



An overview of the Bible

# 30 Days with Jesus...

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Welcome!

We're so glad you're interested in reading this 30-day overview of the Bible. The Bible is an amazing book that tells us so much about God and His work in history and what He wants for us, but it can be intimidating because it's not like any of the other books we usually read. It's actually not just one book, it's a collection of 66 books, 39 in the Old Testament (the Jewish Scriptures) and 27 in the New Testament (written about Jesus). These books were written in 3 different languages by around 40 authors over the span of 1500 years and contain different types of literature (history, poetry, prophecy, letters, etc.). Whew...that's a lot to take in. And that's why we've created this 30-day overview of the Bible as a starting point for you to get an idea of the entire Bible before jumping in to one book or section.

Each day in this guide has a brief introduction before the Bible passages to help with the flow and make any necessary clarifications. At the end of each day there are a few brief questions for you to think about. But the main thing you'll be reading is actual text from the Bible. Feel free to print this out and jot down ideas, thoughts, and questions you have.

It always helps to process what you're learning with others, and there are folks at church that would love to meet with you on Sunday morning for 15-30 minutes just to check in and/or to answer questions or just talk about what you've read. We certainly don't have all the answers, but we promise to listen and share what we've learned. Contact the office (541-497-7885 or [office@northside-albany.com](mailto:office@northside-albany.com)) to let us know that you're starting this journey and would like someone to talk to about it.

We're excited for you as you begin this journey!

## 1. IN THE BEGINNING...GOD WANTED A RELATIONSHIP WITH US

The Bible begins with the story of Creation. God makes a good world and gives humans, who are made in God's likeness, the right and ability to rule it alongside him. Genesis isn't the only place in the Old Testament that speaks of God as Creator. And the New Testament shows Jesus' part in the work of Creation, as we read in the passages from John 1 and Colossians 1.

Genesis 1:1-4 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good.

Genesis 1:26-28 Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. Then 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."

Psalms 139:13-14 You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.

John 1:1-5 In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

Colossians 1:15-17 Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation. For through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we

can see and the things we can't see— such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together.

THINK ABOUT IT:

What do you learn about God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in these passages?

What stands out to you in these passages? Are there words or phrases that catch your attention?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

## **2 – DON'T DO IT!!!**

The first humans had the choice of trusting their Creator, God, or of deciding that they knew better than he. Had they chosen to obey God and stay away from the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil”, the rest of the Story of the Bible would have been very different. But the choice they made to define what was good and evil for themselves rather than accepting God's definitions and boundaries had far reaching consequences that ripple throughout the rest of the Bible.

Genesis 2:15-17 The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. But the LORD God warned him, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden— except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.”

Genesis 3:1-13 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?” “Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,” the woman replied. “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.’” “You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman. “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.” The 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 some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. When 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. Then the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?” He replied, “I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked.”

“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?” The man replied, “It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.” Then the LORD God asked the woman, “What have you done?” “The serpent deceived me,” she replied. “That’s why I ate it.” So 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.

THINK ABOUT IT:

Why do you think God put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden when he knew it would lead to humanity rejecting him?

What do you learn about yourself, the serpent, and God in these passages?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

### 3 - CONSEQUENCE AND PROMISE

In God's response to humanity's rebellion we clearly see dire consequences for their distrust and disobedience. But God also extends hope as he speaks of the "woman's offspring" that will be a wounded victor. In the New Testament we are given a clearer picture of Jesus as this victor.

Genesis 3: 14-24 Then 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. And 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." Then 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." And 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. It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat its grains. By 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."

Romans 5:17-19 For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ. Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous.

I Corinthians 15:22 Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life.

THINK ABOUT IT:

How do you feel about the consequences God gives humanity, and the promise of salvation through Jesus Christ?

What is God telling you through these passages?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

#### **4 - DOWNWARD SPIRAL**

After Adam and Eve leave the Garden of Eden things go downhill. People continue turning their backs on God, and violence and oppression and evil grow and multiply. Finally, God decides to “start over” with just one man’s family, Noah, and a huge flood wipes out everyone and everything else. After the flood God makes a covenant (a binding agreement) with Noah and his family that he won’t ever again destroy all life on earth with a flood. However, Noah and his descendants are also broken people and the downward spiral of humans turning God’s good world bad continues. Noah’s descendants even try to build a great city for their own glory in the land of Babylonia, but God confuses their languages and they scatter.

Genesis 6:5-8 The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the LORD said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.” But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

Genesis 9:8-11 (after the flood) Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

Genesis 11:1-9 Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used

brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”

But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. The LORD said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

THINK ABOUT IT:

What do you learn about God in these passages?

What do you learn about yourself/people?

What is God telling you through these passages?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

## 5 – GOD’S PLAN CONTINUES TO UNFOLD...ABRAM’S CALL

One of the families that scattered from Babel is the family of Abram (God later changes his name to Abraham). God chooses to have a special relationship with him and his family, which is pivotal to the rest of the Story of the Bible. Abraham and his descendants form a dysfunctional, messy family, but God continues to work through them in spite of their shortcomings because of his promise and his plan. It is through this family line that God will reveal himself not only to Abraham’s descendants, but also to the rest of the world. The first four generations of that family, sometimes referred to as “the patriarchs”, are Abraham – Isaac – Jacob (renamed Israel by God) - Joseph

Genesis 12:1-4 The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” So Abram went, as the LORD had told him.

Acts 7:4-15 -- In the New Testament, Stephen, the first Christian martyr, tells the history of Abram’s family as he speaks to the Jewish religious leaders

“So he (Abram) left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. God spoke to him in this way: ‘For four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,’ God said, ‘and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.’ Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs. “Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace. “Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our ancestors could not find food. When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our forefathers on their first visit. On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph’s family. After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died.

Genesis 50:12-21 -- Joseph’s response to his brothers after their father Jacob died shows God at work in this family to bring about his purposes for them and for the world His (Joseph’s) brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. “We are your slaves,” they said. But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

THINK ABOUT IT:

These passages contain hundreds of years of God working in history to accomplish his purposes. Do you see God’s work in your personal history or your family’s history? If so, where?



What questions do you have based on what you read today?

## **6 - BRUTAL SLAVERY IN EGYPT...HAS GOD FORGOTTEN HIS PEOPLE?**

God saved the Israelites by taking them to Egypt to survive a famine (Abraham's family is now called Israel because God changed Jacob's name to Israel and his 12 sons formed the 12 tribes of Israel). But God had told Abraham that his family would then suffer for 400 years in a foreign country (Gen. 15:13), and after Joseph's death these years of slavery begin. The Israelites multiply and grow as a people, but they suffer under Pharaoh's cruelty until God rescues them by choosing one of them, Moses, to lead them out of Egypt. Exodus 1:6-14 In time, Joseph and all of his brothers died, ending that entire generation. But their descendants, the Israelites, had many children and grandchildren. In fact, they multiplied so greatly that they became extremely powerful and filled the land. Eventually, a new king came to power in Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done. He said to his people, "Look, the people of Israel now outnumber us and are stronger than we are. We must make a plan to keep them from growing even more. If we don't, and if war breaks out, they will join our enemies and fight against us. Then they will escape from the country." So the Egyptians made the Israelites their slaves. They appointed brutal slave drivers over them, hoping to wear them down with crushing labor. They forced them to build the cities of Pithom and Rameses as supply centers for the king. But the more the Egyptians oppressed them, the more the Israelites multiplied and spread, and the more alarmed the Egyptians became. So the Egyptians worked the people of Israel without mercy. They made their lives bitter, forcing them to mix mortar and make bricks and do all the work in the fields. They were ruthless in all their demands.

Exodus 2:23-25 Years passed, and the king of Egypt died. But the Israelites continued to groan under their burden of slavery. They cried out for help, and their cry rose up to God. God heard their groaning, and he remembered his covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He looked down on the people of Israel and knew it was time to act.

Exodus 6:1-8 Then the LORD told Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh. When he feels the force of my strong hand, he will let the people go. In fact, he will force them to leave his land!" And God said to Moses, "I am Yahweh—the LORD.' I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El-Shaddai—'God Almighty'—but I did not reveal

my name, Yahweh, to them. And I reaffirmed my covenant with them. Under its terms, I promised to give them the land of Canaan, where they were living as foreigners. You can be sure that I have heard the groans of the people of Israel, who are now slaves to the Egyptians. And I am well aware of my covenant with them. “Therefore, say to the people of Israel: ‘I am the LORD. I will free you from your oppression and will rescue you from your slavery in Egypt. I will redeem you with a powerful arm and great acts of judgment. I will claim you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God who has freed you from your oppression in Egypt. I will bring you into the land I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I will give it to you as your very own possession. I am the LORD!’”

Exodus 12:40 The people of Israel had lived in Egypt for 430 years. In fact, it was on the last day of the 430th year that all the LORD’s forces left the land. On this night the LORD kept his promise to bring his people out of the land of Egypt. So this night belongs to him, and it must be commemorated every year by all the Israelites, from generation to generation.

THINK ABOUT IT:

Why do you think God left the Israelites in Egypt for 430 years before raising Moses up to lead them out and back to Canaan?

Is there an area of your life where you feel enslaved or burdened and you need God to “look down on you and act” (Ex. 2:25)? Tell God about it.

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

## **7 – GOD’S GUIDELINES AND BLESSINGS**

After God leads them out of Egypt (scholars believe there were around 2.4 million people), the Israelites doubt God and rebel against him, which leads to 40 years in the desert before going into Canaan (the Promised Land). During this time God works through Moses to form them into a nation that will follow His way of living, and the law is given to them as their guide to loving God and others well. Through the ups and downs of living in the desert, God's presence never leaves them, and in spite of their stubbornness, He loves them.

Exodus 20 And God spoke all these words: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. "You shall have no other gods before me. "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. "You shall not murder. "You shall not commit adultery. "You shall not steal. "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

Numbers 6:22-27 (An early blessing) The LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: ""The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."" "So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."

THINK ABOUT IT:

God is not just about rules or just about love and peace, as we see in these passages of law and blessing. What have you learned about the many facets of God?

Does anything you've learned about God bother you? Does anything encourage you or challenge your idea of who God is?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

## **8 - LOVE GOD, CHOOSE LIFE**

Before his death, the Israelites' human leader, Moses, pleads with them to follow God once they go into the Promised Land. He clearly lays out God's promises if they follow Him and the consequences if they continue to turn their backs on God and go their own way. These are poignant words from an old man who yearns for his people to follow God.

Deuteronomy 6:3-7 Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Deuteronomy 8:14-18 When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

Deuteronomy 30:11-15, 19-20 Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

THINK ABOUT IT:

What do you learn about God in these passages?

Read today's passages again slowly. How can you "choose life" today in your thoughts, decisions, and relationships?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

## **9 - PROMISED LAND – JOSHUA/ BE STRONG**

Moses doesn't enter the Promised Land with the Israelites. He dies and God passes his place of leadership to his aide, Joshua. This time around the Israelites follow God and conquer the land He's promised them, and it's divided among them. Even some of the Canaanites, neighboring tribes that worship pagan gods with detestable practices such as child sacrifice, become followers of God and part of the nation of Israel. God's promise to Abraham to give him and his descendants the land of Canaan is fulfilled (Gen. 12:4-7). However, just before he dies, Joshua also gives a couple of speeches to remind the Israelites that although God has given them this land, if they choose to be unfaithful to him, in divine justice he will drive them off the land and into exile just as he did the Canaanites.

Joshua 1:5-9 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them. "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

Joshua 23 After a long time had passed and the LORD had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then a very old man, summoned all Israel—their elders, leaders, judges and officials—and said to them: "Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. But you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now. "The LORD has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. One of you routs a thousand, because the LORD your God fights for you, just as he promised. So be very careful to love the LORD your God. "Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed. But just as all the good things the LORD your God has promised you have come to you, so he will bring on you all the evil things he has threatened, until the LORD your God has destroyed you from this good land he has given you. If you violate the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the LORD's anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land he has given you."

THINK ABOUT IT:

Both in Moses' final speech and in Joshua's, they urge the people not to forget God. Does this strike a chord with you? Why or why not?

What is God telling you through these passages?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

## 10 - THE WORD OF THE LORD

The book of Psalms is a collection of ancient Jewish poetry that flows in and through God's history of loving Israel while they continue to turn away from him. The Psalms cover themes from the rest of the Bible in poetry, and are amazing and honest expressions of human thoughts and emotions. The following Psalms speak of the rewards of following God's guidelines for life, some of the same guidelines Moses and Joshua were urging the Israelites to follow.

Psalms 1:1-3 Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. But they delight in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night. They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do.

Psalms 19:7-11 The instructions of the LORD are perfect,reviving the soul. The decrees of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The commandments of the LORD are right, bringing joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are clear, giving insight for living. Reverence for the LORD is pure, lasting forever. The laws of the LORD are true; each one is fair. They are more desirable than gold, even the finest gold. They are sweeter than honey, even honey dripping from the comb. They are a warning to your servant, a great reward for those who obey them.

Psalms 119:9-11, 105 How can a young person stay pure? By obeying your word. I have tried hard to find you— don't let me wander from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.

THINK ABOUT IT:

How do these passages talk about God's commands and rules for living? Would you describe them in these ways? Why or why not?

What insights do you gain about God and/or yourself in these passages?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

## **11 – PEOPLE REJECT GOD AGAIN...ANOTHER DOWNWARD SPIRAL**

Not long after Joshua's death the Israelites turn from God once again. God called the Israelites to be holy, or "set apart" from the Canaanites around them, who were morally corrupt and engaged in evil idol worship practices such as child sacrifice. In the book of Judges we again see the downward spiral of people choosing their own way and the consequences they suffer. Nevertheless, in spite of the Israelites' continued rebellion, God uses judges, military and political leaders (not judges in courtrooms like we'd think of today), to bail Israel out of messes they get into when they turn their backs on him.

Judges 2 After Joshua had dismissed the Israelites, they went to take possession of the land, each to their own inheritance. The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel. Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Heres in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the LORD's anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. In his anger against Israel the LORD gave them into the hands of raiders who plundered them. He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the LORD was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress. Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. Yet they would not listen to their judges but



prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. They quickly turned from the ways of their ancestors, who had been obedient to the LORD's commands. Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the LORD relented because of their groaning under those who oppressed and afflicted them. But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.

Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and said, "Because this nation has violated the covenant I ordained for their ancestors and has not listened to me, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the LORD and walk in it as their ancestors did."

Judges 17:6 and 21:25 In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.

THINK ABOUT IT:

In reading about God's relationship with Israel, do you think he was too harsh or too merciful? Why?

Why do you think God allowed His people to reject him and then suffer before they cried out to him, again and again and again?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

## **12 – INSTEAD OF GOD, THE PEOPLE WANT A KING**

During many years of turmoil a cycle emerges. The people of Israel turn their backs on God, are consequently oppressed by outsiders, cry out to God, and are saved by God through a judge, only to turn their backs on God again. Finally, the people demand to have a human king just like their Canaanite neighbors. God gives them what they want and sends his

prophet, Samuel, to anoint Saul as the first king of Israel. However, Saul soon disobeys God and God chooses another man to be king. This new king, David, will be special because in spite of his failures, God will use one of his descendants, Jesus, to fulfill his promises to Abraham and to the whole world.

1 Samuel 8 All the elders of Israel met at Ramah to discuss the matter with Samuel. "Look," they told him, "you are now old, and your sons are not like you. Give us a king to judge us like all the other nations have." Samuel was displeased with their request and went to the LORD for guidance. "Do everything they say to you," the LORD replied, "for they are rejecting me, not you. They don't want me to be their king any longer. Ever since I brought them from Egypt they have continually abandoned me and followed other gods. And now they are giving you the same treatment. Do as they ask, but solemnly warn them about the way a king will reign over them." So Samuel passed on the LORD's warning to the people who were asking him for a king. "This is how a king will reign over you," Samuel said. "The king will draft your sons and assign them to his chariots and his charioteers, making them run before his chariots. Some will be generals and captains in his army, some will be forced to plow in his fields and harvest his crops, and some will make his weapons and chariot equipment. The king will take your daughters from you and force them to cook and bake and make perfumes for him. He will take away the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his own officials. He will take a tenth of your grain and your grape harvest and distribute it among his officers and attendants. He will take your male and female slaves and demand the finest of your cattle and donkeys for his own use. He will demand a tenth of your flocks, and you will be his slaves. When that day comes, you will beg for relief from this king you are demanding, but then the LORD will not help you." But the people refused to listen to Samuel's warning. "Even so, we still want a king," they said. "We want to be like the nations around us. Our king will judge us and lead us into battle."

1 Samuel 16:1-13 The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king." Samuel did what the LORD said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, "Do you come in peace?" Samuel replied, "Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me." Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD." But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, "The LORD has not chosen this one either." Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, "Nor has the LORD chosen this one." Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, "The LORD has not chosen these." 11 So he asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" "There is still the youngest," Jesse answered. "He is tending the sheep." Samuel said, "Send for him; we will not

sit down until he arrives.” So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; this is the one.” So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David.

THINK ABOUT IT:

God tells Samuel “People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. Does this frighten or encourage you?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

### 13 – MORE PSALMS

Before David became king he was a shepherd and a poet. He continued writing songs and poems to God throughout his lifetime, and many of them are recorded in the book of Psalms. David’s life ran the gamut of human experience...from victories against incredible odds to covering up his sin of adultery with murder. The Psalms he wrote reflect his faith in God in the midst of his life circumstances.

Psalms 23:1-4 – God is with us The LORD is my shepherd; I have all that I need. He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name. Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me.

Psalm 103 Let all that I am praise the LORD; with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name. Let all that I am praise the LORD; may I never forget the good things he does for me. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies. He fills my life with good things. My youth is renewed like the eagle’s! The LORD gives righteousness and justice to all who are treated unfairly. He revealed his character to Moses and his deeds to the people of Israel. The LORD is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.

Psalm 139 – God knows me and is always with me O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I’m far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD. You go

before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand! I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave,[a] you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me.

THINK ABOUT IT:

As you read these Psalms, what words or phrases stand out to you most? Why do you think those caught your attention?

What is God telling you through these passages?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

#### **14 – THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON...OR WAS IT FOOLISHNESS?**

David's son Solomon becomes king after him and begins his rule well with humility before God. However, as his wealth grows and he marries foreign women, disobeying God's instructions, he turns from God to worship idols.

Deuteronomy 17 – Moses' instructions to Israel before he dies "You are about to enter the land the LORD your God is giving you. When you take it over and settle there, you may think, 'We should select a king to rule over us like the other nations around us.' If this happens, be sure to select as king the man the LORD your God chooses. You must appoint a fellow Israelite; he may not be a foreigner. "The king must not build up a large stable of horses for himself or send his people to Egypt to buy horses, for the LORD has told you, 'You must never return to Egypt.' The king must not take many wives for himself, because they will turn his heart away from the LORD. And he must not accumulate large amounts of wealth in silver and gold for himself.

1 Kings 3:5-14 At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he

was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. Now, LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have you asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life." Then Solomon awoke—and he realized it had been a dream.

1 Kings 9:1-7 When Solomon had finished building the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had achieved all he had desired to do, the LORD appeared to him a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. The LORD said to him: "I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there. "As for you, if you walk before me faithfully with integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel.' "But if you or your descendants turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will then become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples.

1 Kings 11:1-6 King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done.

THINK ABOUT IT:

God gave Solomon wisdom (knowledge applied well to life) but Solomon didn't show wisdom when he married hundreds of foreign women. What do you learn about God and/or people through this contradiction?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

### **15 – KINGS and exile...THE FINAL DOWNWARD SPIRAL?**

After Solomon and the Israelites begin to worship other gods, another downward spiral begins in which the United Kingdom of Israel (the 12 tribes) is split into the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Kings rise and fall quickly, many overthrown through secret plots and murder, and the number of kings that faithfully worship God is 0/20 in Israel and 8/20 in Judah. Although there are moments of repentance and a few kings who follow God, the overwhelming evil of both kingdoms leads to their ruin. The Northern Kingdom is conquered by the Assyrians and lost forever as a nation, and Judah, the Southern Kingdom, is finally conquered by the Babylonians and led off to exile in the city of Babylon. Only at the very end of the story of the kings is there a glimmer of hope that the line of David may not be lost forever.

II Kings 17 (Israel's downfall and exile, 722 bc...Northern Kingdom lost forever) Then the king of Assyria invaded the entire land, and for three years he besieged the city of Samaria. Finally, in the ninth year of King Hoshea's reign, Samaria fell, and the people of Israel were exiled to Assyria. They were settled in colonies in Halah, along the banks of the Habor River in Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. This disaster came upon the people of Israel because they worshiped other gods. They sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them safely out of Egypt and had rescued them from the power of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. They had followed the practices of the pagan nations the LORD had driven from the land ahead of them, as well as the practices the kings of Israel had introduced. The people of Israel had also secretly done many things that were not pleasing to the LORD their God. They built pagan shrines for themselves in all their towns, from the smallest outpost to the largest walled city. They set up sacred pillars and Asherah poles at the top of every hill and under every green tree. They offered sacrifices on all the hilltops, just like the nations the LORD had driven from the land ahead of them. So the people of Israel had done many evil things, arousing the LORD's anger. Yes, they worshiped idols, despite the LORD's specific and repeated warnings. Again and again the LORD had sent his prophets and seers to warn both Israel and Judah: "Turn from all your evil ways. Obey my commands and decrees—the entire law that I commanded

your ancestors to obey, and that I gave you through my servants the prophets.” But the Israelites would not listen. They were as stubborn as their ancestors who had refused to believe in the LORD their God. They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their ancestors, and they despised all his warnings. They worshiped worthless idols, so they became worthless themselves. They followed the example of the nations around them, disobeying the LORD’s command not to imitate them.

II Kings 25:8-12 (Judah’s final downfall and exile...587 bc) On August 14 of that year, which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard and an official of the Babylonian king, arrived in Jerusalem. He burned down the Temple of the LORD, the royal palace, and all the houses of Jerusalem. He destroyed all the important buildings in the city. Then he supervised the entire Babylonian army as they tore down the walls of Jerusalem on every side. Then Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, took as exiles the rest of the people who remained in the city, the defectors who had declared their allegiance to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the population. But the captain of the guard allowed some of the poorest people to stay behind to care for the vineyards and fields.

II Kings 25:27-30 (a glimmer of hope) In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah, Evil-merodach ascended to the Babylonian throne. He was kind to Jehoiachin and released him from prison on April 2 of that year. He spoke kindly to Jehoiachin and gave him a higher place than all the other exiled kings in Babylon. He supplied Jehoiachin with new clothes to replace his prison garb and allowed him to dine in the king’s presence for the rest of his life. So the king gave him a regular food allowance as long as he lived.

THINK ABOUT IT:

As we see from Moses’ warnings before the Israelites even entered the Promised Land, God knew that monarchy would lead to Israel’s downfall. Why do you think God allowed them to reject him in favor of a king? Why do you think God allows us to reject him and suffer the consequences?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

## 16 - PROPHECY OF THE MESSIAH (Anointed One) JESUS

Throughout the downward spiral of the 2 kingdoms and Judah's exile in Babylon, God sends prophets to speak on his behalf. Some, like Elijah and Elisha, look ahead to the devastation that will take place if the Israelites turn from God to worship the pagan gods around them. Others, like Isaiah look ahead not only to the devastation, but also speak of hope for the future. They speak of hope, both for a small group of Israelites that will be able to return and partially rebuild Jerusalem, but also to a greater hope for a King that will rule perfectly and forever, God's own son Jesus. After 70 years in Babylon, a group of Israelites do return to Jerusalem and partially rebuild the city. Then the Old Testament closes with God's continued promise to be their God and to come to them. And then silence, a very long silence. A silence of 400 years until strange things begin to happen in Galilee...

Isaiah 40 "Comfort, comfort my people," says your God. "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her sad days are gone and her sins are pardoned. Yes, the LORD has punished her twice over for all her sins." Listen! It's the voice of someone shouting, "Clear the way through the wilderness for the LORD! Make a straight highway through the wasteland for our God! Fill in the valleys, and level the mountains and hills. Straighten the curves, and smooth out the rough places. Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. The LORD has spoken!" (...)

O Jacob, how can you say the LORD does not see your troubles? O Israel, how can you say God ignores your rights? Have you never heard? Have you never understood? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding. He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless. Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall in exhaustion. But those who trust in the LORD will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.

Isaiah 9 For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity.

Isaiah 53 My servant grew up in the LORD's presence like a tender green shoot, like a root in dry ground. There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him. He was despised and rejected— a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows[a] that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all.



Malachi 3:1 “Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.

THINK ABOUT IT:

Are there any downward spirals in your life? How can you break that cycle?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

## **17 – OUR HERO COMES ON THE SCENE...**

The Israelites have been waiting for the promised Messiah to come for 400 years, during which both the Greeks and the Romans conquer them. It’s during the Roman invasion that the hero whom God spoke of in Genesis 3:15, and whom the prophets announced, comes on the scene. God visits an unmarried girl, a descendant of King David, in the small town of Nazareth, and suddenly the Savior of the World is a growing fetus in her womb! The first four books of the New Testament are all biographies of Jesus, called “the gospels”, which means “Good News”. Jesus’ coming to earth is indeed good news for us all! Matthew 1:18-25

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means “God is with us”. When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded

him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Luke 2:4-7 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for the. The news spreads that God is doing something new and extraordinary through a little baby, first to shepherds watching their flocks in fields near Bethlehem. Later magi (or wise men) from the east follow a star to Jerusalem to find the baby. They go ask King Herod, the puppet ruler of Judea for Rome, about where they can find the “newborn king of the Jews” (Mt 2:2). This disturbs and threatens Herod, who tries to find and kill Jesus. Matthew 2:7-15 and 19-21 Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.” (...) After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.” So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

THINK ABOUT IT:

Why do you think God chose to come in the form of a vulnerable baby to a young girl in a small town in Israel?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

## **18 – JESUS BAPTIZED, TESTED, AND LAUNCHED INTO MINISTRY...**

We don't hear much about Jesus once Joseph and Mary return from Egypt and settle in Nazareth. But when he's 30 years old we see him beside the Jordan River where he asks John the Baptist, his own relative and a prophet, to baptize him. He's then tested by the devil in the wilderness, and with both his baptism and testing behind him, Jesus begins his ministry. The next three years of his life Jesus teaches and heals and makes the Jewish religious leaders furious because he's so popular and because he threatens their way of life! Mark's biography of Jesus briefly shares these events before introducing us to some of the 12 disciples, the men who spend the next 3 years with him, listening to him and watching all he does. They're eyewitnesses to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, and the ones that tell others about Jesus after he's gone.

Mark 1:1-20 This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. It began just as the prophet Isaiah had written: "Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, and he will prepare your way. He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the LORD's coming! Clear the road for him!'" This 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 turned to God to be forgiven. All 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. His clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey. John 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. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!" One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy." The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness, where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. He was out among the wild animals, and angels took care of him.

Later on, after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God's Good News. "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!" 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. Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!” And they left their nets at once and followed him. A little farther up the shore Jesus saw Zebedee’s sons, James and John, in a boat repairing their nets. He called them at once, and they also followed him, leaving their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired men.

#### THINK ABOUT IT:

What do you learn about Jesus from this passage? Why do you think Jesus was baptized and tempted by Satan before he began his ministry?

Although the Jewish Scriptures, the Old Testament, are often hard to understand, they continually point ahead to Jesus. In this passage Mark quotes Malachi 3 and Isaiah 40, written hundreds of years before Jesus’ birth. How do the prophecies about Jesus give validity to his claims as Messiah?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

### **19 – THE BEST SERMON EVER PREACHED!**

Near the beginning of his ministry, Jesus climbs a hill and talks to his followers. What he says to them becomes the most famous sermon ever preached, called “The Sermon on the Mount”. The ideas in Jesus’ teaching are profound, revolutionary, and transformative...read the entire sermon in Matthew 5-7! Matthew 5:3-10 -- God's blessings  
 God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth. God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied. God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy. God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. Matthew 5:13-16 -- Salt and Light “You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has

lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father Matthew 5:43-48 -- Love even enemies  
 “You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Matthew 6:1-8 -- Giving and Praying “Watch out! Don’t do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. When you give to someone in need, don’t do as the hypocrites do—blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get. But when you give to someone in need, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. “When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. “When you pray, don’t babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need,[a] and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don’t let us yield to temptation,[b] but rescue us from the evil one.[c]

THINK ABOUT IT:

Read today’s passage again slowly. What invitation do you see being extended to you in Jesus’ words? Do you talk to God in prayer? If not, consider praying like Jesus taught his disciples to pray.

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

## 20 – THE BEST SERMON EVER PREACHED (continued)...

Matthew 6:19-34 -- Money and Worry “Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money. “That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn’t life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren’t you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? “And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith? “So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. “So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

Matthew 7:1-12 -- *Judging others.* “Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. “And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, ‘Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.

*Effective Prayer* “Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. “You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.

*The Golden Rule* “Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.

Matthew 7:24-27 -- A solid foundation “Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won’t collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn’t obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash.”

THINK ABOUT IT:

Does anything in this well known set of teachings by Jesus impact you on a personal level?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

## **21 – WHAT SHOULD I DO?**

Jesus’ teaching doesn’t stop with the Sermon on the Mount. During his three years of public ministry Jesus walks all over what is now modern day Israel, teaching, healing and doing other miracles, and telling instructive stories called parables.

Luke 10:25-37 -

*The Most Important Commandment* One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: “Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus replied, “What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?” The man answered, “‘You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ And, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “Right!” Jesus told him. “Do this and you will live!” The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied with a story: “A Jewish man was traveling

from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. “By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed on the other side. “Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, ‘Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I’ll pay you the next time I’m here.’ “Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?” Jesus asked. The man replied, “The one who showed him mercy.” Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same.”

Luke 18:9-14 – *Parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector* Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: “Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I’m certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.’ “But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’ I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Luke 15:1-10 – *The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin* Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them! So Jesus told them this story: “If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’ In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven’t strayed away! “Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins[a] and loses one. Won’t she light a lamp and sweep the entire house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors and say, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost coin.’ In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God’s angels when even one sinner repents.”

THINK ABOUT IT:



What stands out to you from the passages you read today?

What are your questions about what you read today?

## 22 - JESUS REACHES OUT TO OUTCASTS

Jesus doesn't just talk about loving others, he lives it out, engaging in conversations, touching, healing, and welcoming those that others shunned. Luke 7:36-48 - Jesus Anointed by a Sinful Woman      One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him, so Jesus went to his home and sat down to eat. When a certain immoral woman from that city heard he was eating there, she brought a beautiful alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. Then she knelt behind him at his feet, weeping. Her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing his feet and putting perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!" Then Jesus answered his thoughts. "Simon," he said to the Pharisee, "I have something to say to you." "Go ahead, Teacher," Simon replied. Then Jesus told him this story: "A man loaned money to two people—500 pieces of silver to one and 50 pieces to the other. But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?" Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt." "That's right," Jesus said. Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn't offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You didn't greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume. "I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love." Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven." Matthew 19:13-15 - Jesus Blesses the Children      One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him. But Jesus said, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children." And he placed his hands on their heads and blessed them before he left.

Luke 19 – *Jesus and Zacchaeus* Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way. When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. “Zacchaeus!” he said. “Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.” Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. But the people were displeased. “He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,” they grumbled. Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, “I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!” Jesus responded, “Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. For the Son of Man[a] came to seek and save those who are lost.”

Matthew 8:1-3 – *Jesus Heals a Man with Leprosy* Large crowds followed Jesus as he came down the mountainside. Suddenly, 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.” Jesus reached out and touched him. “I am willing,” he said. “Be healed!” And instantly the leprosy disappeared.

THINK ABOUT IT:

As you read today’s passages, what words/phrases stand out to you the most? Why do you think those particular words/phrases caught your attention?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

**23 – JESUS’ POPULARITY GROWS...AND HIS DEATH DRAWS NEAR.**

People begin to flock to Jesus. The miraculous things he does, the revolutionary things he teaches, the way he treats the “least of these” is magnetic. But the more popularity he gains with ordinary people, the angrier the religious elite grows. And then the tipping point; he raises a man from the dead. John 11:17-53 - The Raising of Lazarus When Jesus arrived at Bethany, he was told that Lazarus had already been in his grave for four days. Bethany was only a few miles[d] down the road from Jerusalem, and many of the people had come to console Martha and Mary in their loss. When Martha got word that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him. But Mary stayed in the house. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask.” Jesus told her, “Your brother will rise again.” “Yes,” Martha said, “he will rise when everyone else rises, at the last day.” Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?” “Yes, Lord,” she told him. “I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God.” Then she returned to Mary. She called Mary aside from the mourners and told her, “The Teacher is here and wants to see you.” So Mary immediately went to him. Jesus had stayed outside the village, at the place where Martha met him. When the people who were at the house consoling Mary saw her leave so hastily, they assumed she was going to Lazarus’s grave to weep. So they followed her there. When Mary arrived and saw Jesus, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, a deep anger welled up within him, and he was deeply troubled. “Where have you put him?” he asked them. They told him, “Lord, come and see.” Then Jesus wept. The people who were standing nearby said, “See how much he loved him!” But some said, “This man healed a blind man. Couldn’t he have kept Lazarus from dying?” Jesus was still angry as he arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone rolled across its entrance. “Roll the stone aside,” Jesus told them. But Martha, the dead man’s sister, protested, “Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible.”

Jesus responded, “Didn’t I tell you that you would see God’s glory if you believe?” So they rolled the stone aside. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, thank you for hearing me. You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me.” Then Jesus shouted, “Lazarus, come out!” And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in graveclothes, his face wrapped in a head cloth. Jesus told them, “Unwrap him and let him go!” Many of the people who were with Mary believed in Jesus when they saw this happen. But some went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the leading priests and Pharisees called the high council together. “What are we going to do?” they asked each other. “This man certainly performs many miraculous signs. If we allow him to go on like this, soon everyone will believe in him. Then the Roman army will come and destroy both our Temple and our nation.” Caiaphas, who was high priest at that time, said, “You don’t know what you’re talking about! You don’t realize that it’s better for you that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed.” He did

not say this on his own; as high priest at that time he was led to prophesy that Jesus would die for the entire nation. And not only for that nation, but to bring together and unite all the children of God scattered around the world. So from that time on, the Jewish leaders began to plot Jesus' death.

THINK ABOUT IT:

What stands out to you from this passage?

What are your questions about what you read today?

## **24 – DEATH and DESPAIR...but it's NOT the END!**

One of his closest followers, Judas Iscariot, hands Jesus over to the chief priests and officers of the temple guard. Jesus then endures a mockery of a Jewish and Roman trial that end with the verdict: he is guilty and deserves to die. His friends have run away and betrayed him, justice has failed, and God has turned his face away. It is the darkest day in history.

Matthew 27:35-66 After they had nailed him to the cross, the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice. Then they sat around and kept guard as he hung there. A sign was fastened above Jesus' head, announcing the charge against him. It read: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. "Look at you now!" they yelled at him. "You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Well then, if you are the Son of God, save yourself and come down from the cross!" The leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders also mocked Jesus. "He saved others," they scoffed, "but he can't save himself! So he is the King of Israel, is he? Let him come down from the cross right now, and we will believe in him! He trusted God, so let God rescue him now if he wants him! For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" Even the revolutionaries who were crucified with him ridiculed him in the same way. At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" Some of the bystanders misunderstood and thought he was calling for the prophet Elijah. One of them ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, holding it up to him on a reed stick so he could drink. But the rest said, "Wait! Let's see whether Elijah comes to save him." Then Jesus shouted out again, and he released his spirit. At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth

shook, rocks split apart, and tombs opened. The bodies of many godly men and women who had died were raised from the dead. They left the cemetery after Jesus' resurrection, went into the holy city of Jerusalem, and appeared to many people. The Roman officer and the other soldiers at the crucifixion were terrified by the earthquake and all that had happened. They said, "This man truly was the Son of God!"

And many women who had come from Galilee with Jesus to care for him were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James and Joseph), and the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee. As evening approached, Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea who had become a follower of Jesus, went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. And Pilate issued an order to release it to him. Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a long sheet of clean linen cloth. He placed it in his own new tomb, which had been carved out of the rock. Then he rolled a great stone across the entrance and left. Both Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting across from the tomb and watching. The next day, on the Sabbath, the leading priests and Pharisees went to see Pilate. They told him, "Sir, we remember what that deceiver once said while he was still alive: 'After three days I will rise from the dead.' So we request that you seal the tomb until the third day. This will prevent his disciples from coming and stealing his body and then telling everyone he was raised from the dead! If that happens, we'll be worse off than we were at first." Pilate replied, "Take guards and secure it the best you can." So they sealed the tomb and posted guards to protect it.

THINK ABOUT IT:

Why do you think God allowed Jesus to go through this? How does this fit with your idea of God?

The Bible says that Jesus chose to be sacrificed on our behalf. How does this fit with your idea of God?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

If Jesus' death had been the end of the story he would've been like many others in history: great leaders that fought for an important cause and died as a result. But when Jesus came back to life it changed EVERYTHING! It's the central event of the story for those who believe that Jesus has the power to save us and give us eternal life with him! A great man could change history; only a risen man could change eternity.

Luke 24:13-34 That same day two of Jesus' followers were walking to the village of Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem. As they walked along they were talking about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus himself suddenly came and began walking with them. But God kept them from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?" They stopped short, sadness written across their faces. Then one of them, Cleopas, replied, "You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn't heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days." "What things?" Jesus asked. "The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth," they said. "He was a prophet who did powerful miracles, and he was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God and all the people. But our leading priests and other religious leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. We had hoped he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel. This all happened three days ago. "Then some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive! Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, his body was gone, just as the women had said." Then Jesus said to them, "You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. Wasn't it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?" Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus acted as if he were going on, but they begged him, "Stay the night with us, since it is getting late." So he went home with them. As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. Suddenly, their

eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared! They said to each other, "Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?" And within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven disciples and the others who had gathered with them, who said, "The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter." Matthew 28:16-20 Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Luke 20:50-53 Then Jesus led them to Bethany, and lifting his hands to heaven, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up to

heaven. So they worshiped him and then returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy. And they spent all of their time in the Temple, praising God.

#### THINK ABOUT IT:

Read today's passages again slowly. What invitation do you see being extended to you by Jesus, who is not in a tomb, but is alive and with you today?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

## **26 – THE CHURCH IS BORN AND GROWS.**

The book of Acts tells us how the church, the name we use for Jesus' followers gathered together, begins and grows. It starts as an all-Jewish movement, localized in and around Jerusalem. In Acts 2 we read Peter's first sermon and we read about the beginning of the church. But Jesus commanded his followers to tell others about him "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). In Acts 9 an important person comes to faith in Jesus; Saul (renamed Paul), who did the most to spread the gospel far and wide and who wrote more books in the New Testament than anyone else. Acts 2:36-47 (Peter said) "So let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!" Peter's words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away—all who have been called by the Lord our God." Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation!" Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all. All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together in one place and

shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. Acts 9:1-22 - Saul's dramatic change Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains. As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"

"Who are you, lord?" Saul asked. And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (...) Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink. 10 Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!" The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. Afterward he ate some food and regained his strength. Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days. Immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is indeed the Son of God!" All who heard him were amazed. "Isn't this the same man who caused such devastation among Jesus' followers in Jerusalem?" they asked. "And didn't he come here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests?" Saul's preaching became more and more powerful, and the Jews in Damascus couldn't refute his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

THINK ABOUT IT:

Saul (then Paul) had a dramatic experience with God. Why do you think God worked this way in his life?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?



## 27 – PAUL'S LETTERS

Paul goes from hating Jesus and Christians to being a great witness and leader in the Church. On three different missionary journeys he travels all over the Roman Empire and tells people about Jesus, leaving groups of believers (small churches) behind as he moves on to the next town. In order to continue teaching these new believers Paul writes many letters explaining faith in Christ and describing the life of a Jesus follower. He also addresses specific situations in these churches, some of which we can relate to and others that are difficult to understand because of cultural differences. These letters were important to the believers in the first century and continue to be incredibly valuable for believers today!

Romans 8:31-39 Nothing can separate us from God's love. What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us. Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? (As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Philippians 4:4-7 (Written by Paul when he was in prison) Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon. Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 1:3-10 - Spiritual Blessings All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. He has showered his kindness on us, along

with all wisdom and understanding. God has now revealed to us his mysterious will regarding Christ—which is to fulfill his own good plan. And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth. Philippians 2:3-11 – Have the Attitude of Christ Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

THINK ABOUT IT:

What do you learn about God and/or about yourself in these passages?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

## **28 – PAUL'S LETTERS (continued...)**

Romans 6.1-11 - Dead to sin

Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. We are sure of this because Christ was

raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 6:10-18 The Whole Armor of God A final word:

Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.

I Corinthians 5:16, 17 – New Person

So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

Galatians 5:19-23 - Acts of sin vs. fruit of Spirit

When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God. But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things.

## Colossians 3:1-13 - Living the New Life

Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory. So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming. You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world. But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us. Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

### THINK ABOUT IT:

IT What is God telling you through these passages?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

## 29 – GENERAL LETTERS.

Although Paul wrote most of the letters we have in the New Testament, many were written by other followers of Jesus such as his half brothers, James and Jude, and his disciples Peter and John. These letters are filled with practical advice, warning, encouragement, and hope.

Hebrews 11:1, 6 - Faith

Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see. And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.

#### Hebrews 12:1-3 – Keep Eyes on Jesus

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up

#### James 1:22-25 – Listening and Doing

Don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

James 1:2-4 Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

1 Peter 3:8-9 – United in Love Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing.

1 Peter 4:1-2 Readiness to Suffer So then, since Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had, and be ready to suffer, too. For if you have suffered physically for Christ, you have finished with sin.

2 Peter 3:8-9 - God wants Everyone! But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

1 John 4:7-10 - Loving One Another Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

2 John 6 – Walk in Love And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.

Jude 24-25 – He is Able Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault. All glory to him who alone is God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord. All glory, majesty, power, and authority are his before all time, and in the present, and beyond all time! Amen.

THINK ABOUT IT:

Do you sense God telling you something through any of these passages?

What questions do you have based on what you read today?

### **30 – THE END IS REALLY JUST THE GLORIOUS BEGINNING**

The final book in the Bible is Revelation, which was actually a letter written to seven churches in Asia Minor while they were enduring persecution and death at the hands of the Romans. To us it seems strange, but was more familiar to the original audience because it is Apocalyptic writing, which they knew from Jewish literature in the Old Testament (Daniel and Ezekiel). Apocalyptic writing recounts a prophet's symbolic dreams and visions that reveal God's perspective on current events so that the present can be viewed in light of history's final outcome. It is meant to warn or comfort God's people in a time of crisis. So regardless of how difficult it is to understand every part of Revelation, the main themes are ones we can hang on to. "God wins!" "Don't give up!"

Revelation 3:20-21 – Jesus' invitation to let Him in to our lives (Jesus says) "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends. Those who are victorious will sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne.

Revelation 12:7-12 - The Enemy Loses Then there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and his angels. And the dragon lost the battle, and he and his angels were forced out of heaven. This great dragon—the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world—was thrown down to the earth with all his angels. Then I heard a loud voice shouting across the heavens, “It has come at last— salvation and power and the Kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters has been thrown down to earth—the one who accuses them before our God day and night. And they have defeated him by the blood of the Lamb and by their testimony. And they did not love their lives so much that they were afraid to die. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens! And you who live in the heavens, rejoice! But terror will come on the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you in great anger, knowing that he has little time.”

Revelation 21:1-7 - HEAVEN Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, “Look, God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.” And the one sitting on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new!” And then he said to me, “Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true.” And he also said, “It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Revelation 21 paints a beautiful picture of God living among his people. What invitation do you sense God is extending to you personally?

***You did it!*** It’s our hope and prayer that reading this overview just made you want to get to know Jesus even more! If that’s the case, there are many things you can do to go deeper into your study of the Bible and your relationship with Jesus. The following are ideas of what you could do next.

- Read Luke for a complete biography of Jesus and follow it up with Acts (also written by Luke) to see how the church started and grew. Read Genesis for exciting history or Psalms for raw emotions expressed to God.
- Download the YouVersion Bible App. It has hundreds of Bible reading plans. You can try reading portions of the Bible based on your situation or parts of the Bible in which you are most interested.
- Explore the videos at [thebibleproject.com](http://thebibleproject.com). These are incredible resources that introduce and explain each book of the Bible.
- Talk to a friend or call the church office to meet with a pastor about what your next steps might be.