal life. It is God's life embodied in Christ, given to all believers now as a guarantee that they will live forever. In eternal life there is no death, sickness, enemy, evil, or sin. When we don't know Christ, we make choices as though this life is all we have. In reality, this life is just the introduction to eternity. Receive this new life by faith and begin to evaluate all that happens from an eternal perspective.

John 3:16 To "believe" is more than intellectual agreement that Jesus is God. It means putting our trust and confidence in him that he alone can save us. It is to put Christ in charge of our present plans and eternal destiny. Believing is both trusting his words as reliable, and relying on him for the power to change. If you have never trusted Christ, let this promise of everlasting life be yours—and believe.

John 3:18 People often try to protect themselves from their fears by putting their faith in something they do or have: good deeds, skill or intelligence, money or possessions. But only God can save us from the one thing that we really need to fear—eternal condemnation. We believe in God by recognizing the insufficiency of our own efforts to find salvation and by asking him to do his work in us. When Jesus talks about unbelievers, he means those who reject or ignore him completely, not those who have momentary doubts.

John 3:19–21 Many people don't want their lives exposed to God's light because they are afraid of what will be revealed. They don't want to be changed. Don't be surprised when these same people are threatened by your desire to obey God and do what is right, because they are afraid that the light in you may expose some of the darkness in their lives. Rather than giving in to discouragement, keep praying that they will come to see how much better it is to live in light than in darkness.

John 3:25ff Some people look for points of disagreement so they can sow seeds of discord, discontent, and doubt. John the Baptist ended this theological argument by focusing on his devotion to Christ. It is divisive to try to force others to believe our way. Instead, let's witness about what Christ has done for us. How can anyone argue with us about that?

plainly I told you, 'I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare the way for him.' ²⁹It is the bridegroom who marries the bride, and the best man is simply glad to stand with him and hear his vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at his success. ³⁰He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.

³¹"He has come from above and is greater than anyone else. We are of the earth, and we speak of earthly things, but he has come from heaven and is greater than anyone else.* ³²He testifies about what he has seen and heard, but how few believe what he tells them! ³³Anyone who accepts his testimony can affirm that God is true. ³⁴For he is sent by God. He speaks God's words, for God gives him the Spirit without limit. ³⁵The Father loves his Son and has put everything into his hands. ³⁶And anyone who believes in God's Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn't obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment."

Jn 3:31 Some manuscripts do not include *and is greater than anyone else*. **Lk 3:19** Greek *Herod the tetrarch*. **Mk 1:14** Some manuscripts read *the Good News of the Kingdom of God*. **Jn 4:1** Some manuscripts read *The Lord*.

Herod Puts John in Prison

LUKE 3:19-20

John also publicly criticized Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee,* for marrying Herodias, his brother's wife, and for many other wrongs he had done. ²⁰So Herod put John in prison, adding this sin to his many others.

Jesus Leaves Judea PARALLEL

MATTHEW 4:12

When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he left Judea and returned to Galilee.

MARK 1:14

Later on, after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God's Good News.*

JOHN 4:1-3

Jesus* knew the Pharisees had heard that he was baptizing and making more disciples than John ²(though Jesus himself didn't baptize them—his disciples did). ³So he left Judea and returned to Galilee.

John 3:26 John the Baptist's disciples were disturbed because people were following Jesus instead of John. It is easy to grow jealous of the popularity of another person's ministry. But we must remember that our true mission is to influence people to follow Christ, not us.

John 3:27 Why did John the Baptist continue to baptize after Jesus came onto the scene? Why didn't he become a disciple too? John explained that because God had given him his work, he had to continue it until God called him to do something else. John's main purpose was to point people to Christ. Even with Jesus beginning his own ministry, John could still turn people to Jesus.

John 3:30 John's willingness to decrease in importance shows unusual humility. Pastors and other Christian leaders can be tempted to focus more on the success of their ministries than on Christ. Beware of those who put more emphasis on their own achievements than on God's Kingdom.

John 3:31-35 Jesus' testimony was trustworthy because he had come from heaven and was speaking of what he had seen there. His words were the very words of God. Your whole spiritual life depends on your answer to one question: Who is Jesus Christ? If you accept Jesus as only a prophet or teacher, you have to reject his teaching, for he claimed to be God's Son, even God himself. The heartbeat of John's Gospel is the dynamic truth that Jesus Christ is God's Son, the Messiah, the Savior, who existed from the beginning and will continue to live forever. This same Jesus has invited us to accept him and live with him eternally. When we understand who Jesus is, we are compelled to believe what he said.

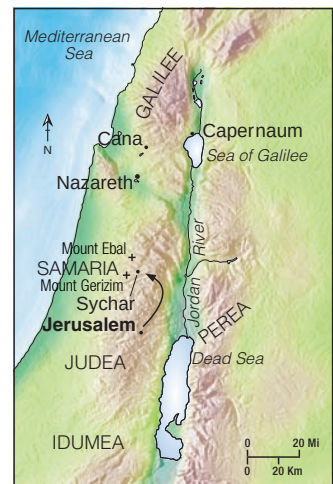
John 3:34 God's Spirit was upon Jesus without measure or limit. Thus, Jesus was the highest revelation of God to humanity (Heb 1:2).

John 3:36 Jesus says that those who believe in him have (not *will have*) eternal life. To receive eternal life is to join in God's life, which by nature is eternal. Thus, eternal life begins at the moment of spiritual rebirth.

John 3:36 John, the author of this Gospel, has been demonstrating that Jesus is the true Son of God. Jesus sets before us the greatest choice in life. We are responsible to decide today whom we will obey (Josh 24:15), and God wants us to choose him and life (Deut 30:15-20). God's angry judgment refers to his final rejection of those who reject him. To put off the choice is to choose not to follow Christ. Indecision is a fatal decision.

Luke 3:19-20 This is Herod Antipas (see p. 1362 for his Profile). Herodias was Herod's niece and also his brother's wife. She would later treacherously plot John the Baptist's death (Matt 14:1-12). The Herods were a murderous and deceitful family. Rebuking a tyrannical official who could imprison and execute him was extremely dangerous, yet that is what John did. He was focused on eternal matters, not safety and comfort for today.

John 4:1-3 Already opposition was rising against Jesus, especially from the Pharisees. They resented Jesus' popularity as well as his message, which challenged much of their teachings. Because Jesus was just beginning his ministry, it wasn't yet time to confront these leaders openly; so he left Jerusalem and traveled north toward Galilee.



THE VISIT IN SAMARIA Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover, cleared the Temple, and talked with Nicodemus, a religious leader, about eternal life. He then left Jerusalem and traveled in Judea. On his way to Galilee, he visited Sychar and other villages in Samaria. Unlike most Jews of the day, he did not try to avoid the region of Samaria.

BEGINNINGS undated–2100 BC	GOD'S CHOSEN FAMILY 2100–1800 BC	BIRTH OF ISRAEL 1800–1406 BC	POSSESSING THE LAND 1406–1050 BC	UNITED MONARCHY 1050–930 BC
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2. JESUS MINISTERS IN SAMARIA

On his way home from Jerusalem, Jesus stopped in Samaria—an area most Jewish people avoided. Jesus didn't have any concern for the prejudices of people around him. Instead, he chose to minister to everyone who was willing to recognize him for who he really was.

Jesus Talks to a Woman at the Well

JOHN 4:4-26

He had to go through Samaria on the way. ⁵Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. ⁷Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink." ⁸He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food.

⁹The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans.* She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?"

¹⁰Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."

¹¹"But sir, you don't have a rope or a bucket," she said, "and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water? ¹²And besides, do you think you're greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well?"

Jn 4:9 Some manuscripts do not include this sentence. **Jn 4:20** Greek on *this mountain*.

How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?"

¹³Jesus replied, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. ¹⁴But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life."

¹⁵"Please, sir," the woman said, "give me this water! Then I'll never be thirsty again, and I won't have to come here to get water."

¹⁶"Go and get your husband," Jesus told her.

¹⁷"I don't have a husband," the woman replied.

Jesus said, "You're right! You don't have a husband—¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and you aren't even married to the man you're living with now. You certainly spoke the truth!"

¹⁹"Sir," the woman said, "you must be a prophet. ²⁰So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim,* where our ancestors worshiped?"

²¹Jesus replied, "Believe me, dear woman, the time

John 4:4 To go from the territory of Judea to Galilee meant passing through a central territory called Samaria. Most Jews did everything they could to avoid traveling through Samaria. The reason goes way back into their history.

After the northern kingdom, with its capital at Samaria, fell to the Assyrians, many Jews were deported to Assyria, and foreigners were brought in to settle the land and help keep the peace (2 Kgs 17:24). The intermarriage between those foreigners and the remaining Jews resulted in a mixed race, impure in the opinion of Jews who lived in the southern kingdom. Thus, the pure Jews hated this mixed race, called Samaritans, because they felt that their fellow Jews who had intermarried had betrayed their people and nation. The Samaritans had set up an alternate center for worship on Mount Gerizim (John 4:20) to parallel the Temple at Jerusalem, but it had been destroyed 150 years earlier. While there was long-standing prejudice between Jews and Samaritans, Jesus did not live by such restrictions. The route through Samaria was shorter, and that was the route he took.

John 4:5-7 Jacob's well was on the property originally owned by Jacob (Gen 33:18-19). It was not a spring-fed well but one into which water seeped from rain and dew, collecting at the bottom. Wells were almost always located outside the city along the main road. Twice each day, morning and evening, women came to draw water. This woman came at noon, however, probably to

avoid meeting people who knew her reputation. Jesus gave this woman an extraordinary message about fresh and pure water that would quench her spiritual thirst forever.

John 4:7-9 This woman (1) was a Samaritan, a member of the hated mixed race, (2) was known to be living in sin, and (3) was in a public place. No respectable Jewish man would talk to a woman under such circumstances. But Jesus did. The Good News is for every person, no matter what his or her race, social position, or past sins. We must be prepared to share it at any time, in any place. Jesus crossed all barriers to share the Good News, and we who follow him must do no less.

John 4:10 What did Jesus mean by "living water"? In the Old Testament, many verses speak of thirsting after God as one thirsts for water (Ps 42:1; Isa 55:1; Jer 2:13; Zech 13:1). God is called the fountain of life (Ps 36:9) and the fountain of living water (Jer 17:13). In saying he would bring living water that could forever quench a person's thirst for God, Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah. Only the Messiah could give this gift that satisfies the soul's desire.

John 4:13-15 Many spiritual functions parallel physical functions. As our bodies hunger and thirst, so do our souls. But our souls need spiritual food and water. The woman confused the two kinds of water, perhaps because no one had ever before talked with her about her spiritual hunger and thirst. We would not think of depriving our bodies of

food and water when they hunger or thirst. Why then should we deprive our souls? The living Word, Jesus Christ, and the written Word, the Bible, can satisfy our hungry and thirsty souls.

John 4:15 The woman mistakenly believed that if she received the water Jesus offered, she would not have to return to the well each day. She was interested in Jesus' message because she thought it could make her life easier. But if that were always the case, people would accept Christ's message for the wrong reasons. Christ did not come to take away challenges, but to change us on the inside and to empower us to deal with problems from God's perspective.

John 4:16-20 When this woman discovered that Jesus knew all about her private life, she quickly changed the subject. Often people become uncomfortable when the conversation hits too close to home, and they try to talk about something else. As we witness, we should gently guide the conversation back to Christ. His presence exposes sin and makes people squirm, but only Christ can forgive sins and give new life.

John 4:20-24 The woman brought up a popular theological issue—the correct place to worship. But her question was a smoke screen to keep Jesus away from her deepest need. Jesus directed the conversation to a much more important point: The location of worship is not nearly as important as the attitude of the worshippers.

is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. ²²You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. ²³But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. ²⁴For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth."

²⁵The woman said, "I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

²⁶Then Jesus told her, "I Am the Messiah!"*

Jesus Tells about the Spiritual Harvest

JOHN 4:27-38

Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked to find him talking to a woman, but none of them had the nerve to ask, "What do you want with her?" or "Why are you talking to her?" ²⁸The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village,

Jn 4:26 Or "The 'I Am' is here"; or "I am the Lord"; Greek reads "I am, the one speaking to you." See Exod 3:14. **Jn 4:35** Greek *white*.

John 4:22 When Jesus said, "Salvation comes through the Jews," he meant that only through the Jewish Messiah would the whole world find salvation. God had promised that through the Jewish race the whole earth would be blessed (Gen 12:3). The Old Testament prophets had called the Jews to be a light to the other nations of the world, bringing them to a knowledge of God; and they had predicted the Messiah's coming. The woman at the well may have known of these passages and was expecting the Messiah, but she didn't realize that she was talking to him!

John 4:24 "God is Spirit" means he is not a physical being limited to one place. He is present everywhere, and he can be

worshiped anywhere, at any time. It is not where we worship that counts, but how we worship. Is your worship genuine and true? Do you have the Holy Spirit's help? How does the Holy Spirit help us worship? The Holy Spirit prays for us (Rom 8:26), teaches us the words of Christ (John 14:26), and tells us we are loved (Rom 5:5).

John 4:34 Jesus was speaking about his spiritual nourishment. It includes more than Bible study, prayer, and attending church. Spiritual nourishment also comes from doing God's will and helping to bring his work of salvation to completion. We are nourished not only by what we take in, but also by what we give out for God. In John 17:4, Jesus refers to completing God's work on earth.

John 4:35 Sometimes Christians excuse themselves from witnessing by saying that their family or friends aren't ready to believe. Jesus, however, makes it clear that around us a continual harvest waits to be reaped. Don't let Jesus find you making excuses. Look around. You will find people ready to hear God's Word.

John 4:36-38 The wages Jesus offers are the joy of working for him and seeing the harvest of believers. These wages come to planter and harvester alike because both find joy in seeing new believers come into Christ's Kingdom. The phrase "others had already done the work" (John 4:38) may refer to the Old Testament prophets and to John the Baptist, who paved the way for the Good News.

Samaria

Samaria was an area of land that was allotted to Ephraim and half the tribe of Manasseh in the days of Joshua (Josh 16:1–17:18). After the death of Solomon and the revolt of the 10 northern tribes, the inhabitants of Samaria followed the idolatry introduced by Jeroboam, refusing to go to Jerusalem to worship at the Temple. Years later, after the 10 tribes had been carried away into captivity, the king of Assyria put into this province a colony of various nations that soon intermingled and intermarried with the original people, causing a strange medley of religions. Second Kings 17:33 says, "Though they worshiped the LORD, they continued to follow their own gods." This conglomerate of people became known as Samaritans. They adopted the Pentateuch (Genesis—Deuteronomy) as their Scriptures and set up a place of worship on Mount Gerizim (Deut 11:26-29). But they were far from having accurate knowledge about the truth, even though they knew about a coming Messiah.

When a remnant of Jews returned from Babylonian captivity, they refused to allow the Samaritans any part in rebuilding the Temple or the city of Jerusalem, even though the Samaritans claimed to have the same God as the Jews. This refusal led to a bitter animosity between the two groups, which was succinctly summed up by John: "Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans" (John 4:9). Jews wouldn't talk to them and generally avoided going through their neighborhoods. But Jesus wasn't bound by these prejudices.



Many Samaritans Believe in Jesus

JOHN 4:39-42

Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, “He told me everything I ever did!”⁴⁰When they came out to see him, they begged him to stay in their village. So he stayed

for two days,⁴¹long enough for many more to hear his message and believe.⁴²Then they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not just because of what you told us, but because we have heard him ourselves. Now we know that he is indeed the Savior of the world.”

3. JESUS MINISTERS IN GALILEE

The majority of Jesus’ ministry took place in Galilee, the northern region of Israel around the Sea of Galilee. Here Jesus performed many miracles, taught extensively (including the Sermon on the Mount), and spent a lot of time investing in the lives of his twelve chosen disciples. He traveled regularly throughout this region, going from town to town sharing his message with all who would listen.

Jesus Preaches in Galilee PARALLEL ●●●●

MATTHEW 4:13-17 ●●●●

He went first to Nazareth, then left there and moved to Capernaum, beside the Sea of Galilee, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.¹⁴This fulfilled what God said through the prophet Isaiah:

- ¹⁵ “In the land of Zebulun and of Naphtali,
beside the sea, beyond the Jordan River,
in Galilee where so many Gentiles live,
¹⁶ the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light.
And for those who lived in the land where death
casts its shadow,
a light has shined.”*

Mt 4:15-16 Isa 9:1-2 (Greek version). **Mt 4:17** Or *has come, or is coming soon*.

¹⁷From then on Jesus began to preach, “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.”*

MARK 1:15 ●●●●

“The time promised by God has come at last!” he announced. “The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!”

LUKE 4:14-15 ●●●●

Then Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit’s power. Reports about him spread quickly through the whole region.¹⁵He taught regularly in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.



JESUS RETURNS TO GALILEE Jesus stayed in Sychar for two days, then went on to Galilee. He visited Nazareth and various towns in Galilee before arriving in Cana. From there he spoke the word of healing, and a government official’s son in Capernaum was healed. The Gospel of Matthew tells us Jesus then settled in Capernaum (Matt 4:12-13).

John 4:39 The Samaritan woman immediately shared her experience with others. Despite her reputation, many took her invitation and came out to meet Jesus. Perhaps we’re ashamed of sins in our past. But Christ changes us. As people see these changes, they become curious. Use these opportunities to introduce them to Christ.

Matt 4:13 Jesus moved from Nazareth, his hometown, to Capernaum, about 20 miles farther north. Capernaum became Jesus’ home base during his ministry in Galilee. Jesus probably moved (1) to get away from intense opposition in Nazareth, (2) to have an impact on the greatest number of people (Capernaum was a busy city, and Jesus’ message could reach more people and spread more quickly), and (3) to utilize extra resources and support for his ministry.

Jesus’ move fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1-2, which states that the Messiah would be a light to the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, the region of Galilee where Capernaum was located. Zebulun and Naphtali were two of the original 12 tribes of Israel.

Matt 4:14-16 By quoting from the book of Isaiah, Matthew continues to tie Jesus’ ministry to the Old Testament. This was helpful for his Jewish readers, who were familiar with these Scriptures. In addition, it shows the unity of God’s purposes as he works with his people throughout all the ages.

Matt 4:17 The “Kingdom of Heaven” has

the same meaning as the “Kingdom of God” in Mark and Luke. Matthew uses this phrase because the Jews, out of their intense reverence and respect, did not pronounce God’s name. The Kingdom of Heaven is still near because it has arrived in our hearts. See the note on Matthew 3:2, p. 1287, for more on the Kingdom of Heaven.

Matt 4:17 Jesus started his ministry with the same message people had heard John the Baptist say: “Repent of your sins.” The message is the same today as when Jesus and John gave it. Becoming a follower of Christ means turning away from our self-centeredness and “self” control and turning our lives over to Christ’s direction and control.

Luke 4:15 Synagogues were very important in Jewish religious life. During the Exile when the Jews no longer had their Temple, synagogues were established as places of worship on the Sabbath and as schools for young boys during the week. Synagogues continued to exist even after the Temple was rebuilt. A synagogue could be set up in any town with at least 10 Jewish families. It was administered by one leader and an assistant. At the synagogue, the leader often would invite a visiting rabbi to read from the Scriptures and to teach. Itinerant rabbis, like Jesus, were always welcome to speak to those gathered each Sabbath in the synagogues. The apostle Paul also took advantage of this practice (see Acts 13:5; 14:1).

JOHN 4:43-45 [0000]

At the end of the two days, Jesus went on to Galilee. ⁴⁴He himself had said that a prophet is not honored in his own hometown. ⁴⁵Yet the Galileans welcomed him, for they had been in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration and had seen everything he did there.

Jesus Heals a Government Official's Son**JOHN 4:46-54**

As he traveled through Galilee, he came to Cana, where he had turned the water into wine. There was a government official in nearby Capernaum whose son was very sick. ⁴⁷When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged Jesus to come to Capernaum to heal his son, who was about to die.

⁴⁸Jesus asked, “Will you never believe in me unless you see miraculous signs and wonders?”

⁴⁹The official pleaded, “Lord, please come now before my little boy dies.”

⁵⁰Then Jesus told him, “Go back home. Your son

will live!” And the man believed what Jesus said and started home.

⁵¹While the man was on his way, some of his servants met him with the news that his son was alive and well. ⁵²He asked them when the boy had begun to get better, and they replied, “Yesterday afternoon at one o’clock his fever suddenly disappeared!” ⁵³Then the father realized that that was the very time Jesus had told him, “Your son will live.” And he and his entire household believed in Jesus. ⁵⁴This was the second miraculous sign Jesus did in Galilee after coming from Judea.

Some Fishermen Follow Jesus [PARALLEL 0000]**MATTHEW 4:18-22** [0000]

One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. ¹⁹Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!” ²⁰And they left their nets at once and followed him.

John 4:46-49 This government official was probably an officer in Herod’s service. He had walked 20 miles to see Jesus and addressed him as “Lord,” putting himself under Jesus even though he had legal authority over Jesus.

John 4:48 This miracle was more than a favor to one official; it was a sign to all the people. John’s Gospel was written to all humankind to urge faith in Christ. Here a government official had faith that Jesus could do what he claimed. The official believed; then he saw a miraculous sign.

John 4:50 This government official not only believed Jesus could heal, he also obeyed by returning home, thus demonstrating his faith. It isn’t enough for us to say we believe that Jesus can take care of our problems. We need to act as if he can. When you pray about a need or problem, live as though you believe Jesus can do what he says.

John 4:51 Jesus’ miracles were not mere illusions. Although the official’s son was 20 miles away, he was healed when Jesus spoke the word. Distance was no problem because Christ has mastery over space. We can never put so much space between ourselves and Christ that he can no longer help us.

John 4:53 Notice how the official’s faith grew. First, he believed enough to ask Jesus to help his son. Second, he believed Jesus’ assurance that his son would live, and he acted on it. Third, he and his whole house believed in Jesus. Faith is a gift that grows as we use it.

Matt 4:18-20 These men already knew Jesus. He had talked to Peter and Andrew previously (John 1:35-42) and had been preaching in the area. When Jesus called

**Fishing Boats**

Fishermen have been working in Palestine from early times, and the profession of fishing is referred to in both the Old and New Testaments (Isa 19:8; Jer 16:16; Ezek 47:10; John 21:3-10). Fishermen formed a distinct class in society. Several fishermen were among Jesus’ disciples, including two pairs of brothers: Peter and Andrew, and John and James (see Matt 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:2-11). Their work was strenuous and not always rewarding (Luke 5:5; John 21:3). Pictured are some modern fishing boats on the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus’ disciples fished. Jesus used the metaphor “fishers of men” for his disciples to indicate that they would “catch” people for the Kingdom (Matt 4:19; Mark 1:17; Luke 5:10).

them, they knew what kind of man he was and were willing to follow him. Jesus told Peter and Andrew to leave their fishing business and begin fishing “for people,” helping others find God. Jesus was calling them away from their productive trade to be productive spiritually. We all need to fish for souls. If we practice Christ’s teachings and share the

Good News with others, we will be able to draw those around us to Christ like a fisherman who pulls fish into his boat with nets.

Matt 4:18 The Sea of Galilee is really a large lake. About 30 fishing towns surrounded it during Jesus’ day, and Capernaum was the largest.

► **MATTHEW 4:18-22** (cont.)

²¹A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, repairing their nets. And he called them to come, too. ²²They immediately followed him, leaving the boat and their father behind.

MARK 1:16-20

One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon* and his brother Andrew throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. ¹⁷Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!” ¹⁸And they left their nets at once and followed him.

¹⁹A little farther up the shore Jesus saw Zebedee’s sons, James and John, in a boat repairing their nets. ²⁰He called them at once, and they also followed him, leaving their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired men.

LUKE 5:1-11

One day as Jesus was preaching on the shore of the Sea of Galilee,* great crowds pressed in on him to listen to the word of God. ²He noticed two empty boats at the water’s edge, for the fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. ³Stepping into one of the boats, Jesus asked Simon,* its owner, to push it out into the water. So he sat in the boat and taught the crowds from there.

Mk 1:16 *Simon* is called “Peter” in 3:16 and thereafter. and thereafter.

Lk 5:1 Greek *Lake Gennesaret*, another name for the Sea of Galilee.

Lk 5:3 *Simon* is called “Peter” in 6:14

⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Now go out where it is deeper, and let down your nets to catch some fish.”

⁵“Master,” Simon replied, “we worked hard all last night and didn’t catch a thing. But if you say so, I’ll let the nets down again.” ⁶And this time their nets were so full of fish they began to tear! ⁷A shout for help brought their partners in the other boat, and soon both boats were filled with fish and on the verge of sinking.

⁸When Simon Peter realized what had happened, he fell to his knees before Jesus and said, “Oh, Lord, please leave me—I’m too much of a sinner to be around you.” ⁹For he was awestruck by the number of fish they had caught, as were the others with him. ¹⁰His partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were also amazed.

Jesus replied to Simon, “Don’t be afraid! From now on you’ll be fishing for people!” ¹¹And as soon as they landed, they left everything and followed Jesus.

Jesus Teaches with Authority **PARALLEL**

MARK 1:21-28

Jesus and his companions went to the town of Capernaum. When the Sabbath day came, he went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²²The people were amazed at his teaching, for he taught with real authority—quite unlike the teachers of religious law.

Matt 4:21-22 James and his brother, John, along with Peter and Andrew, were the first disciples that Jesus called to work with him. Jesus’ call motivated these men to get up and leave their jobs—immediately. They didn’t make excuses about why it wasn’t a good time. They left at once and followed. Jesus calls each of us to follow him. When Jesus asks us to serve him, we must be like the disciples and do it at once.

Mark 1:16-20 We often assume that Jesus’ disciples were great men of faith from the first time they met Jesus. But they had to grow in their faith just as all believers do (Mark 14:48-50, 66-72; John 14:1-9; 20:26-29). This is apparently not the only time Jesus called Peter (Simon), James, and John to follow him (see John 1:35-42 for another time). Although it took time for Jesus’ call and his message to get through, the disciples followed. In the same way, we may question and falter, but we must never stop following Jesus.

Mark 1:17 Fishing was a major industry around the Sea of Galilee. Fishing with nets was the most common method. Jesus called the disciples to fish for people with the same energy they had used to fish for food. The gospel would be like a net, lifting people from dark waters into the light of day and transforming their lives. How can God use you to fish for people’s souls? How can you

train new converts to find new seas and cast new nets where waters have never been fished before? The gospel makes missionaries of all God’s people. Where are you casting your net?

Luke 5:2 Fishermen on the Sea of Galilee used nets, often bell-shaped ones with lead weights around the edges. A net would be thrown flat onto the water, and the lead weights would cause it to sink around the fish. Then the fishermen would pull on a cord, drawing the net around the fish. Nets had to be kept in good condition, so they would be washed to remove weeds and then mended.

Luke 5:8 Simon Peter was awestruck at this miracle, and his first response was to realize his own insignificance in comparison to this man’s greatness. Peter knew that Jesus had healed the sick and driven out demons, but he was amazed that Jesus cared about his day-to-day routine and understood his needs. God is interested not only in saving us but also in helping us in our daily activities.

Luke 5:11 God has two requirements for coming to him. Like Peter, we must recognize our own sinfulness. Then, like these fishermen, we must realize that we can’t save ourselves and that we need help. If we know that Jesus is the only one who can help us, we will be ready to leave everything and follow him.

Luke 5:11 This was the disciples’ second call. After the first call (John 1:35-51), Peter and Andrew had gone back to fishing. They continued to watch Jesus, however, as he established his authority in the synagogue, healed the sick, and drove out demons. Here he also established his authority in their lives—he met them on their level and helped them in their work. From this point on, they left their nets and remained with Jesus. For us, following Jesus means more than just acknowledging him as Savior. We must leave our past behind and commit our future to him.

Mark 1:21 Jesus had recently moved to Capernaum from Nazareth (Matt 4:12-13). Capernaum was a thriving town with great wealth as well as great sin and decadence. Because it was the headquarters for many Roman troops, pagan influences from all over the Roman Empire were pervasive. This was an ideal place for Jesus to challenge both Jews and non-Jews with the Good News of God’s Kingdom.

Mark 1:21-22 Because the Temple in Jerusalem was too far away for many Jews to attend regularly for worship, many towns had synagogues serving both as places of worship and as schools. Beginning in the days of Ezra, about 450 B.C., a group of 10 Jewish families could start a synagogue. There, during the week, Jewish boys were taught the

²³Suddenly, a man in the synagogue who was possessed by an evil* spirit began shouting. ²⁴“Why are you interfering with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

²⁵Jesus cut him short. “Be quiet! Come out of the man,” he ordered. ²⁶At that, the evil spirit screamed, threw the man into a convulsion, and then came out of him.

²⁷Amazement gripped the audience, and they began to discuss what had happened. “What sort of new teaching is this?” they asked excitedly. “It has such authority! Even evil spirits obey his orders!” ²⁸The news about Jesus spread quickly throughout the entire region of Galilee.

LUKE 4:31-37

Then Jesus went to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and taught there in the synagogue every Sabbath day. ³²There, too, the people were amazed at his teaching, for he spoke with authority.

³³Once when he was in the synagogue, a man possessed by a demon—an evil* spirit—began shouting at Jesus, ³⁴“Go away! Why are you interfering with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

Mk 1:23 Greek *unclean*; also in 1:26, 27. **Lk 4:33** Greek *unclean*; also in 4:36. **Mt 8:17** Isa 53:4.

³⁵Jesus cut him short. “Be quiet! Come out of the man,” he ordered. At that, the demon threw the man to the floor as the crowd watched; then it came out of him without hurting him further.

³⁶Amazed, the people exclaimed, “What authority and power this man’s words possess! Even evil spirits obey him, and they flee at his command!” ³⁷The news about Jesus spread through every village in the entire region.

Jesus Heals Peter’s Mother-in-Law and Many Others

PARALLEL

MATTHEW 8:14-17

When Jesus arrived at Peter’s house, Peter’s mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. ¹⁵But when Jesus touched her hand, the fever left her. Then she got up and prepared a meal for him.

¹⁶That evening many demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus. He cast out the evil spirits with a simple command, and he healed all the sick. ¹⁷This fulfilled the word of the Lord through the prophet Isaiah, who said,

“He took our sicknesses
and removed our diseases.”*

Old Testament law and Jewish religion. Girls could not attend. Each Saturday, the Sabbath, the Jewish men would gather to listen to a rabbi teach from the Scriptures. Because there was no permanent rabbi or teacher, it was customary for the synagogue leader to ask visiting teachers to speak. This is why Jesus often taught in the synagogues in the towns he visited. While the Jewish teachers often quoted from well-known rabbis to give their words more authority, Jesus didn’t need to. Because Jesus is God, he knew exactly what the Scriptures said and meant. He was the ultimate authority.

Mark 1:23ff Some people dismiss all accounts of demon possession as a primitive way to describe mental illness. Throughout history mental illness has often been wrongly diagnosed as demon possession, but clearly a hostile outside force controlled this man. Mark emphasized Jesus’ conflict with evil powers to show his superiority over them, so he recorded many stories about Jesus driving out evil spirits. Jesus didn’t have to conduct an elaborate exorcism ritual. His word was enough to send out the evil spirit.

Mark 1:23-24 The evil spirit knew at once that Jesus was the Holy One sent from God. By including this event in his Gospel, Mark was establishing Jesus’ credentials, showing that even the spiritual underworld recognized Jesus as the Messiah.

Mark 1:23 Evil spirits, or demons, are ruled by Satan. They work to tempt people to sin. They were not created by Satan because God is the creator of all. Rather, they are fallen angels who joined Satan

in his rebellion. Though not all disease comes from Satan, demons can cause a person to become mute, deaf, blind, or insane. But in every case where demons confronted Jesus, they lost their power. Thus, God limits what evil spirits can do; they can do nothing without his permission. During Jesus’ life on earth, demons were allowed to be very active to demonstrate once and for all Christ’s power and authority over them.

Luke 4:33 A man possessed by a demon was in the synagogue where Jesus was teaching. This man made his way into the place of worship and verbally abused Jesus. It is naive to think that we will be sheltered from evil in the church. Satan is happy to invade our presence wherever and whenever he can. But Jesus’ authority is much greater than Satan’s, and where Jesus is present, demons cannot stay for long.

Luke 4:34-36 The people were amazed at Jesus’ authority to drive out demons—evil spirits ruled by Satan and sent to harass people, tempt them to sin, and ultimately destroy them. Demons are fallen angels who have joined Satan in rebellion against God. Jesus faced many demons during his time on earth, and he always exerted authority over them. Not only did the evil spirit leave this man; Luke records that the man was not even injured.

While we may not often see cases of demon possession today, it does still exist. There is no doubt that evil permeates our world. We need not be fearful, however. Jesus’ power is far greater than Satan’s. The first step toward conquering fear of evil

is to recognize Jesus’ authority and power. He has overcome all evil, including Satan himself.

Matt 8:14-15 Peter’s mother-in-law gives us a beautiful example to follow. Her response to Jesus’ touch was to wait on Jesus and his disciples—immediately. Has God ever helped you through a dangerous or difficult situation? If so, ask him how you can express your gratitude. Because God has promised us all the rewards of his Kingdom, we should look for ways to serve him and his followers now.

Matt 8:16-17 Matthew continues to show Jesus’ kingly nature. Through a single touch, Jesus healed (Matt 8:3, 15); when he spoke a single word, evil spirits fled his presence (Matt 8:16). Jesus has authority over all evil powers and all earthly disease. He also has power and authority to conquer sin. Sickness and evil are consequences of living in a fallen world. But in the future, when God removes all sin, there will be no more sickness and death. Jesus’ healing miracles were a taste of what the whole world will one day experience in God’s Kingdom.

MARK 1:29-34

After Jesus left the synagogue with James and John, they went to Simon and Andrew's home. ³⁰Now Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. They told Jesus about her right away. ³¹So he went to her bedside, took her by the hand, and helped her sit up. Then the fever left her, and she prepared a meal for them.

³²That evening after sunset, many sick and demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus. ³³The whole town gathered at the door to watch. ³⁴So Jesus healed many people who were sick with various diseases, and he cast out many demons. But because the demons knew who he was, he did not allow them to speak.

LUKE 4:38-41

After leaving the synagogue that day, Jesus went to Simon's home, where he found Simon's mother-in-law very sick with a high fever. "Please heal her," everyone begged. ³⁹Standing at her bedside, he rebuked the fever, and it left her. And she got up at once and prepared a meal for them.

⁴⁰As the sun went down that evening, people throughout the village brought sick family members to Jesus. No matter what their diseases were, the touch of his hand healed every one. ⁴¹Many were possessed by demons; and the demons came out at his command, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But because they knew he was the Messiah, he rebuked them and refused to let them speak.

Mark 1:29-31 Each Gospel writer had a slightly different perspective as he wrote; thus, the comparable stories in the Gospels often highlight different details. In Matthew, Jesus touched the woman's hand. In Mark, he helped her up. In Luke, he spoke to the fever and it left her. The accounts do not

conflict. Just as four people might witness the same event and all recount different details, so each Gospel writer simply emphasized different details of this story.

Mark 1:34 Why didn't Jesus want the demons to reveal who he was? (1) By com-

manding the demons to remain silent, Jesus proved his authority and power over them. (2) Jesus wanted the people to believe he was the Messiah because of what he said and did, not because of the demons' words. (3) Jesus wanted to reveal his identity as the Messiah according to his timetable, not Satan's. The demons called Jesus "Son of God" or "the Holy One sent from God" (Luke 4:34) because they knew he was the Christ. But Jesus was going to show himself to be the suffering servant before he became the great King. To reveal his identity as King too soon would stir up the crowds with the wrong expectations of what he had come to do.

Luke 4:40 The people came to Jesus when the sun was setting because this was the Sabbath (Luke 4:31), their day of rest. Sabbath lasted from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday. The people didn't want to break the law that prohibited travel on the Sabbath, so they waited until the sun set before coming to Jesus. Then, as Luke the physician notes, they came with all kinds of diseases, and Jesus healed each one.

Luke 4:40 When you've faced a particularly difficult time, what helped you most? While some may have said kind words, most likely it was the presence and touch of a friend. A hug, an arm around your shoulder, or even just a hand laid gently on top of yours—these simple, wordless gestures mean so much to those in pain. In healing the sick and the demon possessed, Jesus had already demonstrated that he could heal with just a word (Luke 4:39). Yet here in Capernaum, Luke records that the touch of Jesus' hand healed the sick. Why not just speak a word and heal the whole crowd at once? Why go to all the trouble of treating each person individually, face-to-face? Perhaps because human touch is so very important. Does someone need a touch from you today?

Matt 4:23-24 Jesus preached the gospel—the Good News—to everyone who wanted to hear it. The Good News is that the Kingdom of Heaven has come, that God is with us, and that he cares for us. Christ can heal us, not just of physical sickness, but of spiritual sickness as well. There's



Sea of Galilee

The Sea of Galilee is a large body of water in Palestine. It has had many names in its history. In the Old Testament the Sea of Galilee was known as the Sea of Kinnereth (Num 34:11), named for the town on its border (Josh 19:35). Later, the name was changed to Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1). It derived the name Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1; 21:1) from the town of Tiberias on its southwestern shore. The most familiar name, the Sea of Galilee, was due to its connection with the province of Galilee to its west (Matt 4:18). The Sea of Galilee, which is fed by the Jordan River, lies in the lower section of the Jordan Valley about 60 miles north of Jerusalem. The climate of the Sea of Galilee is semitropical. The lake is 13 miles long and 6 miles wide; its greatest depth is 200 feet. Its shape resembles a harp, and some scholars think the name Kinnereth comes from the Hebrew word meaning "harp." The lake has an abundant supply of fish.

Most of the events in Jesus' ministry took place around the Sea of Galilee, especially around Gennesaret, the most densely populated area of Palestine. Jesus is said to have lived in Capernaum (Matt 4:13), and he did many miracles there. Because the area west of the lake was a health resort, Jesus found many sick people there and healed them.

Jesus Preaches throughout Galilee **PARALLEL**

MATTHEW 4:23-25

Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. ²⁴News about him spread as far as Syria, and people soon began bringing to him all who were sick. And whatever their sickness or disease, or if they were demon possessed or epileptic or paralyzed—he healed them all. ²⁵Large crowds followed him wherever he went—people from Galilee, the Ten Towns,* Jerusalem, from all over Judea, and from east of the Jordan River.

MARK 1:35-39

Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray. ³⁶Later Simon and the others went out to find him. ³⁷When they found him, they said, “Everyone is looking for you.”

³⁸But Jesus replied, “We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too. That is why I came.” ³⁹So he traveled throughout the region of Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and casting out demons.

Mt 4:25 Greek *Decapolis*. **Lk 4:44** Some manuscripts read *Galilee*. **Mt 8:4** See Lev 14:2-32.

LUKE 4:42-44

Early the next morning Jesus went out to an isolated place. The crowds searched everywhere for him, and when they finally found him, they begged him not to leave them. ⁴³But he replied, “I must preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God in other towns, too, because that is why I was sent.” ⁴⁴So he continued to travel around, preaching in synagogues throughout Judea.*

Jesus Heals a Man with Leprosy **PARALLEL**

MATTHEW 8:1-4

Large crowds followed Jesus as he came down the mountainside. ²Suddenly, a man with leprosy approached him and knelt before him. “Lord,” the man said, “if you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean.”

³Jesus reached out and touched him. “I am willing,” he said. “Be healed!” And instantly the leprosy disappeared. ⁴Then Jesus said to him, “Don’t tell anyone about this. Instead, go to the priest and let him examine you. Take along the offering required in the law of Moses for those who have been healed of leprosy.* This will be a public testimony that you have been cleansed.”

no sin or problem too great or too small for him to handle. Jesus’ words were good news because they offered freedom, hope, peace of heart, and eternal life with God.

Matt 4:23 Jesus was teaching, preaching, and healing. These were the three main aspects of his ministry. Teaching shows Jesus’ concern for understanding; preaching shows his concern for commitment; and healing shows his concern for wholeness. His miracles of healing authenticated his teaching and preaching, proving that he truly was from God.

Matt 4:23 Jesus soon developed a powerful preaching ministry and often spoke in the synagogues. Most towns that had 10 or more Jewish families had a synagogue. The building served as a religious gathering place on the Sabbath and as a school during the week. The leader of the synagogue was not a preacher as much as an administrator. His job was to find and invite rabbis to teach and preach. It was customary to invite visiting rabbis like Jesus to speak.

Matt 4:25 The “Ten Towns” (Greek *Decapolis*) was a league of 10 Gentile cities east of the Sea of Galilee, joined together for better trade and mutual defense. The word about Jesus was out, and Jews and Gentiles were coming long distances to hear him.

Mark 1:35-37 Were the disciples impatient that Jesus prayed in solitude while so much ministry waited to be done? How would you have responded if you had been the one to

find Jesus in prayer? It’s easy to be so caught up with ministry that you neglect times of solitude, individual worship, and prayer. Perhaps you need to redesign your schedule. It is vitally important to (1) seek the Lord before your busy schedule takes over your thoughts; (2) withdraw from noise and demands so you can focus on God; (3) take Jesus’ attitude of regular communion with the Father; (4) reflect on the priorities Jesus had for his life; (5) determine to pray on a more regular basis, not just in times of crisis. If prayer was important for Jesus, then it must be important for his followers. Pray—even if you have to get up very early in the morning to do it!

Mark 1:39 The Romans divided the land of Israel into three separate regions: Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. Galilee was the northernmost region, an area about 60 miles long and 30 miles wide. Jesus did much of his ministry in this area, an ideal place for him to teach because there were over 250 towns concentrated there, with many synagogues.

Luke 4:42 Jesus had to get up very early just to get some time alone. If Jesus needed solitude for prayer and refreshment, how much more is this true for us? Don’t become so busy that life turns into a flurry of activity, leaving no room for quiet fellowship alone with God. No matter how much you have to do, you should always have time for prayer.

Luke 4:43 The Kingdom of God is Good News! It was Good News to the Jews

because they had been awaiting the coming of the promised Messiah ever since the Babylonian captivity. It is Good News for us also because it means freedom from the slavery of sin and selfishness. The Kingdom of God is here and now because the Holy Spirit lives in the hearts of believers. Yet it is also in the future because Jesus will return to reign over a perfect Kingdom, where sin and evil will no longer exist.

Matt 8:2-3 Leprosy was a terrifying disease because there was no known cure. In Jesus’ day, the Greek word for “leprosy” was used for a variety of similar diseases, and some forms were contagious. If a person contracted the contagious type, a priest declared him a leper and banished him from his home and city. The leper was sent to live in a community with other lepers until he either got better or died. Yet when the leper begged Jesus to heal him, Jesus reached out and touched him, even though his skin was covered with the dread disease.

Sin is also an incurable disease—and we all have it. Only Christ’s healing touch can miraculously take away our sins and restore us to real living. But first, just like the leper, we must realize our inability to cure ourselves and ask for Christ’s saving help.

Matt 8:4 The law required a healed leper to be examined by the priest (Lev 14). Jesus wanted this man to give his story firsthand to the priest to prove that his leprosy was completely gone so that he could be restored to his community.

BEGINNINGS undated–2100 BC	GOD'S CHOSEN FAMILY 2100–1800 BC	BIRTH OF ISRAEL 1800–1406 BC	POSSESSING THE LAND 1406–1050 BC	UNITED MONARCHY 1050–930 BC
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MARK 1:40-45

A man with leprosy came and knelt in front of Jesus, begging to be healed. "If you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean," he said.

⁴¹Moved with compassion,* Jesus reached out and touched him. "I am willing," he said. "Be healed!" ⁴²Instantly the leprosy disappeared, and the man was healed. ⁴³Then Jesus sent him on his way with a stern warning: ⁴⁴"Don't tell anyone about this. Instead, go to the priest and let him examine you. Take along the offering required in the law of Moses for those who have been healed of leprosy.* This will be a public testimony that you have been cleansed."

⁴⁵But the man went and spread the word, proclaiming to everyone what had happened. As a result, large crowds soon surrounded Jesus, and he couldn't publicly enter a town anywhere. He had to stay out in the secluded places, but people from everywhere kept coming to him.

LUKE 5:12-16

In one of the villages, Jesus met a man with an advanced case of leprosy. When the man saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground, begging to be healed. "Lord," he said, "if you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean."

¹³Jesus reached out and touched him. "I am willing," he said. "Be healed!" And instantly the leprosy

Mk 1:41 Some manuscripts read *Moved with anger.*
of Man" is a title Jesus used for himself.

Mk 1:44 See Lev 14:2-32.

Lk 5:14 See Lev 14:2-32.

Mt 9:4 Some manuscripts read *saw.*

Mt 9:6 "Son

disappeared. ¹⁴Then Jesus instructed him not to tell anyone what had happened. He said, "Go to the priest and let him examine you. Take along the offering required in the law of Moses for those who have been healed of leprosy.* This will be a public testimony that you have been cleansed."

¹⁵But despite Jesus' instructions, the report of his power spread even faster, and vast crowds came to hear him preach and to be healed of their diseases. ¹⁶But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.

Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man

MATTHEW 9:1-8

Jesus climbed into a boat and went back across the lake to his own town. ²Some people brought to him a paralyzed man on a mat. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "Be encouraged, my child! Your sins are forgiven."

³But some of the teachers of religious law said to themselves, "That's blasphemy! Does he think he's God?"

⁴Jesus knew* what they were thinking, so he asked them, "Why do you have such evil thoughts in your hearts? ⁵Is it easier to say 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Stand up and walk'? ⁶So I will prove to you that the Son of Man* has the authority on earth to

Mark 1:40-41 In keeping with the law in Leviticus 13 and 14, Jewish leaders declared people with leprosy unclean. This meant that lepers were unfit to participate in any religious or social activity. Because the law said that contact with any unclean person made that person unclean, too, some people even threw rocks at lepers to keep them at a safe distance. Even the mention of this disabling disease terrified people. How astounding it was, then, when Jesus reached out and touched this man who had leprosy.

The real value of a person is inside, not outside. Although a person's body may be diseased or deformed, the person inside is no less valuable to God. In a sense, we are all people with leprosy because we have all been deformed by the ugliness of sin. By sending his Son, Jesus, God has touched us, giving us the opportunity to be healed.

Luke 5:12 Leprosy had a similar emotional impact and terror associated with it as AIDS does today. (Sometimes called Hansen's disease, leprosy still exists in a less contagious form that can be treated.) The priests monitored the disease, banishing lepers who were in a contagious stage to prevent the spread of infection and readmitting lepers whose disease was in remission. Because leprosy destroys the nerve endings, lepers often would unknowingly damage their fingers, toes, and noses. This man had an

advanced case, so he undoubtedly had lost much bodily tissue. Still, he believed that Jesus could heal him of every trace of the disease. And Jesus did just that, reaching out to touch this untouchable, contagious man in order to restore him. For more on the power of touch, see the second note on Luke 4:40, p. 1310.

Luke 5:16 People were flocking to hear Jesus preach and to have their diseases healed, but Jesus made sure he often withdrew to quiet, solitary places to pray. Many things clamor for our attention, and we often run ourselves ragged attending to them. Like Jesus, however, we should take time to withdraw to a quiet and deserted place to pray. Strength comes from God, and we can only be strengthened by spending time with him.

Matt 9:1 "His own town" was Capernaum, a good choice for Jesus' base of operations. It was a wealthy city due to fishing and trade. Situated on the Sea of Galilee in a densely populated area, Capernaum housed the Roman garrison that kept peace in the region. The city was a cultural melting pot, greatly influenced by Greek and Roman manners, dress, architecture, and politics.

Matt 9:2 Among the first words Jesus said to the paralyzed man were "Your sins are forgiven." Then he healed the man. We must be careful not to concentrate more on God's power to heal physical sickness than

on his power to forgive spiritual sickness in the form of sin. Jesus saw that in addition to physical health, this man needed spiritual health. Spiritual health comes only from Jesus' healing touch.

Matt 9:2 Both the man's body and his spirit were paralyzed—he could not walk, and he did not know Jesus. But the man's spiritual state was what Jesus addressed first. If God does not heal us or someone we love, we need to remember that physical healing is not Christ's only concern. We will all be completely healed in Christ's coming Kingdom; but first we have to come to know Jesus.

Matt 9:3 Blaspheming is claiming to be God and applying his characteristics to yourself. The religious leaders rightly saw that Jesus was claiming to be God. What they did not understand was that he is God and thus has the authority to heal and to forgive sins.

Matt 9:5-6 It's easy to tell someone his sins are forgiven; it's a lot more difficult to reverse a case of paralysis! Jesus backed up his words by healing the man's legs. Jesus' action showed that his words were true; he had the power to forgive as well as to heal. Talk is cheap, and our words lack meaning if our actions do not back them up. We can say we love God or others, but if we are not taking practical steps to demonstrate that love, our words are empty and meaningless. How well do your actions back up what you say?

forgive sins.” Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, “Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!”

7And the man jumped up and went home! 8Fear swept through the crowd as they saw this happen. And they praised God for sending a man with such great authority.*

MARK 2:1-12

When Jesus returned to Capernaum several days later, the news spread quickly that he was back home.

Mt 9:8 Greek for giving such authority to human beings.

2Soon the house where he was staying was so packed with visitors that there was no more room, even outside the door. While he was preaching God’s word to them, 3four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. 4They couldn’t bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they dug a hole through the roof above his head. Then they lowered the man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus. 5Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, “My child, your sins are forgiven.”

Mark 2:3 The paralyzed man’s need moved his friends to action, and they brought him to Jesus. When you recognize someone’s need, do you act? Many people have physical and spiritual needs you can meet, either by yourself or with others who are also concerned. Human need moved these four men; let it also move you to compassionate action.

Mark 2:4 The crowd that had gathered made it impossible to bring the paralyzed man close to Jesus. Successful churches

or busy Christians can be oblivious to needy people who want to see Jesus. In some churches, if the crowd is too thick or too disinterested, a needy person will simply wander away. How sad when the people in a church are so preoccupied with their own relationships and agendas that they don’t even see those who are trying to get in. That should never happen. Where Jesus is present, may the faces of the faithful reflect his love, may their hands extend to greet all

newcomers and seekers as friends, and may they open a way for others to come in.

Mark 2:4 Houses in Bible times were built of stone. They had flat roofs made of mud mixed with straw. Outside stairways led to the roofs. These friends may have carried the paralyzed man up the outside stairs to the roof. They then could easily have taken apart the mud and straw mixture to make a hole through which to lower their friend to Jesus.



PROMINENT JEWISH RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL GROUPS

Name and selected references	Description	Agreement with Jesus	Disagreement with Jesus
PHARISEES Matt 5:20 Matt 23:1-36 Luke 6:2 Luke 7:36-47	Strict group of religious Jews who advocated obedience to the most minute portions of the Jewish law and traditions. Very influential in the synagogues.	Respect for the law, belief in the resurrection of the dead, committed to obeying God’s will.	Rejected Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah. Despised Jesus because he did not follow all their traditions and associated with notoriously wicked people.
SADDUCEES Matt 3:7 Matt 16:11-12 Mark 12:18	Wealthy, upper class, Jewish priestly party. Rejected the authority of the Scriptures beyond the five books of Moses. Profited from business in the Temple. They, along with the Pharisees, were one of the two major parties of the Jewish high council.	Showed great respect for the five books of Moses, as well as the sanctity of the Temple.	Denied the resurrection of the dead. Thought the Temple could also be used as a place to transact business.
TEACHERS OF RELIGIOUS LAW Matt 7:29 Mark 2:6 Mark 2:16	Professional interpreters of the law—who especially emphasized the traditions. Many teachers of religious law were Pharisees.	Respect for the law. Committed to obeying God.	Denied Jesus’ authority to interpret the law. Rejected Jesus as the Messiah because he did not obey all of their traditions.
SUPPORTERS OF HEROD Matt 22:16 Mark 3:6 Mark 12:13	A Jewish political party of King Herod’s supporters.	Unknown. In the Gospels they tried to trap Jesus with questions and plotted to kill him.	Afraid of Jesus causing political instability. Saw Jesus as a threat to their political future at a time when they were trying to regain from Rome some of their lost political power.
ZEALOTS Luke 6:15 Acts 1:13	A fiercely dedicated group of Jewish patriots determined to end Roman rule in Israel.	Concerned about the future of Israel. Believed in the Messiah but did not recognize Jesus as the one sent by God.	Believed that the Messiah must be a political leader who would deliver Israel from Roman occupation.
ESSENES none	Jewish monastic group practicing ritual purity and personal holiness.	Emphasized justice, honesty, commitment.	Believed ceremonial rituals made them righteous.