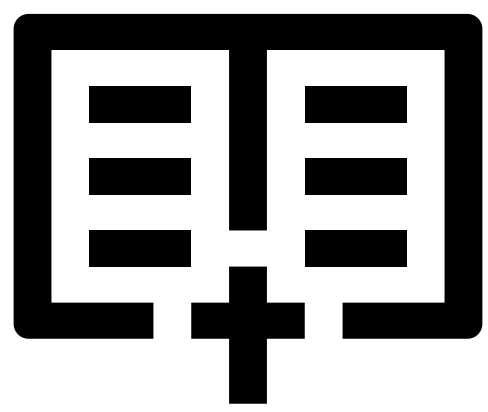


READ SCRIPTURE

ILLUSTRATED SUMMARIES OF BIBLICAL BOOKS

By The Bible Project

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Foreword by Francis Chan

Watch animated videos of each illustration at
www.thebibleproject.com

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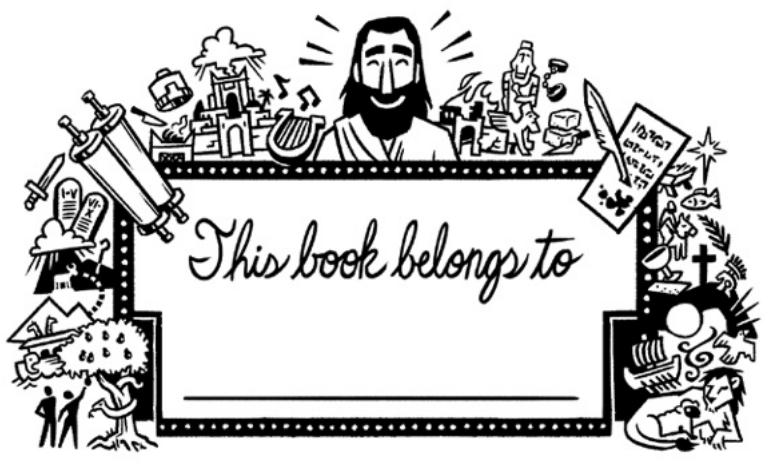
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FOREWORD

One of the greatest privileges of my life is talking with God.

It is hard to exaggerate the thrill of speaking to God and having him answer you. It is comforting and terrifying at the same time. You are left asking: Did that really just happen? Did I just communicate with my Creator? It sets my whole life within a greater perspective, and shifts my sense of what's important.

One of the most breathtaking passages in Scripture is when Moses climbs Mt. Sinai to encounter God. Exodus 19 describes the scene. The ground beneath Moses was shaking and the entire mountain was covered in smoke. At its peak was a thick cloud erupting with lightning and thunder. God descended onto the mountain in fire and each time Moses spoke, God responded in thunder. The people looked on from a distance and trembled in terror. They were witnessing an impossible scenario: God meeting with a human being.

What we don't realize is that today we have this same kind of opportunity. God actually *wants* us to know him. He desires us so much that he made the ultimate personal sacrifice so that we can know and be known by him. You can talk to him right now and know that he hears your voice. You can open your Bible right now and know that you're hearing his.

Sadly, not many people make an effort to read the Bible. Many view the Bible as long and complicated, so they give up on trying to understand it. In so doing, they forfeit the chance to understand God. That is the problem the Read Scripture videos, and this book, hope to solve.

Christians believe that God endows every believer with gifts (see 1 Corinthians 12:7). The Holy Spirit of God moves through people for the good of the entire church. The first time I watched a Bible Project video, that's what I saw—the work of God's Spirit through a few individuals to bring a revival of Bible engagement in the church. These videos and posters have the potential to help large numbers of people become confident and interested in reading the Scriptures.

I was in high school when someone taught me how to read the Bible for myself. I often refer to it as the most meaningful gift anyone has ever given me. For the past 35 years, I have been reading and studying the Bible daily. I honestly can't imagine how life would have turned out if I neglected this habit. Each morning, I take time to seek God and remind myself of what is true and real. It is my favorite time of the day.

Isaiah 64:8 says, "But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand."

Take a moment to picture God as a potter and yourself as clay. If it is true that you have a Creator, what could be more urgent than learning about the One who made you and loves you? What could it look like if you learned how to hear his voice through the Scriptures? What if you filled your mind and heart with God's thoughts, and allowed them to shape your life?

This, for me, is the exciting possibility of the *Read Scripture* videos. Our prayer is that you would join the growing number of people who are learning to seek God every day by learning how to study his Word.



Francis Chan
November 2016

INTRODUCTION

This book is a visual introduction to the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments that make up the Protestant Christian Bible. It's a companion volume to a series of videos called *Read Scripture*, produced by The Bible Project and available for free online (thebibleproject.com). The purpose of *Read Scripture* is to help people see and engage the Bible in a new way. It's for a world in which reading Scripture has become a lost art.

The books of the Bible are inspiring as well as confusing to most modern readers. This is mainly due to the fact that they were written thousands of years ago in a different part of the world by people living in cultures radically different from our own. However, we think that learning to read and appreciate the Bible is an immensely important habit and worth the effort it takes to overcome these challenges. You don't have to be religious to realize that the Bible has played an influential role in the history of human civilization. But the Bible isn't merely a history book. Generations of God's people have found the Bible to be a living text, speaking a divine word that can shape individuals and guide whole communities.

Our conviction at The Bible Project is that the Bible is telling one unified story that leads to Jesus and has wisdom to offer the whole world. Each biblical book makes an important contribution to that overall storyline through its unique literary design. The essays and posters of the *Read Scripture* series give you an overview of each biblical book at a glance. They show you how the main themes and theological message are communicated through the book's literary shape. There's something about seeing the artistic brilliance of the biblical authors drawn out before you. It anchors the ideas in your mind in a way that invites exploration and ignites the imagination. The biblical texts were created for a lifetime's worth of reading and reflection, and if you open your mind, you'll discover the strange new world of the Bible and see Jesus at every turn of the story.

Producing the *Read Scripture* videos and posters has been one of the highlights of my life. The project was a full eighteen months in the making, but in reality it represents nearly twenty years' worth of reading, reflection, and teaching that accompanied an incredible journey of personal growth and transformation.

Some twenty years ago (August 1995, to be exact) I began following Jesus. I still remember the disorientation I experienced when reading the Bible for the first time. I was growing familiar with the stories and teachings of Jesus, but I knew next to nothing about the rest of the Bible. So I began to read it in earnest, and I was confused or disturbed on a regular basis. However, Jesus of Nazareth had fully captured my imagination and my heart, and so I ventured into the Old and New Testaments with his life and love as my guiding lights.

I didn't learn to read the Bible alone. I was part of a vibrant community of Christians that valued learning, worship, sharing the good news of Jesus with others, and skateboarding. My first Christian mentor, Paul Anderson, loved the Scriptures like no one I had ever met. He had memorized huge portions of the Psalms, Proverbs, and New Testament, and would constantly talk with me about what he was learning from the Bible. When I enrolled in classes at Multnomah University and later at Western Seminary, I was graced with a stellar cast of professors who opened my mind to new ways of reading, thinking, and living: Ray Lubeck, Karl Kutz, John Sailhamer, Gerry Breshears, and Jan Verbruggen. They taught me Greek and Hebrew and how to read biblical literature, but even more importantly they modeled for me how to love Jesus with my entire mind.

But the roots of this project go even deeper. My parents, Paul and Linda Mackie, provided me with a childhood crammed full of music and art. My dad's huge art studio provided me with every visual medium I could imagine, and our family room was stacked with coffee table books about M.C. Escher, the art of Star Wars, and the history of Beatles album covers. My mom and dad supported my long obsession with comic books and skateboarding as well as my teenage exploration of dramatic theater performance. Through it all, they showed me the value of expressing my thoughts through art, metaphor, and story.

In 2014, Jon Collins and I combined our interests in visual storytelling and biblical theology and created The Bible Project. We originally planned to produce color-animated short films about all the books of the Bible. There are sixty-six books, and it took us nearly two years just to complete the videos about the first five (Genesis through Deuteronomy). You do the math! We were a bit overwhelmed. In February 2015 we received a surprise phone call from Francis Chan who asked if it was possible to produce a series on the whole Bible within two years. With the help of Robert Perez, The Bible Project's art director, Jon and I began to experiment with different styles, and we produced the first version of Romans 1–4 in two weeks. Francis helped us round up a network of financial support and we were off to the races! The project timeline was set, and I started to crank out one script and pencil drawing every week and a half for the next eighteen months (you'll find examples of those pencil sketches scattered throughout the book). We were able to draw upon the amazing skills of our Bible Project designers who produced the sixty posters in this book along with the seventy-two videos that make up the *Read Scripture* series. To know that the artwork and videos will now live on and influence future generations of Bible readers is very humbling, and immensely rewarding.

It has been a true privilege to work on the *Read Scripture* project. We hope you have as much fun pondering these words and drawings as we had producing them!



Tim Mackie
November 2016

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Read Scripture project exists because of the brilliance and hard work of a really amazing group of people. Jon Collins played a big role in helping me conceive of the first dozen posters and videos, and he taught me much about concise verbal communication paired with visual clarity. Gerry Breshears, a theology professor at Western Seminary, gave his careful theological attention to all of the scripts. Robert Perez created the first few posters and then wisely oversaw Read Scripture as art director to ensure continuity throughout all the remaining artwork. Mac Cooper brought his intuitive artistic brilliance to the production of ten amazing posters that expanded the possibilities of the medium. Everett Patterson, who produced forty seven of the sixty posters, joined the team after we were a couple months into the project. Working with him was so much fun! He brought years of experience in comic book art as well as a thorough knowledge of the Bible. His unmistakable style brought humor, subtlety, and beauty to the project that matured over the year and half we worked together. Our amazing team of animators turned the posters into seventy-two videos that bring these amazing visuals to life: Nathan Meenan, Guy Van Bogart, Josh Swain, Adam Hendrix, and Allan Rosenow. As you might imagine, this project required a lot of logistical organization and Miriam Chesbro brought her sharp mind and bottomless enthusiasm to the task as project manager. She kept all of us on point as she organized the efforts of a stellar production team: Landon Ferguson, Michelle Van Bogart, Abbey Grimes, Jeremy Dagerath, and Jackie Casey. And this large and wonderfully designed book you hold in your hands is the result of Xela Gold's skillful efforts.

On a personal level, this project overlapped with a very busy season of ministry at Door of Hope church, and I want to thank the elders there who continually encouraged me to focus on this task. This project also owes a huge debt of thanks to my favorite person, Jessica Mackie. She helped me plan numerous writing breaks and then made them possible by caring for our two energetic little boys as I holed up writing and drawing.

We also want to thank Francis Chan and Kevin Kim, who played a significant role in the origins of the Read Scripture series. They motivated us to research and pilot the animated-poster style and they connected the Bible Project to a network of incredibly generous people who allowed us to charge full speed into the project. Their team at Crazy Love ministries also developed a smartphone app that combines the videos with a year long Bible reading experience (www.readscripture.org).

Working on the Bible Project has been one long education in God's generous grace and the surprising work of the Spirit. We definitely feel carried along by the prayers of our monthly supporters, and it's a privilege to help people see Jesus again for the first time in the epic storyline of the Scriptures.

Tim Mackie



THE OLD TESTAMENT

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

The book of Genesis is the first book of the Bible. It is divided into two main parts, with chapters 1–11 telling the story of God and the whole world, and chapters 12–50 focusing in on the story of God, a man, and his family. These two parts are connected by a sort of "hinge" story in the beginning of chapter 12—a literary design that gives us a clue as to how to understand the message of the book as a whole, as well as how the entire story of the Bible comes together.

CHAPTERS 1–3

Genesis begins with God taking disorder and darkness and creating out of it order, beauty, and goodness. He creates a world where life can flourish, as well as creatures to inhabit that world.

God makes humans, or *adam* in Hebrew, in "his image", a concept that has to do with their role in God's world. They are made to be reflections of God's character out in the world, and they are appointed representatives to rule God's good world on his behalf. They are to harness this world's potential, to care for it, and to make it a place where they can multiply and flourish. God blesses the humans—a key theme in this book—and gives them a garden from which they can begin their task of building the world.

It is important to note that these humans have a choice as to how they are going to build this world, represented neatly in the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Up until now, God has provided and defined for them what is good and what is not good, but at this point God gives them the freedom and dignity to choose. Will they trust his definition of good and evil, or will they seize autonomy and define good and evil for themselves?

The stakes are high here, to rebel against God is to embrace death by turning away from the tree of life, which represents the gift of life itself.

All of a sudden a mysterious figure, a snake, enters the story. It is given no introduction other than that it is a creature that God made. It becomes clear, however, that the snake is in rebellion against God and wants to lead the humans into rebellion also so that they'll die. The snake tells them a different story about this tree of knowledge and the choice it represents—seizing the knowledge of good and evil won't bring death. On the contrary, it's actually the way to life and to becoming like God himself.

The tragic irony, of course, is that the humans are already like God, as they are a reflection of his image. But instead of trusting God, they seize autonomy and take the knowledge of good and evil for themselves. In an instant, the whole story spirals downward.

The first casualty is in human relationships. The man and woman suddenly realize how vulnerable they are now; can they even trust each other? They make clothes to hide their bodies from each other. The second casualty is that the original intimacy between God and the humans is lost. The humans run and hide from God and start a game of blame-shifting about who rebelled against him first.

At this point, the storytelling shifts into a series of short poems, in which God declares to the snake and the humans the tragic consequences of their actions.

God first announces that, despite the snake's apparent victory, it is destined for defeat and is cursed to eat dust. God promises that one day a "seed" or descendant will come from the woman and will deliver a lethal strike to the snake's head. While this sounds like good news, the victory will come with a cost. While its head is crushed, the snake will deliver its own lethal strike to the descendant's heel.

This mysterious promise of a wounded victor is an act of God's grace—although the humans have rebelled, God promises to rescue them. But it doesn't erase the consequences of their choice. God informs them that every aspect of their life together, in the home and in the field, will be fraught with grief and pain as a result of their rebellion, ultimately leading to death.

CHAPTERS 3–11

Again, the story spirals downward. Chapters 3–11 trace the widening ripple effect of the rebellion and the fracturing of human relationships at every level.

The next story about two brothers, Cain and Abel, shows this fracturing as well. Cain is so jealous of his brother that he wants to murder him. Despite God's warning not to, Cain kills Abel. After the murder, Cain goes on to build a city where violence and oppression reign. This is epitomized in the story of Lamech, who is the first man in the Bible to have more than one wife, accumulating them like property. Lamech also sings a song about himself and how he is more violent and vengeful than Cain ever was.

Then comes an odd story about the "sons of God." There are different views about who they are. The story could be referring to evil angelic beings or they could be ancient kings who claimed to descend from the gods. Like Lamech, they acquired as many wives as they wanted, and produced the nephilim, great warriors of old. Whichever view is right, these people built more kingdoms that filled God's world with more and more violence and corruption.

In response, we are told that God is broken with grief—humanity is ruining his good world as well as each other. Out of a passion to protect the goodness of his creation, he washes the world of humanity's evil with a great flood, but protects the one blameless human, Noah, and his family. God commissions Noah as a new Adam, repeating the divine blessing and commission. Our hopes are high, but soon Noah fails too, and in a garden, no less! He plants a vineyard, gets drunk out of his mind, and then one of his sons, Ham, does something shameful to him. Our new Adam also ends up naked and ashamed. The downward spiral begins again.

This all leads to the foundation of Babylon. Here, the people of ancient Mesopotamia come together around their new technology, the brick. They can make cities and towers bigger and faster than ever before, but they want to take things further and build a new type of tower that will reach up to the heavens. They will be the ones to reunite heaven and earth, and so make a name for themselves. This tower is the epitome of human rebellion and arrogance, the garden tragedy writ large. So God humbles their pride, and scatters them around the world.

Now, Genesis 3–11 is a diverse group of stories, but they're all exploring the same basic point—God keeps giving humans the chance to do the right thing with his world, and they keep ruining it instead. These stories are claiming that we live in a good world gone bad. We've all chosen to define good and evil for ourselves, and so have contributed to a world of broken relationships, conflict, violence, and ultimately death.

There is still hope, however. God promised that one day a descendant would come, the wounded victor who will defeat evil at its source. Despite humanity's evil, God is determined to bless and rescue his world. The big question is, what is God going to do?

Turn the page to keep reading about the book of Genesis.

GENESIS

THE POINT

GOD KEEPS GIVING US A CHANCE!
WE LIVE IN A GOOD WORLD MADE BAD

HOPE FOR A WOUNDED VICTOR
TO DEFEAT EVIL AT ITS SOURCE

GOD'S PLAN TO RESCUE AND BLESS HIS REBELLIOUS WORLD
through Abraham's family
EXODUS 19:4-6 → ISRAEL - "KINGDOM OF PRIESTS" TO SHOW OTHER NATIONS WHAT GOD IS LIKE. | ← ISAIAH 11 PSALM 72 FULFILLED IN THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM.

1-11 GOD & THE WORLD

1-2 DARKNESS
DISORDER
TREE OF LIFE

HUMANS (HE BRED "ADAM") → GOD'S IMAGE
- REFLECTION OF GOD'S CHARACTER
- REPRESENTATIVES OF GOD'S RULE
- HARKNESS CREATION'S POTENTIAL AND CREATE BEAUTY AND ORDER

BLESSING

TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL — CHOICE:
TRUST GOD'S DEFINITION OF GOOD & EVIL...
OR
SEIZE AUTONOMY AND DEFINE GOOD AND EVIL FOR THEMSELVES...?

3 "YOU CERTAINLY WON'T BECOME LIKE GOD!" — CREATURE IN REBELLION AGAINST GOD

3b WHY ARE YOU HIDING? — SHE STARTED IT!!!

3c SNAKE'S DEFEAT & HUMANITY'S GRIEF
DESCENDANT OF WOMAN — 3:15 — WOUNDED VICTOR

4 ABEL, CAIN, & LAMECH

6-9 THE FLOOD — NOAH — HAM

6a "SONS OF GOD"
EVIL ANGELS
OR
KINGS WHO CLAIM DIVINE DESCENT

11 BABYLON — LET'S MAKE A NAME FOR OURSELVES! — BRICKS? — BITUMEN? — SCATTERED

"IN YOU, ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH WILL BE BLESSED."
LAND NATION NAME BLESS
ABRAM
12:1-3

TERAH
NAHOR
SERUG
REU
PELEG

12-50 GOD & ABRAHAM'S FAMILY

12-25a ABRAHAM

12 ABRAHAM BETRAYS HIS WIFE AND 20! — SHE'S...UM... MY SISTER!

16 ABRAHAM SLEEPS WITH HAGAR — BUILD A FAMILY THROUGH MY SLAVE!

15,17 GOD'S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

COVENANT PROMISE
ABRAHAM WILL BE FATHER OF MANY NATIONS AND A BLESSING TO THE WORLD...
(SIGN OF THE COVENANT = CIRCUMCISION)
ABRAHAM TRUSTS GOD. (GENESIS 15:6)

25b-36 ISAAC AND JACOB

"DECEIVER"

JACOB STEALS ESAU'S BIRTHRIGHT & BLESSING 27

ISAAC

29-31 JACOB DECEIVED BY LABAN — GOTCHA! — B-B-B-BUT...

32 JACOB WRESTLES WITH GOD
I WON'T LET GO UNTIL YOU BLESS ME!
YOUR NAME WILL NOW BE ISRAEL.
"WRESTLES WITH GOD."

37-50 JACOB'S SONS

JOSEPH 37 HATED BY HIS BROTHERS — LET'S KILL HIM!

39-40 JOSEPH ENSLAVED & IMPRISONED

41-46 ELEVATED, JOSEPH SAVES EGYPT & HIS FAMILY
YOU PLANNED THIS FOR EVIL, BUT GOD PLANNED IT FOR good, TO SAVE MANY LIVES. (50:20)

ABRAHAM & SONS' REPEATED FAILURE

GOD IS FAITHFUL TO RESCUE & BLESS

49 JACOB'S FINAL BLESSING — ...AND RESTORE GOD'S BLESSING TO THE WORLD.

v.8-13 KING FROM THE LINE OF JUDAH... — ...WHO WILL COMMAND OBEDIENCE OF THE NATIONS

Genesis 1-11: THE POINT
- God keeps giving us grace
- WE live in a good world made bad

GOD

HOPE for the (3:15)
- wounded victor

GENESIS

God's plan to rescue & BLESS his rebellious world
- Through Abraham's Family:
- Kingdom of Priests (Exodus 19:4-6) = to show other nations what God is like
- Fulfilled in the Messianic Kingdom: Isaiah 11 & Psalm 72

49: Jacob's Final Blessing
(49:8-12)
Judah
Garden
NATIONS

GOD & THE WORLD
1-11

GOD & ABRAHAM's FAMILY
12-50

12-25 ABRAHAM
ABRAHAM betrays his wife (Chs. 12 & 20)
she's only my sister!
SARAH
ABE slept (& with Hagar) (Ch. 16 & 21)

12:1-3
- Go to the LAND I will show you
- I will make you into a great NATION
- I will make your NAME great
- I will BLESS
- IN You All the families of the earth will be BLESSED

TERAH
NAHOR
Haran
Lot
Milcah
Iscah

God's Covenant with Abraham (15 & 17)
Covenant Promise:
- Abraham = Father of many nations
- = Blessing to the world
- SIGN of the Covenant
- Circumcision:

Abraham Hears God & Obeys

SCATTERING

25-36: Isaac & Jacob
(D Deceiver
Deceives brother & Father (
ESAU
Esau's BLESSING BIRTHRIGHT
Jacob
Isaac

Ch. 29-31: Jacob is deceived by Laban
Zilpah Bilhah Rachel
Laban

CH. 32: Jacob wrestles with GOD
You're name will now be ISRAEL
= Wrestles w/ GOD
I won't let you until you bless me!

37-50 Jacob's sons
37:2 Joseph is hated by his brothers
Jacob
Joseph
Let's kill him!

39:1-40 Joseph becomes a slave & prisoner

41-46 Joseph elevated & Saves Egypt & his family
You planned all this for evil, but God planned it for good, to save People's lives (50:20)
brothers

ABE & SONS
Repeated Failure

GOD:
FAITHFUL to Rescue & Bless

CHAPTER 12:1–3

After the debacle at Babylon, the author has placed a hinge story that links the two parts of the book together. The author traces the genealogy of one family after the scattering of people from Babylon, and it leads to a man named Abram, later known as Abraham. God's promise to Abraham at the beginning of chapter 12 opens up a whole new movement in the story—one of promise and blessing.

God calls on Abraham to leave his home to go to the land of Canaan, which, God says, will become his one day. In that land God promises to make Abraham into a great nation, to make his name great, and to bless him. These promises reflect back on earlier parts of the book. Babylon arrogantly tried to make a "great name" for itself, but was instead scattered across the earth. God in his generosity, however, will bestow a "great name" on this man Abraham. God's blessing of Abraham also echoes back to the original blessing God gave all creation and humanity. Now the question is, why is God going to bless this man and his family? The last line of God's promise makes it clear: "So that all the families of the earth will find blessing in you."

This is a key moment for understanding the rest of the biblical story. God's plan is to rescue and bless his rebellious world through Abraham's family, who will eventually be called Israel. Later, Israel will be called a "kingdom of priests" at Mt. Sinai (see Exodus 19:4–6) to show all the nations what God is like. Ultimately, this promise is picked up by the biblical prophets and poets who say its fulfillment will come through Israel's messianic king whose reign will bring justice and blessing to all the nations (see Isaiah 11 and Psalm 72).

However, at this point in the story none of that is clear, you just have to keep reading and watching as the promise develops. The rest of the book focuses on Abraham and his family: first Abraham himself, his son Isaac, Isaac's son Jacob, and then Jacob's twelve sons. The stories about Abraham's family are united by two main themes. Each generation is marked by repeated moral failure; they make bad decisions that mess up their lives and put God's promise into jeopardy. However, God remains faithful to them. Despite their failures, he rescues them from themselves and keeps reaffirming his commitment to bless them and bless the nations through them.

We begin with focusing on Abraham. God had promised him a huge family, but on two different occasions, he is afraid for his life because other men are attracted to his wife. His solution is to deny that he's even married to her, which of course only causes more problems. Additionally, Abraham and his wife Sarah are unable to have children together, so Sarah arranges for Abraham to sleep with one of their servant girls, again creating even more problems.

CHAPTERS 13–50

Each time, however, God bails him out, and in chapters 15 and 17 God even formalizes his promise to Abraham with an official commitment, called a covenant. In a classic scene, he invites Abraham to look up at the night stars and count them, saying that that's how numerous his family will become. Now remember, he has no children and he and Sarah have no way to produce children. Despite these very bad odds, Abraham looks up and simply trusts God's promise. God graciously responds by entering into a covenant with him, promising that Abraham will become a father of many nations, that God's blessing may come to the whole world. He asks Abraham to mark his family with the "sign of the covenant," or the circumcision of all males, as a symbol to remind them that their fruitfulness comes from God. Abraham did indeed go on to have many children and lived to the ripe old age of 175 (Genesis 25:7).

The Jacob stories play out even more dramatically. From birth, Jacob lives up to the meaning of his name "deceiver." He cheats his brother Esau out of his inheritance and blessing by deceiving his old, blind father and then simply takes off. Jacob goes on to take four wives, even though he really only loves Rachel, creating all these rivalries within the family. The only thing that humbles him is being deceived by his uncle Laban, who cheats him out of years of his life. After all this humbling, Jacob returns to his homeland. And in a strange story, Jacob ends up wrestling with God. He demands that God's blessing come to him—some things never change. Surprisingly, God honors Jacob's determination by passing Abraham's blessing on to him and renames him as Israel, which means "wrestles with God."

It is the last part, the story of Jacob's sons, in which the key themes of the entire book come to a head. Jacob loves his second to youngest son, Joseph, more than the others and gives him special treatment as well as a colorful coat. The ten older sons come to hate their brother Joseph, so they kidnap him and plan to kill him. However, at the last minute, they decide to sell him into slavery in Egypt, which they do. Talk about a dysfunctional family!

God is with Joseph, however, and orchestrates not only his release from prison, but also his rise to power. Pharaoh discovers Joseph and elevates him to second in command over all of Egypt. Then, during a famine, Joseph saves all of Egypt and also his brothers who had betrayed him. Once again, the folly and sin of Abraham's family is met with God's faithfulness, who can subvert even the evil of the brothers into an occasion to save life. In fact, this is what Joseph says near the end of the book: "You planned all this for evil, but God planned it for good, to save many lives" (Genesis 50:20).

Now, these words are very strategically placed here at the end, because they summarize not only the story of Joseph and his brothers, but also the entire book. From Genesis 3 onward, humans keep acting selfishly and doing evil, but God is not going to leave the world to its own devices. He remains faithful and determined to bless people, despite their failure.

You can especially see this in the way the mysterious promise of the snake-crushing descendant gets developed through out the book. God promised that this wounded victor would destroy the snake and defeat evil at its source (remember Genesis 3:15). Through the genealogies that run through the book, the author connects this promise to the line of Abraham; this defeat of evil is part of how God will bring his blessing to the nations. From Abraham, this promise is connected to Judah, Jacob's fourth son. In an extremely important poem in chapter 49, an aging Jacob on his deathbed is blessing his twelve sons. When he comes to Judah, he predicts that Judah will become a tribe of Israel's royal leaders, and that one day a king will come who will command the obedience of the nations and fulfill God's promise to restore the garden blessing to all the world.

After this, Jacob dies, and then Joseph does as well. The family keeps growing down in Egypt, and the book closes with all these future promises left hanging. You're forced to turn the page and read more to see how it will all turn out.

THE BOOK OF EXODUS

This is the second book of the Bible, and it picks up the storyline right where Genesis left off. Abraham's grandson Jacob and his family of seventy make their way down to Egypt. There, Joseph, one of Jacob's sons, had been elevated to be second in command over Egypt. So the family lived and grew in Egypt as a safe haven for many days.

After a few hundred years, the story of Exodus begins. The word "exodus" refers to the major event that takes place in the first half the book, Israel's exodus from Egypt. The book also has a second half that takes place at the foot of Mt. Sinai. For now, we will focus on the first half, in which centuries have passed and the Israelites "were fruitful and multiplied and filled the land" (Exodus 1:7). This phrase is a deliberate echo of the blessing God gave humanity back in the garden (see Genesis 1:28), which reminds us of the big story so far. When humanity forfeited God's blessing through sin and rebellion, God's response was to choose Abraham's family as the vehicle through which he would restore his blessing to the world.

CHAPTERS 1–4

The new Pharaoh, however, does not view Israel as a blessing; he thinks this growing Israelite immigrant group is a threat to his power. So, just as in Genesis, humanity rebels against God. Pharaoh attempts to destroy the Israelites by brutally enslaving them and using them in hard physical labor. That's bad, but it gets worse when he orders that all Israelite boys be drowned in the Nile River.

This Pharaoh is the worst character in the Bible so far, and his kingdom epitomizes humanity's rebellion against God. Pharaoh has so redefined good and evil according to his own interests that murder of innocent children becomes "good." Egypt has become worse than Babylon, leaving Israel to cry out for help against this new form of evil. God responds by first turning Pharaoh's evil plot upside down. An Israelite mother throws her boy into the Nile, protected inside a basket, and the child floats right into the Pharaoh's very own family. This boy is named Moses, and he eventually grows up to become the man God will use to defeat Pharaoh.

In the famous story of the burning bush, God appears to Moses and commissions him to go to Pharaoh and order him to release the Israelites. God says that he knows Pharaoh will resist, but that he will bring his justice down upon Egypt in the form of plagues. God also says that he will harden Pharaoh's heart.

CHAPTERS 5–15

The confrontation between God and Pharaoh is the major focus in this narrative, but what does it mean that God will harden his heart? It is very important to read this part of the story closely and in sequence. In Moses and Pharaoh's first encounter we are told simply that Pharaoh's heart "grew hard," without any implication that God caused it.

God proceeds to send the first set of five plagues, each one confronting Pharaoh and his gods. Each time, Moses offers a chance for Pharaoh to humble himself and let the people go. However, after each plague we are told that Pharaoh either "hardened his heart" or that his "heart grew hard." He's doing this of his own will. It's only with the second set of five plagues that we begin to hear that God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

The point is this—even though God knew Pharaoh would resist his will, God still offered him many chances to do the right thing. Eventually Pharaoh's evil reaches a point of no return, and even his advisors think he has lost his mind. It's at that point that God takes over and bends Pharaoh's evil to his own redemptive purposes. He lures Pharaoh into his own destruction and saves his people.

With the final plague, the night of Passover, God turns the tables on Pharaoh. Just as Pharaoh killed the sons of the Israelites, so God will kill the firstborn sons of Egypt. Unlike Pharaoh, however, God will provide a means of escape through the blood of a lamb.

Here the story stops and introduces us, in detail, to the annual Israelite ritual of Passover (chs. 12–13). On the night before Israel left Egypt, they sacrificed a young, spotless lamb and painted its blood on the doorframe of their house. When the divine plague came over Egypt, the houses covered with the blood of the lamb would be "passed over," and the sons spared. Every year since, the Israelites have reenacted this night to remember and celebrate God's justice and mercy.

Pharaoh, because of his pride and rebellion, loses his son and is compelled to finally let the Israelites go free. The Israelite slaves make their exodus from Egypt, but as soon as they leave Pharaoh changes his mind. He gathers his army and chases after them for a final showdown, thinking that he will slaughter them by the waters of the sea. However, the Israelites run into the sea and discover they're walking on dry ground that God has provided. Pharaoh finds the opposite, however, and he charges into the waters that destroy him.

This part of the exodus story concludes with the first song of praise in the Bible, called "The Song of the Sea" (ch. 15). The final line declares that "the Lord reigns as king," and the song retells in poetry what the story of God's kingdom is all about. God is on a mission to confront evil in his world, to redeem those enslaved to evil, and to bring them to the promised land where his divine presence will live among them. This is what it looks like when God becomes king over his people.

CHAPTERS 16–18

Yet, after they sing their song, the story takes a surprising turn. The Israelites trek through the wilderness on their way to Mt. Sinai and get really hungry and thirsty. In their distress they start criticizing Moses and God for rescuing them from Egypt! Even though God graciously provides food and water for his people, these events cast a dark shadow. We wonder if it is possible that Israel's heart is as hard as Pharaoh's. We're left with that haunting question as we turn to read about Israel's experience at Mt. Sinai.

Turn the page to keep reading about the book of Exodus.

EXODUS

GOD'S COVENANT PROMISES

ABRAHAM (GENESIS 12, 15, 17): GOD'S BLESSING TO ALL NATIONS

ISRAEL (EXODUS 19:1-6):
- KINGDOM OF PRIESTS TO THE NATIONS
- RESTORATION OF GOD'S PRESENCE

BLESSING
- HUMANITY (GENESIS 1:28)
- ABRAHAM (GENESIS 17:1-6)



400 YEARS PASS

ISRAEL WAS FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLIED AND FILLED THE LAND (1:7)

1-18 EXODUS FROM EGYPT



CONFRONTATION BETWEEN GOD & PHARAOH
5-15



GOD VS PHARAOH



"PHARAOH HARDENED HIS HEART"
OR
"HIS HEART GREW HARD"



"GOD HARDENED PHARAOH'S HEART"
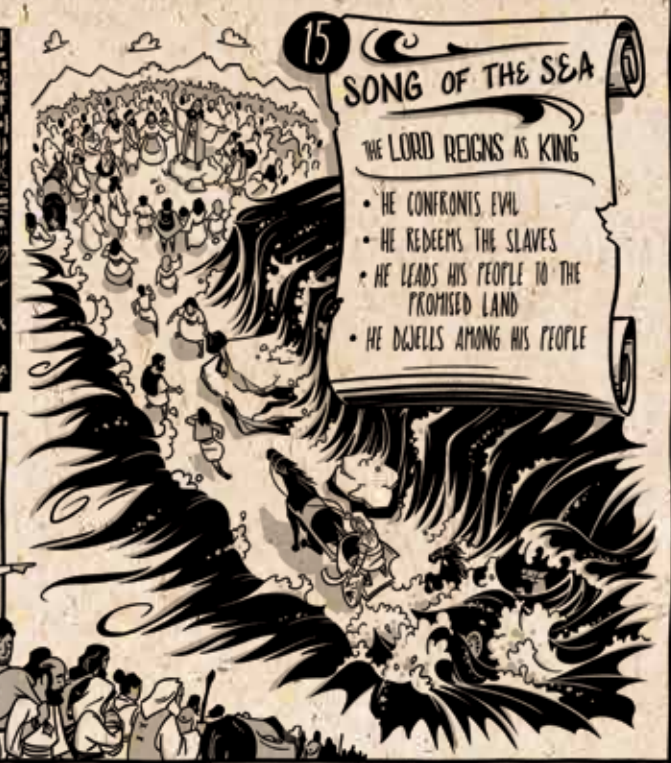
THE POINT

GOD **KNEW** PHARAOH WOULD RESIST, BUT STILL GAVE HIM **MANY CHANCES**

PHARAOH'S **EVIL** REACHES A POINT OF **NO RETURN**

GOD **BENDS** PHARAOH'S EVIL TO HIS PURPOSES & LURES HIM INTO HIS OWN **DESTRUCTION**





16-18 IN THE WILDERNESS



19-40 COVENANT AT MT. SINAI

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ISRAEL
19-24

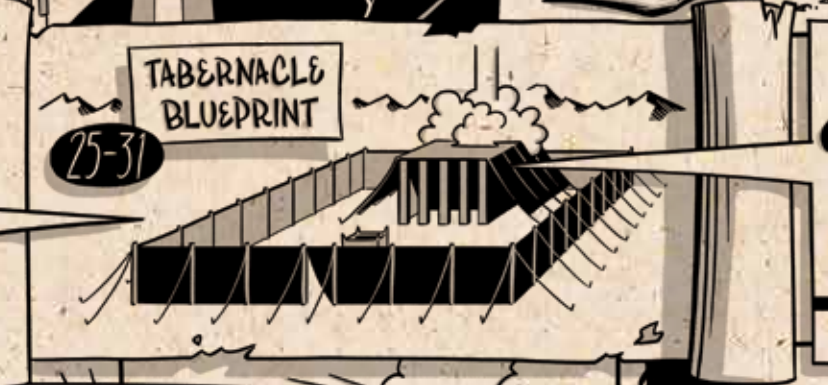




LOTS OF SYMBOLISM



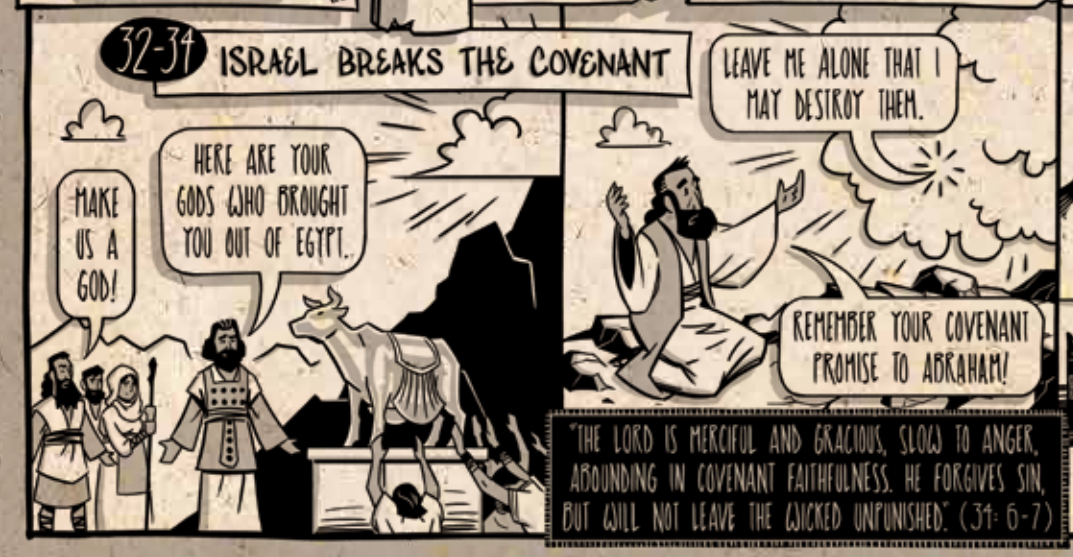
TABERNACLE BLUEPRINT
25-31



MOST HOLY SPACE
HOT SPOT OF GOD'S PRESENCE



32-34 ISRAEL BREAKS THE COVENANT



"THE LORD IS MERCIFUL AND GRACIOUS, SLOW TO ANGER, ABOUNDING IN COVENANT FAITHFULNESS. HE FORGIVES SIN, BUT WILL NOT LEAVE THE WICKED UNPUNISHED." (34:6-7)

35-40 MOSES BUILDS THE TABERNACLE



MOSES CAN'T ENTER

EXODUS

A I J

400 years

Joseph

God's Cont. Promises

- ABRAHAM (Genesis 12, 15, 17): Blessing to all nations
- ISRAEL (Exodus 19:1-6) ~~Israel's Covenant obedience~~ = Kgdm of Priests to the nations
  - Restoration of God's Presence

1—18: Exodus from EGYPT

1-4 Pharaoh tries to destroy Israel

1.
2.
3.

Phi
MOSES

5-15 Confrontation betw. G & P

1st encounter

GOD VS. PHARAOH

Blood
Frogs
Gnats
Flies
Disease
Boils
HAIL
Locust
Darkness
1st born

16-18: IN THE WILDERNESS

19—40 COVENANT @ Mt. SINAI

19-24 God's cont. w/ ISRAEL

TERMS of the Cont. 21-23
-10
-52 more!

2nd layer

25-31 13b. BLUEPRINTS

lots of Symbolism;

MOST HOLY space = Hot Spot of God's Presence

ARK of Cont.

GARDEN of EDEN
God & Humans together in Peace

32-34 ISRAEL BREAKS Cont.

35-40 MOSES BUILDS TAB.

MOSES CAN'T ENTER

CHAPTERS 19–31

The second half of the book of Exodus picks up right as Moses leads Israel to the foot of Mt. Sinai (ch. 19). There God invites the whole nation to enter into a covenant relationship. It's here that we reach another key moment in the big storyline of the Bible. This moment develops God's promise to Abraham, that through him and his family God would restore his blessing to all nations (see Genesis 12, 15, and 17). God says that if the people of Israel obey the terms of the covenant, they will become a "kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6). This means they will become God's representatives to the nations and show them his character by how they live. In this way God's justice and mercy will reach the nations.

The people eagerly accept the offer, and so God's presence appears on the mountain in the form of a cloud. Moses goes up as the people's representative and God opens with the basic terms of the covenant, the famous ten commandments. These are foundational rules and set up how the Israelites relate to God and to each other. After this comes a collection of fifty-two more commands, which fill out the first ten with more detail. There are laws about Israel's worship and about social justice, which shape how Israel was to live differently from the other nations. Moses wrote down all these laws and brought them to the people, who again eagerly agree to these terms of the covenant.

Then God takes the relationship forward another step. He tells Moses that he wants his holy and divine presence to dwell right in the midst of Israel. This develops another aspect of God's original covenant promise from the book of Genesis. After humanity's rebellion in the garden, access to God's presence was lost. However, through the family of Abraham, God's presence has become accessible again, first to Israel at Mt. Sinai, and somehow one day to all nations.

The following seven chapters (chs. 25–31) detail the architectural blueprints of a sacred tent, called "the tabernacle." There is an outer courtyard with an altar, an outer and inner room in the center of the tent, and inside the inner room—called the most holy space—is a golden box with angelic creatures on it, the ark of the covenant. This ark acts as a "hotspot" for God's presence.

Now, there's a lot of detail in these chapters, but it's important to know that every part has a symbolic value. All of the flowers, angels, gold, and jewels, call back to the garden of Eden, the place where God and humans lived together in intimacy. In other words, the tabernacle is a portable Eden, so to speak, where God and Israel live together in peace. At least, that's how it could have been in theory, because things go really, really wrong—Israel breaks the covenant.

CHAPTERS 32–40

While Moses is up on the mountain receiving the blueprints for the tabernacle, the Israelites are losing patience down in the camp. They ask Moses' brother, Aaron, to make a golden calf idol so they can worship it as the god who saved them from slavery in Egypt. Even as God's presence is hovering atop the mountain, here they are already breaking the first two commandments of the covenant: no idols and no other gods.

What follows is very important. God first invites Moses into his anger and pain. God vents his feelings and says he wants to wipe out the entire nation of Israel. After listening, Moses intercedes by appealing to God's character, saying that this would mean going back on his covenant promises to Abraham. Moses also appeals to God's reputation among the nations. What would the Egyptians think if he allowed Israel to die in the wilderness? God accepts Moses' prayer and relents. And while God does bring justice on those who instigated the idolatry, he forgives the nation as a whole and renews the covenant. It's at this point God describes himself to Moses: "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in covenant faithfulness. He forgives sin, but will not leave the wicked unpunished" (Exodus 34:6–7). In other words, God is full of mercy, but he must deal with evil if he claims to be good. Above all else, God is faithful to his promises even if it means committing himself to people who are faithless.

After renewing the covenant, God commissions Moses to build the tabernacle, detailed in the next five chapters (chs. 35–39). It all comes together in the final chapter (Exodus 40). The tabernacle is finished and God's glorious presence comes over the tent. Our hopes are high! As Moses goes to enter the tent, however, he finds that he is unable to; he is actually blocked from entering, and the book comes to a sudden end.

We see now that Israel's sin has damaged the relationship in more ways than we had realized. The book may have opened with Pharaoh's evil threatening Israel, but as the book comes to an end, Israel has become their own worst enemy. The sin and idolatry of God's own people is now the greatest threat to his covenant promises. How is God going to reconcile the conflict between his holy, good presence with the sin and corruption of his own people? That's the question that the next book, Leviticus, sets out to answer.

THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

Leviticus is the third book of the Bible and it flows directly out of the events in the previous book of Exodus. Israel has been freed from slavery in Egypt and they've gathered at the foot of Mt. Sinai to enter into a covenant relationship with God. However, as soon as they agreed to the relationship, they rebelled and violated the foundational terms of the covenant. God had wanted his glorious presence to dwell in the midst of Israel within the tabernacle, but their sin damaged the relationship so that even Moses, Israel's representative, was unable to enter into the tent.

Leviticus opens by immediately reminding us of this problem, "The Lord called to Moses from the tent" (Leviticus 1:1). Moses' inability to enter the tent is an image of the relationship rift between God and Israel. How can God's people, who have proven selfish and rebellious, be reconciled to the holy God? That's what the book of Leviticus is all about; how God graciously provides a way for sinful, corrupt people to live in his holy presence.

Now, let's pause for a moment to explore this core idea that God is "holy," because it's foundational for understanding this biblical book. The word means simply "to be set apart, unique," and in the Bible, God is set apart from all things because of his unique role as Creator and the Author of life itself. God is holy, and when he shows up in person, the space around also becomes holy and set apart because it's permeated with God's own life, power, and purity. If Israel, who is unjust and sinful, wants to live in God's holy presence, they also need to become holy and their sin needs to be dealt with. That's what the book of Leviticus is all about.

Leviticus has an amazing symmetrical literary design, exploring three main ways that God enables Israel to live in his presence. The outer sections (chs. 1–7 and 23–25) are descriptions of rituals Israel is to practice in the presence of God's holiness. The inner sections (chs. 8–10 and 21–22) focus on the role of Israel's priests as mediators between God and Israel. Inside those are two matching sections (chs. 11–15 and 18–20) that focus on Israel's purity. At the center of the book (chs. 16–17) is a key ritual, the Day of Atonement, that brings all the themes of the book together. Finally, the book concludes with a section (chs. 26–27) where Moses calls Israel to be faithful to the covenant.

The first section (chs. 1–7) explores the five types of ritual sacrifices Israel was to perform. Two of them were ways an Israelite could say "thank you" to God, by offering back to God symbolic tokens of what he first gave them. The other three were different ways of saying "sorry" to God. As an Israelite offered up the life-blood of an animal they would acknowledge that their sin had created more evil and death in God's good world. And to make it clear that God would rather forgive a person than destroy them, this animal would symbolically die in their place and "atone" or, more literally, "cover" for their sin. Through these rituals the Israelites were constantly reminded of God's grace but also of his justice and the seriousness of evil and its consequences.

The second set of rituals (chs. 23–25) lays out the seven annual "feasts" of Israel—that of the Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles. Each of these "feasts" retold a different part of the story of how God redeemed Israel and led them through the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. By celebrating these feasts, Israel would remember who they were and who God was to them.

In chapters 8–10, Aaron and his sons are first ordained as priests to enter God's presence on Israel's behalf, while the matching section (chs. 21–22) outlines the qualifications for being a priest. These people were called to the highest level of moral integrity and ritual holiness, as they represent the people before God, and then represent God to the people. Now, as the book progresses we find out why the holiness of the priests matters so much. After Aaron's family is ordained (chs. 8–9), two of the sons waltz right into God's presence and flagrantly violate the rules; they are consumed by God's holiness on the spot.

It's a haunting reminder of the paradox of God's holy presence—its pure goodness can become dangerous to those who rebel and insult God's holiness. This is why it's important that Israel's priests become holy, as well as whole, of the people of Israel. This is what the next inner sections are all about: chapters 11–15 are about the "ritual purity" required of the Israelites, while chapters 18–20 are about their "moral purity."

Here is what's underneath all this "purity" and "impurity" language. Because God is holy and set apart, the Israelites need to be in a state of holiness themselves in order to enter his presence, which was called being "clean" or "pure." God's presence was off limits to anyone who wasn't in a holy state, which was called being "unclean" or "impure." An Israelite could become impure in a few ways: contact with reproductive body fluids (chs. 12 and 15), having a skin disease (chs. 13a and 14a), touching mold or fungus (chs. 13b and 14b), or touching a dead body (see Numbers 19). For the Israelites, these were associated with mortality and the loss of life, which gets us to the core symbolic idea here: you become impure when you're contaminated by touching death, which is the opposite of God's holiness whose essence is life. Now, simply being impure was not sinful or wrong. Touching those things is a normal part of life. Impurity was a temporary state that lasted a week or two and then was over. What was wrong was to waltz into God's presence with symbols of death and impurity on you.

The last way of becoming impure was eating certain animals. The kosher food laws are found in this section as well (ch. 11). There have been many theories about why certain animals were considered impure and off limits, such as to promote hygiene (no bats or slugs) or to avoid cultural taboos (pigs or octopus). But the text isn't explicit about any of these reasons. The only thing that's clear is the basic point—these animals were altogether an elaborate set of cultural symbols to remind them that God's holiness was to affect all areas of their life.

The corresponding section is about Israel's moral purity (chs. 18–20). They were called to live differently than the Canaanites, they were to care for the poor instead of overlooking them, they were to have a high level of sexual integrity, and they were to promote justice throughout their land.

At the center of the book (chs. 16–17) we find a long description of one of Israel's annual feasts, the Day of Atonement. Not every Israelite's sin and rebellion would be accounted for through individual sacrifices, so once a year the high priest would use two goats to represent all the unacknowledged sins of the entire nation. One goat would be sacrificed as a purification offering to atone for the sins of all Israel. The other animal was called the "scapegoat." The priest would confess the sins of Israel and symbolically place them on this goat and cast it out into the wilderness. Again, it's a powerful symbol that God's desire is to remove sin and its consequences from Israel so that they can live together in peace.

The book concludes (chs. 26–27) with Moses calling on Israel to be faithful to all the terms of the covenant. He describes all the blessings of peace and abundance that will result if Israel obeys the laws. He also warns them that if they are unfaithful and dishonor God's holiness it will result in disaster and ultimately exile from the Promised Land.

Now, to see how Leviticus fits into the story of the Torah, it's helpful to look at the first sentence of the next biblical book, Numbers—"The Lord spoke to Moses in the tent." He made it inside! In other words, now that the symbolic rituals of Leviticus are being practiced, Moses can enter God's presence on behalf of Israel. Despite their failures, God has provided a way for their sin to be covered and they can now live with God in peace. From this perspective, the book of Leviticus is a powerful expression of God's holy and gracious mercy.

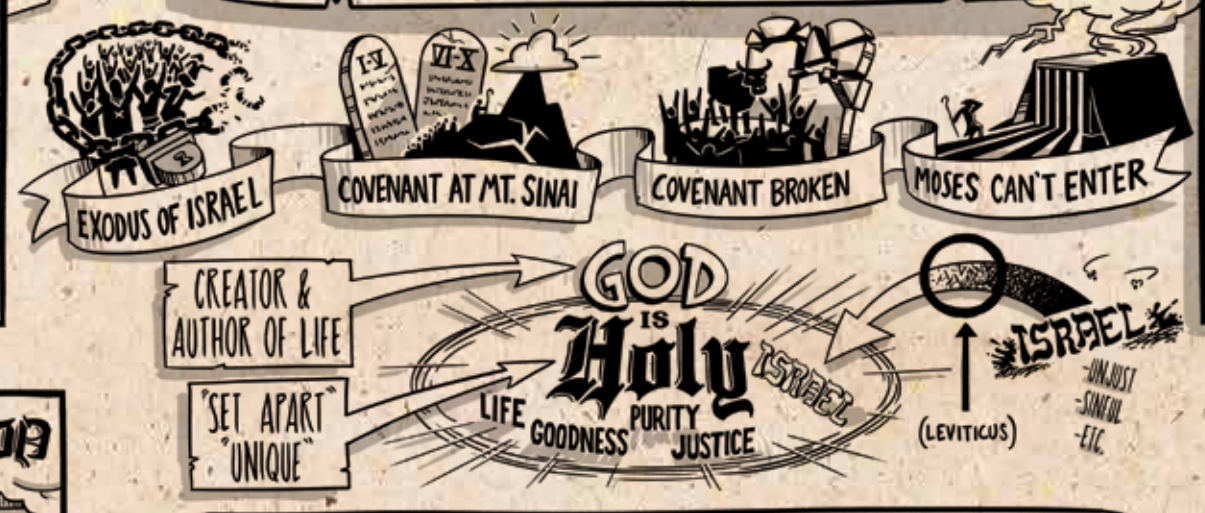
LEVITICUS

GOD GRACIOUSLY PROVIDES A WAY
FOR PEOPLE TO LIVE IN HIS PRESENCE



1-7 RITUAL SACRIFICES





23-25 RITUAL FEASTS





26-27 CALL TO COVENANT FAITHFULNESS



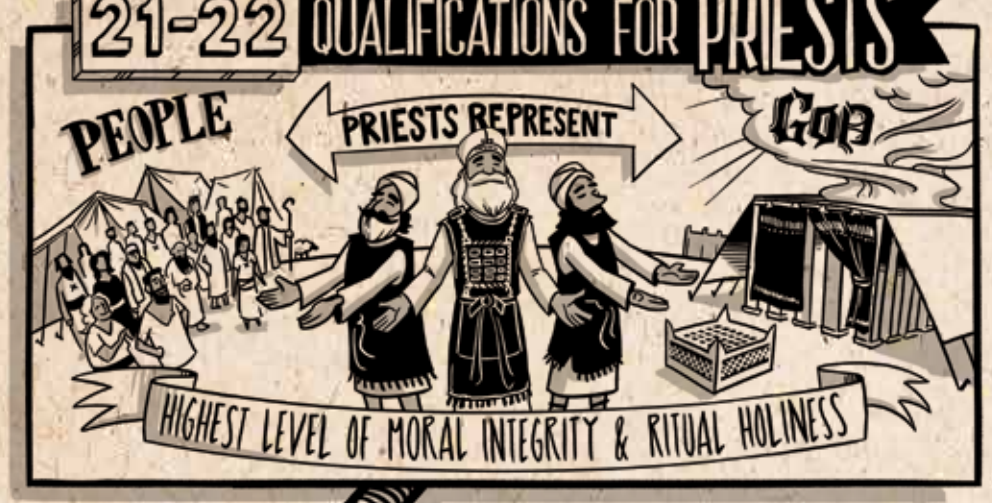
8-10 PRIESTS ORDAINED



IMPURITY AND PURITY



21-22 QUALIFICATIONS FOR PRIESTS



11-15 RITUAL PURITY



16-17 DAY OF ATONEMENT



18-20 MORAL PURITY



THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

This fourth book of the Bible carries forward the story of Israel after their Exodus from slavery in Egypt. God brought them to Mt. Sinai, and entered into a covenant with them there. Despite Israel's rebellion, God graciously provided a way for them to live near his holy presence in the tabernacle.

The book of Numbers begins as the people of Israel wrap up their one year stay at Mt. Sinai and head out into the wilderness on their way to the land God promised to Abraham. The book's storyline is designed according to the stages of their journey: the first section begins at Mt. Sinai (chs. 1–10a), then continues as they set out and travel to the wilderness of Paran (chs. 10b–19). From there they journey towards the plains of Moab (chs. 20–36), right across from the Promised Land.

CHAPTERS 1–10a

The first section (chs. 1–4) opens with a census where the people are numbered—from which the book gets its name—and continues with laws about how the tribes of Israel were to be arranged in their camp. The tabernacle was at the center, surrounded by the priests and Levites, and around them the twelve tribes were to be neatly arranged, with Judah at the head. This is all an elaborate symbol of how God's holy presence was at the center of their existence as a people.

This is followed by a whole series of laws that further develop the ritual purity laws found in Leviticus. If God's presence was in their midst, every effort should be made to make the camp pure, a place that welcomes God's holiness.

CHAPTERS 10b–19

In chapter 10, the cloud of God's presence lifts from the tabernacle, and guides Israel away from Sinai into the wilderness. Immediately things go terribly wrong. In chapter 11 the people complain about hunger and long to go back to Egypt, and then in chapter 12, Moses' own brother and sister oppose and badmouth him in front of all the people. Things are not off to a good start.

The next section begins as they arrive in the desert of Paran, about halfway to the Promised Land. God tells Moses to send out twelve spies, one for each tribe, to investigate the land (chs. 13–14). When they return, ten of them say that there is no chance Israel can survive because the Canaanites will annihilate them. And even though two spies, Caleb and Joshua, say God can save them, the people are whipped up into a fearful rage and start planning a mutiny to appoint a new leader and to go back to Egypt.

God is understandably angry, and Moses intercedes once again and calls upon God to be faithful to his promises to Abraham. God agrees, but not at the expense of justice. He gives the Israelites what they want—to not enter the land—and sentences that generation to wander in the wilderness for forty years until they die out. Only their children will get to enter into the land.

You'd think such a severe consequence would wake up the Israelites, but the rebellion gets worse. In the next story a whole group of Levites begins a rebellion, challenging Moses' and Aaron's leadership, claiming that they've gone too far. God deals severely with them, and then renews his commitment to Moses and Aaron as Israel's leaders.

CHAPTERS 20–36

As they leave the region of Paran, it all goes downhill again. The Israelites again complain about their thirst and ask why Moses ever brought them out of Egypt. God tells Moses to speak to a rock to bring out water for the people, but Moses rebels and oversteps his bounds (see Numbers 20:10). He hits the rock twice and says, "You rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" Moses dishonors God by putting himself in God's place, bringing down on himself the same fate as the wilderness generation—he'll die in the desert and never enter the Promised Land.

The Israelites rebel yet again (ch. 21), and God brings a strange judgment upon them, venomous snakes to bite the people. Moses yet again intercedes for the people, and God tells Moses to make a bronze snake and lift it up on a pole, so that whoever looks at it would be healed of the poison. It's a strange symbol that speaks to the challenge of God's covenant faithfulness. He's right to bring his justice on people's evil and sin, but even his judgment is transformed into a source of life for those who look to him for healing.

From here the people head into the plains of Moab (chs. 22–36). The first main part of this section focuses on the strange figure of Balaam. The king of Moab is disturbed by this huge group of people traveling through his land, so he hires a sorcerer named Balaam to pronounce curses on Israel. However, three different times Balaam finds that he can't curse them, but can utter only blessings upon Israel. Not only does Balaam not curse Israel, but God also gives him a vision of a future Israelite king who will one day bring God's justice to the nations, recalling Jacob's promise to Judah in Genesis chapter 49.

Now it's worth stopping to reflect on the flow of the book so far. The stories of rebellion in the wilderness have been heaping up, getting worse and worse. While God did bring a partial and momentary act of justice upon on Israel, he has also shown mercy by providing food and water along the way. Here, the Balaam story shows God's grace in bright colors. Israel is down in the camp grumbling and rebelling, while up in the hills, God is protecting and even blessing them.

It's this contrast between Israel's rebellion and God's faithfulness in the wilderness that made these stories so important for later generations of Israel. The wilderness stories were retold time and time again by later biblical prophets (see Isaiah 63, Ezekiel 20, and Jeremiah 7) and poets (see Psalms 78, 95, and 106), and even by the apostles in the New Testament (see 1 Corinthians 10 and Hebrews 3–4). For them, these stories were a warning: God will forever remain faithful to his covenant promises, but he will also allow his people to walk away in rebellion and face the consequences of their actions.

The rest of the book focuses on the children of the wilderness generation who are preparing to inherit the Promised Land. After another census is taken of this new generation (ch. 26), they win a number of battles with people groups on the edge of the land of Canaan. These battles enable a few tribes of Israel to settle on the far side of the land promised to Abraham (chs. 34–36).

The book concludes with a new generation of Israel ready to enter into the promised land. A moment of rest allows Moses to deliver his final words of wisdom and warning, which is what we find in the next book of the Torah.



NUMBERS

REBELLION IN THE WILDERNESS
GOD BRINGS JUDGMENT... *AND* SHOWS MERCY.





1-10a MT. SINAI

1-4 ISRAEL NUMBERED & ARRANGED

CENSUS
REUBEN — 46,500
GAD — 45,650
MANASSEH — 32,200
DAN — 62,700
JUDAH — 74,600

LEVITES
PRIESTS
JUDAH

5-10 LAWS ABOUT RITUAL PURITY

10b-12 TRAVEL

11 PEOPLE COMPLAIN
WE'RE TIRED OF MANNA!
IT WAS BETTER IN EGYPT!

12 MIRIAM & AARON OPPOSE MOSES
WHAT MAKES MOSES SO SPECIAL?!

13-19 WILDERNESS OF PARAN

SPY OUT THE LAND!
THE CANAANITES WILL DESTROY US!!!
NO! GOD WILL SAVE US!
CALEB & JOSHUA
LET'S GO BACK TO EGYPT!!!
THIS GENERATION WILL DIE WANDERING IN THE DESERT. ONLY THEIR CHILDREN WILL ENTER THE LAND.
REMEMBER YOUR PROMISE TO ABRAHAM!

13-14 SPIES EXPLORE THE PROMISED LAND

16-17 REBELLION OF KORAH
WHAT MAKES MOSES SO SPECIAL?!
YOU'VE GONE TOO FAR, MOSES! WHO ARE YOU TO LEAD US?
AARON & MOSES

20-21 TRAVEL

20 PEOPLE COMPLAIN & MOSES REBELS
WE'RE THIRSTY!!!
YOU REBELS!! MUST WE BRING WATER OUT OF THIS ROCK?
MOSES, YOU WILL NOT ENTER THE PROMISED LAND EITHER.

A STRANGE SYMBOL: GOD'S JUDGMENT BECOMES A SOURCE OF LIFE

21 THE BRONZE SNAKE

22-36 PLAINS OF MOAB

22-25 BALAAM & THE KING OF MOAB
CURSE ISRAEL FOR ME!
BALAAM
HOW CAN I CURSE SOMEONE GOD HAS NOT CURSED? GOD HAS BLESSED THEM AND I CAN'T CHANGE IT!
SEE GENESIS 12
BALAK
"A STAR WILL COME OUT OF JACOB..."
"A SCEPTER WILL ARISE OUT OF ISRAEL."
SEE GENESIS 49

26-36 THE NEXT GENERATION PREPARES TO ENTER THE LAND

NEW CENSUS
ISSACHAR — 64,300
ZEBULUN — 28,900
EPHRAIM — 32,500
BENJAMIN — 35,400
ASHER — 53,400

32 VICTORY OVER ENEMIES

TRIBES BEGIN TO SETTLE 31-36

THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

This is the fifth book of the Bible and the final book of the Torah. In the preceding books, Israel had left Egypt and stayed at Mt. Sinai for a year, where they entered into a covenant with their God. Despite this amazing start, the Israelites struggled in their journey through the wilderness and the entire Exodus generation was disqualified from entering into the Promised Land. Deuteronomy begins with Moses standing in front of the new generation, and his job is to explain the significance of the laws of the Torah (Deuteronomy 1:1–5). This opening scene helps us understand the design and purpose of the book. It's a series of speeches from Moses who calls the next generation of Israel to be faithful to their covenant with God.

At the center of Deuteronomy is a collection of laws, which make up the terms of the covenant between God and Israel (chs. 12–26). Some are new, but many are repeated from the laws given at Mt. Sinai. This is actually where the book gets the name "Deuteronomy", from a Greek word *deuteronomion*, which means "a second law." Surrounding the laws in this book are two outer frames of Moses' speeches (chs. 1–11 and 27–34), each broken down into two parts themselves (chs. 1–3, 4–11, 27–30 and 31–34).

CHAPTERS 1–11

Moses first summarizes the story so far, highlighting how rebellious the previous generation was in contrast with God's constant provision and grace in the wilderness (chs. 1–3). God brought his justice upon them, yes, but he did not abandon his covenant promises.

Next comes a series of passionate sermons in which Moses calls on the new generation to be faithful to the covenant (chs. 4–11). He reminds them of the ten commandments, and goes on into the centerpiece of this section, a famous line called the *shema*:

> "Listen Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD alone, and you shall love the LORD your god with all your heart, all your soul, and all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:4–5).

This became an important daily prayer in Judaism, and it brings all the themes of the book together. The word "listen" (*shema* in Hebrew) means more than simply "hear," its meaning includes responding to what you hear; in English we would say "obey." Similarly, the word "love" in Hebrew also refers to more than simply an emotion or feeling. It's about a wholehearted commitment and devotion to God that involves your will and your emotions, your mind and your heart.

Now, Israel's obedience and devotion to the covenant serve a much larger purpose. Obedience to the laws will make Israel a unique people among the nations. Like God said at Mt. Sinai, they will become "a kingdom of priests," and Moses explains how: Israel has the chance to show the world the "wisdom and justice of God" (Deuteronomy 4:5–8).

The other key idea of *shema* is that Israel was called to obey and to be devoted to "the Lord alone." In Hebrew, it says literally that "the Lord is one." In context the point is that the Lord is the only God Israel is to worship and follow, and they are not to represent him with any physical image.

Israel is about to enter the land of Canaan, where people worship idol gods that represent various aspects of creation, such as the sun, weather, sex, and war. In Moses' view the worship of these gods degrades people and destroys communities, but obeying the God of Israel, the gracious Creator God who redeemed them from slavery, will lead to life and blessing.

CHAPTERS 12–26

After Moses' passionate sermons, we come next to the large collection of laws in the center of the book, which are roughly arranged by topic. The opening section is about Israel's worship of their God (chs. 12–16a). Israel was to have one central temple, where the one God is worshiped. God was also to be worshiped through Israel's care of its poor. For example, all Israelites were to set aside one tenth of their income to be given to the temple, and another one tenth set aside every three years to give to the poor. Many of these laws put Israel on the cutting edge of justice in comparison to their ancient neighbors, which was all part of their worship of God.

The following section outlines the character qualities of Israel's leaders (chs. 16b–18). Elders, priests, and kings were all placed under the authority of the covenant laws, which God would enforce by sending prophets to keep them accountable. In contrast to Israel's neighbors, who thought of their kings as divine and a law unto themselves, Israel's leaders were all subordinate to the law as well as the prophets.

Next come laws about Israel's civil life (chs. 19–26). They cover issues of marriage and family, business and the legal system, and community justice. Specifically, the difficult circumstances of widows, orphans, and immigrants are highlighted. Israel is to take extra care and make sure these people are supported in their towns. Finally, this section concludes with more laws about Israel's worship.

Now, here are some tips for reading all these laws. Remember, these are the terms of the covenant between God and ancient Israel, which was a very different culture from your own. In other words, it's not going to be helpful to compare them with modern laws from a different time and culture. These laws were given to set Israel apart from their neighbors. When you compare biblical laws with those of Israel's neighbors in Babylon or Assyria, rules that at first seem bizarre or harsh become more clear. You can see God pushing Israel to a higher level of justice than was ever known before. Finally, try to discern what core principle of wisdom or justice underlies a particular law, and you'll discover some really profound things. (Here's some extra credit, check out how Paul the Apostle does this very thing in 1 Corinthians 9:9 when he quotes a law in Deuteronomy 25:4.)

CHAPTERS 27–34

After going through the laws, Moses offers a final challenge to Israel that they should listen to and love their God (chs. 27–30). He issues a warning and ultimatum: if Israel listens to and obeys their God, things will go well and divine blessing will abound; if they don't listen and instead rebel, they will suffer from famine, plague, devastation, and ultimately exile from the land.

Moses then forces a decision: "Today I set before you life or death, blessing or curse, goodness or evil…So choose life, by loving the Lord your God and listening to him" (Deuteronomy 30:15–20).

Now, Moses hasn't somehow forgotten the last forty years with these people. He's not optimistic about Israel's future, and so he continues with this: "I know that after I die, you're gonna rebel, turn away from God, and end up in exile." It's clear he doesn't have high hopes, at least not for the people's ability to obey.

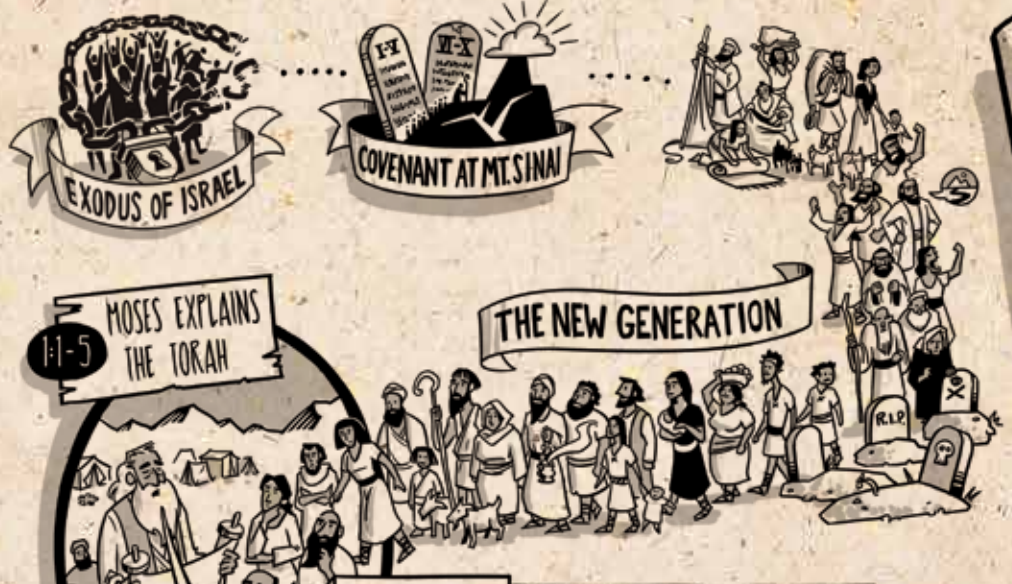
All is not lost, however, because Moses also says that when Israel finds themselves sitting in exile, at any point they can turn back to their God. And in response, God will, in Moses' words, "circumcise your hearts, so that you may love him with your heart and soul and live" (Deuteronomy 30:6). This vivid metaphor is saying that something is fundamentally wrong with Israel's heart; it's stubborn and hard, the same thing that's wrong with all humanity. Going all the way back to humanity's rebellion in the garden, Israel has also seized autonomy to define good and evil for themselves. Along with all humanity, they've ruined themselves and God's good world. But that's not the end of the story, Moses says. He knows that one day God is going to do something to transform the hearts of his people, so that they can actually listen to and love God from the heart and discover true life. This is the promise of the new heart, picked up by later biblical prophets (see Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36).

Moses ends his speech with poems of warning (ch. 32) and blessing (ch. 33). And having made his point, Moses walks up onto a mountain and passes away.

Surprisingly, this is where the Torah draws to a close. Moses' story has ended, but the biblical story is just off to a start. All the major plot tensions generated in the Torah are left totally unresolved:

- When is the descendant of the woman going to come and defeat evil (Genesis 3)?
- How is God going to rescue his world and restore blessing to all nations through Abraham's family (Genesis 12)?
- How can God's holiness be reconciled with continuously rebellious people (Exodus–Numbers)?
- How will God transform the hearts of his people (Deuteronomy)?

The Torah sets up all these problems, and to find their resolution you have to keep reading.



DEUTERONOMY

A CALL TO COVENANT FAITHFULNESS

SOME LAWS ARE NEW, BUT MANY ARE REPEATED.
GREEK: δευτερονομιον = "SECOND LAW"

QUESTIONS UNRESOLVED IN THE TORAH

- WHEN WILL THE DESCENDANT OF WOMAN COME TO DEFEAT EVIL? (GENESIS 3)
- HOW IS GOD GOING TO RESCUE THE WORLD THROUGH ABRAHAM'S FAMILY? (GENESIS 12)
- HOW CAN A HOLY GOD BE RECONCILED TO REBELLIOUS PEOPLE? (EXODUS-NUMBERS)
- HOW WILL GOD TRANSFORM THE HEARTS OF HIS PEOPLE? (DEUTERONOMY 30)

1-11 MOSES' OPENING SPEECH

1-3 THE STORY SO FAR...



4-11 MOSES' CALL TO COVENANT FAITHFULNESS

THE SHEMA

"LISTEN, ISRAEL, THE LORD IS OUR GOD, THE LORD ALONE. AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, ALL YOUR SOUL, AND ALL YOUR MIGHT." –(DEUT 6:4-5)



12-26 COLLECTION OF LAWS





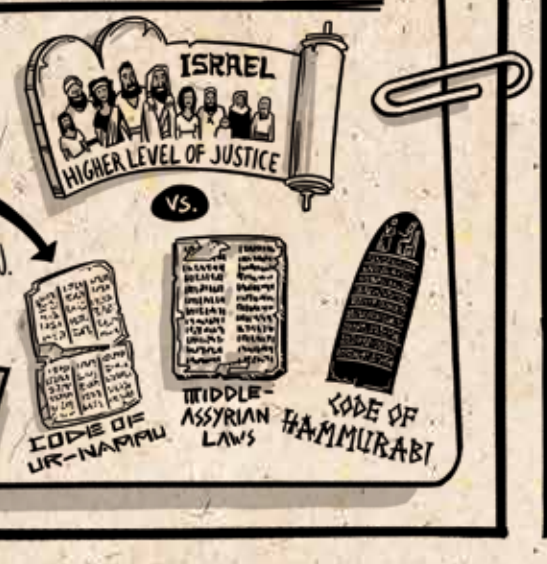
19-26 CIVIL LAWS & SOCIAL JUSTICE
MARRIAGE, FAMILY & BUSINESS — PROTECTION OF THE WIDOW, ORPHAN & IMMIGRANT

TIPS FOR READING THESE LAWS:

1.) THE LAWS ARE THE TERMS OF THE SINAI COVENANT GIVEN TO ANCIENT ISRAEL.

2.) DON'T COMPARE THEM WITH MODERN LAWS, BUT WITH THE LAWS OF ISRAEL'S NEIGHBORS.

3.) DISCERN THE CORE PRINCIPLE UNDERLYING THE LAW.



EXTRA CREDIT: SEE HOW PAUL (1 CORINTHIANS 9:9) DOES THIS WITH DEUTERONOMY 25:4!

27-34 MOSES' FINAL SPEECH & DEATH





THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

Let's back up and remember the story so far. God chose Abraham to bring his blessing to the nations. Abraham's family grew and became the people of Israel, and after some time they are enslaved in Egypt. Through Moses, God rescued the Israelites and brought them out of Egypt to Mt. Sinai where he made a covenant with them. Then God brought the people through the wilderness despite the hardships and rebellions along the way. Finally, as Israel camped outside the Promised Land, Moses called upon them to obey God's commandments so that they could show the other nations the true character of God. The book of Joshua picks up shortly after Moses dies, as Israel prepares to enter the land.

The storyline of Joshua is designed with four main movements: Joshua leads Israel into the Promised Land (chs. 1–5), once they're there, they are met with hostility from the native Canaanites and engage in battle (chs. 6–12), after their victories, Joshua divides up the Promised Land as an inheritance for the twelve tribes (chs. 13–22), and finally, the book concludes with Joshua delivering his final words to the people (chs. 23–24).

CHAPTERS 1–5

Chapter 1 begins with Moses' death and the appointment of Joshua as the new leader of Israel. The author intentionally presents Joshua as a new Moses. Like his predecessor, Joshua calls on the people to obey the terms of the covenant given to Israel at Mt. Sinai that are found in the Torah. In chapter 2, Joshua sends spies into the land, just as Moses had in Numbers 13–14. Things go much better this time, and even some Canaanites, such as Rahab the prostitute, turn to follow the God of Israel. Joshua then leads all of Israel across the Jordan River and into the Land. Just as the sea parted for Moses in the Exodus, so here the river parts as priests carrying the ark of the covenant lead the Israelites across.

The story transitions in chapter 5 as the Israelites look back to their roots as God's covenant people. They have the new generation circumcised to honor that covenant and they celebrate their first Passover in the new land. Just as they prepare to go forward, Joshua has an encounter with a mysterious warrior who, it turns out, is the angelic commander of God's army. Joshua asks, "Are you for us, or for our enemies?" The warrior responds, "Neither", which shows that the real question is whether Joshua is on God's side. Chapter 5 makes clear that this story will not be about the Israelites versus the Canaanites; rather, it is God's battle. Israel will play the role of spectators, and only sometimes act as supporters in his purposes.

CHAPTERS 6–12

This leads into the next section, in which we find stories about all the conflicts Israel had with different Canaanite groups as they entered the land. Chapters 6–8 retell the story of two battles in detail, followed by chapters 9–12, which are a series of short stories that condense years of battles into a few brief summaries.

The first two battles against Jericho and Ai offer contrasting portraits of God's faithfulness and Israel's failure. At Jericho, Israel is to take a completely passive approach, letting God's presence in the ark lead them around the city with music for six days. Just as Rahab turned to the God of Israel, perhaps the people of Jericho would do the same. They do not, sadly, and so on the seventh day when the priests blow their trumpets, the walls miraculously crumble and Israel is led to victory. The point of this story is that God's the one who will deliver his people; Israel simply needs to trust and wait.

The battle at Ai makes a contrasting point, showing what happens if Israel doesn't trust their God. An Israelite named Achan stole goods from Jericho that were meant to be devoted and offered to God, then he proceeded to lie about it—a pretty selfish move after all that God's done for Israel. So, when Israel enters the battle of Ai, they are defeated. It's only after humble repentance and severely dealing with Achan's sin that they gain victory over Ai.

Together, these two stories are placed at the front of the battle narratives to make an important point. To inherit the land, Israel has to be obedient and trust in God's commands. This isn't their battle and God isn't their trophy.

The second part of this section begins in chapter 9, as the Gibeonites, a Canaanite people group, do what Rahab did, turn to follow Israel's God and make peace. This is in stark contrast to many other Canaanite kings, who form coalitions to destroy Israel. Israel, however, wins all of these battles by a landslide. The section concludes with a summary list of all the victories won by Moses and Joshua (ch. 12).

Now, let's stop for a moment, because odds are that these stories and the violence described in the battles are going to bother you. If you're a follower of Jesus, you're bound to wonder, "Didn't Jesus say love your enemies? Why is God declaring war?"

First of all, why the Canaanites? The main reasons given are that their culture had become morally corrupt, especially when it comes to sex (see Leviticus 18), and because they widely practiced child-sacrifice (see Deuteronomy 12:29–31). God didn't want these practices to influence Israel, so these groups needed to be expelled.

But that only raises the second question, "Did God really command the destruction of all the Canaanites, like a genocide?" At first glance, we see the phrases "totally destroy," and "leave no survivor" or "anything that breathes." However, when we look more closely, we discover that these phrases are used by the author as hyperbole and are not meant literally.

Look again at God's original command in Deuteronomy 7. Israel is first told to "drive out" the Canaanites, as well as to "totally destroy" them. This is immediately followed by commands to not intermarry or enter business deals with them. You can't marry or do business with people that you've literally destroyed! Moses is using hyperbole, an exaggerated expression to make his point with force.

The same idea applies to the stories told in Joshua. For example, we're told in Joshua 10:36–39 that Israel left "no survivors" in either Hebron or Debir, but later in 15:13–15, these towns are still populated by Canaanites. In this way, the stories of Joshua fit in with other ancient battle accounts in their use of non-literal hyperbole as part of the narrative style.

So, the word "genocide" doesn't really fit with what we see here, especially in light of the stories about Canaanites who did turn to the God of Israel, like Rahab or the Gibeonites. God was very open to all who would turn to him in repentance and trust.

As a last thought, these stories mark a unique moment in history. These battles were limited to the handful of people groups living in the land called Canaan. We know this was a temporary and limited measure because Israel was commanded by God to pursue peace with all other nations (see Deuteronomy 20). The purpose of these battle stories was never to tell the reader to commit violence in God's name. Rather, they show God bringing his justice on human evil and delivering Israel from being annihilated by the Canaanites.

CHAPTERS 13–24

Now, back to the book's design. After years of battles, an aging Joshua divides up the land for the twelve tribes (chs. 13–22). Most of this section is made up of lists of boundary lines. And let's be honest here, it's kinda boring and hard to visualize, it's like reading a map with no pictures! For the Israelites, however, these lists were super important. This was the fulfillment of God's ancient promises to Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land (see Genesis 12:6–7). It was finally all coming to pass, down to the last detail.

This all leads to the final section with chapters 23–24. Joshua gives two final speeches to the people, very similar to Moses' final speeches in Deuteronomy. Joshua reminds them of God's generosity in bringing them into the land and rescuing them from the Canaanites. He calls them to turn away from Canaanite gods and to be faithful to the covenant that they made with God. If they do so, it will lead to life and blessing in the land, but if they're unfaithful, Israel will call down on itself the same divine judgment the Canaanites experienced and they'll be kicked off the land back into exile.

The book concludes with Joshua leaving Israel with a choice. What are they going to do? That's the big question that looms as the book of Joshua comes to a close.

JOSHUA

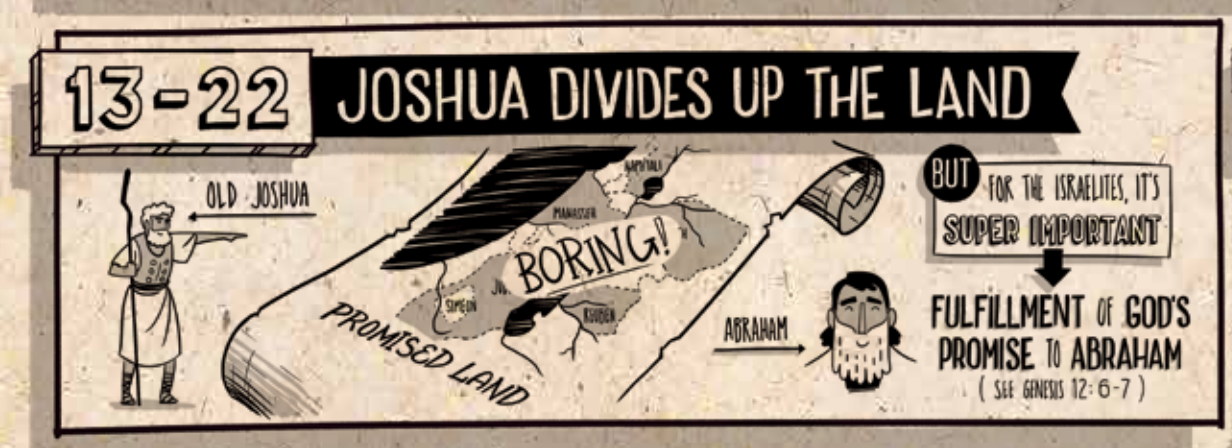

THE STORY SO FAR...
ABRAHAM
NATION OF ISRAEL
MOSES
MT. SINAI
I-V
VI-X
COVENANT COMMANDS
WILDERNESS
OBEY!
PROMISED LAND

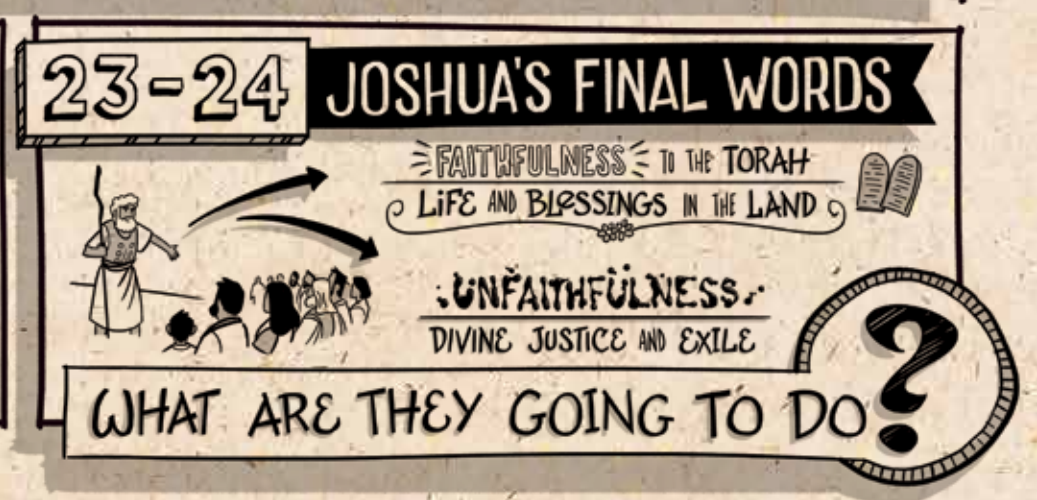

GOD'S JUSTICE ON HUMAN EVIL
WHY THE CANAANITES?
1
MORAL CORRUPTION
(SEE LEVITICUS 18)
CHILD SACRIFICE
(SEE DEUTERONOMY 12: 29-31)
2
DID GOD INITIATE A GENOCIDE?
STORIES USE HYPERBOLE
"TOTALLY DESTROY"
NO SURVIVORS
ALL THAT BREATHES
SEE DEUTERONOMY 7 - "DESTROY" ISN'T LITERAL
SEE JOSHUA 10: 36-39 VS 15: 13-15
CANAANITES CAN TURN TO GOD OF ISRAEL
3
UNIQUE MOMENT IN HISTORY
LIMITED TO CANAANITES
PEACE WITH OTHER NATIONS (SEE DEUTERONOMY 20)


Looking back:
CIRCUMCISION
PASSOVER
Looking forward:
ISRAEL VERSUS CANAANITES
GOD'S BATTLE & PLAN


1-5 JOSHUA LEADS ISRAEL
RIP MOSES
JOSHUA = NEW MOSES
I-V
VI-X
1 OBEY THE COMMANDS OF THE TORAH
2 THE SENDING OF THE SPIES
GOD OF ISRAEL!
RAHAB
ISRAELITES
3-4 LEADS ISRAEL INTO PROMISED LAND
ARE YOU FOR US OR FOR OUR ENEMIES?
NEITHER
5 ANGEL OF THE LORD


6-12 BATTLES WITH THE CANAANITES
6 JERICHO
GOD'S FAITHFULNESS
7-8 AI
ISRAEL'S FAILURE
DEFEATED
ACHAN
VICTORIOUS
The Point TO INHERIT THE LAND, ISRAEL MUST BE OBEDIENT
9 GOD OF ISRAEL!
GIBEONITES
10-11 DESTROY ISRAEL!
CANAANITE KINGS
12 ISRAEL'S VICTORIES
JERICHO
AI
JERUSALEM
HEBRON
LACHISH
EGLON
GEZER
DEBIR
HORMAH
BETHEL
TAPPUAH
ARAD
LASHARON
HAZOR
ASHDOD
TANNACH


13-22 JOSHUA DIVIDES UP THE LAND
OLD JOSHUA
MANASSEH
BENJAMIN
BORING!
SIMEON
JUDAH
REUBEN
PROMISED LAND
ABRAHAM
BUT FOR THE ISRAELITES, IT'S SUPER IMPORTANT
FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM
(SEE GENESIS 12: 6-7)


23-24 JOSHUA'S FINAL WORDS
FAITHFULNESS TO THE TORAH
LIFE AND BLESSINGS IN THE LAND
UNFAITHFULNESS
DIVINE JUSTICE AND EXILE
WHAT ARE THEY GOING TO DO?

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

In the previous book, Joshua finally led the tribes of Israel into the Promised Land, calling on them to be faithful to their covenant with God by obeying the commands of the Torah and being an example to other nations. The book of Judges begins with the death of Joshua and, unfortunately, tells the story of Israel's total failure.

The book's name comes from the types of leaders Israel had in this period. Before they had any kings, the tribes of Israel were ruled by "judges." Don't think of a courtroom here, because these were regional, political, and military leaders, more like tribal chieftains. Now, be warned, the book of Judges is disturbing and violent. It tells the tragic tale of Israel's moral corruption, bad leadership, and, basically, how they become no different than the Canaanites themselves.

However, this sad story is also meant to generate hope for the future, which you can see illustrated in the book's design. There's a large introduction in chapters 1–2 that sets the stage for Israel's failure as they don't drive out the remaining Canaanites like they were told to. The large, main section of the book (chs. 3–16) has stories of the growing corruption of Israel's judges. The progression here shows how Israel's leaders went from pretty good, to okay, to bad, to worse. The concluding section (chs. 17–21) is really disturbing, and shows the corruption of the people of Israel as a whole. Let's dive in and explore each part a bit more.

CHAPTERS 1–2

The opening section begins with the tribes of Israel in their territories within the Promised Land. While Joshua defeated some key Canaanite towns, there was still a lot of land to be taken and a lot of Canaanites still living in those areas. Chapter 1 gives a long list of Canaanite groups that Israel failed to drive out from the land.

Now, remember, the whole point of driving out the Canaanites was to avoid the influence of their moral corruption and the worship of their gods through child sacrifice. God had called Israel to be a holy people, but that did not happen. Chapter 2 describes how Israel simply moved in alongside the Canaanites and began to adopt all their cultural and religious practices.

Then, right there in chapter 2, the story stops, and for nearly a whole chapter the narrator gives us an overview of everything that's about to happen in the rest of the book. This part of Israel's history was a series of cycles, moving in a downward spiral. Israel would become like the Canaanites and would sin against God; God would then allow them to be conquered and oppressed by the Canaanites. Eventually, the Israelites would see the error of their ways and repent, and God would raise up a deliverer, a judge, from amongst Israel who would defeat the enemy and bring an era of peace. Sooner or later, Israel would sin again and it would start all over.

This cycle provides the literary design and flow of the next section of the book and is repeated for each of the six main judges whose stories are told here.

CHAPTERS 3–16

The stories of the first three judges, Othniel, Ehud, and Deborah, are epic adventures that are extremely bloody. Either the judge themselves or the people helping them defeat their enemies and deliver the people of Israel. The stories about the next three judges are longer and focus on their character flaws, which only get progressively worse.

Gideon (chs. 6–9) starts out well enough. He's a coward of a man, but comes to trust that God can save Israel through him. He defeats a huge army of Midianites with only three hundred men carrying nothing but torches and clay pots. Gideon has a nasty temper, however, and murders several of his fellow Israelites for not helping him in battle. To make matters worse, he also makes an idol from the gold he won in a battle, and after he dies, all of Israel worships it as a god and the cycle begins once again.

The next main judge is Jephthah (chs. 10–12), who's something of a mafia thug living in the hills. When things got really bad for Israel, the elders came to him begging for his leadership. Jephthah actually proved to be a very effective leader, as he won lots of battles against the Ammonites. But in the end, he was so unfamiliar with the God of Israel he treated him like a Canaanite deity and vowed to sacrifice his daughter if he won the battle. This tragic story shows just how far Israel has fallen. They no longer know the character of their own God, leading to murder and false worship.

The last judge, Samson (chs. 13–16), is by far the worst. His life began full of promise, but he had no regard for the God of Israel and was promiscuous, violent, and arrogant. He brutally won strategic victories over the Philistines, but only at the expense of his integrity. His life comes to an end in a violent rush of mass murder.

Now, a quick note—you'll notice a repeated theme here that, at key moments, God's Spirit empowers each of these judges to accomplish great acts of deliverance. The fact that God uses these people does not mean he endorses all or any of their choices. God is committed to saving his people, but all he has to work with are these corrupt leaders. And work with them he does.

This whole section shows just how bad things have gotten. You can no longer tell Israelites and the Canaanites apart, and that's just the leaders! The final section, on the other hand, shows Israel as a whole hitting rock bottom.

CHAPTERS 17–21

There are two tragic stories here, in chapters 17–18 and 19–21, that are not for the faint of heart. They are structured by a key phrase that gets repeated four times: "In those days Israel had no king and everyone did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, and 21:25).

The first story is about an Israelite named Micah who builds a private temple to an idol. This temple is then plundered by a private army sent from the tribe of Dan. The soldier from Dan steals everything, but much worse, they burn the peaceful city of Laish to the ground, murdering all its inhabitants. This is horrifying; when Israel forgets its God, might makes right.

The next story is even worse. A shocking tale of sexual abuse and violence, leading to Israel's first civil war. It's very disturbing, and that's the point—these stories serve as a warning. Israel's descent into self-destruction is a result of turning away from the God who saved them from slavery in Egypt. Now they need to be delivered again, but this time from themselves.

The only glimmer of hope is found in this repeated line from the last section, which also forms the last sentence of the book, "Israel has no king." The stage is set for the following books to tell the origins of the family of king David (see Ruth) as well as the origins of kingship itself in Israel (see 1 & 2 Samuel).

The book of Judges has value as a sobering exploration of the human condition, but ultimately points forward to God's grace in sending a king who will rescue his people.

JUDGES

ISRAEL'S TOTAL FAILURE

SO REMEMBER...

JOSHUA: OBEY THE COMMANDS OF THE TORAH!

PROMISED LAND

R.I.P. JOSH

1-2

3-16

JUDGES

THE EMPOWERMENT OF GOD'S SPIRIT ≠ ENDORSEMENT OF HUMAN CHOICES

BE WARNED

DISTURBING and VIOLENT TRAGIC TALE

ISRAEL BECOMES CANAANITE

17-21

PRETTY GOOD — OKAY — BAD — WORSE

1 CANAANITES

JUDAH BENJAMIN JOSEPH MANASSEH EPHRAIM ZEBULUN ASHER NAPHTALI DAN

MORAL CORRUPTION

CHILD SACRIFICE

A PEOPLE

CANAANITE

2

SIN

PEACE

OPPRESSION

DELIVERANCE

REPENTANCE

3a OTHNIEL

3b EHUD

EGLON

4-5 DEBORAH

JAEL

SISERA

ISRAEL FAILS TO DRIVE OUT THE CANAANITES

6-9 GIDEON

ONLY 300 MEN

MIDIANITES

FELLOW ISRAELITES

10-12 JEPHTHAH

help?

AMMONITES

GOD DEMANDS THIS...!

ISRAEL NO LONGER KNOWS THE CHARACTER OF THEIR OWN GOD.

13-16 SAMSON

*PROMISCUOUS
*VIOLENT
*ARROGANT

PHILISTINES

CORRUPTION OF ISRAEL'S JUDGES

17-18

MICAH

DAN

LAISH

"IN THOSE DAYS ISRAEL HAD NO KING AND EVERYONE DID WHAT WAS RIGHT IN THEIR OWN EYES."

19-21

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

VERY DISTURBING

(AND THAT'S THE POINT...)

CIVIL WAR

CORRUPTION OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

THE BOOK OF RUTH

This short story is a brilliant work of theological art that invites us to reflect on the question of how God is involved in the day-to-day joys and hardships of our lives. There are three main characters in this book: Naomi the widow, Ruth the Moabite, and Boaz the Israelite farmer. Their story is told in four chapters that are beautifully designed. Let's dive in and see what unfolds.

CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1 opens with the line, "In the day when the judges ruled." This reminds us of the dark and difficult days from the book of Judges. We find an Israelite family in Bethlehem—Elimelech, Naomi, and their sons Mahlon, and Kilyon—struggling to survive through a famine. In search of food, they move into the land of Moab, Israel's ancient enemy.

There, the father, Elimelech, dies, and the sons marry Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. The sons soon follow after their father and die as well, leaving only Naomi and her daughters-in-law. With no reason to stay, Naomi tells them that she's moving back home. She knows the life of an unmarried, foreign widow in Israel is going to be hard, so she compels them to stay behind. Orpah agrees, but Ruth shows remarkable loyalty to Naomi, saying, "Where you go, I will go. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God" (Ruth 1:16). The two of them return to Israel, and the chapter concludes with Naomi changing her name to "Mara," which means "bitter," as she laments her tragic fate.

CHAPTER 2

Chapter 2 begins with Naomi and Ruth discussing where to find food, and it just so happens to be the beginning of the barley harvest. Ruth goes out and happens to end up picking grain in the field of Naomi's relative, Boaz, who we're told is a "man of noble character." He notices Ruth, and, after finding out about her story, shows remarkable generosity. He makes special provisions for the immigrant Ruth to gather in his field, just as the Torah commands (see Deuteronomy 24:19). Boaz is so impressed by Ruth's loyalty to Naomi that he prays that God will reward her for her boldness. After Ruth comes home that day, Naomi finds out that she met Boaz, and she's thrilled; Boaz is their "family-redeemer." This phrase refers to a cultural practice in Israel, where if a man in the family died and left behind a wife, it was the "redeemer's" responsibility to marry the widow and protect the family. Naomi begins to hope that perhaps there is still a future for her family.

CHAPTER 3

Chapter 3 starts with Naomi and Ruth making a plan to get Boaz to notice their situation. Ruth will stop wearing the clothes of a grieving widow and show that she's available to be married again. Ruth goes to meet Boaz on the farm at night. As she approaches, Boaz wakes up startled, but Ruth makes her intentions clear, asking if Boaz will redeem the family and marry her. Boaz is once again amazed by Ruth's loyalty to Naomi and her family, and calls Ruth a "woman of noble character." He tells her to wait until the next day, when he will redeem Ruth and Naomi legally before the town elders. Ruth returns to Naomi, where they marvel together at the night's events.

CHAPTER 4

In chapter 4, it all comes together. It turns out that there is a closer family member than Boaz who is also interested in redeeming the family, but, at the last minute, finds out he has to marry Ruth the Moabite and declines. Boaz, on the other hand, knows Ruth's true character, and acquires the family property of Naomi's husband and marries Ruth. Just as Ruth was loyal to Naomi's family, so too now Boaz is loyal to their family.

The story concludes with a total reversal of all the tragedies from chapter 1. The deaths of sons and husbands are reversed, as Ruth is married again and gives birth to a new son, granting joy to her and Naomi. This symmetry becomes even more remarkable: the opening tragedy followed by a great act of loyalty on the part of Ruth is matched by Boaz's act of loyalty that leads to the family's final restoration. All this highlights the design of the internal chapters as well. Each begins with Naomi and Ruth making a plan for their future, followed by a providential meeting between Ruth and Boaz, concluded by Naomi and Ruth rejoicing at what has taken place.

The story is beautifully written, and this literary design actually connects with an interesting feature of the story, how little God is mentioned. The characters talk about God a few times, but the narrator hardly ever mentions God explicitly doing anything in the story. This is its subtle brilliance, because God's providence is at work behind every scene, weaving together the lives of the characters. While Naomi's tragedy leads her to think that God is punishing her, we discover he's actually on a mission to restore her. And God accomplishes that restoration through Ruth's boldness and loyalty. And the reason why Ruth's actions bring healing to her and Naomi's life is because of Boaz, a no-nonsense farmer who is full of generosity and loyalty.

The story is a literary exploration of the interplay between God's purposes and human decisions. God weaves together the faithful obedience of his people to bring about his redemptive purposes.

This leads into the actual end of the book, which is not a story. The book concludes with a genealogy that shows how Boaz and Ruth's son, Obed, was the grandfather of king David, from whom came the lineage of the Messiah. All of a sudden, the seemingly mundane events in this story are woven into God's grand story of redemption for the whole world. The small story of Ruth is taken up in the larger story of God's purpose, and in this way the book of Ruth invites us to consider how God might be at work in our own lives as well.

RUTH

"IN THE DAY THE JUDGES RULED"

CURIOUS FACT: GOD IS HARDLY MENTIONED

NAOMI THE WIDOW | RUTH THE MOABITE | BOAZ THE FARMER

INTERPLAY OF GOD'S PURPOSE AND HUMAN DECISIONS

TRAGEDY | BOLDNESS LOYALTY | GENEROSITY LOYALTY

1 2 3 4

1

ELIMELECH MAHLON KILYON NAOMI

LIVING IN BETHLEHEM

TRAGEDY & DEATH

E M K ORPAH RUTH

TRAVEL

THE LAND OF MOAB

Loyalty

ORPAH

CALL ME MARA (BITTER)

WHERE YOU GO I WILL GO. YOUR PEOPLE WILL BE MY PEOPLE, AND YOUR GOD WILL BE MY GOD.

ISRAEL

2

WE NEED FOOD.

BOAZ =

- MAN OF NOBLE CHARACTER 2:11
- SHOWS GENEROSITY (SEE DEUTERONOMY 24:19)
- PRAYS THAT GOD WILL BLESS HER

MAY GOD REWARD YOU.

I MET BOAZ

BOAZ IS OUR KINSMAN REDEEMER!

- CULTURAL PRACTICE
- MARRIES THE WIDOW
- PROTECTS THE FAMILY LINE

3

GET DRESSED UP

WILL YOU REDEEM OUR FAMILY... AND MARRY ME???

"WOMAN OF NOBLE CHARACTER"...YES

HE SAID YES!!!

4

Loyalty

CLOSE RELATIVE

JOY & BIRTH

OBED

GENEALOGY

PEREZ
HEZRON
RAM
AMMINADAB
NAHSHON
SALMON
BOAZ
OBED
JESSE
DAVID

THE BOOKS OF 1 & 2 SAMUEL

The books of Samuel were originally written as one, coherent story, but due to the length of the work, they are separated into two books in our modern Bible.

After the nation of Israel was rescued from slavery in Egypt and made a covenant with God at Mt. Sinai, they eventually came into the Promised Land. There, Israel was supposed to be faithful to God and obey the covenant commands, but the book of Judges shows how Israel failed, big time. It was a time of moral chaos that showed Israel's need for wise, faithful leaders. The books of Samuel provides an answer to that need.

The story focuses on three main characters: Samuel, Saul, and David. These three were important leaders whose actions would transition Israel from a group of tribes ruled by judges into a unified kingdom ruled by king David in Jerusalem.

The books have a fascinating design that weaves the stories of these three characters together through four parts (1 Samuel 1–7, and 8–31, 2 Samuel 1–21 and 22–24). Samuel is a key leader and prophet through the first section of the book (1 Samuel 1–7), and continues to play a key role in the next section. Saul's story (1 Samuel 8–31) is told in two movements: his rise to power and some huge failures (1 Samuel 8–15), followed by his downfall and tragic death (1 Samuel 16–31). The drama of Saul's demise is matched by David's own exciting rise to power (1 Samuel 16–31). David's story is also told in two movements. He first rides the wave of success (2 Samuel 1–9), followed by his own tragic failure and the slow self-destruction of his family and kingdom (2 Samuel 10–20). All this is concluded by an epilogue (2 Samuel 21–24) that reflects back on the whole story.

1 SAMUEL 1–7

Part one picks up from the chaos shown in the book of Judges. We are introduced to the touching story of a woman named Hannah who is grieved because she has never been able to have children. By God's grace, she finally has a son, Samuel, and in joy she sings an amazing poem in chapter 2. She sings about how God opposes the proud and exalts the humble. How, despite human evil, God is working out his purposes. And how God will one day raise up an anointed king for his people. Hannah's poem has been placed at the beginning to introduce themes that we will see throughout the story.

Hannah's son Samuel grows up to become a great prophet and leader for the people of Israel as the Philistines rise to power as their enemy (1 Samuel 4–7). In a crucial battle, the Israelites become arrogant, and, rather than praying, they trot out the ark of the covenant as a kind of magical trophy that will grant them victory in battle. Because of their pridefulness and presumption, God allows Israel to lose the battle and the ark is stolen. The Philistines take the ark and place it in the temple of their god, Dagon. The God of Israel responds by thoroughly defeating the Philistines and their idols, without an army, by sending plagues on them. At this, the Philistines send the ark back to Israel. The point is clear, God is not Israel's trophy, and he opposes pride among both the Philistines and the Israelites. Israel is to remain humble and obedient if they want to experience his covenant blessing.

1 SAMUEL 8–31

However, we continue right on into the next large section (1 Samuel 8–31), in which the Israelites go to Samuel and demand a king, "Just like all the other nations have." Samuel is rightfully angry at this and goes to consult God, who responds that, though their motivations are wrong, if it is a king they want, it will be a king they get. From there, we are introduced to Saul.

Saul is a tragic figure; full of promise, tall, good looking. He seems like a great candidate for a king, but he has deep character flaws. He's dishonest, lacks integrity, and is unable to acknowledge his mistakes. These traits become his downfall. While he wins some battles, his flaws run so deep that he disqualifies himself by blatantly disobeying God's commands (1 Samuel 13 and 15).

The now aging Samuel confronts both Saul and Israel. He had warned the people that they would only benefit from a king who was humble and faithful to God, or else their kings would bring ruin. He then turns to Saul and informs him that God is going to raise up a new king to replace him (1 Samuel 15).

So Saul's downfall begins as God works behind the scenes to raise up this new king, an insignificant shepherd boy named David. He is the least likely candidate to be king, but through the famous story of David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17) we are shown that God's choice of David is not based on his status, but rather his radical and humble trust in the God of Israel. This story embodies themes in Hannah's poem—the proud Saul and Goliath are brought low, while humble David is exalted.

In 1 Samuel 18–31 we watch Saul slowly descend into madness, while David rises to power. David works for Saul as a general, winning all his battles and gaining all the fame. Saul quickly becomes jealous, and starts hunting David down in order to kill him. David, however, has done nothing wrong and simply runs away and waits. This shows his true character. Despite multiple opportunities to kill Saul, he doesn't. Instead, he trusts that despite Saul's evil, God will raise up a king for his people. Many of David's poems in the book of Psalms are linked to this very period of his life (see Psalms 18, 52, 54, 57, 59, and 63). This section comes to an end with Saul, having failed to find and kill David, coming instead to a grisly death himself after losing a battle with the Philistines.

The book of 1 Samuel contains some of the most intricately told stories in the Bible, and the characters are portrayed very realistically. The author puts them forward as character studies, so that you may find yourself in them. In Saul's story we see a warning, it's crucial that we reflect on our own character flaws and how they harm us as well as others. We can see how we need to humble ourselves, and with God's help, deal with our dark side. David is presented as an example of patience and trust in God's timing in our lives. As he was being chased by Saul, David had every reason to think God had abandoned him, but he didn't. In fact, his story encourages us to trust that, despite human evil, God is working out his purpose, to oppose the proud and exalt the humble.

Turn the page to keep reading about the books of 1 & 2 Samuel.

1-SAMUEL-1

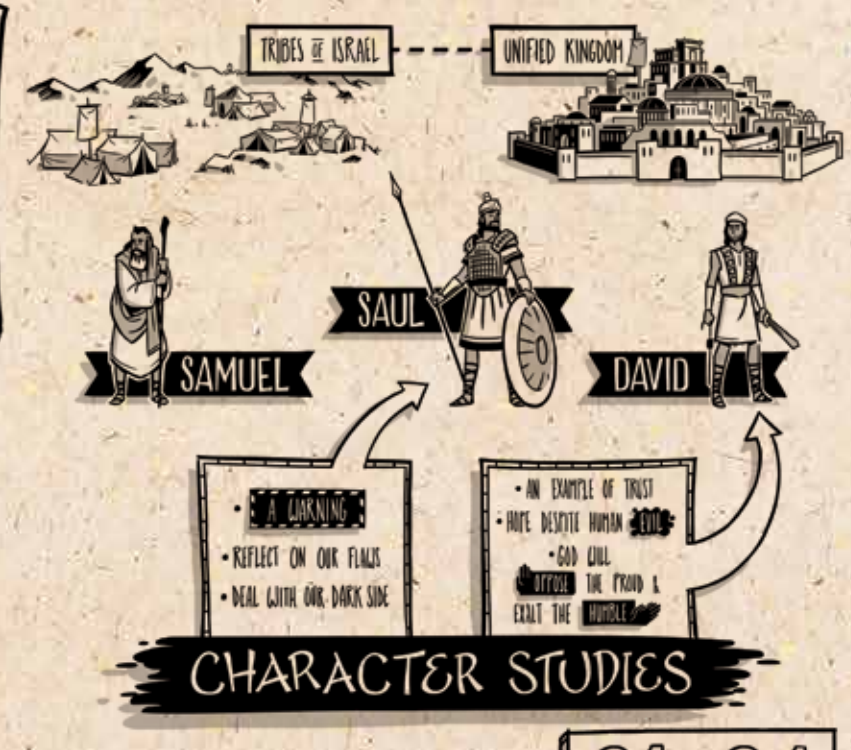
RECAP



2 SAMUEL 7

KEY CHAPTER IN THE BIBLICAL STORY

1. FUTURE KING = TEMPLE = ETERNAL KINGDOM
2. PROMISE OF MESSIAH
   - PSALMS: 2, 72, 132, 110
   - PROPHETS: ISAIAH 11, EZEKIEL 37, ZECHARIAH
3. PROMISE TO ABRAHAM
   - GENESIS 12: MESSIANIC KINGDOM BRINGS BLESSINGS TO ALL NATIONS



1-7

HANNAH'S SONG CHAPTER 2

1-3 HANNAH'S GRIEF & JOY

- GOD OPPOSES THE PROUD & EXALTS THE HUMBLE
- DESPITE HUMAN EVIL, GOD IS AT WORK
- GOD WILL RAISE UP A MESSIANIC KING

4-7 PHILISTINES VS ISRAEL

PHILISTINES — ISRAELITES

ARK STOLEN → PLAGUES → ARK RETURNED

The Point

- GOD IS NOT ISRAEL'S TROPHY
- GOD OPPOSES PRIDE
- ISRAEL MUST REMAIN HUMBLE

8-31

8-10 WE WANT A KING LIKE THE OTHER NATIONS! — SAMUEL — ISRAELITES — GIVE THEM WHAT THEY WANT! — GOD

CHARACTER FLAWS

- DISHONEST
- PRIDEFUL
- LACKS INTEGRITY

DISOBEYS GOD'S COMMANDS

(CHAPTERS 13 & 15)

13 & 15 — ISRAEL NEEDS A HUMBLE, FAITHFUL KING!

PROUD SAUL IS BROUGHT LOW

SAUL'S LIFELINE

DAVID RISES TO POWER

GOD EXALTS HUMBLE DAVID

DAVID & GOLIATH 16-17

I HATE DAVID! — SAUL — WE LOVE DAVID! — 18-20

SAUL HUNTS DAVID — 21-26

DAVID'S LIFELINE

DAVID TRUSTS GOD DESPITE SAUL'S EVIL. GOD WILL RAISE UP A KING

SEE PSALMS 10, 52, 53, 57

31

1 SAMUEL

1-20

1 DAVID'S LAMENT FOR SAUL — HOW THE MIGHTY HAVE FALLEN... — SAUL — JONATHAN

SUCCESS & BLESSING 2-6

BE OUR KING! — ZION — DAVID UNITES AS KING

5-6 DAVID CONQUERS: JERUSALEM = ZION = ISRAEL'S CAPITOL

7 DAVID'S DESIRE FOR A TEMPLE

LET ME BUILD YOU A HOUSE — TEMPLE

NO THANKS. I WILL BUILD YOU A HOUSE — DYNASTY

DAVID & BATHSHEBA 11

YOU ARE THAT MAN — I HAVE SINNED!

12 PROPHET NATHAN CONFRONTS DAVID

13 TAMAR — AMNON — ABSALOM — ASSASSINATED — URIAH

ABSALOM'S REBELLION 15-18 — DAVID'S LAST DAYS 19-20 — ABSALOM

2 SAMUEL

21-24

21a FAILURE OF SAUL — HARMS THE GIBEONITES

21b DAVID & HIS MIGHTY MEN VS THE PHILISTINES — A STORY ABOUT WEAK DAVID

22-23a DAVID'S POETIC MEMOIRS

- REMEMBERS GOD'S GRACE
- GOD'S COVENANT PROMISE
- HOPE FOR A FUTURE KING

23b DAVID & HIS MIGHTY MEN VS THE PHILISTINES — ANOTHER STORY ABOUT WEAK DAVID

24 FAILURE OF DAVID — HARMS THE ISRAELITES

RECAP

JUDGES
CHAOS

CHS.

1 SAMUEL

2 SAMUEL

1 — 2 SAMUEL

SAMUEL
Tribes
- CHARACTER STUDIES for us

SAUL
WARNING
- Reflect on our own Flaws
- with God help deal with our dark side

DAVID
CF
KGDM
- Model of TRUST
- Psalms 18, 32, 34, 51, 54, 57, 59, 63.

2 SAMUEL 7
KEY CHAPTER IN BIBLICAL STORY
- FUTURE KING - TEMPLE - ETERNAL KINGDOM
- PROMISE OF MESSIAH
  - PSALMS (2, 72, 132, 145)
  - PROPHETS (Isaiah 11, Ezekiel 34, ZECHARIAH)
- Promise to Abraham (Genesis 12): MESSIANIC KINGDOM BRINGS BLESSING TO ALL NATIONS

1 — 7

1 — 31

8 — 15
GOD
Give them what they want
SAMUEL
ISRAEL
SAUL

16 — 31
Shepherd David
DAVID
Goliath
17
God exalts humble David
18-19
WE LOVE DAVID!
I hate David!
!DAVID!
SAUL
21 — 26
DAVID Trusts God
Despite fault will
God will Raise up a King
PROUD BROUGHT LOW
31
Philistines

Character Flaws
- Dishonest
- Lack Integrity
- Can't own his mistakes

Disobeys God's Command: 1 Sam 13:13-15
1 Sam 13:13-15
No need a humble, faithful kingdom
SAMUEL
Israel sent back home

1 — 20

DAVID LAMENTS SAUL'S DEATH
How the mighty have fallen! 2 Sam 1
1
17
Saul Dies
2-5
David's Success & Blessing
Be our KING!
- David conquers Jerusalem makes it Israel's Capital
JERUSALEM = ZION

2 SAMUEL 7
David
I want to build you a house
No thanks, I'll build you a house.

SEE OTHER
10-20

21 — 24

21a Failure of Saul
Harm Gibeonites

21b David's Mighty warriors
Philistines
- story of weak David

22 - 23a
POETIC MEMOIRS
- Remembers God's grace
- God's covenant promise
- Future KING

23b David & Mighty warriors
Philistines
- story of weak David

24 Failure of David
harm Israel

1 — 3+4
HANNAH'S GRIEF & JOY
HANNAH'S SONG 1 Sam 2
- God opposes the Proud & Exalts the humble
- Despite human evil, God is at work
- God will raise up a Messianic King anointed

4 — 7
ISRAEL VS. PHILISTINES
SAMUEL
ARMY
Eben-Ezer
ARK of covenant is STOLEN because of arrogance
ARK
DAGON
Plagues

THE POINT:
- God is not Israel's trophy
- God opposes pride
- Israel must remain humble

1 SAMUEL

SAMUEL

2 SAMUEL 1–20

2 Samuel picks up after Saul's death, and David surprises everyone by composing a long poem lamenting the death of the man who tried to murder him. Once again, the author shows David's humility and compassion; he is a man who grieves the death of even his enemies.

David goes on to experience a season of success and divine blessing. The Israelite tribes all come to David and ask him to unify the tribes as their king. He accepts, and the first thing he does as king is to go to Jerusalem, conquer it, establish it as Israel's capital city, and renames it "Zion." From there, David continues to win many battles and expand Israel's territory.

Now that David had made Jerusalem the political capital of Israel, he also wanted to make it their religious capital and so he had the ark of the covenant moved into the city (2 Samuel 6). David then tells God that if Israel now had a permanent home, God's presence should also have a place to inhabit and so he asks if he can build a new temple for him. However, God says to David, "Thanks for the thought, but actually I'm going to build you a house—a dynasty."

Now, this is a key chapter for understanding the storyline of the entire Bible. God makes a promise to David that, from his royal line, there will come a future king who will build God's temple on earth and set up an eternal kingdom. It's this messianic promise to David that gets developed more in the book of Psalms (see Psalms 2, 72, 132, and 145) and in the Prophets (see Isaiah 11, Ezekiel 34, and Zechariah). It's this king that is connected to God's promise to Abraham (see Genesis 12), the future messianic kingdom will be how God brings blessing to all nations.

This is a high point for David. And, sadly, it's right here, in the midst of God's blessing, things go terribly wrong. David makes a fatal mistake—not fatal for him, that is, but for a man named Uriah, one of David's prized soldiers. From his rooftop, David sees Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, bathing. David finds her, sleeps with her, and gets her pregnant. Then, he tries to cover it all up by having Uriah assassinated and marrying her as soon as she's widowed.

When David is confronted by the prophet Nathan, he immediately owns up to what he's done; he's broken and repents, asking God to forgive him. And God does forgive, but he doesn't erase the consequences of David's decisions. As a result of his horrible choices, David's family starts to fall apart, making this section a tragic story much like Saul's.

David's sons end up reliving their father's mistakes, but in even worse ways. Amnon sexually abuses his sister Tamar, and when their brother Absalom finds out, he has Amnon assassinated (2 Samuel 13). Absalom then hatches a plot to oust his own father, David, from power, and he launches a full scale rebellion (2 Samuel 15).

So for a second time, David is forced to run from his own home and hide in the wilderness, except this time he's not innocent. The rebellion ends when David's son is murdered (2 Samuel 18), and this breaks David's heart. Once again he laments over those who tried to kill him. David's last days find him back on his throne, but as a broken man, wounded by the sad consequences of his sin.

2 SAMUEL 21–24

The book concludes in chapters 21–24 with a well-crafted epilogue. The stories are out of chronological order, because they've been given a symmetrical literary design. The outer pair of stories (2 Samuel 21a and 24) come from earlier in David's reign and compare the failures of Saul (2 Samuel 21a) and David (2 Samuel 24), as well as how they hurt others through their bad decisions.

The next pair of stories (2 Samuel 21b and 23b) are about David and his band of "mighty men" fighting the Philistines. What's interesting is that both sections have a story of David's weakness in battle. In contrast to the stories of the heroic, victorious David, here we see a vulnerable David who is dependent on others for help.

The center of the epilogue has two poems that act like memoirs, as David reflects on his life (2 Samuel 22 and 23a). He remembers times when God graciously rescued him from danger and sees this as an expression of God's covenant promise, not just to him, but to all the world. Both of the poems reflect back on the hope for the future Messiah who will build an eternal kingdom.

David's concluding poems also connect back to Hannah's song that had originally opened the book of 1 Samuel. These poems at the beginning and end, and 2 Samuel 7 in the center of the book, bring together all the key themes and ideas. Despite Saul and David's evil, God has been at work, carrying out his purposes. God opposed their arrogance time after time; when David humbled himself, he was exalted. By the book's conclusion, the future hope of the final poems reaches far beyond David himself, looking to the future Messiah who will bring God's kingdom and blessing to all nations.

THE BOOKS OF 1 & 2 KINGS

Although the books of 1 and 2 Kings are two separate books in our Bibles, they were originally written as one book, telling a unified story. In the previous book of Samuel, David had unified the tribes of Israel into a single kingdom. God promised that from David's line would come a messianic king who will establish God's kingdom over the nations to fulfill the promises made to Abraham. The book of Kings tells the story of the long line of kings that come after David, but none of them live up to the promise. In fact, they run the nation of Israel right into the ground.

The book is structured into five main movements. It begins and ends with a focus on Jerusalem, first with Solomon's reign and the construction of the temple (1 Kings 1–11), then ending with Jerusalem's destruction and Israel's exile to Babylon (2 Kings 18–25). The story leading up to this tragedy makes up the three center sections. They explain how Israel split into two rival kingdoms (1 Kings 12–16), how God tried to prevent the corruption of Israel and its kings by sending the prophets (1 Kings 17–2 Kings 8), and how exile became an unavoidable consequence of Israel's sin (2 Kings 9–17).

1 KINGS 1–11

The opening chapters show how the kingdom of Israel passed from an aging, decrepit David to his son, Solomon. David's final words to Solomon are similar to those of Moses, Joshua, and Samuel; it is a call to remain faithful to the commands of the covenant and to offer allegiance to the God of Israel alone. However, his words ring somewhat hollow, as David and Solomon then conspire to consolidate the new kingdom through a series of political assassinations. Already, the story is not off to a great start.

Solomon's brightest moments come when he asks God for wisdom to lead Israel, and even completes David's dream of building a temple for the God of Israel (1 Kings 3–8). The story actually pauses here to describe the design of the temple in detail. Just like the tabernacle in the Torah, the gold and jewels, and the depictions of angels and fruit trees all symbolize and call back to the Garden of Eden—the place where heaven and earth meet, and where God dwells peacefully amongst his people.

No sooner does Solomon finish the temple, however, that he makes some really horrible choices and his kingdom begins to fall apart. He starts marrying the daughters of other kings (hundreds of them!) for political alliances, adopting their gods and introducing their worship into Israel. He then accumulates huge amounts of wealth, builds an enormous army, and institutes slave labor for all his building projects. If you go look at God's guidelines for Israel's kings in Deuteronomy 17, Solomon breaks every one. By the time he dies, he resembles the Pharaoh more than he does David.

1 KINGS 12–16

The next section of the book opens with Solomon's son, Rehoboam, mimicking his father in a sad story of greed and lust for power. He tries to increase taxes and slave labor, but, under the leadership of Jeroboam, the northern tribes of Israel rebel and secede to form their own rival kingdom. We are left with southern Judah, centered in Jerusalem with kings from the line of David, and this new northern kingdom, called "Israel," whose eventual capital will be Samaria. Jeroboam also builds two new temples to compete with the one Solomon built, and he places a golden calf in each to represent the God of Israel. It's a tragic replay of the story of Israel's failure in Exodus 32.

From chapter 12 onwards, the story goes back and forth, from north to south, tracing the fate of both kingdoms. Each had about twenty successive kings, and as the author introduces each one, he evaluates their reign by a few criteria: did they worship the God of Israel alone, or did they promote the worship of other gods? Did they deal with idolatry among the people? And finally, did they remain faithful to the covenant like David, or did they become corrupt and unjust? Using these criteria, the author finds no good kings to come out of northern Israel, and from southern Judah, only eight out of twenty get a positive rating.

This connects to another strategic purpose of the book of 1 & 2 Kings, to introduce the role of the prophets who are key figures in Israel's history. In the Bible, prophets were not fortune tellers, but rather spoke on behalf of the God of Israel and played the role of covenant watchdogs, calling out idolatry and injustice among the kings and the people. They constantly reminded Israel of their calling to be a light to the nations by obeying the commands of the Torah, and so they challenged Israel to repent and follow their God.

1 KINGS 17–2 KINGS 17

For each king, God raised up prophets to hold them accountable. The most prominent are the northern prophets, Elijah and his disciple Elisha. Elijah was a wild-man of a prophet that lived in the desert. His arch nemeses were the northern king, Ahab, and his wife, Jezebel. Together they had instituted worship of the Canaanite god, Baal, all over Israel. In a famous story, Elijah challenged 450 prophets of Baal to a contest to see which God was real. They all built altars and prayed to their gods, but only the God of Israel answered with fire. In another story, Ahab uses his royal power to murder an Israelite farmer and steal the family's vineyard. Elijah again confronts Ahab's injustice and announces the downfall of his house.

Elijah eventually passes the mantle of his prophetic leadership to a young disciple named Elisha, who asks God for twice the power and authority of Elijah. What's fascinating is how the author recounts seven miraculous feats of Elijah, and then offers stories of fourteen acts of power from Elisha. While both prophets were clearly remarkable men and played the same role of confronting Israel's kings for the idolatry and injustice they caused, ultimately they were unsuccessful in turning Israel back from apostasy.

The next section begins with 2 Kings chapter 9, as the northern kingdom is rocked from a bloody revolution by a king named Jehu who destroys Ahab's family. Although he was at first commissioned by God, his violence becomes excessive and creates a spiral of political assassinations and rebellions from which northern Israel never recovered. Coup after coup follows Jehu, as each king worships other gods and allows gross injustice. It all leads up to 2 Kings 17, when the big bad empire of Assyria swoops down and takes out the northern kingdom altogether. The capital city of Samaria is conquered, and the Israelites are exiled and dispersed throughout the ancient world.

2 Kings chapter 17 is key because the author stops the story and offers a prophetic reflection on all that's happened so far. He blames the downfall of the northern kingdom on the idolatry and covenant unfaithfulness of Israel and its kings. Because of their sins, God allowed his people to face the consequences of their decisions.

2 KINGS 18–25

The final movement of the book tells the story of the lone southern kingdom. Here we meet some pretty heroic kings, like Hezekiah, who trusts God when the armies of Assyria come knocking at Jerusalem's door; or Josiah, who discovers a lost scroll of the Torah in the temple and, after reading it, institutes reforms to try to remove all the idols and Canaanite influences in the land. But alas, Judah is too far gone. The king in between Hezekiah and Josiah, named Manasseh, is the worst by far. He not only introduces the worship of idol statues into the Jerusalem temple, but also institutes child sacrifice. God sends prophets to say that the time has come, and that Israel has reached a point of no return.

The final chapters, 2 Kings 24–25, tell the story of the Babylonian empire coming to invade Jerusalem, destroy the temple, and carry the people and the royal line of David off into exile.

The story ends leaving us wondering, is God done with Israel and the line of David?

Well, the final paragraph time warps forty years ahead into the Babylonian exile. We find here an odd short story about Jehoiachin, a descendant from David who would have been king in Jerusalem. The king of Babylon releases Jehoiachin from prison and invites him to eat at the royal table for the rest of his life (2 Kings 25:27–30). It's not much, but the story offers a glimmer of hope that God has not abandoned his promise to David. And it's that hope that gets explored further in the wisdom and prophetic books of the Bible.

KINGS





THE CRITERIA FOR KINGS:

- ☑ WORSHIP THE GOD OF ISRAEL ALONE?
- ☑ RID ISRAEL OF IDOLATRY?
- ☑ FAITHFUL TO THE COVENANT?

NORTHERN ISRAEL	0	20
SOUTHERN JUDAH	8	12

THE ROLE OF PROPHETS:



- SPEAK ON GOD'S BEHALF
- COVENANT WATCHDOGS
- CALL OUT IDOLATRY AND INJUSTICE
- CHALLENGE TO REPENT AND FOLLOW THE TORAH















THE BOOKS OF 1 & 2 CHRONICLES

While they are two separate books in our modern Bibles, Chronicles was originally written as one coherent story. It was only divided later due to scroll length. Another important detail is that the books' current location in the Christian Bibles is different from its original purpose. In most English Bibles, Chronicles comes right after the books of Samuel and Kings. However, most of Chronicles repeats the content of those books, and so many people start reading and think, "Wait, I just read all of this!" and they end up skipping it.

That's a shame because this is a really unique and important book in the Old Testament with a very intentional design. In the traditional Jewish order of the Bible, Chronicles is actually the very last book because it summarizes all of the Jewish Scriptures. It begins with the first word *adam*, the name of the first human character in the beginning of the Scriptures, and it goes all the way through to the last paragraph announcing the return of Israel from exile.

Now, we don't actually know who wrote the book, but we can tell from certain details that it was written by somebody who lived a couple hundred years after the Israelites returned from the Babylonian exile. For this author, Jerusalem and the second temple were rebuilt some time ago, but as we learned from Ezra-Nehemiah, things were not going well. The great prophetic hope was that the city and temple would be rebuilt. God would come to live among his people, the messianic king would come, and all nations would come together under his peaceful rule. It was very clear to everyone in Jerusalem, including this author, that none of this had happened yet.

In response, the author of Chronicles has shaped the ancient stories of David and Solomon from the past to provide a message of hope for the future. The book has been designed to emphasize two clear themes: the hope of the coming messianic king, and the hope for a new temple.

1 CHRONICLES 1–9

1 Chronicles begins with nine chapters of genealogies; long lists of names and family lines. While you read these you may think that it's all very boring, which is kind of true. But, these chapters are actually really important! Through them, the author is summarizing the entire Old Testament storyline by naming all the key characters.

The author has shaped these genealogies to emphasize two particular lineages connected to the two main themes. First is the line of the promised messianic king. Lots of space is dedicated to tracing the line of Judah leading to king David, to whom the messianic promise was given. That line is then traced forward into the author's own day. The other family line that gets a lot of emphasis is that of the priesthood, the descendants of Aaron, who worked in the Jerusalem temple. So, right from the start, you can see the two main themes of the book of Chronicles (hope for the Messiah and the new temple) are rooted deeply in these ancient genealogies.

1 CHRONICLES 10–29

From here, we move on into stories about David (1 Chronicles 10–29), and while most of these will be familiar from reading the book of Samuel, there are some very important differences. First of all, the author leaves out all the negative stories in which David is portrayed as weak or immoral. Saul chasing him around the desert and persecuting him, the story of David's adultery with Bathsheba and the following murder of her husband; all of that's gone, and we are left only with the stories that portray him as a good guy.

There is also new material that shows David in a very positive light. There's a large block of chapters (1 Chronicles 22–29) in which David makes preparations for the first temple, arranging for builders, Levites, and choirs. The author even goes so far as to portray David as a figure like Moses. God gives David the plans for building the temple, just as he gave plans to Moses for the tabernacle (compare 1 Chronicles 28:11–19 with Exodus 25:9).

So why is there all this new material about David? The author is certainly not trying to hide David's flaws. He knows that anyone can go and read about them in the books of 1 & 2 Samuel. It seems instead that the author is trying to portray David as an ideal king, in order to create a narrative prophecy that points to the image of the future messianic king. This is very similar to the ways that Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke of the coming Messiah as "a new David" (see Jeremiah 30:9 and Ezekiel 37:25).

This idea becomes clearer when you read the story of God's covenant promise to David in 1 Chronicles 17 and compare it to its earlier parallel in 2 Samuel 7. The author of Chronicles definitively highlights the fact that neither David, Solomon, nor any of the kings from that line were the messianic king. But when that Messiah does come, he will be a king like the idealized David of these stories. For the author, these classic stories of David from the past are really glimpses into the future kingdom of God.

2 CHRONICLES 1–36

As we continue into 2 Chronicles, we find a lot of overlap with 1 and 2 Kings, but, once again, there are a few key differences. The author has left out all the stories of the kings in northern Israel and instead continues his focus on the line of David. There is a lot of new material and stories about these Davidic kings, and the author specifically highlights those who were obedient to God and gained success and blessing. The author also supplies new stories about kings who were unfaithful to God. Those who failed to follow the Torah and led Israel into idol worship faced horrible consequences and ultimately bring about the Babylonian exile. And it was all a mess of their own making.

This whole section becomes a series of character studies for later generations. The author wants all of God's people to learn from their family history and so become faithful to their God and to the Torah.

The book's conclusion is unique, too. At the very end of the book, the king of the Persians, Cyrus, tells the Israelites that they can return from exile and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. He says, "Whoever there is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up…"(2 Chronicles 36:23)

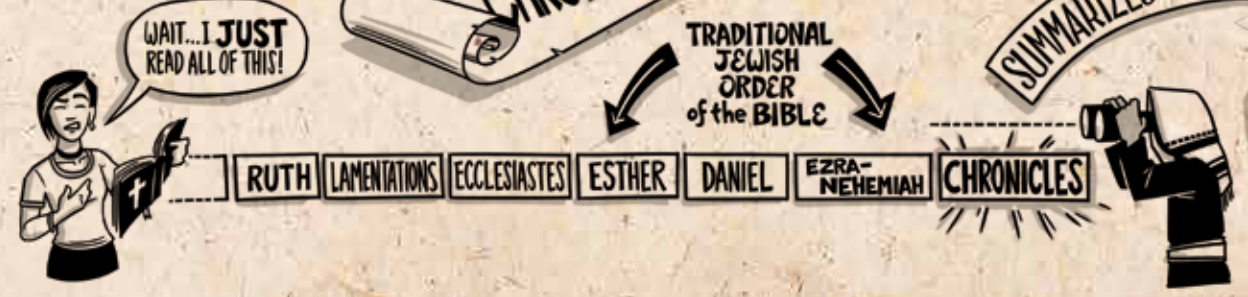
That's actually how the book ends, with an incomplete sentence (it's even more awkward in Hebrew than in English). Now, of course the author knows about the first return from exile and the stories of Ezra and Nehemiah, but clearly in his view the prophetic hopes of Israel were not fulfilled in those events. This incomplete ending shows that the author's hope is set on yet another return from exile, when the Messiah will come to rebuild the temple and restore God's people.

So the book of Chronicles, the final book in the Jewish Scriptures, ends by pointing forward. It calls upon God's people to look back in order to look ahead, because the past is the source of hope for the future. Chronicles concludes the Old Testament as a story in search of an ending.

THE CHRONICLES

A STORY IN SEARCH OF AN ENDING









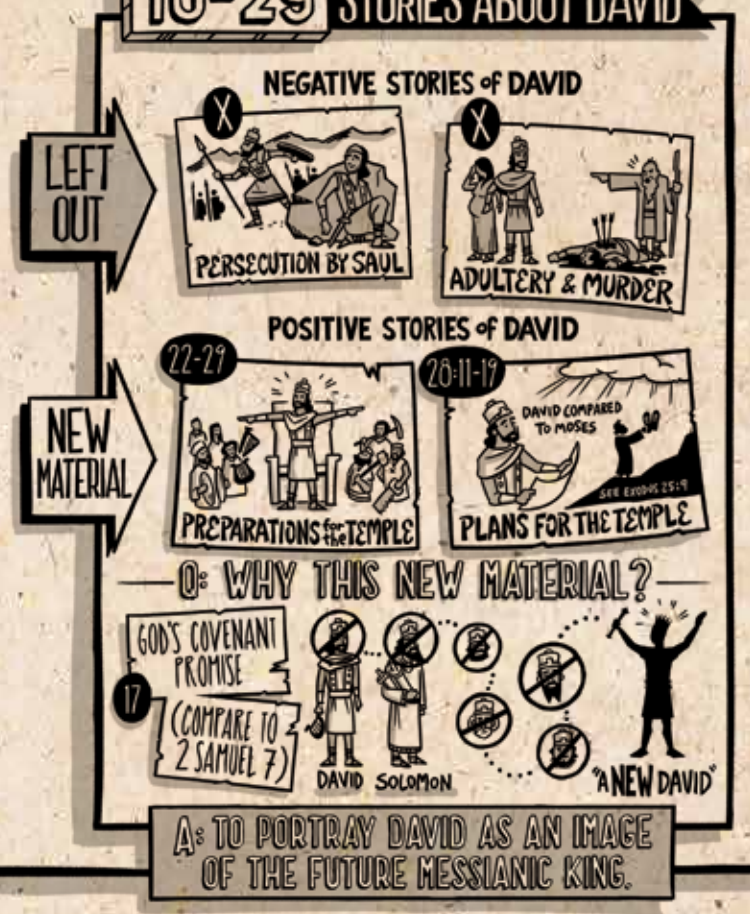


1ST CHRONICLES

1-9 GENEALOGIES!

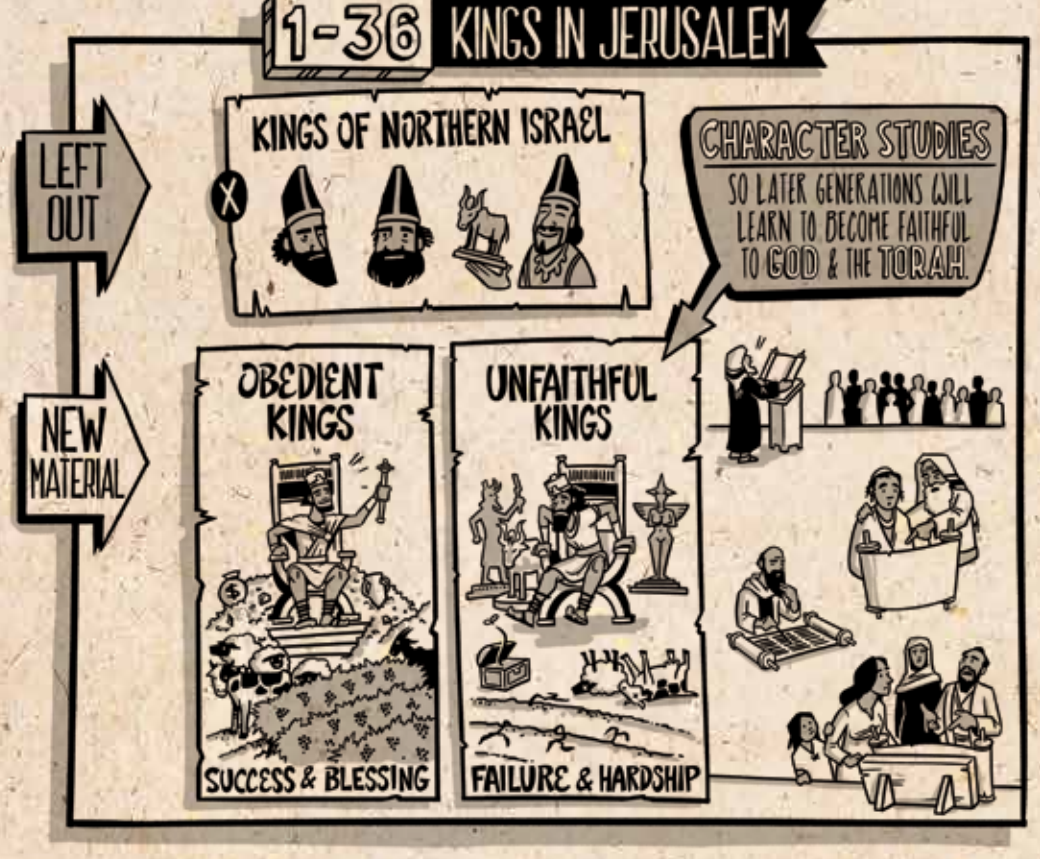


10-29 STORIES ABOUT DAVID



2ND CHRONICLES

1-36 KINGS IN JERUSALEM



THE END?



THE BOOKS OF EZRA-NEHEMIAH

In most modern Bibles these two books are separate, but that division happened long after it was written. It was originally a unified work written by a single author who lived long after the Babylonians' invasion of Jerusalem and the exile (see 2 Kings 24–25). Ezra-Nehemiah picks up some fifty years later, and tells of the return of some Israelites to Jerusalem, as well as what happened when they rebuilt their lives and the city.

More specifically, the book focuses in on three key leaders who led the rebuilding efforts: Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Zerubbabel first led a large group back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1–6). About sixty years later, Ezra arrived in Jerusalem to teach the Torah and to rebuild the community (Ezra 7–10). He was soon followed by Nehemiah, who led the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls (Nehemiah 1–7).

All three stories are designed to be parallel to each other. Each begins with a king of Persia being prompted by God to send a leader to Jerusalem while offering resources and support. Then, each leader encounters opposition in their efforts, which they overcome, but in a way that leads to a strange, anti-climax.

EZRA 1–6

The story begins with a decree from Cyrus (Ezra 1:1–4), the king of Persia, who's moved by God to allow the exiles to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. The author says that this fulfills a promise made by the prophet Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 25) that the exiles would one day return. Now, this fulfillment should trigger our hopes in many other prophetic promises that Israel's exile was not the end of their story. The reader should recall the prophetic hopes for a messianic king from the line of David (see Isaiah 11 and Hosea 3), for a rebuilt temple where God's holy presence will dwell (see Ezekiel 40–48 and Zechariah 2), and for God's kingdom to come over all the nations and bring his blessing upon everyone (see Isaiah 2 and Zechariah 8), just as he promised Abraham (see Genesis 12:1–3).

It's with all these hopes in mind that we read the story of Zerubbabel. His name means "planted in Babylon." He represents the generation born in Babylonian captivity, and he leads a wave of people back to Jerusalem (Ezra 1–2).

After they settle in Jerusalem, they rebuild the altar for offering sacrifices and later the temple itself. The foundation laying ceremony (Ezra 3) and the temple's final dedication (Ezra 6) are key moments. The past stories of the tabernacle and temple's dedication (see Leviticus 9 and 1 Kings 8) should come to mind, when the fiery cloud of God's presence descended. That's not what happens in this case, and while some people were happy about the new temple, the elders who had seen the previous temple of Solomon cry out in grief. This building is nothing like their glorious past or the hopes they had for the future.

It's here that we get the first story of opposition, and it's an odd one. The descendants of the Israelites who were not taken into exile, who had been living around Jerusalem for some time, come and offer help with the temple rebuilding (Ezra 4). Zerubbabel refuses and says, "You have no part in our temple!" This understandably generates conflict, which Zerubbabel eventually overcomes. But we should feel disappointed. The prophets had envisioned the tribes of Israel coming together with all nations to participate in the worship of the God of Israel when his kingdom finally comes (see saiah 2 and Zechariah 8). This turn of events is an anti-climactic opening, to say the least.

EZRA 7–10

In the next section (Ezra 7–10), we move decades into the future and are introduced to Ezra, a leader among the exiled Israelites in Babylon. He's a Torah scholar and teacher, and is appointed by Artaxerxes, king of Persia, to lead another wave of people back to Jerusalem. He wants to bring about social and spiritual renewal among the people.

Our hopes are set high, but once again we come to another strange, anti-climactic moment in the story with chapters 9–10. Ezra learns that many of the exiled Israelites had returned and married non-exiles who had been living around Jerusalem, some of them being non-Israelites, but some who probably were. Ezra then appeals to the commands of the Torah that Israel should be holy and separate from the ancient Canaanites (see Deuteronomy 23:1–4), and continues by saying that the people living around Jerusalem are like the Canaanites and will corrupt the exiles. He offers a prayer of repentance, which is very heartfelt, but then rallies all the leaders during a rainstorm. He enacts a divorce decree that will annul these marriages and send all these women and their children away. This decree is only partially carried out, but we're given a list of some of the men who went through with it.

This story is strange for a number of reasons. God never commanded Ezra to do any of this. It was the leaders of Jerusalem who compelled Ezra to make the decree. While the contemporary prophet Malachi did say that the exiles should care about purity, he went on to say that God was opposed to divorce (see Malachi 2:13–16). The mixed results of the decree fit well into this pattern of strange, disappointing endings.

NEHEMIAH 1–7

This leads us to the section about Nehemiah, who's an Israelite official serving in the Persian government (Nehemiah 1–7). When he hears about the ruined state of Jerusalem's walls, he prays and is given permission from the Persian king Artaxerxes to go and rebuild the walls. The king even gives him an armed escort and extra resources. After arriving and beginning the building project, he too faces opposition from the people who were already living around Jerusalem. We once again face a tension in the story. The contemporary prophet Zechariah said that the new Jerusalem of God's kingdom would be a city without walls, surrounded by God's presence and joined by people from all nations (see Zechariah 2:3–11). Nehemiah seems to operate with the opposite vision. He informs the people surrounding Jerusalem that they have "no part" in the city (Nehemiah 2:19–20), which provokes them to hostility. While Nehemiah carries out his vision for the city with integrity and bravely protects the city with armed guards, we are left wondering if this whole conflict could have been handled differently.

NEHEMIAH 8–13

The conclusion to the book comes in two movements, the first positive (Nehemiah 8–12) and the other negative (Nehemiah 13). Ezra and Nehemiah combine forces to bring about spiritual renewal among the people. They gather the former exiles for a great festival, where they read and teach the Torah to all the people for seven days. Next, they celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles to remember God's faithfulness from the Exodus and wilderness journeys. After this, the people offer a confession of their sins as well as the sins of their ancestors, vowing to renew their covenant with God and to follow all the commands of the Torah. They finish with a great celebration over the finished walls of Jerusalem that echoes the celebration of the temple earlier in the book.

We're thinking that perhaps this will be the turning point in the story…but it's not. The book ends with a huge downer (Nehemiah 13). Nehemiah tours around the city and finds that the people have not fulfilled their covenant vows. Zerubbabel's work is undone as the temple is neglected and staffed by unqualified people. Ezra's work, too, is compromised, as Nehemiah discovers that people are violating the Torah and working on the Sabbath. Even his own work on the walls is spoiled, as people are setting up markets by the walls and gates to work on the Sabbath. Nehemiah goes on a rampage, beating people, pulling out their hair, and yelling that they have to obey the commands of the Torah. His last recorded words are a prayer asking that God remembers him with favor, that at least he tried…

This is a strange ending, yet we feel prepared for it. All those anti-climactic, disappointing moments have been intentionally woven into the book's design. And this all raises the question, what does this book contribute to the storyline of the Bible?

The book started out by raising our hopes in the prophetic promises of the Messiah, the temple, and the kingdom of God, but then none of it happens. Even though Israel is back in their land, their spiritual state seems unchanged from before the exile. While Ezra and Nehemiah try their best, their political and social reforms don't change the core issues in the people's hearts. This is the very same need that Jeremiah and Ezekiel highlighted in their poetry. Israel is in need of a holistic transformation of their hearts if they are ever going to love and obey their God.

While the book ends on a downer, we are forced to keep reading to find out how God is going to fulfill his great covenant promises.

EZRA-NEHEMIAH

2 KINGS 24-25

BABYLON →

50 YEARS LATER

PARALLEL DESIGN

1. PERSIAN KING MOVED BY GOD TO SEND A LEADER TO JERUSALEM

2. LEADER FACES OPPOSITION TO REBUILDING

3. STRANGE ANTI-CLIMAX

EZRA 1-6 ZERUBBABEL — THE TEMPLE

CYRUS: WHOEVER WANTS TO RETURN TO JERUSALEM, MAY GOD BE WITH YOU! (see JEREMIAH 25)

1-2

ZERUBBABEL = "PLANTED IN BABYLON"

3-6

(see LEVITICUS 9 · 1 KINGS 8)

GOD'S PRESENCE?

ELDERS WHO REMEMBER THE FIRST TEMPLE

4

YOU HAVE NO PART IN THE TEMPLE!

WE JUST WANT TO HELP!

ISRAELITES WHO NEVER WENT INTO EXILE

THE END.

ANOTHER 70 YEARS

EZRA 7-10 EZRA — TORAH & COMMUNITY

ARTAXERXES: GO TEACH THE TORAH AND REBUILD YOUR COMMUNITY!

7-8

9-10

THESE PEOPLE ARE AS BAD AS CANAANITES!

DEUTERONOMY 23:1-4

- GOD NEVER COMMANDS EZRA TO DO THIS
- GOD OPPOSES DIVORCE (see MALACHI 2:13-16)
- MIXED RESULTS LEAD TO ANOTHER ANTICLIMAX

YOU HAVE NO PART IN ISRAEL!

THE END.

NEH 1-7 NEHEMIAH — CITY WALLS

ARTAXERXES: MAY I GO REPAIR JERUSALEM'S WALLS?

YES! GO IN PEACE.

YOU HAVE NO PART IN JERUSALEM!

THIS AGAIN...

NEH 8-12 SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

7-DAY TORAH MARATHON

CELEBRATION OF THE FEAST OF BOOTHS

- CONFESSION of SIN
- COVENANT RENEWAL
- VOW to FOLLOW the TORAH
- GREAT CELEBRATION

NEH 13 ...BUT IT'S NOT

ZZZ — TEMPLE NEGLECTED

SABBATH DISHONORED...

NOT MY WALLS!! — ...WITHIN SIGHT of JERUSALEM'S WALLS!

OH GOD... AT LEAST I TRIED!

the END.

PROPHETIC HOPES AFTER EXILE

FUTURE MESSIANIC KING (ISAIAH 11, HOSEA 3)

GOD'S PRESENCE IN A NEW TEMPLE (EZEKIEL 40-48, ZECHARIAH 2)

GOD'S KINGDOM OVER THE NATIONS (ISAIAH 2, ZECHARIAH 8)

FULFILL PROMISE TO ABRAHAM (GENESIS 12)

PROPHETS

WELCOME! WELCOME!

BEGINS WITH HOPE

BUT .....

ENDS WITH DISAPPOINTMENT

THE BOOK POINTS OUT THE NEED FOR A...

NEW HEART

JEREMIAH 31 & EZEKIEL 36

THE BOOK OF ESTHER

This is one of the more exciting and curious books in the Bible. The story is set over one hundred years after the Babylonian exile of the Israelites from their land. While some Jews did return to Jerusalem (see Ezra-Nehemiah), many did not. And so the book of Esther is about a Jewish community living in Susa, the capital city of the ancient Persian empire. The main characters are two Jews, Mordecai and his niece Esther. There is the king of Persia, who is something of a drunken pushover in the story, and then also the Persian official Haman, the cunning villain.

Now, the main reason Esther is a curious book in the Bible is the fact that God is never mentioned, not once. This may strike you as odd, because the Bible is supposed to be a book all about God. However, this is a brilliant technique by the anonymous author. It's an invitation to read the story looking for God's activity, and there are signs of it everywhere. The story's full of odd "coincidences" and ironic reversals that force you see God's purpose at work behind every scene.

CHAPTERS 1–2

The story begins when the king of Persia throws two elaborate banquet feasts that last a total of 187 days, all for the grandiose purpose of displaying his greatness and splendor. On the last day of the feast, the king is drunk and demands that his wife, queen Vashti, appear at the party to show off her beauty. She refuses, and in a drunken rage the king deposes Vashti, and makes a silly decree that all Persian men should be the master of their own homes.

Then the king holds a beauty pageant to find a new queen. And right when the story feels like a bad soap opera, we're introduced to Esther and Mordecai. Esther hides her Jewish identity and poses as a Persian, and she wins the pageant. The king is so obsessed with Esther that he elevates her as the new queen of Persia. After this, and even more serendipitous, is when Mordecai "just happens" to overhear two royal guards plotting to murder the king. He informs Esther, who then tells the king, and Mordecai gets credit for saving the king's life.

Remember, in all these remarkable events God is not mentioned. But it all seems so providentially ordered. What is God up to?

CHAPTERS 3–6

We begin to find out in the next story (ch. 3). We're introduced to Haman, who's not a Persian, but an "Agagite," a descendant of the ancient Canaanites (see 1 Samuel 15). The king elevates Haman to the highest position in the kingdom, and demands that all kneel before him. But when Mordecai sees Haman, he refuses to kneel, which of course fills Haman with rage. And when he finds out that Mordecai is Jewish, Haman successfully persuades the king to enact a decree to destroy all the Jews. They use an outrageous way to decide the date of this horrific day. Haman rolls ancient dice (called *pur* in Hebrew), and the decree is set. Eleven months later, on the thirteenth of Adar, all the Jews will be executed. Haman and the king then have a drinking banquet to celebrate their decision.

After this, the story focuses on Mordecai and Esther, who are now the only hope for the Jewish people. They plan that Esther should reveal her Jewish identity to the king and ask that he reverse the decree (ch. 4). But there's risk involved, because approaching the king without a royal request was an act worthy of death according to Persian law. At a crucial moment in the story, Mordecai asserts that if Esther remains silent, "deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place." Then he wonders aloud, "Who knows, maybe you've become queen for this very moment!" Esther responds with bravery, "If I perish, I perish," and she decides to approach the king.

In what unfolds, we watch the ironic reversal of all of Haman's evil plans. Esther hosts the king and Haman at a first banquet, where she makes a special request that they both come to an even more exclusive banquet the next day. Haman leaves the feast quite drunk and happy with himself, and he sees Mordecai in the street. When Mordecai doesn't bow, Haman fumes with anger and orders that a tall stake be built, so that Mordecai can be impaled upon it in the morning.

It seems things can't get any worse, for the Jews or for Mordecai. But all of a sudden, the story pivots in chapter 6. It just so happens that very night that the king can't sleep. He has the royal chronicles read to him to get him to sleep, and he just happens to hear about how Mordecai saved the king's life from the plot of the guards. The king had totally forgotten about it! So in the morning, as Haman enters to request Mordecai's execution, the king orders Haman to honor Mordecai publicly for saving his life! Haman then has to lead Mordecai about the city on a royal horse. This reversal forms a turning point in the story, beginning with Haman's downfall and ending with Mordecai's rise to power.

CHAPTERS 7–8

The day after is Esther's second banquet (ch. 7). The king and Haman arrive and Esther informs the king of her Jewish identity. Then she reveals that Haman's decree is a ploy to murder her and Mordecai, the man who saved the king's life! After taking in a lot of wine, and then this news, the king goes into a drunken rage (notice how many of those you find in this story). He orders that Haman be impaled on the stake he made for Mordecai! An ironic and grisly way to go.

Haman's execution, however, doesn't solve the problem of the decree to kill all the Jews. So the focus turns back to Mordecai and Esther as they plan to reverse the decree. When they discover that the king can't revoke a decree he's already made, Mordecai is commissioned to issue a counter-decree. On the appointed day, the thirteenth of Adar, when all the Jewish people were to be killed, now they can defend themselves and destroy any who plotted to kill them. After this, Mordecai, Esther, and Jews everywhere hold banquets and feasts to celebrate the new decree.

And, most surprising of all, Mordecai is elevated to a seat beside the king. Who saw that coming?!

CHAPTERS 9–10

Eventually, the decreed day comes, and the Jews triumph over their enemies. First, they destroy Haman's family along with any other Persian officials who had joined Haman's plot. The next day the Jewish people are allowed to destroy anyone who plotted against them throughout the kingdom. This is followed by great joy and celebration, because the Jewish people have been rescued from annihilation.

The story then tells about how Esther and Mordecai establish another decree. This great reversal and rescue will be memorialized by an annual two-day feast called Purim, named after Haman's fateful dice. The book concludes with a short epilogue. Mordecai is elevated to second in command in the kingdom and we're told of his royal greatness and splendor as the Jews thrive in exile.

Now, if you back up and look at the book as a whole, you can see how precisely the story has been designed. The story is full of many moments of ironic reversal, but notice how the entire book is structured as one large reversal, right down to the details.

The king's splendor, feasts, and decrees in chapters 1 correspond to Mordecai's splendor, feasts, and decrees in chapter 10.

Esther and Mordecai first saved the king in chapters 2, and in the end they save all the Jewish people in chapter 9.

Haman's elevation, edicts, and banquet with the king in chapter 3 are reversed by Mordecai's elevation, edict, and banquet in chapter 8.

Also notice how Esther and Mordecai's two planning scenes (chs. 4 and 8), along with Esther's two special banquets (chs. 5 and 7), form a frame around the greatest reversal in the whole story—Haman's humiliation and Mordecai's exaltation (ch. 6).

Another fascinating feature of the book is the moral ambiguity of the characters. There is a lot of drinking, anger, sex, and murder, and Mordecai and Esther participate in at least some of it. Also notable is their violation of many commands in the Torah (like marrying Gentiles, or eating impure food). And so the story doesn't seem to put them forward as impeccable moral examples, nor does it endorse all of their behavior. However, they are presented as models of trust and hope in the midst of terrifying circumstances.

In fact, this focus on Mordecai and Esther's hope brings us all the way back to the curious feature of this book, that God is never mentioned. When God's people are in exile, unable to obey the Torah perfectly, and when God seems absent, does this mean God is done with Israel? Has he abandoned his promises?

The book of Esther says, No.

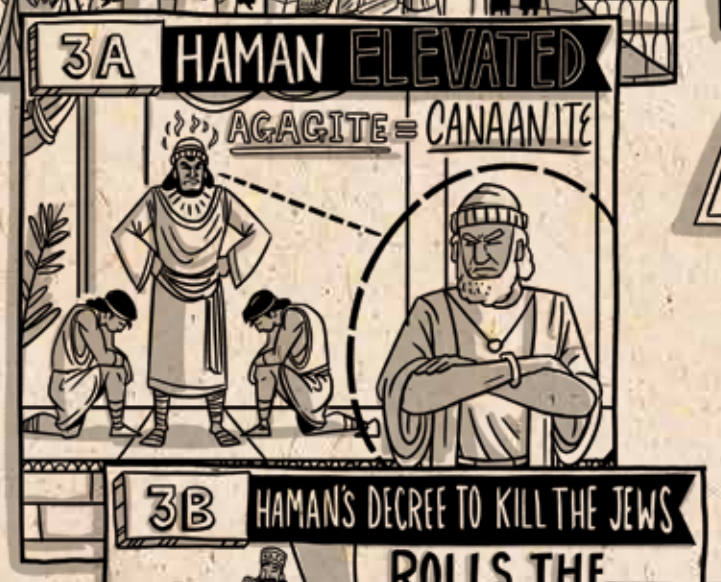
The story invites us to see that God can and does work in the real mess and moral ambiguity of human history, using the faithfulness even of morally compromised people to accomplish his purposes.

The book of Esther asks us to trust in God's providence even when we can't see it working. That requires a posture of hope, to believe that, no matter how horrible things get, God is committed to redeeming his good world and overcoming evil.

That's what the story of Esther is all about.

ESTHER











CURIOUS FACT:

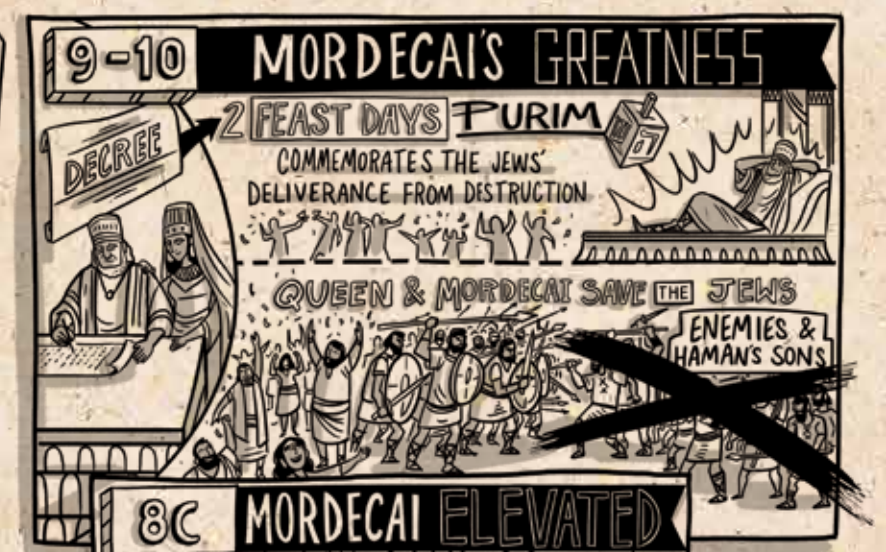
- GOD IS NEVER MENTIONED
- INVITATION TO LOOK FOR GOD'S ACTIVITY
- "COINCIDENCE" & IRONIC REVERSAL

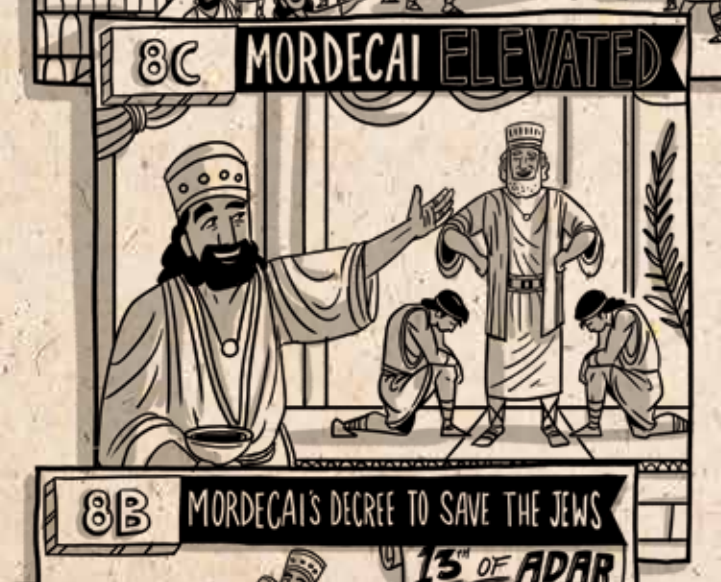
MORAL AMBIGUITY:

- A LOT OF DRINKING, SEX AND MURDER
- VIOLATION OF TORAH COMMANDS

THE POINT:

DESPITE EXILE, "GOD'S ABSENCE," AND ISRAEL'S MORAL COMPROMISE, GOD HAS NOT ABANDONED HIS PROMISES













THE BOOK OF JOB

It's a profound and unique book of the Bible. The story is set in an obscure land far from Israel called "Uz." None of the characters in the book are Israelites. The author, who is anonymous, doesn't place the story in any clear period of ancient history. And this all seems intentional. It's as if the author doesn't want us to be distracted by historical questions, so he forces us to focus on the story of Job and the questions raised by his experience of suffering.

The book has a clear literary design. It opens with a short narrative prologue (chs.1–2), followed by the main body of the book (chs. 3–37), which represents conversations between Job and four dialogue partners called "the friends." These are followed by a series of poetic speeches given by God (chs. 38–41), and then the book concludes with a short narrative epilogue (ch. 42). All these literary pieces just sit next to each other, forcing you to ponder what the overall message might be.

CHAPTERS 1–2

The prologue introduces Job. We're told he is a blameless man who honors God and has a lot of wealth. Then, we're suddenly transported into the heavenly realms, where God is holding court with his angelic "staff team" to discuss how to run the world. Among the heavenly beings is a figure called "the satan" which in Hebrew means "the one opposed." It's as if we are watching a court scene. God presents Job as a truly righteous man, and the accuser challenges God's policy of rewarding righteous people. He says Job obeys God only because he blesses him with prosperity. If Job were to suffer, they would discover how righteous he really is.

God allows the accuser to inflict suffering on Job, and at this point most readers ask, "Why would God do that?" So we read on, assuming that this book will eventually answer our question of why God allows good people to suffer. But, you'll discover, to your frustration, that nothing in the book of Job ever answers that mystery. The prologue is setting up a different question that will become the focus of Job and his friends. Does God run the universe by the strict principle of justice, or not? This is the real question explored in the book of Job, and you don't discover the answer until the book's conclusion.

CHAPTERS 3–37

Back to Job's story. The prologue concludes with a suffering Job approached by three friends who will try to provide wisdom and counsel. Their names are Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. They're all non-Israelites, who represent the best of ancient near eastern thinking. Their appearance opens up the next part of the book, which is structured as follows. First Job speaks, then a friend responds, then Job responds, then another friend responds, and so on, for three cycles. The focus of their debate is whether God is truly just. Does God run the universe on the strict principle of justice? And if so, how is Job's suffering to be explained?

As we will see, Job and the friends hold some unexamined assumptions about what God's justice ought to look like. They think every event in the universe follows from the strict principle of just recompense. If you're wise and good and honor God, good things will happen to you. God will reward you. But if you're evil and stupid, bad things will happen. God will punish you.

Job's constant argument is, first of all, that he's innocent. The logical implication is that his suffering is not a divine punishment. Now, we know from the prologue that these two points are true. God himself said Job is righteous and blameless. Therefore, the only conclusion Job can draw is that God doesn't run the world according to justice, or even worse, that God himself is not just.

The friends beg to differ. They argue that God is just and that God always runs the world by the principle of just recompense. This is why they accuse Job and conclude that he must have done something really bad to merit this suffering. They even start making up sins that Job must have committed.

Job gets so fed up with the friends that he eventually stops talking to them and he takes up his case directly with God. In these chapters, Job is on an emotional roller coaster. He kind of believes that God is just, but he can't reconcile that with his suffering. So in some outbursts he accuses God of being a bully, and once he even claims God has orchestrated all the injustice in the world. But this thought terrifies him, and he backs off by saying God must be just and all-powerful. When he reaches the end of himself, he makes one last statement of his innocence. Job concludes by demanding that God show up personally and explain himself.

It's at this point that a surprise friend, Elihu, appears. He shares the same assumptions as the friends, that God is just and always operates the universe by the principle of strict justice. But Elihu draws a more sophisticated conclusion about why good people suffer. God may not be punishing them. He could be warning them, so they will avoid evil in the future. God can use hardship to build character and teach people valuable life lessons. Elihu doesn't claim to know why Job is suffering, but he's sure of one thing. Job, with his limited life experience, is not in a place to accuse God of being unjust. Job doesn't even respond to Elihu and the dialogues come to a close. All the wisdom of the ancients has been spent, and the mystery remains.

CHAPTERS 38–41

Then, suddenly, God shows up in a whirlwind and responds to Job personally.

God first responds to Job's accusation that he's unjust and incompetent at running the universe. He takes Job on a virtual tour of the universe and asks him questions about the order and origins of the cosmos. Was Job around when God architected the earth or organized the constellations? Has Job ever commanded the sunrise or controlled the weather? God has his eyes on all kinds of cosmic details that Job has never even conceived of. Then God starts describing in detail the grazing habits of mountain goats, how deer give birth to their young, and the feeding patterns of lions and wild donkeys.

What is God's point in all of this? Remember the assumptions of Job and his friends about how God ought to run the world according to the principle of justice. Underneath that assumption is a deeper one. Job and his friends imagine they have a wide enough perspective from which they can tell God how he ought to run the world. This virtual tour is God's indirect way of deconstructing those assumptions. He's showing that the universe is a vast and complex place, and that he has his eyes on all of it, every single detail. Job, on the other hand, has only the small and limited horizon of his own life experience. What may look like divine injustice from Job's point of view, needs to be seen in an infinitely larger context. Job is simply not in a position to make such huge accusations about God.

After the virtual tour, God asks Job if he would like to micromanage the world for a day according to the strict principle of justice to which he's holding God accountable. Let Job play God and punish every evil deed at every moment with precise retribution. It's impossible, because carrying out justice in a world like ours is extremely complex, and can never be black and white.

Which leads to God's last point. He starts describing two fantastic creatures, Behemoth and Leviathan. Some people think these are poetic depictions of a hippo and a crocodile, or perhaps of creatures that are now extinct. They could also refer to well-known creatures from ancient mythology, mentioned elsewhere in the Bible (see Isaiah 27:1, Ezekiel 29:3, and Psalm 74:13–14). Either way, they represent the disorder and danger that still exist in God's good world. They are not evil. God is quite proud of them, even though they would kill you in a second without thinking about it. God's point in bringing up these creatures seems to be that his world is a good place. But it's not perfect, or always safe. It has order and beauty, but it's also wild and often dangerous, like these two creatures.

So, back to the big question of Job and the friends. How does one account for suffering in God's good world? God doesn't explain why. His response is that we live in an extremely complex and amazing world that, at this stage at least, is not designed to prevent suffering.

And that's God's response. Job challenged God's justice, and God replied that Job doesn't have sufficient knowledge about the universe's complexity to make such a claim. Job demanded a full explanation, and God asks Job for trust in his wisdom and character.

CHAPTER 42

And that's what he does. Job responds with humility and repentance. He apologizes for accusing God of injustice, and acknowledges that he's overstepped his bounds.

Then, all of a sudden, the book concludes with a short epilogue. God says that the friends were wrong. Their ideas about God's justice were too simple in light of the complexity of the world or God's wisdom. Then God says that Job has spoken rightly about him! Now, this can't apply to everything Job said about God. But despite Job's hasty and wrong conclusions, God still approves of Job's wrestling. Job came honestly before God and simply wanted to talk to God himself. And God's approval shows this is the right way to process these issues, through the struggle of prayer.

The story ends with Job having his health, family, and wealth restored, not as a reward for good behavior, but simply as a generous gift from God.

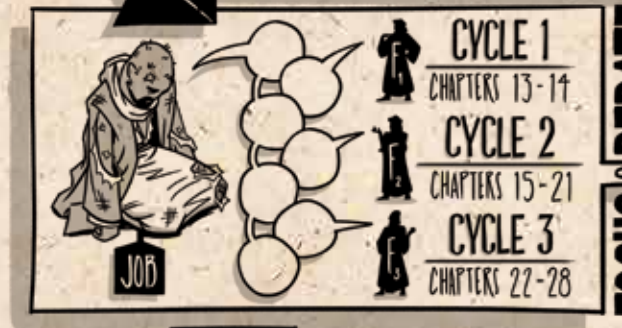
This amazing book doesn't simply unlock the puzzle of why bad things happen to good people. Instead of trying to figure out the "reasons" for suffering, we are invited to trust God's wisdom. When people search for reasons, they tend to either simplify God like the friends, or, like Job, accuse God based on limited evidence.

Job invites us to honestly bring our pain and grief to God, and to trust that he cares, and knows what he's doing. That's the wisdom of the book of Job.

JOB

AN INVITATION TO TRUST GOD'S WISDOM

JOB'S DEBATE WITH THE FRIENDS



- CYCLE 1 — CHAPTERS 13-14
- CYCLE 2 — CHAPTERS 15-21
- CYCLE 3 — CHAPTERS 22-28

FOCUS OF DEBATE

1. IS GOD **JUST**?
2. DOES GOD RUN THE UNIVERSE ON THE STRICT PRINCIPLE OF **JUSTICE**?
3. HOW IS JOB'S SUFFERING TO BE EXPLAINED?

BIG ASSUMPTION

HUMAN ACTION	GOD'S JUSTICE
WISE & GOOD	→ SUCCESS & REWARD
EVIL & STUPID	→ DISASTER & PUNISHMENT

UNIQUE BOOK IN THE BIBLE



- SET IN "UZ" FAR AWAY FROM ISRAEL
- ALL CHARACTERS ARE NON-ISRAELITES
- THERE IS NO CLEAR HISTORICAL SETTING

} INTENTIONAL!

The Point THE AUTHOR WANTS US TO FOCUS ON THE **QUESTIONS** RAISED BY JOB'S SUFFERING

1-2 PROLOGUE



PROLOGUE

3-37 JOB & THE FRIENDS

JOB IS RIGHT



ARGUMENT	IMPLICATION	CONCLUSION
I'M INNOCENT!	MY SUFFERING IS NOT DIVINE JUSTICE	CONCLUSION A: GOD DOESN'T RUN THE WORLD ACCORDING TO JUSTICE —OR— CONCLUSION B: GOD IS UNJUST



ARGUMENT	IMPLICATION	CONCLUSION
GOD IS JUST	GOD RUNS THE WORLD ACCORDING TO JUSTICE	JOB "MUST HAVE" SINNED

SEE JOB 22



ARGUMENT	IMPLICATION	CONCLUSION
GOD IS JUST	GOD RUNS THE WORLD ACCORDING TO JUSTICE	SUFFERING MAY BE A WARNING TO AVOID FUTURE SIN BECAUSE IT BUILDS CHARACTER

BTW: DON'T ACCUSE GOD, DUDE!

JOB'S PROTEST

EMOTIONAL ROLLERCOASTER



"WHY HAS GOD DENIED ME JUSTICE AND MADE MY LIFE BITTER?" 27:2

"GOD ATTACKS ME, TEARS ME UP IN ANGER, AND GNASHES HIS TEETH AT ME." 16:9



"HE DESTROYS THE BLAMELESS AND THE WICKED, HE MOCKS THE DESPAIR OF THE INNOCENT." 9:22-23



"WHAT HOPE DO THE GODLESS HAVE WHEN GOD TAKES AWAY THEIR LIFE?" 27:8

JOB'S LAST STATEMENT

29-31

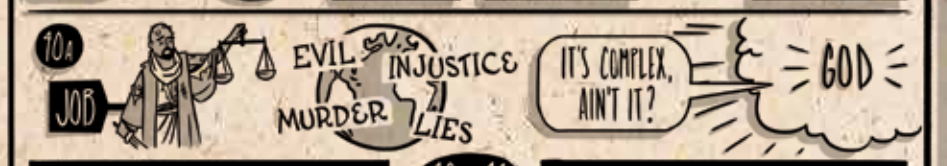
- ASSERTS INNOCENCE
- DEMANDS EXPLANATION FROM GOD



38-41 GOD'S RESPONSE

A VIRTUAL TOUR OF THE UNIVERSE





BEHEMOTH



40:8-41

SEE ISAIAH 27:1 & PSALMS 74:13-14

SYMBOLS OF DISORDER & DANGER

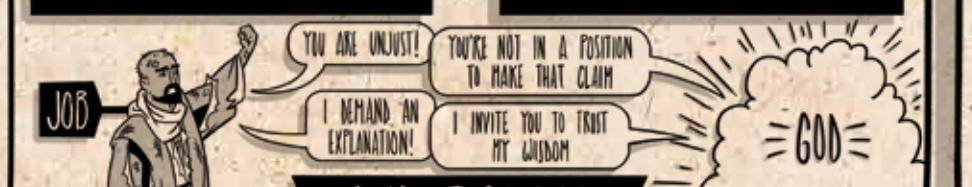
LEVIATHAN



GOD'S WORLD

GOOD, ORDERED, BEAUTIFUL	NOT PERFECT, WILD, DANGEROUS

QUESTION	RESPONSE
WHY IS THERE SUFFERING IN THE WORLD?	WE LIVE IN AN AMAZING WORLD THAT IS NOT DESIGNED TO PREVENT SUFFERING



GOD'S RESPONSE

42 EPILOGUE



12b JOB'S FAMILY & FORTUNES RESTORED



EPILOGUE

THE BOOK OF PSALMS

This is a collection of one hundred and fifty ancient Hebrew poems, songs, and prayers that come from all different eras in Israel's history. Seventy-three of these psalms are connected to king David, who was well-known as a poet and harp player (see 1 Samuel 16 and 2 Samuel 23). There were also many other authors involved. Asaph wrote twelve poems, the Korah sons produced eleven, and other worship leaders in the temple contributed as well (Heman and Ethan wrote one each, see 1 Chronicles 15:17–19). Two are connected to king Solomon and one other to Moses. Nearly one-third of the poems (forty nine, to be exact) are anonymous.

Many of these poems were used by the choirs who sang in Israel's temple (see 1 Chronicles 25 and Nehemiah 11:22–23), but the book of Psalms is not actually a hymnbook. At some point in the period after Israel's exile to Babylon, these ancient songs were gathered together with many other Hebrew poems and intentionally arranged into the book of Psalms. The entire work has a unique design and message that you won't notice unless you read it beginning to end.

To see the book's overall design, it's actually most helpful to start at the end. The book concludes with five poems of praise to the God of Israel (chs. 146–150), each beginning and ending with the word "hallelujah." In Hebrew this word is a command, telling a group of people to "Praise Yah," which is an abbreviation of the divine name, "Yahweh." This neat, five-part conclusion looks very intentional, and invites the question of whether other parts of this book have been designed.

If you pay close attention to the headings of the poems, you'll notice that in five different places your Bible translators have the headings "Book One," "Book Two," all the way up to "Book Five." In other words, the whole book of Psalms has been divided into five "books" or sections (chs. 3–41, 42–72, 73–89, 90–106, and 107–145). The reason for these divisions is that each section has a final poem which concludes with a similar line that looks like an editorial addition, "May the Lord, the God of Israel, be blessed forever. Amen and Amen" (see Psalms 41:13, 72:19, 89:52, and 106:48).

PSALMS 1–2

So the book has a conclusion as well as an internal organization of five main parts. The natural place to go from here is the book's beginning to look for an introduction. Psalms 1 and 2 clearly stand apart from the rest of Book One just by their authorship. These two poems are anonymous, while the majority of psalms in the first book are linked to king David. They also stick out due to their content. Psalm 1 starts out by celebrating the person who is "blessed" because they meditate on the Torah, prayerfully reading and obeying it. Now, the Hebrew word "Torah" simply means "teaching," but it also came to refer to the first five books of the Bible that contain the foundational laws of Judaism. It seems that the word has both of these meanings in Psalm 1. The book of Psalms is being offered as a new Torah that will teach God's people about the lifelong practice of prayer as they strive to obey God's commands in the first Torah.

Psalm 2, on the other hand, is a poetic reflection on God's promise to king David recounted in 2 Samuel 7. God told David that from his line would come a messianic (i.e. "anointed") king, who would establish God's kingdom over the world, defeating evil and rebellion among the nations. The psalm concludes by saying that all those to take refuge in this messianic king will be "blessed," the very same word used in the opening of Psalm 1.

Together, these two poems tell us that the book of Psalms is designed to be the prayer-book of God's people, who are striving to be faithful to the commands of the Torah and hoping and waiting for the messianic kingdom.

PSALMS 3–41

With these themes introduced, we can begin to see intentionality in how the smaller books have been designed around the same ideas. For example, Book One has at its center a collection of poems (chs. 15 and 24) that opens and closes with a call to covenant faithfulness. The opening Psalm 15 is followed by three poems (chs. 16–18) that depict David as a model of such faithfulness, calling out to God for deliverance and being rewarded and elevated as king. These three have a symmetrical pair in Psalms 20–23, where the David of the past has become an idealized image of the future messianic king, who will also call upon God for deliverance and be rewarded with a kingdom over all nations. And right in the center of this collection is Psalm 19, a poem dedicated to praising God for the gift of the Torah. This is a great example within Book One where we see that the twin themes from Psalms 1 and 2 emerge with intentional clarity.

PSALMS 42–72

Book Two (chs. 42–72) opens with two poems united in their hope for a future return to the temple in Zion (chs. 42–43), an image closely associated with the hope of the messianic kingdom. Book Two closes with a corresponding poem that depicts the future reign of the messianic king over all nations (ch. 72). This poem echoes many other passages in the Prophets about the messianic kingdom (see Isaiah 11, 45, 60, and Zechariah 9), and concludes by saying that this king's reign will bring the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham by bringing God's blessing to all nations (Psalm 72:17, see Genesis 12:3 and 22:17–18).

PSALMS 73–89

Book Three (chs. 73–89) also concludes with a poem reflecting on God's promise to David (ch. 89), but this time in light of the tragedy of Israel's exile. The poet remembers how God said he would never abandon the line of David. So how does that promise square with the fact of Jerusalem's destruction and the downfall of the line of David? The poem concludes (Psalm 89:49–51) by asking God to remember his covenant with David, and to forgive his people.

PSALMS 90–106

Book Four (chs. 90–106) is designed to respond to this crisis. In the opening poem we return to Israel's roots with a prayer of Moses (ch. 90), repeating what he did on Mt. Sinai after the golden calf incident by calling upon God to show mercy. The center of Book 4 is dominated by a group of prayers (chs. 93–99) that announce the Lord God of Israel as the true king of the world and all creation. The trees, mountains, and rivers are summoned to celebrate the future day when God will bring his healing justice and kingdom over all the world.

PSALMS 107–150

Book Five (chs. 107–145) opens with a series of poems (chs. 107–110) that affirm that God hears the cries of his people and will one day send the future king to defeat evil and bring about his kingdom. It also contains two larger collections called the "Hallel" (chs. 113–118) and the "Songs of Ascents" (chs. 120–136), both which conclude with poems about the hope of the messianic kingdom (chs. 118 and 132). Right between these collections is chapter 119, the longest poem in the book of Psalms. It is composed according to the order of the Hebrew alphabet and explores the wonder and beauty of the Torah as God's word to his people. Once again, we see the the themes from Psalms 1 and 2, the Torah and the messianic hope, combined here in Book Five.

This brings us all the way back to the the final, five-poem conclusion to the entire book of Psalms. In the center, Psalm 148 says that all creation is summoned to praise the God of Israel, because he has "raised up a horn for his people" (Psalm 148:14). This is a metaphor of a bull's horn raised in victory. The image echoes back to the same metaphor used in Hannah's song (see 1 Samuel 2:10) as well as earlier in Psalm 132:17. In all these poems, the "horn" is a symbol of the messianic king and his victory over evil—a fitting conclusion to this book.

There's one last thing about the book of Psalms that is easy to miss if you don't read it in order. While there are many different types of poems in these collections, they can all be sorted into two larger categories of either lament or praise. Poems of lament express the pain, confusion, and even anger of the poet about the horrible things happening around them or to them. They draw attention to what's wrong in the world and ask God to do something about it. There are a lot of these lament poems in the book, which shows that this is an appropriate response to the evil and tragedy we see in the world. Lamentation can play an important role in our journey of prayer.

While these lament poems make up much of Books One to Book Three, you can see that praise poems are occasionally woven in as well. These are poems of joy and celebration that draw attention to what's good in the world. They retell stories of what God has done in the lives of his people and they thank him for it. In Books Four and Five, praise poems outnumber the laments, culminating in the five-part hallelujah conclusion.

This shift from lament to praise is profound, and tells us something about the nature of prayer according to this new Torah. Hoping for the messianic kingdom as the book teaches us to do will create a lot of tension as we look out on the tragic state of our world, or our own lives. The Psalms teach us to neither ignore our pain nor to let it determine the meaning of our lives. Biblical faith and prayer is always forward looking, anticipating the day when God will fulfill his promises and praising him for this ahead of time. The Torah and Messiah, lament and praise, faith and hope, this is what the book of Psalms is all about.

PSALMS

Torah & Messiah | Lament & Praise | Faith & Hope

150 Hebrew Poems

- DAVID (73)
- ASAPH (12)
- SONS OF KORAH (11)
- HEMAN & ETHAN (2)
- SOLOMON & MOSES (3)
- ANONYMOUS (49)

MANY WRITTEN FOR CHOIR... (SEE 1 CHRONICLES 25 & NEHEMIAH 11:22-23)

...BUT NOT A HYMNBOOK — BOOK OF PSALMS

LAMENT

HOW LONG, O LORD?

- PRAYERS OF PAIN, CONFUSION, & ANGER
- DRAW ATTENTION TO WHAT'S WRONG IN THE WORLD
- ASK GOD TO DO SOMETHING

PRAISE

- PRAYERS OF JOY & CELEBRATION
- DRAW ATTENTION TO WHAT'S GOOD IN THE WORLD
- RETELL THE STORY & THANK GOD

GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD, FOR HE IS GOOD

LAMENT & PRAISE

BOOK 1 — 3-41

1 BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO MEDITATES ON THE TORAH (TEACHING — 5 BOOKS OF MOSES)

PSALMS = A NEW TORAH ABOUT PRAYER

2 POETIC REFLECTION ON 2 SAMUEL 7

MESSIANIC KING — EVIL

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO TAKE REFUGE IN THE KING

15 CALL TO COVENANT FAITHFULNESS

16-18 DAVID'S PAST DELIVERANCE AND ELEVATION AS KING

PSALM 19 TORAH

20-23 FUTURE KING'S DELIVERANCE AND KINGDOM OVER THE NATIONS

24 CALL TO COVENANT FAITHFULNESS

ZION — THE NATIONS

41:13

BOOK 2 — 42-72

42-43 HOPE FOR A FUTURE RETURN TO THE TEMPLE IN ZION

72 FUTURE REIGN OF THE MESSIANIC KING

ECHOES THE PROPHETS:
- ISAIAH 11, 45, & 60
- ZECHARIAH 9

FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM (PS 72:17 = GEN 12:3 & 22:17)

72:18-19

BOOK 3 — 73-89

89 ZION — PROMISE OF A MESSIANIC KINGDOM VERSUS EXILE & DOWNFALL OF DAVID'S KINGDOM

DON'T FORGET YOUR PROMISE

89:52

BOOK 4 — 90-106

90 MOSES — HAVE MERCY ON YOUR SERVANTS!

93-99 THE LORD REIGNS AS KING

"LET THE TREES CLAP, LET THE MOUNTAINS & RIVERS SING"

106:48

BOOK 5 — 107-145

107-110 THE MESSIANIC KING DEFEATS EVIL & BRINGS GOD'S KINGDOM

EVIL

113-118 THE HALLEL

118 MESSIANIC KINGDOM

SUSTAIN HOPE IN A FUTURE EXODUS WHEN GOD REDEEMS HIS PEOPLE

PSALM 119 TORAH

"GOD HAS RAISED UP A HORN FOR HIS PEOPLE" (118:11) = SEE 1 SAM 2:10 & PS 132:17

120-136 THE SONGS OF ASCENTS

132 MESSIANIC KINGDOM

HALLELU-YAH
146 HALLELU-YAH
147 HALLELU-YAH
148 HALLELU-YAH
149 HALLELU-YAH
150 HALLELU-YAH

HALLELU (PRAISE) + -YAH (YAHWEH)

PRAISE & LAMENT

PSALMS: THE PRAYERBOOK OF GOD'S PEOPLE WHO ARE STRIVING TO BE FAITHFUL TO THE TORAH, AND WAITING FOR THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM

MAY THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL BE BLESSED FOREVER, AMEN AND AMEN

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

The word "proverb" typically refers to a short, clever saying that offers wisdom in some way. While this book does contain many hundreds of proverbs, most of them are found in the center section of the book (chs. 10–29). In the outer frames of the book (chs. 1–9 and 30–31) are more elaborate poems all about wisdom. There is more to this book than meets the eye.

PROVERBS 1:1–9

The book of Proverbs has been designed with a short introduction in 1:1–9 that starts by linking the book to king Solomon, son of David. Remember the story in 1 Kings 3, in which Solomon asked God for wisdom to lead Israel well. God honored his request and Solomon became known as the wisest man and teacher in the ancient world. In 1 Kings 4:29–33, we're told that he wrote thousands of proverbs and poems, and that he collected knowledge about plants and animals. Solomon became the fountainhead of Israel's wisdom literature, a group of texts that explore what it looks like to live well in God's good world. Not all the material in this book is written by him personally, but Israel's wisdom tradition began with him.

The introduction goes on to say that by reading this book you will gain "wisdom." For most of us, this word simply means "knowledge." But the Hebrew word *khokhmah* means more than just mental activity. It refers primarily to practical knowledge, and would be better translated with the words "skill" or "applied knowledge." This is why artists and craftsmen in Israel were said to have *khokhmah*, that is, "skill" (see Exodus 31:3). The purpose, then, of this book is to help you develop a set of practical skills for living well in God's good world.

The introduction also links with another foundational idea in this book: "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10). The word "fear" is not about terror. Rather, it refers to a sense of reverence and awe before God, which makes clear your small place in the universe. It's a moral mindset that recognizes that "I am not God and don't get to make up what's right and wrong for myself." The fear of the Lord is a posture of humility before God, embracing his definition of good and evil even when it's difficult or inconvenient.

CHAPTERS 1–9

This introduction leads us into the first main section of the book (chs. 1–9), which doesn't contain any proverbs at all. Instead, we find ten speeches from a father to a son. The father tells the son that he should listen to wisdom and cultivate the fear of the Lord. This will require a life of virtue, integrity, and generosity, all of which will lead to success and peace. The father warns the son about folly and evil, about short-sighted, selfish decisions, and pride. All of these will lead to ruin and shame. Therefore, the son should make the pursuit of wisdom and the fear of the Lord his highest goals. This way of thinking forms the moral logic of the entire book.

These speeches clue us into what biblical wisdom literature is and how it's different from other parts of the Bible. While it does explore how to live well in God's world, wisdom is neither law nor prophecy. Rather, wisdom is the accumulated insight of God's people through the generations. It is all about how to live in a way that honors God and others. Through the book of Proverbs, these human words about wisdom have become God's word and wisdom to his people.

This connects to another key theme in chapters 1–9, the words of "Lady Wisdom." There are four poems where "wisdom" is personified as a woman, calling out to humanity to pay attention to her and to seek her out. Wisdom says that she is woven into the very fabric of the universe. Whenever people are making wise decisions, they're relying on her. Whenever someone is being generous, having sexual integrity, or upholding justice, they're drawing on wisdom. These Lady Wisdom poems are a creative, poetic way of exploring the idea that we live in a moral universe, and that goodness and justice are objective realities that we ignore at our own peril. To fear the Lord and live wisely is to live along with the grain of the universe.

Together, these twin sets of speeches from the father and Lady Wisdom make a powerful claim about the book of Proverbs. This book doesn't simply offer good advice. It is an invitation from God to learn human and divine wisdom from previous generations of God's people.

CHAPTERS 10–29

In chapters 10–29, we finally come to the collections of proverbs. Here are hundreds of ancient sayings that apply wisdom and the fear of the Lord to every life topic you can imagine including: family, work, community life, friendship, sex, marriage, money, anger, forgiveness, alcohol, and debt. These proverbs are short and easy to memorize. This section of the book is meant to become like a reference work to which you return time after time for the rest of your life.

This raises an important issue in reading this book; proverbs are, by nature, about probabilities. If a person fears the Lord and makes wise, moral choices, things will likely go well for them. If a person doesn't fear the Lord and acts foolish, their life will more likely turn out poorly. Both of these statements are often true, but not always. Therefore, proverbs are not promises or guaranteed formulas for success.

For example:

> "The fear of the Lord prolongs your life, but the years of the wicked are cut short" (Proverbs 10:27).

Or:

> "Train up a child in the way they should go, and when they're old, they won't turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

Fearing God and being moral is more likely to lead to a better, longer life. Raising your kids in a stable, loving home can set them up well for the rest of their lives. But there's no guarantee. Lots of things can and do go wrong in our world.

Proverbs by their nature focus on the general rule and not the numerous exceptions to that rule. The biblical wisdom books are not ignorant about this. In fact, these exceptions to the moral rule are what the books of Job and Ecclesiastes are all about. Life is too complex for formulas, which is why we need all these books of accumulated wisdom to get to the bigger picture.

CHAPTERS 30–31

This all leads to the final section of the book in chapters 30–31, where we find two large collections of poems. The first comes from a man named Agur, who begins by acknowledging his ignorance and folly as well as his great need for God's wisdom. He then discovers that divine wisdom has been given to him through the Scriptures. Agur is put before us as a model reader of proverbs and as someone who's always open to hearing God's wisdom.

The final chapter, 31, is connected to a man named Lemuel, a non-Israelite king who passes on the wisdom given to him by his mother. Most of this chapter is made up of guidance for being a wise and just leader, but the final poem is an acrostic or alphabet poem. Each line begins with a new letter from the Hebrew alphabet and tells the story of a "woman of noble character." This woman lives according to the wisdom of Proverbs and stands as a model of someone who takes God's wisdom and translates it into practical decisions in everyday life, at work, at home, in her family, and in her community.

The book of Proverbs opened with words from a father to a son about listening to Lady Wisdom (chs. 1–9), and it appropriately closes by offering the words from a mother to her son, about a woman who lives wisely (ch. 31).

This is a book for everyone, in every season of life. It's a reliable guide for learning to live wisely and well in God's good world.



WISEST MAN IN THE ANCIENT WORLD (SEE 1 KINGS 4:29-33)

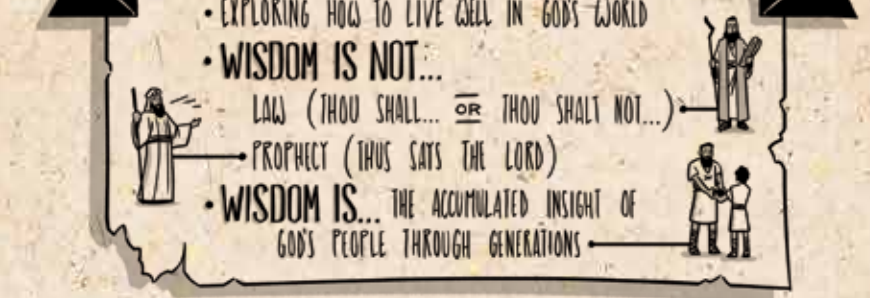


PROVERBS

— A GUIDE FOR LIVING WELL IN GOD'S WORLD —

BIBLICAL WISDOM LITERATURE

- EXPLORING HOW TO LIVE WELL IN GOD'S WORLD
- **WISDOM IS NOT...**
  - LAW (THOU SHALL... OR THOU SHALT NOT...)
  - PROPHECY (THUS SAYS THE LORD)
- **WISDOM IS...** THE ACCUMULATED INSIGHT OF GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH GENERATIONS



1-9 AN INTRODUCTION TO PROVERBS 1:1-9

PROVERBS OF **SOLOMON**

FOR GAINING **WISDOM**

HEBREW: KHOKHMAH

SKILL, APPLIED KNOWLEDGE (SEE EXODUS 31:1-3)



THE **FEAR** OF THE LORD
- REVERENCE & AWE
- A MORAL MINDSET
- HUMBLE ONESELF BEFORE GOD

TEN SPEECHES FROM A FATHER TO A SON



THE MORAL LOGIC OF PROVERBS

WISDOM & FEAR OF THE LORD	→ VIRTUE, INTEGRITY, AND GENEROSITY	→ SUCCESS & PEACE
FOLLY & EVIL	→ SELFISHNESS & PRIDE	→ RUIN & SHAME

APPLY WISDOM IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

FOUR POEMS OF LADY WISDOM

1:20-33 | 3:13-20 | CH 8 | CH 9



- A POETIC WAY OF CLAIMING THAT WE LIVE IN A MORAL UNIVERSE
- FEAR OF THE LORD & WISDOM = LIVING ALONG THE GRAIN OF THE UNIVERSE

PROVERBS ≠ GOOD ADVICE...
= GOD'S INVITATION TO LEARN WISDOM FROM PREVIOUS GENERATIONS

10-29 HUNDREDS OF ANCIENT PROVERBS

ALCOHOL
MARRIAGE
JUSTICE
SPEECH
CHARACTER
FAMILY
FRIENDSHIP
GENEROSITY
POVERTY
DEBT
WORK
FORGIVENESS



THE FEAR OF THE LORD PROLONGS YOUR LIFE, BUT THE YEARS OF THE WICKED ARE CUT SHORT (10:27)

TRAIN UP A CHILD IN THE WAY THEY SHOULD GO, AND WHEN THEY'RE OLD THEY WON'T TURN FROM IT (22:6)

PROVERBS = PROBABILITIES

FEAR OF GOD & WISDOM	NO FEAR OF GOD & FOOLISHNESS
↓	↓
THINGS WILL GO GREAT	THINGS WILL GO POORLY

PROVERBS ≠ PROMISES



PROVERBS FOCUS ON

THE GENERAL RULE NOT EXCEPTIONS



LIFE IS TOO COMPLEX FOR FORMULAS, WE NEED ALL THE WISDOM BOOKS TOGETHER

30 AGUR



31 LEMUEL



THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

This unique book within the Bible's wisdom literature opens with this line, "The words of *Qohelet*, son of David, king in Jerusalem." The Hebrew word *qohelet* means "one who gathers people together." In this case, the gathering is to listen and learn, and so the word is often translated as "teacher." This person is said to be a son, or descendant, of king David, but there are differing opinions on who this figure really is. Many have thought that it refers to king Solomon. Others look at later kings from David's line, and still others think that it's a later Israelite teacher who's adopted a "Solomon-like persona" as a teaching aid.

Whichever of these views is correct, the key thing to recognize is that the teacher is a character in the book and is different from the author of the book, who remains anonymous. While we do hear the voice of the teacher for most of the book, it's actually a different voice, that of the author, who first introduces us to the teacher and who concludes the book by summarizing and evaluating all that the teacher has said. This is someone who not only wants us to hear everything that the teacher has to say, but also wants to help us process it and to form our own conclusion.

VERSES 1:2 & 12:8

So, what exactly does the teacher have to say? The author summarizes the teacher's basic message at the beginning (Ecclesiastes 1:2) and the end (Ecclesiastes 12:8):"*hevel*, *hevel*, everything is utterly *hevel*." Most English Bibles translate this word, *hevel*, as "meaningless," but that doesn't quite capture the entire idea. In Hebrew, *hevel* literally refers to "vapor" or "smoke." The teacher uses this word thirty-eight times throughout the book as a metaphor to describe how life is temporary and fleeting, like a wisp of smoke, but also how life is an enigma or paradox. Smoke appears solid, but when you try to grab it, it's like nothing is there.

Here's what the teacher is getting at. There's so much goodness and beauty in the world, but just when you are enjoying it, tragedy strikes and it all seems to blow away. Most people believe in right and wrong and have a sense of justice, so why do bad things happen to good people all the time, despite our best intentions? Life is constantly unpredictable and unstable, or, in the teacher's description, like "chasing the wind."

"All is *hevel*." This is the teacher's basic motto and it is a total downer. Why is he saying all of this? The author's basic goal is to target all of the ways we try to build meaning and purpose in life apart from God, and then let the teacher deconstruct them. The author thinks that people spend most of their time investing energy and emotion in things that ultimately have no lasting meaning or significance. And so he allows the teacher to give us a reality check.

CHAPTERS 1:3–12:7

You can see this most clearly in the opening and closing poems, which focus on time (Ecclesiastes 1:3–11) and death (Ecclesiastes 11:7–12:7). The teacher says that if your whole focus is about working and achieving in order to bring meaning to your life, you need to stop and consider the march of time. For all the human effort that takes place in the world, nothing really changes. Sure, we develop technology and entire nations rise and fall, but go climb a mountain and see if it cares. That thing was there long before any of us, and it will remain there long after we're gone. A hundred years from now, no one will remember you or me or anything that we have done, but that mountain will still be there. And the ocean will still be breaking on the beach, and the sun will still rise and set. Time will eventually erase you, me, and all we care about.

If that's not disheartening enough, the teacher also can't stop talking about death throughout the entire book, especially in the poem near the end (Ecclesiastes 11:7–12:8). Death is the great equalizer. It renders meaningless most of our daily activities. No matter who you are, or what you've done, good or bad, everyone eventually dies. Death devours the wise and the foolish, the rich and poor. It's inescapable.

With these two ideas in hand, the teacher considers all the activities and false hopes in which we invest our lives in order to find meaning and significance: wealth, career, social status, or pleasure. However important these may seem, the march of time and our impending death reduce all of it to *hevel*. You think working hard in your career makes life worth it? Think of all the stress and the toll it takes on you, the anxiety, the sleepless nights. You're probably gonna be too old to enjoy the payoff by the time you earn it, and by then you have to pass it off to others who may or may not even care about your accomplishments. What about pleasure? Do you think that's what life is all about? Go for it, live for your vacations and the weekend parties. Monday always comes.

What does the teacher advocate, then? Should we all become pure hedonists, or relativists? No, because that's *hevel*, too. The teacher acknowledges the core ideas from Proverbs; living by wisdom and the fear of the Lord has real advantages. On the whole, life will probably go better for you if you live that way (see Ecclesiastes 7:11–12 and 9:13–18). The problem is that living by wisdom and the fear of God are also *hevel*, because they can't guarantee a good life. Good people can still die tragically, while horrible people can still live long and prosper. There are just too many exceptions, and so even wisdom is *hevel*. Once again, this doesn't mean that it's entirely meaningless. But it is an enigma, because it doesn't always work the way you think it should.

So what's the way forward in the midst of all this *hevel*? Paradoxically, the teacher discovers that the key to truly enjoying life is accepting *hevel*, acknowledging that everything in your life is totally out of your control. About six different times, at the bleakest moments in his dialogue, the teacher suddenly talks about "the gift of God," which is the enjoyment of the simple, good things in life such as friendship, family, a good meal, or a sunny day.

You and I can't control the most important things in our lives. Nothing is guaranteed, and strangely, that's the beauty of it. When I adopt a posture of complete trust in God, it frees me to simply enjoy life as I actually experience it, and not as I think it ought to be. In the end, even my expectations about life, my hopes and dreams, are all "*hevel*, *hevel*. Everything under the sun is *hevel*."

CHAPTER 12:9–14

The teacher's words come to an end and the author takes over, bringing the book to a close. He says that it is very important to hear what the teacher has to say. He likens the teacher's words to a shepherd's staff with a "goad," a pointy end that will hurt when it pokes you. But that pain can ultimately steer you in the right direction towards greater wisdom.

The author warns us to not take the teacher's words too far. You can spend your entire life buried in books trying to answer the existential puzzles of human life. Don't exhaust yourself, he says, you'll never get there. Instead, the author offers his own conclusion, that we should "fear God and keep his commands; this is the whole duty of humans, for God will bring every deed into judgment, every hidden thing, whether good or evil."

It's good to let the teacher challenge our false hopes and remind us that time and death make most of life totally out of our control. What gives life true meaning is the hope for God's judgment, that God will one day clear away all the *hevel* and bring true justice to our world. It's this hope that should fuel a life of honesty and integrity before God, even if we remain puzzled by life's mysteries. And strangely, it's the puzzle that can lead us to true peace.

That's the surprising wisdom of the book of Ecclesiastes.

ECCLESIASTES

1:1 THE WORDS OF QOHELET, SON OF DAVID, KING OF JERUSALEM

HEBREW: ONE WHO GATHERS PEOPLE

"TEACHER"

DIFFERENT VIEWS ON AUTHORSHIP

- KING SOLOMON?
- ANOTHER DESCENDANT OF DAVID?
- ISRAELITE TEACHER USING A SOLOMON-LIKE PERSONA

KEY POINT: THE TEACHER IS DIFFERENT THAN THE AUTHOR

ANONYMOUS → TEACHER

BEAUTY GOODNESS JUSTICE

"HEVEL, HEVEL, EVERYTHING IS UTTERLY HEVEL"

HEBREW: VAPOR, SMOKE → USED 38 TIMES

1. TEMPORARY, FLEETING
2. ENIGMA, PARADOX

THE AUTHOR'S BASIC GOAL

TO LET THE TEACHER DECONSTRUCT ALL THE WAYS WE FIND MEANING & PURPOSE APART FROM GOD



THE TEACHER (1:3-12:7)

1:1 INTRODUCTION TO THE TEACHER

1:2 1:3-11 TIME



TIME WILL EVENTUALLY ERASE YOU, ME, AND ALL WE CARE ABOUT

CAREER

STRESS AGE LEAVE IT BEHIND

PLEASURE

MONDAY ALWAYS COMES

- WEALTH
- CAREER
- STATUS
- PLEASURE

- WISDOM
- FEAR OF THE LORD (SEE 9:13-18)

HEVEL
NO GUARANTEES
ENIGMA

HOW DO YOU LIVE LIFE IN THE MIDST OF HEVEL?

ACCEPT THAT ALL OF LIFE IS OUT OF YOUR CONTROL

FRIENDSHIP FAMILY

THE GIFT OF GOD

GOOD MEAL SUNNY DAY

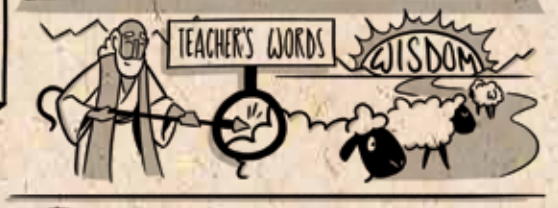
11:7-12:7 DEATH



THE GREAT EQUALIZER

12:8

12:9-14 CONCLUSION & EVALUATION OF THE TEACHER





THE CONCLUSION: FEAR GOD AND KEEP HIS COMMANDS - THIS IS THE WHOLE DUTY OF HUMANS: FOR GOD WILL BRING EVERY DEED INTO JUDGMENT, EVERY HIDDEN THING, WHETHER GOOD OR EVIL (12:13-14)

THE AUTHOR (1:1, 12:9-14)

THE BOOK OF SONG OF SONGS

Song of Songs is a well known but little understood book of the Bible made up of eight chapters of ancient Israelite love poetry. While there is an introduction and a conclusion, the book doesn't have a rigid literary design. It's a collection of poems that are not meant to be dissected, but read and enjoyed as a flowing whole.

The first line of the book declares that it's "the Song of Songs," a Hebrew idiom similar to "holy of holies" or "king of kings." It's a Hebrew way of saying something is "the greatest." This Song is the greatest song of all.

We're also told that this Song is "of Solomon," which could be taken to mean that he's the author. However, as we read the poems, we find that the main voice belongs to a woman called "the beloved." And while there is a male voice in the poems, it is not Solomon's. He is mentioned in the poems, but never as a speaker (Song of Songs 3:7–11 and 8:11–12). Besides, you have to admit that Solomon is an odd candidate for the author, given the fact that he had some 700 wives (see 1 Kings 11:1–3)! This contrasts the two lovers in the Song. They are the only ones for each other.

The "of Solomon" more likely means "in the wisdom tradition of Solomon." Solomon was known for his wisdom and poetry, as well as his love of learning about every part of life (see 1 Kings 4:29–34). He became known as the father of wisdom literature in Israel, and here his legacy is carried on through a collection of poems that explore the human experience of love and sexual desire.

CHAPTER 1:2–7

The opening poem (Song of Songs 1:2–7) introduces the basic theme of the book. We hear the voice of a young woman who delights in her man, who is a shepherd. She's not yet married to him, but it becomes clear that they're engaged and can't wait to be together. From there, the poems flow back and forth between the woman's voice and the man's, shifting from scene to scene without any linear sequence or clear storyline. The poems instead move in symphonic cycles, where key images and themes get repeated and developed.

One of the basic themes uniting the poems is the intense desire the couple has for each other, expressed through their constant "seeking" and "finding." After the opening poem, they're separated but on the hunt for each other. The woman calls out, waking from a dream, and goes looking for her lover more than once (Song of Songs 2:3–6, 3:4, and 8:1–3). When they end up finding each other they embrace, and right when things get a bit racy, the scene suddenly ends and a new one begins with them separated once again.

Another repeated theme is the joy of their physical attraction to each other. At multiple points they pause to describe each other with elaborate metaphors (Song of Songs 4:1–5, 5:10–16, 6:4–7, and 7:1–5). It's helpful here to know that images and metaphors in Hebrew poetry are not primarily visual. If you try to paint a picture based on the metaphors, you end up with something that looks pretty crazy! What you're supposed to do instead is reflect on the meaning of the images as they relate to the man and woman.

CHAPTER 8:6–14

As you read through these poetic cycles, the tension builds on their desire, joy, and attraction for each other. The spiraling repetition becomes a poetic way of heightening and focusing on the mystery and power of sexual love. It all comes together in the conclusion, which pauses to summarize what these poems are all about:

> "Love is as strong as death,
> its passions are as severe as the grave,
> its flashes are of fire,
> a divine flame.
> Many waters cannot extinguish love,
> rivers cannot sweep it away.
> If one were to give all the wealth of one's house for love,
> he would be utterly scorned."
>
> (Song of Songs 8:6–7)

The poem highlights the power and intensity of love. It's beautiful, consuming, and dangerous. Like fire, it can destroy people if abused, but it can be life-giving if protected and nurtured. Ultimately, love expresses the insatiable human longing to know and be fully known and desired by another. Love is one of the most transcendent and mysterious experiences in human life and, as part of the Bible's wisdom tradition, this book says that it's a gift of God.

After this, we suddenly find an odd poem (Song of Songs 8:10–12) about Solomon trying to do what the previous poem said was impossible, to buy love. The woman roundly rejects Solomon's offer, and the book concludes with the characters of the man and woman separated once more and back on the hunt for each other. He calls to hear her voice (Song of Songs 8:13), and she begs him to run away with her (Song of Songs 8:14). And that's how the book finishes...open-ended. It's a lot like true love, which never really concludes because there's always more to discover and pursue in your beloved. Just as true love has no end, neither does this book.

Now, throughout history, the big question raised by the Song of Songs is, "What on earth is love poetry doing in the Bible?" There have been three main interpretations of the book through history. In Jewish tradition, it was read as an allegory, with each character acting as a symbol: the woman is Israel, the man is God, and their love is a symbol of the covenant between them and the giving of the Torah. This view flowed into Christian tradition, but the characters were swapped, it's about Christ's love for his people and the church.

This interpretation was inspired by Paul's words in Ephesians 5:25–33, that a Christian husband's love for his wife is a symbol of Christ's love for the church. However, in the last century, archaeological discoveries among Israel's ancient neighbors in Egypt and Babylon have turned up all kinds of ancient love poetry, and it's full of imagery and language very similar to the Song. In other words, love poetry was a meaningful part of Israel's cultural environment. It should not surprise us to find it in the wisdom literature of the Bible. This has led most scholars today to view the Song as what it presents itself to be, a collection of Israelite love poetry reflecting on the divine gift of love.

However, that doesn't mean it's only ancient love poetry. There's a key feature to these poems that sticks out when they're read as part of the Hebrew Bible, and that's the overwhelming use of garden imagery. There are powerful echoes of the garden of Eden and the idyllic scene of the first married couple in Genesis 1–2. The images of the man and woman naked and vulnerable, yet unified and completely safe with each other (see Genesis 2:23–25), resonate in the background of the Song. It's as if, through these poems, we're witnessing the love of a couple whose relationship is untainted by selfishness and sin.

So, the Song holds out hope. Even though our relationships are often distorted by selfishness, love is a transcendent gift that's meant to point us to something greater, to the gift of God's love that will one day permeate and transform his beloved world.

This beautiful hope is what the "Greatest of All Songs" is about.

the Song of Songs

1:1 "THE SONG OF SONGS, WHICH IS OF SOLOMON..."

HEBREW IDIOM: "HOLY OF HOLIES" "KING OF KINGS" THE GREATEST SONG

AUTHOR?

MAYBE

- ☑ HIS NAME BEGINS THE BOOK.

MAYBE NOT

- ☑ MAIN VOICE IS A WOMAN.
- ☑ MAN'S VOICE ISN'T SOLOMON.
- ☑ SOLOMON'S MENTIONED, BUT NEVER SPEAKS.
- ☑ SOLOMON HAD 700+ WIVES! (SEE 2 KINGS 11:1-3!!!)

"OF SOLOMON" = IN THE WISDOM TRADITION OF SOLOMON

SOLOMON WAS KNOWN FOR WISDOM, POETRY, AND A LOVE OF LEARNING. (SEE 1 KINGS 4:29-34)

POEMS THAT EXPLORE *Love* AND DESIRE

1:2-7 INTRODUCTION

LET HIM KISS ME! (1:2)

COME FIND ME. (1:8)

TAKE ME AWAY WITH YOU! (1:4)

FINDING, EMBRACING

SEPARATE, SEEKING

THEME ONE: INTENSE DESIRE: SEEKING AND FINDING

2:3-6

3:1

4:1-5

5:10-16

8:1-3

THEME TWO: THE JOY OF PHYSICAL ATTRACTION

6:1-7

7:1-5

YOUR EYES ARE LIKE DOVES...
YOUR HAIR, LIKE A FLOCK OF GOATS...
YOUR TEETH, LIKE LAMBS...
YOUR NECK IS A TOWER...
YOUR LIPS DRIP HONEY...

REMEMBER: HEBREW METAPHORS ARE NOT PRIMARILY VISUAL!

8:6-14 CONCLUSION

LOVE

...IS AS STRONG AS DEATH,
ITS PASSIONS ARE AS SEVERE AS THE GRAVE.
ITS FLASHES ARE OF FIRE, A DIVINE FLAME.
MANY WATERS CANNOT EXTINGUISH LOVE,
RIVERS CANNOT SWEEP IT AWAY.
IF ONE WERE TO GIVE ALL THE WEALTH
OF ONE'S HOUSE FOR LOVE,
HE WOULD BE UTTERLY SCORNED. (8:6-7)

- THE POWER AND INTENSITY of LOVE (BEAUTIFUL & LIFEGIVING ... OR ... DANGEROUS & DESTRUCTIVE)
- THE HUMAN LONGING TO KNOW AND BE KNOWN
- TRANSCENDENT, MYSTERIOUS, AND A GIFT FROM GOD

8:10-12

8:13-14

LET ME HEAR YOUR VOICE!

RUN AWAY WITH ME!

(OPEN)ENDING

...A LOT LIKE LOVE...

WHAT IS LOVE POETRY DOING IN THE BIBLE?

THREE MAIN INTERPRETATIONS THROUGH HISTORY:

1. **JEWISH TRADITION**
   AN ALLEGORY OF ISRAEL AND GOD

2. **CHRISTIAN TRADITION**
   AN ALLEGORY OF THE CHURCH AND CHRIST (SEE EPHESIANS 5:25-33)

* THE DISCOVERY OF ANCIENT EGYPTIAN AND BABYLONIAN LOVE POETRY, PART OF ISRAEL'S CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

3. **COLLECTION OF ANCIENT POETRY**
   THAT REFLECTS ON THE DIVINE GIFT OF LOVE

A KEY FEATURE

GARDEN IMAGERY ECHOES *the Garden of Eden* (GENESIS 1-2)

MAN AND WOMAN NAKED AND VULNERABLE, YET UNIFIED AND SAFE

VISION OF A RELATIONSHIP UNTAINTED BY SIN

THE SONG HOLDS OUT HOPE...

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET ISAIAH

Isaiah lived in Jerusalem during the latter half of Israel's kingdom period and spoke to the leaders of Jerusalem and Judah on God's behalf. Isaiah brought with him a warning about God's judgment, telling Israel's corrupt leaders that their rebellion against the covenant with God would come at a cost. Isaiah also said that God would use the great empires of Assyria and later Babylon to judge Jerusalem if they persisted in idolatry and oppression of the poor.

However, that dire announcement was also combined with a message of hope, as Isaiah believed deeply that God would one day fulfill all his covenant promises. He trusted that God would send a king from David's line to establish his kingdom on earth (see 2 Samuel 7, Psalms 2 and 72) and lead Israel in obedience to the laws of the covenant made at Mt. Sinai (see Exodus 19). This was how God's blessing and salvation would flow outward to all nations, just as God promised to Abraham (see Genesis 12). It's this messianic hope that compelled Isaiah to speak out against the corruption and idolatry of Israel and its leaders.

The book has a complex literary design, but there is one simple way to see how it all fits together. Chapters 1–39 contain three large sections that develop Isaiah's warning of judgment on Israel, culminating in an event pointed to at the end of chapter 39, the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of its people to Babylon. But chapters 1–39 also present a message of hope, that after the exile, God's covenant promises would be fulfilled. Chapters 40–66 pick up that promise and develop it further.

CHAPTERS 1–12

The first twelve chapters of the book focus on Isaiah's vision of judgment and hope for Jerusalem. It all begins as Isaiah accuses the city's leaders of covenant rebellion, idolatry, and injustice, especially towards the poor. God will judge the city by sending other nations to conquer Israel. Isaiah says this will be like a purifying fire that burns away all that is worthless among his people. But this fire doesn't only destroy, it will also create a new Jerusalem populated by a remnant of Israel that has repented and turned back to God. Isaiah goes on to say that through these events God's kingdom will come and all nations will gather at the temple in Jerusalem to learn of God's justice. This will bring about an age of universal peace and harmony. Now, this basic storyline of the old Jerusalem changing over to the new will get repeated over and over throughout the book and will get filled in with increasing detail.

At the center of this section, in chapter 6, is Isaiah's grand vision of God sitting on his throne in the temple. He's surrounded by heavenly creatures, all shouting that God is "holy, holy, holy." Isaiah suddenly realizes just how corrupt he and his people are, and he's certain that he'll be destroyed by God's holiness. Instead, God's holiness, in the form of a burning coal, comes and burns Isaiah, not to destroy him, but rather to purify him of his sin.

As Isaiah ponders this strange experience, God commissions him with a difficult task. Isaiah is to continue announcing the coming judgment, but since Israel has already reached a point of no return, his warnings will have the paradoxical effect of hardening their hearts. However, Isaiah is to trust in God's plan—Israel will undergo its own purification like Isaiah. It will be chopped down like a tree, with its stump scorched and burned, but God says that this smoldering stump is a "holy seed" that will survive on into the future. It's a small sign of hope, but who or what is the holy seed?

The rest of this section offers up an answer. Isaiah confronts Ahaz, a descendant of David and king of Jerusalem, and announces his downfall. God says that the great empire of Assyria will chop Israel down and devastate the land, but there's hope! Because of God's promise to David, he will send a new king named "Immanuel," or "God with us" (ch. 7). Immanuel's kingdom will free God's people from violent, oppressive empires. Then Isaiah goes on to describe this coming king as a small shoot of new growth emerging from the old stump of David's family, the holy seed. This king will be empowered by God's Spirit to rule over a new Jerusalem and bring forth justice for the poor; all nations will look to this messianic king for guidance, and his kingdom will transform all creation, bringing peace.

Now, as you finish these chapters you come away with a pretty good understanding of Isaiah's message of judgment and hope. But Isaiah saw another empire rising up after Assyria. That's Babylon, who would also attack Jerusalem and succeed in destroying it.

CHAPTERS 13–27

This brings us to the next sections of the book, first opening with a large collection of poems in chapters 13–27 that explore God's judgment and hope for the nations. It is in these poems that we learn about the coming fall of Babylon and other nations around Israel. Isaiah could see that Assyria's world power would one day be replaced by the empire of Babylon, a nation that was even more destructive and arrogant. Babylon's kings would claim that they were higher than all other gods, and so God vows to bring Babylon down. Isaiah continues down a list of Israel's neighbors—Philistia in chapter 14, Moab in 15–16, Damascus in 17, Egypt and Cush in 18–20, and Tyre in 23—accusing them all of the same kind of pride and injustice, predicting their ultimate ruin.

Remember, however, that for Isaiah, divine judgment isn't the final word for either Israel or these other nations. This idea leads into the next section with a series of poems that tell a tale of two cities, starting off by describing the "lofty city" that's exalted itself over God and has become corrupt and unjust. It's a poetic archetype of rebellious humanity and is described with language borrowed from Isaiah's earlier depictions of Jerusalem, Assyria, and Babylon, all blended together. This city is destined for ruin, and will one day be replaced by the new Jerusalem, where God's kingdom reigns over a redeemed humanity from among all nations and where there's no more death or suffering. These chapters are the climax of this entire section, showing how Isaiah's message pointed far beyond his own day. His was a message for everyone who waits for God to judge violent, oppressive kingdoms and establish his universal kingdom of justice and healing love.

CHAPTERS 28–39

Chapters 28–39 return the focus to the rise and fall of Jerusalem. We first read poems where Isaiah rebukes Jerusalem's leaders for turning to Egypt for military protection against Assyria. He knows that their plan will backfire, and tells the leaders that only trust in their God and repentance can save Israel now.

This is illustrated well in the following story of the rise of king Hezekiah in chapters 36–38. Just as Isaiah had predicted, the Assyrian armies attack the city. Hezekiah humbles himself before God and prays for divine deliverance, and the city is miraculously saved overnight. Hezekiah's initial rise and success, however, is immediately followed by his fall. He attempts to make another political alliance for protection and hosts a delegation from Babylon. Hezekiah tries to impress the Babylonians by showing off everything in Jerusalem's treasury and palaces. Isaiah hears about this and confronts Hezekiah's foolishness, predicting that this "ally" will one day betray him and return as an enemy to conquer Jerusalem. As we know from 2 Kings 24–25, Isaiah was right. Over one hundred years later, Babylon turned on Jerusalem, destroyed the city and its temple, and carried away Israelites into exile in Babylon.

All of Isaiah's warnings of divine judgment lead up to this very moment, and Isaiah was shown to be a true prophet. It all came to pass, just like he said it would. Remember, though, that the purpose of God's judgment was to purify Jerusalem and bring forth the holy seed and the messianic kingdom over all the nations. It's this hope that gets explored in the book's second half.

Turn the page to keep reading about the book of Isaiah.

ISAIAH

ISAIAH'S MESSAGE:

JUDGMENT! ISRAEL'S REBELLION WILL COME AT A COST

BABYLON · ASSYRIA · JERUSALEM

HOPE! THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S COVENANT PROMISES

- FUTURE KING FROM THE LINE OF DAVID (2 SAMUEL 7)
- ISRAEL'S OBEDIENCE TO THE COVENANT (EXODUS 19)
- GOD'S BLESSING TO THE NATIONS (GENESIS 12)

Suffering Servant-King · *Covenant Family of All Nations* · *Hope for a Renewed Creation*

*** WHOSE VOICE ARE WE HEARING IN CHAPTERS 40-66?**
(THE PERSPECTIVE IS FROM **AFTER** EXILE — SEE EZRA-NEHEMIAH)

A. THE VOICE of ISAIAH TRANSPORTED INTO THE FUTURE
720's B.C. · EXILE · 530's B.C.

B. THE VOICE of ISAIAH **AND** HIS PROPHETIC DISCIPLES
(SEE 8:16, 29:10-12, 30:8-9)
720's B.C. · "DISCIPLES" (8:16) · HOPE & JUDGMENT (1-39) · 530's B.C.

1-12 JUDGMENT & HOPE FOR JERUSALEM

1-2 — PURIFYING FIRE

OLD JERUSALEM — REBELLION, IDOLATRY & INJUSTICE

NEW JERUSALEM — JUSTICE & PEACE FOR ALL NATIONS

6 ISAIAH'S TEMPLE VISION — HOLY! HOLY! HOLY!

I'M DONE FOR!!

NO, YOU'RE *PURIFIED!* NOW GO...

ASSYRIA & BABYLON

ISRAEL

A HOLY SEED?

7-12 — AHAZ (BAD KING)

7 "IMMANUEL" = GOD WITH US

9 FREEDOM FROM OPPRESSION

11 A NEW "BRANCH" FROM THE STUMP OF DAVID'S FAMILY

EMPOWERED BY GOD'S SPIRIT

YOU'RE GOING DOWN! GOD WILL RAISE UP A **NEW** KING.

NEW JERUSALEM · ALL NATIONS

13-27 JUDGMENT & HOPE FOR THE NATIONS

13-23 FALL OF BABYLON & ISRAEL'S NEIGHBORS

I WILL ASCEND TO HEAVEN ... AND MAKE MYSELF LIKE THE MOST HIGH GOD! (14:13-15)

BUT YOU'LL BE BROUGHT DOWN TO THE GRAVE! (14:15)

BABYLON · PHILISTIA · MOAB · DAMASCUS · EGYPT · TYRE · ASSYRIA

24-27 A TALE OF TWO CITIES

- ARCHETYPE OF REBELLIOUS HUMANITY
- DESCRIBED WITH IMAGES FROM CHAPTERS 4-23

THE LOFTY CITY — DESTINED FOR RUIN...

GOD'S KINGDOM OVER ALL NATIONS!

NO MORE SUFFERING OR DEATH!

THE NEW JERUSALEM

28-39 THE RISE & FALL OF JERUSALEM

28-35 ACCUSATION OF JERUSALEM'S LEADERS

ALLIANCE WITH EGYPT

NO! YOU'LL BE SAVED BY REPENTANCE & TRUST!!

DELIVER US FROM THE ASSYRIANS, O LORD!

36-38 HEZEKIAH'S RISE

MIRACULOUSLY SAVED!

ANGEL ARMY

39 HEZEKIAH'S FALL

NEW! NEW! NEW!

NO! BABYLON WILL BETRAY & DESTROY JERUSALEM!

BABYLON ATTACKS! (SEE 2 KINGS 24-25)

SURE ENOUGH, 100+ YEARS LATER...

EXILE!

40-48 ANNOUNCEMENT OF HOPE

40 "COMFORT, COMFORT MY PEOPLE!"
- EXILE IS OVER!
- ISRAEL CAN RETURN HOME
- GOD'S KINGDOM IS COMING

41-17 THE TRIAL

THE ACCUSATION: GOD HAS IGNORED US & OUR TROUBLE! (40:27) · MAYBE THE LORD *ISN'T* THE MOST POWERFUL GOD...

GOD'S RESPONSE: 1) EXILE WAS JUDGMENT, NOT NEGLECT · 2) FOR ISRAEL'S SAKE, GOD RAISED UP PERSIA TO CONQUER BABYLON (44:28)

THE RIGHT CONCLUSION: ISRAEL'S GOD IS THE TRUE KING OF HISTORY! · GOD'S SERVANT TO THE NATIONS (42)

BUT ... ISRAEL IS STILL REBELLIOUS 48

GOD'S GOING TO DO A NEW THING!

49-55 THE SERVANT FULFILLS GOD'S MISSION

49 GOD'S SERVANT ... IS REJECTED & KILLED (50:4-9, 52:13-53:12) ... BUT LIVES AGAIN (53:10-12)

YOU ARE NOW "ISRAEL."

GOOD NEWS! GOD'S KINGDOM!

THE MISSION:
1. TO RESTORE ISRAEL
2. TO BE A LIGHT TO THE NATIONS

SERVANT'S DEATH = A SACRIFICE FOR SIN

I DECLARE YOU ARE RIGHT WITH GOD!

51-55 2 Ways to Respond:
- "THE WICKED" RESIST & REJECT THE SERVANT
- "THE SERVANTS" (aka "THE SEED") ARE HUMBLE & REPENT

56-66 THE SERVANTS INHERIT GOD'S KINGDOM

THE WICKED:
- FACE GOD'S JUSTICE
- REMOVED FROM THE CITY

THE NEW JERUSALEM

FORGIVE US, O LORD!

MAY YOUR KINGDOM COME!

THE SERVANTS: INHERIT THE NEW CREATION

59 PRAYER OF REPENTANCE

60-62 SERVANT ANNOUNCES GOD'S KINGDOM

PRAYER OF REPENTANCE 63-64

56b-58 CONTRAST BETWEEN THE WICKED & THE SERVANTS 65-66a

56a ALL NATIONS INVITED TO JOIN GOD'S COVENANT FAMILY 66b

ISAIAH

HOPE
The fulfillment of God's Covenant Promises
- The future king from David's line (2 Samuel 7)
- Israel's obedience to the covenant (Exodus 19)
- God's blessing to the nations (Genesis 12)

ISAIAH'S MESSAGE (prophetic swap)



JUDGMENT
Israel's rebellion will come at a cost



Suffering Servant-King

Covenant Family of all Nations

Hope for a renewed creation

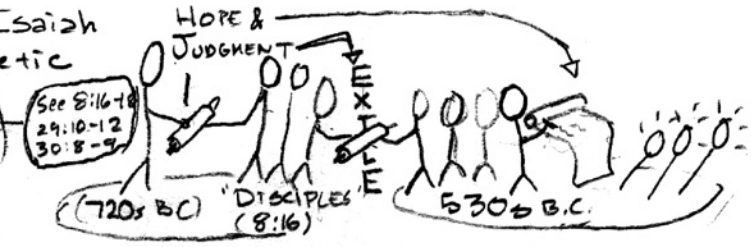
Whose Voice are we hearing in Chs. 40–66?

- THE Perspective is from after the EXILE (see Ezra-Nehemiah)

1. The voice of Isaiah transported into the future

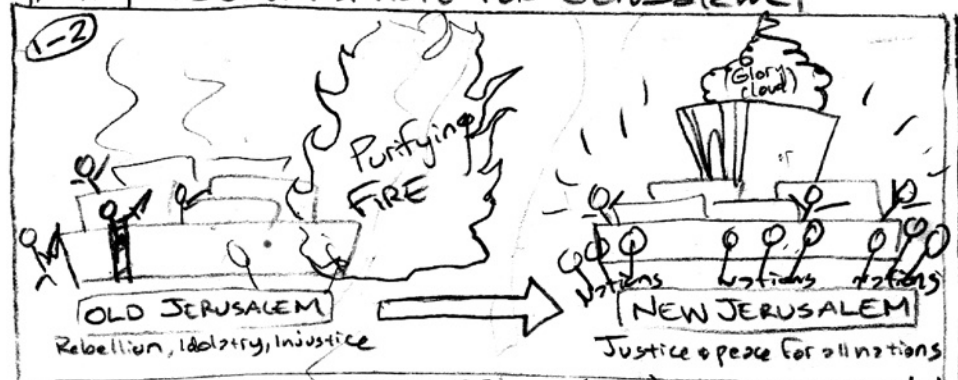


2. The voice of Isaiah and his prophetic disciples.



1–12 JUDGMENT & HOPE FOR JERUSALEM

1–2



6 ISAIAH'S TEMPLE VISION



7–12



13–27 Judgment & hope for the nations

13–23 Fall of Babylon & Israel's neighbors

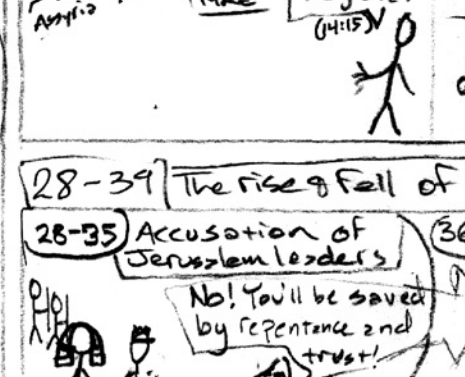


24–27 A TALE OF TWO CITIES



28–39 The rise & fall of Jerusalem

28–35 Accusation of Jerusalem leaders



36–39 Hezekiah's Rise



39 Hezekiah's Fall



EXILE

40–48 ANNOUNCEMENT OF HOPE

40

41–47 THE TRIAL



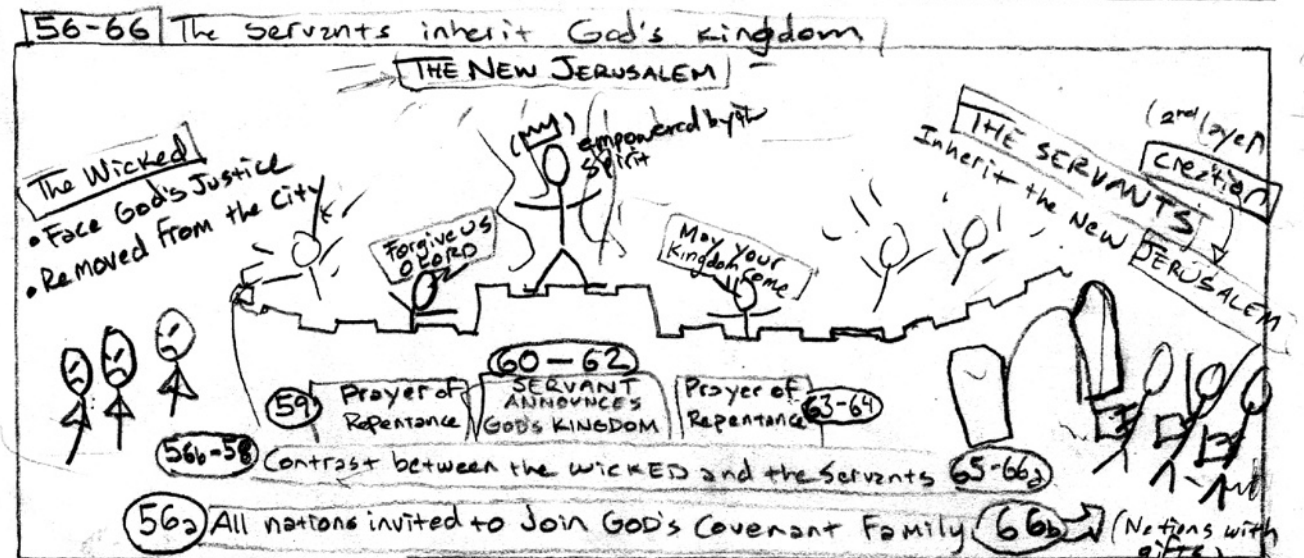
48 Israel is still rebellious

49–55 THE SERVANT FULFILLS GOD'S MISSION

49 God's SERVANT ... Is Rejected and Killed ... But Lives again (53:10-12) (50:4-9, 52:13-53:12)



56–66 The servants inherit God's kingdom



Isaiah chapter 40 opens up the book's second half which explores the future fulfillment of God's covenant promises after the exile.

CHAPTERS 40–48

The first main section, chapters 40–48, opens with an announcement of hope and comfort for Israel. The people are told that the Babylonian exile is over. Israel's sin has been dealt with, and a new era is beginning. They should return home, where God himself will bring his kingdom to Jerusalem and allow all nations to see his glory.

Now, a question most readers ask at this point is, "Who's saying all this? Whose voice are we hearing with these words of hope?" The perspective of the author of these chapters is someone living after the exile, during the time period described in the book of Ezra-Nehemiah. But Isaiah died over 150 years before any of that. What exactly are we to make of this? Many think that these chapters were composed by Isaiah himself, but that he had been prophetically transported nearly 200 years into the future, to speak to later generations as if the exile has already passed.

However, the book of Isaiah itself offers us clues that something else is probably going on. In chapters 8, 29, and 30, we are told that after Isaiah was rejected by Israel's leaders, he wrote and sealed in a scroll his message of judgment and hope, passing it on to his "disciples" (Isaiah 8:16) "as a witness for days to come" (Isaiah 30:8). Isaiah eventually died, waiting for God to vindicate his words. Chapters 1–39 were designed to show us that Isaiah's predictions of judgment were fulfilled in the Babylonian exile, proving him to be a true prophet. So, after the exile was over, Isaiah's disciples, who had long treasured his words, opened up the scroll and began developing his message about the future hope of God's salvation. According to this view, the book of Isaiah consists of both the original collection of Isaiah's words, as well as the writings of his later disciples who God used to extend Isaiah's message of hope to future generations.

Whichever view you take, everyone agrees that these chapters announce that the day of future hope has come and that God is fulfilling his prophetic promises. The prophet expresses his hopes that Israel will respond by becoming God's "servant" after experiencing his justice and mercy, going on to share with the other nations what God is truly like.

Unfortunately, that's not what happens. Israel, instead of bearing witness to all nations, starts complaining and accusing God: "The Lord doesn't pay attention to our trouble, he ignores our cause" (Isaiah 40:27). The Babylonian exile has caused Israel to lose faith in their God; they start to think that maybe he's not all that powerful. Maybe the gods of Babylon are greater.

Chapters 41–47 are set up like a trial scene as God responds to these doubts and accusations with the following arguments. First of all, the exile into Babylon was not divine neglect, but a divinely orchestrated judgment for Israel's sin. Secondly, it was for the sake of Israel's return home that God raised up Persia to conquer Babylon and to fulfill Isaiah's prophetic word (Isaiah 13:17). The right conclusion that Israel should draw is that their God is the king of history, not their idols. In the fall of Babylon and the rise of the Persian king Cyrus, Israel should see God's hand at work and become his servant who will bear witness to the other nations. However, at the end of the trial in chapter 48, we find that Israel is still just as rebellious and hardhearted as their ancestors, disqualifying themselves from being God's servant to the nations. God still has a mission to bless all the nations, however, so the prophet says that God will do a "new thing" to solve this problem.

CHAPTERS 49–55

In chapters 49–55, we are introduced to a new figure called God's "servant," who will fulfill God's mission and do what Israel has failed to do. God gives this servant the title "Israel," and sends him on a dual mission to restore the people of Israel back to their God, and to become God's "light to the nations." We're told that this servant is empowered by God's Spirit (Isaiah 42:1 and 48:16) to announce the good news and bring God's kingdom over all nations, just like Isaiah's messianic king in chapters 9 and 11.

We continue on to learn how this servant will bring about God's kingdom by being rejected, beaten, and ultimately killed by his own people (Isaiah 49:7, 50:4–9, and 53). In reality, he's going to be accused and sentenced to death on behalf of the sins of his people—his death will be a sacrifice of atonement for the people's evil and rebellion. The servant does die, but then suddenly comes back to life (Isaiah 53:10–12). We're told that by his sacrificial death, he provided a way to make people "righteous," that is, to put them back into a right relationship with God.

The section concludes by describing two different ways that people will respond to God's servant. Some will respond with humility, turn from their sins, and accept what the servant did on their behalf. These people are also called "servants" or "the seed," calling back to the "holy seed" from chapter 6. These people are the ones who will experience the blessing of the messianic kingdom (ch. 55). Others, however, will reject both the servant and his servants and are simply called "the wicked."

CHAPTERS 56–66

We come now to the final section of this book with chapters 56–66, in which the "servants," who follow "the servant," inherit God's kingdom. These chapters are artistically designed as a symmetry that brings together all the themes in the book. At the center are three beautiful poems that describe how the Spirit-empowered servant announces the good news of God's kingdom to the poor by reaffirming all the promises of hope from earlier in the book. The new Jerusalem, inhabited by God's servants, will be the place from which God's justice and mercy flow out into the world. Surrounding these poems are two long prayers of repentance (chs. 59 and 63–64). The servants confess Israel's sin and grieve over all the evil that they see in the world around them, asking for God's kingdom to come here on earth as it is in heaven.

On either side of these prayers are other collections of poems (chs. 56b–58 and 65–66a) that contrast the destiny of the servants with that of the wicked who persecute them. God will bring his justice down upon those who pollute his good world with evil through selfishness and idolatry, removing them from his city forever. The servants who are humble and repent will instead inherit the new Jerusalem—an image of the renewed creation, where death and suffering are gone forever. Finally, this brings us to the outer frame (chs. 56a and 66b). In the renewed world of God's kingdom, people from all nations are invited to join the servants in God's covenant family, so that they, too, can know their Creator and Redeemer.

The book of Isaiah comes to an end with a grand vision of the fulfillment of all God's covenant promises. Through the suffering servant king, God creates a covenant family with all nations, who are awaiting the hope of a renewed creation and the coming of God's kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven.

This is the powerful hope of the book of Isaiah.

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

Jeremiah was an Israelite priest who lived and worked in Jerusalem during the final decades of the kingdom of southern Judah. He was called as a prophet to warn Israel of the severe consequences of breaking their covenant with God through idolatry and injustice. He predicted that the empire of Babylon would come to destroy Jerusalem and carry them into exile. And sadly, his words became reality. He lived through the siege and destruction of the city and witnessed the exile take place (see 2 Kings 24–25).

This book came into existence in a really interesting way. Chapter 36 tells us that after twenty years of preaching in Jerusalem, Jeremiah sensed God prompting him to collect all his sermons, poems, and essays and commit them to writing. He did just that by employing a scribe named Baruch, who wrote down and compiled all the material into a scroll. Baruch also gathered lots of stories about Jeremiah, and linked all the pieces together. This is why the book reads like an anthology, or a collection of collections that have all been arranged to present this prophet as a messenger of God's justice and grace.

CHAPTERS 1–25

The book begins with God calling Jeremiah to be a prophet and giving him a dual vocation. He was to be a prophet to Israel and the nations, and his words would "uproot and tear down, and also plant and build up" (Jeremiah 1:10). In other words, Jeremiah will accuse Israel and warn them of God's coming judgment, but he will also give a message of hope for the future. This introduction perfectly summarizes the first large section, chapters 1–24, consisting of a collection of Jeremiah's writings from before the exile.

The core idea here is that Israel has broken their covenant with God and violated all the terms of the agreement in a number of ways. They've adopted the worship of all kinds of Canaanite gods and built idol shrines all over the land. Jeremiah uses a metaphor of idolatry as adultery, and uses the language of prostitution, promiscuity, and unfaithfulness to describe how Israel has given their allegiance to other gods. Jeremiah also repeatedly accuses Israel's corrupt leaders. Their priests, kings, and prophets have all abandoned the Torah and the covenant, leading to the tragic consequence of rampant social injustice. The most vulnerable in their communities, the widows, orphans, and immigrants, are being taken advantage of in clear violation of the laws in the Torah. And Israel's leaders don't even care.

A classic place where all these themes come together is in chapter 7, called Jeremiah's temple sermon. Israelites are coming to worship their God in the Jerusalem temple as if everything is fine. Outside the temple, however, they are worshiping other gods, even adopting the horrifying Canaanite practice of child sacrifice. So Jeremiah makes this very unpopular announcement—the God of Israel is coming in judgment, to destroy his own temple and punish Israel by sending an "enemy from the north." This is an army that God would allow to conquer Jerusalem, known as the great empire of Babylon.

This leads up to the turning point in chapter 25. Israel has still not turned back to their God, so in the first year of Babylon's new king, Nebuchadnezzar, God tells Jeremiah to announce that their armies were coming to conquer and take Israel into exile for seventy years. He compares Babylon to a cup of wine, filled with God's righteous anger at all Israel's injustice and idolatry, and says that he will make Israel and the surrounding nations drink from that cup. This chapter is the key to the book's design, as everything that follows will focus on Babylon's coming attacks, first on Israel (chs. 26–45) and then on the other nations (chs. 46–51).

CHAPTERS 26–45

The section about Israel begins with stories about Jeremiah calling the people to repent (chs. 26–29). He warned them right up to the last minute, despite the constant rejection of Israel's leaders. This section concludes with stories about Jerusalem's siege and eventual destruction, as well as stories of how Jeremiah was persecuted and later kidnapped and taken against his will to Egypt with a group of Israelite rebels (chs. 34–45).

Now, right here in between these dark stories of disaster and judgment is a collection of Jeremiah's messages of hope for Israel's future (chs. 30–33). He picks up on Moses' prediction that Israel would break the covenant with their God and go into exile. But Moses also promised that God would not abandon his people, but renew his covenant with them and transform their hearts (for all this see Deuteronomy 30).

Jeremiah develops Moses' words further by saying that God will one day inscribe the laws of the Torah not on tablets, but on the hearts of his people (Jeremiah 31:33). God would heal their rebellious hearts so that they can truly love and follow him. In that day, Israel will return to their land, the Messiah from the line of David will come, and all nations will recognize the true God. These chapters show that, despite Israel's apostasy, God will not let their sin get the last word. His own faithfulness will bring about the fulfillment of his promises, no matter what.

CHAPTERS 46–52

Next we find another large collection of poems that describe how God will use Babylon to judge the nations around Israel: Egypt (ch. 46), Philistia (ch. 47), Moab (ch. 48), and Edom, Ammon, Damascus and Hazor (ch. 49). Then, surprisingly, the longest poems near the end of the book are about God's coming judgment on Babylon itself (chs. 50–51). Although God used this nation to execute his justice, he does not endorse their violence and idolatry. Babylon, too, is judged under the standard of God's justice, and so Jeremiah denounces its pride and injustice as well.

Babylon is larger than life in these poems, reminding us of the image of the city and tower of Babylon all the way back in Genesis 11. In these poems, the character of Babylon has become an archetype of all the rebellious nations. In their glorification of wealth and war, God will give the Babylonians over to their own destruction.

The book concludes with a story taken from the very end of 2 Kings 25 and tells the story of Babylon's final attack on Jerusalem. The soldiers destroyed the city walls, burned the temple, and took many of the people into exile. The story shows how Jeremiah's warnings of judgment from chapters 1–24 were in fact fulfilled, and Jeremiah was vindicated as a true prophet.

But that's not how the book ends. The conclusion tells a short story about the captive Israelite king, Jehoiachin, from the line of David. After some decades of imprisonment, the king of Babylon releases him, shows him favor, and invites him to eat at the royal table for the rest of his life…and that's the last paragraph.

This relatively gloomy book is designed to end with a small glimmer of hope that recalls Jeremiah's prophecies of hope. God has not abandoned his people or the promise of a future king from David's line. And so the book of Jeremiah gives its readers a sober evaluation of Israel's past along with a hopeful glance into their future.

JEREMIAH

MESSENGER of GOD'S JUSTICE AND GRACE

JERUSALEM

SEE 2 KINGS 24-25

1-24 ACCUSATION & WARNING FOR ISRAEL

1 JEREMIAH'S CALLING

GOD

"I APPOINT YOU AS A PROPHET TO ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS, TO UPROOT AND TEAR DOWN, TO DESTROY AND OVERTHROW, TO BUILD AND TO PLANT." (1:10)

JUDGMENT

HOPE

CORE IDEA:

ISRAEL HAS BROKEN THE COVENANT

WORSHIP OF OTHER GODS
IDOLATRY AS ADULTERY

ACCUSATION OF ISRAEL'S LEADERS
PRIESTS, KINGS, PROPHETS

RAMPANT SOCIAL INJUSTICE WIDOWS, ORPHANS, IMMIGRANTS

7 JEREMIAH'S TEMPLE SERMON

INSIDE - JERUSALEM - OUTSIDE

GOD WILL DESTROY HIS OWN TEMPLE BY SENDING AN ENEMY FROM THE NORTH!

BABYLON

25

BABYLON WILL DESTROY JERUSALEM & EXILE ISRAEL FOR 70 YEARS!

BABYLON = CUP OF GOD'S JUST ANGER

ISRAEL 26-45

NATIONS 46-51

26-45 JUDGMENT & HOPE FOR ISRAEL

26-29 JEREMIAH REJECTED BY ISRAEL'S LEADERS

30-33 HOPE FOR ISRAEL'S FUTURE

AFTER EXILE, GOD WILL RENEW THE COVENANT AND TRANSFORM ISRAEL'S HEARTS. (DEUTERONOMY 30)

MOSES

"I WILL PLACE MY TORAH INSIDE THEM, AND WRITE IT ON THEIR HEARTS." (31:33)

JEREMIAH

RETURN TO THE LAND!

MESSIAH!

ALL NATIONS ACKNOWLEDGE ISRAEL'S GOD!

34-45 SIEGE & DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

EGYPT

(TWENTY YEARS!)

THE MAKING OF JEREMIAH (ch.36)

SERMONS

POEMS

ESSAYS

STORIES ABOUT JEREMIAH:

BARUCH

46-51 JUDGMENT & HOPE FOR THE NATIONS

HAZOR

DAMASCUS

JERUSALEM

AMMON

PHILISTIA

MOAB

EGYPT

EDOM

16-49 GOD WILL USE BABYLON TO JUDGE THE NATIONS AROUND ISRAEL

50-51 GOD WILL JUDGE BABYLON

?!

GENESIS 11

BABYLON= ARCHETYPE OF REBELLIOUS NATIONS

52 DESTRUCTION & EXILE (FROM 2 KINGS 25)

...BUT HOPE FOR DAVID'S LINE

FULFILMENT OF JUDGMENT...

...PROMISE OF HOPE

THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

Lamentations is a unique book in the Old Testament that contains five poems from an anonymous author, who survived and is reflecting back on Babylon's siege of Jerusalem and the destruction and exile that followed (see 2 Kings 24–25).

The fall of Jerusalem and the exile was the most horrendous catastrophe in Israel's history up to this point. God had promised Abraham the land of Canaan and had given David victory to make Jerusalem Israel's capital. This city is where the kings from the line of David lived, where Solomon built the temple for Israel's God, and where the priests maintained the rituals of Israel's worship. After 500 years of all this history, in the summer of 587 B.C., the city fell to Babylon and everything was lost. The book of Lamentations is a memorial to the pain and confusion of the Israelites that followed the destruction.

Now, the lament poems found here are not unique in the Bible, as there are many of them found in the book of Psalms (see Psalms 10, 63, 69, 74, and 79). These biblical poems of lament are a form of protest. They draw everyone's attention, including God's, to the horrible things that happen in his world that should not be tolerated. They are also a way of processing emotion. In these poems, God's people vent their anger and dismay at the ruin caused by sin and violence. Finally, they give a voice to our confusion. How does our suffering relate to God's character and his promises? Lament poems are a full-blown emotional explosion, and none of this is looked down upon in the Bible. Just the opposite, these poems give a sacred dignity to human suffering, as these human words of grief addressed to God have become part of God's word to his people.

The design of the five poems is very intentional and part of the book's message. Chapters 1–4 are made up of "acrostics," or "alphabet poems," in which each poetic verse begins with a new letter of the Hebrew alphabet, consisting of twenty-two letters. This very ordered and linear structure is a stark contrast to the disordered pain and confused grief explored in the poems. It's like Israel's suffering is explored "A to Z," trying to express that which is inexpressible.

CHAPTER 1

Chapters 1 and 2 each have one verse per letter, giving them a similar design, but they differ greatly in their themes. Chapter 1 focuses on the grief and shame of a figure called Lady Zion, as the poet personifies the city of Jerusalem as a widow, also referred to as "the daughter of Zion." She sits alone, bereaved of her loved ones, devastated, and with no one to comfort her. When Lady Zion speaks, she calls on the Lord to notice her fate. It's a powerful metaphor. Through this imagery the poet shows that the city's destruction brought a new level of psychological trauma on the Israelites that can only be expressed as a funeral, mourning the death of a loved one.

CHAPTER 2

Chapter 2 focuses on the fall of Jerusalem and how it was a consequence of Israel's sin, brought about by God's wrath, a key word in this poem. Now, it's important to remember that, in the Bible, God's wrath is not spontaneous, volatile anger. The biblical poets and prophets use this word to talk about God's justice. Israel entered a covenant agreement that they have been violating for centuries through their worship of other gods and by allowing injustice towards the poor. While God is slow to anger, he does still get angry at human evil and will eventually bring his justice in the form of punishment. In the case of Jerusalem, that meant allowing Babylon to conquer the city. Chapter 2 acknowledges that God's wrath was justified, but this doesn't keep the poet from lamenting and asking God to once again show compassion.

CHAPTER 3

Chapter 3 breaks the design pattern by having three verses per letter, making it the longest poem in the book. The voice is that of a lonely, suffering man who speaks as a representative of the entire people of Israel. What's interesting is that this chapter is full of language drawn from other parts of the Old Testament, including the laments of Job (see Job 3), important lament psalms (see Psalms 22 and 69), and even from the suffering servant poems in Isaiah (see Isaiah 53). The poet sees his hardship as a form of God's justice, just as chapter 2 asserted. But, paradoxically, this gives the poet hope and leads him to offer the only optimistic words in the book:

"Because of the Lord's covenant faithfulness,
we do not perish.
his mercies never fail;
they are new every morning. How great is
your faithfulness, O God.
So I say to myself,
'The Lord is my inheritance,
therefore I will put my hope in him.'"

(Lamentations 3:22–24)

If God is consistent enough to bring his justice on Israel's evil, then he will also be consistent with his covenant promises and not allow evil and sin to get the last word. For this poet, God's judgment becomes the seedbed of hope.

CHAPTER 4

Chapter 4 goes back to the same acrostic structure as chapters 1 and 2. It's a vivid and disturbing depiction of the two year siege. The poem contrasts how great things were in the Jerusalem of the past with how terrible it was during the siege. Children once laughed in the streets; now they beg for food. The wealthy once ate lavish meals; now they look for whatever they can find in the dirt. The royal leaders were once full of splendor; now they are famished, dirty, and unrecognizable. Their anointed king from the line of David, is now captured and dragged away. The poem's power comes from the shock of these contrasts, exploring the depth of the suffering Israel has brought on itself.

CHAPTER 5

The final poem is unique and completely breaks the design pattern. It's the same length as the previous acrostic poems that are twenty-two lines, but the alphabetical order is gone. It's as if the poet can't hold it together anymore and his grief has exploded back into chaos. The poem is a long communal prayer for God's mercy. Israel begs God to not ignore their pain or abandon them. The poem also offers a long list of all the different kinds of people that were devastated by Jerusalem's fall and asks God not to forget them. Here, we see how lament poems can be written on behalf of others, to give expression to their pain. Suffering in silence is not a virtue in this book. God's people are not asked to deny their emotions, but rather to voice their protest, to vent, and to pour it all out before God.

The book ends with something of a paradox: the poet acknowledges that God is the eternal king ("You, Lord, reign as king forever!" Lamentations 5:19), but Israel's circumstances make it feel like God is nowhere to be found ("Why do you forget and forsake us?" Lamentations 5:20). The final words leave the tension unresolved: "…unless you've totally rejected us…" (Lamentations 5:22). The poet doesn't offer a nice, neat conclusion, much like our own experiences of pain.

The story of the Bible doesn't end here, but this important book shows how lament and prayer are a crucial part of the journey of faith in a broken world.

LAMENTATIONS

ANONYMOUS AUTHOR

A POETIC REFLECTION ON THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM & THE EXILE

SEE 2 KINGS 24-25

HORRENDOUS CATASTROPHE

PROMISED LAND · TEMPLE · JERUSALEM · PRIESTS · WORSHIP OF GOD · ROYAL LINE OF DAVID

ALL DECIMATED & GONE

BABYLON

1 VERSE PER LETTER · 22 VERSES

DESIGN OF THE FIVE POEMS:

ACROSTIC = "ALPHABET POEM"
1. א (=A) 4. ד (=D) ...
2. ב (=B) 21. ש (=S)
3. ג (=G) 22. ת (=T)

ORDERED & LINEAR STRUCTURE vs. DISORDERED & PAIN CONFUSED GRIEF

LAMENT POEMS IN THE BIBLE:

(SEE PSALMS 10, 63, 69, 74, 79)

- A FORM OF PROTEST
- A WAY TO PROCESS EMOTION
- A PLACE TO VOICE CONFUSION

LAMENT POEMS RESTORE A SACRED DIGNITY TO HUMAN SUFFERING

1 LADY ZION'S GRIEF & SHAME

LOOK, O LORD, ON MY DISTRESS!

JERUSALEM PERSONIFIED AS "THE DAUGHTER OF ZION"

THE CITY'S DESTRUCTION = THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE

2 THE FALL OF JERUSALEM & GOD'S WRATH

DIVINE WRATH ≠ VOLATILE ANGER
DIVINE WRATH = GOD'S JUSTICE

GOD IS SLOW TO ANGER BUT WILL JUDGE HUMAN EVIL.

3 THE SUFFERING ONE

3 VERSES PER LETTER · 66 VERSES

LORD, I CALL ON YOUR NAME!

LANGUAGE DRAWN FROM:

JOB'S LAMENT (ch.3)

LAMENT PSALMS (22, 69)

SUFFERING SERVANT POEMS (ISAIAH 53)

"BECAUSE OF THE LORD'S COVENANT FAITHFULNESS, WE DO NOT PERISH. HIS MERCIES NEVER FAIL; THEY ARE NEW EVERY MORNING. HOW GREAT IS YOUR FAITHFULNESS, O GOD. SO I SAY TO MYSELF, 'THE LORD IS MY INHERITANCE, THEREFORE I WILL PUT MY HOPE IN HIM.'"
— 3:22-24

GOD'S JUDGMENT BECOMES THE Seedbed of HOPE

4 THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM

1 VERSE PER LETTER · 22 VERSES

THE PAST

THE SIEGE

5 COMMUNAL PRAYER FOR GOD'S MERCY

ALPHABET PATTERN GO · 22 VERSES

AS IF THE POET'S GRIEF EXPLODES BACK INTO CHAOS

LAMENT ON BEHALF OF OTHERS

ELDERS · MOTHERS · PRINCES · BOYS · FARMERS

REMEMBER US, O LORD; LOOK ON OUR DISGRACE!

THE BOOK ENDS WITH A PARADOX:

O LORD, YOU REIGN AS KING FOREVER! (5:19)

UNLESS YOU'VE TOTALLY REJECTED US...? (5:22)

WHY DO YOU FORGET AND FORSAKE US? (5:20)

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL

Ezekiel was a priest who had been living in Jerusalem during the first Babylonian attack on the city (see 2 Kings 24:8–17). The city itself was spared; the king of Babylon took a first wave of Israelite prisoners into exile. Ezekiel was among them. The book begins five years after these traumatic events and we find Ezekiel sitting on the bank of an irrigation canal near his Israelite refugee camp, on his thirtieth birthday, no less. It's the year that he would have been installed as a priest in Jerusalem.

CHAPTERS 1–11

All of a sudden, he has a vision and sees a storm cloud approaching, and within the cloud he sees four strange creatures, connected by their outstretched wings. Each of the creatures had four faces—a human, a lion, an ox, and an eagle—and each of the creatures were atop a wheel. Their wings supported a dazzling platform that held a throne, with a mysterious human-like figure shrouded in fire and glowing light. Ezekiel realizes what he's seeing and describes it as the "appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" riding on his royal throne chariot.

The Hebrew word for "glory" is *kavod*, and it means "heavy" or "significant." The biblical authors use this word to describe the physical manifestations of God's importance when he personally appears. The images in the vision are similar to when God appeared on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19 and 24, as well as when his presence came over the ark of the covenant in Exodus 25. And that's actually the most shocking thing about Ezekiel's vision. God's glorious presence is supposed to be dwelling in the Jerusalem temple. What is God's glory doing in Babylon?! This question, which would have been obvious to any ancient Israelite, is what the first section of the book of Ezekiel sets out to answer.

God first speaks to Ezekiel from atop the throne chariot and commissions him as a prophet (chs. 1–3). He is to accuse Israel of breaking the covenant agreement with their God. Israel has given their allegiance to other gods and has been worshiping idols, which has led to rampant social injustice and violence. In response to all this, God has appointed Ezekiel to warn Israel that the first Babylonian attack on Jerusalem would be matched by a second, except this time the city and its temple will be totally destroyed.

In chapters 4–5, we see how Ezekiel gets his message across, with his words and by performing "sign acts," a form of ancient street theater. Ezekiel would publicly behave in strange, bizarre ways that acted as parables of his prophetic message. He was called to build a tiny model of Jerusalem and enact the coming Babylonian attack. He shaved off all his hair and chopped it up with a sword. In the most extreme case, he played the role of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement by lying on his side for over a year, eating food cooked over human waste as a sign of the nasty food that would be eaten during the siege of Jerusalem.

Perhaps the most disheartening thing of all, however, is the bad news that God gave Ezekiel. No one was going to listen to his message. Israel would reject him because of their rebellious and "hard hearts" (see Ezekiel 2:4 and 3:7). This recalls Moses' description of Israel after the wilderness rebellions and his prediction that Israel would eventually end up in exile (see Deuteronomy 30). Ezekiel had the unfortunate privilege of seeing Moses' warning become grim reality.

After his commission, a dismayed Ezekiel began to perform his tasks. After about a year, he has another vision, in which he is taken on a "virtual tour" of the temple to see what's happening there in his absence (chs. 8–11), and it's not good. In the outer court, in front of the temple, stands a large idol statue. He sees the elders of Israel worshiping other gods, both outside and inside the temple, and also sees women worshiping the Babylonian god, Tammuz. Finally, he sees God's glorious throne chariot move out of the most holy space and leave the temple and head east towards Babylon.

And so we come full circle. In chapter 11 we discover why and how God's glory came to appear before Ezekiel as he sat by the canal in Babylon. Israel's idolatry and covenant violations became so blatant and offensive that God decided to leave his own temple. The Israelites have driven their God away, and he gives over the city and temple to destruction. Yet, God has not abandoned his people. Rather, he goes into exile with them. At the end of the vision, God promises that he will return a remnant of Israel back to the land, transforming them by "removing their heart of stone and giving them a new, soft heart of flesh" so that they can love and follow their God after all (Ezekiel 11:19).

It's a small glimmer of hope that's quickly submerged under the reality of imminent destruction. Chapter 11 is a key transition story that helps us understand how the rest of the book is designed. The next three sections are all announcements of God's judgment, beginning with Israel (chs. 12–24), moving on to the neighboring nations (chs. 25–32), and finally addressing the city of Jerusalem itself (ch. 33). Following all this gloom and judgment, we find in chapters 34–48 a more hopeful conclusion for Israel, the nations, as well as all creation.

CHAPTERS 12–24

Chapters 12–24 focus on God's judgment coming for Israel. This is a collection of diverse poems and essays, where Ezekiel shows his fondness for parable and allegory. He portrays Israel as a burnt, useless stick (ch. 15), a rebellious wife (ch. 16), a dangerous, raging lion captured by hunters (ch. 19), and as two promiscuous sisters (ch. 23). These are all depictions of Israel's senseless rebellion and idolatry, and the ruin that results. In chapters 14, 18, and 20, Ezekiel also acts as a lawyer, arguing the case that Jerusalem's destruction is truly deserved after centuries of covenant violation. He argues that, even if the most righteous people in the world like Noah, Daniel, and Job were alive and praying for mercy on Israel, God wouldn't accept their prayers. It's far too late. God's goodness actually demands that he bring justice on this generation of Israel. The exile has become inevitable, as they've reached the point of no return.

CHAPTERS 25–33

Next, Ezekiel focuses on the nations immediately around Israel, like Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia (ch. 25), as well as on the two most powerful states in the region, Egypt and Tyre (chs. 26–32). Israel had allied with these nations and adopted their gods and idols. More specifically, God accuses the kings of Tyre and Egypt of arrogantly viewing themselves as gods, defining right and wrong on their terms. He holds these kings accountable for their pride and announces that he will use Babylon to bring them down. They will face God's justice along with everyone else.

Following these intense sections is a short story in chapter 33. Ezekiel is met by a refugee who has just arrived from Jerusalem to give him a report. Babylon has attacked the city of Jerusalem once again. This time the city has fallen, and the temple is destroyed. Ezekiel's warnings became a reality. But in the midst of his grief, we remember the glimmer of future hope at the end of chapter 11. Jerusalem's destruction is not the end of the story.

Turn the page to keep reading about the book of Ezekiel.

EZEKIEL

WHAT IS GOD'S GLORY DOING IN BABYLON?!

5 YEARS AFTER EXILE...

!!!

"THE APPEARANCE OF THE LIKENESS OF THE GLORY OF THE LORD"

HEBREW KAVOD - PHYSICAL MANIFESTATION OF GOD'S SIGNIFICANCE (SEE EXODUS 19, 24, 25)

BABYLON

EZEKIEL

FIRST BABYLONIAN ATTACK ON JERUSALEM (SEE 2 KINGS 24:8-17)

1-11 ACCUSATIONS AGAINST ISRAEL

EZEKIEL COMMISSIONED 1-3

SON OF MAN! **ACCUSE** ISRAEL OF BREAKING THE COVENANT AND **WARN** THEM OF IMMINENT DESTRUCTION.

- WORSHIP OF OTHER GODS
- SOCIAL INJUSTICE

4-5 EZEKIEL'S SIGN ACTS

EZEKIEL THE SCAPEGOAT, BEARING ISRAEL'S SINS

STAGING THE JERUSALEM SIEGE

CHOPPING HIS HAIR

BAD NEWS: NO ONE'S GOING TO LISTEN. (RECALL DEUTERONOMY ch.30)

ISRAEL'S HARD HEART

8-11 THE TEMPLE VISION

TAMMUZ

JUDGMENT

11 ISRAEL'S IDOLATRY HAS DRIVEN GOD AWAY...

...BUT HE HASN'T ABANDONED HIS PEOPLE.

A REMNANT WILL RETURN WITH NEW, TRANSFORMED HEARTS.

ISRAEL'S NEW HEART

HOPE

12-24 JUDGMENT ON ISRAEL

USE OF PARABLE & ALLEGORY

15 A BURNT VINE

16 A REBELLIOUS WIFE

19 A DANGEROUS LION

23 TWO PROMISCUOUS SISTERS

EZEKIEL AS LAWYER 14,18,20

GOD, HAVE MERCY!

GOD

TOO LATE!

NOAH, DANIEL, & JOB

- ISRAEL'S JUDGMENT IS DESERVED
- GOD'S GOODNESS DEMANDS HE BRING JUSTICE
- THEY'VE REACHED A POINT OF NO RETURN

25-32 JUDGMENT ON THE NATIONS

PHILISTIA

AMMON

MOAB

EDOM

EGYPT

TYRE

VIEWING THEMSELVES AS GODS

BABYLON'S COMING FOR YOU TOO!

ALL BROUGHT DOWN BY BABYLON...

33 JERUSALEM HAS FALLEN!

34-37 HOPE FOR ISRAEL

MESSIANIC KING

34 A NEW DAVID

36 A NEW ISRAEL WITH A NEW HEART

GOD'S SPIRIT

AN IMAGE OF ISRAEL'S SPIRITUAL STATE: EXILE & DEATH

37 VALLEY OF DRY BONES

RECALLS GENESIS 2: HUMANS = DIRT + DIVINE BREATH

THE ONLY HOPE IS FOR GOD TO REMAKE HUMANS TO LOVE GOD & OTHERS.

38-39 HOPE FOR THE NATIONS

GOD DEFEATS EVIL AMONG THE NATIONS

GOG

ANCIENT KINGDOM FROM GENESIS 10

DESCRIPTION OF GOG = DESCRIPTION OF KINGS OF TYRE & EGYPT

ARCHETYPE OF HUMAN REBELLION

EARTHQUAKE

FIRE

THESE SCENES ARE FULL OF SYMBOLS & IMAGERY ABOUT GOD'S final defeat of EVIL

40-48 HOPE FOR ALL CREATION

40-46 VISION OF A NEW TEMPLE

THE MEANING of the VISIONS?

1.) **LITERAL** BLUEPRINTS OF NEW TEMPLE IN THE FUTURE MESSIANIC KINGDOM.

2.) **SYMBOLIC** DEPICTION OF GOD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE IN THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM.

DEAD SEA VALLEY

47-48 NEW GARDEN OF EDEN: "THE LORD IS THERE"

EZEKIEL

A

Babylon

refugee camp

CANAL

Syrtaki

"The appearance of the likeness of the GLORY of the LORD" (1:28)

Hebrew: KAVOD = physical manifestation of God's significance - see Exodus 19 & 24 & 25.

JUDGMENT

1-11

stunned

SON OF MAN! Accuse Israel of breaking the covenant, and WARN them of imminent destruction

• worship of other gods
• social injustice

1-3 EZEKIEL Commissioned

4-5: Ezekiel's SIGN ACTS

Jerusalem's STORY

(Jerusalem)

(price)

(Grief!)

Ezekiel the scapegoat, bearing Israel's sins.

(shaved)

(sword chair)

BAD NEWS: No one's going to listen.

Israel's hard heart

(Recall Deuteronomy 30!)

8-11 THE Temple vision

GOD LEAVES HIS TEMPLE because of Israel's idolatry

BABYLON

(Tarkenx)

Tammuz

women

Ch. 11

• ISRAEL's Idolatry has driven God away...

... But he hasn't abandoned his people.

A Remnant will return, with new, transformed, hearts

(Israel's new heart)

HOPE

First Babylonian attack on Jerusalem: see 2 Kings 24:8-17

BABYLON

12—24 JUDGMENT ON ISRAEL

Ezekiel's use of Parable & Allegory

ISRAEL IS...

Ch. 15 A burned useless stick

Ch. 16 A rebellious daughter

Ch. 19 Dangerous Lion

Raging Lion in a net w/ hunters

Ch. 23 Promiscuous sisters

Two ladies outside door beckoning to passing man

Ezekiel the lawyer (chs. 14, 18, 20)

God have Mercy!

Noah Daniel Job

Too late!

• Israel's judgment is deserved.
• God's goodness demands he bring justice
• They've reached a point of no return

25-32 JUDGMENT ON NATIONS

AMMON MOAB EDOM PHILISTIA

TYRE & EGYPT

(arrogant)

(Pons)

Babylon's Coming for you too!

Viewed themselves as gods

All Brought down by Babylon

33

JERUSALEM HAS FALLEN!

Refugee

Ezek

34-37 HOPE FOR ISRAEL

B

38-39 HOPE FOR THE NATIONS

God defeats Evil among the nations.

GOG

• Ancient King of Lydia
• Described with images from Kings of Tyre, Egypt
• Archetype of human rebellion

Earth

Fire

• These scenes are full of symbol & images about God's Final defeat of Evil

40-48 HOPE FOR ALL CREATION

C

The next main part of Ezekiel (chs. 34–48) explores the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. This was the most horrendous catastrophe that had ever happened to Israel, and it raised the question of whether or not God was done with his people. Back in chapter 11, however, we were left with the hope that there was still a future beyond the exile. The rest of the book is designed to explore this vision of hope, first for Israel (chs. 34–37), then for the nations (chs. 38–39), and, finally, for all creation (chs. 40–48).

CHAPTERS 34–37

God promises Israel that he will raise up a "new David," a future messianic king who will be the kind of leader that Israel always needed but never got (ch. 34). The new Israel that will come under this king's reign will be transformed. God will deal with their problem of rebellion by giving them new hearts (ch. 36). Just as Moses promised (see Deuteronomy 30:6), God says that he's going to remove Israel's hard hearts and send his Spirit into his people to give them new, soft hearts that will love and obey their God (Ezekiel 36:23–30).

This idea gets developed further in the next chapter through a strange vision (ch. 37). Ezekiel sees a huge valley, filled with dried human bones and skeletons. God tells him that it's an image of Israel's spiritual state. Their rebellion against God has resulted in the exile, which brought a metaphorical and literal death to Israel. God then tells Ezekiel that his Spirit will come and bring them back to life. A wind comes and causes the bones to stand, filling them with breath and life, and causing them to regrow skin. All of a sudden, Ezekiel sees all these new humans standing before him!

This vision recalls the story about the creation of humanity from Genesis 2, in which God made humans from dirt and divine breath. Israel and all humanity have rebelled, resulting in death, so the only hope left is that God would perform an act of new creation and remake humans in such a way that they truly live in a relationship of love with God and others.

So, even if God is going to deal with the evil in the hearts of his people, some questions still remain unresolved. What about the evil still rampant in the other nations, and what about the temple? This is what the final two sections of the book are all about.

CHAPTERS 38–39

First come chapters 38 and 39, where God promises to finally defeat evil among the nations, which is personified by a ruler named "Gog of the land of Magog." The name is derived from a genealogy of ancient kingdoms in Genesis 10, which referred to powerful nations from the distant past. Ezekiel picks up this ancient name as an image of violent kingdoms in any age. This is why we find Gog allied with seven nations from all four directions of the compass. This army is a symbol of all the rebellious nations put together. This also helps us understand why Ezekiel describes Gog with images that he used earlier to describe the king of Tyre and the Pharaoh of Egypt. For Ezekiel, Gog is an amalgam of all the worst rulers in the Bible, an archetype of human rebellion against God.

The basic story here is that Gog resists God's plan to restore his people. Just like Pharaoh in the Exodus story, Gog comes to destroy them. God, however, unleashes his justice upon Gog in a flurry of scenes that don't make literal sense when you read them in sequence. Gog is first consumed by an earthquake, and once again by fire. But after that, God strikes Gog and his army down in the fields, where they lie unburied for months. It's clear that these scenes are full of symbolic imagery. Ezekiel used his entire poetic tool set to describe how God is paving the way for a new creation by finally defeating all the human evil that has ruined his world.

CHAPTERS 40–48

After God's victory, chapters 40–48 describe how God's presence will one day return to his people and to his temple, resulting in cosmic restoration. Ezekiel has an elaborate vision of a new temple and city. He's given a heavenly tour guide, who shows Ezekiel around this new temple complex that's much larger and more even majestic than Solomon's temple. There's a new altar, new priests, and a new system of worship. After the elaborate tour, God's glorious throne chariot that Ezekiel saw in his first vision comes back and enters this new temple.

Now, the meaning of these visions has been a source of debate for a long time. Some Jewish and Christian readers believe that this vision will be fulfilled literally one day, and that these chapters offer the actual blueprints of the new temple to be built when the Messiah returns and brings God's kingdom. Many other Jewish and Christian readers think that this vision, like Ezekiel's other visions, is full of symbolic imagery. They depict the reality of God's presence returning to his people in the messianic kingdom, but not necessarily in the form of an actual building.

Whichever view you take, it's important to notice that Ezekiel never calls the city Jerusalem, and in chapter 47 we discover why. Ezekiel sees a tiny stream pouring out of the temple threshold, quickly becoming a raging river that flows from the temple, through the city, and out into the desert. The river empties into one of the most desolate places on planet earth, the Dead Sea Valley. As the river advances, it leaves behind a trail of trees and life, and the Dead Sea is transformed into a living sea, teeming with plants and animals. All this imagery comes from the description of the garden of Eden in Genesis 1–2, and we can now see just how cosmic Ezekiel's vision is. God's plan has always been to restore all humanity and creation to his life-giving presence, exemplified in the name of this garden-city: "The Lord is There."

With these stirring images the book of Ezekiel comes to a close. Out the darkness of Israel and all humanity's evil emerges a future full of hope. New humans in a new world, animated by God's life-giving Spirit and living in a world permeated with God's love and justice. This is the profound hope of the prophet Ezekiel.

THE BOOK OF DANIEL

Daniel's story is set right after Babylon's first attack on Jerusalem (see 2 Kings 24). They had plundered the city and the temple, taking a wave of Israelites into exile. Among these prisoners were four men from the royal family line of David: Daniel, later named Belteshazzar, and his three friends, who you probably know by their Babylonian names of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. This book tells of their struggles to maintain hope in the land of their conquerors.

The book's design seems simple at first. Chapters 1–6 contain stories about Daniel and his friends in Babylon, while chapters 7–12 contain Daniel's visions about the future. This two-part shape is made more interesting by another design feature, namely, the fact that it's written in two languages. The book begins with chapter 1 written in Hebrew, the language of the Israelites, but chapters 2–7 are written in Aramaic, a cousin language to Hebrew that was spoken widely among the ancient empires. Meanwhile, chapters 8–12 go back to Hebrew. This design shows not only how the Aramaic chapters 2–7 are a coherent section, but also highlights how chapters 2 and 7 are important for understanding the later chapters of the book.

CHAPTERS 1–6

Chapter 1 introduces the basic plot tension that drives the entire story. Daniel and his friends are wise and capable, and are soon recruited to serve in the royal palace of Babylon. However, they are also pressured to give up their Jewish identity by living and eating like Babylonians, violating the Jewish food laws found in the Torah. They refuse and instead choose faithfulness to the Torah. This decision puts them in grave danger, but God delivers them and they go on to be elevated by the king of Babylon.

After this comes the Aramaic section, which has its own special, symmetrical design. The king of Babylon has a dream that, it turns out, only Daniel is able to interpret. It's about a huge statue that dominates the landscape and is made up of four types of metal. Daniel says the statue symbolizes a sequence of kingdoms, with Babylon as the head. Suddenly, a huge rock flies in and shatters the statue, turning it into a mountain. Now, this dream is the first of many symbolic visions in the book, but this one introduces a basic storyline. Daniel says that the statue represents a train of human kingdoms following after Babylon that will fill God's world with violence. One day, however, God's kingdom will come and humble the arrogant nations of the world, filling the earth instead with the healing and just kingdom of God.

After this, chapter 3 tells the famous story of Daniel's three friends. They refuse to bow down and worship a huge idol statue which represents the king and his imperial power, just like the statue in the previous chapter. The friends are persecuted for their choice and thrown into a fiery furnace. Once again, God delivers them from death, and they're exalted by the king who now acknowledges their God as the true one.

Chapters 4 and 5 make up a pair of stories about two Babylonian kings: a father, Nebuchadnezzar, and then his son, Belshazzar. Both are filled with pride because of their power, and so, as in chapter 2, God warns them both through dreams and visions. Again, just like in chapter 2, only Daniel can interpret for them. After doing so, he tells both kings that they are to humble themselves before God's kingdom, and they both arrogantly resist. Nebuchadnezzar is stricken with madness, and becomes like a beast in the fields. Eventually, he does humble himself before God, and as his humanity returns he is restored as king. This contrasts with his son Belshazzar, who does not humble himself and is assassinated that very night.

These two stories draw their imagery from Genesis 1–2 and Psalm 8, in which humans are depicted as the royal image of God and appointed to rule over the beasts on behalf of God, who is the world's true king. When human kingdoms forget that they are not God, when they exalt their own power as divine, they become less than human and more like violent beasts who will face God's justice.

This brings us to chapter 6, the pair of chapter 3. This time, it's Daniel who's persecuted, because he refuses to pray to and worship the king as a god. So, like the friends, he is sentenced to death, and thrown into a lion's den. God delivers him from the beasts and, like the friends, the king exalts Daniel and praises his God.

CHAPTER 7

We finally come to chapter 7, the pair of chapter 2 and the center of the book, where all the themes come together. The focus of the story is another dream, but this time it's Daniel's, and, ironically, he can't understand it until an angelic messenger explains it to him. Daniel sees a series of four beasts. Three of them are like a lion, a bear, and a winged leopard, and each symbolize arrogant kingdoms. The last creature is a monstrosity, identified as a terribly evil empire. This fourth beast has lots of horns—a common symbol for kings in the Old Testament—with one specific horn that represents a king who arrogantly exalts himself above God and persecutes his covenant people. The symbol for God's people is a figure called the "son of man," who is both an image of God's covenant people and their king from the line of David. God, who's referred to as "the Ancient of Days," comes to set up his throne. He destroys the great monster and exalts the "son of man" to the clouds, where he sits at God's side and shares in God's rule over the nations.

We can now look back and see how all these stories and dreams work together. The three stories of faithfulness despite persecution (chs. 1, 3, and 6) are meant to offer hope to God's suffering people among the nations. They suffer because human kingdoms have rebelled against God and have become beasts (chs. 4 and 5). The visions (chs. 2 and 7) encourage patience that waits for God to bring his rule over the world and vindicate his people. But when is God going to do this? That question is what the final three visions in chapters 8, 9, and 10–12 set out to explore.

CHAPTERS 8-12

In chapter 8, Daniel has another vision about the final two beasts from the previous chapter. This time, they are symbolized by a ram (which we're told is an image of the empire of the Medes and Persians) and a goat (an image of ancient Greece). Out of the goat comes a bunch of horns, one of which symbolizes the evil king of chapter 7. In this vision we're given a little more information about this king. He will attack Jerusalem and exalt himself above God by defiling the temple with idols. However, in the end, this king will be destroyed by God, who will in turn exalt his people and kingdom.

Now, in chapter 9, Daniel is puzzled as to when all this will take place. He consults the scroll of the prophet Jeremiah, where God said that Israel's exile would last for seventy years before God would restore them. For Daniel, the seventy years are almost up, and he asks God to fulfill his promise. However, an angel comes and informs Daniel that Israel's sin and rebellion hasn't been fully dealt with by the exile, and their times of oppression under the nations will last seven times longer than Jeremiah had envisioned.

Daniel is deeply disturbed, and has one final vision that spans chapters 10–12. We're shown the same sequence of kingdoms: Persia, then Greece and Alexander the Great, followed by lesser kings that all lead up to the final "king of the north." He will invade Jerusalem, set up idols in the temple, and exalt himself above God. The vision concludes, like the others, with this king suddenly coming to ruin.

Now, there have been endless debates about what all these visions refer to. Many see a clear connection to the exploits of the Syrian king, Antiochus, during the mid-second century B.C. He killed many faithful Jews in Jerusalem and set up idols in the temple. Others think that they point forward to the Roman empire's role in the execution of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 70 A.D. Still others think that it all will be fulfilled in the future events that will happen when Jesus returns.

The problem is that the symbols and numbers don't quite match any of these views perfectly, which opens up the possibility that, in a sense, they are all right. The book of Daniel has been designed to offer hope to all future generations of God's people. It did so in the days of Antiochus' empire, and it has ever since. That's why Jesus used imagery from Daniel to accuse the oppressive leaders he confronted in Jerusalem (see Mark 14:62), and it's why John, who wrote the Revelation, adapted Daniel's visions and applied them to the Roman empire of his day as well as all future oppressive empires (see Revelation 13).

The book of Daniel offers readers of all generations an insight into God's promise and a pattern at work in history. The pattern reveals how humans and their kingdoms become violent beasts when they glorify their power and don't acknowledge God as their true king. But Daniel's visions also hold out a promise, that one day God will confront the beast, rescue his world and his people, and bring his kingdom. This book is for every generation, and it speaks a message of hope that motivates faithfulness.

DANIEL

HOPE THAT MOTIVATES FAITHFULNESS

ch.1-6 STORIES ABOUT DANIEL & HIS FRIENDS

VISIONS OF DANIEL ch.7-12



1 RECRUITED TO SERVE IN BABYLON



2 THE KING'S DREAM



3 THE FIERY FURNACE



4 NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S PRIDE



5 BELSHAZZAR'S PRIDE



6 THE LION'S DEN



7 DANIEL'S DREAM



8 DANIEL'S 2ND VISION



9 DANIEL'S PRAYER



10-12 DANIEL'S 3RD VISION



WHAT DOES ALL THIS REFER TO?

1. EXPLOITS OF THE SYRIAN KING ANTIOCHUS IN THE 160s B.C.
2. ROMAN EMPIRE'S DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM IN 70 A.D.
3. EVENTS YET TO HAPPEN WHEN JESUS RETURNS

IN A SENSE, THEY'RE ALL RIGHT

- THE BOOK OFFERS HOPE TO ALL FUTURE GENERATIONS
- JESUS USED DANIEL TO DESCRIBE JERUSALEM'S LEADERS
- JOHN (AUTHOR OF REVELATION) ADAPTED DANIEL TO DESCRIBE ROME & ALL FUTURE EMPIRES

THE POINT OF DANIEL: a Pattern & a Promise FOR ALL GENERATIONS

HUMAN BEINGS BECOME **BEASTS** WHEN THEY DON'T ACKNOWLEDGE GOD'S KINGDOM.

GOD WILL ONE DAY CONFRONT THE **BEAST** AND RESCUE HIS WORLD.

IMAGERY FROM GENESIS 1-2 & PSALM 8

HUMANS:
THE ROYAL IMAGE of GOD *to rule on God's behalf*
.....but.....
WHEN HUMANS REBEL & MAKE THEMSELVES GOD, THEY BECOME **BEASTS**

HEBREW — ARAMAIC — HEBREW

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET HOSEA

Hosea lived in the northern kingdom of Israel about 200 years after it broke off from southern Judah (see 1 Kings 12). He was called to speak on God's behalf to the people of Israel (who he also called "Ephraim" or "Jacob") during the reign of one of Israel's worst kings, Jeroboam II. This king led the nation into chaos from which it never recovered. In the year 722 B.C. the big bad Assyrian empire would swoop in to destroy Israel (see 2 Kings 14–17), and Hosea had seen it all coming.

The book is a collection of some twenty-five years' worth of his preaching and writing, almost all of which is in the form of poetry. The book has been designed to have three main sections, consisting of chapters 1–3, 4–11, and 12–14.

CHAPTERS 1–3

The opening section tells the story of Hosea's broken marriage to a woman named Gomer, who commits adultery. While it's not totally clear whether or not Gomer kept lovers before or only after they got married, she and Hosea had three children together. Things fell apart between them, but God told Hosea that, despite Gomer's unfaithfulness, he was to find her and pay off the debts she owed to her other partners. Then he was to commit his love and faithfulness to her once again. God then says that these circumstances—the broken and repaired marriage, the children—are prophetic symbols that tell the story of God's relationship to Israel.

God has been like a faithful husband to Israel. He rescued them out of slavery in Egypt and entered into a covenant with them at Mt. Sinai, where he asked them to be faithful to him alone. When God brought them into the Promised Land, however, Israel took all the abundance that he provided for them—such as grain, wine, and oil—and dedicated it to the worship of the Canaanite god, Baal. Therefore, God has legitimate reason to end the covenant and divorce Israel. But after considering it, God instead says that he's going to pursue Israel once again and renew the covenant, purely because of his own "love, compassion, and faithfulness" (Hosea 2:19–20).

Hosea spells out exactly what all this means. The consequence for Israel's rebellion will be imminent defeat by other nations and exile, but there is still hope for future restoration. One day, Israel will repent and come back to worship their God. And in response, God will bring them a new messianic king from the line of David who will bring God's blessing.

These opening chapters (chs. 1–3) introduce all the main ideas of the book: Israel's rebellion will bring severe consequences, but God's own covenant love and mercy are more powerful and will open the way to a new future. In the remaining sections of the book, Hosea's flowing poetry explores these themes in more depth. There are two collections of his accusations and warnings for Israel (chs. 4–11 and 12–14), each concluded by a hopeful poem about God's mercy (chs. 11 and 14).

CHAPTERS 4–14

In chapters 4–10, Hosea explores the causes and effects of Israel's unfaithfulness. He says numerous times that Israel lacks all "knowledge" or "understanding" of God. The Hebrew word *yada*, "to know," is about more than just intellectual activity. It's personal, relational knowledge. It's the difference between knowing about someone, and actually knowing that person. God wants Israel to know him in a committed relationship, and to experience his love for them. That's the kind of knowledge that transforms people's hearts and lives.

This is why Hosea is constantly exposing the hypocrisy of Israel's worship. He shows how they constantly break the ten commandments. They allow grave injustice within their communities, and then go to their sacred temples and offer sacrifices to God like everything is fine. But things are not fine, not only because of their hypocrisy, but also because they worship many other gods, like Baal.

Just like Israel has given their allegiance to false gods, they have also put trust in their political alliances with Egypt and Assyria. Instead of trusting in God to protect them, they want to become more like these other nations and rely solely on military power. So, God says, it's all going to come crashing down on their heads. Not too long from now, Assyria will turn on Israel and come to ravage their lands.

In chapters 12–13, Hosea gives an Israelite history lesson to show just how they've been unfaithful from the very beginning. He alludes to the patriarch Jacob's lying and treachery (see Genesis 27–28), to Israel's rebellion in the wilderness (see Numbers 12–20), and to their appointment of the corrupt king Saul, who led them into disaster (see 1 Samuel 12 and 15). This is Hosea's way of saying that some things never change.

It's easy to lose hope here, but remember that in chapter 3 God said he had a plan to save and restore his people. Chapter 11 illustrates this turning point well. It's a beautiful poem depicts God as a loving father who raised his son, Israel, and shared everything with him. But his son has rebelled and turned on him by taking advantage of his father's generosity. In this poem, God is emotionally torn apart. He's angry, naturally, and says that he'll bring down severe consequences. But God's anger quickly turns to heartbreak, and he's moved by mercy and compassion to forgive the son he loves. He says, "How can I give you up, Ephraim? My heart churns inside me, all my compassion is aroused" (Hosea 11:8). So, while God did allow Israel to be conquered by Assyria, it's not the end of the relationship; God still loves Israel with a passion and wants to save his people.

That is what the last chapter (ch. 14) explores. Hosea calls on Israel to repent and turn back to their God, but he knows it won't last. It never does. But God says that one day he will "heal their waywardness, and love them freely" (Hosea 14:4). He goes on to describe this new, healed Israel as a lush tree that will grow deep roots and broad branches, offering shade and fruit to the nations. It's a beautiful image of God's promise to Abraham that Israel would become a blessing to the nations. However, if that's ever going to happen, it will require an act of God's healing power to repair the deep brokenness and selfishness of the human heart so that his people can truly receive his love and love him in return. God promises to do just that.

After this poem concludes, we find the last verse of the book (Hosea 14:9). It's an appended note, likely from the author who collected Hosea's poetry. The note addresses you, the reader: "Who is wise and discerning, to understand all this? The ways of the Lord are right. The righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them" (Hosea 14:9). The author wants you to know that Hosea's ancient poetry to northern Israel is not locked in the past; it reveals deep truths about God's character and human nature, and about the future of God's covenant people. While God should and sometimes does bring his justice upon human evil, his purpose and his heart is ultimately to heal and to save. And that is Hosea's message to all future generations.

HOSEA



1-3 INTRODUCE HOSEA'S MAIN THEMES:
ISRAEL HAS REBELLED & GOD WILL BRING SEVERE CONSEQUENCES... *BUT* GOD'S LOVE & MERCY ARE MORE POWERFUL THAN ISRAEL'S SIN.

(EXPLORED IN MORE DEPTH)

AUTHOR'S CONCLUDING NOTE:
"WHO IS *WISE* & *DISCERNING*, TO UNDERSTAND ALL THIS? THE WAYS OF THE LORD ARE RIGHT. THE *RIGHTEOUS* WALK IN THEM, BUT THE *REBELLIOUS* STUMBLE IN THEM." 14:9

- HOSEA'S POETRY REVEALS DEEP TRUTHS ABOUT GOD'S CHARACTER & HUMAN NATURE.
- GOD'S ULTIMATE PURPOSE IS TO *Heal & Save*

1-3 HOSEA'S MARRIAGE TO GOMER



PROPHETIC SYMBOL OF GOD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH ISRAEL





4-11 ACCUSATIONS & WARNINGS FOR ISRAEL

4-10 CAUSES & EFFECTS OF ISRAEL'S UNFAITHFULNESS





11 HOPE FOR THE FUTURE



12-14 *MORE* ACCUSATIONS & WARNINGS

12-13 HOSEA'S HISTORY LESSON



14 HOPE FOR THE FUTURE



THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET JOEL

This is a short collection of prophetic poems that are both powerful and puzzling. The book of Joel is unique among the books of the prophets for a few reasons, starting with the fact that there's no explicit indication of when it was written. It's most likely set during the time period of Ezra-Nehemiah after the return from the exile because he mentions Jerusalem and the temple, but not a kingdom. Another aspect that sets this book apart is that Joel is clearly familiar with many other scriptural books, as he alludes to or quotes from the prophets Isaiah, Amos, Zephaniah, Nahum, Obadiah, Ezekiel, Malachi, as well as the book of Exodus. Finally, Joel never accuses Israel of any specific sin. Like the other prophets, he announces that God's justice is coming to confront Israel's sin, but he never says why. This is because Joel assumes that, like him, you've been reading the books of the prophets and already know all about Israel's rebellion.

Now, put all together, these three features help us understand this fascinating little book a bit better. Joel is a biblical author who was himself immersed in earlier biblical writings. His reflection on them helped him to make sense of the tragedies of his day and gave him hope for the future.

CHAPTERS 1–2b

In chapters 1 and 2, Joel focuses on "the day of the Lord." This is a key phease in the prophets that describes events in the past when God appeared in a powerful way to save his people or to confront evil, like the plagues in Exodus. But these past events serve for the prophets as pointers to a future time when God would once again confront evil and bring salvation to the entire world. These opening chapters bring two parallel poems that focus on this theme.

Chapter 1 is about a past day of the Lord, and begins by recalling a recent disaster in which a locust swarm devastated Israel.

The description calls back to the day of the Lord against Egypt, specifically the 8th plague from Exodus chapter 10, except now the locusts are sent against Israel! Joel calls upon the elders and priests to lead the people in repentance and prayer. And he joins in the prayer himself: "To you, O Lord, I call" (Joel 1:19).

Chapter 2 begins by announcing another day of the Lord, except this time it is a future event, an imminent disaster coming for Jerusalem. Joel begins describing what at first seems like another wave of locusts, but the attackers change into a different kind of threat as Joel starts using metaphors about military ranks and cosmic catastrophe. The locusts become an army, with its cavalry and soldiers marching and destroying everything in their path. The sun is darkened and the earth quakes. Joel sums it up appropriately: "The day of the Lord. It's dreadful, who can endure it" (Joel 2:11)?

Once more, Joel calls on the people to pray and repent, this time elaborating on how: "rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to your God" (Joel 2:13). In other words, repentance can just be a show you put on to get out of trouble. God is interested in genuine change, when his people stop their selfishness and evil. Joel then goes on to say why Israel should repent: "God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, full of love" (Joel 2:13). This is a quote from the Exodus 34:6, when God forgave Israel after they made the golden calf. Joel knows from Scripture that God's mercy and love are more powerful than his wrath and judgment, so once more leads the priests in acts of repentance and prayer, asking God to "spare your people, O Lord" (Joel 2:17).

All of a sudden the scene shifts and we find a short narrative about God's response to the repentance of Joel and the people. "So God was filled with passion for his land and had pity on his people" (Joel 2:18). God says that he will reverse the day of the Lord, turning it from judgment into salvation. He will defeat the threatening invaders and turn them all away. He will restore the devastated land and make it abundant and full of life once more. Finally, God says that his divine presence will once again become accessible and real among his people.

Up to this point, the poems have told a powerful story in which Joel leads Israel to see how their sin has led to disaster and divine judgment. And yet, because of God's mercy, there's always hope. Joel sees in all these past events of disaster and restoration an image of the future day of the Lord.

CHAPTERS 2c–3

In the final section of the book (chs. 2c–3), Joel writes three more poems to match God's three-part response, weaving in images from other prophetic books and expanding it into a vision of hope for all creation. The hope for God's presence among his people is expanded into a promise that, one day, God's own Spirit and his personal life presence will not only fill the temple, but also all of his people. Here Joel draws upon the promises in Isaiah 32:15 and 44:3, Jeremiah 31:31–34, and Ezekiel 36:23–28, that God's Spirit would come to empower and transform his people so they can love and follow him.

Joel continues by picking up on God's promise to confront the threatening invaders. He sees in these ravaging locusts a similarity to the arrogant, violent nations of his day that ravage and oppress his people. He calls upon the promises in Isaiah 13, Zephaniah 3, and Ezekiel 38–39 about the future day of the Lord, when God will confront evil among the nations and turn their violence back on themselves and bring forth his justice to right all wrongs.

Finally, Joel picks up on the images of the land's restoration and he sees a hope for the renewal of all creation. He looks back at the promises in Isaiah 35, Ezekiel 47, and Zechariah 14, that God's final day of justice would be followed by a restoration of the entire world. It will become a new Eden where God's presence in Jerusalem will flow out like a river and bring about cosmic renewal. Joel's poem ends with God's forgiveness and mercy opening up a whole new creation.

This unique little book explores profound ideas—how human sin and failure wreak such destruction in our world; how God longs to show mercy to those who will own up and confess their sin; and how all of this leads us to hope that one day God will defeat evil, both in our world and inside ourselves, bringing his healing presence to make all things new. Joel's message is ultimately one of hope.

JOEL

the DAY of the LORD

PAST EVENTS WHEN GOD SAVED HIS PEOPLE & CONFRONTED EVIL

FUTURE TIME WHEN GOD WILL DEFEAT EVIL & SAVE THE WORLD

A BIBLICAL AUTHOR IMMERSED IN EARLIER BIBLICAL WRITINGS →

MALACHI
OBADIAH
EZEKIEL
ZEPHANIAH
NAHUM
ISAIAH
AMOS

UNIQUE THINGS ABOUT JOEL:

1.) NOT CLEAR WHEN IT WAS WRITTEN- LIKELY THE PERIOD OF EZRA-NEHEMIAH

2.) JOEL IS FAMILIAR WITH MANY OTHER SCRIPTURAL BOOKS

3.) JOEL DOESN'T ACCUSE ISRAEL OF ANY SIN: HE ASSUMES YOU'VE READ THE OTHER PROPHETS

ISRAEL'S SIN LED TO DISASTER → BUT GOD'S MERCY CREATES HOPE → THE PAST BECOMES AN IMAGE OF THE FUTURE

1 A PAST DAY OF THE LORD

A RECENT LOCUST SWARM IN ISRAEL

ANNOUNCEMENT OF DISASTER

REMEMBER THE PLAGUES ON EGYPT (SEE EXODUS 10)

2a A *FUTURE* DAY OF THE LORD

AN IMMINENT DISASTER FOR JERUSALEM

"THE DAY OF THE LORD IS DREADFUL: WHO CAN ENDURE IT?" 2:11

CALL TO REPENTANCE

TO YOU, O LORD, I CALL! (v19)

WHY: "GOD IS GRACIOUS & COMPASSIONATE, SLOW TO ANGER, FULL OF LOVE." -GOD'S MERCY IS MORE POWERFUL THAN HIS WRATH 2:13b

QUOTATION OF EXODUS 34:6

HOW: "REND YOUR HEARTS, NOT YOUR GARMENTS." =GENUINE CHANGE 2:13a

ACTS OF REPENTANCE

SPARE YOUR PEOPLE, O LORD! (2:17)

2b GOD'S RESPONSE

"SO GOD WAS FILLED WITH PASSION FOR HIS LAND AND HAD PITY ON HIS PEOPLE." 2:18

w20-21 DEFEAT OF THE INVADERS

w22-26 RESTORATION OF THE DEVASTATED LAND

v27 DIVINE PRESENCE AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE

2c-3 THE FUTURE DAY OF THE LORD

3:1-16 GOD WILL CONFRONT EVIL AMONG ALL NATIONS

GOD

SEE: ISAIAH 13, ZEPHANIAH 3, EZEKIEL 38-39

3:17-21 RENEWAL OF ALL CREATION

A NEW EDEN

SEE: ISAIAH 35, EZEKIEL 47, ZECHARIAH 14

2:28-32 GOD'S SPIRIT WILL FILL ALL HIS PEOPLE

SEE: ISAIAH 32:15 & 44:3, JEREMIAH 31:31-34, EZEKIEL 36:23-28

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET AMOS

Amos was a shepherd and fig tree-farmer (Amos 7:14) who lived right near the border between northern Israel and southern Judah. The north had seized its independence about 150 years earlier (see 1 Kings 12), and was currently being ruled by Jeroboam II, a successful military leader. He won battles and new territory for Israel, which generated lots of new wealth. But in the eyes of the prophets, he was one of the worst kings ever. His wealth had led to social apathy and he had allowed idol worship of the Canaanite gods, all of which in turn led to injustice and neglect of the poor.

It got to the point where Amos couldn't take it anymore. He sensed God's call to trek up north to Bethel, an important city with a large temple, to start announcing God's word to the people. This book is a collection of his sermons, poems, and visions uttered over the years. They were later compiled to give God's people a sense of his divine message to the northern kingdom—a message we still need to hear today.

The book has a fairly clear design: chapters 1–2 are a series of messages to Israel and the other nations, chapters 3–6 are a collection of poems that express Amos' message to the people of Israel and its leaders, chapters 7–9 contain a series of visions Amos experienced that visually depict God's coming judgment on Israel.

CHAPTERS 1–2

The book opens with a series of short poems that accuse all of Israel's neighbors of violence and injustice, which seems odd, because the book's opening line said that Amos spoke against "Israel." As Amos names all these neighboring nations—Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah—you can look at a map and see that he's drawing a circle with Israel in the center, like a target in the cross hairs. When he does get to Israel, Amos unleashes a poetic accusation three times longer and more intense than any of the others. He accuses Israel's wealthy of ignoring the poor and allowing grave injustice, specifically by allowing them to be sold into debt slavery and then denying them legal representation. Is this, Amos asks, the same family that was denied justice and enslaved in Egypt, who God graciously rescued from oppression? The party's over, he says. God's done putting up with this.

CHAPTERS 3–6

The opening to the next section explains why. God says, "I chose you Israel, from among all the families of the earth…" (Amos 3:2). It's an allusion to Genesis 12, when God called the family of Abraham to become God's blessing to all nations. God continues the thought by saying, "…this is why I will punish you for all your sin." Israel had a great calling that came with great responsibility, and so their sin and rebellion will bring great consequences.

The following section brings together lots of Amos' poems, in which you'll see a few key themes repeated. First of all, he's constantly exposing the religious hypocrisy of Israel's wealthy and leaders. He describes how they faithfully attend the religious gatherings and give offerings to God, all the while neglecting the poor and ignoring injustice.

Amos says that it's all a sham and that God hates their worship because it's totally disconnected from how they treat other people. God says that a real relationship with him will transform a person and how they treat others. Amos' call to true worship is to "let justice flow like a river, and righteousness like a never failing stream" (Amos 5:24). These two words are important to Amos. *Tsedaqah* or "righteousness" refers to a standard of right, equitable relationship between people no matter their social differences, and *mishpat* or "justice" refers to concrete actions you take to correct injustice and create righteousness. Both of these values are to permeate the life of God's people like a rushing stream fills a dry riverbed.

The next theme explored is Amos' repeated accusations of Israel's idolatry, which is connected with the previous themes about worship and justice. Remember when the northern kingdom broke away from southern Judah and their king built two new temples to rival Solomon's one in Jerusalem, placing a golden calf in each (see 1 Kings 12)? Since then Israel had only accumulated more idols, representing the gods of sex, weather, and war. In the prophets' view, the worship of these gods always leads to injustice. These gods simply didn't require the same degree of justice and righteousness as the God of Israel, and were actually immoral themselves. The God of Israel, on the other hand, can say at one moment, "Seek me, that you may live" (Amos 5:4), and later say, "Seek good, not evil, that you may live" (Amos 5:14). True worship of the Creator God of Israel is synonymous with doing good and spreading generosity and justice.

The final theme in these chapters is that, because Israel and its king have rejected Amos and other prophets, God will send "the day of the Lord," a great and terrible act of justice, on Israel. More specifically, he predicts that a powerful nation will come, conquer and destroy their cities, and take them away into exile. We know that his prediction came true some forty years later; the Assyrian empire swooped in and did exactly as Amos said they would (see 2 Kings 17).

CHAPTERS 7–9

The book closes with a series of visions Amos experienced, which are symbolic depictions of the coming "day of the Lord." He sees Israel devastated by a locust swarm and a scorching fire, before being swallowed up like overripe fruit. In the final vision, Amos sees God violently striking at the pillars of Israel's great idol temple at Bethel, and the whole building comes crumbling down. It's an image of God's justice on the leaders and gods of Israel—their end has come.

Yet, the final paragraph suddenly offers up a glimmer of hope. Using the image of Israel as a destroyed building, God says that, out of the ruins, he will one day restore the house of David. In other words, God will bring a future messianic king from David's line and rebuild the family of his people, which, surprisingly, includes the other nations. All of the devastation caused by Israel's sin and God's judgment will be reversed.

This final paragraph is really important, it's the only sign of hope on the other side of judgment and helps us see how this book explores the relationship between God's justice and mercy. While God must confront and judge evil among Israel and the nations, his long-term purposes are for restoration and creating a new family.

Through Amos' words we can still hear the call to learn from Israel's hypocrisy and the disastrous consequences of their sins. It's a call to embrace the true worship of God that should always lead to justice, righteousness, and loving our neighbor. That's what the book of Amos is all about.

AMOS

AMOS
SERMONS
POEMS
VISIONS
A SHEPHERD & FIG-TREE FARMER (SEE 7:14)
SOUTHERN JUDAH
TEKOA
BETHEL
NORTHERN ISRAEL
JEROBOAM II
-WON NEW TERRITORY & GENERATED WEALTH
-ALLOWED IDOLATRY & INJUSTICE
SEE 1 KINGS 12

TRUE WORSHIP of GOD should always lead to JUSTICE, RIGHTEOUSNESS, & LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD'S JUSTICE & MERCY

HE MUST CONFRONT EVIL AMONG ISRAEL & THE NATIONS

HIS LONG-TERM PURPOSES ARE FOR RESTORATION & A NEW FAMILY

1-2 MESSAGE TO THE NATIONS & ISRAEL

1-2a ACCUSATIONS AGAINST THE NATIONS

TYRE
DAMASCUS
ISRAEL
AMMON
MOAB
JUDAH
GAZA
EDOM
N

2b ACCUSATIONS AGAINST ISRAEL

the WEALTHY IGNORE the POOR
... and SELL THEM INTO DEBT SLAVERY
... and DENY THEM LEGAL REPRESENTATION
THE PARTY'S OVER!

3:2 "I CHOSE YOU, ISRAEL, FROM AMONG ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH, AND THIS IS WHY I WILL PUNISH YOU FOR ALL YOUR SIN."

GREAT CALLING + GREAT RESPONSIBILITY = GREAT CONSEQUENCES

3-6 MESSAGE TO ISRAEL & ITS LEADERS

ALLUSION to GENESIS 12
ISRAEL SHOULD BE A BLESSING TO ALL NATIONS.

EXPOSURE OF RELIGIOUS HYPOCRISY

IT'S ALL A SHAM!

"LET JUSTICE FLOW LIKE A RIVER, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS LIKE AN UNFAILING STREAM..." (5:24)

HEBREW: MISHPAT
ACTIONS TAKEN TO CORRECT INJUSTICE

HEBREW: TSEDAQAH
RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS
EQUITY DESPITE SOCIAL DIFFERENCES

ACCUSATIONS OF IDOLATRY

(SEE 1 KINGS 12)
ASHERAH (SEX)
ANAT (WAR)
BAAL (WEATHER)
WORSHIP OF THESE GODS LEADS TO INJUSTICE...
...BUT NOT THE GOD OF ISRAEL

"SEEK ME, THAT YOU MAY LIVE." (5:4)
"SEEK GOOD, NOT EVIL, THAT YOU MAY LIVE." (5:14)

ANNOUNCING THE DAY OF THE LORD

AMOS & the PROPHETS
Zzz
yaaaan...
40 YEARS LATER... (SEE 2 KINGS 17)
ARMIES of ASSYRIA

7-9 AMOS' VISIONS

SYMBOLIC DEPICTIONS OF THE DAY OF THE LORD

SCORCHING FIRE
LOCUST SWARM
OVERRIPE FRUIT

GOD

9:11-15 A GLIMMER OF HOPE

HOUSE OF DAVID
FUTURE MESSIANIC KINGDOM
GOD'S KINGDOM OVER ALL NATIONS

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET OBADIAH

This is the shortest book in the Old Testament with a mere twenty-one verses, and, at first glance, doesn't look very promising. It's a series of divine judgment poems set against the ancient people of Edom, a nation neighboring Israel on the other side of the Dead Sea. However, there's way more going on in this little book than you might think.

First of all, here is the back story. The people of Edom are unique because they shared a common ancestry with the Israelites, they both belonged to the family of Abraham. Through Abraham and his wife Sarah, Isaac and his wife Rebekah had two sons called Jacob and Esau. Genesis 25–27 tells the story of these brothers, who, to say the least, had a tense relationship. The brothers later received the names "Israel" and "Edom," which eventually became the name of their families who replayed the same difficult relationship of their ancestors. Israel and Edom had enormous tensions throughout the centuries (see Numbers 20:14–20), despite their ancient family ties.

That family bond, however, was betrayed and shattered during the tragic events of Jerusalem's fall to Babylon (see 2 Kings 25). When Israel was invaded and conquered, the people of Edom apparently took advantage by plundering Israelite cities, capturing and even killing their captives (see Psalm 137:7, Lamentations 4:22, Ezekiel 35, and Amos 1:6–9). Now, in other prophetic books, Israel's other neighbors were held accountable for such violence, and here does the same with Edom.

VERSES 1–14

The book is made up of two halves, the first of which is a series of accusations against the leaders of Edom for their pride and self-exaltation. They say to themselves, "we live in the heights, at home with the stars. Who can bring us down" (Obadiah 1:3–4)? It is this pride that led the Edomites to not just stand idly by when Babylon came to destroy Jerusalem, but to actually participate in the destruction. So, God says through Obadiah, Edom will be brought down from their heights and destroyed. "As they have done to Israel, so it will be done to them" (Obadiah 1:15).

VERSE 15

Now, right when you think you're about to hear how Edom will meet its doom, the topic suddenly shifts. In verse 15, we hear that "the day of the Lord is near, against all nations." Why this sudden shift of focus from Edom to all nations?

This verse acts as a hinge piece, linking the first half of this book to the second, in which Obadiah announces the day of the Lord, not only for Edom but all nations. Obadiah says that all nations that act like Edom will face God's justice and they too will fall from their prideful heights and come to ruin.

The combination of these two sections shows us why Obadiah is so interested in this tiny southern neighbor of Israel in the first place. He sees Edom's pride and fall as an example or image of how God will one day confront the pride among all nations and bring about their fall. It's hardly coincidental that in Hebrew, the word *Edom* is spelled with the same three letters (אדם) as the word for "humanity" (*adam*). Even though these are different words, the wordplay shows that for Obadiah, Edom's behavior is typical of all the nations and deserves to face justice.

VERSES 16–21

However, as in all the prophet books, God's judgment is never his final word. Look back at the conclusions of the two previous books, Joel and Amos. Joel had painted a picture of what happens after the day of the Lord against all nations. He said that God would perform a new act of salvation in Jerusalem, that all who humbled themselves and called upon him would be delivered (see Joel 2:32 and 3:17). Amos said that, after the day of the Lord had judged Israel's evil, God would one day raise up the house of David and build a new kingdom for Israel that would include "Edom and all the nations that bear my name" (Amos 9:12). The book of Obadiah has been placed right after Joel and Amos to expand upon these very promises about the hope of God's kingdom over all the nations. God will restore his kingdom over the new Jerusalem and repopulate it with a faithful remnant. From there, God's kingdom will expand to include all the territory and nations surrounding Israel.

The little book of Obadiah contributes to the larger portrait of God's justice and faithfulness that we find in the prophets. The ancient pride and betrayal of the people of Edom becomes an example of the human condition and the ways in which people betray and hurt each other as well as God's good world. There's still hope, however, as Edom's downfall points to the day when God will deal with the evil in our world and bring his kingdom of peace over all nations.

That's what the book of Obadiah is all about.

OBADIAH

THE BACKSTORY:

- SHORTEST BOOK IN THE OLD TESTAMENT
- POEMS OF DIVINE JUDGMENT AGAINST ANCIENT EDOM
- BUT WAIT! THERE'S MORE TO IT!

ABRAHAM & SARAH

ISAAC & REBEKAH

JACOB & ESAU

SEE GENESIS 25-27

AKA ISRAEL

AKA EDOM

SEE NUMBERS 20:14-20

ISRAEL

MOAB

JUDAH

EDOM

BABYLON *INVADES* JERUSALEM (SEE 2 KINGS 25)

EDOM:
- PLUNDERED ISRAELITE CITIES
- ABUSED REFUGEES

(SEE PSALM 137:7, EZEKIEL 35, AMOS 1:6-9)

EDOM'S PRIDE & FALL
HEBREW: אֱדוֹם "EDOM"

IS AN IMAGE OF

THE PRIDE & FALL OF ALL NATIONS
HEBREW: אָדָם "ADAM" = HUMANITY

EDOM'S PRIDE is an EXAMPLE of the HUMAN CONDITION

EDOM'S DOWNFALL points to the COMING of GOD'S KINGDOM over ALL NATIONS

vv1-14 ACCUSATIONS AGAINST EDOM

EDOM'S PRIDE & SELF-EXALTATION

WE LIVE IN THE HEIGHTS, AT HOME WITH THE STARS! WHO CAN BRING US DOWN?! (1:3-4)

AS YOU HAVE DONE TO ISRAEL, IT WILL BE DONE TO YOU!

v15

"THE DAY OF THE LORD IS NEAR AGAINST ALL NATIONS.

vv16-21 THE DAY OF THE LORD FOR ALL NATIONS

v16 JUDGMENT OF ALL PRIDEFUL NATIONS

YOU GUYS TOO!

vv17-21 RESTORATION OF GOD'S KINGDOM OVER JERUSALEM & ALL NATIONS

NEW JERUSALEM

ALL NATIONS

AFTER THE DAY OF THE LORD:

JOEL 2&3: GOD WILL SAVE JERUSALEM & ALL WHO CALL ON HIS NAME.

AMOS 9:11-15 GOD WILL RESTORE DAVID'S LINE & INCLUDE EDOM & ALL NATIONS IN HIS KINGDOM.

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET JONAH

Jonah is unique among the books of the prophets, which are typically collections of God's words spoken through a prophet. This book doesn't really focus on the words of a prophet; rather, it's a subversive story about a prophet who resents his God for loving his enemies.

The prophet Jonah appears only one other time in the Old Testament, during the reign of one of Israel's worst kings, Jeroboam II. Jonah prophesied in his favor, promising that he would win a battle and regain territory on Israel's northern border (see 2 Kings 14:23–25). Now, it's important to know that the prophet Amos confronted Jeroboam II, and that through him God specifically reversed Jonah's prophecy (see Amos 6:13–14). Amos promised that Jeroboam II would lose those same territories because of his sin. So, before Jonah's story even begins, we're already a bit suspicious of this character.

The book is beautifully designed and is full of exquisite literary pairing and symmetry. Chapters 1 and 3 tell the story of Jonah's encounters with non-Israelites, first with some sailors, and later on with his hated enemies, the Ninevites. Each story offers a comic contrast between Jonah's selfishness and their humility and repentance. Chapters 2 and 4 contain "prayers" of Jonah, one a prayer of repentance, sort of, and the other a prayer in which Jonah chews God out for being too merciful and kind.

This careful design is matched by a very distinct style of narrative. The story is full of stereotyped characters who, ironically, do the exact opposite of what you would expect. The prophet, a man of God, rebels against and can't stand his own God. The sailors, who are supposed to be immoral pagans, have soft, repentant hearts and turn to God in humility. The king of the most powerful, murderous empire on earth humbles himself because of Jonah's five word sermon; even his cows join in the repentance. This kind of story fits in with what we would, today, call "satire": stories about well-known figures in extreme circumstances, using humor and irony to critique their stupidity and character flaws.

CHAPTER 1

The story opens with God addressing Jonah, commissioning him to go preach against the evil and injustice in Nineveh, the capital city of the Assyrian empire and Israel's bitter enemy. Instead of going east to Nineveh, Jonah runs in the opposite direction and finds a ship going as far west as one could possibly go, to Tarshish. The big question is, of course, why? Why does he run? Is he afraid? Does he just hate Ninevites? We're not told yet.

So the man of God tries to run from his God; he boards a ship full of pagan sailors and promptly goes below deck and falls asleep. God has to send a huge storm just to wake up his own prophet, while, ironically, the sailors are wide awake and see exactly what's happening. They discern that a divine power is at work, so they throw dice and discover that it's Jonah's sin that's causing the problem. When asked to explain himself, Jonah spouts off a bunch of religious mumbo-jumbo: "I'm a Hebrew, and I worship the LORD, who made the sea and the land." What a joke! He's obviously right in saying that God made the sea and dry land. But then he's dumb enough to run from that very same God…by getting on a boat?! When the sailors ask Jonah what to do, he says that they should just kill him by throwing him overboard. This seems noble at first, until you realize that this could be his most selfish move yet; what better way to avoid going to Nineveh?

He puts his blood on the innocent sailors' hands by forcing them to kill him. The sailors remain reluctant and actually repent to God as they toss the prophet over. The storm subsides and they come to fear the God of Israel and, unlike Jonah, actually worship him.

CHAPTER 2

God foils Jonah's plans to escape Nineveh by providing a strange, watery tomb for him—the stomach of a large fish. Under normal circumstances this would mean certain death, but in this story everything is upside down. Jonah's submarine death becomes his passage back to life. Cramped within the stomach of the beast, Jonah utters a prayer. He never technically says that he's sorry, but he does thank God for not abandoning him and promises that he will obey his God from this point on, no matter what. God's response is comical, the fish vomits Jonah out back onto dry land.

CHAPTER 3

Once again, God commissions Jonah to go to and preach in Nineveh, and this time he complies. We're told that Nineveh was a gigantic city that took days to walk through. Jonah only gets one day in and spreads this message, "forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned." His sermon is very short—a mere five words in the original Hebrew—and it's also a bit odd. Look at what's missing: there's no mention of what the Ninevites have done wrong or what they should do to respond; no mention of who might overturn them; and, most noticeably, there's no mention of God. What's going on here? Has Jonah intentionally given the bare minimum of information? Is he trying to sabotage his own message? It's almost like he's trying to ensure their destruction, as there's just no effort on his part.

Whatever his hidden motives are, the plan doesn't work. No sooner does he utter his five word sermon than the king of Nineveh and the entire city, including their cows, all repent in sorrow and ashes. For the second time, the "evil pagans" show themselves to be more responsive and humble than God's own prophet. God forgives the Ninevites and doesn't bring destruction down on the city.

Now, here's a brilliant part of this story, the last word of Jonah's short sermon, "overturned," means just that, "turned over." It can refer to a city being overthrown or destroyed, like Sodom was in Genesis 19:21, it can also be used to mean transformation—something being turned over and changed into its opposite (see 1 Samuel 10:6). So, ironically, Jonah's words did come true, but not in the way he intended. Nineveh gets turned over, alright, as Jonah's enemies repent and find God's mercy.

CHAPTER 4

The final chapter brings all the pieces together. Jonah is fuming mad and utters his second prayer. He first tells God why he ran away back in chapter one. It wasn't because he was afraid, but because he knew that God is so kind and merciful. Jonah actually quotes God's self-description from Exodus 34:6 and throws it back in his face as an insult. He knew that God is compassionate and would find a way to forgive those horrible Ninevites. You can almost hear the disgust in Jonah's voice before he cuts off the conversation and prays that God would just kill him on the spot. He'd rather die than live with a God who forgives his enemies.

Fortunately for Jonah, God doesn't comply but simply asks if Jonah's anger is justified. Jonah ignores the question and goes outside the city to camp on a nearby hill, waiting to see what will happen. Maybe those Ninevites will repent of their repentance and get roasted after all.

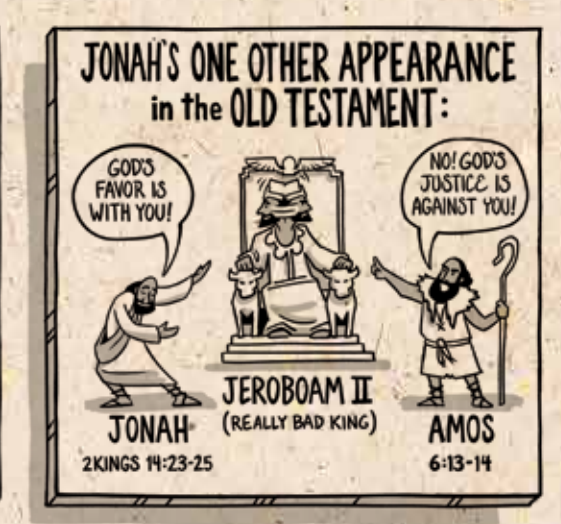
What happens next is a little odd. God provides a viney plant to shade Jonah from the sun, which makes him quite happy. But then God sends a tiny worm to eat the plant. Jonah loses his shade and gets really angry, again. In the heat of the sun Jonah asks again that God kill him. And God asks Jonah a second time if his anger is justified. Jonah barks back, "Absolutely, just let me die!" And those are Jonah's last words in the book.

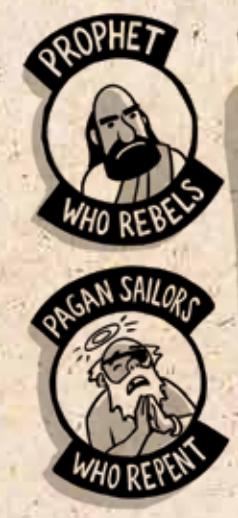
It's God who speaks the final words of the book. He says that the whole vine incident was an attempt to get through to Jonah. He got all emotional over this withered vine that he only enjoyed for a day. But, God asks, aren't humans a bit more valuable than vines? Isn't it OK if God feels the same emotional intensity and concern for the city of Nineveh, full of thousands of people who have lost their way? The book ends right there with God asking Jonah for permission to show mercy to his enemies, and their cows.

Jonah's answer? Well, the story doesn't say, because that's not really the point. The point is that this book is trying to mess with you—God's questions are really addressed to you, the reader. Are you okay with the fact that God loves your enemy?

The book of Jonah holds up a mirror to whoever reads it. In Jonah, we see the worst parts of ourselves magnified which should generate humility and gratitude that God does love his enemies and puts up with the Jonah in all of us. This strange story becomes a message of good news about the wideness of God's love, which ought to challenge us to the core.







JONAH

THE SUBVERSIVE STORY OF A REBELLIOUS PROPHET WHO HATES GOD FOR LOVING HIS ENEMIES

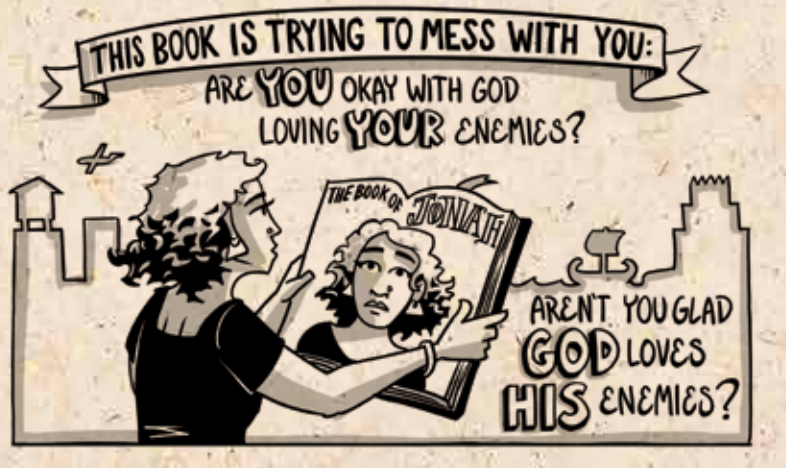
DISTINCT NARRATIVE STYLE:

EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES

Satire

HUMOR AND IRONY





1 JONAH AND THE SAILORS



2 JONAH'S 1ST PRAYER OF REPENTANCE (...SORT OF)



3 JONAH AND THE NINEVITES





4 JONAH'S 2ND PRAYER A CRITICISM OF GOD'S MERCY

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET MICAH

Micah lived in the small town of Moresheth in the southern kingdom of Judah at the same time Isaiah was alive in Jerusalem. The northern and southern kingdoms had split long ago, and both had been violating their covenant with the God of Israel. Micah warned that God would allow the empire of Assyria to take out the north and ravage Jerusalem, and that after them, Babylon would bring even more destruction. Like all the prophets, Micah spoke on God's behalf to accuse Israel, or, as he puts it in chapter 3, "I am filled with strength, with the Spirit of God, and with justice and power, to declare how Israel has rebelled" (Micah 3:8).

Most of this book explores Micah's accusations and warnings of God's impending judgment on Israel, but Micah also had a message of hope that countered these warnings and told of the restoration that God would one day bring about.

CHAPTERS 1–4a

The first two sections of the book develop Micah's accusations and warnings against Israel and its leaders. Chapter 1 opens with a poetic description of God appearing over Israel, just like he did at Mt. Sinai—with fire, smoke, and earthquake. Unlike the time at Mt. Sinai, God hasn't come to make a new covenant, but will instead bring judgment on them for over five hundred years' worth of rebellion. Micah proceeds to go down a list of towns and cities in Israel, like Shapir, Gath, Jerusalem, Lachish, Adullam, that were the culprits of all this rebellion, and says that God is coming for them. But why, exactly?

Micah is picking a fight with Israel's leaders. He says that they've become wealthy through theft and greed, alluding to the story of Ahab stealing a family vineyard from Naboth (see 1 Kings 21). Even Israel's prophets are corrupt, as they are quite happy to offer promises of God's protection to anyone who can pay them. As a result, Micah tells them that God has withdrawn his protection from Israel.

In chapters 3–4 Micah describes in a second set of accusations even more ways that the leaders and prophets have worked together to create grave injustices. They run the land with bribes and bend the law to favor the wealthy, depriving the poor of their land, their security, and eventually their hope. This is all in violation of the laws of the Torah, which declared it illegal to sell land belonging to families, including poor ones. God's judgment for this is going take the form of oppressive nations coming to take out the northern kingdom and Jerusalem and their temple.

While these are stiff warnings, the book doesn't end things there. Each section of warning is concluded with a striking promise of hope. The first of these is a poem about how God is like a shepherd who's going to rescue and regather his flock, the remnant of his people (see Micah 2:12–13). He'll bring them to good pastures and become their king once more. The second promise found in chapter 4, where Micah picks up on the image of the ruined Jerusalem temple and says that it won't be permanent. God will one day exalt his temple, fill it with his presence, and fill the city with the remnant of his people. God's purpose, to make Israel the meeting place of heaven and earth, will be fulfilled and all nations will stream to Jerusalem, where God will become their king and bring peace to all the earth.

CHAPTERS 4b–5

These two poems of hope are very powerful already, and the next section of the book develops their themes further with another set of beautifully designed poems. In Micah 4:8–13, we learn that after the Assyrian attack, Israel will be exiled to Babylon, but that God will eventually restore his people and bring them back to their land. In Micah 5:1–6, we learn that a new, messianic king from the line of David will come to the New Jerusalem. He'll be born in Bethlehem, and will rule in Jerusalem over the restored people of God. Finally, in Micah 5:7–14, we see that in the messianic kingdom of God the faithful remnant of God's people will be a blessing among the nations. This is when God will bring his final justice and remove evil from the world.

CHAPTERS 6–7

The final section of the book returns to the same pattern used in the first part; warning, followed by hope (chs. 6–7). Micah exposes the unjust economic practices of Israel's leaders that are destroying both the land and the people. It's here that Micah offers his famous words summarizing what it means for Israel to follow their God: "He has told you, O human, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). Israel has not been doing any of this, and so will come to ruin.

However, the book ends on another powerful note of hope. Israel is personified as an individual, sitting alone in shame and defeat. It's clearly an image of Israel's destruction and exile. The poet is watching for God's mercy, begging God to listen to and to forgive him—but why? Why should God do this for a faithless and rebellious people? The poet offers two reasons. First, because of God's character: "Who is a God like you, who forgives sin and pardons rebellion" (Micah 7:18)? Micah knows that God's mercy is more powerful than his anger or judgment. The second reason is because of God's promises: "You will stay true to Jacob, and show covenant love to Abraham, as you swore long ago" (Micah 7:20).

These are the final words of the book, and they're an allusion to God's covenant promises to Abraham's family all the way back in the book of Genesis 12, 15, and 17, that all nations will find God's blessing through Abraham and his family. In order to become this blessing, however, Israel must be faithful to their God. This explains all the back and forth between judgment and hope in the book of Micah. If God's going to bless the nations through Israel, then he must first confront and judge the evil among his people. And so, God's judgment is actually a source of hope, because his covenant love and promise are more powerful than human evil. God's ultimate purpose is not to destroy, but to save and redeem. As the concluding lines of the book put it, God "delights in covenant love, so he will again show compassion, he will trample our evil, he will toss our sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:18–20).

That's what the book of Micah is all about.

MICAH

"GOD DELIGHTS IN COVENANT LOVE, SO HE WILL AGAIN SHOW COMPASSION. HE WILL TRAMPLE OUR EVIL; HE WILL TOSS OUR SINS INTO THE DEPTHS OF THE SEA." 7:18-20



ALLUSION TO GOD'S COVENANT PROMISES TO ABRAHAM (GENESIS 12,15,17)

ALL NATIONS WILL FIND BLESSING THROUGH ABRAHAM

JUDGMENT ← GOD MUST CONFRONT & JUDGE EVIL AMONG HIS PEOPLE.

HOPE → GOD'S COVENANT LOVE & PROMISE ARE MORE POWERFUL THAN HUMAN EVIL.

1-2

ACCUSATIONS & WARNINGS

GOD APPEARS

TO JUDGE HIS PEOPLE

(LIKE AT MT. SINAI – SEE EXODUS 19-20)

GATH · LACHISH · ADULLAM · SHAPIR · JERUSALEM

BUT WHY...?

NABOTH (1 KINGS 21)

LEADERS & PROPHETS

WEALTHY THROUGH THEFT & GREED

HOPE & RESTORATION

2:12-13 GOD WILL SHEPHERD THE REMNANT OF HIS PEOPLE

3-4a

INJUSTICE OF ISRAEL'S LEADERS

DEED OF SALE · BUT IT'S OUR LAND!

TORAH VIOLATION! illegal sale of family land (SEE LEVITICUS 25:23, NUMBERS 36:7)

DISASTER IS COMING...

NO MORE!

...BUT IT'S NOT PERMANENT

4:1-7

REMNANT RESTORED!

PEACE ON EARTH!

NEW JERUSALEM

4b-5

4:8-13 ASSYRIA → BABYLONIAN EXILE → RESTORATION

BABYLON

BETHLEHEM · NEW JERUSALEM

5:1-6 MESSIANIC KINGDOM

5:7-14

GOD'S KINGDOM CONFRONTS EVIL & BLESSES THE NATIONS

THE REMNANT AMONG THE NATIONS!

6-7

ISRAEL'S UNJUST ECONOMIC PRACTICES

"HE HAS TOLD YOU, O HUMAN, WHAT IS GOOD, AND WHAT THE LORD REQUIRES OF YOU: TO DO JUSTICE, TO LOVE MERCY, AND TO WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD." (6:8)

7:8-20 ISRAEL PERSONIFIED AS A SUFFERING, DEFEATED INDIVIDUAL

2 REASONS FOR FUTURE HOPE:

1 GOD'S CHARACTER

"WHO IS A GOD LIKE YOU, WHO FORGIVES SIN & PARDONS REBELLION?" (7:18)

I WATCH FOR THE LORD... · LET MY GOD HEAR ME!

2 GOD'S PROMISES

"YOU WILL STAY TRUE TO JACOB & SHOW COVENANT LOVE TO ABRAHAM, AS YOU SWORE LONG AGO." (7:20)

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET NAHUM

This short prophetic book is a collection of poems that announce the downfall of one of Israel's worst oppressors, the ancient empire of Assyria and its capital city, Nineveh. The Assyrians arose as one of the world's first great empires, and their expansion into Israel resulted in the total destruction and exile of the northern kingdom and its tribes (see 2 Kings 17). Their armies were violent and destructive on a scale that the world had never seen before. Israel and its neighbors awaited the downfall of Assyria, which eventually came in the year 612 B.C. as the Babylonians rose up and began a rebellion that overtook Nineveh and brought down the Assyrian empire.

Chapter 2 depicts the fall of Nineveh in vivid poetry, while chapter 3 explores the downfall of Assyria as a whole. But this book isn't just an angry tirade against Israel's enemies. The introductory chapter shows that there's way more going on in this short prophetic work.

CHAPTER 1

The book opens with an incomplete alphabet poem that begins by describing a powerful appearance of God's glory and power. Similar to how the previous book, Micah, began, and how the following book, Habakkuk, concludes. God, the all-powerful Creator, comes to confront the nations and bring his justice on their evil.

The poem opens by quoting the famous line from God's self-description after the golden calf incident in Exodus 34:6–7, that "the Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and he won't leave evil unpunished." The rest of the poem goes back and forth, contrasting the fate of the arrogant, violent nations with the fate of God's faithful remnant: while God brings down all the arrogant empires, he will also provide refuge for those who humble themselves before him.

Now, this is interesting because it seemed like this book was only going to be about Assyria. If we look closer, we find that in the Hebrew text of Nahum, Nineveh is never actually mentioned by name in chapter 1. Also, as Nahum describes the downfall of Assyria, he does so with the same language Isaiah used to describe the fall of Babylon that happened much later (Nahum 1:8–9 and 14, see Isaiah 10 and 14). Not only that, but Nahum also describes the downfall of the bad guys as "good news for the remnant" of God's people, a direct allusion to Isaiah's good news about the downfall of Babylon (Nahum 1:15, see Isaiah 52:7).

All of these little details from chapter 1 come together and make a key point: for Nahum, the fall of Nineveh is an example, an image of how God is at work in history. He won't allow arrogant or violent empires to endure forever. This is very similar to the message of the book of Daniel. Assyria stands in a long line of violent empires throughout history, and Nineveh's fate is a memorial to God's commitment to bring down the arrogant in every age.

CHAPTERS 2–3

With this perspective in mind, the book continues by putting its focus back on Assyria. Chapter 2 describes the battle at Nineveh and the overthrow of the city in progressive stages. We see the front line of Babylonian soldiers, the charge of the chariots, the chaos on the city walls as the city is breached, the slaughter of Nineveh's people, and finally the plundering of the city. Chapter 3 describes the results of the city's downfall for the empire as a whole. Nahum announces a woe upon the city, whose kings built it with the blood of the innocent—an image of how injustice was built into the very system that made the nation successful. Their violence has sown the seeds of their own destruction, and so Assyria will fall before Babylon.

The book concludes with a taunt against the fallen king of Assyria, who's stricken with a fatal wound. No one from any of the nations he has oppressed offers help. Instead, they celebrate his demise. And that's where the book ends, describing this grim party.

Nahum is a gloomy book, but it's important to see how Nahum's message addresses the tragic and perpetual cycles of human violence, oppression, and suffering. Human history is filled with tribes and nations elevating themselves and using violence to take what they want, always resulting in massive loss of innocent lives. The book of Nahum, using Assyria and Babylon as examples, says that God is grieved and cares about the death of the innocent and that his goodness and justice compels him to orchestrate the downfall of oppressive nations. God's judgment of evil is good news, unless, of course, you happen to be Assyria.

This brings us all the way back to the conclusion of that first poem: "The Lord is good, a refuge in the day of distress. He cares for those who take refuge in him" (Nahum 1:7). The book invites every reader to humble themselves before God's justice, and trust that, in his time, he will confront the oppressors of every time and place.

NAHUM

A COLLECTION OF POEMS ANNOUNCING THE DOWNFALL OF ASSYRIA & NINEVEH

(SEE 2 KINGS 17)



ASSYRIA'S RISE ..... AND FALL*

*612 BC

ADDRESSES THE TRAGEDY OF VIOLENT OPPRESSION & HUMAN SUFFERING IN HISTORY

GOD IS GRIEVED BY THE DEATH OF THE INNOCENT

GOD'S GOODNESS & JUSTICE COMPEL HIM TO ORCHESTRATE THE DOWNFALL OF OPPRESSIVE NATIONS

etc...

the POINT:

NAHUM IS PORTRAYING NINEVEH'S FALL AS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW GOD WON'T ALLOW VIOLENT EMPIRES TO ENDURE. (SEE DANIEL)

ASSYRIA BABYLON PERSIA GREECE ROME etc.....

SIMILAR TO MICAH ch.1 & HABAKKUK ch.3

"THE LORD IS SLOW TO ANGER & GREAT IN POWER, & HE WON'T LEAVE EVIL UNPUNISHED." (1:3) (QUOTING EXODUS 34:6-7)

1

1:1-6 GOD APPEARS TO JUDGE EVIL AMONG THE NATIONS

1:7-15 THE FATE OF THE NATIONS

VS.

THE FATE OF GOD'S FAITHFUL REMNANT

1:8-9:14 FALL of the "BAD GUYS" = FALL of BABYLON (ISAIAH 10 & 14)

NAHUM *NOWHERE* MENTIONS NINEVEH IN ch.1

1:15 "GOOD NEWS" FOR THE REMNANT = ISAIAH 52:7

"THE LORD IS GOOD, A REFUGE IN THE DAY OF DISTRESS. HE CARES FOR THOSE WHO TAKE REFUGE IN HIM." (1:7)

2 THE FALL OF NINEVEH

THE OVERTHROW OF THE CITY

3 ASSYRIA'S DOWNFALL

"WOE TO THE CITY BUILT ON INNOCENT BLOOD!" (3:1)

ASSYRIA

VIOLENCE SOWS the SEEDS of its OWN DESTRUCTION

BABYLON

"PEOPLE CLAP AT YOUR FALL, FOR WHO HASN'T FELT YOUR PERPETUAL CRUELTY?" (3:19)

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET HABAKKUK

Habakkuk lived in the final decades of Israel's southern kingdom. It was a time of injustice and idolatry, and he saw the rising threat of the Babylonian empire on the horizon. Unlike the other Hebrew prophets, Habakkuk doesn't accuse Israel or even speak to the people on God's behalf. Instead, all of his words are addressed to God. The book tells us about Habakkuk's personal struggle to believe that God is good when there is so much tragedy and evil in the world.

Many of Habakkuk's words are actually poems of lament, similar to the lamentations in the book of Psalms. In a lament, the poet lodges a complaint to draw God's attention to the suffering and injustice in the world and then demands that God do something. Knowing this is actually the key to understanding the design and message of this short book. Chapters 1 and 2 are framed as a back-and-forth argument between Habakkuk and God. The prophet lodges two complaints (Habakkuk 1:2–4 and 1:12–2:1), to which God offers two responses (Habakkuk 1:5–11 and 2:2–5).

CHAPTERS 1–2a

Habakkuk's first complaint in verse 1:2–4 is that life in Israel is horrible. The Torah is neglected, resulting in violence and injustice, and all of it is being tolerated by Israel's corrupt leaders. Habakkuk is crying out, asking God to do something, but nothing is changing.

All of a sudden, God responds (Habakkuk 1:5–11), saying that he is aware of the deep corruption among his covenant people and that he's summoning the armies of Babylon to bring justice down on rebellious Israel. Similar to the message of Micah and Isaiah, God says that he will use this terrifying empire to devour Israel because of their injustice and evil.

Habakkuk has a problem with this answer, and offers up his second complaint (Habakkuk 1:12–2:1). Babylon, he says, is even worse than Israel. They are even more violent and corrupt; they've deified their own military power and treat humans like animals, gathering them up like fish in a net. They devour nations and people groups to further build their empire. Habakkuk asks how such a holy, good, and just God can possibly use such corrupt people as his instruments in history?! He demands an explanation and depicts himself as a watchman on the city walls, awaiting God's response.

God tells Habakkuk to get some tablets and write down all that he sees and hears, sending him a vision about an appointed time in the future that may seem slow in coming, but that will come. God also tells him that the "righteous person will live by their faith" in the hope presented in this vision.

What exactly is the divine promise that Habakkuk is to write down? God will one day bring Babylon down, using the never-ending cycle of revenge and violence created by nations like Babylon. The fact that God may, for a time, use a corrupt nation like Babylon doesn't mean that he endorses everything they do. He holds all nations accountable to his justice and so Babylon will fall, along with any nation that acts like them.

CHAPTER 2B

God's promise is then elaborated by a series of five "woes" that describe the typical forms of oppression and injustice perpetrated by nations like Babylon. The first two target unjust economic practices, like how wealthy people charge ridiculous interest to keep others trapped in debt, building their own wealth through crooked means. The third woe is a critique of slave labor and those who treat humans like animals, threatening them with violence if they aren't productive enough. The fourth woe targets the abuse of alcohol by irresponsible leaders. While others suffer under their bad leadership, they're partying and wasting their wealth on sex and booze. The last woe exposes the idolatry driving such nations. They have made money, power, and national security into gods, offering allegiance to them at all costs and becoming slaves to their own empire.

Now, the practices described here aren't unique to Babylon, and that's the point—given the human condition, most nations will eventually become Babylon. God's answer to Habakkuk becomes God's answer to all later generations, to anyone who lives in a world ruled by other Babylons. This leaves us with an unsettling, open question: will God let this cycle go on forever, letting Babylon-like empires ruin each other and his world?

CHAPTER 3

This question is what the last chapter is all about. In the opening line it's a "prayer of Habakkuk," where the prophet begins by pleading with God to act in the present like he has in the past, bringing down corrupt nations: "renew your work in our days (Habakkuk 3:2)." What follows is an ancient poem that describes a powerful and terrifying appearance of God through clouds, fire, and earthquake. It's very similar to the opening poems of Micah and Nahum as well as the appearance of God at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19–20. When the Creator shows up to confront human evil, it will get everyone's attention.

Habakkuk continues by describing the future defeat of evil among the nations as a future Exodus. Just like God came as a warrior and split the sea in his battle against Pharaoh, Habakkuk says that God will once more bring his judgment down on the "head of the evil house." Pharaoh, like Babylon, has become an archetype of violent nations. At the same time, when God confronts evil, he will "save his people, and his anointed one"—a reference to the coming king from the line of David (Habakkuk 3:13). In this poem, the Exodus story of the past has become an image of a future Exodus God will perform. He will once again defeat evil and bring down the Pharaohs and Babylons of the world, bringing justice to all people and rescuing the oppressed and innocent.

It's this hope that enables Habakkuk to end the book with hopeful praise. Even if the world is falling apart from food shortages, drought, war, or whatever, he will choose to trust and take joy in the covenant promise of God. By the end of the book, Habakkuk becomes a shining example of how "the righteous live by faith." He recognizes just how dark and chaotic the world and our lives can become, but also how this invites us into the journey of faith, trusting that God loves this world more than we can imagine and that he will one day deal with its evil.

HABAKKUK



- DOESN'T ACCUSE ISRAEL
- ADDRESSES GOD WITH HIS STRUGGLE: IS GOD GOOD WHEN THERE'S SO MUCH EVIL IN THE WORLD?
- **LAMENT**: DRAWING GOD'S ATTENTION TO INJUSTICE

A PAST EXODUS becomes an *image* of A *FUTURE* EXODUS

WHEN GOD WILL:

- DEFEAT EVIL
- BRING JUSTICE TO ALL
- RESCUE THE OPPRESSED

NOT UNIQUE! MOST NATIONS EVENTUALLY *BECOME* BABYLON...

GOD'S ANSWER TO Habakkuk ➡ Later Generations

1-2a HABAKKUK . . . . & GOD

1:2-4 COMPLAINT #1

HOW LONG WILL I CRY OUT? WHY WON'T YOU LISTEN? (1:2)

TORAH NEGLECTED

VIOLENCE & INJUSTICE

CORRUPT LEADERSHIP

1:5-11 RESPONSE #1

LOOK! I'M RAISING UP THE BABYLONIANS.

1:12-2:1 COMPLAINT #2

WHAT?! BABYLON IS EVEN **WORSE** THAN ISRAEL!

THEY DEIFY THEIR POWER
THEY TREAT HUMANS LIKE ANIMALS
THEY DEVOUR NATIONS

I'LL STAND WATCH & WAIT FOR GOD TO RESPOND TO ME. (2:1)

2:2-5 RESPONSE #2

- GOD WILL BRING BABYLON **DOWN!**
- GOD MAY USE CORRUPT KINGDOMS, BUT DOESN'T ENDORSE THEM.
- *ALL* NATIONS ARE ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD'S JUSTICE.

VISION ABOUT AN APPOINTED TIME

"Righteous WILL LIVE BY THEIR Faith" (2:4)

2b FIVE 'WOES'

THE OPPRESSIVE INJUSTICE OF BABYLON

1&2) UNJUST ECONOMICS

3.) SLAVE LABOR

4.) IRRESPONSIBLE LEADERS

5.) IDOLATRY

3 HABAKKUK'S PRAYER

3:1-2 HABAKKUK PLEADS WITH GOD

RENEW YOUR WORK IN **OUR** DAYS! (3:2)

3:3-7 GOD APPEARS IN POWER!

SIMILAR TO MICAH 1 & NAHUM 1... & TO MT. SINAI (EXODUS 19-20)

ARCHETYPE of EVIL NATIONS

"YOU CRUSH THE HEAD OF THE EVIL HOUSE." (3:13)

"YOU SAVE YOUR PEOPLE AND YOUR ANNOINTED ONE." (3:13)

3:8-15 A FUTURE EXODUS

3:16-19 HOPEFUL PRAISE

EVEN IF THE FIELDS PRODUCE NO FOOD, I WILL FIND **JOY** IN GOD MY SAVIOR. (3:17-18)

SHINING EXAMPLE OF THE "Righteous LIVING BY Faith"

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET ZEPHANIAH

Zephaniah lived during the final decades of the southern kingdom of Judah, when king Josiah had attempted to bring about real change in the land by removing idols and restoring the temple to the worship of Israel's God alone (see 2 Kings 22–23). By that point, however, Israel was already too far gone, as the worship of other gods was too entrenched in the people's lives. Josiah's pride led him to a tragic death on the battlefield (see 2 Chronicles 35:20–25), and so Jerusalem was set on a collision course with Babylon. Zephaniah had seen all this coming and had been warning the leaders of Jerusalem for years. This book is a collection of his poetry and a summary of his message.

The book of Zephaniah has a three-part design. The first focuses on the day of the Lord's judgment coming for Judah and Jerusalem (Zephaniah 1:1–2:3), while the second looks at the day of the Lord's judgment on the other nations and Jerusalem once more (Zephaniah 2:4–3:8). The third section explores the hope that remains for the nations and Jerusalem on the other side of judgment (Zephaniah 3:9–20).

CHAPTERS 1:1–2:3

The first section opens with a shocking reversal of Genesis 1, God's good, ordered world is going to descend back into disorder and darkness, becoming uninhabitable once again. As you keep reading, you realize that Zephaniah is developing this powerful poetic image to describe how Jerusalem's world is going to end. All of the city's institutions for worshiping the gods of the Canaanites will be destroyed. All the leaders who perpetrated injustice, all the economic centers where crooked lending and borrowing took place, all of it will be gone. Zephaniah is using these apocalyptic images to show the heavenly significance of what's going to happen. God will allow a great army to come and to take out Jerusalem.

It's interesting that Zephaniah never mentions whose army God will use to bring his judgment. We know from the books of Micah and Habakkuk that it's Babylon, but Zephaniah never mentions that because he wants to highlight God's role in orchestrating the rise and fall of nations. This is actually what gives Zephaniah hope. While Jerusalem as a whole cannot avoid its fate, Zephaniah calls on any in the city who would "seek the Lord" (Zephaniah 2:1–3). He says that these are the faithful remnant, who can be spared if they repent.

CHAPTERS 2:4–3:8

In the second section, Zephaniah widens his focus to include the nations around Judah: the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, even the Assyrians. He accuses them all of corruption, violence, and arrogance and predicts that they will fall before Babylon (Zephaniah 2:4–15).

What's shocking is that the final people group targeted in this section about the pagan nations are the Israelites in Jerusalem. Their leaders, prophets, and priests are so corrupt, violent and estranged from their God that he doesn't even recognize them as his people anymore. The section ends with God's final decision: he's going to gather up all nations, including Jerusalem, and "pour out his burning indignation" (Zephaniah 3:8). God's justice becomes a consuming fire, devouring evil from the land.

CHAPTER 3:9–20

This is some really intense imagery, and so the following line that brings us into the final part of the book comes as a surprise. This burning fire of divine justice is not aimed at total destruction, but will rather purify the nations and Jerusalem itself (Zephaniah 3:9–20). God says that he will heal and transform the rebellious nations into a unified family, and that, after being purified, they will turn from their evil and call upon the name of the Lord. These images point to the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham from Genesis 12, that he would find a way to bless the nations, and here Jerusalem as well.

The conclusion of the book focuses on the restoration of a new Jerusalem at the center of the other nations. God's presence will be there, along with the faithful remnant that's been humbled and transformed by God's mercy. This remnant is called to sing and rejoice, and, in a striking image, we're told that God is a poet who sings as well: "Your God will live among you…he will celebrate you with songs of joy" (Zephaniah 3:17). The closing poem ends with powerful images of God gathering up into his family the outcast, the poor, and the broken, exalting them into a place of honor.

The little book of Zephaniah contains some of the most intense images of God's justice and love that you find anywhere in the prophets. His Justice comes from his passion to protect and rescue his world from the horror of human evil and violence. He simply won't tolerate the horrible things that humans do to each other and the world they live in. But God's judgment has a greater purpose, to restore and create a world where people can flourish in safety and peace.

Zephaniah forces us to hold together two aspects of God's character—his justice and his love—and wants us to discover that, together, they contain the future hope for our world.

ZEPHANIAH

FINAL DECADES of the SOUTHERN KINGDOM (SEE 2nd KINGS 22-23)



ZEPHANIAH CONTAINS VERY INTENSE IMAGES OF GOD'S

JUSTICE A PASSION TO RESCUE HIS WORLD FROM HUMAN EVIL & VIOLENCE

...IN ORDER TO:

& **LOVE** CREATE A WORLD WHERE EVERYONE CAN FLOURISH IN SAFETY & PEACE

1-2:3 JUDGMENT ON JERUSALEM

1 JERUSALEM'S WORLD IS GOING TO END

DARKNESS

REVERSAL of GENESIS 1

DISORDER

APOCALYPTIC IMAGES REFER TO AN ARMY

ZEPHANIAH DOESN'T SAY WHO,
(HINT: IT'S BABYLON)
BECAUSE HE WANTS TO HIGHLIGHT *GOD'S* ROLE.

2:1-3 HOPE FOR THE REMNANT

SEEK THE LORD, YOU WHO ARE HUMBLE. (2:3)

IN YOUR MERCY, SPARE US, O GOD!

2:4-3:8 JUDGMENT ON THE NATIONS & JERUSALEM ...AGAIN!

2:4-15 ACCUSATIONS AGAINST THE NATIONS

PHILISTINES

MOABITES

AMMONITES

ASSYRIANS

ALL OF THEM WILL FALL BEFORE BABYLON

3:1-8 ...INCLUDING JERUSALEM!

GOD DOESN'T EVEN RECOGNIZE HIS OWN PEOPLE ANYMORE...

NOT TOTAL DESTRUCTION, BUT *Purification*

"MY DECISION IS TO GATHER ALL THE NATIONS & POUR OUT MY BURNING INDIGNATION." (3:8)

3:9-20 HOPE FOR THE NATIONS & JERUSALEM

3:9-10 GOD TRANSFORMS THE NATIONS INTO A UNIFIED FAMILY

"I WILL PURIFY THE LIPS OF THE NATIONS SO THEY CAN CALL ON THE LORD." (3:9)

FULFILMENT OF GOD'S PROMISES TO ABRAHAM *to bless the nations* (SEE GENESIS 12, 15, 17)

3:11-20 GOD RESTORES JERUSALEM

"YOUR GOD WILL LIVE AMONG YOU & HE WILL CELEBRATE YOU WITH SONGS OF JOY." (3:17)

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET HAGGAI

While Haggai is one of the smaller prophetic books in the Bible, it is crucially important in the overall story of the Hebrew Bible. For centuries, the Hebrew prophets had been accusing Israel of breaking their covenant with God through idolatry and injustice. They warned that God would send the great empire of Babylon to take out Jerusalem, destroy the temple, and haul the people off into exile. And this is what happened in the year 587 B.C. (see 2 Kings 24–25), but it wasn't the end of the story. The prophets had a deep conviction that God would bring back a transformed remnant of Israel to live in a new Jerusalem, where God's presence would live in their midst.

When we turn to Haggai, the date is 520 B.C., nearly seventy years after the exile. Babylon's empire has recently collapsed, and the world is now ruled by the Persians, who allowed the return of any exiled Israelites who wanted to go back to Jerusalem. Under the leadership of a high priest, named Joshua, and Zerubbabel, an heir from the line of David, a group of exiles returned and began to rebuild the city and their lives (see Ezra 1–6). So, you can imagine, the people's hopes are high, and the future seems bright! But not from Haggai's point of view.

CHAPTER 1:1–15

The book consists of four sections that summarize Haggai's message given to the people of Jerusalem over the course of four months. He opens in chapter 1 by accusing the people of misplaced priorities. Sure, they've come back to Jerusalem, but they're spending all their time and resources rebuilding their own fancy houses, while the temple still lay in ruins from its destruction nearly seventy years ago. Haggai asks, "Are your own houses really more important than your allegiance to God?" This neglect is tantamount to the covenant rebellion of their ancestors. This is why the land is unproductive and why they're struck with famine and drought. They are repeating the folly of their forefathers, which is why Haggai echoes the list of covenant curses from Deuteronomy 28:22–40.

Haggai's words are followed by a story about the people's response, similar to Ezra 5:1–2. We're told that Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the remnant of Israel were provoked by Haggai's message and were motivated to start rebuilding the temple.

CHAPTER 2:1–9

In the second section, Haggai follows up one month later and addresses a problem of shattered expectations among the people. The temple they are rebuilding is…unimpressive. It's nothing compared to the glory of the temple Solomon built some five hundred years earlier. As you can imagine, morale was pretty low for finishing the project. Haggai reminds the people of the great prophetic promises of the future kingdom of God and his temple. Here he draws from earlier prophets, especially Isaiah and Micah, saying that the new Jerusalem will be the place from which God will redeem the world, and that all nations will come and participate in God's kingdom, resulting in peace for all (see Isaiah 9, 60–62, and Micah 4–5). So, the temple plays a key role in God's plans for the future, and Haggai calls on the people to work in hope, despite the disappointing circumstances.

CHAPTER 2:10–19

In the third section, Haggai follows up two months later with a call to covenant faithfulness. Calling back to the key ideas from Leviticus, he engages some priests in a conversation about ritual purity,. If someone touches a dead body and becomes ritually impure, or marked by death, and then goes to touch some food, does it become impure, too? The priests say, "Yes." Then Haggai turns this scenario into a parable. It's the same with the people of Israel and what they're putting their hands to as they rebuild the temple. If the current generation doesn't humble themselves and turn from injustice and apathy, then whatever they build with their hands, including the new temple, will be impure.

In other words, it's only by true repentance and covenant faithfulness that their building efforts will result in God bringing his kingdom and blessing. So, in one sense, their future lay in their hands, and God is waiting for his people to be faithful. The choice that Haggai puts before the exiled generation is very similar to the challenge Moses gave to the wilderness generation before entering the land (see Deuteronomy 30). Their obedience will lead to blessing and success, while faithlessness will lead to ruin.

CHAPTER 2:20–23

The book concludes with Haggai's summary of the future hope in God's kingdom. God will make the new Jerusalem the center of his glorious international kingdom. Just as he defeated Pharaoh long ago, God will again confront and defeat evil among the nations and fulfill his promise to David by establishing a king from his line, who, in Haggai's day, was represented by Zerubbabel.

The book concludes with the choice of a bright future just hanging there. Will Haggai's generation be faithful to God and experience the fulfillment of the promises? Will Zerubbabel be faithful and turn out to be the messianic king?

To find out, you have to keep reading into the last two books of the prophets, Zechariah and Malachi. But you can see how this little book contains a great challenge to every generation of God's people. Haggai's point is that our choices matter, and the faithfulness and obedience of God's people is part of how he has chosen to work out his purposes in the world. This surprising reality should motivate humility and action in the hope of God's coming kingdom. That's the challenge Haggai laid before his own people, and before you and I today.

HAGGAI

587 B.C. (SEE 2 KINGS 24-25)

BABYLON'S COMING! DESTRUCTION! EXILE!

HEBREW PROPHETS

...BUT THERE'S HOPE!

NEW JERUSALEM

THE CHALLENGE OF HAGGAI

- OUR CHOICES MATTER.
- THE OBEDIENCE OF GOD'S PEOPLE IS PART OF HOW GOD WORKS IN THE WORLD.
- THIS SHOULD MOTIVATE HUMILITY & ACTION.

BABYLON
PERSIA

520 B.C. (SEVENTY YEARS LATER)

JOSHUA (high priest)

ZERUBBABEL (from the line of David)

SEE EZRA ch 1-6

THE FUTURE SEEMS BRIGHT...

...BUT NOT FROM HAGGAI'S POINT OF VIEW!

1:1-15 ACCUSATION & RESPONSE

AUGUST 520 B.C.

IT'S NOT *TIME* TO REBUILD THE TEMPLE! (1:2)

ARE YOUR HOUSES MORE IMPORTANT THAN YOUR ALLEGIANCE TO GOD? (1:4)

THE TEMPLE

THIS IS COVENANT *REBELLION!* SEE DEUTERONOMY 28:22-40

JOSHUA & ZERUBBABEL

THE PEOPLE SET TO WORK (SEE EZRA 5:1-2)

2:1-9 ADDRESSING SHATTERED EXPECTATIONS

ONE MONTH LATER

ELDERS WHO REMEMBER SOLOMON'S TEMPLE

REMEMBER THE PROMISE OF GOD'S FUTURE KINGDOM!

NEW JERUSALEM

NEW TEMPLE

THE NATIONS JOIN GOD'S KINGDOM (SEE ISAIAH 9 & 60-62, MICAH 4-5)

2:10-19 CALL TO COVENANT FAITHFULNESS

TWO MONTHS LATER

A CONVERSATION ABOUT RITUAL PURITY (REMEMBER LEVITICUS)

THIS GUY'S RITUALLY IMPURE FROM TOUCHING A DEAD BODY...

...IS THE FOOD IMPURE TOO?

YES!

THAT'S WHAT THESE PEOPLE ARE LIKE:

IMPURITY = INJUSTICE, APATHY

IMPURE!

(SEE DEUTERONOMY 30)

OBEDIENCE → BLESSING

UNFAITHFULNESS → RUIN

THE WILDERNESS GENERATION

THE EXILED GENERATION

MOSES

HAGGAI

ONLY TRUE REPENTANCE & COVENANT FAITHFULNESS

WILL LEAD TO...

THE COMING OF GOD'S KINGDOM & BLESSING

2:20-23 FUTURE HOPE OF GOD'S KINGDOM

THAT SAME DAY

ESTABLISHMENT of MESSIANIC KING (ZERUBBABEL?)

DEFEAT EVIL AMONG the NATIONS

NATIONS

NEW JERUSALEM

ARGH!

WILL HAGGAI'S GENERATION EXPERIENCE THE FULFILMENT OF THESE PROMISES? IS ZERUBBABEL THE MESSIAH?.....KEEP READING!

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH

This book is set after the return of the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem. We were told in the book of Ezra (see Ezra 5:1–2) that Zechariah and Haggai together challenged and motivated the people to rebuild the temple and to look for the fulfillment of God's promises. Long ago, Jeremiah the prophet had said that Israel's exile would last for seventy years (see Jeremiah 25:11 and 29:10), and that afterwards God would restore his presence to a new temple. That's when God would bring his kingdom and the rule of the Messiah over all nations (see Jeremiah 30–33). The dates at the beginning of this book tell us that the seventy years were almost up, but life back in the land was hard and it seemed like none of these hopes were ever going to be fulfilled. The book of Zechariah offers an explanation about what went wrong.

The book has a fairly clear literary design. There's an introduction that sets the tone for a large collection of Zechariah's dream-like visions in chapters 1–6. The dreams are concluded in chapters 7–8, and are then followed by two more collections of poetry and prophecy in chapters 9–11 and 12–14, respectively. Let's dive in and see how it all works.

CHAPTER 1:1–6

The book begins with Zechariah's challenge to his generation to turn back to God and to not act like their ancestors who had rebelled and refused to listen to the earlier prophets. That rebellion is what landed them in exile. The people's response to Zechariah was ideal, as they repented and humbled themselves before God, or so it seems.

CHAPTERS 1:7–6:15

The next section is a collection of eight nighttime visions that Zechariah experienced. Just to prepare you, these are full of bizarre and strange images, just like your own dreams. The idea that God communicates to people through symbolic dreams is an old one, going all the way back to Genesis. The dreams of Jacob in Genesis 28, Joseph in Genesis 37 and Pharaoh in Genesis 41 all gave meaning to current events or offered a window into the future.

Zechariah's dreams have been arranged in a really cool symmetrical structure. The first and last visions (Zechariah 1:8–17 and 6:1–8, respectively) are about four horsemen, who are like rangers, patrolling the world on God's behalf. They represent God's attentive watch over the nations, and their report is that the world's at peace (Zechariah 1:11 and 6:8). In Zechariah's day, God raised up Persia to conquer Babylon and bring relative peace. The question arises, if the seventy years of Israel's exile are nearly up and if there's peace, isn't now the time for the messianic kingdom in Jerusalem? God responds by saying that he will fulfill those promises, but he leaves the issue of timing strangely unanswered.

The second and seventh visions (Zechariah 1:18–21 and 5:5–11) are paired as reflections on Israel's past sin that led to the exile. The second vision is about four horns that symbolize the nations that attacked and scattered Israel. Like Assyria and Babylon, those empires were themselves scattered by a group of blacksmiths, an image of Persia. The matching seventh dream is about a woman in a basket. We're told that she is a symbol of the centuries of Israel's covenant rebellion, and she is promptly carried to Babylon by other women with stork wings (so bizarre!).

The third and sixth visions (Zechariah 2:1–13 and 5:1–4) are paired as they both focus on the rebuilding of a new Jerusalem. The third dream depicts a man measuring the city. It's an image of God's promise that Jerusalem will be rebuilt and will become a beacon to the nations who will join God's people in worship. In the sixth vision, a scroll flies around the new Jerusalem punishing thieves and liars, the idea being that the new Jerusalem is a place purified from sin by the Scriptures.

The fourth and fifth visions (Zechariah 3:1–10 and 4:1–14) are at the center of the dream section. They are about the two key leaders among the returned exiles: Joshua, the high priest and Zerubbabel, a royal descendant of David. Joshua was symbolically wearing Israel's sin in the form of dirty clothes, but in the fourth dream those are taken off and he's given new clean clothes and a turban as a symbol of God's grace. An angel tells Joshua that if he remains faithful to God, he will lead his people and become a symbol of the future messianic king.

The fifth vision is of two olive trees that supply oil to an elaborate gold lamp. The lamp is a symbol of God's watchful eye over his people, while the two trees symbolize the anointed leaders Joshua and Zerubbabel, who are leading the temple rebuilding efforts. God says, however, that success won't come to the new temple if it's only the result of political maneuvering; rather, these two must be dependent on the work of God's Spirit (Zechariah 4:6).

The dreams conclude with a short bonus vision from Zechariah in 6:9–15. This vision picks up the themes of the central fourth and fifth visions. Joshua the priest is given a crown and is presented as a symbol of the future Messiah, who will also be a priest in God's kingdom. However, Zechariah says, all this will be fulfilled only if the current generation is faithful to God and obeys the terms of the covenant. All together, these three visions emphasize how the coming of the messianic kingdom is conditional upon this generation becoming faithful to God.

CHAPTERS 7–8

This leads up to the conclusion of the dream visions with another challenge in Zechariah 7–8. A group of Israelites come, who have been mourning over the former temple's destruction for nearly seventy years. They ask, "Should we stop grieving? Is God's kingdom coming soon?" In response, Zechariah again reminds them of how their ancestors rejected God's call through the prophets, which led to the exile (Zechariah 7:4–14). He repeats this ancient prophetic challenge in chapter 8. This generation will see the messianic kingdom, but only if they pursue justice and peace and remain faithful to the covenant. In other words, Zechariah reverses their question and asks, "Will you become the kinds of people who are ready to receive and participate in God's coming kingdom?"

The question is left hanging as the people don't answer, and the book just moves on.

CHAPTERS 9–14

The two final sections (Zechariah 9–11 and 12–14) are very different from the first eight chapters. Each one is a kaleidoscopic collage of poems and images about the future messianic kingdom. The first (chs. 9–11) describes the coming of a humble messianic king, riding a donkey into the new Jerusalem to establish God's kingdom over the nations. The king is then symbolized as a shepherd over the flock of Israel. He is rejected by his own people and their leaders, who are also symbolized as shepherds. As a form of discipline, God hands Israel over to those corrupt leaders. This then raises the question, will Israel's rejection of their shepherd king last forever?

The final section (chs. 12–14) answers with a clear, "No." It's another mosaic of poems and images about the future messianic kingdom. With imagery very similar to the poetry of Joel and Ezekiel, these chapters depict the new Jerusalem as the place where God's justice finally confronts and defeats evil among the nations. However, God also confronts the rebellion of his own people. He's going to pour out his Spirit upon them, so that they repent and grieve over the fact that they rejected their messianic shepherd. The final chapter 14 concludes with the new Jerusalem as the gathering point for all the nations. The city becomes a new garden of Eden, with a river of living water flowing out of the temple to bring healing to all creation.

And that's where the book ends. Zechariah leaves you to ponder the connection between chapters 1–8 and 9–14. The point seems to be that the future kingdom of the book's second half will only come when God's people are faithful to the covenant as the first half made clear.

Reading the book of Zechariah is a wild ride. These visions and poems are full of startling imagery, and they don't really follow a linear flow of thought. That's actually part of the point. It's like history, or our own lives, which don't always fit into neat, orderly patterns. The prophets offer us glimpses of God's hand at work, guiding history towards his purpose. So, ultimately, Zechariah invites us to look above the chaos and hope for the coming of God's kingdom, which should motivate faithfulness in the present moment. That's the challenge Zechariah offers to all generations of God's people.





(SEE EZRA 5:1-2)

ZECHARIAH



1:1-6 INTRODUCTION



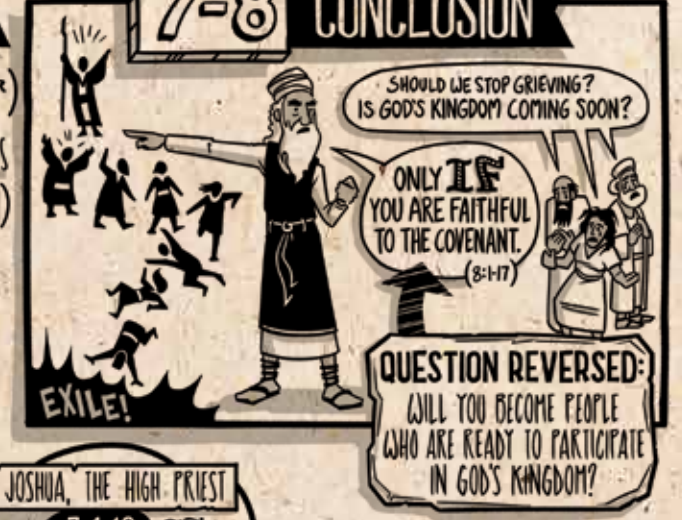
1:7-6 ZECHARIAH'S DREAM-VISIONS



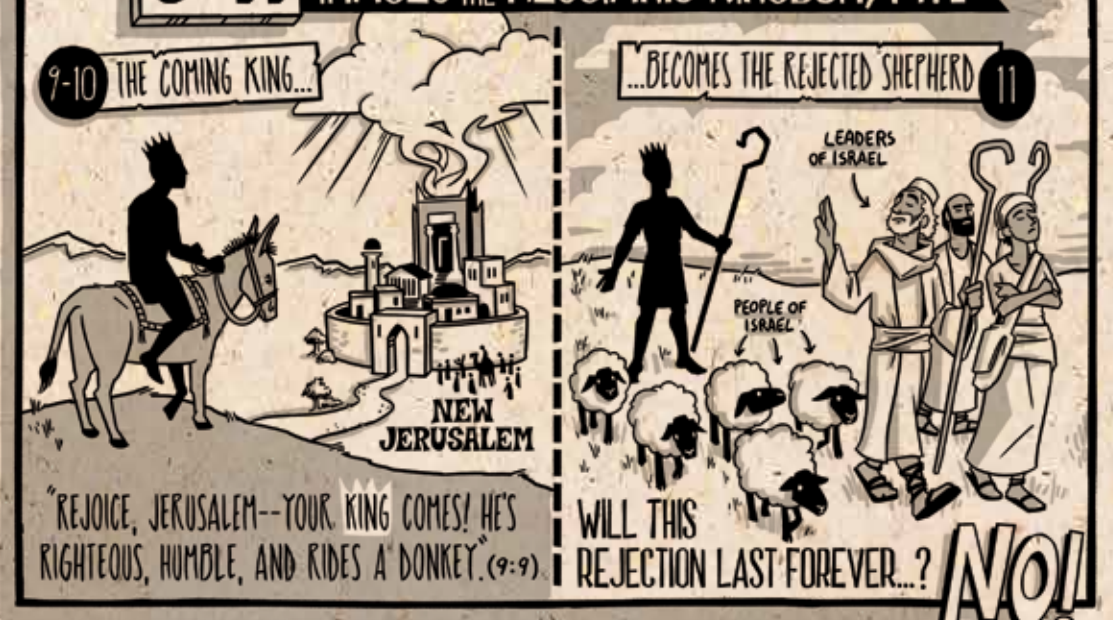
WARNING: THESE ARE BIZARRE (LIKE YOUR DREAMS!)

- THE IDEA OF GOD SPEAKING IN DREAMS IS ROOTED IN GENESIS (JACOB, ch28: JOSEPH, ch37: PHAROAH, ch41)
- THEY EXPLAIN CURRENT EVENTS *OR* POINT TO THE FUTURE.

7-8 CONCLUSION



9-11 IMAGES OF THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM, PT. 1





















12-14 IMAGES OF THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM, PT. 2



THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET MALACHI

Malachi lived about a hundred years after the Israelites had returned from Babylonian exile, and his message was directed to the people who had been living in Jerusalem for some time. The temple had been rebuilt a while ago, but recall the stories in Ezra-Nehemiah; things were not going well. When the first Israelites had returned from exile, hopes were high. They would rebuild their lives and the temple, and all the great promises of the prophets would come true. The Messiah would come and set up God's kingdom over a unified Israel and over the other nations, bringing peace and justice.

Unfortunately, none of that had happened, and the Israelites who repopulated the city proved to be just as unfaithful to God as their ancestors. Jerusalem became a place of poverty and injustice once again, and in the book of Malachi, we find out just how corrupt this new generation had become.

The book is designed as a series of disputes, or arguments. Most sections begin with God saying something or making a claim or an accusation. This is followed by Israel disagreeing or questioning God's statement. Finally, God will respond and offer the last word. This pattern repeats itself six times. In the first three disputes (chs. 1–2), God exposes Israel's corruption, while in the final three (ch. 3) he confronts their corruption. The overall impression you get from reading these disputes is that the exile didn't fundamentally change anything in the people. Their hearts are as hard as ever.

CHAPTERS 1–2

The first dispute (Malachi 1:2–5) starts as God says that he still loves his covenant people, Israel, despite their failures. Israel rudely says, "How have you shown us love?" God reminds them of how he graciously chose the family of Jacob, their ancestor, to become the carrier of God's covenant promises instead of his brother Esau and his family, who eventually came to ruin (see Genesis 25–27 and Obadiah). Right from the start in this first dispute, Israel is exposed as suspicious, doubting God's faithfulness and love.

The second dispute (Malachi 1:6–2:9) exposes a problem with Israel's second temple. God accuses the people of despising him and defiling the temple (Malachi 1:6–7), while the people fire back, "How have we despised you?" God responds by focusing on how the people are bringing shameful offerings of sick, blemished animals. It shows that they don't value or honor their God. And the priests are part of the problem too, because they not only tolerate but also participate in these corrupt forms of worship. From top to bottom, God's people have proven themselves totally faithless.

In the third dispute (Malachi 2:10–16), God accuses the Israelite men of treachery against him and their wives (see Malachi 2:10 and 14). Of course, they deny this. So God exposes the toxic combination of idolatry and divorce that was taking place. Israelite men were marrying non-Israelites, and adopting the worship of their wives' ancestral gods in their homes (see Nehemiah 13). Malachi then connects this to a wave of men divorcing their wives without any good reason. The worst part is that the people seem fine with all of this. Malachi says, "No!" This is a betrayal of their covenant with God.

CHAPTER 3

Malachi transitions into the second set of disputes, which confront Israel's rebellion. The fourth dispute (Malachi 2:17–3:5) begins with the Israelites accusing God of neglect, saying, "Where is the God of justice?" They see injustice and corruption abound, but God seems to do nothing. God responds by saying that he will send a messenger who will prepare the people for his personal return in the day of the Lord. It will come like a fire, to purify his people and to remove idolatry, sexual immorality, and social injustice, so that only the faithful remnant is left to become his people.

In the fifth dispute (Malachi 3:6–12) God calls the people to turn back to him, to which the people say, "How?!" God confronts their selfishness and reminds them that they stopped offering a tithe from their income to the temple. Now, the word "tithe" just means "one-tenth," which was supposed to be the amount of their income that was annually donated to support the temple and its priests, a practice that was laid out in the Torah in Leviticus 27:30 and Deuteronomy 12:6. However, we know from Malachi and Nehemiah 13:10–11 that the people had neglected this responsibility and so the temple fell into disrepair. God confronts them, saying that while he wants to bless them with abundance, he will only do so if they are faithful.

In the final dispute (Malachi 3:13–18), the people accuse God, saying that it is pointless to serve him. They observe wicked, prideful people succeeding in life all the time, but God seems to do nothing about it. The response, for the first time in the book, is not a speech from God, but a short story (Malachi 3:16–18). It's about the faithful remnant in Israel, who still fear the Lord and love to talk together about how to honor and serve him. God orders that a "scroll of remembrance" be written for them, so that they can read the scroll to better remember God's character and promises. Malachi is reflecting here on the divine gift of the Scriptures. They point us to the past to remember what God has done, in order to inspire faithfulness and hope for the future.

CHAPTER 4

This leads to the conclusion of the book in Malachi 4:1–3. This passage picks up and further develops the imagery of the fourth dispute about the coming day of the Lord. God has appointed that day of purifying judgment to consume the wicked from among his people, but, as this conclusion adds, there is still a future for the remnant. For them, the day of the Lord isn't a threat, but is instead a cause for joy. It will be like the rays of the rising sun, bringing life and healing as well as hope for the future.

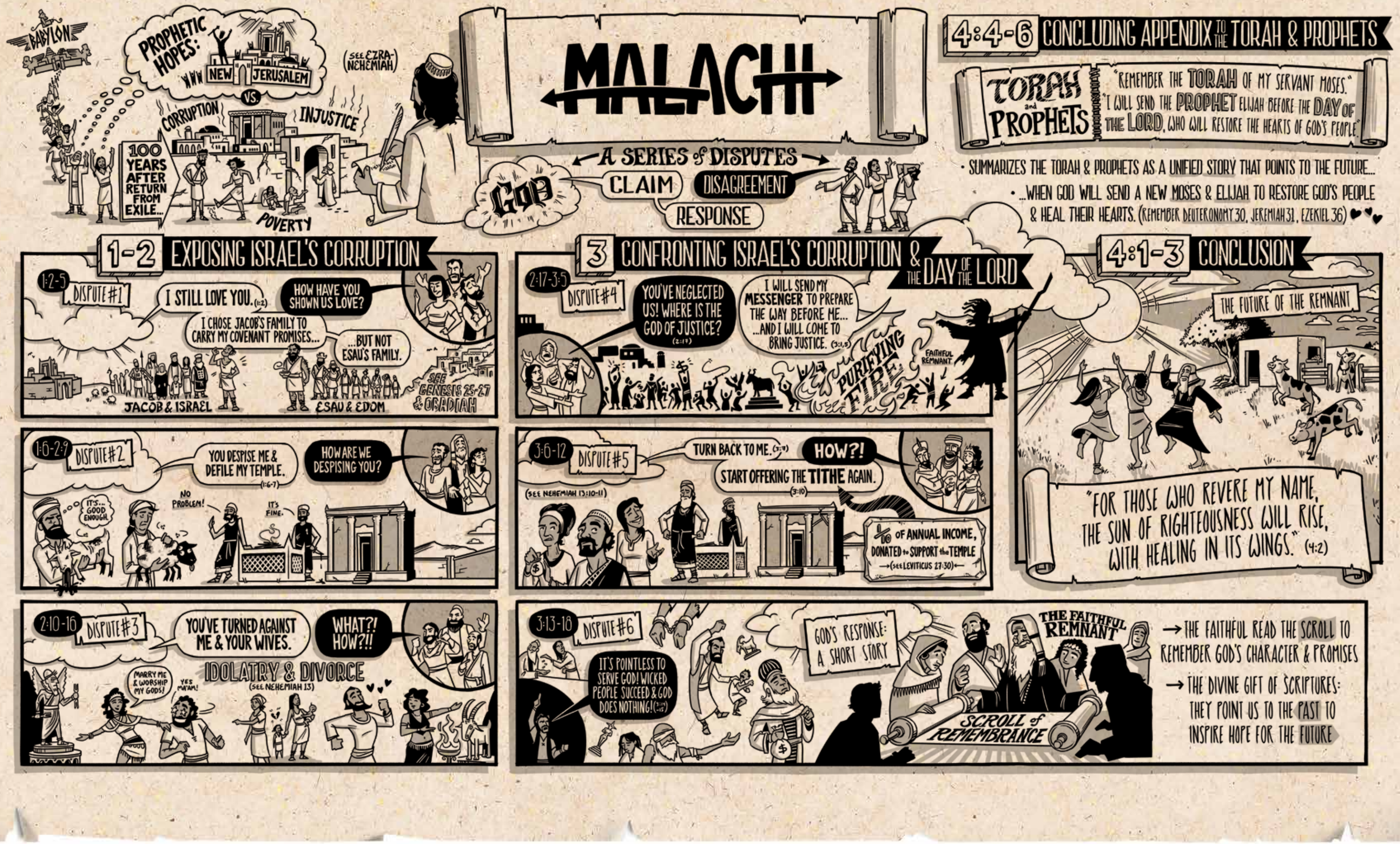
Malachi's disputes come to a close, but there's actually still a bit more to the book. The final three verses (Malachi 4:4–6) are not part of the disputes and they function more like a concluding appendix that brings closure not only to Malachi, but to the whole collection of the Torah and the Prophets.

First, the reader is called to "Remember the law (or Torah) of my servant Moses" (Malachi 4:4), which recalls the story and laws of the covenant in the first five books of the Bible. Next, we hear this summary of the books of the Prophets: "I will send the prophet Elijah before the day of the Lord, who will restore the hearts of God's people" (Malachi 4:5–6).

This conclusion, first of all, summarizes the Torah and the Prophets as a unified story that points to the future. Israel was redeemed by God, but then betrayed him with their rebellion and hard hearts, breaking the laws of the Torah. The Scriptures anticipate a future day when God will send a new Moses and a new Elijah, who will restore God's people and heal their hard hearts (see Deuteronomy 30, Jeremiah 31, and Ezekiel 36).

This concluding appendix also presents the Torah and prophetic Scriptures as a divine gift to read, ponder, and pray over. They tell the truth about the human condition as well as our selfishness and sin, but they also announce God's promise that he will one day send a messenger and show up personally to confront evil, restore his people, and bring his healing justice.

That future hope is what Malachi, the Torah, and the Prophets are all about.


MALACHI
BABYLON
PROPHETIC HOPES:
NEW JERUSALEM
VS
(SEE EZRA-NEHEMIAH)
CORRUPTION
INJUSTICE
100 YEARS AFTER RETURN FROM EXILE...
POVERTY
A SERIES of DISPUTES
GOD
CLAIM
DISAGREEMENT
RESPONSE
4:4-6 CONCLUDING APPENDIX TO THE TORAH & PROPHETS
TORAH and PROPHETS
"REMEMBER THE TORAH OF MY SERVANT MOSES."
"I WILL SEND THE PROPHET ELIJAH BEFORE THE DAY OF THE LORD, WHO WILL RESTORE THE HEARTS OF GOD'S PEOPLE."
• SUMMARIZES THE TORAH & PROPHETS AS A UNIFIED STORY THAT POINTS TO THE FUTURE...
• ...WHEN GOD WILL SEND A NEW MOSES & ELIJAH TO RESTORE GOD'S PEOPLE & HEAL THEIR HEARTS. (REMEMBER DEUTERONOMY 30, JEREMIAH 31, EZEKIEL 36)
1-2 EXPOSING ISRAEL'S CORRUPTION
1:2-5 DISPUTE #1
I STILL LOVE YOU. (1:2)
HOW HAVE YOU SHOWN US LOVE?
I CHOSE JACOB'S FAMILY TO CARRY MY COVENANT PROMISES...
...BUT NOT ESAU'S FAMILY.
JACOB & ISRAEL
ESAU & EDOM
SEE GENESIS 25-27 & OBADIAH
1:6-2:9 DISPUTE #2
YOU DESPISE ME & DEFILE MY TEMPLE. (1:6-7)
HOW ARE WE DESPISING YOU?
IT'S... GOOD ENOUGH.
NO PROBLEM!
IT'S FINE.
2:10-16 DISPUTE #3
YOU'VE TURNED AGAINST ME & YOUR WIVES.
WHAT?! HOW?!!
MARRY ME & WORSHIP MY GODS!
YES MA'AM!
IDOLATRY & DIVORCE
(SEE NEHEMIAH 13)
3 CONFRONTING ISRAEL'S CORRUPTION & THE DAY OF THE LORD
2:17-3:5 DISPUTE #4
YOU'VE NEGLECTED US! WHERE IS THE GOD OF JUSTICE? (2:17)
I WILL SEND MY MESSENGER TO PREPARE THE WAY BEFORE ME... ...AND I WILL COME TO BRING JUSTICE. (3:1,5)
PURIFYING FIRE
FAITHFUL REMNANT
3:6-12 DISPUTE #5
TURN BACK TO ME. (3:7)
HOW?!
START OFFERING THE TITHE AGAIN. (3:10)
(SEE NEHEMIAH 13:10-11)
1/10 OF ANNUAL INCOME, DONATED to SUPPORT the TEMPLE
→(SEE LEVITICUS 27:30)←
3:13-18 DISPUTE #6
IT'S POINTLESS TO SERVE GOD! WICKED PEOPLE SUCCEED & GOD DOES NOTHING! (3:14-15)
GOD'S RESPONSE: A SHORT STORY
THE FAITHFUL REMNANT
SCROLL of REMEMBRANCE
4:1-3 CONCLUSION
THE FUTURE OF THE REMNANT
"FOR THOSE WHO REVERE MY NAME, THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WILL RISE, WITH HEALING IN ITS WINGS." (4:2)
→ THE FAITHFUL READ THE SCROLL TO REMEMBER GOD'S CHARACTER & PROMISES
→ THE DIVINE GIFT OF SCRIPTURES: THEY POINT US TO THE PAST TO INSPIRE HOPE FOR THE FUTURE



THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

This is one of the earliest official accounts of Jesus of Nazareth. While the book itself is anonymous, the earliest reliable tradition links it to Matthew the tax collector, one of the twelve apostles that Jesus appointed, who appears in the book himself (Matthew 9:9 and 10:3). For about thirty to forty years, the apostles orally taught and passed on their eyewitness accounts about Jesus, along with his teachings that they had memorized. Matthew has collected and arranged all those into an amazing tapestry, and has designed his account to highlight certain themes about Jesus.

Matthew wanted to show how Jesus is the continuation and fulfillment of the whole biblical story of God and Israel, so he emphasizes that:

- Jesus is the Messiah from the line of David
- he is a new, authoritative teacher like Moses, and
- Jesus is God with us, or in Hebrew, "Immanuel."

The book has been designed with an introduction and a conclusion that act as a frame around five clear sections in the center. Each of those sections concludes with a long block of Jesus' teaching.

CHAPTERS 1–3

Chapters 1–3 set the stage by attaching Jesus' story right onto the Old Testament Scriptures. Matthew opens with a genealogy of Jesus that highlights him as the messianic son of David and the son of Abraham, who will bring God's blessing to all of the nations. After that, we come to the famous story about Jesus' birth and how it fulfilled the Old Testament prophetic promises about how the nations would come to honor the messiah who was born in Bethlehem. More than that, Jesus' conception was by the Holy Spirit and he was named "Immanuel," which amounts to a claim that Jesus is no mere human. He is "God with us," the God of Israel embodied as a human.

You can see right away two of Matthew's key themes in the intro (Jesus is the Messiah and God with us), but Matthew also wants to show how Jesus is like a new Moses. Like Moses, Jesus came up out of Egypt (ch. 2), passed through the waters of baptism (ch. 3), entered the wilderness for forty days (ch. 4), and went up onto a mountain to give new teaching, most of which focuses on the Torah (ch. 5–7)! Matthew is claiming that Jesus is the promised greater-than-Moses figure, who will deliver Israel from slavery, give them new divine teaching, save them from their sins, and initiate a new covenant relationship between God and his people. This also explains why Matthew structured the center of the book into five main parts that highlight Jesus' teaching. He's created a parallel to the five books of Moses, presenting Jesus as Israel's new, authoritative teacher who will fulfill the storyline of the Torah.

CHAPTERS 4–7

In the first main section (chs. 4–7), Jesus steps onto the scene announcing the arrival of God's kingdom. This is really important because "the kingdom" is the main theme of Jesus' teaching. In essence, it's about God's rescue operation for his world, all taking place through king Jesus. He has come to confront evil, especially spiritual evil and its legacy of demonization, disease, and death. He is here to restore God's reign over the world by creating a new family of people who will live under his rule.

After Jesus begins healing people and forming a movement, he takes his followers to a mountain and delivers his first block of teaching, traditionally called the Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5–7). Here, Jesus explores what it looks like to follow him and live in God's kingdom—it's an upside-down kingdom where there are no privileged members. The poor, the nobodies, the wealthy, the religious, everyone is invited to turn and follow Jesus, joining his new family. Jesus makes clear that he's not here to set aside the commands of the Torah, but rather to fulfill them through his teachings, which transform the hearts of his people to truly love God and their neighbor, including their enemies.

CHAPTERS 8–10

After concluding his great teaching on the kingdom, the next section shows Jesus bringing the kingdom into reality in the day-to-day lives of people (chs. 8–10). Matthew has arranged nine stories in which Jesus brings the liberating power of God's kingdom to bear on the lives of normal people. There are three groups of three stories here, all about people who are sick, broken, or in danger. Jesus heals or saves all of them by acts of power. Then, in between the triads, we find two parallel stories about Jesus' radical call to follow him. A person can only enter God's kingdom by following him and becoming his disciple.

In chapter 10, we continue into the second large block of teaching in the book, as Jesus extends his reach by sending out twelve disciples. He teaches these disciples how to announce the kingdom of God as well as what to expect once they do. While many among Israel will accept the kingdom of Jesus, Israel's leaders stand to lose a lot if they repent. They will likely reject and persecute Jesus and his followers and they should be ready for it.

CHAPTERS 11–13

This leads into chapters 11–13, where Matthew has collected a group of stories about people responding to Jesus and his message. It's a mixed bag. Some react positively; they love Jesus and recognize him as the Messiah. Others are neutral, they're not sure what to make of Jesus. John the Baptist ends up in this group when he makes it clear that Jesus is not what he expected. The reactions of Israel's leaders are negative, as the Pharisees and Bible teachers reject and challenge Jesus altogether. They think that he's a false teacher leading the people astray, and accuse him of blasphemy for his exalted claims of divine authority.

Jesus isn't surprised or thrown by these diverse responses. In fact, he focuses on them in the third large block of teaching starting in chapter 13. Here, Matthew has collected many of Jesus' parables about the kingdom: the farmer throwing seed on four types of soil, the mustard seed, the pearl, and the buried treasure. These parables are like a commentary on the stories that you've just read. Some accept Jesus with enthusiasm, while others reject him, but God's kingdom will continue spreading despite these obstacles.

As we finish chapter 13 we are halfway through Matthew's story of Jesus, and he's raised the key questions about Jesus. How will this tension between Jesus and Israel's leaders play itself out?

Turn the page to keep reading about the Gospel of Matthew.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

AUTHOR:

30-40 YEARS OF ORAL TRADITION

EARLIEST TRADITION — Matthew — SEE 9:9 & 10:3

MATTHEW

1. MESSIAH FROM THE LINE OF DAVID
2. NEW MOSES
3. GOD -WITH- US

Things to look for

#1 LOOK UP OLD TESTAMENT QUOTATIONS (THERE ARE A LOT)

#2 LOOK CLOSELY AT THE PEOPLE WHO ACCEPT JESUS

IRRELIGIOUS & UNIMPORTANT + FAITH = TRANSFORMATION

NEW MOSES

MOSES	JESUS
• OUT OF EGYPT	• OUT OF EGYPT
• CROSS THE RED SEA	• BAPTISM IN THE JORDAN RIVER
• WILDERNESS FOR 40 YEARS	• WILDERNESS FOR 40 DAYS
• RECEIVES LAW FROM MOUNTAIN	• GIVES LAW FROM MOUNTAIN

JESUS > MOSES

- DELIVER FROM SLAVERY
- GIVE NEW DIVINE TEACHING
- SAVE FROM SIN
- INITIATE A NEW COVENANT

1-3

ABRAHAM .... DAVID .... JESUS

CONNECT JESUS TO OLD TESTAMENT

FULFILL OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETIC PROMISES

BETHLEHEM (MICAH 5:2) · VIRGIN BIRTH (ISAIAH 7:14) · ISAIAH 60

Immanuel = GOD WITH US

4-7

ANNOUNCE GOD'S KINGDOM

SERMON ON THE MOUNT (CH 5-7)

GOD'S RESCUE OPERATION FOR THE WORLD

EVIL

- CONFRONT EVIL
- RESTORE GOD'S REIGN
- CREATE A NEW FAMILY

HOW TO LIVE IN GOD'S KINGDOM

UPSIDE DOWN KINGDOM · FULFILL THE TORAH · TRANSFORM HEARTS TO LOVE

8-10

JESUS BRINGS KINGDOM INTO PEOPLE'S LIVES

SENDING THE 12 (CH 10)

EXPECT ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION

LEPER · CENTURION'S SERVANT · SICK MOTHER · FOLLOW ME! · STORM SEAS · DEMONIZED MEN · PARALYZED MAN · FOLLOW ME! · DEAD GIRL & SICK WOMAN · TWO BLIND MEN · MUTE MAN

11-13

RESPONSES TO JESUS

PARABLES ABOUT THE KINGDOM (CH 13)

PARABLES = COMMENTARY

POSITIVE: PEOPLE — JESUS IS THE MESSIAH!

NEUTRAL: JOHN THE BAPTIST — IS HE THE MESSIAH...?

NEGATIVE: PHARISEES — HE IS NOT THE MESSIAH!

14-20

DIFFERENT EXPECTATIONS ABOUT THE MESSIAH

THE UPSIDE DOWN KINGDOM (CH 18 & 19-20)

- HONOR BY SERVING
- REVENGE VS FORGIVE
- GAIN TRUE WEALTH BY GIVING IT AWAY

JEWISH · NON-JEWISH · JESUS · JOHN THE BAPTIST · PHARISEES · PETER & DISCIPLES · HE'S THE MESSIAH! · WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM? · YOU'RE THE MESSIAH!

SUFFERING SERVANT (ISAIAH 53) VS VICTORIOUS! DEFEATS PAGANS! (PSALM 2 & DANIEL 2)

21-25

CLASH OF KINGDOMS

CRITIQUE OF PHARISEES: YOU HYPOCRITES! (CH 23-25) — NEW JERUSALEM

- ASSERTING AUTHORITY
- SAW TEMPLE AS COMPROMISED BECAUSE OF HYPOCRISY
- OFFENDED
- DECIDE TO KILL JESUS

26-28

PASSOVER MEAL = NEW MEANING

RETELLS THE STORY OF...
- RESCUE FROM SLAVERY
- DEATH OF PASSOVER LAMB

RESCUE FROM...
- EVIL & SIN
- DEATH OF JESUS

YOU'RE NOT THE MESSIAH! · YOU HAVE BLASPHEMED GOD! — SANHEDRIN (JEWISH LEADERS)

PILATE — HE'S INNOCENT BUT... LET HIM BE CRUCIFIED!

NOT A FAILURE

FULFILLED OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETIC PROMISES

SUFFERING SERVANT (ISAIAH 53)

INSTEAD OF JUDGING THEM HE IS JUDGED ON THEIR BEHALF

GREAT COMMISSION

JESUS IS KING OF THE WORLD · TELL ALL NATIONS THE GOOD NEWS · ALL PEOPLE CAN JOIN THE KINGDOM

BE BAPTIZED · FOLLOW JESUS' TEACHINGS · I WILL BE WITH YOU -Immanuel-

1 2 3 4 5

BOOKS OF MOSES (TORAH)

Author ?

ORAL TRAD

Section 9

MATTHEW

1 Moses

2 DAVID

3 IMMANUEL

THINGS TO COOK FOR

#1 OT

#2

NEW MOSES

Moses	Jesus
—	—
—	—
—	-
-	-

1-3 Genealogy ABE DAVID JESUS

4-7 5-7

8-10 10

11—13 13

ACCEPT

NEUTRAL

Reject

14—20 18 19 20

21 — 25 23-25

1

2

3

4

5

NEW TORAH

26-28

PASSOVER NEW MNG.

CHAPTERS 14–20

In chapters 14–20, the next main section of the book, Matthew explores the different perspectives people had about what it meant for Jesus to be Messiah. Jesus keeps healing sick people, and twice he miraculously provides food for huge crowds in the desert, one of which is made up of Jewish people (ch. 14), the other non-Jewish (ch. 15). This sign is very similar to what Moses did for Israel in the wilderness (see Exodus 16), so lots of people become excited about Jesus and think that he's the great prophet and messiah.

The religious leaders, however, are not convinced. Their view of the messiah is centered and built on passages such as Psalm 2 or Daniel 2, about a victorious messiah who will deliver Israel and defeat the pagan oppressors. From their point of view, Jesus is a false teacher who's making blasphemous claims about himself, so they increase their opposition and start hatching a plan to kill him.

In chapters 16 and 17, Jesus withdraws and teaches his closest disciples what it really means for him to be Israel's messiah, because it's not what they expect. Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter comes up with the right answer, "You're the Messiah, the Son of the living God." It soon becomes clear, however, that Peter is thinking of a king who will reign victoriously through military power.

Jesus challenges Peter, saying that, yes, he will become king, but in a different way. Jesus starts teaching on themes from the prophet Isaiah, who said that the messianic king would suffer and die for the sins of his people. Jesus was positioning himself as a messianic king who reigns by becoming a servant, and who will lay down his life for Israel and the nations.

Peter and the disciples don't really get it, so Jesus continues into the fourth large block of teaching in chapter 18, followed by another series of teachings after that in chapters 19 and 20. These are all about the upside-down nature of Jesus' messianic kingdom, and how it turns our normal value systems on their head. In the community of the servant king, you gain honor by serving others. Instead of revenge, you forgive and do good to your enemies. You gain true wealth by giving it away. To follow the servant messiah, you must become a servant yourself.

CHAPTERS 21–25

In the next section (chs. 21–25), we watch the two kingdoms clash, Jesus' kingdom and that of Israel's leaders. Jesus comes to Jerusalem for Passover, riding in on a donkey as the crowds hail him as the messiah. Jesus immediately marches into the courtyard of the temple, creating a disruption that brings daily sacrifices to a halt. His actions speak louder than words. As Israel's king, Jesus was asserting his royal authority over the temple, the place where God and Israel met together. In Jesus' view, the temple was compromised by the hypocrisy of Israel's leaders, so he challenged their authority. The leaders are deeply offended, and in chapter 22, they try to trap Jesus and shame him in public debate. They fail, and as a result they determine to have him killed.

In response, Jesus delivers his final block of teaching (chs. 23–25). First, he offers a passionate critique of the Pharisees and their hypocrisy before weeping over Jerusalem and its rejection of God's kingdom. Jesus withdraws with the disciples and starts telling them what's going to happen. These leaders are going to execute him, but, in doing so, they will be creating their own demise. Instead of accepting Jesus' way of the peaceful kingdom, they are going to take the road of revolt against Rome, so the city and the temple will be destroyed.

But, Jesus says, that's not the end of the story. He will be vindicated after his death by his resurrection, and will one day return to set up his kingdom over all nations. In the meanwhile, the disciples should stay alert and committed to announcing Jesus' kingdom and spreading the good news about him.

CHAPTERS 26–28

With all of this ringing in the disciples' ears, the story comes to its climax in chapters 26–28. That night, Jesus takes the disciples aside to celebrate a Passover meal, which retells the story of Israel's rescue from slavery and the death of the Passover lamb. Jesus uses the bread and wine from the meal as new symbols, showing that his coming death would be a sacrifice that would redeem people from slavery to evil and sin.

After the meal, Jesus is arrested and put on trial before the Sanhedrin, a council of Jewish leaders. His claim to be the messiah is rejected, he's charged with blasphemy against God, and he's brought before the Roman governor Pilate. Pilate thinks that Jesus is innocent, but gives in and sentences Jesus to death by crucifixion. Jesus is led away by the Roman soldiers and is crucified.

You'll notice here that, just as in the opening chapters, there are lots of references to the Old Testament. Matthew is showing that Jesus' death was not a failure, but was rather the surprising fulfillment of prophetic promises. Jesus came as the servant messiah, who was rejected by his own people. But instead of judging them, he is judged on their behalf and bears the consequences of their sin.

The crucifixion scene comes to a close and Jesus' body is placed in a tomb, but the book ends with a surprising twist. On Sunday morning, the disciples discover that the tomb is empty. Suddenly, all kinds of people begin to see Jesus risen from the dead.

The book concludes with the risen Jesus giving a final teaching called the Great Commission. He is now the true king of the world, so he sends the disciples to all nations with the good news that Jesus is Lord. Anyone can join his kingdom by being baptized and following his teachings. Echoing all the way back to the first chapter with his name, "Immanuel," or "God with us," Jesus' last words to his disciples are, "I will be with you." It's a promise of Jesus' personal presence that will be with his followers until he finally returns to rejoin heaven and earth in God's kingdom.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

This book is one of the first accounts of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The earliest historical traditions available link this book to a Christian scribe named Mark, or John Mark, who was a co-worker with Paul (see Colossians 4:10, and 2 Timothy 4:11) and a close partner with Peter (see 1 Peter 5:13). In fact, an ancient church historian named Papias recalls that Mark had collected all the eyewitness accounts and memories of Peter, shaping them into this account.

Mark did not, however, just randomly throw all of this together. He has very carefully designed this story of Jesus. In the first line of the book, Mark makes his claim about who Jesus is: "The beginning of the good news about Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God." Now, what's interesting is that this is the only time Mark says what he thinks about Jesus. For the rest of the book, he hopes to influence you by simply putting Jesus' actions and words in front of you, as well as showing you how other people react to him.

Mark has designed the story of Jesus as a drama with three acts. The first act is set in Galilee, the third takes place in Jerusalem, and the second act is Jesus "on the way" from one place to the other. Each of these acts focuses on a repeated theme. In Act 1 (chs. 1–8), everyone is blown away and is wondering "who is Jesus?" In Act 2 (chs. 8–10) it's the disciples who are struggling to understand what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah. In Act 3 (chs. 11–16), we watch the surprising paradox of how Jesus becomes the messianic king.

CHAPTERS 1–8a

After the opening line, Mark quotes the ancient prophets Isaiah and Malachi, who said that God would send a messenger to Israel to prepare them for when their God would arrive to rescue Jerusalem (Mark 1:2–15). Mark introduces John the Baptist as that messenger, and, right when you expect God to show up personally, Mark introduces Jesus. As he enters the scene, the heavens open, and God's Spirit descends upon Jesus, and God says, "You are my beloved Son."

Mark next places in front of us a summary of Jesus' core message. He went about Galilee, announcing "the good news that God's kingdom has come near." Jesus is carrying forward the story from the Old Testament Scriptures about God's rescue operation for his world. Through Jesus, God is restoring his reign over the world by confronting and defeating evil as well as its hold on people's lives. Jesus then invites all to live under his reign by following him as a disciple.

After this introduction to Jesus and to his message, Mark has placed a large block of stories showing Jesus' power as he brings God's kingdom into reality. Jesus goes around healing people whose bodies are sick or broken or under the oppression of dark spiritual powers. He even does something that, for Jewish people, only God has the authority to do—forgive people's sins. Jesus' provocative actions in these stories produce very different responses. Many people become his disciples and follow him, while others don't know what to think. There are some who totally reject him, specifically Israel's leaders, who accuse him of blaspheming God and being empowered by evil.

Jesus isn't surprised by all these diverse responses. In fact, he draws attention to them. In chapter 4, Mark has collected many of Jesus' parables about the hidden, mysterious nature of God's kingdom. Jesus says that his message is like seed falling on different types of soil. Some soils are receptive to this seed, but others are not. It's also like a tiny mustard seed, which seems small and insignificant but will grow to a huge size and surprise everyone. Jesus' subtle point in these parables is that he really is the messiah bringing God's kingdom, but it doesn't look like what anyone had expected.

This growing confusion about Jesus among the crowds is related to an important and repeated idea that Mark emphasizes in Act 1. Even among Jesus' circle of disciples, there are multiple occasions where they are confused about him. Mark is highlighting how everybody struggles to grasp who Jesus is.

This brings us to Act 2, which begins with a crucial conversation. Jesus takes the disciples aside and asks, "Who do you all say that I am?" Peter answers quickly, "You're the Messiah!" But then it becomes clear that, for Peter, this means a victorious, military king from the line of David, who would rescue Israel from the Romans. For Jesus, however, the messianic vocation is to become the suffering servant king of Isaiah 53, who's going to establish God's rule by giving up his life in Jerusalem.

The disciples just don't get it. They think following king Jesus will mean fame and status and importance, but Jesus makes it clear that following him is like dying and carrying a cross to your own execution. It means rejecting violence, pride, and selfishness, as well as pouring out one's life for others in acts of service and love. Jesus has this same conversation two more times in Act 2, and it all culminates in Jesus' important statement that "the Son of man did not come to be served, but to become a servant and give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The disciples still don't get it, and respond in confusion and fear.

CHAPTERS 8b–10

Now, here in Act 2, Mark has placed another key story that echoes the book's introduction. Jesus takes three of his disciples up to a mountain, where he is suddenly transformed and radiates with light and glory as a cloud envelops them. Now, this is just like the glory of the God of Israel that showed up long ago on Mt. Sinai (see Exodus 19– 20, and 1 Kings 19). The two prophets who stood in God's presence on Mt. Sinai, Moses and Elijah, appear next to Jesus as God announces again, "This is my beloved son."

By placing this story in the middle of all these conversations in Act 2, Mark is making an astounding claim that Jesus, God's Son, is the physical embodiment of God's own radiant glory. Through Jesus, the glorious God of Israel will become king by suffering and dying for the sins of his own people. It's a shocking claim that confuses and scares the disciples as they leave the mountain.

CHAPTERS 11–16

This brings us to Act 3 in which Jesus makes his public, royal entry into Jerusalem for Passover, where he is hailed as the messiah. He then enters the temple courtyard and asserts his royal authority by running out the people scamming a profit off the worshipers and stopping the sacrificial system. This kicks off a whole week of Jesus debating and confronting the leaders of Israel, exposing their hypocrisy. In response, these leaders set in motion a plan to have Jesus killed.

Jesus warns the disciples, predicting that Jerusalem and its temple will be destroyed within a generation (ch. 13). His disciples will also be persecuted just like him, until he returns one day to bring God's kingdom fully over all the world.

It all leads up to the final night (ch. 14). Jesus has his last Passover meal with his disciples, a symbolic meal that told the story of Israel's liberation from slavery through the death of the Passover lamb. Jesus takes these symbols and gives them new meaning. They point to him and the liberation from sin and death that will take place through the death of suffering servant messiah.

From here, the story rushes forward to Jesus' arrest and trial before Israel's priests and the Roman governor Pilate, resulting in Jesus' crucifixion. This culminates in a key scene that matches the important scenes in Acts 1 and 2. This time, however, darkness descends instead of a cloud, and, instead of a voice from heaven, Jesus cries out in a loud voice before he dies. What's most surprising is a Roman soldier, who sees Jesus die and grasps who he is: "This man was the son of God." He's the first person in the story to recognize the story's shocking claim about Jesus' identity. The Messiah is the crucified Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth, who died for his friends and his enemies.

Jesus' body is placed in a tomb, and, on the first day of the new week, two women from among Jesus' disciples discover that the tombstone has been rolled away. An angelic man informs them that Jesus is not there because he's risen from the dead! The angel orders them to go tell the good news to the other disciples, that Jesus is alive and will meet them back up in Galilee.

The women are freaked out, as Mark says, "they fled from the tomb in terror, telling no one, for they were afraid…" That's how the book ends, with Jesus' disciples showing the same kind of fear and confusion that concluded Act 1 and Act 2.

CHAPTER 16:9–20

Now, if you look in your Bible, you'll see that the Gospel of Mark has more. It's a longer ending where Jesus appears and speaks to the disciples, but there's also a note telling you that this ending is not part of the original book and is only found in later, less reliable manuscripts. It's possible that the original ending got lost or that Mark never actually finished his account, but it's most likely that the abrupt ending with the terrified women is intentional to make a point.

The entire story has focused on the shocking claim that puzzled Jesus' disciples all throughout the story, that the suffering, crucified, and now risen Jesus is the messiah and Son of God. God's love and upside-down kingdom were revealed when Jesus died for the sins of the world. The story ends without closure, forcing you, the reader, to grapple with this strange and scandalous claim. Will you run away like the disciples, or will you recognize the crucified Jesus as your king? Will you go forth and tell the good news?

Only you can answer these questions, and that's exactly what the Gospel of Mark is prompting you to do for yourself.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

EARLY CHURCH HISTORIAN PAPIAS: MARK COLLECTS PETER'S EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY

(JOHN) MARK, A COWORKER OF: PETER (1 PETER 5:13) -and- PAUL (COLOSSIANS 4:10)

THE ONLY TIME MARK TELLS YOU WHAT *HE* THINKS

HE HOPES TO INFLUENCE YOU BY SHOWING *JESUS* & PEOPLE'S REACTIONS TO HIM

1:1 "THE BEGINNING OF THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF GOD."

THE ENDING OF MARK

GO AND ANNOUNCE THE GOOD NEWS!

NOT ORIGINAL (ONLY FOUND IN LATER MANUSCRIPTS)

16:9-20

LOST? OR... NEVER FINISHED?

THE ABRUPT ENDING IS INTENTIONAL

- MARK EMPHASIZES THE SHOCKING CLAIM THAT THE CRUCIFIED & RISEN JESUS IS THE MESSIAH.
- THE LACK OF CLOSURE FORCES YOU TO ASK: WILL **YOU** RUN AWAY, OR RECOGNIZE THE CRUCIFIED JESUS AS **YOUR** KING?



ACT 1: GALILEE

1-8a WHO IS JESUS?

BEHOLD, I WILL SEND MY MESSENGER BEFORE YOU... TO PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD. (ISAIAH 40 & MALACHI 3)

1:2-15

YOU ARE MY BELOVED SON. (1:11)

JOHN THE BAPTIST

SUMMARY OF JESUS' MESSAGE:

GOOD NEWS! GOD'S KINGDOM HAS COME NEAR! (1:15)

- GOD'S RESCUE OPERATION FOR THE WORLD
- CONFRONTATION WITH EVIL
- INVITATION TO LIVE UNDER GOD'S REIGN BY FOLLOWING JESUS

JESUS BRINGS GOD'S KINGDOM

...AND GETS DIVERSE RESPONSES

BE HEALED!

YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN.

WHO IS HE?

WHERE DID HE GET THIS WISDOM?

ONLY GOD CAN FORGIVE SINS!

YOUR POWER COMES FROM THE DEVIL!

WE'LL FOLLOW YOU!

4 PARABLES ABOUT THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S KINGDOM

THE FOUR SOILS

RECEPTIVE

NOT RECEPTIVE

THE MUSTARD SEED

JESUS IS THE MESSIAH, BUT NOT THE KIND PEOPLE EXPECTED.

DISCIPLES

WHO IS HE, REALLY?

WHAT DO THESE PARABLES MEAN?

ACT 2: "ON THE WAY"

8b-10 WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR JESUS TO BE THE MESSIAH?

CONVERSATION #1 (8:27-38)

SUFFERING SERVANT OF ISAIAH 53

WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?

YOU'RE THE MESSIAH!

VICTORIOUS KING! DEFEAT ROMANS

FOLLOWING JESUS:
- IS LIKE DYING
- MEANS REJECTING VIOLENCE & PRIDE...
- ACTS OF SERVICE & LOVE

FOLLOWING JESUS:

CONVERSATION #2 (9:30-37)

CONVERSATION #3 (10:32-45)

THE SON OF MAN DID NOT COME TO BE SERVED, BUT TO BECOME A SERVANT & GIVE HIS LIFE AS A RANSOM FOR MANY. (10:45)

THIS IS MY BELOVED SON. (9:7)

JUST LIKE GOD'S GLORY ON MT. SINAI (EXODUS 19-20) & THE TWO PROPHETS WHO MET GOD ON MT. SINAI

MOSES (EXODUS 33)

ELIJAH (1 KINGS 19)

JESUS as the EMBODIMENT of GOD'S GLORY: THE GLORIOUS GOD SUFFERING and DYING for HIS PEOPLE

ACT 3: JERUSALEM

11-16 HOW JESUS BECOMES KING

SAVE US, SON OF DAVID!

JESUS' ROYAL ENTRY

YOU'VE TURNED MY HOUSE INTO A DEN OF THIEVES!

JESUS ASSERTS HIS AUTHORITY OVER THE TEMPLE

WHAT AUTHORITY DO **YOU** HAVE?!

LET'S KILL HIM...

JESUS CONDEMNS ISRAEL'S LEADERS

13 PREDICTION OF JERUSALEM'S DOWNFALL

- THE CITY & TEMPLE WILL BE DESTROYED WITHIN A GENERATION
- THE DISCIPLES WILL BE PERSECUTED
- JESUS WILL ONE DAY RETURN.

14 THE LAST SUPPER

OLD MEANING: LIBERATION from SLAVERY through the DEATH of the PASSOVER LAMB

NEW MEANING: LIBERATION from SIN & DEATH through the DEATH of the new MESSIAH

PASSOVER

DARKNESS

THIS MAN WAS THE SON OF GOD! (15:39)

FIRST PERSON IN THE STORY TO GRASP JESUS' IDENTITY

THE CRUCIFIED SON OF GOD IS THE MESSIAH

JESUS ISN'T HERE! HE'S RISEN FROM THE DEAD & WILL MEET YOU UP IN GALILEE!

16:8 "THEY FLED FROM THE TOMB IN TERROR, TELLING NO ONE, FOR THEY WERE AFRAID..." THE END?

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE

The book of Luke is another one of the earliest accounts of Jesus' life, and it's actually part one of a unified, two-volume work called "Luke-Acts". If you compare the opening lines of both books, it's clear that they come from the same author (Luke 1:1–4; see Acts 1:1–2). There are internal clues in Acts and also in early tradition that identify the author as Luke, a doctor as well as the traveling companion and co-worker of Paul the Apostle (see Colossians 4:14 and Philemon v. 24).

Luke opens with a preface (Luke 1:1–4) to tell us how and why he wrote the book. While he acknowledges that other fine accounts of Jesus' life are out there, he wanted to go back to the eyewitness traditions of as many early disciples as he could, in order to produce what he calls "an orderly" account about "the things that have been fulfilled among us." That word, "fulfilled," shows us why Luke produced this volume. For him, the story of Jesus isn't merely ancient history. He wants to show how it's the fulfillment of the long covenant story of God and Israel, and, on a larger scale, the story of God and the whole world.

The book's design is fairly clear. There's a long introduction in chapters 1–2, setting up the stories of John the Baptist and Jesus. In chapters 3–9, Luke presents a robust portrait of Jesus and his mission in his home region of Galilee. After that, the large mid-section of the book (Luke 9:51–19:27) contains Jesus' long journey to Jerusalem, leading into the story's climax (Luke 19:28 through the final chapter), Jesus' final week in Jerusalem that leads to his death and resurrection. This in turn leads on into the book of Acts.

CHAPTERS 1–2

The extended introduction in chapters 1–2 recounts, in parallel, the birth stories of both John the Baptist and Jesus. An elderly, priestly couple (Zechariah and Elizabeth) and a young, unmarried woman (Mary) both receive an unlikely divine promise that they'll have a son. Both promises are fulfilled as John and Jesus are born, and both parents sing poems of celebration.

These songs are filled with echoes from the Psalms and Prophets in the Old Testament, and they show how these children will fulfill God's ancient promises. The poems also preview each child's role in the story to follow. John is the prophetic messenger promised in the Torah and Prophets, who will prepare Israel to meet their God. Jesus is the messianic king promised to David, who will bring God's reign over Israel and his blessing to all the nations, just as was promised to Abraham.

Mary brings Jesus to the Jerusalem temple for his dedication, where two elderly prophets, Anna and Simeon, see Jesus and recognize who he is. Simeon sings a poem of his own that's inspired by the prophet Isaiah. This child is God's salvation for Israel, and he will become a light to the nations.

CHAPTERS 3–9a

With all this anticipation, the story moves forward into the next main section with chapters 3–9, in which Luke presents Jesus and his mission. Luke sets the stage with John's renewal movement at the Jordan river, calling a new, repentant and recommitted Israel into existence through baptism. He is preparing for the arrival of the kingdom of God. Jesus appears as the leader of this new Israel. He's marked by the Spirit and the voice of God from heaven, announcing that he is the beloved Son of God.

After this, Luke follows up with a genealogy that traces Jesus' origins all the way back to David, then back to Abraham, and finally back to Adam from Genesis. Luke's claiming here that Jesus is the messianic king of Israel, who will bring God's blessing not only to Israel, the family of Abraham, but to all the descendants of Adam, all humanity.

Next, Luke has strategically placed the story of Jesus going to his hometown Nazareth (ch. 4), where he launches his public mission. At a synagogue gathering, Jesus stands up and reads from the scroll of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, to preach good news to the poor and freedom for prisoners; new sight for the blind, and freedom from the oppressed" (Luke 4:18, quoting from Isaiah 61:1–2).

Along with the other Gospels, Jesus is presented as the messianic king, bringing the good news of God's kingdom. What Luke uniquely highlights here, however, are the social implications of Jesus' mission. He brings "freedom," (the Greek word is *aphesis*) which literally means "release." The term refers to the ancient Jewish practice of the year of Jubilee (see Leviticus 25), when all Israelite slaves were released, people's debts were canceled, and sold land was returned to families. This was all a symbolic enactment of God's liberating justice and mercy.

Jesus says that this good news of "release" is specifically for "the poor." Now, in the Old Testament, the "poor" (the Hebrew word is *ani*) has a broader meaning than just those who don't have much money. It can refer to people of low social status in their culture, like people with disabilities, women, children, or the elderly. It also includes social outsiders, like people of other ethnic groups, or those whose poor life choices have placed them outside acceptable religious circles. And surprisingly, Jesus says that God's kingdom is especially good news for these people.

Luke immediately goes into a large block of stories showing what Jesus' "good news for the poor" looks like in reality (chs. 4–8). We watch Jesus heal a bedridden, sick woman (Luke 4:38–39), and people with skin disease (Luke 5:12–16), and those who are paralyzed (Luke 5:17–26). There are also stories about Jesus welcoming into his community a "tax-collector," Levi (Luke 5:27–32), who's not financially poor but is a social outsider. There is also a story about Jesus forgiving a prostitute (Luke 7:36–50). Luke is showing how Jesus' kingdom brought restoration and the reversal of people's entire life circumstances. By doing so, Jesus expands the circle of people who are invited to discover the healing power of God's kingdom.

As his mission attracts a large following, Jesus does something provocative by forming them into a new Israel, appointing the twelve disciples as leaders, a clear symbol of Israel's original twelve tribes (Luke 6:12–16). Jesus teaches them his manifesto of an upside-down kingdom, often called "the Sermon on the Plain" (Luke 6:17–49). God's love for the outsider and the poor means that his kingdom brings a reversal of our value systems. He's here to form a new, alternative people of God who respond to Jesus' invitation by practicing radical generosity and serving the poor. Jesus' disciples lead by serving and live by peacemaking, and by being deeply pious but rejecting religious hypocrisy.

Eventually, Jesus' radical kingdom vision and his claim to divine authority start to generate resistance and controversy, specifically from Israel's religious leaders. His outreach to questionable people is a threat to their religious traditions (Luke 5:33 and 6:2), as well as their sense of social stability. They accuse Jesus of blaspheming God, mixing with sinners, and being a drunk (Luke 5:21, 5:30, and 7:33).

This section culminates in a new revelation of Jesus' mission to his disciples (Luke 9:18–36). Jesus says that he is the messianic king and will assert his reign over Israel by dying in Jerusalem, becoming the suffering servant king of Isaiah 53 that dies for the sins of Israel.

This shocking idea gets explored further in the next story, as Jesus goes up a mountain with three of his disciples. Jesus is suddenly transformed before them, and they're enveloped in a cloud of God's presence, and they hear the announcement, "This is my chosen Son." Moses and Elijah, the two other prophets who encountered God's presence and voice on a mountain, are present as well (see Exodus 19–20 and 1 Kings 19). Luke tells us that they talk together about Jesus' "Exodus" that he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem (Luke 9:31), an obvious reference to the Exodus story.

Luke is portraying Jesus as a new Moses, who will lead his newly formed Israel into freedom and release from the tyranny of sin and evil in all its personal, spiritual, and social forms. But to do this, Jesus must journey to Jerusalem, which brings us to the second main section of Luke's account.

Turn the page to keep reading about the Gospel of Luke.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE

- A UNIFIED, TWO-VOLUME WORK
- FROM THE SAME AUTHOR:
- **LUKE**
- A TRAVELING CO-WORKER WITH **PAUL** (COLOSSIANS 4:14, PHILEMON V.24)

LUKE COMPARE 1:1-4 WITH 1:1-2 **ACTS**

1:1-4 PREFACE

HOW & WHY LUKE WROTE HIS "orderly account about the things that have been FULFILLED among us..."

HOW: CONSULTS EYEWITNESS TRADITIONS (MARK)

WHY: TO SHOW HOW THE STORY OF JESUS **FULFILLS** THE STORY OF GOD & ISRAEL ...& THE WHOLE WORLD

1-2 INTRODUCTION

PARALLEL BIRTH STORIES OF JOHN THE BAPTIST & JESUS

UNLIKELY PROMISE OF A SON → POEMS OF CELEBRATION

MAY THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL BE PRAISED! (1:67-79)

MY SPIRIT REJOICES IN GOD MY SAVIOR! (1:46-55)

JOHN THE PROPHETIC MESSENGER WHO PREPARES ISRAEL TO MEET THEIR GOD

JESUS THE MESSIANIC KING WHO WILL BRING GOD'S REIGN & BLESSING

MY EYES HAVE SEEN YOUR SALVATION! (2:29-32)

ANNA & SIMEON

3-9a JESUS & HIS MISSION

3 JESUS' BAPTISM & GENEALOGY

YOU ARE MY BELOVED SON.

Jesus, SON OF [illegible], SON OF David, SON OF Abraham, SON OF Adam, SON OF GOD

JESUS IS THE MESSIANIC KING WHO BRINGS GOD'S BLESSING TO ALL HUMANITY

4 JESUS LAUNCHES HIS KINGDOM MISSION

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, TO PREACH GOOD NEWS TO THE **POOR** & **FREEDOM** FOR PRISONERS; NEW SIGHT FOR THE BLIND & **FREEDOM** FOR THE OPPRESSED. (4:18 = ISAIAH 61:1-2)

ISAIAH

GREEK: aphesis "RELEASE." REFERS TO YEAR OF JUBILEE (see LEVITICUS 25) – ALL SLAVES RELEASED – DEBTS CANCELLED

HEBREW: 'ANI PEOPLE OF LOW SOCIAL STATUS OR OUTSIDERS

4-8 JESUS' GOOD NEWS FOR "THE POOR"

HEALING THE SICK:

WELCOMING THE OUTSIDER: TAXES • TOLLS

FOLLOW ME!

I'M FORGIVEN!

6:12-49 FORMING A NEW ISRAEL:

MANIFESTO OF AN UPSIDE-DOWN KINGDOM

GOD'S LOVE-REVERSAL OF OUR VALUE SYSTEMS

RADICAL GENEROSITY, SERVANT LEADERSHIP, PEACEMAKING, FORGIVENESS, DEEP PIETY THAT REJECTS RELIGIOUS HYPOCRISY

7:18-27 A NEW REVELATION

LEADS TO

RESISTANCE FROM LEADERS

HE BLASPHEMES GOD! (5:21)

HE DISHONORS OUR TRADITIONS! (5:33, 6:2)

HE'S A DRUNK! (5:30, 7:34)

I AM THE MESSIAH, AND I'M GOING TO DIE IN JERUSALEM. see ISAIAH 53

9:28-36 JESUS' TRANSFORMATION

THIS IS MY CHOSEN SON.

MOSES ELIJAH

...TALKING TOGETHER ABOUT JESUS' **EXODUS** TO BE FULFILLED IN JERUSALEM.

JESUS: A **NEW** MOSES, FREEING HIS **NEW** ISRAEL FROM THE TYRANNY OF EVIL

CONSISTS MOSTLY OF JESUS' PARABLES & TEACHING "ON THE ROAD"

LUKE PORTRAYS FOLLOWING JESUS AS A JOURNEY... YOU LEARN AS YOU GO!

9b-19a JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

15 PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

A FOOLISH SON RUNS AWAY... BUT COMES BACK REPENTANT

LET'S THROW A **PARTY!** MY LOST SON IS FOUND!

GOD'S JOY WELCOMES EVERYONE INTO HIS FAMILY

THE TRAGEDY OF ISRAEL'S LEADERS WHO REJECT JESUS & HIS KINGDOM

JESUS' CONTINUED MISSION TO "THE POOR"

YOU'VE NEGLECTED THE JUSTICE & THE LOVE OF GOD! (11:42)

JESUS' BANQUETS WITH ISRAEL'S LEADERS (11:37-52, 14:1-24)

VS.

I CAME TO SEEK & SAVE THE LOST! (19:10)

THE SICK THE BLIND SAMARITANS ZACCHAEUS

JESUS' KINGDOM BANQUETS WITH "THE POOR"

GO AHEAD OF ME & ANNOUNCE: GOD'S KINGDOM HAS ARRIVED!

10 JESUS SENDS OUT THE 70

JESUS TEACHES ABOUT:

- PRAYER (11:1-13)
- TRUSTING IN GOD'S PROVISION (12:1-12)
- WEALTH, POSSESSIONS & GENEROSITY (12:13-31; 16; 18:18-30)

24:33-53 THE CONCLUDING SCENE

THE SCRIPTURES HAD TO BE FULFILLED, THAT THE MESSIAH WOULD SUFFER DEATH & BE RESURRECTED.

GO ANNOUNCE GOD'S FORGIVENESS TO THE NATIONS, BUT WAIT FIRST FOR THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

ISAIAH PSALMS

KEEP READING INTO ACTS...

19b-24 JESUS' FINAL WEEK IN JERUSALEM

19b ARRIVAL & REJECTION IN JERUSALEM

IF ONLY YOU HAD RECOGNIZED THE WAY TOWARD **PEACE**. (19:42)

20-21 JESUS PREDICTS THE TEMPLE'S DESTRUCTION

THIS HAS BECOME A DEN OF REBELS! (19:46)

JERUSALEM WILL BE SURROUNDED BY ARMIES!

ITS DESOLATION IS NEAR! (21:10)

22 JESUS' LAST PASSOVER

HE'S DONE NOTHING WORTHY OF DEATH. (23:14, 19, 15)

HEROD ANTIPAS

PILATE

NEW SYMBOLS ABOUT A NEW EXODUS

BROKEN BODY & SHED BLOOD WILL LIBERATE JESUS' NEW ISRAEL

HE SAYS HE'S A KING!

REMEMBER ME, JESUS!

FATHER, FORGIVE THEM. (23:34)

TODAY YOU'LL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE. (23:43)

24:1-12 THE EMPTY TOMB

JESUS IS RISEN!

24:13-32 THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

WHY ARE YOU SO SAD?

WE THOUGHT JESUS WOULD **REDEEM** ISRAEL, BUT HE'S DEAD...

JESUS!

THE POINT: ONLY WHEN WE SUBMIT OURSELVES TO JESUS' UPSIDE-DOWN KINGDOM, EPITOMIZED BY THE CROSS, CAN WE TRULY EXPERIENCE THE REAL JESUS

LUKE + ACTS

- A unified, two-volume work
- From the same author: Luke
- A traveling co-worker with PAUL (Colossians 4:14; Philemon v.24)

Compare 1:1-4 with 1:1-2

(John Mark)

MARK

HOW consult eye-witness traditions | WHY To show how the story of Jesus fulfills the story of God and Israel and the whole world.

LUKE

Consists mostly of Jesus' parables & Teaching "on the road"

Luke portrays following Jesus as a journey; you learn as you go!

9:51-19:27a JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

1:1-4 PREFACE

HOW & WHY

Luke wrote his "orderly account about the things that have been fulfilled among us."

1-2 INTRODUCTION

PARALLEL BIRTH-STORIES OF...

JOHN the BAPTIST (Zech)

Unlikely Promise of a Son

JESUS (Mary)

(told)

May the LORD God of Israel be praised... (1:67-79)

John is the prophetic messenger who prepares Israel to meet their God.

Poems of celebration

My spirit rejoices in God my Savior (1:46-55)

Jesus is the messianic King who will bring God's reign and blessing

my eyes have seen your salvation

Anna & Simeon

3-9:50 JESUS AND HIS MISSION

Ch.3 Jesus' Baptism & Genealogy

You are my beloved son

JESUS

John

DAVID

ABRAHAM

ADAM

Jesus is the messianic King who brings God's blessing to all Humanity

Ch.4 Jesus launches the kingdom mission

The SPIRIT of the Lord has anointed me to announce GOOD NEWS to the POOR and freedom for prisoners; new sight for the blind and FREEDOM for the oppressed (4:18 = Isaiah 61:1-2)

Greek: aphesis = "release." Refers to Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25) all slaves released & debts cancelled

Hebrew: ANI: People of Low Social status or outsiders

Chs.4-8 Jesus' Good News for the Poor

Healing for the Sick

(Simon's mother-in-law)

Forming A NEW ISRAEL

6:17-49 Manifesto of an upside-down Kingdom

Welcoming the Outsider

Tax collector

Follow me

(disabled woman)

I'm forgiven! (Positive, tears)

God's love = reversal of our value systems:

- Radical generosity, servant-leadership, peacemaking, forgiveness
- Deep piety that rejects religious hypocrisy

He dishonors our traditions (5:33, 6:2)

He blasphemes God (5:21)

He's a Drunk! (7:30; 7:33)

I am the messiah, and I'm going to DIE in Jerusalem (see Isaiah 53)

IS TO A NEW REVELATION 9:18-27

(not puzzled)

9:28-36 Jesus' Transformation

THIS IS MY CHOSEN SON

"They were talking together about Jesus' EXODUS to be fulfilled in Jerusalem (9:31)

Jesus is a New MOSES freeing his new Israel from the tyranny of evil

Moses

Elijah

Jesus sends out the 70

Go ahead of me and announce: God's kingdom has arrived!

JESUS' Teaching about:

- Prayer (11:1-13)
- Trusting God's Provision (12:1-13)
- Wealth, Possessions & generosity (12:13-31, ch16 18:18-31)

Ch.15 Parable of the Prodigal son

(Party)

A Foolish Son runs away, but comes back repentant

Let's throw a party, my lost son is found!

God's joy welcomes everyone into his family

The tragedy of Israel's leaders who reject Jesus & his kingdom

JESUS' continued Mission to "the Poor"

The blind

The sick

Sick Samaritans

I've come to seek and save the lost! (19:10)

(Zacchaeus)

You've neglected the justice and the love of God! (11:42)

Jesus' Kingdom banquets with the Poor VS. JESUS' Banquets with ISRAEL'S LEADERS (11:37-52, 14:1-24)

19:28-Ch.24 Jesus' Final Week in Jerusalem

19:28 Jesus' arrival & rejection in Jerusalem

(weeping)

If only you had recognized the way toward Peace (19:42)

20-21 Jesus predicts the temple's destruction

This has become a den of rebels (19:46)

Jerusalem will be surrounded by armies! It's desolation is near! (21:20)

(armies)

He says he's a king!

22a Jesus' Last Passover

NEW symbols about a NEW Exodus

Broken body & shed blood Will liberate Jesus' New Israel

He's done nothing worthy of death (23:4,14,15)

(whatever!)

Herod Antipas

(Pilate)

Father, forgive them... (23:34)

Remember me Jesus

Today you'll be with me in Paradise (23:43)

Layer 1 = Bound (Jesus)

24:1-12 The empty tomb

Jesus is Risen!

24:13-32 The Road to Emmaus

We thought Jesus would REDEEM Israel, but he's dead...

JESUS!

Why are you so sad?

THE POINT

It's only when we submit ourselves to the upside-down Kingdom of Jesus, epitomized by the CROSS, that we can truly experience the real Jesus.

24:33-52 The Concluding Scene

The scriptures had to be fulfilled, that the Messiah would suffer death and be resurrected

Go announce God's forgiveness to the nations, but wait first for the POWER of the SPIRIT

(Risen Jesus)

(Go)

Fish

KEEP READING INTO ACTS

CHAPTERS 9B–19a

In the large center section of the book (Luke 9:51–19:27), Jesus leads his newly formed Israel on a journey to Jerusalem for Passover (Luke 9:51). This part of the book consists mainly of Jesus' teaching and parables given "on the road" to people he encounters, mostly his growing group of disciples. In this way, Luke portrays following Jesus as a journey, in which you learn as you go along life's path.

Jesus invites his disciples into his mission as he sends a wave of them to travel further ahead, announcing God's kingdom. Luke is showing us that being a disciple, from the beginning, meant participating in the kingdom mission of Jesus and making it your own. As Jesus' disciples come back, he starts to give various teachings about prayer (Luke 11:1–13) and trusting in God's provision (Luke 12:1–12). It's in this section of Luke that Jesus talks about money, possessions, and generosity more than anywhere else (Luke 12:13–31, 16, and 18:18–30). If following him is truly like being on the road, it should produce a minimalist mentality, creating a freedom from possessions that allows for radical generosity.

Another key theme in these chapters is Jesus' continued mission to "the poor." As he travels, Jesus continues to form his new Israel. He encounters people who are sick or blind, or Samaritans (ancient enemies of the Jewish people), and famously, Zacchaeus, a Jewish man who headed up tax collection for the Romans. All of these people meet Jesus and are transformed by their encounter, choosing to join his kingdom community, which Jesus describes as a great banquet party. He's here to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10), and so he celebrates when people discover the mercy of God.

Not everyone at the party is happy, however. Luke includes multiple stories of Jesus at banquets with Israel's leaders. These quickly become heated debates in which Jesus confronts their pride and hypocrisy. These contrasting banquet parties are captured most memorably in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32), about a father who had two sons. The younger son was foolish, ran away, and squandered his inheritance. This son comes back repentant, however, and his father forgives him and throws a huge party to celebrate this "son who was lost, but now is found!" The older brother, however, is angry and resents his father's generosity to this undeserving son.

In this famous parable, Jesus is explaining his mission to the leaders of Israel. His kingdom parties represent God's joyous welcome of every kind of person into his family. The only entry requirement is humility and repentance. In other words, this parable highlights the tragedy of Israel's leaders who reject Jesus and his upside-down kingdom community.

CHAPTERS 19b–24

As this resistance to Jesus ramps up, and he finally arrives in Jerusalem for Passover (see Luke 19:28–44), Jesus weeps as he nears the city. His disciples hail him as the messianic king, but the religious leaders denounce him. Jesus knows that their rejection of his kingdom of peace will set Israel on a road of resistance and rebellion against the Roman empire, which will eventually bring about the city's downfall.

It's this looming destruction that Jesus symbolically enacts as he storms into the temple and runs out the animal sellers, bringing a halt to the sacrificial system. He says that this place of worship has become a "den of rebels" (Luke 19:46), and so will be destroyed. This action generates a whole series of debates between Jesus and Israel's leaders, all leading up to Jesus' prediction that Roman armies will one day surround the city and desolate it and the temple, all within a generation.

With that, Jesus retreats with his disciples to celebrate the Passover meal, the annual symbolic meal that retells Israel's liberation from slavery through the death of a lamb. Jesus turns the meal's bread and wine into new symbols about a new Exodus. His broken body and shed blood will bring liberation for Jesus' renewed Israel.

After the meal, Jesus is arrested and examined before the Jewish leaders. He is soon put on trial as a person claiming to be king, and here Luke emphasizes Jesus' innocence. Pilate the Roman governor claims that Jesus is innocent three times before giving in. Even Herod, the ruler of Galilee, finds nothing for an accusation against Jesus. Despite this, however, the religious leaders and their persistence finally compel Pilate to have Jesus crucified.

Even during his painful death, Jesus embodies the love and mercy of God that he taught so much about. He offers God's forgiveness to the soldiers as they crucify him ("Father forgive them…" Luke 23:34). Later, one of the criminals being executed alongside Jesus realizes who he truly is, saying, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). Jesus' final words are an offer of hope to this humiliated criminal: "Today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). With this last act of generosity and kindness, Jesus dies.

His body is placed and sealed inside a tomb, but on the first day of the week, some of Jesus' disciples come to the tomb only to find it empty. Two angelic figures are there, who inform them that Jesus is alive, risen from the dead. The disciples leave, minds blown.

At this moment, Luke tells one of the most beautiful stories (Luke 24:13–32). Two of Jesus' disciples are leaving Jerusalem for a town called Emmaus, heartbroken over Jesus' death. Suddenly, Jesus is there, walking alongside them, but they don't recognize him. He asks why they're sad, and they go on to talk about how they had hoped Jesus was the one "to redeem" Israel. But he obviously wasn't, given the tragic fact that he's dead. It was all for nothing. Then, later, as they're having a meal, Jesus breaks the bread for them, as he did at the Passover meal, and it's in that moment that they finally recognize him!

Luke tells this story to make a powerful point about following Jesus. When a person imposes their agenda and view of reality onto Jesus, he remains invisible and unknown to them. We will only see and know the real Jesus when we submit ourselves to his upside-down kingdom, epitomized in his broken body on the cross that was offered in self-giving love.

The book's concluding scene is set around yet another meal. Jesus appears before his disciples and explains to them from the Old Testament Scriptures how these events were all part of God's plan. The messiah would become Israel's king by suffering and dying for their sins, conquering their evil with his resurrection life. Just as Simeon the prophet promised all the way back in Luke chapter 2, Jesus' kingdom was always meant to move outward. So Jesus tells the disciples that God's forgiveness must now be announced to all the nations by inviting people to follow him.

But for the moment, Jesus tell his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Spirit, who will empower them for this new mission. And this, of course, compels you to turn the page and keep reading into Luke's second volume, the book of Acts.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

This is another one of the earliest accounts of Jesus' life, and we learn at the end of the book that it comes from one of Jesus' closest followers, called "the disciple whom Jesus loved." He appears many times in the story itself (John 13:23, 19:34–37, and 20:2), and there's some debate about whether it's John the son of Zebedee who was one of the Twelve, or a different John who lived in Jerusalem and was later known as John the Elder.

Whichever John it was, the book embodies his eyewitness testimony. It has been brilliantly designed with a clear purpose that he states near the end. He says he wrote the book, "So that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and that by believing, you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). John believes that the Jesus you read about in this book is alive and real, and can change your life forever.

The book opens with an introductory poem and a short story (ch. 1) that is followed by a big block of stories about Jesus performing miraculous "signs" that generate increasing controversy (chs. 2–10). It all culminates in Jesus' greatest sign, the raising of Lazarus, which also creates the greatest controversy. Israel's leaders decide to kill Jesus (chs. 11–12), which launches us into the book's second half in chapters 13–17. These chapters focus on Jesus' final night and last words to his disciples, followed by his arrest, trial, death, and resurrection (chs. 18–20). The book concludes with an epilogue in chapter 21.

CHAPTER 1

The first half of the book opens with a two-part introduction. First, there is a poem (John 1:1–18) that opens with the famous line, "In the beginning was the Word." This is an obvious allusion to Genesis 1, when God created everything with his word. The image is powerful and profound. A person's words are distinct from the person who speaks, yet they are also the embodiment of that person's mind and will. John says that God's Word was "with God," that is, distinct, but also "the Word was God," that is divine. As we ponder this, we hear later in the poem that this divine "Word" became human, as Jesus. John draws on the stories from Exodus 33–34, saying that Jesus is God's tabernacle in our midst. The glorious, divine presence that hovered over the Ark of the Covenant became a human, Jesus. This leads us to his last claim, that the one, true God of Israel consists of God the Father and the Son, who has become human to reveal the Father to us.

As we consider these mind-bending claims, we next read the stories about how John the Baptist meets Jesus and then leads others to meet him and become his disciples. One by one, as people encounter Jesus, they say out loud who they think he is. In this one chapter, Jesus is given seven titles: the Lamb of God, Son of God, Rabbi, Messiah, King of Israel, Jesus of Nazareth, and the Son of man. These prepare us for John's love of "sevens" in designing the story, which altogether make a claim that this fully human Jesus from Nazareth is the messianic king and teacher of Israel, and that he's the Son of God who will die for the sins of the world.

CHAPTERS 2–12

Now, that's a big claim to make about someone, but John will support it through the stories in chapters 2–12. They all follow the same basic pattern. Jesus performs a sign or makes a claim about his divine identity, resulting in misunderstanding or controversy, and in the end people are forced to make a choice about who they think Jesus is.

Chapters 2–4 show Jesus encountering four classic Jewish institutions, and, in each case, Jesus shows how he is the reality to which that institution points. Jesus is first placed at a wedding party where the wine runs out. Jesus takes huge jars of water, totaling about one hundred and twenty gallons, and he turns them into the best wine ever. The head waiter then says to the groom, "You saved the best wine for last!" While this is true on a literal level, John also calls this miracle a "sign" (John 2:11). It's a symbol that reveals something about Jesus. Just as Isaiah had said, the messiah's kingdom would be like a huge party with good wine (see Isaiah 25:6–8). This first miraculous sign reveals the generosity of Jesus' kingdom.

Next, Jesus goes to the Jerusalem temple, the place where heaven and earth were supposed to come together. This is where God meets with his people. Jesus marches in and asserts his authority over the temple, running out all the money changers and stopping the sacrificial offerings. When he is threatened for this behavior, Jesus responds by saying, "Destroy this temple and I'll raise it again in three days." In other words, Jesus is claiming that his coming sacrificial death is where heaven and earth will truly meet. He is the reality to which the temple building points.

In chapter 3, Jesus has an all-night conversation with a rabbi named Nicodemus, who thinks that Jesus is just like him, another "rabbi" or "teacher" of Israel. Jesus tells him that Israel needs more than just another teacher with new information. They need a new heart and life, or, in Jesus' words, "No one can experience God's kingdom without being born again." He believes that humans are caught in a web of selfishness and sin, leading to death, but he knows that God loves this world and is here to offer people a new birth and a chance for a new life.

From there, Jesus travels north and ends up at a sacred well, in conversation with a Samaritan, or non-Jewish, woman (ch. 4). They start talking about "water," which Jesus turns into a metaphor of himself; he's here to bring "living water" that can become a source of "eternal life." In the book of John, this important phrase refers to a new quality of life, one that is infused with God's eternal love, beginning now and lasting into the future.

The book continues from here with another collection of stories in chapters 5–10. These chapters take place during four Jewish sacred days, or feasts. Once again, Jesus uses images related to the feasts to make claims about himself.

In chapter 5, Jesus heals a paralyzed man on the Sabbath, starting a controversy with the Jewish leaders about "working" on the day of rest. Jesus says that his Father is working on the Sabbath, and so is he. They catch his meaning. He was "calling God his Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:17–18), and they want to kill him for this claim.

Chapter 6 takes place during Passover, the feast that retells the Exodus story with a symbolic meal of lamb, bread, and wine. On this occasion, Jesus miraculously provides food for a crowd of thousands. This results in people asking him for more bread, and Jesus responds by saying that he is the "true bread," and that if they "eat" him they will discover eternal life. This offends many people, who all stop following him.

Chapters 7–10 make up a block of stories set in Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles. This festival retold the story of Israel's wilderness wanderings as God guided them with the pillar of cloud and fire and provided them with water in the desert. Jesus stands in the temple courts and shouts, "If anyone is thirsty, let them come to me and drink" (John 7:37). Later, he says, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). In both of these announcements, Jesus is claiming to be the illuminating presence of God as well as the life-saving gift of God to his people. While some people believe and follow him, others are offended and try to kill him for his exalted claims (John 8:59).

The final feast story, also told in chapter 10, takes places during Hanukkah, which means "rededication." This festival retells the story of Judah Maccabee clearing the temple of idols and setting it apart as holy once more. Jesus enters into the temple area and says that he is the one whom God has "set apart as the holy one" (John 10:36). His point is that he is the true temple where God's presence dwells, which is why he finally says, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). This makes the Jerusalem leaders even more angry, and they set in motion a plan to kill Jesus, and he retreats from the city.

All these conflicts culminate in one last miraculous sign in chapter 11. Jesus hears that his dear friend Lazarus is sick, but his family lives near Jerusalem. That city is now a death trap for Jesus, and he could stay away and save his own life, but he loves Lazarus. Once Jesus hears that Lazarus has died, he goes to raise him from the dead. Jesus calls him back to life and out of his tomb, knowing that it will cost his life. The news of this amazing sign spreads quickly, and, just as Jesus knew would happen, the Jerusalem leaders hear about it and conspire to murder him. Jesus rides into Jerusalem as Israel's king, who is rejected by their leaders.

The first half of John draws to a close with this story about Jesus laying down his life as an act of love for a friend. This is, of course, yet another sign pointing forward to the cross. In this way, the story of Lazarus concludes the stories about Jesus' signs and transitions the reader into the second half of the book.

Turn the page to keep reading about the Gospel of John.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN



AUTHOR: "THE DISCIPLE JESUS LOVED" (SEE 13:23; 19:34-37; 20:2)
- JOHN, SON OF ZEBEDEE?
- JOHN THE ELDER?

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK:
"SO THAT YOU MAY COME TO BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE MESSIAH, AND THAT BY BELIEVING, YOU MAY HAVE LIFE IN HIS NAME." (20:31)

BASIC PATTERN IN THE STORIES IN 2-12



7 "I AM..."

THE BREAD OF LIFE	6:35
THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD	8:12
THE GATE FOR THE SHEEP	10:7
THE GOOD SHEPHERD	10:11
THE RESURRECTION	11:25
THE WAY, TRUTH & LIFE	14:6
THE TRUE VINE	15:1

Εγω Ειμι
GOD'S COVENANT NAME
(EXODUS 3:14, ISAIAH 43:10, 46:9)

7 "I AM."

1:26	6:20
8:21	8:28
8:58	13:19
18:5	

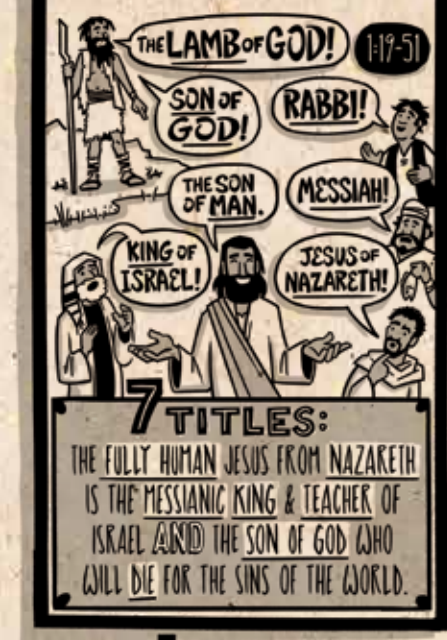
7 SIGNS

WATER INTO WINE	ch.2
HEALING A SICK BOY	ch.4
HEALING A PARALYZED MAN	ch.5
FEEDING THE 5,000	ch.6
HEALING A BLIND MAN	ch.9
RAISING LAZARUS	ch.11
JESUS' RESURRECTION	

1 INTRODUCTION (1:1-18)

"IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD, AND THE WORD WAS WITH GOD, AND THE WORD WAS GOD."





7 TITLES:
THE FULLY HUMAN JESUS FROM NAZARETH IS THE MESSIANIC KING & TEACHER OF ISRAEL AND THE SON OF GOD WHO WILL DIE FOR THE SINS OF THE WORLD.

2-10 MIRACULOUS SIGNS & CONTROVERSIES

2-4 FOUR JEWISH INSTITUTIONS



5-10 FOUR JEWISH FEASTS

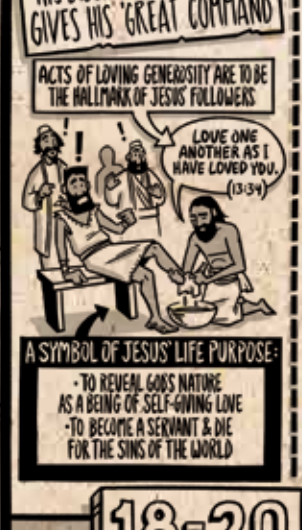


11-12 RAISING LAZARUS



13-17 JESUS' FINAL WORDS

13 JESUS WASHES HIS DISCIPLES' FEET & GIVES HIS 'GREAT COMMAND'



14-17 JESUS' SPEECH & PRAYER



18-20 JESUS' DEATH & RESURRECTION

18a JESUS' ARREST



18b-19 JESUS' CRUCIFIXION



20 THE RESURRECTION



21 EPILOGUE



A PICTURE OF DISCIPLESHIP
JESUS' FOLLOWERS ARE MOST EFFECTIVE WHEN THEY LISTEN FOR JESUS & SIMPLY OBEY HIS WORD.



JOHN

20:20-25 | Author: "the disciple Jesus loved" (see 13:23, 19:34-37, 20:2)

- John son of Zebedee?
- John the elder?

The Book's Purpose: (20:31)

A

Basic Pattern of the Stories in chs. 2-12

1. Jesus performs a sign of makes a claim — "I AM."
2. People misunderstand or get angry

"I AM" & YHWH/all God's covenant name (Exodus 3:14, Isaiah 43:10, 46:19)

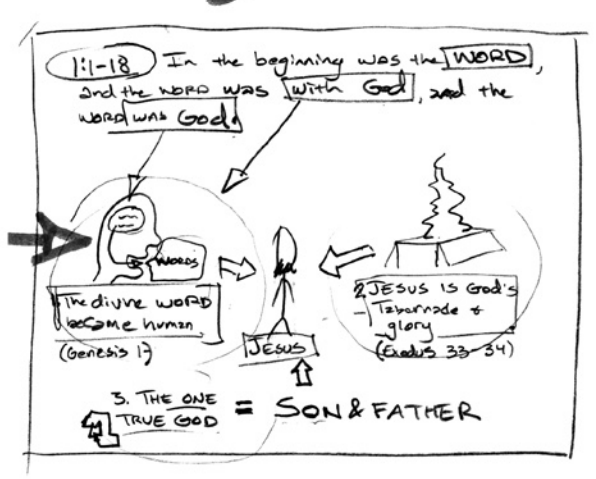
7 "I am" + the bread of life (6:35), the light of the world (8:12), the gate for the sheep (10:7), the good shepherd (10:11), the resurrection (11:25), the way, truth, & life (14:6), the true vine (15:1)

7 "I am." (4:26, 6:20, 8:24, 8:28, 8:58, 13:19, 18:5)

7 Signs
1. Water into wine (ch.2)
2. Healing a sick boy (ch.4)
3. Healing the paralyzed man (ch.5)
4. Feeding the 5,000 (ch.6)
5. Healing the blind man (ch.9)
6. The raising of Lazarus (ch.11)
7. Jesus' Resurrection

B

1:1-18 In the beginning was the WORD, and the WORD was with God, and the WORD was God.

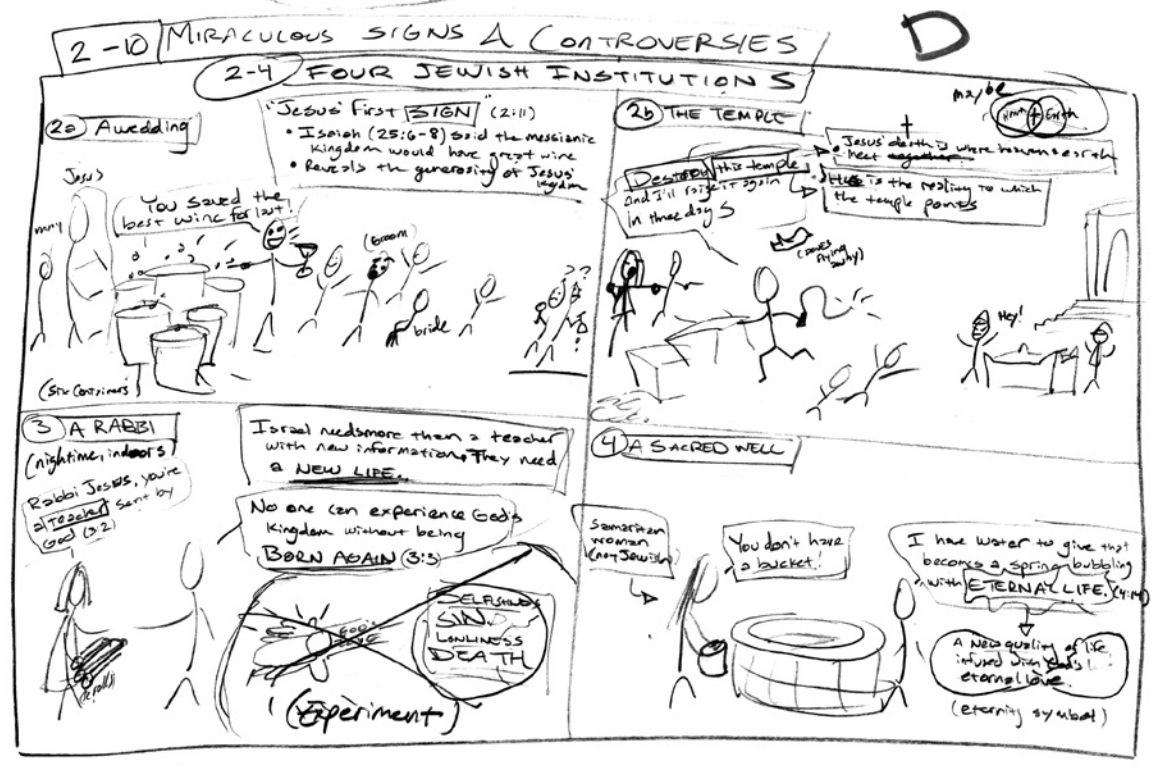




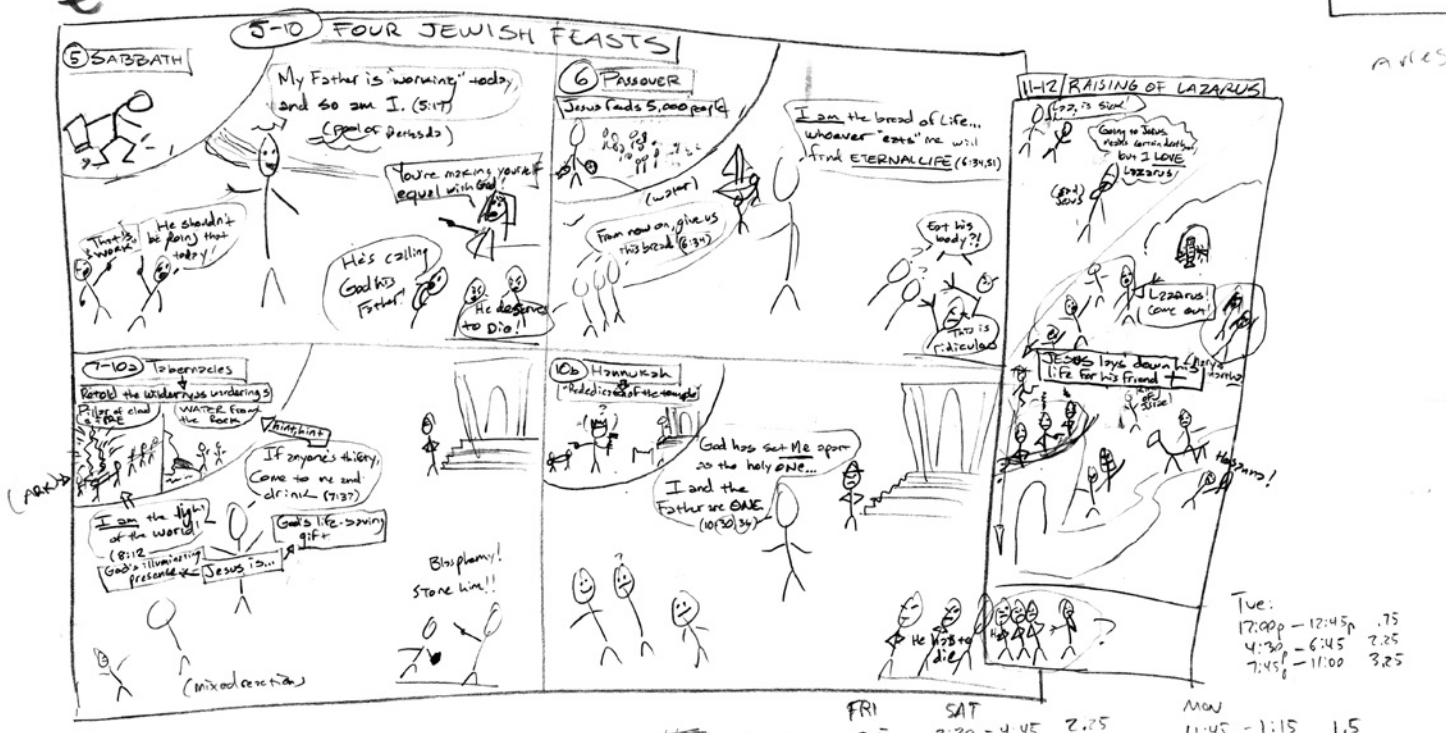
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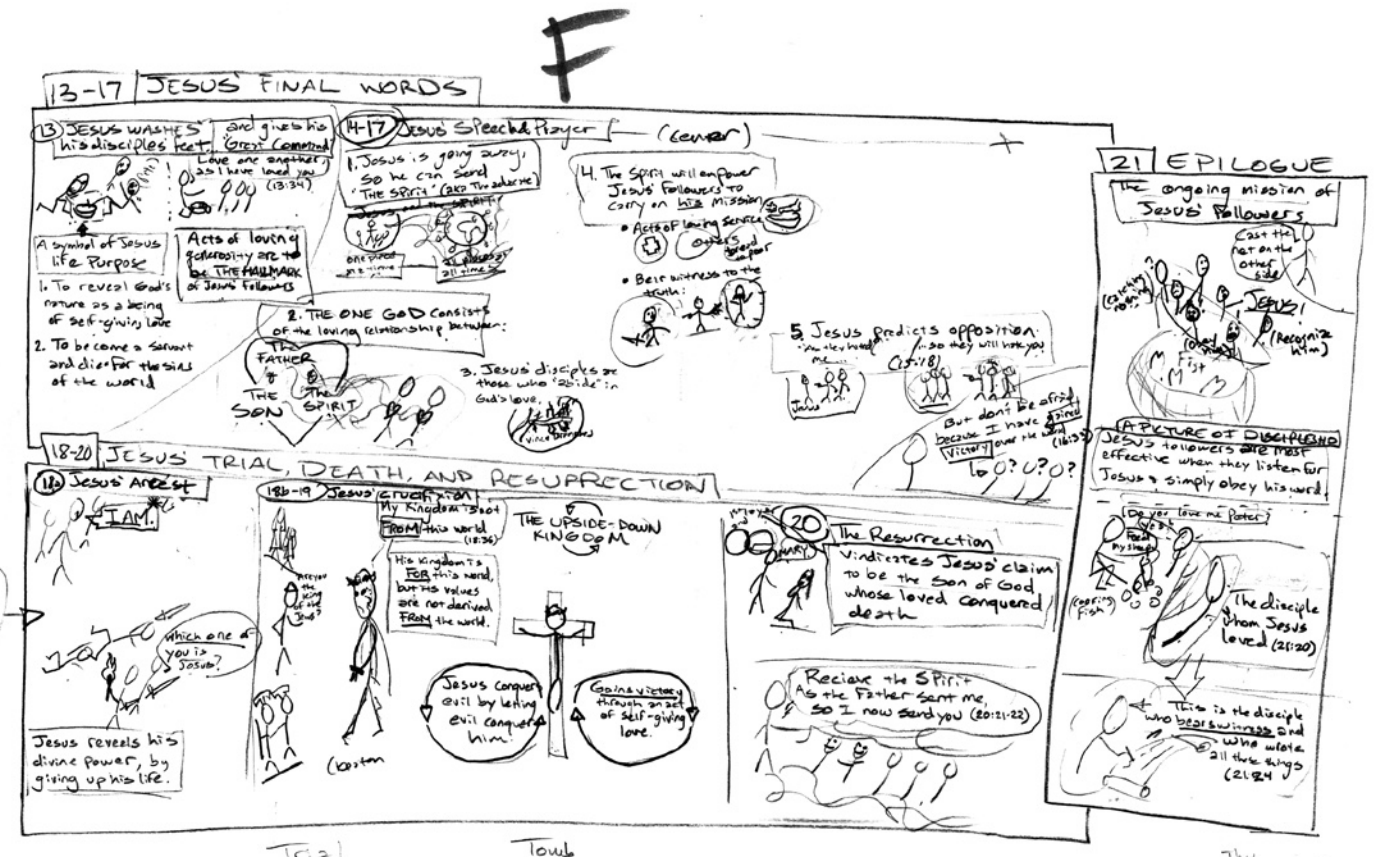
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E



F



CHAPTERS 13–17

The second half of John begins with chapters 13–17, and it focuses entirely on Jesus' final night and last words to his disciples. He tries to prepare them for his coming death, and he starts by performing a shocking act at dinner (ch. 13). Jesus takes on the role of a common servant by kneeling down to wash the disciples' dirty feet. In their culture a superior rabbi would never do this kind of thing for his disciples. Jesus says this act is a symbol of his entire life purpose, which is to reveal God's true nature as a being of self-giving love. It also symbolizes what it means for Jesus to be the messianic king. He will become a servant and give up his life to die for the sins of the world.

This leads to Jesus' great command to his disciples. To follow Jesus is to love other people just as Jesus loved them. Acts of loving generosity are to be the hallmark of Jesus' followers, because this is what shows the world who Jesus is, and, therefore, who God is.

Jesus continues with a long, flowing speech, concluded with a prayer (chs. 14–17). In these speeches you'll find a handful of repeated themes. Jesus keeps saying that he'll be "going away." This saddens the disciples, but Jesus also says that it's for the best because it means that he will send "the Spirit," also called "the Advocate." As a human, Jesus can only be in one place at a time, but the Spirit can be Jesus' divine, personal presence in any place and any time.

Now, remember, for John, the unique deity of the one God consists of the loving, unified relationship shared between the Father and the Son. Jesus says the Spirit is that loving personal presence, which comes to live "in" his people and draw them into the love of the Father and the Son. Jesus says that his disciples are those who "abide" or "remain" in that divine love, in the same way that branches are connected to a vine. He's describing how the personal love of God can permeate a person's life, healing, transforming, and making them new.

The Spirit will also empower Jesus' followers to carry on his mission in the world and fulfill the great command to love others through radical acts of service. In this way, Jesus says, his disciples will "bear witness to the truth." The Spirit will enable them to expose the selfish, corrupt ways we humans treat each other, and declare that, in Jesus, God has saved the world through his love and opened up a new way to be human.

Finally, Jesus predicts that there will be opposition. Just as the Jewish leaders rejected him, his followers will also be persecuted. Jesus tells them not to be afraid because he has already "conquered" or "gained victory" over the world (John 16:33). Now, what Jesus means by the word "victory" he doesn't really say, but it does lead us into the next section of the book, chapters 18–20. These chapters are where John shows us what "victory" looks like, Jesus-style.

CHAPTERS 18–20

The Jewish leaders send soldiers to arrest Jesus, and they find him and his disciples in a garden. When they ask which one is Jesus, he declares, "I am," and they fall backward. This is brilliant writing on John's part. These words of Jesus are the culmination of two sets of seven instances in which Jesus has used that very phrase, highlighting one of John's core claims about Jesus.

The words "I am" (*ego eimi* in Greek) equal the Greek translation of the personal covenant name of God that was revealed to Moses in Exodus 3 and repeated many times in Isaiah. John has strategically placed seven moments in the story where Jesus says "I am," followed by an astounding claim: I am the bread of life; the light of the world; the gate for the sheep; the good shepherd; the resurrection; the way, the truth, and the life; the true vine. John has also designed seven other stories that have key moments where Jesus simply says "I am," echoing the divine name. This occurrence as Jesus is arrested is the ironic climax of them all. The moment when Jesus most fully reveals his divine power and victory is the moment he gives us his life.

Jesus is put on trial for his exalted claims of being the Son of God and the king of Israel. He's first tried before Israel's high priest, and later before the Roman governor Pilate, who has to take seriously anyone charged with claiming to be the king of Israel. Jesus tells Pilate that "my kingdom is not from this world," meaning that, while he is a king and that his kingdom is for this world, its radically different value system and definition of power and greatness are not derived from this world. The values of Jesus' kingdom are defined by God's character, revealed through Jesus' death on the cross. The world's true king conquers sin and evil by letting it conquer him. He gains victory over the world through an act of self-giving love.

After Jesus' body is placed in a tomb that is sealed up, chapter 20 begins on the first day of the new week. Mary and then other disciples discover that Jesus' tomb is strangely open, and empty. Mary suddenly meets Jesus, who is alive and raised from the dead!

Now, pause for a moment. The resurrection of Jesus connects into another pattern of sevens in John's Gospel. Back at the wedding party, when Jesus changed water into wine, John said that it was Jesus' "first sign." John also identified the healing of the sick boy from chapter 4 as the "second sign," letting you keep count of the rest. If you do, you'll realize that the sixth sign was raising Lazarus from the tomb, which Jesus performed at the cost of his own life. This means that the seventh and final sign is the greatest, Jesus' own resurrection from the dead. It vindicates Jesus' claim to be the Son of God, the author of all life, whose love conquered death itself.

After the discovery of the empty tomb, Jesus meets up with the disciples and commissions them by sending the Spirit as he promised, so that his mission from the Father can now be carried on through them.

CHAPTER 21

The book then concludes with an epilogue exploring the ongoing mission of Jesus' disciples (ch. 21). A number of disciples are fishing, but catching nothing. Jesus appears to them on the shore, telling them to cast their net on the other side of the boat. When they obey him, they catch a huge amount of fish, and only in that moment do they recognize him. John is offering this story as a picture of discipleship to Jesus. His followers will be most effective in the world when their focus is not on their work as such, but on listening for Jesus' voice and obeying his words. That's when they will truly see him at work in their lives.

Jesus next questions Peter and commissions him as a unique leader in the Jesus movement. Jesus indicates that Peter will also give up his life one day in service to Jesus. Then, all of a sudden, the story shifts focus to another figure standing there with Peter, the disciple whom Jesus loved. This is none other than the book's author, John, and Jesus says his role in leading the church will not be like Peter's. John is called to spend his long life bearing witness to Jesus so that others may believe in him.

And that is exactly what he did, as he authored this amazing story about Jesus, the Messiah, and Son of God.

THE BOOK OF ACTS

This is the second volume in the unified, two-part work that we know today as "Luke-Acts." Both books were written by the same author, Luke, a traveling co-worker to Paul (see Colossians 4:14). This is clear from the book's introduction, in which Luke says, "I produced my first volume (that is, the Gospel) about all the things Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). In this opening line, Luke is also giving a clue as to what the book of Acts will be about. In volume 1, Jesus began "to do and teach," and so volume 2 will naturally be about what Jesus "continued" to do and teach.

This leads to an interesting point about the book's traditional, but not original, title: "The Acts of the Apostles." While different apostles do appear throughout most of the stories, the only single character who unifies the story from beginning to end is Jesus, appearing personally or acting through the Holy Spirit. The book, therefore, could be more accurately named "The Acts of Jesus and the Spirit."

CHAPTER 1

The book's introduction recounts how the risen Jesus spent some forty days with his disciples teaching them "about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3), connecting back to the story of Luke's Gospel. There, Jesus claimed that he was restoring God's kingdom over the world, beginning with Israel. He called Israel to live under God's reign by following him, and was enthroned as the messianic king when he gave up his life, conquering death through his love. As such, the book of Acts begins with the risen king Jesus instructing the disciples about life in his kingdom.

Jesus promises that the Spirit will soon come and immerse them with his personal presence, fulfilling one of the key hopes in the Old Testament Prophets. They promised that in the messianic kingdom, God's presence, or his Spirit, would take up residence among his people in a new temple, transforming their hearts (see Isaiah 32:15, Ezekiel 36:26–27, and Joel 2:28–32). Jesus says that when this happens, the Spirit will empower his disciples "to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

From here, Jesus is taken up from their sight in a cloud. This is an image from the book of Daniel chapter 7, showing that Jesus is now being enthroned as the Son of Man who was vindicated after his suffering. He now shares in God's rule over the world which he will bring fully here on earth when he one day returns.

The main themes and design of the book flow right out of this opening chapter. The book of Acts is about Jesus leading his people through the Spirit to go out into the world and invite all nations to live under his reign. The story will begin with that message spreading in Jerusalem (chs. 2–7), into the neighboring regions of Judea and Samaria, full of non-Jewish people (chs. 8–12), and from there out to the nations and the ends of the earth (chs. 13–28).

CHAPTERS 2–7

The focus stays on Jerusalem in chapters 2–7, as Jesus' followers wait in the city until the feast of Pentecost when Jewish pilgrims arrive from all over the ancient world. The Holy Spirit suddenly comes upon the disciples as a great wind, and something like flames appear over each person's head. Together, the disciples start announcing and telling stories of "God's mighty deeds" (Acts 2:11), speaking in all these languages that they didn't know before. And, remarkably, all the people gathered nearby understand their words perfectly.

Now, in order to see what Luke is emphasizing in this story, it's crucial to see the Old Testament roots to the key images. First of all, the wind and fire are a direct allusion to the stories about God's glorious, fiery presence filling the tabernacle and temple (see Exodus 40:38 and 2 Chronicles 7:1–3). These images also recall the prophetic promises that God would come live, through his Spirit, in the new temple of the messianic kingdom (see Ezekiel 43 and Haggai 2). Here in Acts, God's fiery presence comes to dwell not in a building, but in his people. Luke is saying that the new temple spoken of by the prophets is actually Jesus' new covenant family.

This connects to the second thing that Luke's trying to say. The prophets promised that when God came to dwell in his new temple he would reunify the tribes of Israel under the messianic king. This is when the good news of God's reign would be announced to all nations (see Isaiah 11 and Ezekiel 37). Luke describes in detail the international, multi-tribe makeup of the Israelites who first responded to Peter's message at Pentecost. The apostles start calling Israelites to acknowledge Jesus as their messiah, and thousands do, forming new communities of generosity, worship, and celebration.

Not everyone's celebrating, however. Luke also shows how Jesus' new family quickly faced hostility from the leaders of Jerusalem. With a beautifully symmetrical design in chapters 3–5, Luke tells a "tale of two temples." God's new temple, the community of Jesus' followers, are gathering "every day in the temple courts and from house to house" (Acts 2:46 and 5:42). Inside of these identical notices are two stories of Peter and other apostles healing people in the temple courts, only to be arrested by the temple leaders (chs. 3–4a and 5b). These arrests are followed each time by a speech from Peter, claiming that Jesus is the true king of Israel.

At the center of this symmetry are stories about Jesus' followers who donate property and possessions to a common fund to help the poor (Acts 4:25–5:11). And this generosity is wonderful, but it seems random for Luke to mention it here. Jewish readers would understand however, because according to the laws of the Torah (see Deuteronomy 14–15) this practice was supposed to be happening through the Jerusalem temple and its leaders. Luke's point is clear. The new temple of Jesus' community is fulfilling the purpose God always intended for the Jerusalem temple, to act as a place where heaven and earth meet, and where people encounter God's generosity and healing presence.

This conflict between the temples culminates with the first wave of persecution in chapters 6–7. Jesus' followers continue to multiply, requiring a new generation of leaders. One of them, Stephen, is a bold witness for Jesus in Jerusalem, but ends up arrested and accused of speaking against and even threatening the temple (Acts 6:12–13). Stephen gives a long speech, showing how Israel's leaders have always rejected the messengers God sent them, including Jesus, and now his disciples. The Jerusalem leaders become enraged and murder Stephen, launching a wave of persecution against Jesus' followers and driving most of them from the city. The crisis has a paradoxical effect, however. Luke shows how this tragedy actually becomes the means by which Jesus' people are now sent out into "Judea and Samaria," just as Jesus had planned (remember Acts 1:8).

CHAPTERS 8–12

In the following section (chs. 8–12), Luke has collected a diverse group of stories that show how the mostly Jewish, Jerusalem-based community of Jesus became a multi-ethnic, international movement. The first story is about Philip's mission into Samaria, which is the land of Israel's hated enemies. Many come to know and follow Jesus (ch. 8). Next, we see the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, later and better known as Paul (ch. 9). He was the sworn enemy and even a persecutor of the followers of Jesus, until he personally met him as the risen king. He went on to instead become a passionate advocate on Jesus' behalf.

Next is a story about Peter (chs. 9–11), who has a dream-vision in which he learns that God does not consider non-Jewish people ritually impure or unworthy of joining Jesus' family. Peter is led by the Spirit to the house of a Roman soldier, full of non-Jews, who all respond to the good news about Jesus. In this story, the Spirit shows up just as powerfully as he did for the Jewish disciples of Jesus in chapter 2.

These themes all culminate in the founding of the church at Antioch (ch. 11b), the largest, most cosmopolitan city in that part of the Roman empire. Luke tells us that Barnabas, a Jewish leader from the Jerusalem church, went along with Paul to help lead this church community. During their time there, it also became the first large, multi-ethnic church in history, as well as being the location at which Jesus' followers were first called "Christians" (Acts 11:26). From this church, the first international missionaries are sent out, and we watch Jesus' commission becoming a reality.

Turn the page to keep reading about the book of Acts.

LUKE-ACTS

HOW GOD'S KINGDOM CAME ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN THROUGH JESUS & HIS SPIRIT & HIS CHURCH

EXAMPLES OF FAITHFULNESS TO KING JESUS:
- -SHARING THE GOOD NEWS IN WORD & ACTION
- -FORMING DIVERSE COMMUNITIES WHERE PEOPLE ARE EQUALS
- -TRUSTING IN THE POWER & GUIDANCE OF THE SPIRIT

- A UNIFIED, TWO-VOLUME WORK
- FROM THE SAME AUTHOR: LUKE
- A TRAVELING CO-WORKER WITH PAUL (COLOSSIANS 4:14, PHILEMON V.24)

LUKE ACTS

1:1 "I produced my FIRST ACCOUNT about all the things Jesus BEGAN to do & teach."

IMPLICATION: ACTS = WHAT JESUS "CONTINUED" TO DO & TEACH

TRADITIONAL NAME: The Acts of the Apostles

A MORE ACCURATE NAME:

The ACTS of JESUS & the SPIRIT

1 INTRODUCTION

KINGDOM OF GOD:
- JESUS RESTORES GOD'S KINGDOM OVER THE WORLD
- CALLED ISRAEL TO FOLLOW HIM
- ENTHRONED AS KING THROUGH HIS DEATH & RESURRECTION

PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT:
- FULFILLS PROPHETIC HOPE (ISAIAH 32, EZEKIEL 36, JOEL 2)
- NEW TEMPLE IN THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM FILLED WITH GOD'S PRESENCE

"YOU'LL BE MY WITNESSES in JERUSALEM, JUDEA & SAMARIA, and to the ENDS OF THE EARTH." (1:8)

JESUS IS EXALTED AS KING OF THE WORLD

FROM: DANIEL CH. 7

JESUS IS ENTHRONED as the SON OF MAN

2-7 IN JERUSALEM

2 PENTECOST

HOLY SPIRIT

GOD'S GLORY FILLING THE TEMPLE

IN THE PAST: EXODUS 40, 2ND CHRONICLES 7

IN THE FUTURE: EZEKIEL 43, HAGGAI 2

THE NEW TEMPLE IS JESUS' NEW COVENANT FAMILY

ISRAEL REUNIFIED UNDER THE MESSIANIC KING (ISAIAH 11, EZEKIEL 37)

3-5 A TALE OF TWO TEMPLES

A PRACTICE DESCRIBED IN THE TORAH (DEUTERONOMY 14-15) SUPPOSED TO BE MANAGED BY THE TEMPLE

LUKE'S POINT:

THE NEW TEMPLE OF JESUS' COMMUNITY IS NOW WHERE PEOPLE ENCOUNTER GOD'S GENEROSITY & healing presence

3:6a JESUS' FOLLOWERS SELL POSSESSIONS TO SUPPORT THE POOR

3:1a PETER HEALS & PREACHES IN THE TEMPLE--ARRESTED & TRIED

3:1b

2:42 "JESUS' DISCIPLES GATHER DAILY IN THE TEMPLE COURTS & HOUSE TO HOUSE"

5:12

6:1-8:3 FIRST PERSECUTION

STEPHEN

(WHY DO YOU ALWAYS RESIST GOD'S SPIRIT?)

JESUS' FOLLOWERS DRIVEN FROM THE CITY

8-12 JUDEA & SAMARIA

HOW THE MOSTLY JEWISH, JERUSALEM-BASED COMMUNITY OF JESUS ...BECAME... A MULTI-ETHNIC, INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT

8 PHILIP IN SAMARIA

SAUL, WHY DO YOU PERSECUTE ME?

CONVERSION OF SAUL OF TARSUS 9a

9b-11a PETER & CORNELIUS

DON'T CALL IMPURE SOMETHING GOD HAS PURIFIED!

11b THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH

BARNABAS & PAUL

- FIRST MULTI-ETHNIC CHURCH
- FIRST USE OF "CHRISTIANS" (11:26)

13-20 THE MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

GREECE

ASIA MINOR

ANTIOCH

JERUSALEM

13-14 ASIA MINOR

16-18a ASIA MINOR & GREECE

18b-20 ASIA MINOR & GREECE AGAIN!

CONTINUED MISSION TO ISRAEL

JESUS IS KING OF ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS!

HE OPPOSES THE TORAH!

15 THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

UNLESS PEOPLE BECOME JEWISH, THEY CAN'T BE SAVED. (15:1)

NO WAY!

GOD'S PLAN WAS ALWAYS TO INCLUDE NON-JEWS IN HIS PEOPLE.

AMOS

GROUNDBREAKING

MEMBERSHIP IN JESUS' PEOPLE IS NOT BASED ON ETHNICITY OR TORAH OBSERVANCE, BUT SIMPLY ON TRUSTING & OBEYING JESUS.

THE CLASH OF CULTURES (ch.14,16-17,19)

GALLIO

HE'S DANGEROUS TO OUR WAY OF LIFE!

IDOLS

THE RISEN JESUS IS THE ONE TRUE GOD & KING!

ACCUSATIONS OF REBELLION (ch.17,18)

HE'S DEFYING CAESAR, SAYING THERE'S ANOTHER KING, JESUS!! (17:7)

THE PARADOX OF THE EARLY CHURCH:
- A JEWISH MESSIANIC MOVEMENT... ...but ethnically diverse
- MEN & WOMEN, RICH & POOR, SLAVE & FREE...all treated as equals
- LOYAL TO JESUS ALONE... ...but not a military threat to Rome

21-28 PAUL'S WITNESS SPREADS TO ROME

21-22 PAUL ARRESTED IN JERUSALEM

HE TEACHES AGAINST OUR PEOPLE & OUR TEMPLE! (21:28)

HE'S THE TERRORIST FROM EGYPT! (21:38)

ROME

23-26 PAUL ON TRIAL BEFORE...

UHHHHH... ...PASS!

24 GOVERNOR FELIX

RID THE EARTH OF HIM!!!

23 THE SANHEDRIN

25 GOVERNOR FESTUS

HE'S OUT OF HIS MIND!

HE'S DONE NOTHING WORTHY OF DEATH!

26 KING AGRIPPA

I STAND ON TRIAL BECAUSE OF MY HOPE IN THE RESURRECTION OF THE SUFFERING MESSIAH. (23:6, 26:23)

PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT ALLOWS TIME TO COMPOSE HIS APOSTOLIC LETTERS

TO: COLOSSAE

TO: EPHESUS

TO: PHILIPPI

TO: PHILEMON

28 UNDER HOUSE ARREST IN ROME

"PAUL ANNOUNCED THE KINGDOM OF GOD, BOLDLY TEACHING ALL ABOUT THE LORD JESUS, THE MESSIAH, TOTALLY UNHINDERED." (28:31)

- A unified, two part work
- From the same Author:
  LUKE
- Traveling Co-worker with Paul (Colossians 4:14)

"I produced my first volume about all the things Jesus began to do and teach (1:1)

Implication: Acts = what Jesus continued to do & teach

Traditional NAME
"The Acts of the Apostles"

More accurate name

LUKE 1:1-2 ACTS

THE ACTS of JESUS & THE SPIRIT

LUKE-ACTS

- How God's kingdom came on earth as in heaven through Jesus and his spirit and his church.
- Examples of faithfulness to King Jesus
  - sharing the good news in word & action
  - forming diverse communities where people are equals
  - trusting in the power & guidance of the Spirit

1 INTRODUCTION

Kingdom of God
- Jesus restored God's kingdom over the world
- Called Israel to follow him
- Enthroned as King thru death & resurrection

Promise of the SPIRIT
- Fulfills Prophetic hope (Isaiah 32, Ezekiel 36, Joel 2)
- New temple in the messianic kingdom filled with God's presence

= 1:8 "You'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea & Samaria, and unto the ends of the earth!"

Jesus exalted as King of the world.

From Daniel 7
Jesus is enthroned as the son of Man

2-7 In JERUSALEM

(2) PENTECOST
God's glory filling the temple
- In the Past (Exodus 40, 2 Chronicles 7)
- In the Future (Ezekiel 43, Haggai 2)

HOLY SPIRIT
(Peter)
THE NEW TEMPLE IS Jesus' NEW COVENANT FAMILY

Israel reunified under the Messianic King (Isaiah 11, Ezekiel 37)

(ANTI-JESUS)
- Arabic
- Greek
- Egyptian

3-5 A TALE OF TWO TEMPLES

A practice described in the Torah (Deuteronomy 14-15): supposed to be happening through the Temple

LUKE'S POINT
The new temple of Jesus's community is now where People encounter God's generosity & presence

(Peter)
Jesus followers sell possessions to support the poor (4:6-5:)

(3-4a) Peter heals & Preaches in the temple > arrest and trial (5b)

2:46 Jesus' disciples every day in the temple courts and house to house 5:42

6-7 1st Persecution

Passionate
Why do you always resist God's spirit?
He must DIE!
STEPHEN

Jesus followers driven from the city

8-12 JUDEA & SAMARIA

Move into this space to create more below?

(8) Philip in Samaria
Simon is King?

(9a) Conversion of Saul of Tarsus
Saul, why do you persecute me?

(9b-11a) PETER & CORNELIUS
Lizard
Pig
Hawk
Don't Call impure something God has purified!
(Spirit)
Good news!
(Peter)
(Intl. People)

(11b) The Church in Antioch
- The 1st Multi-ethnic Church
- Barnabas & Paul
- "Christian" 1st used in Antioch (11:26)

How the Mostly Jewish, Jerusalem-based community of Jesus became a multi-ethnic, International movement.

13-20 THE MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

(MAP)
Greece
Asia minor
Antioch
Jesus

#1 Chs. 13-14: Asia Minor
#2 Chs. 16-18a Asia Minor & Greece
#3 Chs. 18b-20: Asia Minor & Greece (again!)

KEY THEMES

The Continued Mission to Israel
- Jesus is the King of Israel AND the nations
- He's opposed Moses & the Torah!

LEADS TO The Jerusalem Council Ch. 15
- Unless People become Jewish they can't be Saved (15:1)
  - circumcision
  - Sabbath
  - Kosher Diet
- NO WAY! (PAB) (Peter) (James)
- God's plan was always to include non-Jewish his People

GROUNDBREAKING
Membership in Jesus' People is not based on ethnicity or Torah observance, but simply trusting & obeying Jesus.

CLASH OF CULTURES (Chs. 14, 16, 17, 19)
He's dangerous to our way of life!
GALLIO
ARTEMIS

ALLUSATIONS OF REBELLION (Chs. 16, 17, 18)
The risen Jesus is the one true God & KING!
(PAUL)
He's defying Caesar, saying there's another King, Jesus!!!
Deal with it yourselves
(Jewish)

THE PARADOX OF THE EARLY CHURCH
- A Jewish Messianic movement, but ethnically diverse
- Men & women, rich & poor, slave & Free, all treated as EQUALS
- Allegiance given to Jesus alone, but not a military threat to Rome

21-28 PAUL'S WITNESS SPREADS TO ROME

(21-22) Paul arrested in Jerusalem
He teaches against our people and our temple! (21:28)
The terrorist from Egypt! (21:38)

(23-26) Paul on trial before... (Parallel to the same panel in LUKE)
(23) The Sanhedrin
Rid the earth of him!
(24) Governor FELIX
Enough of this...
(Tops)
(25) Governor FESTUS
He's done nothing deserving of death
(26) KING AGRIPPA
He's out of his mind!

I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the suffering Messiah (23:6, 26:23)

Paul's Imprisonment allows time to write his apostolic letters
Philippians
Colossians
Ephesians
Philemon

(28) Paul under house-arrest in Rome
28:31 Paul announced the Kingdom of God, boldly teaching all about the LORD Jesus, the Messiah, totally unhindered.

CHAPTERS 13–20

The church in Antioch became the flagship church of the first international Christian missionaries. Barnabas and Paul were serving in this church and were prompted by the Spirit to leave, and this opens up the second main section of the book of Acts (chs. 13–20). Paul and various co-workers travel around the Roman empire to announce the good news that Jesus is king. The first journey is into the interior of what's called "Asia Minor" (located in modern day Turkey), and ends with an important meeting of the apostles back in Jerusalem (ch. 15). The second trip is through Asia Minor and into ancient Greece (chs. 16–18a), and the third trip goes through the same territory once again, concluding in Paul's journey back to Jerusalem (chs. 18b–20).

In recounting these stories, Luke has highlighted a number of key themes through repetition, beginning with the continued mission to Israel. Upon entering a new city, Paul always first visits the Jewish synagogue to share about how Jesus is the risen king who is now forming a new multi-ethnic people of God. Many Jewish people come to recognize Jesus as their messiah. Others, however, oppose Paul and sometimes even run him out of town as a dangerous rebel who opposes the Torah and Jewish tradition.

This tension culminates after the first journey and leads to an important council in Jerusalem (ch. 15). Paul discovers that there are some Jewish followers of Jesus in Antioch claiming that unless non-Jewish people become Jewish by practicing circumcision, the Sabbath, and obeying kosher food laws, they can't be a part of Jesus' redeemed people. Paul and Barnabas radically disagree with this claim, so they take the debate to a leadership council in Jerusalem. There, Peter, Paul, and James, the brother of Jesus, discuss and discern from the Scriptures and from their experience that God's plan was always to include the nations within his covenant people. While they do require non-Jewish Christians to stop participating in pagan temple sacrifices, they don't require them to adopt an ethnically Jewish identity or to become Torah-observant.

This decision was groundbreaking for the history of the Jesus movement. Jesus, who is the risen king of all nations, is an ethnically Jewish messiah. However, a person's membership among his people is not based on ethnic identity or Torah observance. Instead, one must simply trust in Jesus and follow his teachings.

It's this multi-ethnic reality of the Jesus movement that leads to the next theme Luke emphasizes, namely, the clash of cultures between the early Christians and the Greek and Roman world.

Luke records multiple clashes in Philippi, Athens, and Ephesus (chs. 14, 16–17, and 19). Paul would announce Jesus as the revelation of the one, true God who is the king of the world. The implication of this claim is that all other gods and idols are powerless and futile. This message was consistently viewed as subversive to the Roman way of life and Paul is accused of being a dangerous social revolutionary. These stories show how the multi-ethnic, monotheistic Jesus-communities didn't fit into any cultural boxes familiar to the Romans. The ancient world had simply never seen anything quite like these Christian communities.

Even more to the point, Luke makes clear that the Christians aroused more than just suspicion. Multiple stories show Romans accusing Paul and the Christians of rebellion and treason against Caesar. And it's understandable. People were hearing Paul correctly when he announced that "there was another king, Jesus" (Acts 17:7), and they correctly saw the Christian way of life as a challenge to many Roman cultural values. But every time Paul is arrested and interrogated by Roman officials, they can't see any threat and they end up releasing him.

All of these themes show the paradox that the early church presented to the world. It was a Jewish messianic movement, made up of ethnically diverse communities. Men and women, rich and poor, slave and free, were all treated as equals because they all gave their allegiance to king Jesus alone and to no other god or king. Their very existence subverted the core values of Roman culture, yet they posed no military threat because Jesus had taught them to be a people of peace. Really, the only crime that they could be accused of is not conforming to the status quo.

CHAPTERS 21–28

The book's final section, chapters 21–28, returns the focus to Paul's witness, spreading from Jerusalem to Rome. His final missionary journey ends in Jerusalem, where his controversial reputation precedes him. Paul is attacked by Jewish people who think that he has betrayed Israel, attracting the attention of Roman soldiers. These soldiers in turn think that Paul is a terrorist from Egypt who is starting a rebellion, so they arrest him. Paul is put on trial before the Jewish leaders of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem (ch. 23), as well as before a series of Roman leaders in Caesarea. Governor Felix only puts Paul off for the next Governor, Festus, who eventually brings Paul before King Agrippa (chs. 24–26). Paul ends up in prison for years, even though each trial fails to declare him guilty. All he's doing is announcing that his hope in the resurrection has been fulfilled through king Jesus. It's hardly a crime but, at this point, the Roman legal machine can't just let him go, so Paul appeals to Rome's highest court.

Now, all this prison time would seem like a setback for Paul, whose heartbeat was to go on the road and start new Jesus-communities. But in this story, the Spirit orchestrates all things for good. The prison time allows Paul to have his most important apostolic letters written—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and these become the way his missionary legacy was carried on into history. Eventually, Paul was transferred as a prisoner to Rome, and, after a terrifying and near-death voyage across the Mediterranean, he ends up under house arrest in Rome, awaiting his delayed trial. From there, he hosts regular meetings that reach both Jews and Gentiles. The book ends with Paul "announcing the kingdom of God, and boldly teaching all about the Lord Jesus Messiah, totally unhindered" (Acts 28:31)—all right under Caesar's nose in Rome.

The unified work of Luke and Acts does so much more than just give a history of Jesus and the early church. They tell the story of how God's kingdom arrived here on earth as in heaven. It began with Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and continued through the coming of his Spirit to empower Jesus' followers to bear witness from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. In telling this story, Luke has also given us scores of examples of what faithfulness to king Jesus looks like. It means sharing the good news of the risen king through words and actions. This results in the formation of diverse communities in which people of all kinds are treated equally, as they give their allegiance to Jesus and live by his teachings. And threading all of this together, is the power and guidance offered by the Spirit, who leads the church beyond chapter 28 and continues the story even today.

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS

This is one of the longest and most significant things ever written by Paul the Apostle, who was formerly known as Saul of Tarsus. He was a Jewish rabbi belonging to a group known as the Pharisees, and he passionately devoted his life to observe the Torah of Moses and the traditions of Israel. He viewed Jesus and his followers as a threat to these traditions, so he persecuted them. His life was changed, however, when he had a radical encounter with the risen Jesus himself. He was commissioned to become an "apostle" for Jesus, like an official representative, to the world of non-Jewish people, or "Gentiles."

As part of this new vocation, he started going by his Roman name, Paul, and he traveled about the ancient Roman empire telling people about the risen king Jesus. These new converts would form into communities called "churches," and Paul would occasionally write letters to these communities to foster their faith, address specific problems, or to answer questions. The book of Romans is one of these letters, written later in his career.

We know from Acts 18:1–2 that the church in Rome had existed for some time and was made up of both Jewish and non-Jewish followers. The crisis for this church began when the Roman Emperor Claudius expelled all of the Jewish people from Rome. About five years later, all those Jews, including many who followed Jesus, were allowed to return. When they did, they found a church that had become very non-Jewish in its customs and practice. This culture clash created lots of tension, and, by Paul's day, the Roman church was divided. They disagreed about how to follow Jesus, debating about whether or not non-Jewish Christians should celebrate the Sabbath, or eat kosher, or be circumcised, and so on.

Paul wrote this letter in order to accomplish a few things. He wanted this divided community to become unified once again. For a practical purpose, he hoped that the Roman church could become a staging ground for his mission to go even further west, all the way to Spain. These tense circumstances motivated Paul to write out his fullest explanation of the gospel, the good news that announces Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

While the letter is designed to have four main movements, it is also unified as one long, flowing exploration of the gospel, which "reveals God's righteousness" (chs. 1–4), "creates a new humanity" (chs. 5–8), and "fulfills God's promise to Israel" (chs. 9–11). As a result, it's this gospel alone that can "unify the church" (chs. 12–16).

CHAPTERS 1–4

Paul opens by introducing himself as an apostle appointed by God to spread the gospel about Jesus (Romans 1:1–17). This is the message announcing that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel, who was raised from the dead as the Son of God and king of the nations. As a result, Jesus now calls all humanity to come under his loving rule. Paul says that this good news about king Jesus is God's power to save people who trust in him, and that it "reveals God's righteousness."

"Righteousness" is a rich, Old Testament word for Paul, which describes God's character. It means that God always acts in a way that is just and right, and also that God is faithful and just to fulfill his promises. Paul is saying that the story of Jesus shows how God has done both of these things.

In Romans 1:18–32, Paul goes into a long, creative retelling of Genesis 3–11, showing how the Gentile world, all nations, have become trapped in a spiral of sin and selfishness. The human heart and mind are broken. We've turned away from God to embrace idolatry, which means finding ultimate significance in created things, and giving ultimate allegiance to things that are not God. This results in a distortion of our humanity and destructive behavior. What's left is a humanity that stands guilty-as-charged before a just and righteous God.

To this, Paul's fellow Israelites might respond, "Well, good thing God chose our people out from among the nations. He saved us out of slavery in Egypt and gave us the laws of the Torah, like observing the Sabbath, eating kosher, or circumcision. They all show us how to live as God's holy people."

Paul respond, "Not so fast!" He recalls the story of the Torah and the rest of the Old Testament, which showed that Israel was just as sinful, idolatrous, and morally broken as the rest of humanity. In fact, Israel is actually more guilty than the Gentiles because they have the Torah, and because they should know better.

Paul concludes that all humanity, both the Gentiles and Israel, is hopelessly trapped and guilty before God, but that's not the final word. The good news about Jesus is God's response. Instead of holding humanity guilty, Jesus came as Israel's messiah to die on behalf of all people as a sacrifice for sins. As our representative, Jesus took into himself the just consequences of all the pain, sin, and death humans have caused in the world, and he overcame it all by his resurrection from the dead. It's Jesus' own new life that is now made available to others. Jesus became what we are, so that we might become what he is. All of this, Paul says, is how God "justifies" those who trust, or have faith, in Jesus.

"Justification" is another rich, Old Testament term for Paul and is related to God's righteousness. It literally means "to declare righteous." Because of what Jesus did on our behalf, we are given a new status before God. Instead of being found guilty, God declares that a person is in a right relationship with him and is forgiven. This results in a new family, as a person who trusts Jesus is given a place among God's covenant people. Justification also results in a new future, which begins a journey of life transformation by God's grace. All of these realities about justification are God's gift to those who are "in Christ" because of their faith and loyalty to him.

In chapter 4, Paul explores the huge implications all this has for who can now be part of God's covenant family. He turns to the story of Abraham in Genesis 15. Before the laws of the Torah were ever given to Israel, Abraham was "justified" or "declared righteous" before God. God promised that Abraham would become the father of a large, multi-ethnic family that would receive his blessing. However, Abraham and Sarah were very old and had never been able have children. Nonetheless, Abraham had radical faith and trust in God's promise, and so God declared him to be "righteous" (see Genesis 15:6). Paul's claim is that Abraham's multi-ethnic family is now becoming a reality through Jesus and his followers. Abraham's descendants are spreading throughout the world, made up of Jews and Gentiles who have faith and trust in the one who fulfilled God's promises to Abraham, Jesus the Messiah.

Before we move onto chapters 5–16, let's pause to summarize Paul's main ideas in chapters 1–4, because they're the foundation for understanding the rest of the letter. All of humanity is hopelessly trapped in sin and needs to be rescued, but that rescue will not happen by people trying to obey the laws of the Torah. God's righteous character has moved him to rescue the world through Jesus' death and resurrection, enabling the creation of a faith based, multi-ethnic family as his people.

Now Paul will go on to show how this new family is part of a much bigger story that is calling them to a totally new way of life.

Turn the page to keep reading about Paul's letter to the Romans.

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS

SAUL OF TARSUS, A PHARISEE — BECOMES — PAUL APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES — OFFICIAL REP. OF JESUS

TORAH & TRADITION — RADICAL! — †=👑

OCCASIONALLY WROTE letters

PAUL'S FULLEST EXPLANATION OF THE GOSPEL, THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS' LIFE, DEATH, & RESURRECTION

SPAIN!

SUMMARY OF CHS. 1-4

- ch. 1 ALL HUMANITY IS TRAPPED IN SIN & NEEDS TO BE RESCUED
- ch. 2 RESCUE WON'T HAPPEN BY TRYING TO OBEY THE LAWS OF THE TORAH
- ch. 3 GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS HAS RESCUED THE WORLD THROUGH JESUS...
- ch. 4 ...TO CREATE THE FAITH-BASED, MULTI-ETHNIC FAMILY OF ABRAHAM

THE GOSPEL...

1-4 ...REVEALS GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

1:1-17 THE GOSPEL:
- IS GOD'S POWER TO SAVE PEOPLE
- REVEALS GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS
  - ① HE ALWAYS DOES WHAT IS JUST & RIGHT.
  - ② HE IS FAITHFUL TO HIS PROMISES

THE RISEN JESUS IS KING OF THE NATIONS

1:18-32 ALL NATIONS ARE TRAPPED

SIN — IDOLATRY — GUILTY!

...ISRAEL IS TRAPPED TOO! 2:1-3:8

SIN — TORAH — IDOLATRY — MORE GUILTY!

3:9-26 BUT...GOOD NEWS!

JESUS BECAME WHAT WE ARE... TRAPPED & GUILTY

...SO WE COULD BECOME WHAT HE IS.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH — "TO DECLARE RIGHTEOUS"
- NEW STATUS: RIGHT WITH GOD & FORGIVEN
- NEW FAMILY: INCLUDED IN GOD'S PEOPLE
- NEW FUTURE: TRANSFORMED LIFE

"IN CHRIST"

4 WHO IS IN GOD'S COVENANT FAMILY?

DECLARED RIGHTEOUS BY HIS FAITH IN GOD'S PROMISE (GENESIS 15:6)

ALL NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED THROUGH YOU & YOUR OFFSPRING.

GOD

ABRAHAM (GENESIS 12, 17)

THOSE WHO HAVE FAITH IN THE ONE WHO FULFILLED GOD'S PROMISE

THE CHURCH of ROME (SEE ACTS 18:1-2)

EMPEROR CLAVDIVS — JEWS EXPELLED

NON-JEWISH — JEWISH

5 YEARS LATER

@#$%@☆!!! WE ARE FREE IN CHRIST! — Uh...WHAT?! — OH, YOU'RE BACK AGAIN... — GENTILE CHRISTIANS

BLASPHEMY!! YOU MUST EAT KOSHER!! — YOU NEED THE SABBATH!! — YOU NEED TO BE CIRCUMCISED. — JEWISH CHRISTIANS

I WANT YOU TO BE UNIFIED!

5-8 ...CREATES A NEW HUMANITY

5 JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH CREATES NEW HUMANITY

ADAM "HUMANITY" — JESUS "THE NEW ADAM"

SIN — SLAVERY — GOD'S JUDGMENT — DEATH

FAITHFULNESS — OBEDIENCE — LOVE — LIFE

LEAVE THIS HUMANITY!

6 DEATH — BAPTISM — NEW LIFE!

WE ARE JOINED TO JESUS — WHAT'S TRUE OF HIM IS TRUE OF US.

LIBERATED to LOVE GOD & NEIGHBOR

7 WHAT WAS THE POINT OF THE LAW? (TORAH)

A THE STORY of THE TORAH

B THE 613 COMMANDS GIVEN THROUGH MOSES

GOOD & SHOW GOD'S WILL
- ☒ DON'T LIE
- ☒ DON'T STEAL
- ☒ LOVE OTHERS
- ☒ DON'T COVET

THE PARADOX IS THE POINT! — MORE GUILTY!

THE SOLUTION: JESUS & THE SPIRIT

8 MESSIAH — LAWS ENGRAVED — SPIRIT — RENEWED CREATION!

LIBERATED to LOVE GOD & NEIGHBOR

9-11 ...FULFILLS GOD'S PROMISE TO ISRAEL

MY PEOPLE, ISRAEL!!

9 ISRAEL IN THE PAST

ETHNIC ISRAEL ≠ COVENANT MEMBER

GOD SELECTED A SUBSET OF THE FAMILY

ABRAHAM — ISHMAEL — ISAAC — ESAU — JACOB

JESUS' REJECTORS — JESUS' FOLLOWERS

THE LINE OF PROMISE

THE GOLDEN CALF — PHARAOH'S REBELLION

PEOPLE'S REJECTION ACCOMPLISHES GOD'S PURPOSES

10 ISRAEL IN THE PRESENT

COVENANT RELATIONSHIP BASED ON LAWS

NEW COVENANT FAMILY BASED ON FAITH

11 ISRAEL IN THE FUTURE

Q: IS GOD DONE WITH ISRAEL?

A: NO!

JEWISH & GENTILE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS — MULTI-ETHNIC FAMILY

GOD'S COVENANT FAMILY

SOME GRAFTED ON — SOME BROKEN OFF

REJECTORS OF JESUS

ONE DAY, JESUS WILL BE ACKNOWLEDGED BY HIS PEOPLE. HOW? WHEN?

12-16 ...UNIFIES THE CHURCH

12-13 UNIFYING THROUGH LOVE & FORGIVENESS

SERVING ONE ANOTHER — SERVING — LEADING — TEACHING — PROPHESYING — GIVING

HUMILITY & FORGIVENESS — I'M SORRY... I'VE BEEN A JERK.

Love fulfills the TORAH

14-15 HEALING ETHNIC DIVISION

SHOW GRACE TO EACH OTHER ON NON-ESSENTIAL ISSUES

GENTILE — EVOF — JEWISH

16

HONOR PHOEBE! ...SHE'S LEGIT! SAY HI TO THE GANG!

ROMANS

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS

Formerly SAUL of Tarsus, a Pharisee → Became → PAUL, Apostle to the gentiles. → Official Rep. of JESUS

Tradition & TORAH

THE Church in ROME (Acts 28:1-2)

Jewish / Not-Jewish

Leave Now!

Emperor Claudius → LEFT → 5 yrs LATER

Gentile / Jewish

THE GOSPEL...

I want you to be unified → WENT → Spain!

Paul's fullest explanation of the GOSPEL

"Good news" about Jesus' life, death, & resurrection

OR:

Summary of CHS. 1–4

CH1: All humanity is trapped in sin & needs to be rescued.

CH.2 Rescue won't happen by trying to obey the laws of the TORAH.

CH.3 God's Righteousness has rescued the world through JESUS...

CH.4 ... in order to create the faith-based, multi-ethnic family of Abraham

1-4 ... Reveals God's Righteousness

1:1-7 THE GOSPEL is God's power to save people → Reveals God's Righteousness

The Risen Jesus is King of the nations.

1. He always does what is Just & Right | 2. He is Faithful to his promises.

→ (center)

1:18-32 All nations are trapped

Idolatry

SIN

GUILTY!

2:1-3:8 Israel is trapped too!

TORAH

Idolatry

SIN

MORE GUILTY!

3:9-26 BUT.. GOOD NEWS! JUSTIFICATION by Faith ("To declare righteous")

Trapped & Guilty

JESUS became what we are ... so we could become what he is

NEW STATUS: Right with God/forgiven

NEW FAMILY: included in God's people

NEW FUTURE: a transformed life

"IN CHRIST"

CH.4 WHO is IN God's Covenant family?

Abraham Genesis 12,15

All nations will be blessed through you & your offspring

God

Declared Righteous by Faith in God's promise (Genesis 15:6)

Those who have faith in the ONE who Fulfilled God's promise.

(INTL. crowd)

(see GALATIANS 3-4 scene)

5-8 ... Creates a new humanity

5 Justification by Faith Creates NEW HUMANS

ADAM ("Humanity") — JESUS (THE NEW ADAM)

SIN, Slavery, God's Judgment, DEATH

Faithfulness, Obedience, C.N.I., LOVE, LIFE

6 LEAVE THIS Humanity!

BAPTISM

DEATH

You are joined to Jesus: What's true of him is true of US.

NEW LIFE

Liberated to ♡ God & Neighbor

7 What was the point of THE LAW (TORAH)

A The story of the TORAH | B The 613 commands given through Moses

GOOD & SHOW GOD'S WILL

☐ Don't lie ☐ Don't steal ☐ Love others ☐ Don't covet

The paradox is the Point!

(Awetch)

MORE GUILTY!

8 The Solution: Jesus & Spirit

LAW & PROPHETS

ISRAEL (1st) MESSIAH (2nd)

SPIRIT

Liberated to ♡ God & Neighbor

RENEWED CREATION

9-11 ... Fulfills God's Promise to Israel

9 Israel in the Past

Ethnic Israelite ≠ Covenant Member

Abraham

God selected a sub-set of the FAMILY

Ishmael, Isaac

Esau, Jacob

Rejectors of Jesus, Followers of Jesus

LINE OF PROMISE

Golden Calf

Pharaoh's Rebellion

My people Israel

People's Rejection accomplishes God's Purposes

10 Israel in the Present

Covenant Relationship based on LAWS

NEW Covenant Family based on Faith

(INTL crowd)

11 Israel in the future

Q: Is God done with Israel?

A: NO!

Jewish & gentile Followers of Jesus

Multi-ethnic Family

some grafted in

God's Covenant Family

some broken off

Rejectors of Jesus

"One day Jesus will be acknowledged by his people"

12-16 ... Unifies the Church

12-13 Unity through LOVE & forgiveness

SERVING one another (-ing)

Humility & FORGIVENESS

"Sorry I've been a Jerk"

LOVE Fulfills the TORAH

14-15 Healing ethnic division

Gentile & Jewish Christians

Show Grace for each other on non-essential issues

16 Honor Phoebe!

"Here's my résumé"

Romans

After showing that Jesus is forming a new covenant family of people from all nations, Paul goes on to claim that these people are the new humanity that fulfills God's promises to ancient Israel by obeying the Torah in the power of the Spirit.

CHAPTERS 5–8

Paul begins by exploring how Jesus' family is a new kind of humanity (ch. 5). He looks back at the first human character in the biblical story, Adam, whose name means "humanity." Adam and all humanity after him have chosen sin and selfishness, and as a consequence face God's judgment. They've become slaves to sin's influence, which results in death. Paul then contrasts Adam with Jesus, the "new Adam," a human who lived in faithful obedience to God through his act of sacrificial love. Jesus offers his life as a gift to others, so that they can be justified before God. And now Jesus stands as the head of a new humanity that is being transformed by the very same gift.

This leads right into chapter 6, where Paul reminds the Christians in Rome that choosing to follow Jesus means leaving their old Adam-like humanity behind and entering into the new Jesus-style humanity. And the sacred physical symbol of that transition was the immersion of their baptism. Their old humanity died with Jesus as they entered the water, but their new humanity was raised with him from the dead as they came up out of the water. When a person trusts in Jesus, their life is joined to his and what's true of him becomes true of them. It's when people accept their identity as new, Jesus-like humans that they are liberated to become whole-hearted people that can love God and their neighbor.

Now, if creating this new humanity was always God's purpose, Paul asks in chapter 7 what, then, was the point of God giving Israel "the Law," or, in Hebrew, the Torah? Paul says that the commands in the Torah were good, and showed God's will for how Israel should live. However, if you read the storyline of the Torah, Israel broke all of its commands.

The more laws Israel received, the more they replayed the sin of Adam in rebellion. Even when God gave his people specific rules to obey, it didn't fix the problem of the sinful human heart. So, paradoxically, the laws of the Torah made Israel even more guilty. But, Paul says, that paradox was the very point: God's goal was to make it crystal clear that evil has hijacked the human heart, and the Torah, as good as it is, couldn't do a thing about it.

In chapter 8, however, Paul says that the solution has arrived through Jesus and the Spirit. The commands of the Torah had acted like a magnifying glass, focusing the problem of the human condition in one place, Israel. But now, Israel's representative, Jesus the Messiah, has paid for and dealt with all that sin through his death and resurrection. He has released his Spirit into his new family to transform their hearts, so that they can truly fulfill the ultimate call of all of the Torah's commands—to love God and neighbor. God's renewal of human beings is the first step in his larger mission to rescue and renew all creation, making it into a place where his love gets the final word.

Now, while chapters 1–8 explains God's eternal purpose that's now fulfilled through Jesus, what is the current status of Paul's fellow Israelites, who don't acknowledge Jesus as their messiah? How does this story fulfill God's ancient promises to them?

CHAPTERS 9–11

Paul begins in chapter 9 with his own anguish over fellow Israelites who don't think Jesus is their messiah, then he reflects on the Israel of the past and the Old Testament. He reminds us that simply being an "ethnic Israelite," a physical descendant of Abraham, has never automatically made a person a faithful member of his covenant family. Paul shows us how God has always selected a subset from Abraham's family line to carry on the line of promise. His point is that, now in the present, the line of promise is carried on by those who follow Jesus. He reminds us that, for a very long time, people inside and outside Abraham's family have rejected God's will.

Paul recalls the story of Israel and the golden calf, as well as Pharaoh's rebellion, showing how God was able to orchestrate events so that people's rejection actually accomplishes his own redemptive purposes.

In chapter 10, Paul turns his focus to the Israel of the present. The reason so many Israelites reject Jesus is that they're basing their covenant relationship with God on their performance of the commands of the Torah. Sadly, they don't recognize what God has done through Jesus to create the new covenant family.

In chapter 11, Paul asks, what about Israel in the future? Will God write his own people off? "No way," Paul says. There are many Jewish people, including himself, who have recognized Jesus as the Messiah, but there are also a lot who haven't. Once again, God has used this rejection for his own purposes, as it's caused the gospel to spread quicker and farther into the Gentile world, making the family of Abraham even larger and more multi-ethnic. Paul describes God's covenant family as a big olive tree. The rejectors of Jesus are branches that have been broken off, while these gentiles are like wild branches that have been grafted on. Paul does say, however, that one day Jesus will be acknowledged by his own people. He doesn't offer any details about how, but simply trusts in God's character and promise that he will not give up on his covenant people.

CHAPTERS 12–16

These ideas transition into the final section of the book, chapters 12–16. Because of their faith in Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles are a part of Abraham's family. This new humanity is being transformed by God's Spirit, and as such is fulfilling God's ancient promises. The only reasonable response to this is for these Jewish and non-Jewish Christians to become a unified church community.

In chapters 12–13, Paul shows us that this unity comes from a commitment to love and forgiveness. Love will look like everyone using their diverse gifts and talents to serve one another. Unity also means having humility and forgiveness. When these different ethnic groups and cultures come together in Jesus, conflict is inevitable and can only be overcome through the hard work of forgiveness. All of this is how these believers show the greatest Christian virtue, love, which fulfills the Torah's greatest commands to love God and neighbor.

Chapters 14–15 focus specifically on the issues creating ethnic divisions in the church, specifically, disputes about Jewish food laws and observing the Sabbath. Paul says that these practices don't define who is in or out of Jesus' family. If the believers differ over these culturally important but non-essential issues, they need to respect each other's differences. In this way, love is what heals and unifies Jesus' family.

Paul closes his letter by first commending Phoebe, a key leader of the church in Cenchreae. She had the honor of carrying and likely reading this letter aloud to the Roman churches. Paul further concludes by greeting all the people that he hasn't seen for a while.

All the pieces of this majestic letter fit together into a profound masterpiece of Paul's writing. It explained and served to spread the message of Jesus' new covenant family in the first century, and it continues to do the same in our world today.

PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

This was written to a church community that Paul knew very well. Corinth was a major port city in the ancient world with several temples, making it a huge economic-religious center in the Roman world. Paul strategically traveled there as a missionary, spending about a year and a half getting to know the people and telling them about Jesus. Many people there became followers and eventually formed the first church community in the city (see the story in Acts 18).

After a while, Paul left to start churches in other cities. It wasn't long before he received a report that things were not going well at the church in Corinth. They were being plagued by all kinds of problems, and so Paul wrote this letter to offer guidance, teaching, and encouragement.

The book is broken up into five main parts and a final greeting. The five sections correspond to the five problems Paul addresses, so that the letter reads like a collection of short essays. In each section, Paul defines a problem and responds to it with some part of the gospel story, illustrating how these church members were not actually acting or living out what they say they believe in. This pattern of problem, then gospel solution, shows us how Paul is teaching the Corinthians to think as Christians. Following Jesus means developing the skill of seeing all areas of life and relationships through the lens of the gospel.

CHAPTERS 1–4

In chapters 1–4, Paul defines the problem of divisions in the church. Some other Christian teachers had come through Corinth after Paul, like Apollos and Peter. The problem was that many Corinthians had picked favorites between the three, and people became almost like groupies around these teachers. They would insult and disrespect those who didn't belong to their group. Paul responds sharply, with sarcasm even, "Were you baptized into the name of Paul?!" The church is not a popularity contest!

The church is supposed to be a community of people centered around Jesus. Its leaders and teachers are simply servants of Jesus, and, while you may prefer one over another, it's not something worth dividing over. The foundation of this community called "the church" is not its leaders, but Jesus and the good news about who he is and what he's done.

CHAPTERS 5–7

In chapters 5–7, Paul addresses the problems related to sex. There were a number of people who were sleeping around in the church, including a guy living with his stepmother. A number of the members were also still worshiping at the local temples to Greek gods and sleeping with the prostitutes there. Even more disturbing to Paul is the fact that many in the church were saying that all this was fine, "We are free in Christ, and God's grace is bottomless, right?"

With the gospel in hand, Paul shows just how wrongheaded this thinking is. He calls them to remember that Jesus died for the consequences of their sins, which includes the ruin of broken relationships caused by sexual misconduct. If someone is a Christian, sexual integrity and purity is one of the main, non-negotiable ways to respond to Jesus' love and grace.

Paul also reminds them that, just as Jesus was physically raised from the dead, so our bodies, too, will be raised from the dead. Meaning that, if your body is being redeemed by Jesus both now and in the future, then what you do with your body matters, a lot. A Christian's body is not their own to do whatever they want. It belongs to Jesus and will be raised alongside him, and the body is meant for service to him. Paul is very clear, being a follower of Jesus involves no compromise when it comes to sexual integrity.

CHAPTERS 8–10

In chapters 8–10, the problem concerns food, but not simply food preferences. The Corinthians were divided on the consumption of meat from animals that were sacrificed in the local temples to Greek-Roman gods. This was likely a split between the Jewish and non-Jewish Christians about how to respond to this issue, and once again Paul appeals to core ideas from the gospel. He says that a Christian's allegiance is to Jesus alone, not to other gods. If you're in a situation where there's meat dedicated to another god, there could be people present who will watch you eat this meat and conclude that Christians worship Jesus along with lots of other gods. In that scenario, Paul says, don't eat the meat. Your loyalty is to Jesus, and you should love those people for whom Jesus died. Don't mislead them by your own freedom.

Paul does go on to clarify, however, that God is the Creator of all things, including every animal. If there is no one around to misunderstand your intentions, you can eat whether it's kosher or not. As a new human in Christ, you're free to follow your conscience in these debatable matters. The qualifying principle that should guide your actions in situations like these is love. Love is a core idea in the gospel and is denying oneself in order to look out for the well-being of others. Love is what Jesus did for us, so, Paul says, it's what Christians should do for others.

CHAPTERS 11–14

In chapters 11–14, Paul addresses problems in their weekly worship gathering. People were having powerful spiritual experiences during the gathering and would start praying out loud in unknown languages. There were others who would start sharing a teaching or word from God, and then someone would interrupt them so they could share something with the group. It all became chaotic, distracting people, especially visitors, from hearing the gospel. Paul helps them first think about the purpose of the gathering and to see what kinds of behaviors are appropriate. He says that the gathering is a place where God's Spirit can work through everybody, but that it should happen in a unified way.

Paul develops a metaphor of the church as a body. While a body is a single, unified whole, it also consists of all these different parts that serve different and unique roles. Paul lists off several things that the Spirit does through people, all for the purpose of building up the church. He concludes that the highest value to the gathering is a concept that's central to the gospel, God's love. Love should compel each person to use their role to serve others.

Paul then applies all of this to the Corinthians' problems. Some people think the purpose of the gathering is to have intense spiritual experiences or to speak their mind to others. Paul says that, while he's a big fan of powerful experiences of prayer, when it distracts or freaks other people out, you have to stop. You're loving yourself more than others. The gathering should be orderly, so that everyone can learn, worship, and hear God speaking to them in their own language.

CHAPTER 15

In chapter 15, Paul addresses the final issue of Jesus' resurrection and the future hope of his followers. Some people in the church were saying that the idea of resurrection is ridiculous, and that it doesn't matter to being a Christian. Paul reacts, big time, by saying that the resurrection is an indispensable part of the gospel. We believe in the resurrection because of the hundreds of eyewitnesses that saw Jesus alive after being publicly executed. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then his death would be meaningless and we would all still be lost in our sin and selfishness. At that point, we should all just stop being Christians.

Paul goes on to show, in detail, how the resurrection was Jesus' victory over death and evil, as well as a source of life and power for us, promising hope for the entire world. Because of the resurrection, we have a reason for unity in Jesus, motivation for sexual integrity, power to love others more than ourselves, and, ultimately, victory over death.

So, Paul concludes, we do believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. Furthermore, this means that the Gospel is not merely moral advice or a recipe for private spirituality. It's an announcement about Jesus that opens up a new reality.

That's what Paul's letter to the Corinthians is all about—seeing every part of life through the lens of the gospel.

READ ABOUT THIS IN **ACTS:** CHAPTER 18

1 CORINTHIANS

SEEING EVERY PART OF LIFE THROUGH THE GOSPEL





1 DEFINE THE PROBLEM

2 RESPOND WITH THE GOSPEL

THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS

Life
- RELATIONSHIPS
- FAMILY
- COMMUNITY
- WORK

1-4	5-7	8-10	11-14	15	16
DIVISIONS	SEX	FOOD	THE GATHERING	THE RESURRECTION	FINAL GREETING

DEFINE THE PROBLEM











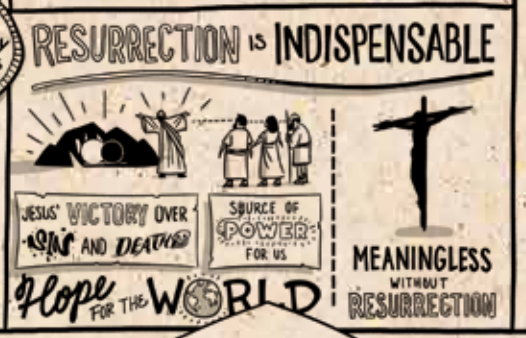
RESPOND WITH THE Gospel











BECAUSE OF THE RESURRECTION WE HAVE ...

A REASON FOR UNITY

MOTIVATION FOR Sexual Integrity

POWER TO LOVE OTHERS MORE THAN YOURSELF

VICTORY OVER DEATH

THE GOSPEL: AN ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT **JESUS** THAT OPENS UP A NEW REALITY

PAUL'S SECOND LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS

Even though this book is called the "second" or "2 Corinthians" in our Bibles, there are multiple clues within this letter that it's not the second thing Paul ever wrote to the church in ancient Corinth. Paul had started this Jesus community some time ago on one of his missionary journeys (see Acts 18), and, after moving on, he had heard a report that things were not going well. The letter he wrote to them in response to this news is commonly known as "1 Corinthians," but it appears that many in the church had rejected Paul's teachings within that letter and had rebelled against his authority.

We learn that Paul followed up in person, with what he calls a "painful visit" (2 Corinthians 2:1), and that he later sent another letter, which was written with "anguish and tears" (2 Corinthians 2:3–4 and 7:8–12). After all these measures most, but not all, of the Corinthians realized their arrogance and apologized to Paul, hoping to reconcile with him. So, finally, Paul wrote this letter, second Corinthians, to assure them of his love and commitment.

This book has been designed with three main sections, each addressing a distinct topic.

In chapters 1–7, Paul first finalizes his reconciliation with the Corinthians. In chapters 8–9, he addresses the topic of forgotten generosity. Finally, in chapters 10–13, Paul challenges the remaining Corinthians who still reject him.

CHAPTERS 1–7

Paul opens by thanking the "God of all mercy and comfort," who brought peace and encouragement to him and the Corinthians during this time of division and dispute. He acknowledges that things have been tense since his painful visit, and makes it clear that he has forgiven them and wants an open, honest relationship.

Why had they rejected Paul in the first place? Well, as we discover later in the letter (in chs. 10–11) that the Corinthians had disregarded Paul as a credible leader. He was poor and earned only a meager living through manual labor. He was under constant persecution, and was often homeless. To top it off, he wasn't a very impressive public speaker. Once the Corinthians were exposed to other more wealthy, impressive Christian leaders, they started to think less of Paul and eventually became ashamed of him.

Paul responds by first showing that the elevation of these leaders based on their wealth, eloquence, and success is a betrayal to Jesus and shows a totally distorted value system. True Christian leadership is not about status or self-promotion. Paul depicts himself and the other apostles as a captive slaves to king Jesus, who's leading a procession of triumph. Paul's job isn't to be impressive, but rather to point to the one who is, Jesus.

In chapter 3, Paul alludes to a recent demand of the Corinthians that he provide some letters of recommendation from other apostles in order to prove his authority and credentials. This is silly to Paul, as their church wouldn't even exist had he not started it. Paul says that they are the proof of his genuine leadership, and that they themselves are his letter of recommendation. He cleverly quotes from the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, saying that God's Spirit has written his letter of love on the hearts of his new covenant people. The Corinthians shouldn't need any more proof than that.

The mention of the new covenant leads Paul into a long comparison of the old covenant between God and Israel, mediated by Moses, and the new covenant between God and the Corinthians, mediated by Jesus and the Spirit. The old covenant made at Mt. Sinai was truly glorious, making Moses himself shine with God's glory, but that glory eventually faded. Not to mention that the laws of the covenant were ineffective at truly transforming Israel. The new covenant, by comparison, is even more glorious, because the resurrected Jesus is the glory of God. He lives on forever, and his Spirit is transforming people to become more faithful, like Jesus himself.

While this sounds amazing—who wouldn't want to share in God's glory?—Paul goes on to show how the paradox of the cross turns upside down the Corinthians' ideas of glory and success (chs. 4–7). After all, Jesus' glorious exaltation as king of the world took place through his suffering, execution, and death. On the cross, Jesus revealed God's salvation as he died for the sins of the world, reconciling people to God. And even more , Jesus revealed God's character, that the Father is a being of utter self-giving, suffering love that seeks the well-being of others. Jesus also revealed a new, "cruciform" way of life, in which believers should imitate the cross by love and sacrificial service to others.

Paul's ultimate goal is that his own life and ministry imitates the cross. So, although his apostolic career has been marked by humility, suffering, and poverty, it was all to serve the Corinthians. When they disapprove of Paul's poverty and suffering, they disapprove of Jesus too. Paul's way of life and leadership is actually the proof that he authentically represents the crucified and risen Jesus. While Paul really wants to reconcile with the Corinthians, he won't let things lie until they have been transformed and embrace the upside-down paradox of the cross.

CHAPTERS 8–9

After this passionate appeal, Paul moves on to address the Corinthians' forgotten generosity (chs. 8–9). The Jewish-Christians back in Jerusalem had fallen into poverty due to a famine. In response, Paul was raising money from among the new churches that he had started, which were mostly full of non-Jews. The hope was that these churches would all send a relief gift as a symbol of their unity in the messiah Jesus. While many churches were indeed thrilled to give, the Corinthians, in the midst of all this conflict with Paul, forgot to save up for the gift.

For Paul, this wasn't just about the money. It's another sign that the Corinthians have not been transformed by the gospel, which is, at its heart, a story of generosity. "For you know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus the Messiah, that even though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). In other words, Paul is telling the story of the gospel through financial metaphors. Jesus gave up his glorious honor, or "wealth," and lowered himself to die like a poor slave. He did this so that other people, impoverished through sin and death, could be exalted and become wealthy through the riches of God's grace. To be a Christian is to let this story sink deep into your heart and mind, letting it transform you into someone who is more generous and more willing to share your life and resources to help others.

CHAPTERS 10–13

In the final section of the letter, chapters 10–13, Paul focuses on the main source of conflict with the Corinthians. There was a group of impressive leaders that Paul sarcastically calls "super-apostles" (2 Corinthians 11:5 and 12:11). They came to Corinth promoting themselves and badmouthing Paul as a poor, unsuccessful leader. At the risk of sounding self-promoting, Paul says that, if these guys want to compare credentials, he can totally take them on.

Are they Jewish Bible experts? Well, so is Paul. He was a Pharisee, for goodness' sake, and has the entire Bible memorized! Do they brag about their superior knowledge of Jesus? Well, Paul has actually seen and spent time with the risen Jesus himself, and he's even had visions of Jesus' heavenly throne room! More importantly, Paul has given his entire life to the mission of Jesus, sacrificing comfort and stability, never asking the Corinthians for money. Unlike the super-apostles who charged a lot for their "wisdom," Paul has earned his own living so he could serve them free of charge.

But, Paul says, he refuses to brag about his accomplishments, because those aren't the things that really matter as a Christian. Instead, he will brag about how flawed and weak he is, because it's in his inadequacies that he discovers the love and mercy of Jesus. Or, as Jesus once told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect through weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Paul concludes with a sober warning to the Corinthians (ch. 13). They need to check themselves. Their contempt for Paul's way of life, their love for these super-apostles, it all shows that they don't grasp who Jesus is on a fundamental level. They're not living like transformed followers of Jesus should be, so he invites them, once again, to humble themselves before the grace and love of Jesus.

2 Corinthians gives us a unique window into the life of Paul and the paradox that the cross of Jesus sets before us. The cross challenges our values and the ways we see the world. Most societies value success, education, and wealth, but God values humility and weakness and service. We know this because his love and power were made known through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The cross also unleashed the transforming power and presence of the Spirit, empowering Jesus' followers take up his "cruciform" way of life and make it their own.

And that is the powerful challenge that 2 Corinthians is all about.

2 CORINTHIANS

THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH IN CORINTH

see ACTS CHAPTER 18





THE REPORT
(SEE 1 CORINTHIANS 1:11)



THE FIRST LETTER



"THE PAINFUL VISIT"
(2 CORINTHIANS 2:1)



THE SECOND LETTER
(2 COR 2:3-4, 7:8-12)



THE PARADOX OF THE CROSS

CHALLENGES OUR VALUES	TRANSFORMS THROUGH THE SPIRIT
GOD VALUES HUMILITY & WEAKNESS BECAUSE HIS LOVE & POWER WERE MADE KNOWN THROUGH THE DEATH & RESURRECTION OF JESUS	JESUS' "CRUCIFORM" WAY OF LIFE BECOMES OUR OWN

1-7 PAUL RECONCILES WITH THE CORINTHIANS

1-2a OPENING PRAYER



WHY DID THEY REJECT PAUL?



DISTORTED VALUE SYSTEM

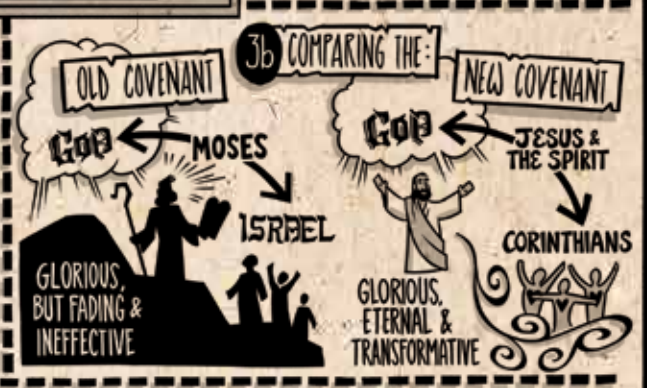
2b TRUE CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP: NOT ABOUT STATUS



3a LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION



3b COMPARING THE: OLD COVENANT / NEW COVENANT

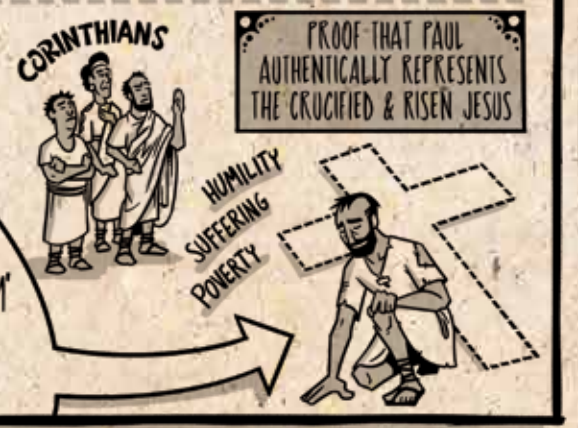


4-7 THE PARADOX OF THE CROSS



THE CROSS REVEALS:

- GOD'S SALVATION — JESUS DIED FOR OUR SINS
- GOD'S CHARACTER — SELF-GIVING LOVE
- A NEW 'CRUCIFORM' WAY OF LIFE — IMITATING THE CROSS



PROOF THAT PAUL AUTHENTICALLY REPRESENTS THE CRUCIFIED & RISEN JESUS

8-9 FORGOTTEN GENEROSITY



THIS ISN'T REALLY ABOUT MONEY: THEY HAVEN'T BEEN TRANSFORMED BY THE GOSPEL — A STORY OF GENEROSITY

> "FOR YOU KNOW THE GENEROUS GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS THE MESSIAH, THAT EVEN THOUGH HE WAS RICH, FOR YOUR SAKE HE BECAME POOR, SO THAT THROUGH HIS POVERTY, YOU MIGHT BECOME RICH." (8:9)



10-13 PAUL'S FINAL CHALLENGE

10-12 A MAIN SOURCE OF THE CONFLICT



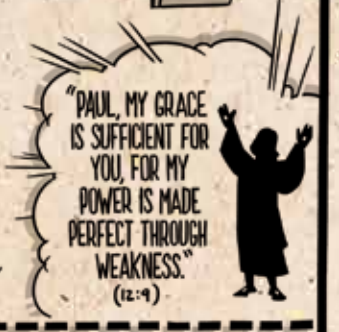
THE SUPER-APOSTLES (11:5, 12:11)

- ☑ JEWISH BIBLE EXPERTS
- ☑ KNOWLEDGE ABOUT JESUS
- ☑ ASKED FOR LOTS OF MONEY

PAUL

- ☑ A PHARISEE (MEMORIZED THE WHOLE BIBLE!)
- ☑ SPENT TIME WITH THE RISEN JESUS
- ☑ HAD VISIONS OF JESUS' HEAVENLY THRONEROOM
- ☑ GIVEN HIS ENTIRE LIFE TO THE MISSION OF JESUS
- ☑ NEVER ASKED FOR MONEY





13 A SOBER WARNING



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

This letter was actually addressed to a number of churches in the region of Galatia, where Paul had traveled on one of his missionary journeys (see Acts 13–14). He wrote this important letter from a place of deep passion, as well as frustration. Here's the back story...

Christianity had begun as a Jewish messianic movement in Jerusalem, but its message was for all humanity, so it quickly spread beyond Israel. By the time Paul became a missionary, there were as many non-Jews as there were Jewish people in the Jesus movement. This conflict of cultures sparked a huge debate, which came to a head in the events recounted in Acts 15. Historically, the covenant people of God were focused in one ethnic group, Israel, and were set apart by practices commanded in the Torah, like circumcision of males, eating kosher, and observing the Sabbath. There were many Jewish Christians who believed that, for all of these non-Jews to truly become a part of God's covenant family, they needed to obey the laws of the Torah as well. Some of these Jewish Christians had come to the Galatian churches and began undermining Paul, demanding the circumcision of all male Christians.

When Paul found out, he was both heartbroken and angry. He wrote this letter as a result, in which he challenges the Galatians with a summary of the gospel message about the crucified messiah. He argues that this gospel is what creates the new, multi-ethnic family of God, truly transforming people through the presence and power of Jesus' Spirit.

CHAPTERS 1–2

Paul expresses his bewilderment that the Galatians have embraced "a different gospel," one promoted by these Christians who badmouth Paul and demand circumcision. Paul defends the authenticity of his message and authority as an apostle, reminding them that he was commissioned by the risen Jesus himself to go into the non-Jewish world (see Acts 9). Paul says that it was only much later that he went to Jerusalem to consult the other apostles, like Peter or James. When he told them that he was not requiring non-Jewish Christians to be circumcised or to eat kosher, they were in full support.

However, the tension ran deeper when Peter came to visit Antioch and see all these non-Jewish Christians. Peter was perfectly fine with eating and mingling with them, but when some of the Jerusalem opposition group showed up in town, Peter caved under the pressure. He stopped eating with these uncircumcised Christians and actually started to avoid them. Paul confronted and accused Peter of hypocrisy, as well as "not staying true to the gospel" (Galatians 2:14).

To Paul, demanding that these new Christians become circumcised and Torah observant is wrongheaded for lots of reasons, first and foremost because it's a betrayal of the gospel. In Paul's words, "People are not justified by the works of the Torah, but rather by the faith of Jesus the Messiah, and we have faith in the Messiah Jesus" (Galatians 2:16). To be "justified" or "declared righteous" is a rich Old Testament term for Paul. When God declares that someone is in a right relationship with him, it means that they're forgiven, given a place in God's family, and as a result are being transformed by God's grace. It's Paul's conviction that you can't be justified by observing the commands of the Torah, but only by "the faith of Jesus." This is a dense phrase that could refer to Jesus' own faithfulness in living and dying on our behalf, or our own trust and devotion to Jesus. Either way, the point is clear. People are justified only through trusting what God did for them through Jesus, not by what they do for themselves.

At the heart of Paul's gospel is the claim that, when people trust in the Messiah Jesus, what's true of him becomes true of them. His life, death, and resurrection all become theirs. Or, in Paul's words, "I have been crucified with the Messiah, and it's not I who came back to life, but it's the Messiah living in me. The life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:19–20).

The reason anyone can say that they are right with God and belong to Jesus' covenant family is not because they obeyed the laws of the Torah. It's only through what Jesus did for them, which they could never do for themselves. Now, this profound understanding of what Jesus accomplished has huge implications for who can be included in God's covenant family, as well as what it means to live as a member of that family.

CHAPTERS 3–4

Paul turns back to the stories about Abraham, recalling how he was justified or "declared righteous" before God for simply having faith and trusting in God's promise that one day all nations would find God's blessing through him and his "offspring" (see Genesis 15:6). In other words, God's purpose was always to have one large, multi-ethnic family of people who relate to him on the basis of faith, not the laws of the Torah.

Now, this whole line of thought raises an important question. If God's plan was always to have a multi-ethnic family, why did he give the laws of the Torah to Israel in the first place (Galatians 3:19)? Paul offers a brief, dense explanation that he later fills out in chapters 7–8 of his letter to the Romans. He observes that the laws of the Torah were given to Israel at Mt. Sinai long after God's promise to Abraham. If you read the Torah carefully, you'll see that God had always intended the laws to be a temporary measure.

Paul continues by saying that the laws had both a negative and positive role. Negatively, the laws acted like a magnifying glass on Israel's sin, exposing how Israel shared in the sinful human condition and constantly rebelled against God. So, the law, which is essentially good, ended up pronouncing Israel guilty along with all the rest of humanity. As Paul says, "the laws imprisoned everyone under the power of sin" (Galatians 3:22). The laws, of course, had a positive role as well, acting like a strict schoolteacher and keeping Israel in line until the coming of the promised "offspring of Abraham," the Messiah (Galatians 3:24).

Once the messiah came, he fulfilled the purpose of the laws on Israel's behalf. Jesus was the faithful Israelite, who truly loved God and neighbor. As the messianic king, he died to take the curse and consequence of Israel's failure into himself in order to bring redemption. Now, through Jesus, the offspring of Abraham, God's blessing finally comes to all people regardless of their ethnicity, social status, or gender.

For Paul, requiring Torah observance from non-Jewish Christians just doesn't make sense. It's acting as if Jesus didn't fulfill God's promise or deal with our sins. It neglects the new freedom gained through Jesus' resurrection and the gift of the Spirit. Finally, it limits God's promise and blessing to one ethnic family.

CHAPTERS 5–6

Paul's opponents might argue, the laws of the Torah are a proven guide to living according to God's will. How will non-Jewish Christians learn without them? Paul responds in chapters 5–6, describing how Jesus' transforming presence through the Spirit is the key. The laws of the Torah are good and wise, Paul says. In fact, they can all be summarized, as Jesus did, in the command to love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18). However, the laws, as good as they are, didn't give Israel the power to obey them. In contrast, the good news is that Jesus fulfilled the laws on our behalf. He now "lives in us" through the Spirit, making his people into new humans who fulfill the law by loving others.

Paul goes on to contrast the old and new humanity. The habits of the old humanity are obvious; behaviors that dehumanize people and destroy their relationships and communities through selfishness, envy, divisiveness, sexual immorality, idolatry, and murder. While the laws of the Torah prohibited these behaviors, Jesus is the one who "put them to death" on the cross. When a person trusts in Jesus, living in dependence on the power of his Spirit, his life becomes theirs. This produces what Paul calls the "fruit of the Spirit." It's Jesus' own way of life, which he wants to reproduce in his family so that they become people of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

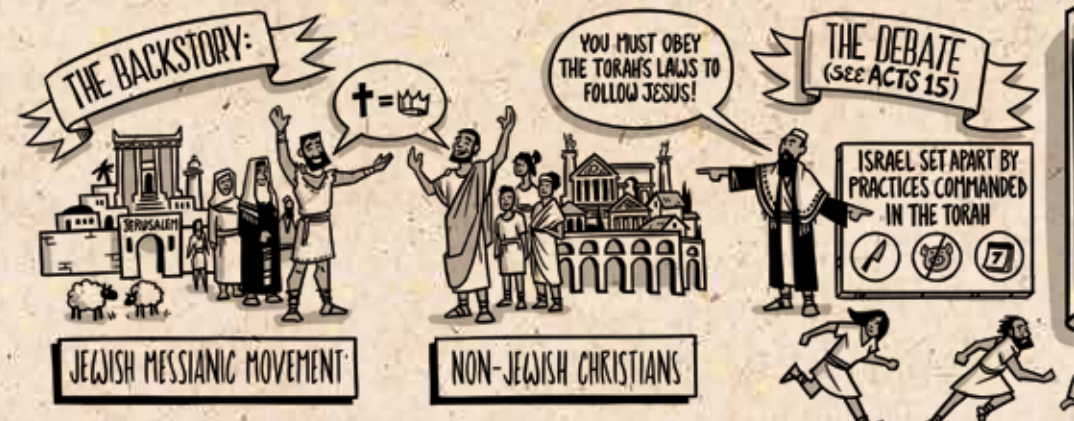
The production of this fruit isn't automatic, Paul says. It requires cultivation just like real fruit. In his words, "If we live by the Spirit, we have to keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25). Doing so requires intentionality. We have to learn how to prune off our old habits and cultivate new ones. As we do so, we find ourselves carried along by the Spirit, as Jesus reshapes our minds and hearts, making us into people who love God and others. In this way, Jesus' people fulfill what Paul calls "the Torah of the Messiah" (Galatians 6:2).

In the end, Paul concludes that this requirement that Christians should become Torah observant or be circumcised is an adventure in missing the point. What really matters is God's new creation (Galatians 6:15), the new, multi-ethnic family of the messiah. These are the people who are full of faith in Jesus, learning to love God and others through the power the Spirit.

That's what Paul's letter to the Galatians is all about.

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

THE BACKSTORY:



THE DEBATE (SEE ACTS 15)

ISRAEL SET APART BY PRACTICES COMMANDED IN THE TORAH



1-2 THE GOSPEL OF THE CRUCIFIED MESSIAH...



"DECLARED RIGHTEOUS"

- IN RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD
- FORGIVEN & GIVEN A PLACE IN GOD'S FAMILY
- RESULTS IN TRANS-FORMATION BY GRACE

"PEOPLE ARE NOT JUSTIFIED BY THE WORKS OF THE TORAH, BUT RATHER BY THE FAITH OF JESUS THE MESSIAH, AND WE HAVE FAITH IN THE MESSIAH JESUS." (2:16)

JESUS' FAITHFULNESS TO LIVE & DIE ON OUR BEHALF
OR
OUR TRUST & DEVOTION TO JESUS

THE HEART OF PAUL'S GOSPEL

WHEN PEOPLE TRUST IN JESUS, WHAT'S TRUE OF HIM... ...BECOMES TRUE OF THEM



"I HAVE BEEN CRUCIFIED WITH THE MESSIAH & IT'S NOT I WHO COME BACK TO LIFE, BUT THE MESSIAH LIVING IN ME. AND THE LIFE I NOW LIVE, I LIVE BY FAITH IN THE SON OF GOD, WHO LOVED ME & GAVE HIS LIFE FOR ME." (2:19-20)

3-4 ...CREATES A NEW, MULTI-ETHNIC FAMILY...



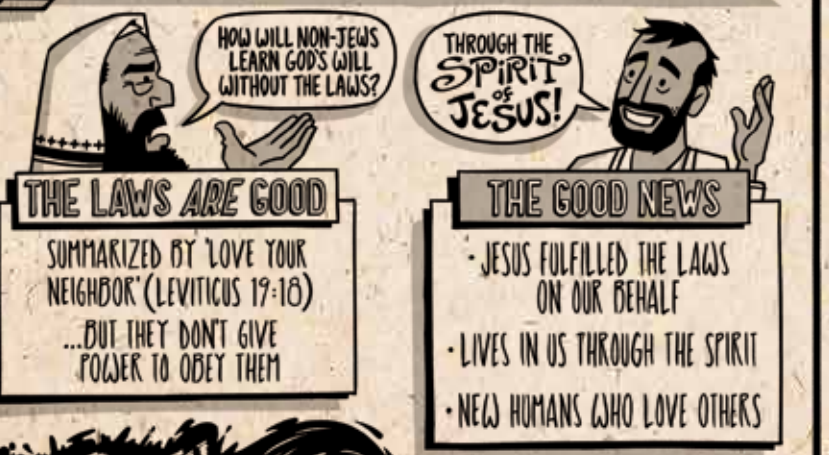
REQUIRING NON-JEWISH CHRISTIANS TO OBSERVE THE TORAH:

- ACTS AS IF JESUS DIDN'T FULFILL GOD'S PROMISE OR DEALT WITH OUR SINS
- NEGLECTS THE FREEDOM THAT JESUS GAINED FOR US
- LIMITS GOD'S BLESSING TO ONE ETHNIC FAMILY

WHAT MATTERS IS GOD'S NEW CREATION (6:15)

THE NEW, MULTI-ETHNIC FAMILY OF THE MESSIAH...
...FULL OF FAITH IN JESUS...
...LOVING GOD & OTHERS IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

5-6 ...THAT IS TRANSFORMED BY THE SPIRIT



THE LAWS *ARE* GOOD

SUMMARIZED BY 'LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR' (LEVITICUS 19:18)
...BUT THEY DON'T GIVE POWER TO OBEY THEM

THE GOOD NEWS

- JESUS FULFILLED THE LAWS ON OUR BEHALF
- LIVES IN US THROUGH THE SPIRIT
- NEW HUMANS WHO LOVE OTHERS



THIS FRUIT REQUIRES CULTIVATION (it's not automatic)

"IF WE **LIVE** BY THE SPIRIT, WE HAVE TO KEEP **IN STEP** WITH THE SPIRIT." (5:25)

THROUGH THE SPIRIT, JESUS MAKES US INTO PEOPLE WHO LOVE GOD & OTHERS, AND FULFILL THE TORAH OF THE MESSIAH." (6:2)

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

The story of how Paul came to the city of Ephesus is really fascinating, and you can read all about it in chapter 19 of the book of Acts. Ephesus was a huge city, acting as the epicenter for worship of most of the Greek-Roman gods. For over two years, Paul had an effective missionary presence there and converted many people to Christianity. Years later, after being imprisoned by the Romans, he wrote an important letter to the church there.

The movement of thought in the letter divides it into two, distinct halves. In the first half (chs. 1–3), Paul explores the story of the gospel, how all history came to its climax in Jesus and his creation of a multi-ethnic community of followers. The second half (chs. 4–6) is linked to the first by the word "therefore." There, Paul explores how the gospel should affect the way we live our lives, personally, in our community, and with our families.

CHAPTERS 1–3

Chapter 1 opens with a beautiful, Jewish-style poem, in which Paul praises God the Father for the amazing things that he's done through Christ Jesus. From eternity past, the Father had proposed to choose and bless a covenant people, which had started with Abraham's family in Genesis 12:1–3. Through Jesus, anyone can now be adopted into that family. His death covers our worst sins and failures, and in him we find God's grace. In fact, that grace has opened up a whole new way to understand life and our entire world. Paul says that God's purpose has always been "to unify all things in heaven and earth under Christ" (Ephesians 1:10). In other words, God's plan was always to have a huge family of restored humans who are unified in Jesus.

This divine purpose first became clear, Paul says, when "we" were first made into that family, referring to ethnic Jews from the family of Abraham. He then says that "you," or non-Jews, heard about Jesus and the salvation through him and were also brought into the family. Paul is referring here to stories told in the book of Acts, which tells how the work of God's Spirit brought Jew and non-Jew together as one family in Jesus, just as God had promised Abraham so long ago. In this poem, Paul talks about the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Spirit, all three working together as he tells the story of the gospel.

After the poem, Paul prays that these Christians would not just know about, but truly experience the power of the gospel. He prays that they be energized by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and placed him as the exalted head of the whole world.

In chapter 2, Paul elaborates on key ideas from the poem, beginning with God's grace. He retells the story of these non-Jewish Christians who came to know Jesus. Before hearing about him, they were physically alive but spiritually dead. They were trapped in a purposeless life of selfishness and sin, deceived by dark spiritual forces of evil. But God, in his great love and mercy, saved them, forgiving all their sins and joining their lives to Jesus' resurrection life. Now, having been recreated as new human beings through Jesus, they have the joy of discovering the new purpose and tasks God has for them.

In Paul's story, these new Christians have not only been shown God's grace, but they've also been invited into a new family. Before hearing about Jesus, non-Jews were cut off from God as well as his covenant people, the family of Abraham. This was for a practical reason, as the commands of the Sinai covenant formed a boundary line around Israel, like a barrier that kept most non-Jews away. In Jesus, however, the laws of the Torah have been fulfilled and the barrier removed. The two ethnic groups can now become, as Paul puts it, "a new, unified humanity" (Ephesians 2:15) that lives together in peace.

In chapter 3, Paul goes on to marvel at the unique role he has had in spreading the gospel to the Gentiles. Even though he has been imprisoned for it, Paul thanks God for the chance to see the covenant family grow. He closes this first half of the letter with another prayer, this time asking that they be strengthened by God's Spirit and grasp the love of Christ.

CHAPTERS 4–6

In the second half of the letter, Paul shifts gears and begins to challenge the Ephesians to respond to the gospel in how they live out their own life story. In chapter 4 he begins by focusing on the everyday life of the church, which is actually a big family made up of lots of different kinds of people. He emphasizes that, even with their differences, they are one. This is a key word in this chapter. They are one body, unified by one Spirit, with one Lord and one faith, one baptism to one God. That's a lot of unity.

However, unity does not mean uniformity! Paul explores how Jesus' unified family consists of lots of different kinds of people, all empowered by the one Spirit to use their unique talents and passions to serve and love one another as well as build up the church. Paul develops two related metaphors here. The church community is the new temple, and these communities form a new humanity, a body of people with Jesus as their head. This new human body is the main theme that Paul runs with for the rest of the letter.

Paul challenges every Christian to "take off their old humanity" like a set of clothes, and to "put on their new humanity," through which the image of God is restored. Paul continues on into a long section that compares the sins of the "old" to the actions of this "new" humanity. Instead of lying, these new humans speak the truth. Rather than harboring anger, they peacefully resolve conflicts. They generously give instead of stealing. They encourage others instead of gossiping, and forgive instead of getting revenge. Rather than continue in the actions of the old humanity, believers come under the influence of God's Spirit. They express this new influence in a few ways, like singing alone or singing together with Jesus' followers. The third sign is being grateful for everything, while the fourth is putting themselves under others so as to elevate them as more important.

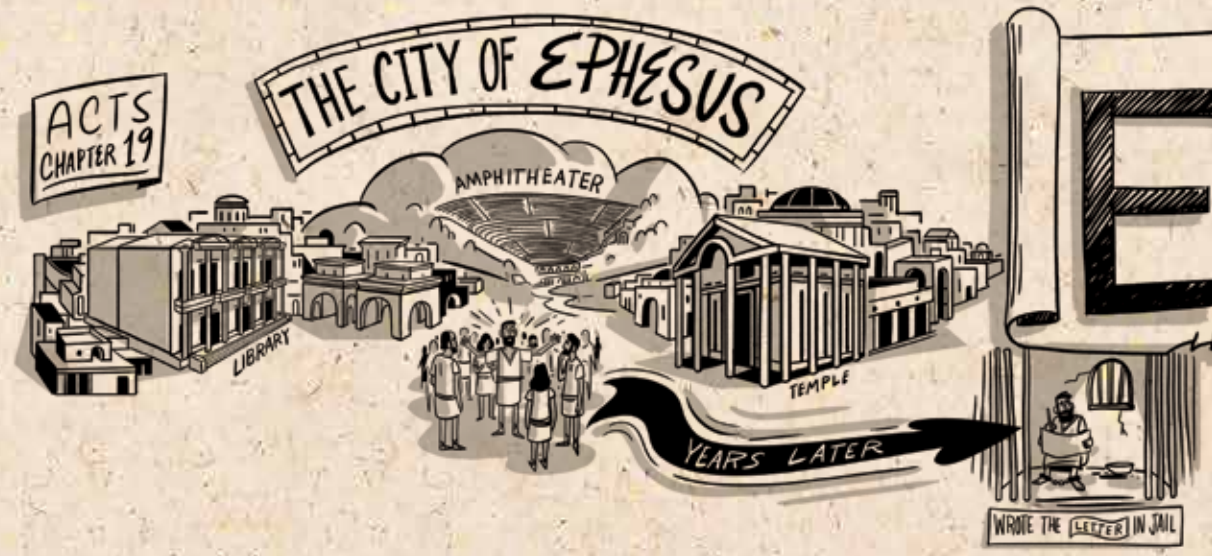
Paul expands on this fourth sign of the Spirit by describing how it works in a Christian marriage. A Christian wife is to respect and allow her husband to be responsible for her, while the Christian husband is to love his wife and use his responsibility to lay down his life and prioritize his wife's well-being above his own.

Paul says that this kind of marriage is a reenactment of the gospel story. The husband's actions mimic Jesus' loving self-sacrifice, while the wife's actions represent the church allowing Jesus to love her and make her new. The same idea applies to the relationship between children and parents, as well as slaves and masters.

Paul closes the letter by reminding these Christians of the reality of spiritual evil. There are beings and forces that will try to undermine their unity and compromise their new humanity in Jesus. He challenges them to stand firm and to put on a metaphorical set of armor, alluding to pieces of body armor that in the book of Isaiah describe the Messiah. In other words, Christians need to embody the same values and strengths of Jesus himself; they are his body after all. In a practical sense, this means forming habits, proactively praying and pondering the Scriptures, and depending on one another as we continue to grow as followers of Jesus.

The letter of the Ephesians is Paul's call to allow the gospel story about Jesus reshape every part of our own life story.

ACTS CHAPTER 19



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE

EPHESIANS

PAUL SUMMARIZES THE GOSPEL STORY & HOW IT SHOULD RESHAPE EVERY PART OF OUR STORY.

1-3 THE GOSPEL STORY

1:3-14 OPENING POEM

PRAISE GOD FOR WHAT HE'S DONE IN CHRIST

ACTS CHAPTER 2

SPIRIT

EXPERIENCE THE POWER THAT RAISED JESUS FROM THE DEAD

1:15-23 PRAYER

WE JEWS — YOU GENTILES

SEE GENESIS 12:1-3

FORGIVENESS — GRACE

COVENANT FAMILY

1:10 UNITY OF EVERYTHING UNDER THE MESSIAH

2:1-10 GOD'S GRACE...

NEW HUMANS

NEW PURPOSE & TASKS

GOD'S LOVE AND GRACE

ACCESS TO

NO PURPOSE DECEPTION SELFISHNESS SIN

2:11-22 ...A NEW, MULTI-ETHNIC FAMILY

COVENANT FAMILY

"A NEW, UNIFIED HUMANITY THAT LIVES IN PEACE." (2:15)

3 PAUL'S UNIQUE ROLE AS MESSENGER TO NON-JEWS

MAY YOU BE STRENGTHENED BY GOD'S SPIRIT & GRASP THE LOVE OF CHRIST

"THEREFORE"

4-6 OUR STORY

4:1-16

BODY — LORD — BAPTISM — FAITH — SPIRIT — GOD

One

UNITY DOES NOT = UNIFORMITY

one SPIRIT, MANY GIFTS

- APOSTLE
- PROPHET
- TEACHER
- PASTOR
- EVANGELIST

TO BUILD UP THE CHURCH:

1. NEW TEMPLE
2. JESUS THE HEAD OF A NEW HUMANITY

4:17-6:9

OLD — NEW

TAKE OFF	PUT ON
LIES	TRUTH
ANGER	PEACE
THEFT	GENEROSITY
GOSSIP	ENCOURAGE
REVENGE	FORGIVENESS
PROMISCUITY	SELF-CONTROL
DRUNK	GOD'S SPIRIT

SIGNS of the SPIRIT

1. SINGING TOGETHER
2. SINGING ALONE
3. BEING THANKFUL
4. ELEVATING OTHERS

and so:

CHRISTIAN HOUSEHOLD

CHURCH — JESUS

RESPECT — LOVE

ALLOW RESPONSIBILITY — LAY DOWN LIFE

CHILDREN — PARENTS

SLAVES — MASTERS

6:10-24 THE ARMOR OF GOD

SALVATION

RIGHTEOUSNESS — FAITH

WORD OF GOD

TRUTH

SEE ISAIAH 11:5 49:2 59:17

GOSPEL

SPIRITUAL EVIL

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

The church in Philippi was the first Jesus community that Paul started in eastern Europe (see Acts 16). Philippi was a Roman colony in ancient Macedonia, which was full of retired soldiers and was well known for its patriotic nationalism. As you might imagine, Paul faced resistance there for announcing Jesus as the true king of the world. After Paul had moved on, those who did become followers of Jesus continued to suffer persecution, but they remained a vibrant community, faithful to the way of Jesus.

Paul sent this letter to them during one of his many imprisonments for a very practical reason. The Philippians had sent one of their members, Epaphroditus, to take a financial gift to Paul and to support him in prison. Paul sent this letter back with Epaphroditus, to say thanks for the generous gift, as well as a whole lot more.

The design of this letter does not develop one, singular idea from the beginning to end like some of his other letters do. Instead, Paul has arranged a series of short, reflective essays or vignettes, all revolving around the center of gravity in this letter, the poem in chapter 2. It artistically retells the story of the Messiah's incarnation, life, death, resurrection and exaltation. In each of the letter's vignettes, Paul takes up key words and ideas from the poem, to show how living as a Christian means seeing your own story as a lived expression of Jesus' story.

CHAPTER 1:1–26

Chapter 1 opens with a prayer of gratefulness, as Paul thanks God for the Philippians' generosity and faithfulness. He expresses his confidence that the life-transformation work that God has begun in them will continue to grow into greater, more beautiful expressions of faithfulness and love.

Paul turns the focus onto the obvious concern at the moment, his status in prison. While being in a Roman prison is no picnic, it has paradoxically turned out for good as it has helped advance the good news about Jesus. All the Roman guards and administrators know that Paul is in prison for announcing Jesus as the risen Lord. Additionally, his imprisonment has inspired confidence in other Christians to talk about Jesus more openly.

While Paul is optimistic that he'll be released from prison, it's still possible that he could be executed instead. As he reflects more on it, he decides that that would actually be way better: "For me, life is the Messiah, and so dying would be a gain" (Philippians 1:21). For Paul, his life in the present and the future is defined by the life and love of Jesus. If he is executed, he would be with Jesus, which would be great for him. If he's released, on the other hand, he could keep working to start more Jesus communities, which is better for others. It's more the second that he hopes for. Notice his train of thought. Dying for Jesus is not the real sacrifice for Paul, it's staying alive to serve others. It's his way of participating in the story of Jesus, who suffered in order to love others more than himself.

CHAPTERS 1:27–2:18

Paul turns his attention to the Philippians, urging them to participate in Jesus' example by taking up the same mindset. He tells them that their "life as citizens should be consistent with the good news about the Messiah" (Philippians 1:27). These Christians lived in a hotbed of Roman patriotism, but their way of life is shaped by another king, Jesus, which could easily bring persecution. They are not to be afraid, however, because suffering for association with Jesus is a way of living out the story of his self-giving love for others.

This leads Paul into the great poem of chapter 2. It's rich with echoes of key Old Testament texts, specifically the story of Adam and his rebellion in Genesis 1–3, as well as the poems about the suffering servant from chapters 45 and 52–53 of Isaiah. This thing is worth committing to memory. It's a beautifully condensed version of the gospel story

Before he became human, the Messiah preexisted in a state of glory equal to God (Philippians 2:6). Unlike Adam, who tried to seize equality with God, the Messiah chose to not exploit his equal status for self-advantage. Instead, he emptied himself of status to become a human, a servant to all. What's more is that he allowed himself to be humiliated, but was obedient to the Father by going to his death on a Roman execution rack. Through God's power and grace, the Messiah's shameful death was reversed through the resurrection, highly exalting Jesus as king of all. He was bestowed the name above all names, so that all creation should now recognize that "Jesus the Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

This last statement is astounding because Paul is quoting from Isaiah 45:23, a passage in which all creation recognizes the God of Israel as "Lord." Paul's point is clear. In the crucified and risen Jesus, we discover that the one, true God of Israel consists of God the Father and the Lord Jesus. For Paul, this poem expresses his convictions about who Jesus is, but it also does even more than that. It offers the example of Jesus as a way of life that his followers are to imitate.

CHAPTER 2:19–30

This is why Paul immediately follows up with two stories about Timothy and Epaphroditus, because they're both examples of people living out Jesus' story. Timothy is like Jesus, in that he is constantly concerned for the well-being of others more than himself, making sacrifices to serve them. Epaphroditus, whom the Philippians sent with their gift, ended up risking his life to serve Paul in prison, he got so sick that he almost died while helping Paul. Thankfully, God had mercy on him, sparing Paul the loss of a friend. Paul's point is that these kinds of people are living, breathing examples of the life and story of Jesus and are worthy of imitation.

CHAPTERS 3:1–4:1

Paul then turns to give his own story as an example. The Christians that had demanded circumcision of non-Jews (remember the Galatians) are still stirring up trouble for Paul. They remind him of his own troubled past, when he was a persecutor of Jesus' followers and tried to show his "right standing" before God by zealous obedience to the Torah. Like Jesus, Paul has given up his status and honor, now regarding it all as filth (the Greek word he uses is less polite!). He gave it all up and became a servant, like Jesus, participating in his suffering and sacrificial love. Paul does it all in the hope that the grace and love of Jesus will carry him through death, out the other side into resurrection life.

Paul says that, for followers of Jesus, their true "citizenship" is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). Now, for Paul, this does not mean that we all should hope to get away from earth and go to heaven. Rather, heaven is the transcendent place where Jesus is king of creation. Paul says that we're eagerly waiting for our royal savior to come from there and return here, bringing his healing justice and transforming love to bring about a new creation.

CHAPTER 4:2–23

Paul challenges the Philippians to keep living the Jesus story and addresses two prominent women leaders in the church that had worked alongside him. They're in some kind of conflict, so Paul pleads with them to follow Jesus' example of humility, to reconcile, and to become unified. Paul also urges the Philippians to not give into fear, but, in their persecution, to vent all their emotions and needs to God, who will give them peace. That peace, Paul says, comes by focusing your thoughts on what is good and lovely. There's always something you could complain about, but a follower of Jesus knows that all of life is a gift. We can choose to see beauty and grace in any situation.

This leads to the conclusion of the letter. Paul again thanks the Philippians for their sacrificial gift, and wants them to know that his imprisonments and times of poverty are not true hardships. They've become his greatest teachers, showing him that, no matter the circumstances, there is a secret to gaining contentment. It is simple dependence on "the one who strengthens" him (Philippians 4:12–13). Paul has come to view his suffering as a participation in the story of Jesus.

This letter to the Philippians gives us a unique window into Paul's heart and mind. He saw his entire life as a reenactment of Jesus' story. You can easily sense his close connection to the Messiah and his awareness that Jesus' love and presence is closer than even his own skin. That's what gave him hope and humility in his darkest hours. Paul shows us that knowing Jesus is, at its core, a deeply personal and transforming encounter.

This is the Jesus that Paul invites others to follow, and that's what his letter to the Philippians is all about.

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

A UNIQUE WINDOW INTO PAUL'S HEART & MIND

- HE SAW HIS LIFE AS A REENACTMENT OF JESUS' STORY
- HIS AWARENESS OF JESUS' LOVE & PRESENCE GAVE HIM HOPE & HUMILITY
- KNOWING JESUS IS DEEPLY PERSONAL & TRANSFORMATIVE





1:1-11 OPENING PRAYER



1:12-26 PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT



EXECUTION

"FOR ME, LIFE IS THE MESSIAH, AND SO DYING WOULD BE A GAIN." (1:21)

PRESENCE WITH JESUS GREAT FOR PAUL...

OR

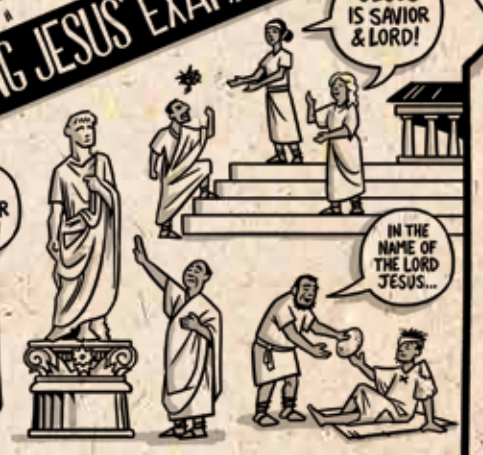
RELEASE

START MORE JESUS COMMUNITIES

BETTER FOR OTHERS

PARTICIPATING IN THE STORY OF JESUS

1:27-2:18 FOLLOWING JESUS' EXAMPLE



"YOUR LIFE AS CITIZENS SHOULD BE CONSISTENT WITH THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT THE MESSIAH." (1:27)

RICH WITH OLD TESTAMENT ECHOES:

ADAM (GENESIS 1-3)

SUFFERING SERVANT (ISAIAH 40-55)

2:6-11 THE MESSIAH POEM



ALTHOUGH HE EXISTED IN THE NATURE OF GOD,
HE DID NOT REGARD HIS EQUALITY WITH GOD
AS A THING TO BE EXPLOITED;
RATHER, HE EMPTIED HIMSELF,
TAKING UP THE NATURE OF A SERVANT;
HE WAS BORN AS A HUMAN
& RECOGNIZED AS A HUMAN;
HE HUMBLED HIMSELF BY BECOMING OBEDIENT
TO THE POINT OF DEATH,
EVEN DEATH ON A CROSS.

THEREFORE, GOD HAS HIGHLY EXALTED HIM,
AND GIVEN HIM THE NAME
WHICH IS ABOVE EVERY NAME,
SO THAT AT THE NAME OF JESUS
EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, IN HEAVEN,
ON EARTH, OR UNDER THE EARTH,
AND EVERY TONGUE WILL CONFESS:

JESUS the MESSIAH is LORD! To the GLORY of GOD the FATHER!



QUOTING ISAIAH 45:23

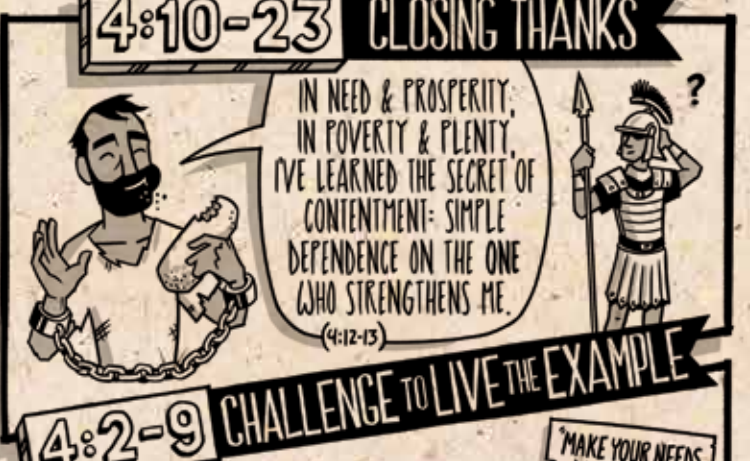
PAUL'S POINT: the One True God consists of GOD the FATHER & the LORD JESUS



2:19-30 TWO EXAMPLES



4:10-23 CLOSING THANKS



4:2-9 CHALLENGE TO LIVE THE EXAMPLE

3:1-4:1 PAUL'S EXAMPLE



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

This letter was written during one of Paul's many imprisonments for announcing Jesus as king. Unlike his other letters, this is addressed to a group of people that he had never met and to a community that he didn't start. The church in Colossae was started by a co-worker of Paul, named Epaphras, who was actually from there (see Colossians 1:7–8 and 4:12–13). Now, Epaphras had recently visited Paul in prison and updated him on how well the Colossians were doing overall. However, Epaphras had also mentioned some of the cultural pressures that were tempting them to turn away from Jesus. Paul wrote this letter to encourage the Colossians, to address the issues Epaphras had raised, and to challenge them to a greater devotion to Jesus.

The letter's design and flow of thought are pretty easy to follow. The opening movement focuses on Jesus as the exalted Messiah, followed by Paul's description of his suffering in prison for the Messiah. Then, Paul addresses the pressures tempting them to turn away from Jesus. In chapters 3–4, Paul explores the new way of life that Jesus' resurrection has opened up for them.

CHAPTER 1:1–23

The letter opens with two prayers. Paul first thanks God for what he learned from Epaphras, that the Colossians have been totally faithful to Jesus and showing love for God and their neighbors. He moves on to pray that they will grow in their wisdom and understanding about Jesus. Paul has placed a poem here to help the Colossians, and us, do exactly that (Colossians 1:15–20). It's the centerpiece of chapter 1, and it's all about the crucified and exalted Messiah.

This poem has two parallel stanzas, crammed with language and imagery from the books of Genesis, Exodus, the Psalms, and Proverbs. The first stanza explores how Jesus is the true image of God. In him, the full character and purpose of God is embodied in a human. Jesus is the firstborn, an Old Testament phrase about Jesus' royal status over all creation. In this, he shares the very identity of the one, true Creator God. Through him, all reality, all powers and authorities, both spiritual and human, were created.

It's in Jesus the Messiah that we discover the very author and king of creation, as well as the one who will bring about new creation. He's the head of a new body, which refers to Jesus' people, who are the new humanity of which his resurrection existence is a prototype. God's glorious temple presence dwells in him, so it's through Jesus' death and resurrection that God has reconciled himself to humanity, to all spiritual powers, and to all creation. It's a remarkable poem, which Paul will keep referring back to as he continues with the letter.

CHAPTERS 1:24–2:5

Paul then shows how the truth of this poem transforms his own experience of suffering in prison (Colossians 1:24–2:5). While he's being punished for announcing Jesus as the risen Lord and king to the Greek and Roman world, this suffering is not a defeat. It's actually Paul's way of participating in Jesus' own suffering, which was also done as an act of love. Paul's hardships are actually a cause for joy, as he has been imprisoned for spreading the surprising news about Israel's resurrected Messiah. Just as the divine glory dwells in Jesus, so Jesus dwells in and among his international family. In Paul's words, "the Messiah is in you all, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

CHAPTER 2:6–23

Paul then addresses the cultural pressures that are tempting the Colossians to turn away from Jesus (Colossians 2:6–23). They were being confronted by a combination of mystical polytheism and pressure to observe the laws of the Torah. All of these new Christians had grown up worshiping the various Greek-Roman gods who governed different arenas of everyday human life. Apparently some of the Colossian Christians considered Jesus as one more deity that they could worship alongside the others. At the same time, from a different cultural group, there was great pressure from the Jewish Christian community for these non-Jews to "complete" their commitment to the Messiah by following all the laws found in the Torah. Paul specifically mentions the pressures of eating a kosher diet, observing sacred days, and circumcision (see Paul's letter to the Galatians).

For Paul, to give into these temptations is total compromise, and a failure to grasp who Jesus is and what he accomplished on their behalf. The Colossians used to live in fear of spiritual powers and "elemental spirits," as Paul calls them (Colossians 2:8 and 20), but Jesus has triumphed over them all through his death and resurrection. Jesus has freed the Colossians from any former obligation to these powers. In the same way, Jesus has fulfilled on our behalf all the laws of the Torah, which never had the power to transform the selfish human heart. What Jesus did through his life, death, and resurrection lacks nothing, and doesn't need to be supplemented by following all those laws. After all, Jesus is the reality to which the Torah was pointing all along.

CHAPTERS 3–4

Rather than trying to live under the laws of the Torah, Christians have the power of Jesus' resurrection to change their hearts, minds, and way of life. Following Jesus means joining the new humanity, because their lives have been joined to the risen Jesus. This is why Paul challenges the Colossians to "set their minds on things above, where the Messiah is seated," and where he "rules" at God's right hand (Colossians 3:1). Now, Paul doesn't mean for them to think about "leaving earth to go to heaven." Rather, the heavens are the transcendent place from which Jesus rules over creation. From there he will one day return here, to transform all things. Or, as Paul says, "When the Messiah, who is your life, is revealed, you too will be revealed with him in glory" (Colossians 3:4).

Paul challenges them to live in the present, as the new kinds of humans that they will one day become. Paul describes their "old humanity," which was characterized by distorted sexuality and destructive speech. For Christians, that old humanity died along with Jesus and is replaced with his own new humanity, characterized by mercy, generosity, forgiveness, and love. This new humanity transcends the ethnic and social boundary lines of our world in order to create, in Paul's words, a people in which "no one is Greek or Jewish, circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free. But the Messiah is all, and is in all people" (Colossians 3:11).

Paul next offers an example that's very practical, showing the Colossians what this new humanity might look like in a first century Roman family. The Roman household was a highly authoritarian institution in which the patriarch held the power of life and death over his wife, children, and slaves. This is not so in a Christian household, because the risen Jesus is the true lord. "In the Lord," the wife allows her husband to be responsible for her, and the husband is subject to Jesus by loving his wife and placing her well-being above his own.

In a home where Jesus is Lord, children are not objects but are called to maturity and respect. Parents are to raise their children with patient understanding. Christians who are slaves, on the other hand, are also to honor their human masters, precisely because they're not the real master—Jesus is! Christians who have slaves are to understand that the slaves are not their property, but are fellow members of Jesus' body. They are to be honored and embraced in love.

Paul is walking a fine line here. He takes the most basic Roman institution and reshapes it around Jesus, who rules with self-giving love. While he doesn't abolish the household structure outright, the exalted Messiah demands that it be transformed, almost beyond the point of recognition for any Roman living in Colossae.

You can see this most clearly in the letter's conclusion (Colossians 4:2–18). After a request for prayer, Paul applies these instructions about Christian slaves and masters to the church at Colossae. We discover that Tychicus is the one carrying and reading this letter to the Colossians, and that he's accompanied by a certain Onesimus, a former slave to a Colossian Christian named Philemon. We also discover from another letter of Paul's, addressed to Philemon, that Onesimus had escaped from his master; a crime that was worthy of imprisonment. In the face of all this relational tension, Paul asks the whole church to greet Onesimus "as a faithful and beloved brother in the Lord" (Colossians 4:9). In the letter to Philemon, Paul is even more clear. He says that Onesimus should be received "no longer as a slave, but as a brother" (see Philemon v. 16). Talk about ending with a punch!

In this letter, Paul invites us to see that no part of human existence remains untouched by the loving, liberating rule of the risen Jesus. Our suffering, our temptation to compromise, our moral character, even the power dynamics inside our own homes, everything must be reexamined and transformed. We are invited to live in the present as if the new creation really arrived when Jesus rose from the dead.

That's what Paul's letter to the Colossians is all about.





PAUL'S LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

NO PART OF HUMAN EXISTENCE REMAINS UNTOUCHED BY THE LOVING & LIBERATING RULE OF JESUS.

WE'RE INVITED TO LIVE IN THE PRESENT AS IF THE **NEW CREATION** ARRIVED WHEN JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD.

1:1-23 THE EXALTED MESSIAH

WE THANK GOD FOR YOUR FAITH, Love, and HOPE. (1:3-5)

WE PRAY FOR GREATER WISDOM and Spiritual Understanding. (1:9-10)

1:15-20 THE MESSIAH POEM

FULL of ECHOES of: - GENESIS 1 - PSALMS 2, 8, 68 - EXODUS 40 - PROVERBS 8

HE IS THE **IMAGE** OF THE INVISIBLE GOD,
FIRSTBORN OVER ALL CREATION,
FOR IN HIM ALL THINGS WERE **CREATED**,
IN THE HEAVENS & ON EARTH,
THINGS VISIBLE & INVISIBLE,
THRONES OR KINGDOMS,
POWERS OR AUTHORITIES.
ALL THINGS WERE **CREATED** THROUGH HIM & FOR HIM,
AND HE IS BEFORE ALL THINGS,
AND IN HIM ALL THINGS COHERE.

AUTHOR & KING OF CREATION...

SHARES THE IDENTITY OF THE ONE CREATOR GOD

AND HE IS THE **HEAD** OF THE **BODY**, THE CHURCH.
HE IS THE BEGINNING,
FIRSTBORN FROM AMONG THE DEAD, SO THAT IN
ALL THINGS HE WOULD HOLD THE HIGHEST ROLE.
FOR GOD WAS PLEASED FOR HIS FULL
PRESENCE TO DWELL IN HIM,
AND THROUGH HIM TO **RECONCILE** ALL THINGS TO HIMSELF,
WHETHER IN THE HEAVENS OR ON EARTH,
MAKING PEACE THROUGH THE BLOOD OF HIS **CROSS**.

...WHO BRINGS THE NEW CREATION

1:24-2:5 THE SUFFERING APOSTLE

PUNISHMENT FOR ANNOUNCING: JESUS IS LORD!

NO! CAESAR IS!

...FOR THE MESSIAH'S NEW, MULTI-ETHNIC FAMILY

PARTICIPATION IN THE SUFFERING OF THE MESSIAH

THE MESSIAH IN YOU ALL, THE HOPE OF GLORY. (1:27)

2:6-23 THE PRESSURE TO TURN AWAY

TWO INFLUENCES TO RESIST

Mystical Polytheism

(MUSIC) (SEX) (MONEY) JESUS? APOLLO HERMES

GIVING INTO THESE IS COMPROMISE!

Observance of the Laws of the Torah

SEE (GALATIANS)

JESUS TRIUMPHED OVER ALL SPIRITUAL POWERS (2:15)

JESUS FULFILLED THE LAWS, WHICH LACKED POWER TO CHANGE THE HEART.

JESUS IS THE REALITY TO WHICH THE LAWS POINTED.

3-4 THE RESSURECTION LIFE

3:1-17 THE NEW HUMANITY

"SET YOUR MIND ON THINGS ABOVE, WHERE THE MESSIAH RULES." (3:1)

(3:4) "WHEN THE MESSIAH IS REVEALED, YOU TOO WILL BE REVEALED WITH HIM IN GLORY."

CHALLENGE: LIVE IN THE **PRESENT** AS THE KIND OF HUMAN **YOU WILL BECOME**

OLD HUMANITY: DISTORTED SEXUALITY & DESTRUCTIVE SPEECH

NEW HUMANITY: MERCY! GENEROSITY! FORGIVENESS! LOVE!

"HERE NO ONE'S GREEK OR JEWISH, CIRCUMCISED OR UNCIRCUMCISED, SLAVE OR FREE: THE MESSIAH IS ALL & IS IN ALL PEOPLE." (3:11)

3:18-4:1 THE NEW ROMAN HOUSEHOLD

PATRIARCH HELD THE POWER OF LIFE & DEATH

JESUS IS LORD OF THE HOUSE

WEIRDOS!

PAUL RESHAPES THE ROMAN HOUSEHOLD AROUND JESUS, WHO RULES WITH SELF-GIVING LOVE

4:2-18 CONCLUSION

ONESIMUS

"RECEIVE ONESIMUS NO LONGER AS A SLAVE, BUT AS A BELOVED BROTHER." (4:16)

ESCAPED SLAVE OF PHILEMON

TYCHICUS

COLOSSIANS

PHILEMON

"GREET ONESIMUS AS A BELOVED BROTHER IN THE LORD." (4:9)

?!!

PHILEMON

PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS

This is most likely the earliest letter we have from Paul, and you can read the book of Acts chapter 17 to discover the back story. Paul and his co-worker Silas went to the ancient Greek city of Thessalonica. After just one month of telling people the good news, a large number of both Jewish and Greek people gave their allegiance to Jesus and formed the first church community there. Trouble was brewing, however, as Paul's announcement of the risen Jesus as the true Lord led to local opposition. The Christians in Thessalonica were accused of defying Caesar, the Roman emperor, simply by "saying that there's another king, Jesus" (Acts 17:7). This led to a persecution that got so intense that Paul and Silas were forced to flee from Thessalonica. This was a doubly painful tragedy, as they loved the people there.

This letter is Paul's attempt to reconnect with them, after receiving a report from Timothy that the Thessalonian Christians were doing more than okay—they were flourishing, despite intense persecution!

This letter was written with two main movements. The first section celebrates their faithfulness (chs. 1–3), while the other section is a challenge to keep growing as followers of Jesus (chs. 4–6). These two larger sections are surrounded by three prayers. The letter opens with a thanksgiving prayer in 1:1–5, the two movements are linked together by a transitional prayer in 3:11–13, and, finally, the whole thing is concluded with a final prayer in 5:23–28.

CHAPTERS 1–3

Paul opens the letter by giving thanks and celebrating the Thessalonians' faith, their love for others, and their hope in Jesus despite persecution. He goes on to retell the story of their conversion, looking back at how they were once idolatrous polytheists, living in a culture in which all of life was permeated with institutions and practices honoring the Greek and Roman gods. Paul says that they "turned away from idols, to serve the living and true God, and are waiting for the coming of God's Son from heaven" (1 Thessalonians 1:9–10). In a city like Thessalonica, transferring your allegiance to the Creator God of Israel and king Jesus came at a cost—isolation from your neighbors as well as hostility from family. For these Christian Thessalonians, the overwhelming love of Jesus and the hope of his return made it all worth it.

Paul continues on to retell the story of his mission in Thessalonica, as well as the dear friendships that he formed with the people. Paul uses intimate metaphors to show his love for them. They treated him like their child, while he became like their mother and father. "We were happy to share not only the good news from God, but our very selves, because we came to dearly love you" (1 Thessalonians 2:8). Paul reminds us that the essence of Christian leadership is not about power and influence. It is about healthy relationships and humble, loving service. Paul reminds them that he never asked for money, but simply came to serve and love them in the name of Jesus.

Next, Paul reflects on their common persecution. Just as Jesus was rejected and killed by his own people, so Paul is persecuted by his fellow Jews, and so the Thessalonians face hostility from their Greek neighbors. Paul draws a strange comfort from knowing that, together, their sufferings are a way of participating in the story of Jesus' own life and death.

Paul shares the anguish that he experienced when he heard of the hardships of the Thessalonians, after he and Silas had fled from there. He had sent Timothy to support them and to see how they were doing. To his joy, Timothy discovered that they were actually going strong! They were still faithful to Jesus, full of love for God and neighbor, and were longing to see Paul as much as he longed for them. Paul concludes this thought with a prayer for endurance, introducing topics that he will address in the letter's second half. He prays that God will grow the Thessalonians' capacity to love, strengthen their commitment to holiness, and fix their hope on the return of king Jesus.

CHAPTERS 4–5

Paul continues into the second half of the letter by challenging them to live a life that's consistent with the teachings of king Jesus. This means, first of all, a serious commitment to holiness and sexual purity (1 Thessalonians 4:1–8). In contrast to the promiscuous, sexually destructive culture around them, they are to follow Jesus' teaching about experiencing the beauty and power of sex within the haven of a committed marriage covenant relationship (see Matthew 5:27–32 and 19:1–12). God takes sexual misbehavior very seriously, as it dishonors and destroys people as well as their dignity.

Following Jesus also means a commitment to loving and serving others (1 Thessalonians 4:9–12). Paul instructs them that Christians should be known in the city as reliable people who work hard. This is not just to make money, but also so that they can have resources to provide for themselves as well as to generously share with those in need.

After this, Paul addresses a number of questions the Thessalonians had raised about the future hope of Jesus' return (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). Some Christians in the church had recently died, most likely killed as martyrs, and their friends and family were wondering what their fate would be when Jesus returns. Paul makes it clear that, despite their grief and loss, not even death can separate Christians from the love of Jesus. When he returns as king, he will call both the living and the dead to himself.

Paul then uses powerful imagery that would be familiar to the Thessalonians. He employs language that would normally describe how a city subject to the Roman Caesar would send a delegation to welcome or "meet" his arrival. Paul then applies this image to the arrival of king Jesus! He, too, will be greeted by a delegation of his own people, who will "meet the Lord in the air" as they welcome and escort him back to his world, where he will establish his kingdom of justice and peace.

Paul wants Thessalonians to see how this hope should motivate faithfulness to Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:1–11). He first pokes at some famous Roman propaganda that claimed the one who brings "peace and security" is Caesar (1 Thessalonians 5:3). Of course, Rome's peace actually came about through violence, enslavement of the enemy, and military occupation. Paul warns that Jesus will return as king one day, and will confront this kind of injustice. Followers of king Jesus should live in the present as if that future is already here. Despite the nighttime of human evil all around them, they should stay sober and awake, as the light of God's kingdom dawns here on earth as it is in heaven.

Paul closes all these exhortations as he began, with a hopeful prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:23–28). He prays that God will permeate their lives with his holiness, setting them apart to be wholly devoted and blameless until the return of king Jesus.

1 Thessalonians reminds us that, from the very beginning, following Jesus as king has produced a truly countercultural, or, "holy" way of life, which sometimes generates suspicion and conflict. The response of Jesus' followers to such hostility should always be love, meeting opposition with grace and generosity. This way of life is motivated by hope in the coming kingdom of Jesus, which has already begun with his resurrection from death.

Holiness, love, and future hope—that's what 1 Thessalonians is all about.

1 THESSALONIANS

Holiness Love Future Hope

FOLLOWING JESUS PRODUCES A COUNTER-CULTURAL **HOLY** WAY OF LIFE...

...THAT RESPONDS TO HOSTILITY WITH **LOVE** & GENEROSITY.

...THAT IS MOTIVATED BY **HOPE** IN THE COMING KINGDOM OF JESUS.



1-3 A CELEBRATION OF FAITHFULNESS

1:1-5 THANKSGIVING PRAYER

I THANK GOD FOR YOUR FAITH, LOVE, and HOPE!

1:6-10 THE THESSALONIANS' CONVERSION



"YOU TURNED AWAY FROM **IDOLS** TO SERVE THE LIVING & **TRUE GOD**, AND ARE WAITING FOR THE COMING OF GOD'S SON FROM HEAVEN." (1:9-10)

2:1-12 PAUL'S MISSION IN THESSALONICA



"WE WERE HAPPY TO SHARE NOT ONLY THE GOOD NEWS FROM GOD, BUT **OUR VERY SELVES**, BECAUSE WE CAME TO DEARLY LOVE YOU." (2:8)

3:11-13 PRAYER FOR ENDURANCE

MAY GOD INCREASE YOUR **LOVE**, **HOLINESS**, & **HOPE**!

2:13-16 THEIR COMMON PERSECUTION



THEIR SUFFERING IS A WAY OF PARTICIPATING IN THE STORY OF JESUS.

2:17-3:10 PAUL'S ANGUISH...



4-5 A CHALLENGE TO GROW

4:1-8 **HOLINESS** & SEXUAL PURITY

FOLLOWING JESUS' TEACHINGS ON **SEX** & **MARRIAGE** (MATTHEW 5:27-32, 19:1-12)



4:9-12 COMMITMENT TO **LOVE** & SERVICE

WORKING HARD SO THAT YOU CAN BE GENEROUS TO OTHERS (SEE 2 THESSALONIANS 3:11-13)



5:23-28 PRAYER OF HOPE

MAY GOD KEEP YOU **HOLY** AS YOU AWAIT THE ARRIVAL OF JESUS.

4:13-18 FUTURE **HOPE** OF JESUS' RETURN



PEACE & SECURITY!

5:1-11 THIS **HOPE** SHOULD MOTIVATE FAITHFULNESS



PAUL'S SECOND LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS

Not long after Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians, he got another report about the Christians in Thessalonica. The problems he had addressed in his first letter had not only continued, but had actually gotten worse. The persecutions had intensified, and the Thessalonian Christians became confused and scared about the return of Jesus.

Paul sent off this short second letter, which is designed to have three sections that address three issues within the church. In chapter 1, Paul first offers hope in the midst of continued persecution. In chapter 2, he offers more clarity about the coming day of the Lord. Finally, in chapter 3, Paul gives a specific challenge to the "idle," people who were refusing to work normal jobs. The end to each of these sections is clearly marked by a short closing prayer (2 Thessalonians 1:11–12, 2:16–17, and 3:16–18).

CHAPTER 1

Paul opens with a thanksgiving prayer for the Thessalonians' continued faithfulness and love, specifically for their endurance (2 Thessalonians 1:1–3). He has learned that their Greek and Roman neighbors have intensified the persecution of these Christians. They're a religious minority, facing violent oppression, and Paul worries that they might give up on Jesus if it gets much worse. Paul reminds them, as he did in the first letter, that suffering because you're associated with Jesus is actually a way of participating in God's kingdom (2 Thessalonians 1:4–12). Jesus was inaugurated as king through the suffering of the cross, so his followers can show their own victory over the world by imitating Jesus' non-violence and patient endurance.

Paul also reminds them that this won't last forever. When Jesus returns, he will bring justice to bear on those who have oppressed them and shed the blood of the innocent. More specifically, Paul says that their punishment is to be banished "away from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his power" (2 Thessalonians 1:9). Paul doesn't speculate on the fate of those who reject Jesus, except to say that, throughout their lives, they had wanted nothing to do with Jesus, and in the end they get what they want—relational distance from their Creator and king. For Paul, this is the ultimate tragedy. To choose separation from Jesus, who is the source of all love and life, is to embrace one's own undoing. He closes this thought by praying that God would use their suffering to bring about deep character change inside them, so that their lives may bring honor to the name of Jesus (2 Thessalonians 1:11–12).

CHAPTER 2

In chapter 2, Paul moves on to address a specific issue related to the return of Jesus and the day of the Lord. Someone in the Thessalonian church community had been spreading wrong information in Paul's name, saying that God's final act of justice on human evil, the day of the Lord, was upon them. According to them, judgment day had come! These people had likely been predicting dates to the end of all things and had started frightening other Christians. Given the difficult circumstances of the Thessalonians, you can see why this would cause some concern. They were afraid for their lives, and vulnerable to someone claiming that Jesus had already returned "like a thief in the night," as Paul had described in his first letter (see 1 Thessalonians 5:2). Maybe God had abandoned them to their suffering!

This really ticks Paul off, because he's being grossly misrepresented. The return of Jesus should never inspire fear, but instead hope and confidence! He reminds them of all he had taught about Jesus' return when he was still in town, leaving here only a short summary. In fact, it's a little too short, and so the paragraph has many puzzles and problems of interpretation. What is clear is that Paul cites a well known theme from chapters 13–14 of the book of Isaiah and from chapters 7–12 of the book of Daniel.

The kingdoms of the world will continue to produce rulers who rebel against God, like Nebuchadnezzar or the king of the North did in the past. These leaders had exalted themselves to divine authority, and sowed the seeds of their destruction. For Paul, the prophecies about these ancient kings offer a pattern, which he saw fulfilled in his own day with the Roman emperors Caligula and Nero, and which he expected to see repeated again. History will repeat itself, eventually culminating with a rebellious ruler, empowered by evil itself, who will wreak violence and havoc in God's world, but not forever. When Jesus returns, he will confront "the Rebel" and all those who perpetrate evil, delivering his people.

Paul's point here was not to give later readers fuel for apocalyptic speculation. Rather, he's trying to comfort the Thessalonians by recalling the teaching of Jesus, who said that the events leading up to his return will be very public and very obvious (see Mark 13). In other words, they don't need to be scared or worried that they've been abandoned, but they do need to stay faithful until Jesus returns to deliver them. In his closing prayer (2 Thessalonians 2:16–17), Paul asks Jesus and the Father to comfort and strengthen the Thessalonians, so that they may stay devoted to the way of Jesus.

CHAPTER 3

This brings us to the final topic, a challenge for the people who were "idle" (2 Thessalonians 3:1–15). This term doesn't mean that they were just "lazy." It refers to the people that were irresponsible, refusing to work or to provide for themselves, resulting in chaotic personal lives. Paul had addressed this problem in his first letter, in 1 Thessalonians 4:10–12 and 5:14, but it appears to have gotten worse.

We don't know for certain why some people were refusing to work. It's possible that this issue was connected to the previous one. Maybe some people thought Jesus would return very soon, and as a result quit their jobs and dropped out of normal life. However, it's more likely that this problem is related to a practice in Roman culture called "patronage." Poorer people in cities would become "clients," kind of like "personal assistants," to wealthy people and live off of their generosity, with many strings attached. This often forced the clients to participate in their patron's morally corrupt way of life, not to mention that it was an unstable source of income. This is what Paul refers to as "leading a disordered life, not working, but meddling in the business of others" (2 Thessalonians 3:11).

Paul reminds them of the example he set when he was with them. He didn't ask for their support, but worked a manual labor job to provide for himself, so that he could serve the Thessalonians free of charge. This is the ideal he's promoting. A follower of Jesus should imitate the Lord's self-giving love by working hard, providing for themselves, and acting as a benefit to others.

Paul concludes with a final prayer, asking that in the midst of all their confusion and suffering, God would grant them peace through the Lord Jesus, the Messiah.

This short letter to the Thessalonians helps us to see that the early Christian belief in Jesus' return and the hope of final justice were not meant to generate speculation about apocalyptic time lines. Rather, these beliefs were supposed to bring hope to inspire faithfulness and devotion to Jesus. This was especially true for persecuted Christians facing violent opposition.

For later generations of Christians, whether they undergo persecution or not, this letter reminds us that what you hope for shapes what you live for. That's what the second letter to the Thessalonians is all about.



2 THESSALONIANS

BELIEF IN JESUS' RETURN & HOPE FOR FINAL JUSTICE

- NOT SPECULATION ABOUT TIMELINES
- INSPIRED HOPE & FAITHFULNESS FOR PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

WHAT YOU HOPE FOR SHAPES WHAT YOU LIVE FOR.

1 HOPE DESPITE PERSECUTION

1:1-3 · 1:4-12



1:11-12 MAY THE LORD JESUS BE HONORED THROUGH YOU.

2 THE DAY OF THE LORD



2:16-17 MAY THE LORD GIVE YOU COMFORT & STRENGTH

3 CHALLENGE TO THE "IDLE"

NOT LAZY, BUT IRRESPONSIBLE & REFUSING TO WORK

(SEE 1 THESSALONIANS 4:10-12, 5:14)



3:16-18 MAY THE LORD OF PEACE GRANT YOU PEACE

PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO TIMOTHY

Paul had spent many years traveling around, starting new Jesus communities, developing a large team of co-workers in the process. Timothy was one such co-worker. Once, when Paul visited Lystra, he met Timothy's faithful mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5; see Acts 16:1–3). He was impressed by the young Timothy's passion and devotion to Jesus. Paul mentored him for many years, often sending him on missions to some of the churches he had started.

When Paul heard about a group of leaders that had infiltrated the influential church in Ephesus, spreading incorrect views about Jesus, he sent Timothy to confront them and to restore order to the community. After Timothy arrived there, Paul sent this letter to follow up with and instruct him on how to fulfill his mission.

The letter is very well designed. There is both an opening and a closing address (chs. 1 and 6b) in which Timothy is commissioned to confront these corrupt leaders and their bad theology. These addresses surround two large central sections (chs. 2–3 and 4–6a), which are full of practical instructions about the specific problems Timothy faced in the Ephesian church. Finally, all of these sections are linked together by a series of three poems (1 Timothy 1:17, 3:16, and 6:15–16) that exalt the risen Jesus as the king of the world.

CHAPTER 1

Paul opens by recalling how he had sent Timothy to Ephesus in order to confront the leaders spreading false or "strange teaching" (1 Timothy 1:3). He describes them as being obsessed with speculation about the Torah, specifically with the early stories and genealogies from the book of Genesis. As we'll soon find out, they had developed all kinds of strange ideas about food, marriage, and sexuality, none of which were at all consistent with the teachings of Jesus or the apostles. Paul even names some of them, Alexander and Hymenaeus (1 Timothy 1:20), describing how their teaching has divided the church and generated controversy. Paul says that this is a clear sign that their teaching is distorted, because genuine Christian teaching that's faithful to the way of Jesus results in love and genuine faith.

He also says that the true purpose of the Torah is not to fuel speculation, but to expose the truth of the sinful human condition, as it did for Paul himself. Correct teaching about the Torah will lead people to see the grace of God revealed in the Messiah, who came into the world to save sinful, broken people (1 Timothy 1:16). Paul closes with a poem that honors Jesus as king over all, as well as calling Timothy to confront these men and shut down their false teaching.

CHAPTERS 2–3

In chapters 2–3, Paul addresses some very specific problems caused by the corrupt teachers. First of all, Paul calls on Timothy to hold regular church gatherings to pray for the governing leaders of Rome and for peace (1 Timothy 2:1–7). Peace in the land creates the ideal setting for Jesus' followers to keep spreading their message about the God of peace, who wants all people to be saved. This is why Jesus came as the one and only mediator to give his life as ransom for all people. In contrast to the corrupt teachers, Paul reminds Timothy that God's desire is to rescue the whole world, and, through prayer, they will keep that at the forefront of their minds.

Paul next addresses problems related to men and women who have been influenced by the corrupt leaders in Ephesus (1 Timothy 2:8–15). Paul shuts down the men who were getting drawn into the angry theological disputes started by the teachers (1 Timothy 2:8). Next, he confronts a group of wealthy women in the church, who were treating the Sunday gathering as a fashion show, dressing so upscale that they would shame others who couldn't afford such a wardrobe. Not only that, but some of these women were usurping leadership positions in the church and teaching others the same bad theology as the corrupt teachers (1 Timothy 2:9–15).

Paul shuts these women down by saying that they should not teach or lead in the church, making a reference back to the story of Adam, Eve, and the serpent from Genesis 3. Now, this is one of those sections in Paul's letters that Peter referred to when he said Paul is hard to understand (see 2 Peter 3:16). There are lots of different views on what Paul actually means here. There are some who think that Paul is prohibiting women from ever leading or teaching men, in any church, and that his comments about Adam and Eve must reveal how God has ordered that only men should be leaders in the church. There are others who think that Paul is prohibiting women from having leadership authority over men, but once educated, that they can serve as teachers under male leadership. There are still others who think that Paul is only prohibiting these specific women in Ephesus, and that his comments about Adam and Eve are a comparison of how these women have been deceived by the false teachers.

Whichever view you take, Paul does make it clear that these Ephesian women need leadership and a proper theological education. Ultimately, the goal is to help them mature so that they can become like the outstanding female ministers mentioned in Paul's other letters, like Phoebe (see Romans 16:1), Junia (see Romans 16:7), or Priscilla (see Acts 18:26).

In chapter 3, Paul continues to address this leadership crisis, calling Timothy to appoint a small, healthy team of husbands and fathers, who will act as "elders" or "overseers" to the church. These should be men of outstanding character and integrity, who will work alongside a team of "deacons," a Greek word meaning "servant." The deacons are a group of men and women who possess the same upstanding character as the elders and will lead the ministries of the church. All of these people should be known for healthy relationships within their families, demonstrating their ability to lead in their church, which is "God's family." These people should live alongside each other in the new family created by king Jesus.

Jesus' story is explored in the closing poem. 1 Timothy 3:16 is all about his incarnation, death, and resurrection that led to his exaltation as king and the spread of his family through the world.

CHAPTERS 4–6A

Paul's second section of instructions in chapters 4–6a are again centered around specific problems caused by the false teachers. Paul once again corrects their bad theology, in which they tell people to stop eating certain foods as well as to stop getting married, which Paul thinks is ridiculous. Paul appeals to Genesis 1 and reminds Timothy that God's entire creation is good, including all foods and marriage. All of it is to be received with gratefulness by those who know the Creator.

Paul moves on to address problems with the church's care of widows (1 Timothy 5:1–16). This important ministry was being abused by younger, wealthy widows (likely the same trouble-makers from chapter 2). They would sign up for the church's support and then spend their days sleeping around, spreading gossip, and damaging the church's reputation. Paul put his foot down. He made it clear to Timothy that only older widows with no other family support should qualify. For widows who really need it, the church should show the same love and generosity of Jesus.

Next, Paul writes about problems among the older men in the church. Timothy is to respect their age, but not their misbehavior, which seems related to alcohol abuse. Whatever exactly it is that they're doing, it's damaging the church's reputation in Ephesus. Timothy is to lovingly confront them and have them step down if they are in leadership positions. Paul adds on a side note, saying that this doesn't mean Timothy himself should never drink. Given his stomach problems, he should have a glass of wine each night with dinner.

In chapter 6, Paul addresses a problem with some Christians in Ephesus who were slaves and were disrespecting their Christian masters. This was tricky for Paul. On the one hand, the gospel creates equality among all of Jesus' followers, but that equality must be implemented in a strategic way that doesn't compromise the mission of the church. If Christians become associated with slave rebellions, they will undermine the effectiveness of their message. The Christian transformation of the Roman household should be implemented strategically, so that their neighbors can be persuaded and not repulsed by the radically different, new vision of God's family.

CHAPTER 6B

Finally, Paul closes the letter by once again calling Timothy to confront the corrupt teachers. Paul exposes their motive to make lots of money by accumulating followers and charging high rates. They betray Jesus' message of contentment and simple living, so Paul instructs the wealthy Ephesian Christians to be rich in good works and to act generously. He encourages them to act as people who submit all their resources to king Jesus, inspiring a final poem about how Jesus is the true king over all others.

1 Timothy is a crucially important letter in which we can gain a holistic vision of the nature and mission of the church. What a Jesus community believes in will directly shape how that community lives and behaves, so its theology and beliefs must be constantly formed by the Scriptures and the good news about Jesus.

At the same time, how the church is perceived is also important. Christians should be people that are full of integrity and known for good works, serving the poor and the most vulnerable out of their devotion to the risen king Jesus.

That's what 1 Timothy is all about.



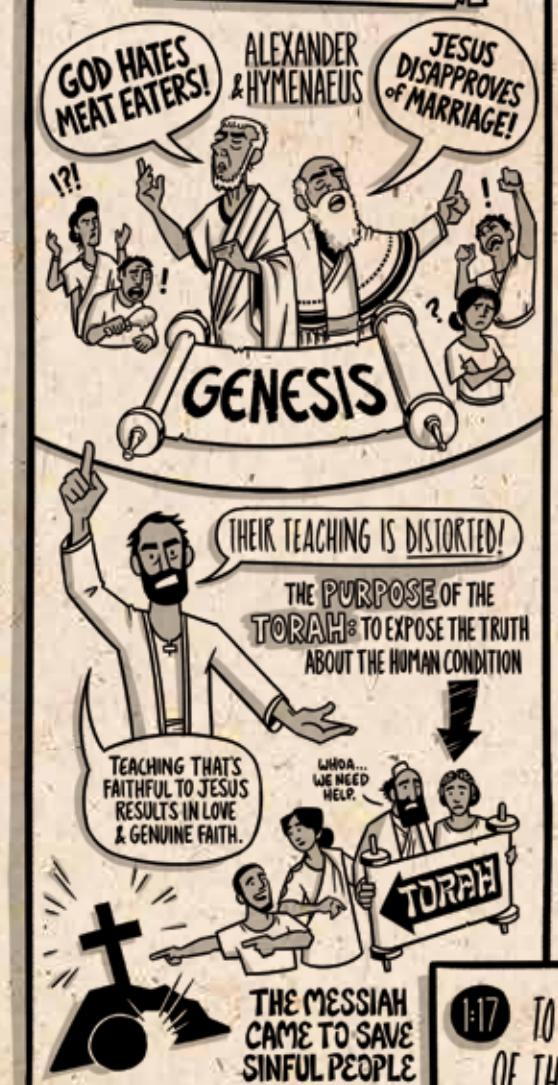
1 TIMOTHY

A HOLISTIC VISION OF THE CHURCH

- WHAT A CHURCH **BELIEVES** → WILL SHAPE HOW IT **LIVES**.
- THE CHURCH SHOULD BE KNOWN FOR INTEGRITY & SERVICE TO THE POOR OUT OF DEVOTION TO KING JESUS.

1 TIMOTHY'S COMMISSION

CONFRONT THE CORRUPT TEACHERS & THEIR "STRANGE TEACHING"



1:17 TO THE KING OF THE AGES BE HONOR & GLORY!

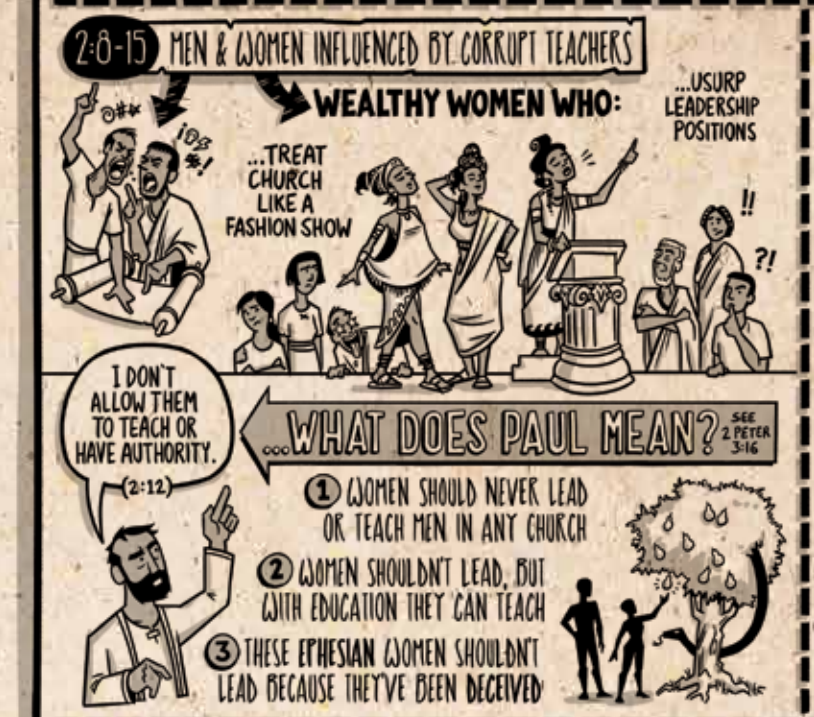
2-3 INSTRUCTIONS FOR EPHESUS, PT. 1

2:1-7 A CALL TO PRAYER



CREATES THE IDEAL SETTING TO SPREAD THE MESSAGE ABOUT JESUS.

2:8-15 MEN & WOMEN INFLUENCED BY CORRUPT TEACHERS



THEY SHOULD BE INSTRUCTED UNDER TIMOTHY'S LEADERSHIP



3 APPOINTING LEADERS



HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS
- IN *THEIR* FAMILIES
- IN *GOD'S* FAMILY (THE CHURCH!)

3:16



4-6a INSTRUCTIONS FOR EPHESUS, PT. 2

1:1-16 CORRECTING BAD THEOLOGY



5:1-16 CARING FOR WIDOWS



5:17-25 CONFRONTING OLDER MEN



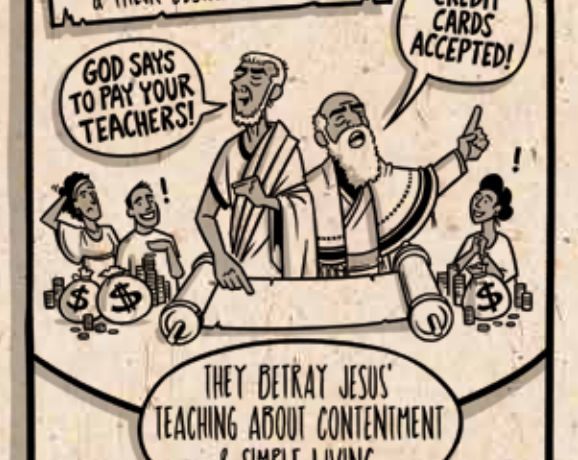
6:1-2 CHRISTIAN SLAVES



CHRISTIAN TRANSFORMATION OF THE ROMAN HOUSEHOLD SHOULD HAPPEN *STRATEGICALLY* TO PERSUADE OTHERS.

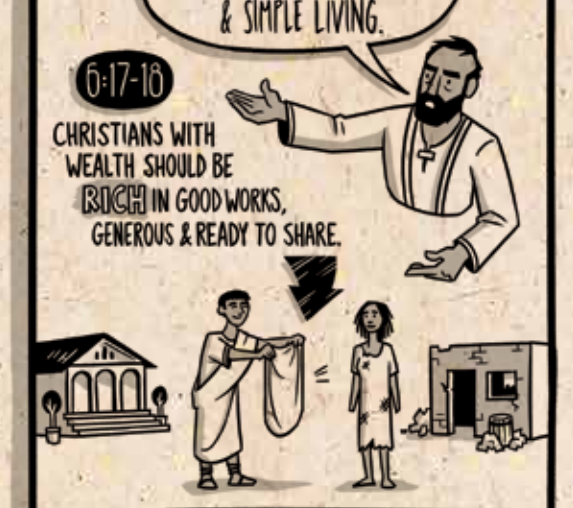
6b TIMOTHY'S COMMISSION

CONFRONT THE CORRUPT TEACHERS & THEIR DESIRE FOR WEALTH



THEY BETRAY JESUS' TEACHING ABOUT CONTENTMENT & SIMPLE LIVING.

6:17-18 CHRISTIANS WITH WEALTH SHOULD BE **RICH** IN GOOD WORKS, GENEROUS & READY TO SHARE.



6:15-16 "TO THE ONLY KING BE HONOR & POWER! AMEN."

PAUL'S SECOND LETTER TO TIMOTHY

This is Paul's final and most personal letter. He wrote it during yet another time in prison and addressed it to his dear co-worker and protégé, young Timothy. While we don't know exactly how much time has passed since he wrote 1 Timothy, we can easily see that Paul's situation has changed for the worse.

We learn that Paul is imprisoned in Rome, which could refer to his time under house arrest in chapter 28 of the book of Acts. On the other hand, it could also mean that he was released from that imprisonment and had another long season of ministry before being arrested again in Troas (2 Timothy 4:13–15). Either way, Paul says that he's in the middle of his court trial, and that it's not going well. Paul is pretty sure that he's not gonna survive this one. Out of this dark situation, Paul appeals to Timothy, who is apparently still on assignment in Ephesus. Paul asks Timothy to come be with him in prison, so that he can pass on his plans for a church planting mission.

The letter's design is pretty simple. There are two large sections in which Paul challenges Timothy. Paul first calls on Timothy to accept his calling as a leader (2 Timothy 1:1–2:13). He also asks that, before he comes to Paul, Timothy deal with the corrupt teachers who are still causing problems in the church of Ephesus (2 Timothy 2:14–4:5). After these sections, Paul concludes the letter (2 Timothy 4:6–22).

CHAPTERS 1:1–2:13

Paul opens by thanking God for Timothy and his family. Paul makes sure to specifically mention his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice. Both of these women had immersed the young Timothy in the story of the Old Testament Scriptures, instilling in him a deep faith in the Messiah, Jesus. Because of that firm faith, Paul offers his first challenge to Timothy (2 Timothy 1:6–18), calling him to reject any temptation to be ashamed of the good news about Jesus, or of Paul's suffering in prison for announcing that good news. Paul has to emphasize that last point because of the negative stigma he had gained from his frequent imprisonments. Even some of Paul's co-workers had begun to doubt his calling as an apostle. Paul specifically mentions two, Phygelus and Hermogenes (2 Timothy 1:15), who had deserted him because they were ashamed of being associated with an accused criminal. Paul asks Timothy to reject any fear of shame and to come see him.

However, Paul does realize that this is a costly request that could put Timothy at risk. Paul reminds him that Jesus' grace is a source of power (2 Timothy 2:1), which is incredibly important, because following him is not easy. It requires everything you have. Paul likens following Jesus to enrolling as a soldier who strives to please their commanding officer, or like an athlete focused on training their body for a competition, or like a hard-working, dedicated farmer. All three of these metaphors involve a person who is committed to something bigger than themselves, as well as people who are willing to make sacrifices and endure challenges in order to accomplish a greater goal.

Of course, the highest example is Jesus himself. Because of his commitment to the Father, he suffered crucifixion by the Romans. Similarly, Paul himself now suffers in a Roman prison. Hardship and sacrifice are inherent to the Christian life, which is why Jesus' resurrection is the foundation of Christian hope. Or, as Paul says in a short, powerful poem:

> If we died with him,
> then we will live with him.
> If we endure,
> then we will reign with him.
> If we deny him,
> then he will deny us.
> If we are unfaithful,
> he will remain faithful,
> for he is unable to deny his own nature.
>
> 2 Timothy 2:11–13

God's love for our world has opened up a new hope through the death and resurrection of Jesus. For those who take the risk of trusting and following Jesus, God promises vindication and life. For those who reject him, God will honor their decision and do the same, but their faithlessness will never compel God to abandon his faithfulness. Paul calls Timothy to have faithfulness, knowing that it may come with a cost.

CHAPTERS 2:14–4:5

As Paul moves into the second half of the letter (2 Timothy 2:14–4:5), he asks Timothy to confront the corrupt teachers in Ephesus before coming to Rome. Their teaching is spreading through the Ephesian church like a cancer. They've targeted and corrupted a number of influential women in the church, likely the same wealthy women that Paul had to deal with in his first letter. He doesn't offer much detail about these teachers' bad theology, as Timothy already knows all about it, but Paul does give one hint: they teach that "the resurrection has already taken place" (2 Timothy 2:18).

It's not certain whether or not these teachers are following Greek philosophy's rejection of the idea of bodily resurrection and think that it's only about spiritual experience. Of course, they also could have simply distorted Paul's teaching about the resurrection life. Either way, the problem is that they've abandoned the robust, future hope of resurrection and new creation, and have instead embraced a private, hyper-spiritualized Christianity that is disconnected from their day to day lives and relationships.

Paul calls Timothy to raise up faithful leaders, who will teach the real good news about Jesus (2 Timothy 2:2). These leaders should avoid the senseless arguments that result from debating with those guys. In contrast, Timothy and his leadership team are to keep the focus on the core storyline and message of the Scriptures, which, in this context, means the Old Testament. "The Scriptures," Paul says, "are able to give you wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in the Messiah Jesus." In other words, the whole point of the Scriptures is to tell a unified story that leads to Jesus and offers wisdom to the whole world.

Paul also talks about the Scripture's nature and purpose. "All Scripture is divinely breathed," or literally "god-Spirited," a reference to the Spirit's role in guiding the biblical authors to write what God wanted his people to hear. God speaks to his people through the Scriptures for practical reasons, as it is useful for teaching, for challenging, for correcting, and for training in righteousness. In other words, by reading the Scriptures, God's people will be prepared to do good (2 Timothy 3:15–17).

CHAPTER 4:6–22

Paul closes the letter by reminding Timothy that he is probably not going to make it out of prison alive. He asks Timothy to come as soon as possible, before winter hits. Paul doesn't want to freeze in his cell, so he is going to need his heavy coat that he had to leave behind along with all of his important personal documents in Troas, likely where he got arrested. He mentions how Alexander is an especially dangerous man who is to be avoided. He is probably the one responsible for Paul's most recent arrest.

Paul further concludes by mentioning how nearly everyone has abandoned him to his fate. His only source of comfort is the personal presence of Jesus, who stands with him and waits to deliver him even if he dies.

2 Timothy stands as a reminder that Paul's influential life and mission were marked by persistent challenge, suffering, and struggle. Following Jesus involves risk and sacrifice, and means inviting tension and discomfort into your life. These things are not a sign of Jesus' absence. Rather, as Paul discovered along with generations of believers after him, it's precisely in those dark and difficult moments that Jesus' love and faithfulness become most tangible and real.

That's what 2 Timothy, Paul's final letter, is all about.

2 TIMOTHY

PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT IN ROME

I. HOUSE ARREST IN ACTS ch.28
II. A LATER ROMAN IMPRISONMENT (see 2 Tim 4:13-15)





DEAR TIMOTHY, 1:1-2:13 ACCEPT YOUR CALLING...



BIG RISK!

2:1-13 JESUS' GRACE IS A SOURCE OF POWER (2:1) TO BECOME LIKE...



- COMMITTED TO SOMETHING BIGGER THAN THEMSELVES.
- WILLING TO SACRIFICE & ENDURE FOR A GREATER GOAL

2:11-13

"IF WE **DIED** WITH HIM,
THEN WE WILL **LIVE** WITH HIM.
IF WE **ENDURE**,
THEN WE WILL **REIGN** WITH HIM.
IF WE **DENY** HIM,
THEN HE WILL **DENY** US.
IF WE ARE **UNFAITHFUL**,
HE WILL REMAIN **FAITHFUL**,
FOR HE IS UNABLE TO DENY HIS OWN NATURE."

FAITHFULNESS TO JESUS COMES WITH A *COST*.

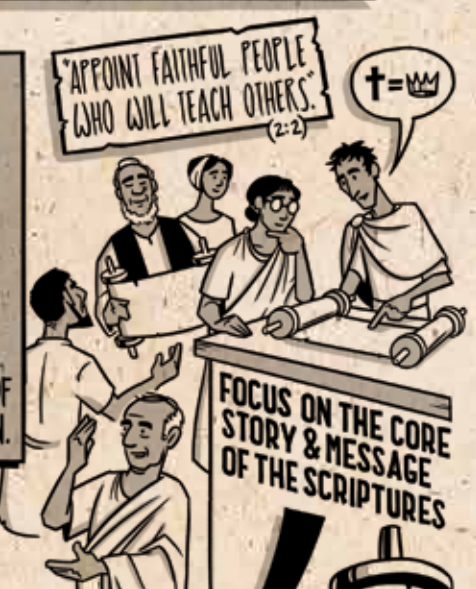
2:14-4:5 ...& DEAL WITH CORRUPT TEACHERS



OR

I	II
FOLLOWING GREEK PHILOSOPHY'S REJECTION OF BODILY RESURRECTION	DISTORTING PAUL'S THEOLOGY OF RESURRECTION BEGINNING **NOW**

BOTTOM LINE:
THEY'VE ABANDONED THE HOPE OF RESURRECTION & NEW CREATION.



"THE SCRIPTURES ARE ABLE TO GIVE YOU **WISDOM** THAT LEADS TO **SALVATION** THROUGH **FAITH** IN THE MESSIAH JESUS. ALL SCRIPTURE IS DIVINELY BREATHED...

...& USEFUL FOR TEACHING, CHALLENGING, CORRECTING, & TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, SO THAT GOD'S PEOPLE ARE PREPARED FOR DOING GOOD." (3:15-17)

SCRIPTURE'S NATURE



GOD'S SPIRIT GUIDED THE AUTHORS, SO WHAT THEY WROTE IS WHAT GOD WANTS PEOPLE TO HEAR.

SCRIPTURE'S PURPOSE



FOLLOWING JESUS INVOLVES RISK & TENSION

THIS IS **NOT** A SIGN OF JESUS' ABSENCE

IN DARK & DIFFICULT MOMENTS, JESUS' LOVE & FAITHFULNESS BECOME TANGIBLE & REAL

4:6-22 CONCLUSION

THE TIME OF MY DEPARTURE IS NEAR — COME BEFORE WINTER.



PAUL'S LETTER TO TITUS

Titus was a Greek follower of Jesus and was, for years, a trusted co-worker and travel companion to Paul. Titus had also helped Paul with crisis situations in the past (see Galatians 2:1–3 and 2 Corinthians 7–8). In this letter, we discover that Paul had assigned Titus the task of going to Crete, a large island off the coast of Greece, so that he could restore order to a network of house churches.

Now, Cretan culture was notorious in the ancient world. One of the Greek words for being a "liar" was *kretizo*, or "to be a Cretan." These people were infamous for their treachery and greed. Most men served as mercenary soldiers to the highest bidder, while the island's cities were known to be unsafe, as they were plagued by violence and sexual corruption.

Yet the island of Crete had many strategic harbors that serviced cities from all over the Mediterranean Sea. From Paul's point of view, it was the perfect place to start a network of churches. While we don't know the exact details, we do learn within this letter that these churches had come under the destructive influence of corrupt Cretan leaders who claimed to be Christians. Paul assigned Titus with the task of setting things straight, with this letter providing the instructions.

The letter was written with a pretty straightforward design. After a brief introduction in Titus 1:1–4, Paul gives Titus clear instructions about his tasks in the church (Titus 1:5–16). Paul then offers guidance about the new kind of household (Titus 2:1–15) as well as the new humanity (Titus 3:1–11) that the gospel can create in these Cretan communities. He closes the letter with some final greetings in Titus 3:12–15.

CHAPTER 1

Paul opens by reminding Titus that his message as an apostle is about the hope of eternal life, that is, the life of the new creation that's available now through Jesus the Messiah. This hope was promised long ago by "God, who does not lie" (Titus 1:3). This little opening comment introduces an important underlying theme in this letter. One of the problems in the Cretan churches is that they had assimilated their ideas about the Christian God with ideas about the Greek gods that they had grown up with, particularly Zeus, the chief god.

Cretans claimed that Zeus was born on their island and loved to tell stories of his underhanded character, seducing women and lying to get his way. Paul wants to make it crystal clear that the God revealed in Jesus is totally different than Zeus. Jesus' basic character traits are faithfulness and truth, which means that the Christian way of life will be about truth as well. This will be a huge culture shift for Cretans who want to follow Jesus.

Paul then addresses Titus with a two-fold task in verse 1:5–16. First, he was to appoint new leaders in each church community (Titus 1:5–9), in the form of a team of elders. These were to be mature husbands and fathers, whose way of life is the opposite of Cretan culture. They are to be known for their integrity and total devotion to Jesus, for self-control and generosity both in their families and in their communities. These new leaders will need to teach the good news about Jesus, and will be replacing the corrupt leaders.

Confronting these leaders is Titus' second task (Titus 1:10–16). Paul identifies these teachers as "those of the circumcision" (Titus 1:10). In other words, they were ethnically Jewish Cretans who said they followed Jesus. However, these teachers demanded that non-Jewish Christians be circumcised and follow the laws of the Torah to "really" become followers of the Jewish Messiah. They're obsessed with "Jewish myths and human commands" (Titus 1:14). And to top it all off, they're in the church leadership business to make money.

To undermine them, Paul, in a brilliant move, pulls a quote from an ancient Cretan poet, Epimenides. He was frank and honest about the character of his own people, "Cretans are always liars, vicious beasts, and lazy gluttons." They blur the lines between true and false, good and evil, and worse, they're in it for the money. While these leaders may claim to know God, their Cretan way of life denies him.

CHAPTER 2

Due to these corrupt leaders, many Christians in these churches have homes and personal lives that are a total wreck. Three times Paul highlights the result of their bad leadership. The message about Jesus "is discredited," their non-Christians neighbors have good cause to make "evil accusations," and this all makes "the teaching about God our Savior" totally unattractive and uncompelling (Titus 2:5, 8, and 10).

Here, Paul paints a picture of what the ideal Cretan household devoted to Jesus would look like. Elderly men and women are to be full of integrity and self-control, acting as models of character to the young. Young women shouldn't be sleeping around and avoiding marriage, as was fashionable at the time. Rather they should look for faithful partners so they can raise stable families. The young men are to do the same and to be known as productive, healthy citizens.

Christians slaves were in a unique position. We know that they were treated as social equals in Paul's churches, but there was a danger that they could use that equality as license to disrespect their masters. This could lead to association with slave rebellions, which would further discredit the Christian message, and so Paul urges them to respect and serve their masters.

Paul is negotiating a fine line here: he believes that the gospel about Jesus must prove its redemptive power in the public square if it's going to transform Cretan culture, but that won't happen through social upheaval or Christians cloistering away from urban life. The Christian message will be compelling to Cretans only when Christians fully participate in public life and when their lives and homes look similar on the surface. After a closer look, their neighbors will discover that these Christians live by a totally different value system, out of devotion to a very different God.

It's that very difference that Paul beautifully summarizes in Titus 2:11–15. The value system driving the Christian way of life is based on God's generous grace, which was demonstrated when Jesus gave up his honor to die a shameful death on behalf of his enemies. It's that same grace that calls God's people to say "no" to corrupt ways of life that are inconsistent with the generous love of God.

CHAPTER 3

In chapter 3 Paul moves the focus from the Christian household to a vision of Christians living like new humans in Cretan society. Of all people, Christians should be the ideal citizens that are peaceable, generous, obedient to authorities, and known for pursuing the common good.

Yet, if Cretans were born into this destructive way of life, how are these Christians supposed to sustain this counterculture? Paul believes that the power source is the transforming love of the one, true God. He explores this in a poem in 3:4–7, writing that God's kindness and love saved us, despite ourselves. Through the Holy Spirit, God has washed, rebirthed, and renewed his people. Through Jesus, God has provided a way for the people to be declared right before him, opening up "eternal life," or the new future in the new creation.

This living story is so powerful that it can produce new kinds of people. Paul's convinced that Spirit-empowered faithfulness to the teachings of Jesus will declare God's grace all over the island of Crete, and the world. With these thoughts in mind, Paul concludes in 3:12–15, by promising to send backup for Titus with either Artemas or Tychicus. Paul also asks for him to say hello to their common friends.

The letter to Titus shows us Paul's missionary strategy about how these churches could become agents of transformation within their communities. Change cannot be won by waging a culture war or by simply assimilating to the Cretan way of life. He calls on these Christians to wisely participate in Cretan culture, rejecting what's corrupt while embracing what's good. If they can live peaceably, devote themselves to Jesus and the common good, they will, in his words, "show the beauty of the message about our saving God" (Titus 2:10).

That's what the letter to Titus is all about.

paul's letter to TITUS











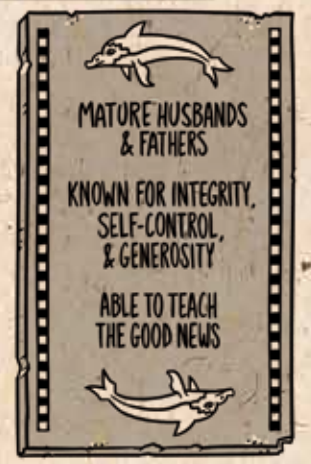
1:1-4 INTRODUCTION





1:5-16 TITUS' TASKS











2 THE NEW HOUSEHOLD





3 THE NEW HUMANITY





PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

This letter to Philemon was written during one of Paul's many imprisonments. It's his shortest letter he ever wrote, but don't let its size trick you. This is actually one of the most explosive things Paul ever wrote.

From what we can gather, Philemon was a wealthy Roman citizen from Colossae. He likely met Paul during his mission in Ephesus (see Acts 19), where he became a follower of Jesus. When Paul's co-worker Epaphras started a Jesus community in Colossae, Philemon became a leader of a church based in his home.

Now, Philemon, like all other household patriarchs in the Roman world, owned slaves, one of whom was named Onesimus. At some point, these two had a serious conflict. Onesimus wronged Philemon in some way, perhaps by theft or cheating. Whatever exactly happened, it was made worse when Onesimus ran away (Philemon vv. 18–19). Eventually, he found his way to visit Paul in prison, likely to appeal for help, and there he became a follower of Jesus and a beloved assistant to Paul.

Paul finds himself in a difficult and very delicate situation as he writes this letter. He wants Philemon to not just simply forgive Onesimus, but also to receive and embrace him as a brother in the Messiah. In other words, Paul is asking Philemon to release Onesimus from slavery and treat him like an equal within their Jesus community.

VERSES 1–7

Paul opens with a prayer (Philemon vv. 1–7), thanking God for the love and faithfulness Philemon has shown towards Jesus and his people. Paul starts to pave the way for his request with this dense line:

> "I pray that the partnership that springs from your faith may effectively lead you to recognize all the good things at work in us, leading us into the Messiah" (Philemon vv. 6).

The key word here is "partnership," or in Greek, *koinonia*. It means "sharing, mutual participation." It's when two or more people receive something together and share in it, becoming partners. Paul says that faithfulness to Jesus means recognizing that all of his followers are equal partners, who share together in the gift of God's love and grace. For Paul, this experience of *koinonia* among Jesus' followers isn't just an idea, it's something you do in your relationships.

VERSES 8–20

With that, Paul gives his request (Philemon vv. 8–20), finally bringing up Onesimus, who has become Paul's "child" in prison (Philemon vv. 10). Paul has led Onesimus to dedicate his life and allegiance to Jesus, so both Paul and Onesimus are now family members in Jesus. Onesimus has been serving Paul faithfully in prison, and, although Paul wants to keep him around, he knows that this unresolved conflict with Philemon has to be reconciled, especially since they are both followers of Jesus. Paul asks that Philemon receive Onesimus back "no longer as a slave, but as more than a slave, as a beloved brother…in the Lord" (Philemon v. 16).

This is a tall order, under Roman law, Philemon had every legal right to have Onesimus punished or put in prison. Paul is not only asking him to forgive Onesimus, but to welcome his slave back into Colossae as a social equal and as a family member.

This is way beyond kindness—it's downright unheard of! Freeing a slave and treating them like family would mean upsetting the status-quo of Roman social order. Why should Philemon do such a thing? At this point Paul pulls a brilliant move, recalling the key word *koinonia* from his opening prayer. He says that, if you are truly a "partner" with me, then "welcome Onesimus as if he were me. And if he's wronged you or owes you anything, charge it to me…I will repay it" (Philemon vv. 17–19).

Within this request, we can see the heart of Paul's gospel message being acted out. It's about reconciliation, first of all. As he had told the Corinthians, "In the Messiah, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting people's sins against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19). In this situation, Paul is playing out the role of Jesus. He will absorb the consequences of Onesimus' wrongdoing and will pay the cost himself, all so that he can be reconciled to Philemon.

Paul's message was about more than just a legal transaction, it's all about *koinonia*. Onesimus, Philemon, and Paul are all equal partners before God, and they all share the same need for forgiveness. The ground is level before the cross. Philemon and Onesimus can no longer relate merely as "master" and "slave," because they are now family members, brothers in the Messiah. As Paul tells Philemon, along with the entire church of Colossae:

> "In God's new family people are not Greek or Jewish, circumcised or uncircumcised, foreigners or uncivilized, slave or free. But the Messiah is all, and is in all people" (Colossians 3:11).

VERSES 21–25

Paul then brings the short letter to a close, stating his confidence that Philemon will do even more than Paul has requested. Paul asks him to prepare a guest room, as he wants to visit as soon as he's out of prison. With a few final greetings, Paul ends the letter.

Paul's letter to Philemon is powerful for many reasons. It is the only letter in which Paul doesn't explicitly mention Jesus' death or resurrection. This is not an oversight. He doesn't need to explain the cross with words, because he is demonstrating it through his actions. Paul is embodying the meaning of the cross, becoming the means by which Onesimus and Philemon are reconciled to God as well as to each other.

This letter shows us that the implications of the good news about Jesus are extremely personal, but never private. The fact that Philemon and Onesimus are now brothers in the Messiah makes their master-slave relationship totally irrelevant. The family of Jesus' people, where all are equal recipients of God's grace, is a new kind of society or a "new humanity," as Paul calls it (see Colossians 3:10). In this new society, people's value and social status is no longer defined by race, gender, social or economic class. In the Messiah, they are just new humans who are equal partners, sharing together in God's healing mercy through Jesus.

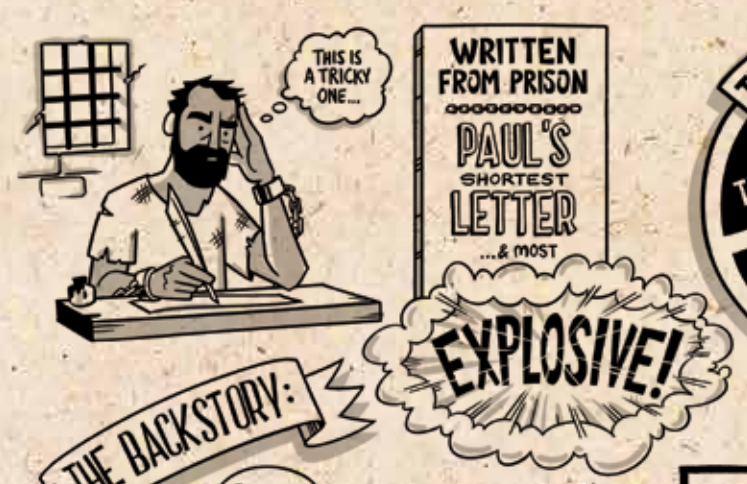
That's what Paul's letter to Philemon is about.

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

THE MISSION: GET PHILEMON TO FORGIVE ONESIMUS AND EMBRACE HIM AS A BROTHER

- THE ONLY LETTER WHERE PAUL DOESN'T *TALK ABOUT* JESUS' DEATH & RESURRECTION...BECAUSE HE'S *ACTING IT OUT.*

- THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE GOOD NEWS ARE **PERSONAL**, BUT NEVER **PRIVATE**: JESUS' FAMILY IS A NEW HUMANITY OF EQUAL **PARTNERS** WHO SHARE TOGETHER IN GOD'S HEALING MERCY. (COLOSSIANS 3:10)



THE BACKSTORY:



vv1-7 OPENING PRAYER



vv8-20 PAUL'S REQUEST



vv21-25 FINAL GREETING



THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

The author of this letter is unknown. People have long speculated over whether or not Paul or one of his co-workers wrote it, like Barnabas or Apollos. But really we just don't know. There is an interesting bit of information about the author in 2:3–4, where he says he had a firsthand relationship with the disciples who were around Jesus. So, even if we don't know who wrote this letter, we do know that it is anchored in the teaching of the apostles.

It's also unclear who the audience of this letter was or where they lived. The author, however, knows them well, and he also assumes they have a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, especially that of the first five books. The author expects them to be very familiar with the story of Abraham's family, all the details of the Exodus, what happened at Mt. Sinai about Israel's journey through the wilderness. Because of this expectation, it's most likely that this letter was written to Jewish Christians, which explains the letter's title, "to the Hebrews."

We have clues from verses 10:32–34 that this community was facing persecution and imprisonment because of their association with Jesus, and that some in the community were abandoning the faith. All of this explains the purpose and structure of the letter. There is a short introduction (Hebrews 1:1–4) followed by four sections, in which the author compares and contrasts Jesus with key people and events from Israel's history: Angels and the Torah (chs. 1–2), Moses and the Promised Land (chs. 3–4), the Priests and Melchizedek (chs. 5–7), the Sacrifices and the Covenant (chs. 8–10). After all these comparisons he challenges these Christians to follow Jesus no matter the cost (chs. 11–13).

Throughout all the comparisons that make up the main body of the letter, the author has two main goals. First, he elevates Jesus as superior to anyone and anything else in order to show that he is worthy of total trust and devotion. Second, he is leveling a challenge to these believers to remain faithful to Jesus, despite persecution. This is why each section includes a strong warning to not abandon Jesus.

CHAPTERS 1–2

The elevation of Jesus begins right away in the opening sentence of the introduction, "In the past God spoke to our ancestors in many different ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us in his Son" (Hebrews 1:1). The author is saying that Jesus is superior to all the previous ways God had revealed himself to Israel. He goes on to make an astounding claim that Jesus is "the radiance of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's nature." These metaphors of "radiance" and "imprinting" are making the closest possible identification between Jesus and the God of Israel. Jesus is what the rays of light are to the sun, or what the wax impression is to a signet ring. For this author, there is no God apart from Jesus. He is the one true Creator God, become human as the Son. It's this elevated view of Jesus that continues to be explored throughout the whole letter.

Chapters 1–2 compare Jesus to angels, which might strike you as a bit odd. In Jewish tradition, it was taught that the Torah and the words of God were delivered to Moses at Mt. Sinai by angels (see Deuteronomy 33:2). So, by saying that Jesus is superior to angels, the author is claiming that Jesus and his message of good news are superior to all previous messengers of God's Word.

The first warning flows out from this key point. If Israel was called to pay attention to the Torah delivered by angels, how much more should we pay attention to the message announced by the Son of God? Not only that, but given Jesus' status above the angels, how remarkable is it that he gave it up to become human and to suffer and die? In Jesus, we see God's great glory and humility, as he sympathetically joined himself to humanity's tragic fate.

CHAPTERS 3–4

Chapters 3–4 move on to argue that Jesus is superior to Moses, who had led Israel through the wilderness and built the tabernacle. Jesus is also a leader of God's people, but in him we see the builder of not just a tent, but all creation. The author retells the story of how the Israelites had rebelled against Moses in the wilderness, losing their chance to enter into the rest God had offered in the Promised Land. It's from this that the second warning comes. If Jesus is greater than Moses, how much higher are the stakes if we rebel against him? We are also in a similar wilderness environment, trusting in God for the future rest of the new creation. Let's make sure that we don't act like Israel did in the wilderness, losing out on God's gracious offer to enter that new world.

CHAPTERS 5–7

Chapters 5–7 compare Jesus to Israel's priests from the line of Aaron. The role of these priests was to represent Israel before God and offer sacrifices that atoned for the sins of the people. However, those same priests were themselves morally flawed, and so they constantly had to offer sacrifices for their own sins as well as for others. Something more was needed, something like an ultimate priest. Jesus, says the author, was that priest, but he didn't come from the line of Aaron.

Jesus was actually a priest in the order of Melchizedek, that mysterious priest-king in ancient Jerusalem who briefly appears in the stories of Abraham (see Genesis 14). In Psalm 110, we're told that the messianic king from the line of David would be a priest from the order of Melchizedek. The point of all this is that Jesus is the ultimate priest-king. He is morally flawless and eternally available for his people, and so he is simply superior to any other mediator between God and humans. With this in mind, the author warns that to reject Jesus is to reject one's only chance to be reconciled to God.

CHAPTERS 8–10

This brings us to the last comparison in chapters 8–10. The author shows how Jesus' death on the cross was the ultimate sacrifice, vastly superior to any animal sacrifices offered in the temple. Those sacrifices had to be offered every day and every year on the Day of Atonement. In contrast, when Jesus offered his life once and for all, it was sufficient to cover the sins of the entire world. The author warns that walking away from Jesus is turning your back on God's gracious offer of forgiveness. Jesus' sacrifice is permanent and acts as the foundation for the new covenant spoken of in the Prophets, in which all sins are forgiven.

CHAPTERS 11–13

Now that the author has elevated Jesus through all these comparisons, the final section is one big challenge to continue to follow him. Given all that has been said about Jesus, that he is God's very Word (chs. 1–2) and offers hope for new creation (chs. 3–4), that he is an eternal priest (chs. 5–7) and the perfect sacrifice (chs. 8–10), it only makes sense that we should follow all the great models of faith found within the story of the Scriptures (ch. 11) by remaining faithful to Jesus. He urges these suffering Christians to trust that, despite hardship and persecution, God will not abandon his people (chs. 12–13).

Here's a few extra tips when reading this letter. When the author quotes from the Old Testament, which is nearly every other sentence, you should stop to look up the reference and read the quotation in its original context. Sometimes you'll be puzzled, but more often than not you will see extra connections that you would not have noticed otherwise. It's worth the effort.

Also, if these warning passages make you uncomfortable, you should know that's kind of the point. They're not meant to make you afraid, but to show you that rejecting Jesus is foolish. The warnings all serve the larger purpose of showing that Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God. That's what the letter to the Hebrews is all about.

THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

JESUS IS THE ULTIMATE REVELATION OF GOD

AUTHOR: ?

- PAUL?
- BARNABAS?
- APOLLOS?

APOSTLES → JESUS

AUDIENCE: ?

SEE 10:32-34

PERSECUTION & IMPRISONMENT

THOROUGH KNOWLEDGE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE

ABRAHAM · NATION OF ISRAEL · MOSES AT MT. SINAI · TORAH & COVENANT · PRIESTS AND SACRIFICES · THE WILDERNESS · THE PROMISED LAND

HA! A "BRIEF" WORD OF EXHORTATION 13:22

2 MAIN GOALS

#1 ELEVATE JESUS AS SUPERIOR

#2 CHALLENGE THE READER TO REMAIN FAITHFUL TO JESUS DESPITE PERSECUTION

JESUS EQUALS...

"THE Radiance OF GOD'S GLORY"

"THE EXACT IMPRINT OF GOD'S NATURE"

GOD · JESUS

THESE METAPHORS MAKE THE CLOSEST POSSIBLE IDENTIFICATION BETWEEN JESUS AND GOD

1:1-3

IN THE PAST GOD SPOKE TO OUR ANCESTORS IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS, BUT IN THESE LAST DAYS HE HAS SPOKEN TO US IN HIS SON

1-2 ANGELS & TORAH

SEE DEUTERONOMY 33:2

GOD'S GLORY · GOD'S HUMILITY · GOOD NEWS

WARNING

ISRAEL · US · GOOD NEWS

GOD'S WORD

3-4 MOSES & THE PROMISED LAND

ISRAEL · GOD'S PEOPLE · PROMISED LAND

WARNING

US · NEW CREATION

HOPE FOR NEW CREATION

5-7 PRIESTS & MELCHIZEDEK

LINE OF AARON · PRIEST · SIN · GOD

GENESIS 14 · PSALM 110

LINE OF MELCHIZEDEK · JESUS · ULTIMATE PRIEST WHO OFFERED PERFECT SACRIFICE · PERMANENT · ETERNAL · GOD

WARNING

REJECTING JESUS = REJECTING RECONCILIATION WITH GOD

ETERNAL PRIEST

8-10 SACRIFICE & COVENANT

DAILY & YEARLY · FOUNDATION OF THE NEW COVENANT · ONCE FOR ALL

WARNING

OFFER OF FORGIVENESS

PERFECT SACRIFICE

11-13

FOLLOW GREAT MODELS OF FAITH

ABEL · ENOCH · NOAH · ABRAHAM · SARAH · ISAAC · JACOB · JOSEPH · MOSES · RAHAB

DESPITE HARDSHIP & PERSECUTION GOD WILL NOT ABANDON HIS PEOPLE

Extra Tips

#1 LOOK UP OLD TESTAMENT QUOTATIONS (THERE ARE A LOT)

#2 THE POINT IS TO FEEL A BIT UNCOMFORTABLE, BUT NOT AFRAID

THE LETTER OF JAMES

The original pronunciation of this author's name in Greek was *Iakobos*, which spelled his Hebrew name *ya'akov*. This is why most ancient and modern translations render his name as "Jacob," and that's what we will call him as well.

There are many Jacobs in the New Testament. Two of them belonged to Jesus' inner circle of twelve disciples, the son of Zebedee and the son of Alphaeus (see Mark 3:16–19). This letter, however, comes from the Jacob who was a half-brother to Jesus himself (see Mark 6:3).

We learn this Jacob's story from the book of Acts and Paul's letters (see Acts 12 and 15, and Galatians 1–2). After Peter moved on from Jerusalem to start new churches, Jesus' half brother Jacob rose to prominence as a leader of the mother church in Jerusalem, made up of messianic Jews. This church was the first Christian community ever, and we know that it fell on hard times during the twenty years that Jacob was its leader. There was a famine that led to great poverty in their region, while, at the same time, these messianic Jews were being persecuted by the traditional Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. Jacob, however, was known as a "pillar" of this Jerusalem church, acting as a peacemaker who led with wisdom and courage until his untimely death. He was murdered by the priestly establishment in Jerusalem for following Jesus sometime around 62 A.D.

In this book, we have the legacy of Jacob's teaching and wisdom condensed into a short but very powerful work. While it does begin like a letter, with Jacob greeting all the messianic Jews living outside the land of Israel, the rest of the work doesn't read like a letter at all. It doesn't address the specific problems of one local church, like Paul's letters. Instead, this book is a summary of Jacob's sage wisdom for any and every community of Jesus' followers. His goal isn't to teach us new theological information, rather he wants to get in your business and challenge how you live.

Jacob's wisdom has been heavily influenced by two sources, the first of which is Jesus' teaching about life in the kingdom of God, especially the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5–7). The second key influence is the biblical wisdom book of Proverbs, especially the poems in Proverbs 1–9. Jacob literally grew up with Jesus and the book of Proverbs, so his own teaching sounds a lot like them both and is stamped with their language and imagery. This book is made up of short, challenging wisdom speeches, which are full of metaphors and easy to memorize one-liners.

In essence, Jacob is calling the messianic community to become truly wise by living according to Jesus' summary of the Torah: love God, and love your neighbor as yourself.

CHAPTERS 2–5

The body of the book is found within chapters 2–5, consisting of twelve short teachings that call God's people to wholehearted devotion to the way of Jesus. All together, they don't develop one, main idea in a linear way. Instead, each teaching stands alone and usually concludes with a catchy one-liner. They are all connected through key repeated words and themes.

We begin with the first teaching, which is all about favoritism and love (James 2:1–13). Jacob exposes how we tend to show favor to people who can benefit us, and we neglect people who can't, because they are needy. This behavior is the exact opposite of love as Jesus defined it (see Matthew 5:46–48). Jacob goes on to show what genuine faith does and does not look like (James 2:14–26). If someone says that they have faith in God but neglects the needs of the poor, this person's faith is dead. Their actions betray what they say they believe. Genuine faith will always result in obedience to Jesus' teachings (see Matthew 7:21–27).

Scattered throughout this section of the book, we find three different places where Jacob develops Jesus' own teaching about our words. With the very same mouth, we unleash pain on others while offering praise to God (James 3:1–12). We judge people and talk badly about them behind their backs (James 4:11–12), and we all tend to distort the truth to our own advantage (James 5:12). This is so backwards and hypocritical! How we talk to and about people opens a window into our hearts and our core values. Our words tell the real truth about our character.

Jacob also believes that God's kingdom community, as Jesus taught about it, is a place where the divisions created by wealth and social status are dismantled. He warns of the arrogance that wealth can create in people, especially those who believe that it will be around forever (James 4:13–17). Their wealth, however, will one day rot away just as they will (James 5:1–6). In contrast, God's people are to live with the patient hope for Jesus' return to set all things right (James 5:7–11, see Matthew 24:13), and this should in turn inspire a life full of faith filled prayer (James 5:13–18, see Matthew 21:21–22).

This part of the book is really powerful. Each teaching deserves slow rereading over a cup of tea, followed by a long walk.

CHAPTER 1

Now, before you even come across the twelve wise teachings surveyed above, the introductory chapter is designed to sum up the main ideas to the entire book. Chapter 1 is a flowing stream of wise teachings and one-liners that introduce you to all of the keywords and themes that you'll see in chapters 2–5.

Jacob knows from personal experience that life is hard. After all, he was martyred not long after writing this letter. He believes, however, that life's trials and hardships are paradoxical gifts that can produce endurance and shape our character. God can work on us in the midst of suffering to help us become "perfect and complete" (James 1:4). Now, this word "perfect" is important for Jacob and he repeats it seven times throughout the book (James 1:4, 1:17, 1:25, 2:8, 2:23, and 3:2). In biblical Hebrew, the word is *tamim*, while the Greek is *teleios*. This word refers to "wholeness." In this context, it means living a completely integrated life in which your actions are always consistent with the values and beliefs you learned from Jesus. Jacob knows that most of us live as fractured people, with large inconsistencies in our character. All of us are more compromised than we'd ever like to admit, but God is on a mission to restore fractured people and to make them whole.

This journey begins with gaining wisdom, the ability to see hardships through a new perspective (James 1:5–8). God will generously give such wisdom to people who ask for it in faith, without doubting God's character. It's when we realize our humble and frail place before God that we're forced to choose between anxiety or trust. True wisdom is choosing to believe that God is good, despite any circumstances.

In James 1:9–11, Jacob assumes that hard times in life are often caused by poverty. He urges that you try to view this circumstance as a gift that forces you to trust in God alone. Besides, wealth is fleeting and will pass away like wildflowers in the summer heat.

When we do fall into hard times (James 1:12–18), we must not accuse God. Rather, we should let our circumstances teach us what Jesus himself taught about God's character, that the Father is generous, there to meet us in our pain, and is trustworthy. This God, has "given us new birth" through Jesus to become new kinds of humans, who can face their suffering with total trust in the Father, just as Jesus did.

This new humanity is something that we discover when we not only listen to God's word, but actually do what it says (James 1:19–27). Jacob calls God's word "the perfect Torah of freedom." He's referring here to the greatest command of the Torah as interpreted by Jesus (see Matthew 22:34–40), in which he freed us to love God and our neighbor. Jacob then shows us practically what that looks like. It means speaking to others in a kind and loving way, serving the poor, and living with wholehearted devotion to God alone.

You can see how this one opening chapter contains all the key words and ideas that are explored more deeply in the twelve teachings of chapters 2–5. Jacob immersed himself in the teachings of Jesus and the Proverbs, and he's given us a great gift in this book of his own wisdom. It's a beautifully crafted punch in the gut for those who want to follow Jesus, and that's what the book of James, or Jacob, is all about.

THE LETTER OF JAMES

A.K.A. JACOB
HEBREW: YA'AKOV
GREEK: IAKOBOS

MANY JACOBS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT:

SON OF ZEBEDEE
SON OF ALPHAEUS
BROTHER OF JESUS (SEE MARK 6:3)
†=👑
JESUS' TWELVE DISCIPLES (SEE MARK 3:16-19)

SEE ACTS 12&15, GALATIANS 1-2
- LEADER OF THE MESSIANIC MOTHER CHURCH IN JERUSALEM
- LIVED THROUGH FAMINE, POVERTY, & PERSECUTION

THE LEGACY OF JACOB'S WISDOM

A LETTER TO: ALL OF JESUS' FOLLOWERS

OUCH.
WHOA!
DANG.

TWO MAIN INFLUENCES:

JESUS' TEACHING — especially the SERMON ON THE MOUNT — SEE MATTHEW 5-7
+
THE BOOK OF PROVERBS — especially CHAPTERS 1-9
=
SHORT WISDOM SPEECHES FULL OF METAPHORS & ONE-LINERS

REPEATED 7 TIMES!
HEBREW: TAMIM
GREEK: TELEIOS
"WHOLENESS" & INTEGRITY
VS.
FRACTURED & INCONSISTENT

SUMS UP THE BOOK'S MAIN IDEAS & KEY WORDS

1 INTRODUCTION

v.2-4 LIFE'S TRIALS PRODUCE ENDURANCE & CAN MAKE US "PERFECT"

v.5-8 GOD GIVES WISDOM TO THOSE WHO ASK IN FAITH

v.9-11 POVERTY CAN FORCE US TO TRUST GOD: WEATH WILL PASS AWAY

v.12-18 GOD IS GENEROUS & GIVES US NEW BIRTH THROUGH JESUS

v.19-27 DON'T JUST LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD, BUT DO IT.

THE TORAH of FREEDOM

CALLS US TO:
- SPEAK WITH LOVE
- SERVE THE POOR
- TO BE WHOLLY DEVOTED TO GOD

TRUE WISDOM

JESUS' SUMMARY OF THE TORAH: LOVE GOD & LOVE NEIGHBOR
SEE MATTHEW 22:34-40

2:1-13 FAVORITISM VS. LOVE
YOU GOT THIS!
SEE MATTHEW 5:46-48

2:14-26 GENUINE FAITH
DEAD FAITH
SURE, I BELIEVE... STAY WARM, FRIEND!
SEE MATTHEW 7:21-27

3:1-12 THE TONGUE
PRAISE GOD!
YOU IDIOT!
SEE LUKE 6:43-45

3:13-18 TRUE VS. FALSE WISDOM
SEE MATTHEW 5:3-11

4:1-10 A DIVIDED HEART
SEE MATTHEW 6:24

4:11-12 CONDEMNING OTHERS
SEE MATTHEW 12:36-37

4:13-17 THE ARROGANCE OF WEALTH
ESTIMATED PROFITS
YOUR LIFE IS JUST A MIST!
SEE MATTHEW 6:28-34

5:1-6 THE DANGER OF WEALTH
YOUR WEALTH WILL ROT, JUST LIKE YOU!
SEE MATTHEW 6:19-21

5:7-11 PATIENCE & ENDURANCE
COME, LORD JESUS...
SEE MATTHEW 24:13

5:12 TELLING THE TRUTH — LET YOUR "YES" MEAN "YES"
SEE MATTHEW 5:37

5:13-18 FAITH-FILLED PRAYER
SEE MATTHEW 21:21-22

5:19-20 RESTORING OTHERS
SEE MATTHEW 18:15

2-5 12 TEACHINGS ABOUT WHOLEHEARTED DEVOTION TO JESUS

THE FIRST LETTER OF PETER

His name was Simon when he became one of Jesus' first followers and part of the inner circle of the twelve disciples. When he made his confession that Jesus was the Messiah (see Matthew 16:18–19), Jesus changed his name to *kephas*—an Aramaic word meaning "rock," which would later be translated into Greek as *Petros* or "Peter." Jesus promised that he would become a leader among the apostles to guide the messianic community in Jerusalem through its earliest years. If we look back at chapters 1–10 of the book of Acts, this would prove to become true.

Eventually, however, Peter was called to carry the good news of Jesus beyond the borders of Israel, and decades into his mission into the wider Roman world, he wrote this letter. We discover at the letter's conclusion that Peter is in Rome (though he calls it "Babylon"), and we learn that, while Peter commissioned the letter, it was actually composed by his co-worker Silvanus (1 Peter 5:12–13).

This was a circular letter that was sent to multiple church communities in the Roman province of Asia Minor (in modern day Turkey). Peter learned that these mostly non-Jewish Christians were being persecuted, facing hostility and harassment from their Greek and Roman neighbors (1 Peter 2:12, 3:16, and 4:16). Peter wrote to encourage them in their suffering, which helps us understand the letter's design and main themes.

It opens with a greeting in verses 1:1–2, and then moves into a poetic song of praise to God (1 Peter 1:3–12). This poem introduces the key themes that are then explored in the next three movements, in which he affirms the new family identity of these Christians (1 Peter 1:13–2:10), helps them to see their suffering as a way to bear witness to Jesus (1 Peter 2:11–4:11), and encourages them to focus their future hope on the return of Jesus (1 Peter 4:12–5:11).

CHAPTER 1:1–12

Peter opens by greeting these churches as the "chosen" people of God who are "exiled" around the world (1 Peter 1:1). While he makes it clear that these Christians are Gentiles (1 Peter 1:14, 18, and 4:3–4), Peter goes on to describe them with phrases from the Old Testament that tell how God "chose" Israel (see Genesis 18:19 and Isaiah 41:8), the family stemming from Abraham who was himself an "exile and wanderer" (see Genesis 23:4). This is a key strategy that Peter repeats through the entire letter. He wants these suffering Gentile Christians to see that, through Jesus, they now belong to the family of Abraham and are wandering exiles just like he was. They will likely be misunderstood and mistreated like their spiritual ancestors as they wait for their true home in the Promised Land.

This idea is immediately found within the opening song (1 Peter 1:3–12). He praises God for causing people to be "born again into a living hope" through Jesus' resurrection and the power of the Spirit. God is inviting all people into a new family centered around Jesus, a family that has a new identity as God's beloved children and a new hope of a world reborn by God's love when Jesus returns as king. For people with this hope, suffering and persecution is actually like a strange gift, because it burns away false hopes and distractions like a purifying fire and reminds us of our true home. So, paradoxically, life's hardships actually deepen our faith and make it more genuine. From here, Peter moves into the body of the letter and explores these ideas in greater depth.

CHAPTERS 1:13–2:10

He first develops the theme of their new family identity (1 Peter 1:13–2:10) by taking memorable Old Testament images about the family of Israel and applying them to these Gentile Christians. Like the Israelites who left Egypt, they, too, are to "gird up their loins" (1 Peter 1:13, see Exodus 12:11), and leave behind their former life on the way to a new future. They are the "holy people" of God journeying through the wilderness (1 Peter 1:15–16, see Leviticus 11:44), as well as the people of the new Exodus, redeemed by the blood of Jesus, the ultimate Passover lamb (1 Peter 1:17–21, see Exodus 12–15). They are the people of the new covenant who have God's Word buried deep inside, restoring their hearts and minds (1 Peter 1:22–25, see Isaiah 40:6–8 and Jeremiah 31:31–34). Finally, they are the new temple, built on the foundation of Jesus himself (1 Peter 2:1–8, see Isaiah 28:16 and Psalm 118:22), as well as the new kingdom of priests who serve God as his representatives to the nations (1 Peter 2:9–10; see Exodus 19:4–6 and Isaiah 43:21).

CHAPTERS 2:11–4:11

By applying all these images to persecuted Gentile Christians, he places their suffering within the context of a new story. This leads into the next section (1 Peter 2:11–4:11), where their persecution can actually help clarify their mission in the world. They are called to bear witness to God's mercy among the nations. Peter first encourages them to submit to Roman rule, even if it's oppressive (1 Peter 2:13–17). While their persecution and suffering are indeed unjust, resisting with violence will solve nothing and will betray the teachings of Jesus, who loved his enemies instead of killing them.

Peter then specifically highlights the difficult situation that Christian slaves and wives faced when they lived in Roman households where the patriarch did not follow Jesus (1 Peter 2:18–3:7). Peter was well aware that giving allegiance to Jesus would generate suspicion, because it was expected that everyone in the household would submit to and worship the patriarch's gods. And while it is true that all Christians, including Roman wives and slaves, have been fully liberated by Jesus, they are to demonstrate that freedom not through rebellion. Rather they are to resist evil in the same way Jesus did, by showing love and generosity to his enemies. So that's what Peter calls these wives and slaves to do as well.

Now, in homes where the husband is a Christian, there is a different story. These husbands are to treat their wives in a totally different way than their Roman neighbors, by regarding them as equals before God that are worthy of honor and respect.

Peter is hopeful that this imitation of Jesus' love and the upside-down kingdom will give power to their words as they bear witness to God's mercy and show people the beautiful truth about the way of Jesus. However, Peter is also a realist. He knows that these Christians will continue to be persecuted, so he reminds them of their future vindication (1 Peter 3:8–4:11). He recalls how Jesus himself was unfairly persecuted and murdered by corrupt human powers. But, in reality, he was dying for the sins of his enemies, and afterward he was vindicated and given resurrection life by the Spirit. That's when he was exalted as king over all human and spiritual powers.

Peter goes on to show how baptism points to the same future vindication of Jesus' persecuted followers. Like Noah, they've been saved through the waters, not as a magic ritual, but as a sacred symbol that shows their change of heart and desire to be joined to Jesus in his death and resurrection. This way, even if they are killed for following Jesus, their hope is in future vindication and exaltation alongside him.

CHAPTERS 4:12–5:14

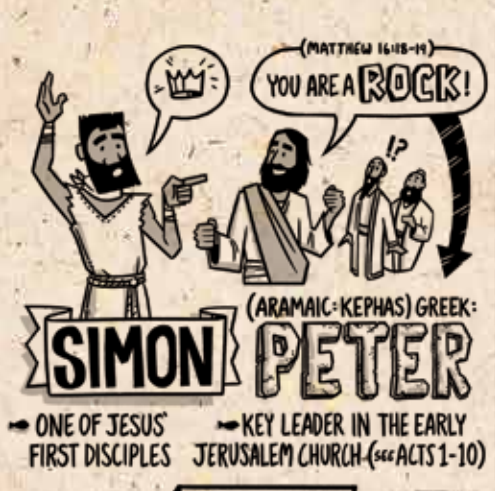
As we proceed into the final movement (1 Peter 4:12–5:11), Peter recalls Jesus' words that his disciples should consider it an honor and a joy to be persecuted like he was (1 Peter 4:12–19, see Matthew 5:11–12). Peter then calls on the church leaders to care for these suffering Christians (1 Peter 5:1–5), showing the same kind of servant-leadership that Jesus showed to his followers. Finally, Peter reminds these Christians of the real enemy they're facing. This hostility isn't just cultural or political, as there are dark forces of spiritual evil at work inspiring hate and violence (1 Peter 5:6–9). They are to resist this evil by staying faithful to Jesus and his teachings, anticipating his return and then ultimate victory.

Peter concludes in verses 5:10–14, with a prayer for divine strength, and a greeting from the church in Rome, which he calls "Babylon." Peter is adopting here the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, for whom the name "Babylon" became an archetype for any and every corrupt nation (remember Jeremiah 50–51). Rome has become the new Babylon, and its empire is where God's people are now "exiled" from their true home in the renewed creation.

Peter's first letter is a powerful reminder of Christian hope in the midst of suffering. God's people have been a misunderstood minority from the very beginning. They should expect to face hostility because they live under the rule of a different king, Jesus. However, persecution can become a strange gift to the church, offering a chance to show others the surprising generosity and love of Jesus, which is fueled by the hope of his return.

This powerful, living hope, is what Peter's first letter is all about.

1 PETER





HOPE IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING

- GOD'S PEOPLE ARE A MISUNDERSTOOD MINORITY, LIVING UNDER THE RULE OF A DIFFERENT KING.
- PERSECUTION OFFERS A CHANCE TO SHOW OTHERS THE GENEROUS LOVE OF JESUS.

1:1-2 GREETING



1:3-12 SONG OF PRAISE



1:13-2:10 A NEW FAMILY IDENTITY



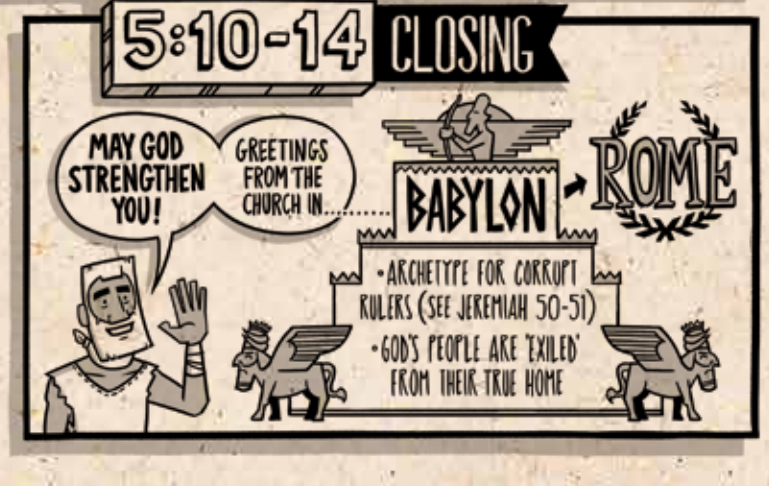
2:11-4:11 SUFFERING AS A WITNESS TO JESUS



4:12-5:9 SUFFERING & FUTURE HOPE



5:10-14 CLOSING



THE SECOND LETTER OF PETER

This letter is addressed to the same network of churches as Peter's first letter (see 1 Peter 1:1 and 2 Peter 3:1), and was likely sent from the same location in Rome (see 1 Peter 5:13). Peter has become aware of the fact that he is going to die soon (2 Peter 1:14), and the evidence we have from early tradition is that Peter was executed by the Roman authorities during the reign of emperor Nero. This letter, in effect, acts as Peter's farewell speech.

He begins by challenging Jesus' followers to never stop growing (ch. 1). This is followed by two final warnings about the growing number of corrupt teachers who are leading Christians astray through their twisted way of life as well as by their distorted theology (chs. 2–3). In each of these sections, Peter counters accusations made by these leaders against himself and the other apostles. His goal is to restore confidence and order to these church communities.

CHAPTER 1

Peter begins by reminding these churches that, through Jesus, God has invited people to become "participants of his divine nature" (2 Peter 1:3). That is, to share in God's own eternal life and love. This is an incredible gift that requires lifelong responsibility. To receive this gift means a commitment to developing the same character traits that mark God's own "divine nature:" moral goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, and family affection. The final trait, love, encompasses and crowns all the others. According to Jesus, love means devoting oneself to the well-being of others no matter their response or the cost involved.

Peter continues on to state the letter's purpose. It will act as a memorial of his teaching, passing its knowledge onto later generations (2 Peter 1:12–15) as he knows he won't be around much longer to give it in person. Additionally, before he dies, he wants to address the accusations being made by leaders who distort the teaching of Jesus and the apostles.

Peter first addresses an objection repeated by skeptics present and future. It's the claim that Peter and the apostles just made up everything about Jesus being the risen king of the world and about his future return (2 Peter 1:16–20). As a counter, Peter offers his eye-witness testimony of the powerful moment of Jesus' transformation on the mountain (see Mark 9:1–8), where the apostles saw Jesus exalted as king. His resurrection means that he is alive as king and will return to rescue our world one day. Furthermore, Jesus' future return to bring God's kingdom will fulfill what the ancient Scriptures have been pointing to all along. The words of the Old Testament prophets are not fabricated fantasies, but, through the human words of the Scriptures and through the human Jesus, God himself has spoken to us.

CHAPTER 2

In Chapter 2, Peter moves on to address the corrupt teachers' way of life, which is connected to another objection. These leaders deny the idea of a final reckoning (2 Peter 2:1–3), the time when God will hold all people accountable for their choices. This denial conveniently allows them to ignore Jesus' teaching about money and sex, as they are shamelessly sleeping around and making tons of profit by teaching in churches.

Peter recalls three ancient examples when God brought his justice against such rebellion (2 Peter 2:4–11). In the first example he mentions the story of the "sons of God" in Genesis 6 as it was interpreted in a popular Jewish work called 1 Enoch. In this text these "sons" were identified as rebellious angels who crossed the line and slept with women, earning divine judgment. He also reminds us of the story of the ancient flood (see Genesis 6–8), followed up by the third example, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (see Genesis 19). In each case, there was rebellion leading to divine judgment. But, as Peter points out, God was always faithful to deliver his people, just as the story of Lot shows.

Peter then connects these ancient stories to the teachers' corrupt way of life. They are after money and sex, they despise authority, and they lead people to think that God doesn't care about our moral decisions. They teach a message of Christian "freedom" as a license to do whatever they want. This is why Peter brings up Paul's letters later in 2 Peter 3:15–16.

It appears that these teachers have distorted Paul's message of liberation in Christ (see Romans 6). These behaviors and the justification for their actions are not what Paul intended, and Peter makes it clear that these teachers are not free. In reality they are slaves to their bodily impulses. The fact that they are Christians makes it more tragic, because knowing Jesus' teachings makes them doubly-accountable. They have become pitiful examples of the ancient proverbs about a dog returning to its vomit (see Proverbs 26:11), and a washed pig going back to the mud.

CHAPTER 3

Peter continues by addressing the reasoning behind their denial of the final reckoning (2 Peter 3:1–4). The skeptics say that "generations of God's people keeping passing away without seeing the fulfillment of their hopes. Where is this promised return of Jesus?" Peter counters by showing how short-sighted this objection is. "Look around," he says, "at this remarkable universe we inhabit" (2 Peter 3:5–9). The fact that we exist at all means that, at some moment in the past, God's word "intervened" in a dramatic way to bring something out of nothing, order out of chaos, and he can do so again.

Here's the real question. Why is God taking so long? Peter reminds us that our human conception of time is extremely limited. The long expanses of time through which God works don't fit neatly within the framework of our very short lives. This is actually a sign of God's patience. Each generation is offered the chance to recognize their selfishness, to humble themselves, and to repent before his generous grace.

Indeed, God's grace will bring the story to a close on the day of the Lord (2 Peter 3:10–13). Peter draws upon the prophetic poetry of Isaiah chapter 34 and Zephaniah chapters 3. These poems described the day of God's justice as a consuming fire. Peter says that "the heavens will pass away and the *stoicheia* will melt by fire" (2 Peter 3:10). This is a Greek word that can refer to the "elements," in which case Peter is talking about a future dissolution of the material universe. But the word can also mean "heavenly bodies" or the stars. The second meaning is how the word is used in Isaiah 34:4, where Peter is quoting from. In that case, the statement is a metaphor about the "sky being peeled back" before the God who sees all. This is why the fire doesn't result in the annihilation of creation, but rather that "the earth and all its works are exposed" (2 Peter 3:10).

The ultimate purpose of God's consuming justice is not to scrap the universe, but rather to expose evil and injustice and remove it so that a "new kind" of heaven and earth can emerge. It will be a creation that is permeated with "righteousness," where people know and love God and therefore love their neighbor as themselves.

Peter concludes by saying that this is the real Christian hope that Jesus and the apostles have been announcing. Including, of course, Paul, whose writings can be misunderstood if you rip his teachings out of their context. So don't do that!

The tone of 2 Peter feels really intense, but his passion comes from the firm conviction that God loves this world and is determined to rescue it through Jesus. This means that God's love must confront and deal with the sin and injustice that ruins his beloved. In God's own time he will do just that, opening up a new future for humanity and the universe itself. This is the wide, expansive vision of hope we discover in Peter's second letter.

2 PETER

TO THE CHURCHES ASIA MINOR (SEE 1 PETER 1:1; 2 PETER 3:1)

PETER'S FAREWELL SPEECH

I KNOW I DON'T HAVE LONG! (1:14)

2 PETER

NERO

1 A FINAL CHALLENGE

1:1-11 GOD'S INVITATION TO BECOME...

PARTICIPANTS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

GOD'S OWN LIFE & LOVE

LOVE — DEVOTION TO THE WELL-BEING OF OTHERS

GOODNESS · KNOWLEDGE · SELF-CONTROL · ENDURANCE · GODLINESS · FAMILY AFFECTION

1:12-15 THE LETTER'S PURPOSE

A MEMORIAL OF PETER'S TEACHINGS...

...TO LATER GENERATIONS...

2 PETER

1:16-20 OBJECTION #1:

YOU APOSTLES MADE ALL THIS UP!

WE SAW JESUS EXALTED AS KING OF THE WORLD...

...WHICH FULFILLS THE PROMISES OF PROPHETIC SCRIPTURES.

ISAIAH · MICAH · ZECHARIAH

2 WARNINGS ABOUT CORRUPT LEADERS' WAY OF LIFE...

2:1-3 OBJECTION #2:

THERE WON'T BE A FINAL RECKONING!

2:1-11 THREE ANCIENT EXAMPLES OF DIVINE JUSTICE

REBELLIOUS ANGELS (1 ENOCH, GENESIS 6)

THE FLOOD (GENESIS 6-8)

SODOM & GOMORRAH (GENESIS 19)

LOT

GOD DELIVERS PEOPLE

CORRUPT TEACHERS

2:12-22 THE TEACHERS' CORRUPT WAY OF LIFE

WE ARE FREE IN CHRIST... ...SAYS PAUL!

PAUL

THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT!

SEE ROMANS chapter 6

IN REALITY, THEY'RE SLAVES TO THEIR BODILY IMPULSES.

THEY'RE LIKE THE PROVERB: (26:11)

THE DOG · THE PIG

YUM!

3 ...& THEIR DISTORTED THEOLOGY

3:1-4 OBJECTION #3:

GENERATIONS COME & GO... WHEN IS JESUS' PROMISED RETURN? SO WHY DOES GOD TAKE SO LONG?!

3:5-9 THE UNIVERSE EXISTS BECAUSE OF GOD'S INTERVENING WORD

OUR CONCEPT OF TIME IS LIMITED & GOD IS PATIENT

3:10-13 THE DAY OF THE LORD SEE ISAIAH 34, ZEPHANIAH 3

3:10 "THE HEAVENS WILL PASS AWAY & THE GREEK STOICHEIA WILL MELT BY FIRE..."

...SO THAT THE EARTH & ALL ITS WORKS ARE EXPOSED."

GOD'S PURPOSE:

1 "ELEMENTS" — THE UNIVERSE DISSOLVES

God

2 "HEAVENLY BODIES" ☆☆☆ A QUOTE FROM ISAIAH 34:4

- NOT TO SCRAP THE UNIVERSE
- TO EXPOSE EVIL & REMOVE IT

NEW HEAVEN & EARTH

METAPHOR: THE SKY IS "PEELED BACK" BEFORE GOD

3:14-18 CONCLUSION:

...AND THIS IS THE TRUE CHRISTIAN HOPE!

DON'T TWIST MY WORDS!

JAMES JOHN PETER PAUL

PETER'S PASSIONATE CONVICTION:

GOD LOVES THE WORLD & IS DETERMINED TO RESCUE IT.

HE MUST CONFRONT & DEAL WITH EVIL TO OPEN THE WAY FOR A NEW FUTURE.

THE FIRST, SECOND, AND THIRD LETTERS OF JOHN

First John is actually anonymous, but second and third John are written by someone called "the Elder."

The language and style of all three letters are identical to each other as well as to John's Gospel, so most people think that all of them were written by the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (see John 21:20–24). This person, however, is yet another enigma. He could be John, son of Zebedee and one of the Twelve, or another John from amongst Jesus' early disciples, who was later known as "the Elder." Whichever John it is, he is now in his old age and is overseeing a network of house church communities, likely around ancient Ephesus.

From clues within the Gospel as well as the letters, it seems that these communities were made up mostly by Jewish followers of Jesus. We also learn that they had recently gone through a crisis, which had motivated John to write these letters. He mentions that a group of people have broken off from these churches, who no longer acknowledge Jesus as Israel's Messiah or as God's Son (1 John 2:18–23 and 4:1–3). To make matters worse, they are stirring up hostility among those who stayed behind (1 John 3:4–10).

2 & 3 JOHN

In fact, the second and third letters clearly address this conflict. 2 John is a warning to a specific house church. The people who deny Jesus, whom John calls the "deceivers," are probably going to come looking for validation or support. John specifically tells the church that they are not to offer any. 3 John, meanwhile, is written to a certain member of a house church, named Gaius. John asks Gaius to welcome the legitimate missionaries that will be arriving soon, because the leader of that church community, Diotrephes, is acting like a jerk and rejecting people that are associated with John the Elder.

These letters give us a window into the tension and conflict that John faced with these churches. This helps us see 1 John as a form of literary damage control. In it, the elder assures those who still believe in the messiah that God is with them as they adhere to the truth.

All this helps us better understand the uniqueness of 1 John, which is not actually a letter at all. The book reads more like a poetic sermon. John says that he's not communicating new information (1 John 2:9). In fact, almost all of the key words and images in the sermon come right from Jesus' teachings in chapters 13–17 of the Gospel of John. John's goal is to remind and persuade these Christians to stay true to what they already believe.

The poetic quality to John's sermon is important to note, as he doesn't develop his ideas in a linear or logical way. Rather, he uses a well-known technique of ancient rhetoric called "amplification." John has just a few core ideas to communicate about life, truth, and love, and he cycles around the ideas repeatedly. Each time he offers a slightly different angle and emphasis, using hyperbole and stark contrasts with simple, universal images. But don't let the sermon's simplicity fool you. This work is deeply profound.

Apart from the clear introduction and conclusion, the flowing cycles of the sermon don't offer a rigid literary design. That being said, there do seem to be two larger sections (1 John 1:5–3:10 and 3:11–5:17). Both of these are marked off by the introductory phrase "this is the message," followed by a concentration of images of God as light, and God as love. All of the ideas presented in each of these parts flow out of and cycle back into these core ideas.

1 JOHN 1:1–4

The introduction to this book is very similar to the prologue of the Gospel of John (compare 1 John 1:1–4 with John 1:1–18). It's packed with echoes of Genesis 1 and Proverbs 8, as John speaks about "the Word of Life" that was with God "in the beginning." For John, the word "God" refers to both the Father and the Son who came to bring life to the world. Those who saw, heard, and touched the Son are referred to as "we." In other words, John is talking about himself and the other apostles who were eyewitnesses to Jesus. And now "we" have a message for "you," the next generation. When the apostolic eyewitnesses share the "Word of Life" with others, they too are brought into "fellowship" with the Father, the Son, and the apostles. The word for this is *koinonia* in Greek, which means "participation or sharing." When people hear the genuine message about Jesus from the eyewitness apostles, the message brings them into a real relationship with the Savior himself, as well as into a real participation in God's own life and love.

1 JOHN 1:5–3:10

This thought flows right into the first main section (1 John 1:5–3:10). The message of the apostles is that the God revealed in Jesus is light. So, if they participate in God's own life through Jesus, then they need to keep "walking in the light," meaning that they must keep Jesus' commands. When they fail in this, his atoning death covers their sins for them and they are called again to obey his teachings. John reminds them of the command that Jesus gave his disciples at the Last Supper, to love one another as he loved them (see John 13:34). Doing this is like walking in the light.

If God's light is now shining through Jesus, then that means the world's darkness is passing away and God's children already have victory over the sin and death that reigns in the world. This leads John to give a challenge to the churches. Don't love the world, because it will pass away, too. John specifically refers to pride and sexual corruption, which were likely problems connected to the conflict that had recently happened in the churches.

John also takes time to warn these churches about the people who have left and who are denying Jesus as the Messiah (1 John 2:18–3:10). He calls them "anti-messiahs" and "deceivers." He's confident, however, in those who still know the truth about Jesus. These are truly the "children of God," who are loved by the Father and who show that they're a part of God's family by "doing righteousness" and loving each other. This is very unlike the deceivers, who are trying to generate anger and strife.

1 JOHN 3:11–5:17

This flows into the second main section of the sermon (1 John 3:11–5:17). Once again, John begins by saying "this is the message" from the apostles, that God is love. His children, therefore, should love each other and avoid hate. They are not become like Cain from Genesis 4, whose hatred led him to murder his own brother. For Christians, love is defined by Jesus giving up his life as a sacrifice for the well-being of others. When God's children trust in the love for them that was shown through Jesus, it changes their hearts and minds.

John warns them again about the deceivers, this time calling them "false-prophets" (1 John 4:1–21). When these people denied that Jesus is the Messiah, they also claimed to speak for God. John says, however, to test the spirits. If anyone claims to speak for God but doesn't focus on Jesus, they really don't speak for him. God's true children center their lives around the crucified Jesus, because that's where we see God's heart. On the cross God is revealed as a being of total self-giving love, compelling us to love others in the same way. When you meet this God of love, it does away with fear and angst for good.

This is a part of what John means by having "victory" over the world (1 John 5:1–17). When you realize that God is crazy about you, his love becomes the thing that grounds your whole life. This love is what comes through trusting in the crucified Jesus and trusting in God's testimony, which is given by both the Spirit and the apostles. When God's love gets a hold of you, it opens up "eternal life." This is a way of existing in the world, a way of life that is permeated with God's own life and love, beginning now and carrying on into eternity.

1 JOHN 5:18–21

With that, we are brought to the climactic conclusion to the sermon:

> "We know the Son of God has come so we can know the One who is true. And we are in the One who is true, in his Son Jesus the Messiah. This is the true God, and eternal life" (1 John 5:18–21).

Now, your head might be spinning and you're probably wondering, "Wait, who is the One who is true and gives me true life? Jesus, or God?" And John's answer is simply, "yes." John doesn't know any God apart from Jesus. When he and the other apostles encountered Jesus, they discovered the God who loves us so deeply that he has chosen not to exist without us, despite our failures. This revelation of God is so surprising and unexpected that John's final words call us to "keep away from idols," that is, to resist any temptation to remake this God in our own image (1 John 5:21).

To know Jesus is to know the God of creative, life-giving and self-giving love. This is the one, true God, and that's what the letters of John are all about.

THE LETTERS OF 1·2·3 JOHN

THE AUTHOR

"THE ELDER" (SEE 2&3 JOHN) ⇨ THE DISCIPLE JESUS LOVED (SEE JOHN 21:20-24)

JOHN
- SON OF ZEBEDEE?
- THE ELDER?





THE CRISIS



- A GROUP LEFT THE CHURCH & DENIED JESUS AS MESSIAH & SON OF GOD (SEE 1 JOHN 2:18-23, 1:1-3)
- THEY'VE GENERATED HOSTILITY (1 JOHN 3:1-10)
- JOHN WROTE THESE FOR DAMAGE CONTROL & TO ASSURE THE CHURCHES.

KNOWING JESUS = KNOWING THE GOD of LOVE

THE UNIQUENESS OF 1 JOHN

- NOT A LETTER, BUT A POETIC SERMON
- ALL THE KEY IDEAS COME FROM JESUS' FINAL SPEECH IN JOHN chs.13-17





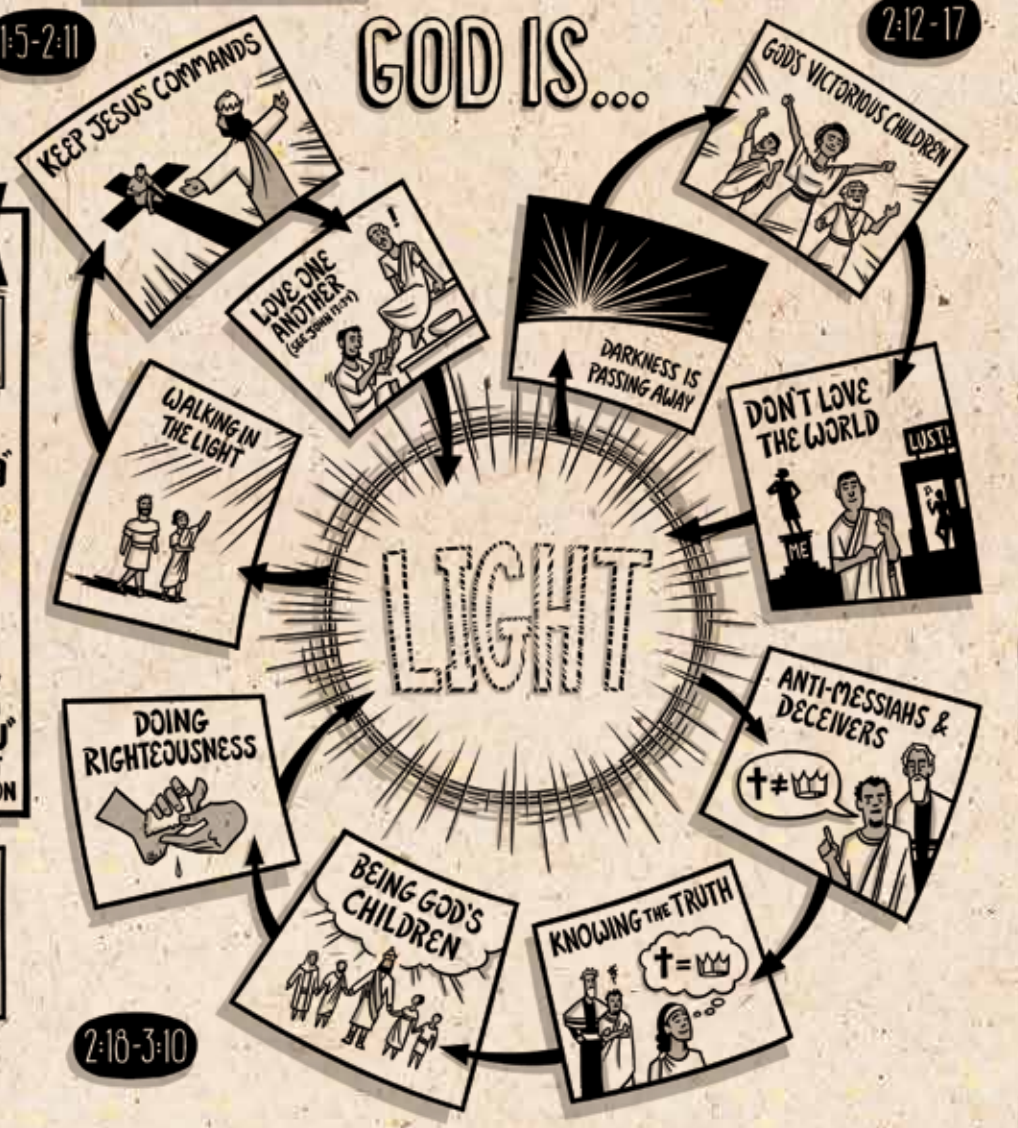
"AMPLIFICATION"



- CYCLICAL REPETITION
- HYPERBOLE
- STARK CONTRASTS

1:5-3:10 THIS IS THE MESSAGE...

GOD IS... LIGHT



1:1-4 INTRODUCTION

- SIMILAR TO JOHN 1:1-18
- ECHOES OF GENESIS 1 & PROVERBS 8



FELLOWSHIP = GREEK: KOINONIA
PARTICIPATION IN GOD'S OWN LIFE & LOVE

3:11-5:17 THIS IS THE MESSAGE...

GOD IS... LOVE



5:18-21 CONCLUSION

"WE KNOW THE SON OF GOD HAS COME SO WE CAN KNOW THE ONE WHO IS TRUE & WE ARE IN THE ONE WHO IS TRUE, IN HIS SON JESUS THE MESSIAH. THIS IS THE TRUE GOD & ETERNAL LIFE." (5:20)



"KEEP AWAY FROM IDOLS." (5:21)



RESIST REMAKING GOD IN YOUR OWN IMAGE.

2 JOHN

DEAR CHURCH,

IF THE 'DECEIVERS' COME TO YOUR CHURCH...



...DON'T OFFER THEM SUPPORT.

3 JOHN

DEAR GAIUS,

WELCOME THE BROTHERS...



....DON'T BE LIKE DIOTREPHES.

THE LETTER OF JUDE

This letter was written by Jude, or more accurately, "Judah," according to the pronunciation of his name in Greek (*Ioudas*) and Hebrew (*Yehudah*). He was one of Jesus' four brothers named in the Gospel accounts (see Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3). None of them followed Jesus as the Messiah before his death (see John 7:5), but they did all become his disciples once they saw him risen from the dead (see 1 Corinthians 15:7). All of these brothers became leaders in the first Jewish Christian communities, with Judah acting as a traveling teacher and missionary (see 1 Corinthians 9:5).

All of this gives us a background from which to understand the purpose of this letter. We don't know what specific community Judah wrote to, but it was very likely made up of mostly messianic Jews. His writing style assumes a deep knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, as well as other popular Jewish literature.

Judah had become aware of a crisis that was facing this church, which helps us better understand the letter's design. It begins with an opening charge in verses 1–4, followed by a long warning and accusation against corrupt teachers who had been influencing the church in verses 5–19. Judah then concludes the letter by completing a charge about what this church should do (Jude vv. 20–25).

VERSES 1–4

Judah starts by charging the church to contend for the true Christian faith. His plan had been to write a much longer work that explored "our shared salvation" through the Messiah, but that project got delayed when he heard the urgent news about this church. He instead fired off this short but thoughtful letter. In any case, Judah doesn't begin with how they are to contend for the faith, rather, he first goes into why they should.

It's all because of the corrupt teachers who have infiltrated the community. It's not their teaching that he targets, but their way of life. Their moral compromise is what tells you that they have bad theology. They have distorted God's grace as a license to sin. They think that, because they have been forgiven and have God's Spirit, they can do whatever they want, especially when it comes to money and sex. Judah, however, says that they betray Jesus by rejecting the authority of his teachings.

VERSES 5–19

Judah wants this church to know that the appearance of these teachers is not a surprise, and transitions into a longer warning to stay away from them. He offers two sets of three Old Testament examples, the first of which is about rebellious people who received divine justice (Jude vv. 5–10). The Israelites who rebelled against God in the wilderness got what they wanted, as they were barred from entering the Promised Land and died in the middle of nowhere (see Numbers 14).

The next story is about angels, who are imprisoned for their rebellion until they face God's final justice. What Judah is referring to here is the interpretation of Genesis 6 that was offered in the popular Jewish work, 1 Enoch. In it, the "sons of God" are interpreted as being angels, who go on to rebel against God, have sex with women, and who are judged accordingly. Judah's third example is about the ruin of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19, in which violent men try to have forced sex with angels. Both of those last stories are about rebellion against God and specifically lead to sexual immorality, which is precisely what the corrupt teachers are guilty of.

Judah also brings up a bonus example from another popular Jewish text, called the "Testament of Moses," which, like 1 Enoch, was not a part of the Old Testament Scriptures. It's a creative retelling of Moses' final days and words from chapters 30–34 of Deuteronomy. In the story Judah quotes from, Moses has died and the good angel Michael is refuting the devil's accusations against him, but Michael leaves the final judgment for God alone.

Now, while these stories may seem odd to you, for Jewish people who were raised on this literature, Judah's warning makes good sense. The behavior of the corrupt teachers has ancient roots. Rebellion against God's authority, sexual immorality, and rejection of God's angelic messengers is nothing new and should not take Judah's listeners by surprise.

This all connects to the second trio of examples, about rebels who went on to corrupt others. Cain murdered his brother and went on to build a city where violence reigned (see Genesis 4). Balaam couldn't curse Israel, so he lured them into idolatry and sexual misbehavior (see Numbers 31:16). Korah the Levite led a rebellion against Moses that ended in disaster for many others (see Numbers 16). Judah concludes this second trio with a barrage of Old Testament images describing the teachers. They're like the selfish shepherds of Ezekiel 34:2, the clouds with no rain from Proverbs 25:14, or the chaotic waves from Isaiah 57:20. Their self-absorption betrays their claim to follow Jesus and they bring chaos wherever they go.

Judah concludes his warnings by quoting two other warnings, one ancient in verses 14–16, and one recent in verses 17–19. The first comes, once again, from the popular book of 1 Enoch, which claimed to contain the visions of the ancient figure of the same name (see Genesis 5:21–24). What's fascinating about this is that Judah quotes from the opening section of Enoch, which is itself quoting half a dozen Old Testament texts about the final "day of the Lord" (see Deuteronomy 33:2, Zechariah 14:5, and Isaiah 66:15–16).

Judah then matches Enoch's ancient warning with a more recent one from the apostles. Peter, John, and Paul all predicted that corrupt teachers would arise and distort the good news, denying Jesus by their actions (see 1 John 4:1–3, 2 Timothy 3:1–9, and 2 Peter 2:1–3). They were simply echoing Jesus' earlier warning of the very same thing (see Matthew 7:15–19). With all these examples, hopefully, this church wouldn't need any more convincing that these teachers have to be dealt with.

VERSES 20–25

With that, Judah moves into his closing charge, picking up his opening line about "contending for the faith." He unpacks how to do this through a set of metaphors. The community of Jesus is God's new temple, so they are to build their lives on the foundation of "the most holy faith," referring to the core message of the good news about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for our sins. On that foundation, the church is to build itself up through dedication to prayer and by devoting itself to the "love of God" through obedience. The integrity of this building will be maintained by staying alert for the return of Jesus, as well as by helping each other stay faithful. Judah concludes by praising the God who will protect his people and keep them from falling too far from his grace.

This short letter is very powerful, but it is puzzling for many modern readers. Why does Judah quote from texts that were never considered a part of the Scriptures, like 1 Enoch or the Testament of Moses? It's important to remember that the Jewish culture of this time was immersed in religious texts. Jesus, his family, and all of the early Jewish Christians grew up reading the Hebrew Bible along with many other books based on and inspired by the Scriptures.

This is no different than reading popular religious books by authors in our own day. While they're not a part of the Bible, many other texts offer powerful messages to God's people. Many Jewish texts from this period, known today as the collections of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, were preserved and read in Jewish and Christian communities and treated with great respect. That doesn't mean that they were originally designed to be a part of the Hebrew Bible, and virtually no one thought that they were. It's because Judah knows his audience that he used these texts. His readers were familiar with this literature and it could help him communicate his message.

And his message was that God's grace through Jesus demands a whole-life response, not just intellectual assent. Notice that Judah doesn't criticize or focus on the corrupt teacher's theology, but on their immoral way of life. Judah is applying what Jesus first told his disciples, "If you really love me, you'll obey my teachings" (John 14:15).

For Christians, how you live is the most reliable indicator of what you actually believe, and that's what the letter of Judah is all about.

THE LETTER OF JUDE

A.K.A. JUDAH
GREEK: IOUDAS
HEBREW: YEHUDAH

JESUS' BROTHERS (SEE MATTHEW 13:55, MARK 6:3)
JACOB JOSEPH SIMON JUDAH
FOLLOW ME!

AFTER THE RESURRECTION, THEY BECAME DISCIPLES, (ACTS 1:14) LEADERS, AND MISSIONARIES. (1 CORINTHIANS 9:5)

†=👑

GOD'S GRACE DEMANDS A WHOLE-LIFE RESPONSE

- JUDAH DOESN'T FOCUS ON THEOLOGY, BUT ON MORAL CHOICES
- *LOVING* JESUS = *OBEYING* JESUS (SEE JOHN 14:15)

vv1-4 OPENING CHARGE

vv1-3 CONTEND FOR THE FAITH...



- WRITTEN TO A MESSIANIC JEWISH COMMUNITY
- ASSUMES DEEP KNOWLEDGE OF THE HEBREW BIBLE & OTHER JEWISH LITERATURE

WHY DOES JUDAH QUOTE FROM STRANGE BOOKS?

REMEMBER...
- ANCIENT JUDAISM WAS IMMERSED IN THE HEBREW BIBLE & MANY OTHER TEXTS INSPIRED BY THE SCRIPTURES.
- A BOOK DIDN'T HAVE TO BE IN THE BIBLE TO BE IMPORTANT
- THE APOCRYPHA & PSEUDEPIGRAPHA WEREN'T DESIGNED AS PART OF THE HEBREW BIBLE.

vv5-19 ACCUSATION OF CORRUPT LEADERS

vv5-10 3 OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES: REBELLION & DIVINE JUSTICE



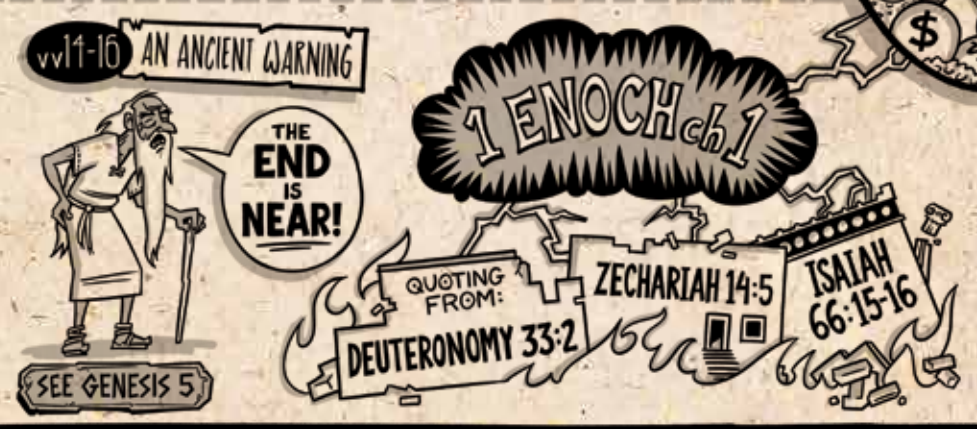
- REBELS AGAINST GOD'S AUTHORITY
- SEXUALLY IMMORAL
- REJECT GOD'S MESSENGERS



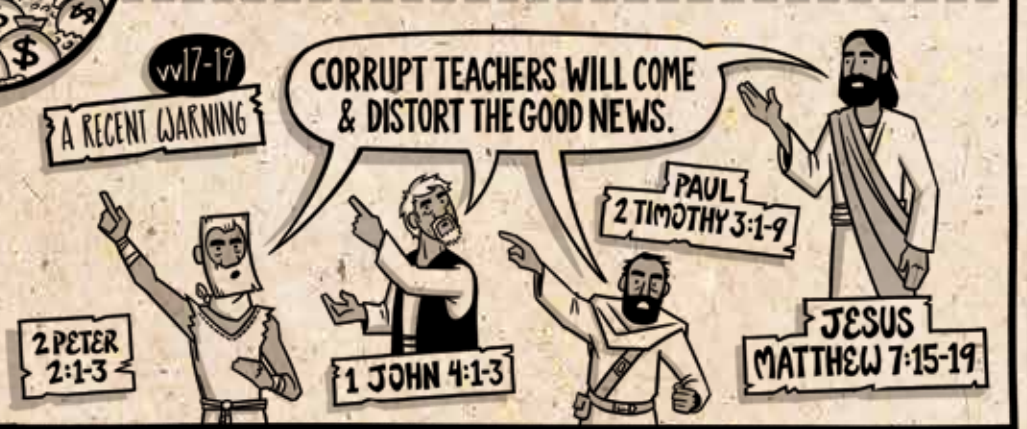
vv11-13 3 *MORE* OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES: REBELS WHO CORRUPT OTHERS



vv11-16 AN ANCIENT WARNING



vv17-19 A RECENT WARNING



vv20-25 CLOSING CHARGE

vv20-21 CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH 101

METAPHOR: COMMUNITY OF JESUS = GOD'S NEW TEMPLE



THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION OF JESUS

In the opening paragraph the author identifies himself as "John," which could refer to the author of the Gospel and letters of John, or it could be another leader in the early church named John.

CHAPTERS 1–3

Whichever John it was, he makes it clear in the opening paragraph that this book is a "revelation." The Greek word used here is *apokalupsis*, which refers to a type of literature found in the Hebrew Scriptures and in other popular Jewish texts. Jewish apocalypses recounted a prophet's symbolic visions that revealed God's heavenly perspective on history, so that the present could be viewed in light of history's final outcome. These texts also constantly use symbolic imagery and numbers, not to confuse, but to communicate. Almost all the imagery is drawn from the Old Testament, and he expects his readers to discover what it all means by looking up the texts that he alludes to.

John says that this apocalypse is a "prophecy," a word from God, spoken through a prophet to God's people, usually to comfort or challenge them. This apocalyptic prophecy was sent to real people that John knew. The book opens and closes as a circular letter, which was sent to seven churches in the ancient Roman province of Asia. The fact that the Revelation is a letter means that John is actually addressing these first century churches. While this book has a lot to say to Christians of later generations, its meaning must first be anchored in the historical context of John's time and place.

John says he was exiled on the island of Patmos, where he saw a vision of the risen Jesus, standing among seven burning lights. The image, adapted from Zechariah 4, is a symbol of seven local churches in Asia Minor. Jesus then addresses the specific problems facing each church. Some were apathetic due to wealth and affluence, while others were morally compromised. But there were others who remained faithful to Jesus and were suffering harassment and persecution. Jesus warned them that a "tribulation" was upon the churches that will force them to choose between compromise or faithfulness.

By John's day, the murder of Christians by the Roman emperor Nero had passed, and the persecution by emperor Domitian was likely underway. Jesus calls the churches to faithfulness, by which they will "conquer," and receive a reward in the final marriage of heaven and earth. In this way, the opening section sets up the main plot tension throughout the book. Will Jesus' people "conquer" and inherit the new world that God has in store? But why is faithfulness to Jesus described as "conquering?" The rest of the book is John's answer.

CHAPTERS 4–5

John's next vision is of God's heavenly throne room, described with images from many Old Testament prophetic books. Around God are creatures and elders, representing all creation and human nations, who are giving honor and allegiance to the one, true Creator God. In God's hand is a scroll closed up with seven wax seals, symbolizing the scrolls of the Old Testament prophets and Daniel's visions. Their message was all about how God's kingdom would come here on earth, as in heaven.

However, no one is qualified to open the scroll until John finally hears of the one who can. It's "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" and the "Root of David" (see Genesis 49:9 and Isaiah 11:1). These are classic Old Testament descriptions of the messianic king, who would bring God's kingdom through military conquest. That's what John hears, but what he turns and sees is not a lion-king, but a sacrificed, bloody Lamb, who is alive again, standing there ready to open the scroll.

This symbol of Jesus as the slain Lamb is crucially important for understanding the book. John is saying that the Old Testament promise of God's future kingdom was inaugurated through the crucified Messiah. Jesus died for his enemies as the true Passover Lamb, so that others could be redeemed. His death on the cross was his enthronement and the way that he "conquered" evil. The vision concludes with the Lamb alongside the One on the throne, and together they are worshiped as the one, true Creator and Redeemer. The slain Lamb begins to open the scroll, a symbol of his divine authority to guide history to its conclusion.

This brings us into the next section of the book with three cycles of sevens: seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls. Each cycle depicts God's kingdom and justice coming on earth as in heaven.

Some people think these three sets of seven divine judgments represent a literal, linear sequence of events that happened in the past, present, or will happen when Jesus returns. Notice, however, that John wove them together. The seven bowls come out of the seventh trumpet and the seventh seal, and the seven trumpets emerge from the seventh seal. They're like nesting dolls, each seventh containing the next seven. Also, each series culminates in the final judgment, all with matching conclusions. Because of this, it's more likely that John is using each set of seven to depict from three distinct perspectives the same period of time between Jesus' resurrection.

CHAPTERS 6–8a

As the Lamb opens the scroll's first four seals, John sees four symbolic horsemen (an image from Zechariah 1) who symbolize times of war, conquest, famine, and death. The fifth seal, depicts the murdered Christian martyrs before God's heavenly throne. The cry of their innocent blood rises up before God, and they're told to rest because, sadly, more Christians are going to die. The sixth seal is God's ultimate response to their cry. He brings the great Day of the Lord described in Isaiah 2 and Joel 2. The people of the earth cry out, "Who is able to stand?!"

At this point, John pauses the action with an intermission to answer that question. He sees an angel with a signet ring coming to place a mark of protection on God's servants enduring all this hardship. He then hears the number of those sealed: 144,000. It's a military census of twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes of Israel (see Numbers 1). Now, the number of this army is what John heard, just like he heard about the conquering lion of Judah. In both cases, what he turned and saw was the surprising fulfillment through Jesus, the slain Lamb. John is seeing the messianic army of God's kingdom. It's made up of people from all over the world, fulfilling God's ancient promise to Abraham. This multi-ethnic army of the Lamb can stand before God, because they've all been redeemed by his blood. And they are called forth to conquer, not by killing their enemies, but by suffering and bearing witness just like the Lamb.

With this, the seventh and final seal is broken, but before the scroll is opened, the seven warning trumpets emerge, and only then does the day of the Lord come to bring final justice once and for all.

CHAPTERS 8b–11

When we come to the seven trumpets, John backs up and retells the story once again, this time with images from the Exodus story. The first five trumpet blasts replay the plagues sent upon Egypt, while the sixth trumpet releases the four horsemen from the first four seals. John then tells us that, despite these plagues, "the nations did not repent," just like Pharaoh. God's judgment alone does not bring people to humble themselves before him.

John then pauses the action with another intermission. An angel brings to John the unsealed scroll that was opened by the Lamb. John is now told to eat the scroll and to proclaim its message to the nations. Finally, the Lamb's scroll is open and we discover how God's kingdom will ultimately come.

The scroll's content is spelled out in two symbolic visions. First, John sees God's temple and the martyrs within it, and he is told to measure and set it apart (it's an image of protection drawn from Zechariah 2:1–5). The outer courts and city, however, are excluded and trampled by the nations. Some think that this refers literally to a destruction of Jerusalem in the past or the future. It is more likely, however, that John is using the new temple as a symbol for God's new covenant people, just like the other apostles did (see 1 Corinthians 3:16, Hebrews 3:6, and 1 Peter 2:4–5). The vision shows that while Jesus' followers may suffer persecution, this external "defeat" cannot cancel their victory through the Lamb.

This idea is elaborated in the scroll's second vision. God appoints "two witnesses" as prophetic representatives to the nations. Some think that this refers literally to two prophets who will appear one day. However, John calls these characters "lampstands," one of his clear symbols for the churches (Revelation 1:20). In that case, this vision is about the prophetic role of Jesus' followers, who like Moses and Elijah, are to call idolatrous nations and rulers to turn to the one true God. Then, a horrible beast appears, who conquers the witnesses and kills them (remember Daniel 7). God brings the witnesses back to life, however, and vindicates them before their persecutors. This results in many among the nations finally repenting and giving honor to the Creator God.

Let's pause, and think about the story so far. God's warning judgments through the seals and the trumpets did not generate repentance among the nations. Now the Lamb's scroll reveals the strange mission of his army. God's kingdom is revealed when the nations see the church imitating the loving sacrifice of the Lamb and loving their enemies instead of killing them. It's God's mercy, shown through the church, that will move the nations to repentance. After this, the last trumpet sounds and the nations are shaken as God's kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven.

The message of the scroll is finished, but who was that terrible beast who declared war against God's people? John turns to this question in the second half of the Revelation.

Turn the page to keep reading about the Revelation of Jesus.

THE REVELATION OF JESUS

SECRET PROPHECY CODE!

A SYMBOLIC VISION FOR EVERY GENERATION OF THE CHURCH

HISTORY'S PATTERN: ALL HUMAN KINGDOMS BECOME BABYLON & MUST BE RESISTED ← THAT REVEALS → GOD'S PROMISE: JESUS WILL RETURN TO REMOVE EVIL FROM HIS WORLD

1a OPENING

ASIA MINOR

LETTER (1:4, 22:21) SENT TO: 7 CHURCHES — ITS MEANING FOR US MUST BE ANCHORED IN JOHN'S MEANING FOR THEM.

APOCALYPSE (1:1) GREEK: αποκαλυψις
- A TYPE OF JEWISH LITERATURE (EZEKIEL, DANIEL, 4 EZRA, 1 ENOCH)
- SYMBOLIC VISIONS THAT REVEAL A *HEAVENLY PERSPECTIVE* ON HISTORY IN LIGHT OF ITS FINAL OUTCOME

MEANINGFUL IMAGES DRAWN FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

PROPHECY (1:3)
- GOD'S WORD THROUGH A PROPHET
- BRINGS OLD TESTAMENT PROPHESY TO ITS CLIMAX

JOHN — THE BELOVED DISCIPLE? ANOTHER JOHN?

1b-3 MESSAGE TO THE 7 CHURCHES

THE SEVEN CHURCHES (SEE ZECHARIAH 4) — EPHESUS, SMYRNA, PERGAMUM, THYATIRA, SARDIS, PHILADELPHIA & LAODICEA

PERSECUTION, APATHY, AFFLUENCE, IMMORALITY

"TRIBULATION" (2:9-10)

COMPROMISE — DOMITIAN — FAITHFULNESS

†≠ ♛ — †= ♛

THE CONQUERORS ARE REWARDED *in the* NEW CREATION (chs. 21-22)

4-5 THE THRONE OF GOD & THE LAMB

HOLY! HOLY! HOLY! (SEE ISAIAH 6, EZEKIEL 1, DANIEL 7)

MESSAGE OF THE PROPHETS (ISAIAH 8:16, EZEKIEL 2-3, DANIEL 12) ABOUT HOW GOD'S KINGDOM WILL COME ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

WHO CAN OPEN THE SCROLL?

THE LION OF JUDAH! (GENESIS 49:9) THE ROOT OF DAVID! (ISAIAH 11:1)

SEES — HEARS

THE SACRIFICED LAMB
- GOD'S KINGDOM WAS INAUGURATED THROUGH THE CRUCIFIED MESSIAH WHO DIED FOR HIS ENEMIES.
- HIS DEATH WAS CONQUEST OVER EVIL.

6-16 3 SETS OF 7 DIVINE JUDGMENTS

A — LITERAL SEQUENCE OF EVENTS (PAST, PRESENT, OR FUTURE)

BUT NOTICE:
- BOWLS CONTAINED WITHIN 7TH TRUMPET, TRUMPETS WITHIN 7TH SEAL
- EACH SET CONCLUDES WITH FINAL JUDGMENT

B — THE TIME PERIOD BETWEEN JESUS' RESURRECTION & RETURN FROM THREE PERSPECTIVES

6-8a SEVEN SEALS

1 WAR, 2 CONQUEST, 3 FAMINE, 4 DEATH, 5 HOW LONG, O LORD?, 6 THE DAY OF THE LORD! (ISAIAH 2, JOEL 2) — REST A LITTLE LONGER... — WHO CAN STAND?!

(SEE ZECHARIAH ch. 1)

ch7 THE LAMB'S ARMY

MARK GOD'S SERVANTS: the 144,000 MILITARY CENSUS OF 12 TRIBES (SEE NUMBERS 1)

HEARS — SEES — THEY CAN!

THE MESSIANIC ARMY OF GOD'S KINGDOM FROM ALL NATIONS

8:5 — 11:19

8b-11 SEVEN TRUMPETS

EAT THIS & PROPHESY. — OKAYYYY...

THE EXODUS PLAGUES (SEE EXODUS ch. 7-11)
1 HAIL, 2 BLOOD, 3 FOUL WATER, 4 DARK SKIES, 5 DEMON LOCUSTS, 6 THE FOUR HORSEMEN

THE NATIONS DON'T REPENT (9:20-21)

10:1-11:13 THE LAMB'S SCROLL — MEASURE THE TEMPLE... — "PROTECTION" (SEE ZECHARIAH 2) — ...BUT EXCLUDE THE COURTS.

A) LITERAL DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM
B) NEW TEMPLE = SYMBOL OF GOD'S PEOPLE (1 CORINTHIANS 3:16, HEBREWS 3:6, 1 PETER 2:4-5)

TWO WITNESSES PROPHESY... — "LAMPSTANDS" = CHURCHES (1:4+1:20)
- A 2 LITERAL PROPHETS
- B SYMBOLS OF THE CHURCH'S PROPHETIC ROLE

...& ARE KILLED... (SEE DANIEL 7) — ...BUT THEN VINDICATED... — & THE NATIONS DO REPENT (11:13)

THE SCROLL REVEALS THE CHURCH'S MISSION:
- IMITATE THE LOVING SACRIFICE OF THE LAMB
- GOD'S MERCY BRINGS REPENTANCE

12-14 SEVEN SIGNS (=SYMBOLS)

12 THE COSMIC BATTLE (BASED ON GENESIS 3:15) — THE MESSIAH & HIS PEOPLE — THE DRAGON — THEY CONQUER THE DRAGON THROUGH THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB (12:11) — NOT THE REAL ENEMY

13 THE EARTHLY BATTLE (BASED ON DANIEL 7-12) — MILITARY POWER = 666 = ECONOMIC MACHINE — BABYLON, PERSIA, GREECE, ROME, etc.....
1.) THE ANTI-SHEMA: PRAYER OF ALLEGIANCE FROM DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9 WRITTEN ON FOREHEAD & HAND (THOUGHTS) (ACTIONS) — MARK of the BEAST = ALLEGIANCE
2.) THE NUMBER 666 = נרון קסר = (NERO CAESAR) = (BEAST)

14a THE LAMB'S ARMY — THE ETERNAL GOSPEL (14:6) — BABYLON HAS FALLEN! — FEAR GOD & GIVE HIM GLORY! — THE NEW JERUSALEM

14b FINAL JUSTICE — THE GRAIN HARVEST of GOD'S PEOPLE — THE GRAPE HARVEST of HUMANITY'S EVIL

THE CHOICE: RESIST BABYLON TO FOLLOW THE LAMB — OR — FOLLOW THE BEAST & SUFFER ITS DEFEAT

15-16 SEVEN BOWLS

THE EXODUS PLAGUES (AGAIN!) — 1 SORES, 2 BLOOD, 3 BLOOD, 4 FIRE, 5 DARKNESS

ARMAGEDDON:
LOCATION OF MANY ISRAELITE BATTLES (JUDGES 5:19, 2 KINGS 23:29)
SYMBOL OF REBELLIOUS NATIONS (EZEKIEL 38-39)

7 — 16:17-21

17-19a THE FALL OF BABYLON

BABYLON → ROME'S MILITARY & ECONOMIC POWER → ARCHETYPE OF HUMANITY'S REBELLION AGAINST GOD

GOD — WOE! — BLOOD OF THE INNOCENT (16:24)

BLEND OF OLD TESTAMENT IMAGES DESCRIBING BABYLON, TYRE & EDOM (ISAIAH 13, 23, 39, 47; JEREMIAH 50-51; EZEKIEL 26-27)

19b-20 THE FINAL BATTLE

19:11-21 THE FINAL BATTLE I — ISAIAH 11:4, 49:2 — JUSTICE — ARMAGEDDON IS NOT A BLOODBATH — JESUS DIED FOR HIS ENEMIES & NOW HOLDS THEM ACCOUNTABLE.

20:1-7 THE MARTYRS VINDICATED — THE MARTYRS REIGN — FOR 1,000 YEARS!

20:8-15 THE FINAL BATTLE II (SEE DANIEL 7) — THE DRAGON, BABYLON & ALL WHO CHOOSE THEM ARE ETERNALLY QUARANTINED

LITERAL SEQUENCE: 1,000 YEAR KINGDOM — JESUS' RETURN — FINAL JUDGEMENT

THOUSAND YEARS = SYMBOL OF JESUS' PRESENT VICTORY

TWO BATTLES = JESUS' RETURN FROM TWO ANGLES

THE POINT: JESUS WILL RETURN AS A KING TO DEAL WITH EVIL & VINDICATE HIS FOLLOWERS

21-22 THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN & EARTH

THE BRIDE OF THE LAMB

I AM MAKING ALL THINGS NEW. (21:5)

ALL CREATION IS THE TEMPLE OF GOD & THE LAMB

HUMANITY RULES AS GOD'S IMAGE (GENESIS 1:27-28)

KALEIDOSCOPE OF OLD TESTAMENT PROMISES
- NEW HEAVEN & EARTH (ISAIAH 65:17)
- NEW GARDEN OF EDEN (GENESIS 2, EZEKIEL 47)
- NEW JERUSALEM (ISAIAH 2, ZEPHANIAH 3)

THE REVELATION OF JESUS

1:1-8 OPENING — JOHN

ASIA MINOR

LETTER (1:4; 22:21)
Sent to Seven churches
Its meaning for us must be anchored in John's message to them.

The beloved disciple of another John (Mark)

Prophecy (1:3)
- God's word through a prophet
- Brings Old Testament prophecy to its climax

Apocalypse (1:1)
Greek: apokalupsis
- A Type of Jewish literature (Ezekiel, Daniel, 4 Ezra) 1 Enoch
- Symbolic visions that reveal heavenly perspective on history in light of its final outcome
- Meaningful images drawn from OT

Secret Prophecy Code!

- A Symbolic vision for every generation of the church that reveals...

History's Pattern
All Human kingdoms become Babylon & must be resisted

God's PROMISE
Jesus will return to remove evil from his world

CH. 6-16 3 Sets of 7 Divine Judgments
① Literal Sequence of events in the (Past, Present, or Future)
② The time Period between Jesus' Ascension & return from 3 perspectives

But notice!
- 7th trumpet & bowl Contained within Preceding 7th (See 8:1-2, 11:19, 15:5-6)
- Each set concludes with final judgment

1:1b-3 Message to the 7 churches

Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, SARDIS, PHILADELPHIA, LAODICEA, APATHY, AFFLUENCE, Immorality
The 7 Churches (see Zechariah 4)
PERSECUTION = Tribulation 2:9-10
COMPROMISE OR FAITHFULNESS
The CONQUERORS are rewarded in the New creation (chs. 21-22)
DOMITIAN

6:1-8:2 SEVEN SEALS
WAR, CONQUEST, FAMINE, DEATH
HOW LONG O LORD?!
Rest a bit longer...
DAY OF THE LORD
WHO CAN STAND?!
(See Zechariah 14:1)

CH. 7 THE LAMB'S ARMY
MARK God's SERVANTS: the 144,000 ⇒ Military Census of 12 Tribes (1) (Numbers ch 1)
(multi-ethnic)
The Messianic Army of God's Kingdom from all Nations (Genesis 17:4)
8:5

8:6-11 SEVEN TRUMPETS
HAIL, Blood 2, Poisoned Waters, Locust Demons 5, Darkness 4, FOUR HORSEMEN
THE EXODUS PLAGUES (Exodus chs. 7-11)
THE Nations Don't Repent 9:20-21

10:1-11:13 The Lamb's Scroll
Eat this & Prophesy!
Measure the temple... = Protection (See Zechariah 2)
...but exclude the Courts
The Two witnesses Prophesy
...and Killed...
...but then Vindicated...
Lampstands 11:4 & 1:20 = Churches
1. Two literal Prophets
2. Symbols of Prophetic role of the Church
Glory to God!
...and the Nations DO Repent!
11:13
The Scroll reveals the Church's MISSION:
- imitate the loving sacrifice of the lamb
- God's mercy brings Repentance

1. Literal destruction of Jerusalem
2. NEW Temple = Symbol of God's People (1 Corinthians 3:16, Hebrews 3:6, 1 PETER 2:4-5)

CH. 4-5 The Throne of God & THE LAMB
(Eagle) (Man) (Ox) (Lion)
HOLY HOLY HOLY
(See Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1, Daniel 7)
Who Can Open the Scroll?!
The LION of JUDAH (Genesis 49:9) & ROOT of DAVID (Isaiah 11:1)
Message of the Prophets (Isaiah 8:16, Ezekiel 2-3, Daniel 12) about HOW God's Kingdom will COME on earth as in heaven
WORTHY
THE SACRIFICED LAMB
- God's kingdom was inaugurated through the crucified Messiah who died for his enemies
- His death = CONQUEST over evil

CH. 12-14 The SIGNS (= Symbols)

CH. 12 The Cosmic Battle (Based on Genesis 3:15)
The Messiah & his People VS. The DRAGON
They Conquer the dragon through the blood of the lamb (12:11)
NOT the real enemy

CH. 13 The Fourth battle (Based on Daniel 7-12)
1. The Anti-Satanic Trinity of allegiance from Dragon, Sea & Land (= Babylon) written on forehead (= thoughts) & hand (= actions)
Allegiance = Mark of the Beast
2. The Number
Nero Caesar = Beast
תרין קסר = 666
BABYLON, PERSIA, GREECE, ROME
Economic Machine

CH. 14a The Lamb's Army
The Eternal Gospel (14:6)
Babylon has Fallen!
Fear God & give him glory
NEW JERUSALEM

CH. 14b. FINAL JUSTICE
The Grain harvest of God's people
The Grape Harvest of humanity's evil!
ANGER
The choice!
Resist Babylon to follow the lamb
OR
Follow the beast & suffer his defeat

15:1-16:16 SEVEN BOWLS
Exodus plagues (again)
ARMAGEDDON (location of so many historic battles (Judges 5:19, 2 Kings 23:29) • symbol of Rebellious Nations (Ezekiel 38-39).
16:17-21 Day of the LORD
(Gog)

17:1-19:10 The Fall of Babylon
BABYLON = ROME's Military & Economics = Archetype of humanity's rebellion against God
Blood of the innocent (18:24)
(Coliseum)
woe!
Blend of Old Testament images about Babylon, Tyre, & Edom: Isaiah 13, 23, 34, 47 Jeremiah 50-51, Ezekiel 26-27

19:11-21 FINAL BATTLE I
The Final battle I
ARMAGEDDON is NOT a bloodbath
Isaiah 11:4, 49:2
Justice
Jesus died for his enemies & now holds them accountable.
(Gog)

20:1-7 Vindication of the martyrs
The Martyrs reign for 1000 years!
1 Literal Sequence: Jesus returns → 1000yrs + Final Kingdom → Judgment
2 1000yrs = Symbol of Jesus' Present victory
Two battles = Jesus' return from two angles
THE POINT
JESUS WILL RETURN AS KING TO DEAL WITH EVIL & VINDICATE HIS FOLLOWERS

20:8-15 The Final Battle II (See Ezekiel 7)
The dragon, Babylon & all who choose them are eternally quarantined.
(Gog)

CH. 21-22 The Marriage of Heaven & EARTH
THE BRIDE OF THE LAMB
I am making all things new (21:5)
All creation is the temple of God & the LAMB
Humanity Rules as God's Image (Genesis 1:27-28)
(multi-ethnic)
Kaleidescope of OT Testament Promises
- New Heaven & Earth (Isaiah 65:17)
- New Garden of Eden (Genesis 2, Ezekiel 47)
- New Jerusalem (Isaiah 2, Zephaniah 3)

CHAPTERS 12–16

After exploring the surprising message of the Lamb's opened scroll, John offers a series of seven visions that he calls "signs" (Revelation 12–15). That word means "symbol," and these chapters are full of them. The purpose of these visions is to expand further on the message of the Lamb's scroll.

The first sign reveals the cosmic, spiritual battle that lay behind the Roman empire's persecution of Christians. It's the ancient conflict that started in Genesis 3:15. The serpent in the garden of Eden, the source of all spiritual evil, is depicted here as a dragon. It attacks a woman and her seed, who represent the Messiah and his people. But the Messiah defeats the dragon through his death and resurrection, casting him to earth. There, the dragon may inspire hatred and persecution of the Messiah's people, but God's people will conquer him by resisting his influence, even if it kills them. John is showing the seven churches that neither Rome, nor any other nation or human, is the real enemy. There are dark spiritual powers at work who can be conquered only when Jesus' followers remain faithful and love their enemies.

John's next vision replays the same conflict, this time with the symbolism of Daniel's animal visions (see Daniel 7–12). John sees two beasts, one representing national military power that conquers through violence. The other beast symbolizes the economic propaganda machine that exalts this power as divine and demands full allegiance from all nations. This is symbolized by taking the "mark of the beast and his number 666" on the forehead or hand.

The meaning of this image is not found by reading the news headlines, but the Old Testament: the mark is the "anti-Shema." The Shema is an ancient Jewish prayer of allegiance to God found in Deuteronomy 6:4–8. It was to be written on the Israelites' foreheads and hands as a symbol devoting all your thoughts and actions to the one, true God. But now, the rebellious nations demand their own god-like allegiance.

The number of the beast is also a symbol. John was fluent in both Hebrew and Greek, and his readers knew well that Hebrew letters also function as numbers. If you spell the Greek words "Nero Caesar" or "beast" in Hebrew, both amount to 666. John isn't saying that Nero was the precise fulfillment of this vision. Rather, he's a recent example of the pattern explored in Daniel. Human rulers become beasts when they divinize their power and economic security and demand total allegiance to it. Babylon was the beast of Daniel's day, followed by Persia, then Greece, and now Rome in John's day. The pattern stands for any later nation who acts the same.

Standing opposed to the dragon's beastly nations is another king, the slain Lamb as well as his army, who have given their lives to follow him. From the new Jerusalem their song goes out to the nations as "the eternal gospel" (Revelation 14:6). All people are called to repent, worship God, and to come out of Babylon. Then John sees a vision of final justice, symbolized by two harvests. One is a good grain harvest, and king Jesus gathers up his faithful people. The other is a harvest of wine grapes, representing humanity's intoxication with evil, which are taken to the wine press and trampled. With these "sign" visions John places a choice before the seven churches. Will they resist Babylon and follow the Lamb, or will they follow the beast and suffer its defeat?

Then John replays a final cycle of seven divine judgments, symbolized as seven bowls. Similar to the Exodus plagues, the bowls do not bring about repentance. Just the opposite. People resist and curse God, just like Pharaoh.

With the sixth bowl, the dragon and beasts gather the nations together to make war against God's people in a place called Armageddon. This refers to a plain in northern Israel, where many battles had been fought against invading nations (see Judges 5:19 and 2 Kings 23:29). Some think that this image refers literally to a future battle, while others just think that it's a metaphor of final judgment. Either way, John has taken these images from Ezekiel 38–39, where God's battles Gog, who is a symbol of rebellious humanity gathered before God to face his justice. And so, in the seventh bowl evil is defeated among the nations once and for all.

CHAPTERS 17–20

Now that John has fully unpacked the message of the Lamb's unsealed scroll, he expands upon three key themes introduced earlier: the fall of Babylon, the final battle to defeat evil, and the arrival of the new Jerusalem. Each one explores the final coming of God's kingdom from a different angle.

John is first shown a stunning woman who is dressed like a queen but is drunk with the blood of the martyrs and of all innocent people. She is riding the dragon from the sign visions and is called "Babylon, the prostitute." All the detailed symbols of this vision were clear to John's first readers, because he's depicting the military and economic power of the Roman empire. But he's also doing more. The vision quotes language and imagery from every Old Testament passage about the downfall of Babylon, Tyre, and Edom (see Isaiah 13, 23, 34, and 47, Jeremiah 50–51, and Ezekiel 26–27). He's showing that Rome is simply the newest version of that old archetype of humanity in rebellion against God. Nations that exalt their own economic and military security to divine status isn't limited to the past or the future. Babylons will come and go, leading up to the day when Jesus returns to replace them all with his kingdom.

Up to this point in the book, the day of the Lord has been depicted as a day of fire, earthquake, or harvest. Here at the conclusion of the book, it is described as a final battle, told twice (Revelation 19:11–21 and 20:7–15), that results in the vindication of the martyrs (Revelation 20:1–6). John takes us back to the sixth bowl, as the nations gathered to oppose God. Jesus appears as the great hero and as "the word of God," riding a white horse and ready to "conquer" the world's evil. Notice, however, that he's covered with blood before the battle even begins (Revelation 19:13). It's his own. Additionally, his only weapon is "the sword of his mouth," an image adapted from Isaiah 11:4 and 49:2.

John is trying to tell us is that Armageddon is not a bloodbath. The same Jesus who shed his blood for his enemies comes proclaiming justice, holding accountable those who refuse to repent of the ruin they've caused in God's good world. The destructive hellfire that they have caused to be unleashed in the world justly becomes their God-appointed destiny.

After this, John sees a vision of Jesus' followers who have been murdered by Babylon. They are brought to life, so they can reign with the Messiah for one thousand years. After this, the dragon once again rallies the nations of the world to rebel against God. But they are all brought before God's throne of justice and face the consequences of eternal defeat. The forces of spiritual evil and all those who do not want to participate in God's kingdom are destroyed. They are given what they want, which is to exist by themselves and for themselves. The dragon, Babylon, and all those who choose them are eternally quarantined, unable to spoil God's new creation ever again.

There's a lot of debate about the relationship between the one thousand years that comes in between these two battle scenes. Some think that it refers to a literal, chronological sequence of Jesus' return, followed by his one thousand year kingdom on earth, and then the final judgment. Others think the one thousands years are a symbol of Jesus' and the martyr's present victory over spiritual evil, while the two battles depict Jesus' future return from two different angles. Whichever view you take, the point is that John promises the return of Jesus as king, to deal with evil forever and to vindicate those who have been faithful to him.

The book concludes with a vision of the marriage of heaven and earth (Revelation 21:1–22:9). An angel shows John a stunning bride, symbolizing the new creation that comes to forever join God and his covenant people. God announces that he has come to live together with humanity forever, and that he is making all things new (Revelation 21:5).

CHAPTER 21–22

This vision is a kaleidoscope of Old Testament promises. It's a new "heavens and earth" (see Isaiah 65:17), that is, a restored creation that's been healed of the pain and evil of human history. It's a new garden of Eden (see Genesis 2), the paradise of eternal life with God. However, it's not just simply a return back to the garden, it's also a step forward into the new Jerusalem (see Isaiah 2). It's a great city where human cultures in all their diversity work together in harmony. In the most surprising twist, however, there is no temple building. The presence of God and the Lamb, once limited to the temple, now permeates every square inch of this new world. This is when the new humanity will fulfill the calling that was placed on them all the way back on page one of the Bible (see Genesis 1:26–28), to rule in God's image and to partner together with God in taking his creation into new uncharted territory.

So ends both John's apocalypse and the epic story of the Bible. John did not write this book as a secret code for deciphering the timetable of Jesus' return. It, instead, is a symbolic vision that brought challenge and hope to the seven first century churches as well as every generation since. It reveals history's pattern and God's promise, showing how every human kingdom eventually becomes Babylon and must be resisted. But the Messiah, Jesus, who loved and died for our world, will not let Babylon go unchecked. He will return one day, to remove evil from his good world and to make all things new.

This promise should motivate faithfulness in every generation of God's people, until the king finally returns. That's what the book of Revelation is all about.