

GOD'S GREAT STORY



CROSSROADS
PRISON MINISTRIES

ANSWER KEY

Cover artwork by Gilberto M., Crossroads student



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PRISON MINISTRIES

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v.0826

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Study Tools	4
Glossary of Terms	5
Lesson 1	8
Lesson 2	15
Lesson 3	20
Lesson 4	25
Lesson 5	33
Lesson 6	40
Lesson 7	46
Lesson 8	54

INTRODUCTION

The Bible is a big book. It is well over 1,000 pages in most editions. But this very big book is God's Word given to you. In the Bible, God has given you a great story that goes from creation to salvation to the restoration of the world. But sometimes it can be difficult to see exactly how all the major pieces of the Bible fit together. It can also be hard to see our own places in God's story. The purpose of this course is to help you do just that. Our aim is to help you to navigate your Bible better. Throughout the Bible, God is working to build His Kingdom. All the books of the Bible together tell a unified story of His creation and His plan through His Son to establish His Kingdom.

STUDY TOOLS

Throughout this course, students will be provided the tools listed below to assist them in their studies. These tools provide ways that you can interact with students.



CONVERSATION BOXES: We have included some spaces throughout the print versions of lessons that we call **conversation boxes**. Students can share questions or thoughts about the lesson or life. Students completing digital lessons can use the comment box at the end of the lesson for the same purpose. You may respond in any open space.



ACTION STEPS: At the end of each lesson, we have included a challenge called an **action step**. It asks the student to apply what they have learned. If they feel that they need help or encouragement to complete it, they may simply write down what they plan to do. You can follow up with the student by asking if they have completed it.

Glossary of Terms

Each lesson contains Bible names, terms, and ideas that may be new to students. We will do our best to provide definitions that are easy to understand. The list below includes all of the terms found in this course. In each lesson, we have included an asterisk (*) the first time each term appears.

Abram – A central figure in the Biblical story, Abram is promised a multitude of children. His name is later changed to Abraham and he becomes the father of the children of Israel.

Ark of the Covenant – A storage chest made of wood with a solid gold decorated lid in which the Hebrew people kept the stone tablets of the Law, Aaron's rod, and a pot of manna, the food God provided to the Hebrew people in the desert.

Baal – The supreme god of the Canaanite and Phoenician nations.

Babylonians – A group of people who established a far-reaching, powerful empire in the ancient world. Also known as the Amorites. Around 600 BC, the Babylonians defeated Judah and took many Jews as prisoners.

Blasphemy – The act of insulting or showing contempt or lack of reverence for God.

Centurion – A Roman military officer.

Covenant – A solemn agreement between two parties in which a promise is made to fulfill the obligations of the agreement. Frequently, blessings were pronounced upon obedience to the covenant and curses upon disobedience.

Descendant – One's offspring, either naturally or through adoption.

Eden – The place on the earth that God created and placed Adam and Eve. More broadly, it refers to God's perfect plan for humanity to live in His perfect presence and blessing.

Enmity – The state or feeling of being actively opposed or hostile to someone or something.

Exile – To be sent away or forced to leave your country, usually by force by a ruler.

Exodus – The event in which God rescued His people from slavery in Egypt and led them through the wilderness to the Promised Land. This mass departure, led by Moses, is recorded in the second book of the Bible, Exodus, which tells the story of God's deliverance and His covenant with His people.

Feast of Pentecost — A Jewish celebration instituted by God to be celebrated 50 days after Passover. Christians celebrate Pentecost as the day that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to empower His disciples after He went back to heaven.

Flogged — To beat with a stick or whip as a means of punishment or torture.

Genealogy — A written record of family members. Sometimes referred to as a family tree.

gods — Idols that were worshipped as gods in place of the true God, Yahweh.

Great Commission — Jesus' instruction to His followers to continue His work of making disciples.

Holy Spirit — One of the three persons of the Trinity. The Trinity is made up of three distinct persons, God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit.

Idol — In ancient Israel and Judah, idols were false gods that were worshipped in place of Yahweh. Today, an idol can be anything that we place above God in importance.

Idol Worshiper — A person who worships gods of their own making.

Incarnation — The embodiment of God the Son in human flesh as Jesus Christ.

Israel — Originally the twelve tribes of God's chosen people. When the kingdom was divided, the ten tribes in the area to the north of Jerusalem became known as Israel.

Judah — Descendants of Jacob. In Jewish history, the tribe of Judah inhabited the region in the south of the promised land, along with the tribe of Benjamin.

Ketuvim — Means "Writings." The third of three sections of the Old Testament. It includes poems, scrolls, and other books not included in the Torah or Nivi'im.

Legacy — The long-lasting impact of events and actions of someone's life.

Logos — The Greek word translated in the Bible as "Word." The Greeks understood the logos to be the intelligent force behind the universe. John tells us that the Word is Jesus.

Lord's Supper — The celebration in the early church of remembering Jesus' body that was broken and blood that was shed on the Cross.

Martyr — Someone who is put to death or suffers because of their faith.

Nivi'im — The second of three sections of the Old Testament. It is commonly divided into “Former” and “Latter” Prophets.

Passover — The miracle God did to save the Jews in Egypt as He cursed the Egyptian firstborn sons and cattle with death. The Passover became a remembrance celebration that God ordered His people to honor each year. Ultimately, Jesus was the final Passover Lamb who fully took away the sin of mankind.

Persians — People of an ancient kingdom located in modern-day Iran. Under their king, Cyrus, the Persians defeated the Babylonians (see “**Babylonians**”) and allowed the Jews to return to the Promised Land.

Pharoah — Kings that ruled over ancient Egypt.

Plague — An unpleasant event like disease, an infestation of tormenting insects, or crime.

Promised Land — The land that God promised to Abraham that He would give to His people. It would be many generations before Joshua actually brought the Hebrew people into this region to make their permanent homes.

Redemption — The action of saving or being saved from sin, error, or evil.

Synagogue — Building or place where a Jewish assembly or congregation meets for religious worship and instruction.

Synoptic Gospels — The first three Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They follow a similar sequence of events in Jesus’ life. A general summary or “synopsis.”

TaNaK — Or T.N.K. T=Torah N=Nivi'im K= Ketuvim

Theophilus — The person to whom Luke addressed his Gospel and the Book of Acts. Theophilus is believed to be a wealthy supporter of the ministry of the Apostles.

Torah — The first five books of the Old Testament. It is sometimes also referred to as the Pentateuch (five) or Books of the Law.

Word — The way John identifies Jesus in the first chapter of his Gospel (see “**Logos**”).

LESSON 1: The Kingdom of God

Lesson Focus:

In the beginning of Genesis, we see God's original design for His Kingdom: God's people living peacefully in God's place under God's rule and protection.

Introduction to the Structure of the Bible

The Bible is a collection of books written by more than forty people on three different continents over the course of hundreds of years! The Bible is a book that contains not only the history of God's creation and activity among His people, but it also contains poetry, wisdom for living, and plans for His creation for eternity. Rather than a random collection of books, the Bible is the Word of God for us. Though the Bible may have many human writers, it has one author – The Holy Spirit Himself.

1. Read **2 Timothy 3:15**. What do you think Paul meant when he wrote that the Scriptures are "God-breathed"?

Paul was reminding Timothy that Scripture can be trusted as coming from God, not from the thoughts of men. God communicated His thoughts to the writers who were faithful to record all that God had spoken through His Spirit.

God did not just hand the books of the Bible to humans. Instead, God used the personalities of each human writer, and He ensured that what was written was exactly what He wanted us to know. As we look at just a few of the writers of the Bible, we can see that they were each very different. Luke the physician was not part of the original group of Jesus' followers, but like a good detective, he sought out those that had lived and ministered with Jesus to record Jesus' actions and words. Paul, also not one of Jesus' first followers, was a religious teacher familiar with the history and story of God. Jeremiah, known as the weeping prophet, was a passionate and emotional communicator of the thoughts and heart of God. Everything in the Bible written by these very different men is the very Word of God to us.

2. Read **Hebrews 1:1-2**. According to the writer of Hebrews, what role did the prophets play in God's Kingdom prior to Jesus?

God spoke to His people through His prophets.

Each book in the Bible is a piece of a puzzle that tells of God's work in inviting a people to establish His Kingdom on earth. Most importantly, the Bible is the story of God establishing His Kingdom in the hearts of sinners through the work of Jesus, the true King. In this course, we will be tracing God's story from the creation of the Universe to the hope we have for His future Kingdom in eternity.

As your Crossroads mentors review each lesson, it can be helpful for them to know your prior experience with studying the Bible. The way they reflect on an answer might be different for someone who is new to the Bible than it would be for someone who has a lot of experience studying God's Word in depth.

3. How would you describe your Bible knowledge? Check one:

- _____ Expert: many years of Bible study
- _____ Knowledgeable
- _____ About average for most Christians
- _____ Have read and understand some of the Bible
- _____ Not very familiar with the Bible

The student's answer provides the mentor with an assessment of the student's knowledge of the Bible to help the mentor provide feedback relative to the student's prior learning.

A Short Overview of the Bible

The Bible has two main divisions, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament covers the time before Jesus. The New Testament covers Jesus' ministry and the teachings of His apostles. There are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament.

In a previous course, *What Is the Bible?*, you learned that the Jewish name for the Old Testament is the TaNaK*. The "T" stands for "Torah*," meaning "Law," and includes the following books:

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

The "N" stands for "Nivi'im*," meaning "Prophets," and includes the following books:

Joshua	Isaiah	Obadiah	Haggai
Judges	Jeremiah	Jonah	Zechariah
1 Samuel	Ezekiel	Micah	Malachi
2 Samuel	Hosea	Nahum	
1 Kings	Joel	Habakkuk	
2 Kings	Amos	Zephaniah	

The "K" stands for "Ketuvim*," meaning "Writings," and includes the following books:

Ruth	Psalms
1 Chronicles	Proverbs
2 Chronicles	Ecclesiastes

Ezra	Song of Songs
Nehemiah	Lamentations
Esther	Daniel
Job	

Another way to look at the Old Testament divisions is what we see in our English Bibles. If you look at the Table of Contents in your English Bible, you will see that the Law and historical books come first (Genesis through Esther), then the poetic books (Job through Song of Songs), followed by the prophetic books (Isaiah through Malachi).

The arrangement of the New Testament, the time during and after Jesus' time on the Earth, can be seen in the following chart:

Gospels	Matthew, Mark, Luke, John
Acts or Acts of the Apostles	Luke's history of the spread of the Gospel
Epistles (letters)	Romans to Jude
Revelation	John's vision from God about the triumph of Jesus at the end of history

Throughout this course, we will look at one complete story of how God is building His Kingdom. We will examine the complete story of God's dealings with humanity as it has been recorded in the Bible. To study the Bible as one continuous story of God's Kingdom may be different from what you have done in the past.

The Old Testament

It is helpful to view the Old Testament in light of how it tells us about God's Kingdom--past, present, and future.

The pattern of the Kingdom is set in Eden* (Genesis 1-2). God's original creation, which He called "very good," is a picture of how God intended His new world to be. God's people (Adam and Eve) were living in God's place (Eden) under God's rule and blessing. Eden is the original pattern of God's Kingdom.

- From what you have previously learned about God's Kingdom on Earth in the Garden of Eden before sin entered the world, how would you describe this paradise?

Sin had not entered into the creation. Adam and Eve talked with God and enjoyed a life that God had designed for them. It was perfect.

The fallen kingdom (Genesis 3-11). Adam and Eve chose life outside of God's Kingdom, outside of the place He had for them and outside of His full blessing. This resulted in disaster

for humanity. The sons and daughters of Adam and Eve were no longer God's people and no longer enjoyed His special blessing and rule. The children of Adam and Eve, now cut off from God and living in a world with sin, began doing terrible things. From the outside, it looked like God's plan had failed. But God is determined to establish His Kingdom in the hearts of sinners.

5. Read **Genesis 6:5-21**: How did God react to the wickedness of humans in this section of Genesis?

Because humans were so evil, God regretted that He had created them. God's heart was deeply troubled by their wickedness. God wiped humanity off the earth, except for Noah and his family.

The promise of a future Kingdom (Genesis 12-50). Just when things seemed hopeless, God called Abraham and made him a promise. God promised Abraham that He would build His Kingdom on Earth through Abraham and his family. Abraham's children would become God's people, living in God's place, under God's rule and blessing. And through Abraham's children, God would eventually extend His Kingdom to include the entire world.

You might remember from your past reading of Genesis 12 that God told Abraham to leave his country, home, family, and friends to follow God's plan and promise. Abraham was a wealthy and respected man in his home country.

6. If you were Abraham, wealthy and respected by those who knew you, how would you feel if God asked you to leave everything you knew and had come to rely on?

Possible answers include: angry, afraid, confused, excited. There is not a wrong answer.

7. If you are a Christian, in what ways was your experience similar to Abraham's when God called you to follow His Son Jesus?

The student might answer that they were afraid or unsure of what their life would be like if they followed Jesus. They could also say that they were ready to be forgiven of their sins and had no hesitation about following Jesus.

8. If you are not a Christian, is it because you don't believe or is because you think the price to follow God is too high? Explain:

Students will most commonly say that they are a Christian already. If they are not, use the student's answer to provide encouragement and support about how the cost of following God pales in comparison to the alternative.

The Kingdom beginnings (Exodus – 1 Kings 11). The Bible records how God's promises to Abraham were only partly fulfilled during the time of Abraham, his son Isaac, grandson Jacob (Israel), and Jacob's sons. For 300 years, the Hebrew people grew in numbers in the land and under the rule of Egypt. After 300 years in Egypt, God called Moses, a Hebrew, to lead the Hebrew people out of their slavery in Egypt. This story is recorded in the Book of Exodus, the

second book of the Old Testament. Exodus means “exit.” God had not forgotten His promises to Abraham. Through Moses, God led His people out of Egypt to what is known as “the promised land.” This was the land that God had promised to Abraham.

It took hundreds of years for the Hebrew people to start experiencing the promises of a land and nation of their own. God’s plan is a plan for all time, not just for today or tomorrow. When we look at the Bible as one whole story of God and His Kingdom, we can begin to put the pieces of the puzzle together.

9. When was a time that you felt that God was slow to give you His promises for your life?

The student’s answer should provide the mentor with an opportunity to share from their own experience how God doesn’t work on our timeline but is always perfect in His timing.

Moses led the Hebrew people out of Egypt under the miraculous hand of God. When they left Egypt, God gave Moses His Law. What people call the Ten Commandments is one small part of that Law. The Law revealed to God’s people more than just rules to live by. The Law revealed to God’s people the things that were important to their God. Eventually the Hebrew people referred to the first five books of our Old Testament as the Law. Another name for those first five books is the Torah. One of Moses’ main military men, Joshua, led the Hebrew nation to take the territory that God has set aside for them. As the nation got settled in their new country and began to prosper, they became powerful and known by the world. Because they wanted to be like other nations, they demanded to have a king, someone who would be a symbol of their power to the nations. When their first king, Saul, began to disobey God and His plans, God chose the shepherd David to shepherd God’s people as their king and God’s chosen leader. This is the high point of the Old Testament. God had brought His people to His place to live under His rule and blessing. King David began making plans to build a great temple for the nation that would become the center of worship for the nation.

Read **1 Chronicles 22:5-10** and answer the following questions:

10. While King David made plans to build a temple for the nation of Israel, David had to pass the project on to his son, Solomon. What did God tell David about his building of the temple? (1 Chronicles 22:8)

God told David that David would not build the Temple because he was a man of war who had shed much blood. This disqualified David from the task.

11. What did God tell David about his son Solomon? (1 Chronicles 22:9)

“But you will have a son who will be a man of peace and rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side. His name will be Solomon, and I will grant Israel peace and quiet during his reign.”

But there was still a big problem: sin. The problem of sin had not been fully dealt with. Even God’s chosen King David did terrible things. Likewise, David’s son Solomon did not fully follow

God. God needed a king who could do something about His people's sin. Because of this sin, the kingdom was on the brink of crumbling.

The Kingdom still to come (1 Kings 12 - Malachi). The kingdom divided into two separate kingdoms after Solomon died. Both kingdoms struggled against their enemies. There were kings who tried to turn the hearts of God's people back to Him, but they failed. The northern kingdom was conquered and scattered. The southern kingdom was forced to leave God's place as prisoners of a Babylonian king named Nebuchadnezzar.

During this depressing period in their history, God spoke to the people of Israel and Judah through His prophets. He explained that they were being punished for their sin. But God, in His love, offered hope for their future. The prophets pointed forward to a time when God would act decisively through his King, the Messiah, to fulfil all his promises. When the southern kingdom, Judah, returned from exile, God made it clear that the time for God to ultimately deal with His people's sin was still in the future. That is where the Old Testament ends: waiting for God's King to appear to introduce His Kingdom. God's people would have to wait for another 400 years for the coming of their promised Messiah.

While God had Solomon build a physical temple building, His plan was to establish a Kingdom that would endure forever. In 2 Samuel 7:12-16, the prophet Nathan told David God's ultimate plan. Read this section in 2 Samuel and answer the following questions:

12. What was God's plan for His Kingdom and His people?

The student's answer should reflect God's words to David through Samuel.

"The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."

The New Testament

The Kingdom arrives (Matthew - John). Four hundred years passed after the completion of the Old Testament before Jesus began his public ministry with the words, *"The time has come. . . The kingdom of God is near"* (Mark 1:15). The waiting was over; God's king, who was both God and human, had come to establish God's Kingdom. He had the power to put everything right again, and He chose a very surprising way of doing it: by dying in weakness on a cross. It was by His death that Jesus dealt with the problem of sin and made it possible for human beings to come back into relationship with His Father. The resurrection proved the success of Jesus' rescue mission on the cross and announced that there is hope for our world. Those who trust in Christ can look forward to eternal life with Him.

After His time of temptation in the desert and His baptism by John, Jesus was teaching in a synagogue* and read from a section of Isaiah.

Read **Luke 4:14-30** and answer the following question:

13. Why did those who heard Jesus speak in the synagogue become angry with Jesus?

Because Jesus was telling them that because of their rejection of God in the time of Elijah, God did not answer to the needs of those in Israel. Jesus was critical of their lack of faith.

Jesus proclaims the Kingdom (Acts - Jude). By His death and resurrection, Jesus did all that was necessary to put everything right again and completely restore God's Kingdom. But there was more to be done. Jesus' followers, including us if we are believers, are called to continue the work.

Jesus ascended into heaven and made it clear that there would be a delay before He returned. The delay is to enable more people to hear about the good news of Christ so they can put their trust in Him and be ready for Him when He comes. We live during this period, which the Bible calls "the last days." It began on the Day of Pentecost when God sent the Spirit to equip His church to tell the whole world about Christ.

14. Where do you see your own place in God's story?

There is not a correct answer to this question. The student may have a strong sense of where they fit in God's story, or they may not. The student's answer provides the mentor with some insight into the student's experience with God. Encourage, support, or provide a different perspective if needed.

The perfect Kingdom to come (Revelation). One day Christ will return. There will be a great division. His enemies will be separated from His presence, but His people will join Him in a perfect new creation. Then at last, God's promises will be completely fulfilled. The book of Revelation describes a fully restored Kingdom: God's people, Christians from all nations, in God's place, a new creation (heaven), under God's rule enjoying His blessings for eternity.

Action Step

Spend time considering how you fit into God's Great Story. What do you need to do to continue the ministry of Jesus today? Decide on one thing you can do today to fulfill what you have been called to do in the Kingdom. It may be sharing the Gospel, sharing the love of God, or being reconciled with someone with whom you have a broken relationship. Write down what you will do, pray that God will help you, and follow through to action.

LESSON 2: The Fallen Kingdom

Lesson Focus:

After humanity fell into sin, it seemed like God's Kingdom promise may have failed, but God responded to humanity's sin with hope and the promise of a future.

In The Beginning: The Pattern of the Kingdom

As part of His creation, God made a man and a woman to live in fellowship with Him on a perfect earth. Adam and Eve enjoyed every blessing God provided for them. They were God's people, in God's place, living under God's blessing. God, the perfect King, had created a perfect Kingdom.

When God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He told them to rule over all He had made. While they enjoyed blessings from God, they were also given a command and responsibility to take care of His creation.

1. Read **Genesis 1** and match each creation with the day it happened.

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| <u>B</u> Day 1 | a. God created the creatures of the sea and birds. |
| <u>E</u> Day 2 | b. God created light and darkness—day and night. |
| <u>F</u> Day 3 | c. God created land animals, and He created humans in His own image. |
| <u>D</u> Day 4 | d. God created the sun, moon, and stars. |
| <u>A</u> Day 5 | e. God created the water and the sky. |
| <u>C</u> Day 6 | f. God created dry ground and vegetation. |

2. Read **Genesis 1:26–30**. What do you think it means to “rule over” God's creation? What else did God command Adam and Eve to do?

God told humans to steward and be responsible for managing and taking care of creation. Humans were created superior to animals. God also told humans to be fruitful and multiply.

Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect fellowship with God and with each other. Jealousy, anger, fear, and envy did not exist in humanity. Adam and Eve loved each other and had the only sinless marriage in history. This is what it meant to be God's people, in God's place, under God's rule and blessing.

But sin entered the world through the temptation of the serpent and the disobedience of the man and woman God had created. He told Adam and Eve that they would surely die if they ate from the forbidden tree. Because of their disobedience, they suffered spiritual death and were forced to leave the perfect garden. Their bodies began to grow old. But God did not wipe them

out. Though He kicked Adam and Eve out of the garden, and sin had now entered the human race, God still loved them, and He still had a plan to establish His Kingdom. He gave Adam and Eve hope for salvation to come.

Immediately after Adam and Eve's sin, God pronounced a curse against the serpent, Satan, which is also a promise of hope for all humanity:

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:15)*

God declared He would put enmity (hostility or conflict) between Satan's offspring (those who choose to follow Satan instead of God) and the woman's offspring (meaning Jesus, who would be born into her family line many years later). This promise was ultimately fulfilled through Jesus, God's true King, who crushed the head of the serpent, Satan, when He was lifted up on the cross for our sins.

Centuries later, Jesus' followers understood that God had a plan since the Fall to establish His Kingdom and redeem humanity through Jesus. The apostle Paul discussed the connection between Adam and Jesus in several of his letters.

Read **Romans 5:12–21**.

3. What did Paul say happened to all people because of the sin of Adam (verse 12)?

Sin and death became part of the human experience.

4. Adam was a pattern for whom, according to Paul (verse 14)?

The one to come / Jesus

5. Although we all experience death because of Adam, what can we experience through Jesus (verse 17)?

Grace, God's righteousness, life

Read **1 Corinthians 15:42–49**.

6. The first Adam became a living being. What did the last Adam, Jesus, become (verse 45)?

A life-giving Spirit

7. The first man, Adam, came from dust. What did the second man, Jesus, come from (verse 47)?

Heaven

The Fallen Kingdom

Many years separated God's promise to Adam and its fulfillment in Jesus—years filled with humanity's sin and God's response to that sin. Genesis 4–11 is filled with stories that show the consequences of sin.

In Genesis 5, we see the first genealogy* of the Bible. It is shocking how long humans lived in those days—Methuselah lived 969 years (see Genesis 5:27)! But even though they lived a long time, they still died. Death was a consequence of Adam and Eve's sin. In addition to experiencing death by natural causes, people began fighting amongst themselves and even killing each other. The people had become so evil that God decided to bring judgment on all of them. But God chose one man, Noah, and his family to carry on His promise.

Read **Genesis 6:1–8**.

8. What was an additional consequence for humanity's wickedness that God pronounced in verse 3?

A limited lifespan of 120 years

9. Why was God so deeply troubled (verse 5)?

The wickedness of mankind

10. Why did God choose Noah to carry on His promise?

Because Noah had found favor in the eyes of the Lord

11. God's promise depended on one man: Noah. What does this teach you about God?

The student might answer that it teaches us that God did not entirely give up on man or that one person can make a great difference through their life.

God's chosen seed of the woman was down to the one tiny family. God decided to bring judgment on the rest of the earth. He commanded Noah to build a giant ark to prepare for the coming judgment. He sent a flood that destroyed everything except Noah, his family, and the animals God had commanded Noah to save on the ark.

Read **Genesis 9:1–17**.

12. Where in this passage do you see similar promises and commands to those God gave to Adam and Eve?

Like Adam and Eve, Noah had God's blessing and command to be fruitful and multiply to populate the earth. God gave Noah and his descendants authority to manage and rule over all living animals. God affirmed to Noah that humans are made in His image. Like

Adam and Eve, God gave Noah a specific command of what not to eat. While Adam and Eve were commanded not to eat fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Noah was told not to eat meat of an animal that had been strangled and still contained the animal's blood.

13. Why did God give Noah the sign of a rainbow?

The rainbow was a sign of a covenant, or promise, that God made that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood.

Although Noah had found favor with God, he and his sons were still marked with the stain of original sin. Neither Noah nor any of his sons would be God's chosen King who would fulfill His promise to usher in His glorious Kingdom on earth.

God's promise would eventually be fulfilled through the future descendants* of Shem, Noah's son. God would use imperfect, sinful humans in His plan to establish His Kingdom through Jesus. The imperfections of humanity are seen clearly throughout the family line of Noah to Abraham. Joshua 24:2 tells us that the generations of Shem's descendants were idol worshippers* rather than followers of the one true God.

Genesis 11 describes how the people turned against God again. Building a tower to heaven, they were now working together toward a common evil to secure their power and to be looked upon as gods themselves. In response, God caused so much confusion that the people could not communicate with each other and were forced to separate, abandoning their dreams of making a name for themselves in the world and reaching up to heaven together.

Read **Genesis 11:1–9**.

14. When God saw what the people who settled on the plain of Shinar were doing, what did He say?

But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." (Genesis 11:5-7)

God does everything for a good purpose. Although the people did not understand at the time, followers of Jesus can look back on this account and see God's bigger purpose.

15. After confusing their language, what did God do to the people?

God scattered them around the earth.

16. According to Acts 17:26–28, why did God separate the people into nations?

From one man He made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth.

After the confusion at Babel, things seemed hopeless again. The sinful nature of humanity, stemming from the original sin of Adam and Eve, didn't take long to show itself in the actions of men and women. The wickedness of men made God's promise of redemption seem impossible.

The Rise of Abram*

In chapter 12 of Genesis, the Bible's focus shifts significantly. Genesis 1–11 shows us how God dealt with the world prior to establishing a nation of people that would belong to Him. In Genesis 12, the focus shifts to one man: Abram (later called Abraham). By the time of Abram, the population of the earth had already grown considerably. But God, in His wisdom, did not tell us about the rest of the world. While we may be curious about other people on the earth during this time, God wanted His Word to focus on His plan to build a nation and redeem humanity through Jesus.

17. Read **Genesis 12:1–3**. Why is Abram so important that the Bible talks about him so much?

The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;

I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;

and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

The Bible's shift in focus shows us that God will be faithful to His promise. Who would crush the serpent's head? Who would rectify Adam and Eve's wrongs? A first-time reader of Genesis might expect it to be Abram. But God's timing does not always correspond to our expectations. The rest of Genesis tells us that Abram made a lot of wrong choices too. This is a pattern we see throughout the entire Old Testament. All the heroes of the Old Testament were flawed people just like we are. Jesus is the only hero in the Bible who has no flaws. Jesus is the fulfillment of all of God's promises to redeem His people who live under His rule and blessing.

18. God acts according to His time and His purposes. What was an instance in your life when God acted in His time rather than your own?

The student is asked to reflect on their life experience and identify God's intervention and activity in their life despite their own decisions and efforts.

Action Step

List three ways that you are experiencing the blessing of living under God's rule right now.

LESSON 3: The Kingdom of Promise

Lesson Focus:

Through God's promise to Abraham (Abram), He built a nation of His chosen people and blessed the world.

God's Promise to Abram

In the previous lesson, you read that Genesis shifts from discussing the whole world in the first eleven chapters to focusing on one man, Abram, and the promises God would fulfill through him and his descendants. Despite the world's messy, sinful state discussed in Genesis 3–11, God promised to build a nation and a Kingdom through a single man with whom He made a covenant.*

The nation that God would build through Abram would reflect God's nature and purposes for creation. The surrounding nations worshipped idols and gods that were not really gods at all. Many of them had mighty armies. The Babylonians* and Persians* were two of the nations that sought to expand their territories and increase their power in the region.

But God did not choose to take something mighty and make it mightier. God could have made one of these powerful nations to be His chosen people, but instead, He chose Abram.

1. Read **Genesis 17:3–8**. Which of the following did God promise to Abram? Mark all that apply:

- ☒ **X** Make him into a great nation
- ☐ Give him a life free from trouble
- ☒ **X** Bless him and be his God
- ☒ **X** Give him land for his people

Before God made this covenant with Abram, He had made a covenant with Adam to give Adam dominion over His creation. That covenant was renewed with Noah and his sons after the flood. Later in the Bible, we read about God making covenants with Moses and King David and then making the new covenant through Jesus. But God's covenant to build a people for Himself was made to Abram and his descendants.

In God's promise to Abram, we clearly see the theme of His Kingdom: God promises His people land where those people can live under God's rule and blessing. That was God's plan for Adam and Eve, but they were disqualified because of their disobedience. After their sin, God pronounced a curse on the serpent: his head would be crushed, meaning he would ultimately be defeated. But Abram, a man born under the curse of original sin, would not be the one to

crush the head of the serpent. God's covenant with Abram was the beginning of God's plan for His people, but Jesus was the one to defeat Satan through His work on the cross.

Abram was used by God not because of his righteousness. It was because he believed the promises of God that he would later be called righteous by Paul in Romans chapter 4. The same righteousness that Abram had because he believed in God is the righteousness that we have when we believe in God's Son, Jesus.

Read **Romans 4:20–25**.

2. What did Paul say Abraham (Abram) was fully persuaded of?

God had the power to do what He had promised.

3. Paul wrote that Abraham was credited with righteousness. Who else would be credited with the same righteousness?

The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

God's covenant with Abram included a promise to make a nation from Abram and his descendants. But when God made that promise, Abram and his wife, Sarai, did not have any children. Abram, later renamed Abraham, meaning “father of many nations,” could not reasonably have children, as he and his wife were well beyond the age of childbearing. Abraham was well over eighty, and Sarai, whom God renamed Sarah, was in her seventies. The name Sarah means princess.

Sarah, in desperation, not wanting to disappoint Abraham, told Abraham to have a child with their servant Hagar. Hagar bore a son for Abraham named Ishmael. While Sarah may have meant well, this was not God's plan. After Ishmael was born, God reassured Abraham that he would have a child with Sarah.

4. Like Sarah, we sometimes try to solve our own problems rather than waiting for God to do His will. Describe a time when you tried to fix a problem yourself rather than wait for God's answer to your problem.

The student is being asked to identify a time in their life when they tried to fix a problem using their own strength and understanding that they now understand was not successful or had unintended consequences.

5. Think back to a time when you were in desperate circumstances, and it seemed like God was not going to answer your prayers. How did this impact your faith?

The student may say that their faith was challenged or that they were tempted to take matters into their own hands.

God sent three visitors to Abraham, who told him that he and Sarah would have a son within a year.

6. Read **Genesis 18:11–12**. What was Sarah’s reaction to the conversation she overheard?

She laughed to herself because she lacked faith that, at her old age, she would become pregnant.

God blessed Ishmael, Abraham’s son with his servant Hagar, and made him a powerful leader of a nation. But God made it clear to Abraham that His promises would not be fulfilled through Ishmael but through his son with Sarah, Isaac.

After the birth of Isaac, it seemed like God was on track to fulfill His promises. Then God did something unexpected: He told Abraham to take Isaac up on a mountain and sacrifice him there. In Abraham’s time, idolaters often sacrificed children to gain favor with their gods. But the God of the Bible didn’t require child sacrifices. Abraham certainly would have been saddened and confused by the request from God to kill Isaac. Isaac was a miraculous blessing from God, and Abraham loved him very much. Why would God ask Abraham to sacrifice him?

Read **Genesis 22:1–19**.

7. If you were Abraham, what would you have thought and felt when you heard God speak the words in verse 12?

Possible student responses could be, but are not limited to:

Relief, confusion, gratefulness

8. What did Abraham name the mountain where God called him to sacrifice Isaac?

The Lord Will Provide

Abraham passed the test of obedience and proved that he was willing to trust God no matter what. God spared Isaac and provided a ram to sacrifice. This showed Abraham that God was committed to fulfilling His promise.

This story is a reminder that, many years later, God would provide His perfect Lamb, Jesus, as a sacrifice in our place.

Joseph in Egypt

Later in Genesis, we read about the great-grandchildren of Abraham fighting amongst themselves. Joseph, one of the twelve grandsons of Isaac, was sold into slavery by his brothers (see Genesis 37 for this story). But instead of being cursed and forgotten in a foreign land, God used Joseph to begin to fulfill His promise to bless the world through Abraham’s offspring.

First, God blessed the slave owner who bought Joseph. Seeing how capable Joseph was, the slave owner put Joseph in charge of all his household. The slave owner's household prospered because of this. However, the slave owner's wife tempted Joseph to sleep with her. When he refused, she lied to her husband that Joseph tried to rape her. Furious, the slave owner sent Joseph to prison.

Read **Genesis 39:1–23**.

9. How did Joseph respond to Potiphar's wife when she tempted him?

At first Joseph refused Potiphar's wife's advances. When she persisted, he ran out of the house.

10. Whom did Joseph say he would be sinning against if he did what Potiphar's wife wanted him to do?

God (Genesis 39:9)

11. Why was Joseph so successful in everything that he did?

When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did (Genesis 39:3)

Joseph even made the prison in which he was placed prosper so much that the warden put him in charge of the prison. Everywhere Joseph went, God blessed the nations through the fruit of Abraham and Sarah's womb. God was doing in a partial and temporary way what He would later do in a complete and permanent way through Jesus.

Because God was with him, Joseph was soon noticed by people from the royal court of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Pharaoh summoned Joseph to interpret a dream he had that no one else could interpret. Through revelation from God, Joseph interpreted the dream. Impressed with Joseph's wisdom, Pharaoh made Joseph second in command. Joseph helped save Egypt and his own family from a severe food shortage. Joseph's father, Jacob, and Joseph's brothers, who had sold him into slavery, brought their families and moved to Egypt to survive.

12. Read **Genesis 45:6–8** and **50:18–20**. Why did Joseph say he was sent to Egypt?

But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. (Genesis 45:7)

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. (Genesis 50:20)

But after a few generations of living in Egypt, the kings of Egypt forgot everything Joseph had done. They bought and sold the children of Abraham, the Hebrews, as slaves. And thus began

one of the most dramatic rescues of God's people in history, the Exodus* from Egypt, which we will look at in the next lesson.

One Book, One Story

There is a lot of information in the Old Testament, and it can be easy to get lost in the details. The Bible is a big book. But it all points to Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises.

After mentioning Abraham, Moses, and many other Old Testament heroes of the faith, the author of Hebrews wrote:

These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. (Hebrews 11:39–40)

All the heroes of the Old Testament longed to see the salvation of God's people through the perfect King. None of them received what had been promised—but we did! We have the same faith as Abraham, in the same God, but our faith is so much richer because we have received salvation through Jesus and are part of the Kingdom that God has been building.

Every time you read the Bible, keep in mind that each passage ultimately points to Jesus. Each of these major Old Testament events teaches us more about who God is and what Jesus had to do to save us.

Action Step

God blessed many people through Joseph, even people who didn't know God. Think of two people in your life whom God could bless through you. Ask God to show you ways you could bless them and then write down what you did.

LESSON 4: Kingdom Beginnings

Lesson Focus:

The people of God oftentimes rebel, but God keeps building His Kingdom, showing patience and love.

Exodus: A Rescue to Remember

The book of Genesis ends with Joseph telling God's people that God will not forget His promises. God will visit them and bring them to His place to bless them. Joseph went from being sold into slavery by his own brothers to being the second in command of all Egypt. God used Joseph to save his family, as well as the entire nation of Egypt, from a severe food shortage. After all that Joseph had accomplished for Egypt as the Pharaoh's* top advisor, in a few generations Joseph's importance to Egypt was forgotten. The Hebrew people would eventually become slaves to the Egyptians. The Bible does not give us a lot of detail about what happened to the Hebrews right after Joseph died. The Hebrews were in Egypt for around 300 years after Joseph's death. Their exit from Egypt is one of the most dramatic rescues that God has ever performed for His people.

As slaves, the number of Hebrews increased significantly. Their numbers became so large that Pharaoh started to worry that they would rebel. Pharaoh ordered the execution of all the male Hebrew babies by drowning in the Nile River. Not surprisingly, many mothers began hiding their babies. One mother put her baby boy in a basket and sent him down the river. Pharaoh's daughter found the basket and pulled the baby out, naming him Moses. He was to become one of the greatest leaders in the entire Bible.

But being raised by someone in Pharaoh's court did not change what God had planned for Moses. Years later, Moses witnessed someone beating a Hebrew slave. He killed the person beating the slave. Pharaoh gave an order to have Moses killed. Moses fled to the desert, in what is the modern-day Arabian Peninsula, far from Egypt.

Read **Exodus 2:23-25**.

1. What has God done for you that you often forget about?

When life gets difficult, and sometimes when life is going well for us, we forget all that God has done. This question challenges the student to recall all that God has done in their life. Encourage your student to write some of these things down and review them from time to time to cultivate an attitude of gratitude.

Read **Exodus 2:23-25**.

2. What did God hear that caused Him to act (verse 23)?

The Israelites groaning and calling out to God because of their difficult lives as slaves.

3. What did God remember that caused Him to act (verse 24)?

God remembered the covenant (promise) He had made with Abraham and Isaac.

In the desert, Moses was not abandoned by God. Moses saved seven daughters of a man named Jethro, a priest of an area called Midian. He ended up marrying one of those girls, Zipporah, and got a job looking after Jethro's sheep. He stayed there for 40 long years. While tending sheep, God appeared to him in a burning bush. God told him to go back to Egypt, where he was wanted for murder, to free God's people, the Hebrews. God often calls those who do not feel up to the task. Moses did not feel adequate to do what God wanted.

4. Read Moses' responses to God in Exodus 3:11, 3:13, 4:1, 4:10, and 4:13 and match the verse with the response.

A. 3:11	<u> E </u>	"Please send someone else."
B. 3:13	<u> D </u>	"I am slow of speech."
C. 4:1	<u> C </u>	"What if they won't believe me?"
D. 4:10	<u> B </u>	"What if they ask me Your name?"
E. 4:13	<u> A </u>	"Who am I?"

5. What is your most common response to God when you believe He is asking you to do something difficult? Can you relate to any of Moses' responses? If so, which ones?

The student is being asked how they respond when what they believe God is requiring of them seems too difficult. The student's response will give their mentor insight into their insecurities, fears, or lack of faith.

After his first response, Moses obeyed God and returned to Egypt to lead God's people out of bondage and slavery. Pharaoh refused Moses' demands for freedom for the Hebrews. Through Moses, God showed His power to Pharaoh through the miracle of Moses' staff turning into a snake. Pharaoh's heart became hard, and he was determined not to let the Hebrews go free. God then used Moses to send a series of 9 plagues* to come upon Egypt. Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he refused. Then God sent a terrible 10th plague.

6. Using the chapter and verses given from Exodus, list the ten plagues.

Ex. 7:17	<u> The Nile River was changed to blood </u>	plague
Ex. 8:5	<u> Frog infestation </u>	plague
Ex. 8:16-17	<u> Gnats </u>	plague
Ex. 8:20-22	<u> Flies </u>	plague
Ex. 9:1-4	<u> Disease to livestock </u>	plague
Ex. 9:8-9	<u> Boils on people and animals </u>	plague

Ex. 9:22-23	Hail	plague
Ex. 10:4-5	Locusts	plague
Ex. 10:21-22	Darkness	plague
Ex. 11:4-7	Death of firstborn sons	plague

The 10th plague was God's judgment to kill all of the first-born sons of the Egyptians. God gave instructions to the Hebrews, which became known as Passover. The Hebrews were protected by the blood of a spotless lamb, which each family was to prepare. The blood was placed on the doorposts of each Hebrew home. God sent an angel of death to kill the Egyptian firstborn children. The angel passed over the Hebrew homes because they were protected by the blood of the lamb. This story should point us to Jesus. Jesus' death on the cross as the spotless lamb saves us from the wrath of God against our sin. He becomes the true Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Even after Pharaoh agreed to let the Hebrews go, he changed his mind. He and his army stormed out to destroy the Hebrews. God, through Moses, parted the Red Sea so the Hebrews could escape on dry ground. When the Egyptians pursued them, they were drowned in that sea.

The now free Hebrews traveled into the desert of Sinai and arrived at Mount Sinai where they made their camp. At the foot of Mount Sinai, God appeared in a thick cloud. The mountain trembled. God then commanded Moses to come meet with him on the mountain. Moses went up Mount Sinai and spent 40 days with God. It was there that God gave Moses what became known as the Ten Commandments.

7. Open your Bible to Exodus Chapter 20 and place the appropriate number in front of each commandment in the order that they are given to Moses:

- 6 You shall not murder
- 4 Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy
- 9 You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor
- 10 Do not covet your neighbor's house, wife, or property
- 2 Do not make an image (statue) of God or worship idols
- 3 Do not misuse the name of the Lord
- 1 You shall have no other gods before Me
- 7 You shall not commit adultery
- 8 You shall not steal
- 5 Honor your father and mother

The Golden Calf

While Moses was on the mountain with God for forty days, the Hebrew people started to grumble. They thought maybe Moses had died on the mountain. They became impatient with Aaron, Moses' elder brother. Aaron was Moses' second in command. They insisted that an idol be made to worship. We are unsure why Aaron agreed, but the people put a lot of pressure on Aaron in Moses' absence. They collected some of the gold jewelry they had brought with them from Egypt. The gold was melted and made into a golden calf to worship. Aaron told the people that the calf

was a symbol of the gods that had brought them out of Egypt. He was likely trying to make the people happy without offending God. The calf was a familiar symbol in pagan worship in Egypt and surrounding countries. The making and worship of the calf was idolatrous and sinful. The Hebrew people offered sacrifices to the idol and participated in pagan style worship.

God told Moses what the people were doing. God was angry at the people and was going to destroy them. Moses pleaded with God not to destroy the people. Moses came down from the mountain with the two tablets of commandments from God. When he saw the people worshipping the calf, Moses threw down the tablets, breaking them.

8. What does it say to you about God, that even though angry, He agreed not to destroy those that worshipped the golden calf after Moses pleaded with Him? (Exodus 32)

The student may answer one or more of the following:

- **God hears us. Moses pleaded on behalf of the people and God listened.**
- **The Egyptians would think God was evil and delivered His people to destroy them.**
- **God keeps His promises. He made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Israel.**

A Rebellious People Like Us

The Hebrews rebelled against God, but God did not abandon them. The generation that rebelled wandered around the desert. But God was in their midst. He gave instructions for Moses to build a moveable temple called a tabernacle. And God led them through the desert with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He fed them and met all their needs.

So much of the Exodus sounds like our Christian lives. God rescues us from slavery to sin and leads us by the hand to His place to live under His rule and blessing, just like He did for the Hebrews. And just like the Hebrews, we often complain, forget God, and serve our own sinful desires. But God loves us through it all and meets all of our needs.

9. Briefly write about a time where God was leading you and taking care of you, but you didn't realize it at the time.

The student is being asked to consider how God worked in their life in the past, but they could not see or understand it at the time. The student should give an example.

Conquest and Kingdom

After the death of Moses, God chose Joshua and promised to be with him just like He was with Moses. Joshua's task is no longer to lead God's people as they roamed around the desert. Joshua's task was to make war and drive out the wicked people from God's place. The Hebrews of Joshua's generation rebelled and complained like their ancestors did. They oftentimes didn't trust that God could defeat the armies that stood against them in the Promised Land*. But God was faithful and He gave the scared Hebrews victory over many enemies.

The Hebrews under Joshua had many victories. The first was the conquest of the city of Jericho.

10. What miracle did God do that allowed the Hebrew army to enter Jericho and defeat that nation? (Joshua 6:20-21)

He collapsed the walls of the city of Jericho.

The second military conquest for Joshua and his army was the city of Ai. God gave assurances that Joshua would easily win the battle. But God instructed Joshua that none of his army should take any of the wealth of Ai for themselves. Achan did not obey this command from Joshua.

11. What did Achan do that went against the orders God gave to Joshua?

He stole some of the treasure that was taken from Jerico that was supposed to be dedicated to God.

After the death of Joshua, the Hebrews enter what we call the period of the judges. Before Moses' death he had set up judges to deal with issues between the Hebrews. But the judges that we read about in the Book of Judges are different. These judges are called to judge the nations who were at war with the Hebrews. These were warrior judges, not the type you see in court.

The book of Judges may be the most disturbing book in the Bible. In addition to being violent at times, it has a disturbing pattern: God's people rebel, they are defeated by their enemies, God raises up a judge to save them, then the people rebel after being delivered from trouble. The book ends with, "In those days there was no king in Israel; but everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Not what is right in God's eyes, or even the eyes of the leaders, but everyone did what was right in their own eyes, meaning everyone served their own sinful desires.

Read **Judges 2:8-23** and answer the following questions:

12. How old was Joshua when he died? (Judges 2:8)

110 years old

13. After Joshua's death, Israel did this: (Judges 2:11-12)

They began worshipping idols / Baal.

14. When one of the Israelite judges would die, the people did the following: (Judges 2:18-19)

They returned to their corrupt ways.

The period of the Judges was brought to a close when Israel wanted a king, "like all the other nations" (1 Samuel 8:5). God knew this would happen, and He even warned them about it through Moses (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). The prophet Samuel is offended by this request. However, God tells Samuel:

"Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king." (1 Samuel 8:7)

We Want a King!

The people of Israel wanted a king like the other nations had. They were jealous of other nations that had palaces and kings. They also did not have confidence in Samuel's sons. Israel chooses a tall handsome man named Saul to be their king. He starts out well but ends horribly. Saul tries to make a name for himself instead of obeying God's commands. Saul looks impressive but his heart is far from God. Like the Israelites, he sees success in a worldly way. God, as the true King over Israel, rejects Saul and chooses someone who trusts in Him.

15. What did Saul do to disqualify him from being Israel's king? (1 Samuel 15:17-19)

He disobeyed God. He stole the plunder (valuables) that were taken in battle.

David: God's Man

God leads Samuel to the household of a man named Jesse to select a king pleasing to God. He asks Jesse and his sons to come make a sacrifice to God with him.

Read **1 Samuel 16:1-13** and answer the following questions:

16. Samuel, seeing Jesse's son Eliab, thought that he looked most suitable to be God's choice for a king. But God tells Samuel what? (1 Samuel 16:6-7)

That He rejected Eliab as the next king. While people see the outward things of men, God sees the hearts of men.

17. What does God tell Samuel after Jesse's youngest son, David, is brought to them? (1 Samuel 16:12)

Rise and anoint him. He was the one chosen to be king.

David is anointed king while he was still a very young man and while Saul is still on the throne. David quickly rises to fame in Israel. Still a young boy, David defeats Goliath, the giant who, along with the Philistines, waged war against God's people. David proves himself in battle after battle. Soon the Israelites take notice. Saul becomes jealous and tries to kill David multiple times. David escapes Saul each time. David had opportunities to kill Saul but refused because Saul was at one time the Lord's anointed king. That's how much David feared and loved the Lord.

David was a man after God's own heart, but at times had a divided heart himself, wanting to serve his own desires. After Saul was dead and David was king, he stole another man's wife, Bathsheba, and committed adultery with her. Bathsheba became pregnant. To cover up his sin, David called Bathsheba's husband back from a battle many days' journey away. He wanted Bathsheba's husband Uriah to sleep with her so everyone would think he was the father. Uriah

doesn't fall for it, so David murders him by having him killed in battle. David is now free to take Uriah's wife, or so he thinks.

Read **2 Samuel 12:1-24** and answer the following:

18. What did Nathan say the rich man stole from the poor man? (2 Samuel 12:1-4)

His one lamb. His most valuable possession.

19. What is David's response to Nathan? (2 Samuel 12:5-6)

The rich man should die and pay four times the value of the lamb that was stolen from the poor man.

If David was convinced of anything throughout his life, it was that God was abundantly merciful. When he is confronted with his sin, time and time again, he quickly turns to the Lord expecting mercy. We can see this in Psalm 51, a song written by David after Nathan confronted him, and we see it in many of the other psalms he wrote.

David begins to prepare to build God a permanent temple in Jerusalem. David was eager to house the Ark of the Covenant*, which currently resided in the temporary tabernacle or tent, where priests would go in and offer sacrifices for the sins of the people. Instead of a tent, God tells David He wanted a temple. God made promises to His people through David. We call this the Davidic Covenant*. The prophet Nathan delivered the following message from God to David:

"The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."

20. Which of David's sons did God call to build His temple? (1 Chronicles 22:6-10)

Solomon

21. Why did God say David would not be the one to build His temple? (1 Chronicles 22:6-10)

God told David that he would not build the Temple because he was a man of war who had shed much blood on the earth.

God bound Himself to David's bloodline. From it will eventually come Jesus, the eternal and perfect King. Our King was not raised in an ivory palace. Born in a manger and raised as a common laborer, He ascended to David's throne by way of the cross, complete with a crown of

thorns. Raised from the dead, He now sits on the throne governing the universe.

Action Step

This week, seek out other Christians at your facility to talk about how God has worked in their lives even when they were not aware that it was Him orchestrating events. Encourage each other with your testimonies of God's mercy and grace.

LESSON 5: The Kingdom to Come

Lesson Focus:

The people of God often rebelled against Him. They lost control of the Temple and were driven from God's Holy place. But God promises something better than a physical temple: A king who would faithfully lead God's people.

In the previous lesson, we learned about the establishment of God's Kingdom in Israel. The people of Israel largely rejected God as their King. They wanted to be like the nations around them and have a human king. God granted their request, but only temporarily. God was committed to bless His people by ruling over them. He does this only finally and fully in Jesus, the King of Kings.

In this lesson we will learn about some of the kings who came after David, how the kingdom in Israel was torn in two, and how the people were sent away into exile* as slaves. The captives from the Southern Kingdom of Judah were given permission to return after 70 years. Upon their return however, the people of God were still waiting for the "forever-king" that God promised to David.

David's Short-Term Legacy

Before David was even dead, his household was torn apart. His son Absalom attempted to steal the throne that would later belong to Solomon, David's son by Bathsheba. Absalom is killed and David is devastated. God has promised that David's throne will last forever, but things certainly are not looking good.

Solomon came to the throne around 970 BCE. He built an amazing temple for God. God appeared to Solomon in a dream and told him that He would grant whatever Solomon asked. Solomon did not ask for wealth or power. He asked for wisdom. Because of that, God gave him wealth and power, along with the wisdom he asked for. He became famous for his wisdom. He did not deal well with success. He married many women, and some of his wives did not follow Yahweh, the one true God.

1. If God told you He would grant whatever you asked, what would you ask for?

Solomon could have anything he asked for. He asked for wisdom. The student is asked to reflect on their own heart and the desires of the heart. There is no right or wrong answer. Affirm the student or offer a Biblical perspective.

The Kingdom is Divided in Two

Because Solomon's heart and actions did not fully follow God, his legacy* is one of confusion and division. Through a prophet named Ahijah, God told Jeroboam, one of Solomon's officials,

that he would be given ten of the twelve the tribes of Israel to rule over. When Solomon heard this, he wanted Jeroboam killed. Jeroboam fled to Egypt for safety. When Solomon died and his son Rehoboam became king, Jeroboam returned from Egypt.

Jeroboam warned Rehoboam not to burden the people with excessive taxes to build his wealth. Rehoboam wouldn't listen to Jeroboam or his father Solomon's advisors but instead burdened the people with more taxes. Eventually, the kingdom was torn in two, with the kingdom of Israel in the north ruled by Jeroboam and the kingdom of Judah in the south by Solomon's son Rehoboam.

The people of Israel followed Jeroboam, except for the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Rehoboam amassed an army of 180,000 men to attack Jeroboam. They failed. In 1 Kings 12:24 God said that He did not allow Rehoboam to be successful in battle against Jeroboam.

2. Complete the following verse from 1 Kings 12:24:

"This is what the Lord says: Do not **go up and fight against your brothers**, the Israelites."

The books of 1-2 Kings and 1-2 Chronicles show that most of the kings in each kingdom ended up being much worse than Solomon. God sent them prophets, like Isaiah, to warn them and remind them of God's love. But the people of God were so corrupted by sin, that God eventually punished them. God would send them away into exile from the land to be slaves in Babylon for 70 years.

The Northern Kingdom – Israel

The kingdom of Israel*, in the north, had a history of violence and political fighting. A number of kings ruled Israel in the north in the years following Jeroboam's rule. Baasha, a military leader, assassinated Jeroboam's son Nadab to seize power. Baasha's rule was characterized by years of wars with the kingdom of Judah in the south.

King Ahab, the son of King Omri, reigned in Israel for 22 years, from about 869 BCE to 850 BCE. Ahab is most known for his marriage to Jezebel, a foreign princess from the region of Phoenicia. Jezebel was very influential in leading the people away from God. Under Ahab and Jezebel, the worship of the false god Baal grew. During the time of Ahab and Jezebel's rule over Israel, God raised up a prophet named Elijah. Elijah confronted Ahab and challenged the prophets of Baal to show who the true God of Israel was.

Read the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18:20-40 and answer the following questions:

3. What was the name of the mountain where Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal?
(1 Kings 18:20)

Mount Carmel

4. Elijah told the 450 prophets of Baal to call on their god and he would call on his God. The true God would answer how? (1 Kings 18:24)

“The god who answers by fire—he is God.”

Three generations after Ahab, King Jehu reigned in Israel from 842 BCE to 814 BCE. Jehu was a reformer who outlawed the worship of idols.

The northern kingdom of Israel, under King Hoshea (732 BCE to 722 BCE), finally came to an end. King Shalmaneser V of Assyria took control of the north. The ten tribes of Israel, the northern kingdom, disappeared from history. These “lost tribes” of Israel have been the subject of many theories concerning where they went.

Judah – the Southern Kingdom

In Judah, the southern kingdom, under Solomon’s son Rehoboam, there were years of military conflict with the north. Some of the kings that succeeded Rehoboam were better than others. Under King Asa, from 913 BCE to 873 BCE, there was a return to God. Asa removed the worship of idols in Judah. Asa is known as a religious reformer. He was one of the “good kings” of the south.

King Jehoshaphat, King Asa’s son, continued the religious reforms of his father, strengthening the people’s faith in God. The peace and prosperity under Jehoshaphat were good for the people. While Jehoshaphat was considered a good king, he made a serious mistake by forming an alliance with King Ahab in the north, to fight against the Arameans.

The alliance between Jehoshaphat in the south and Ahab in the north would eventually have devastating consequences. Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, gained control of the southern kingdom of Judah. Athaliah worked to eliminate the worship of God (Yahweh) in Judah. This was one of the darkest periods in the history of Judah.

The next few hundred years were marked by periods of both idolatry and periods of returning to God.

Jeremiah’s Warning

In 605 BCE, the prophet Jeremiah, speaking for God, told the people of Judah that they were facing destruction by King Nebuchadnezzar and would be taken prisoner by the Babylonian king and made slaves if they did not repent.

5. What did Jeremiah accuse the people of Judah of in Jeremiah 25:3?

Not listening to the warnings he told them from God.

6. Jeremiah had told the people that God would not harm them if they did what? (Jeremiah 25:6)

"Do not follow other gods."

7. Because the people did not listen to repeated warnings from Jeremiah, God told them He was going to do what? (Jeremiah 25:8-11) List all of the consequences listed in these verses.
- **Therefore the LORD Almighty says this: "Because you have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon," declares the LORD, "and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations.**
 - **I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin.**
 - **I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp.**
 - **This whole country will become a desolate wasteland,**
 - **and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years."**

In about 597 BCE, the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar II, attacked Jerusalem and took many prisoners. These attacks occurred over several--possibly as many as ten--years. By 587 BCE, Jerusalem and the Temple of Solomon were destroyed and many of the inhabitants had fled or been taken prisoner by the Babylonians.

The Idolatry of the People

God's chosen people had a long history of worshipping other gods* rather than the one true God. These other gods we call idols*. Idolatry is the worship of someone or something that is not God as if it were. While there were and are many gods that people worship, anything that we place in front of God in our lives is an idol. We can make money, power, sex, drugs, alcohol, relationships, and even anger into idols.

One way to determine what idols we have in our lives is to look at what we go to for comfort when life gets difficult. What do we rely on to make us feel better? These idols are the things we use to feel better when we don't put God first. The false gods of the Babylonians, and the idols we allow in our lives, will not be able to save us from ourselves. God is merciful and doesn't want to punish us, but if we trust in our money, for instance, in the end our money will let us down. While we may have used drugs or alcohol to self-medicate or cope with our difficulties, the harm they do is obvious.

8. In your past, what are some of the idols that you have allowed in your life?

Idols are those things in our lives that we go to before God for pleasure, relief, or greed. The student is asked to identify some of those things in their own life either now or prior to coming to faith in Jesus.

9. Think about the particular idol that was most destructive to you. What was it about that idol that gave you relief from the difficulties of life?

Our idols provide us with a false sense of security or satisfaction. The student is asked to reflect on why their idols brought them some temporary relief from their difficulties in life.

When we place our trust in gods or idols that are not the God of the Bible, like the Jewish people, we have willingly placed ourselves in danger. God was patient and gave the Jewish people many opportunities to repent and return their worship back to Him.

The Return of God's People

When the Jewish people's 70 years as prisoners of the Babylonians was over, God promised He would punish the Babylonians. The Babylonians were eventually punished when they were conquered by the Persian King, Cyrus. Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to the land of Judah and the city of Jerusalem. After 70 years of imprisonment, some of those offered release chose to stay in Persia, formerly Babylon. Most of them would have been born in Babylon and never lived in Judah. The prosperous Persian Empire, under the kinder King Cyrus, offered opportunities and an easier life for them. The prospect of returning to Jerusalem to rebuild the destroyed city did not appeal to them. While King Cyrus was kinder than Nebuchadnezzar, he worshipped the god Marduk. The Hebrews that remained in Persia traded God's plan for their lives for lives in an idolatrous country.

10. Some men and women in prison decline parole and choose to "max out" or "jam" their sentence. How is that similar to what the Jewish people who chose to stay in Persia did when they were offered freedom?

It can feel safer to be in an environment that we have become comfortable in rather than move to an environment that we are unsure of. In prison it may be easier to do all of our sentence rather than paroling out and have to be supervised by a parole officer.

Those Jews that returned to Judah and Jerusalem after 70 years as prisoners returned to a homeland and temple that had been destroyed. They soon found themselves facing many difficulties of their own doing. The prophet Haggai received a message from God that he gave to the Jewish people that explained why they were having so much difficulty.

In the prophesy that God gave to Haggai, God begins to explain in verses 1:2-4 of the first chapter of Haggai the mistakes that the Jewish people had made.

11. In your own words, what did the people do when they were released to go back to their homeland? (Haggai 1:2-4)

The people made their own comfort and luxury a priority over God and restoring their religion and Temple.

12. As a result of their actions, what were the results they were experiencing? (Haggai 1:5-6)

The student's answer should reflect an understanding of the following section of Haggai.

“Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.”

This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,” says the LORD. “You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?” declares the LORD Almighty. “Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house. Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops.”

13. What does God tell the people to do to reverse the course they were on? (Haggai 1:8)

Build His house, the Temple that had been destroyed. Rebuilding the Temple first and restoring the worship of God should have been their priority.

The mistakes the Jewish people made after being released from 70 years of imprisonment by the Babylonians are the same mistakes that many people make when they are released from prison. Rather than putting God first, they want to make up for lost time by attending to their own desires. Rather than build the Temple so they could reestablish their worship of God, the Jewish people built paneled houses for themselves. Paneled houses were a luxury. Their priority was to think of themselves and what they wanted rather than first having their spiritual life in order.

Read **Matthew 6:25-34** and answer the following questions:

14. In Matthew 6:25, Jesus said not to worry about what?

“Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.”

When the Jewish people returned to their own country after 70 years of incarceration, they came home to a mess. The Temple was destroyed. Most of their roads, buildings, homes, and farms were gone. They would have to start over rebuilding their lives.

15. What does Jesus say in Matthew 6:33?

“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

God's People Wait

God's people started over in the land God gave them. But things were never the same. They eventually rebuilt the Temple the Babylonians had destroyed. The new Temple and land did not compare to the greatness and grandeur of Solomon's Temple and rule. The new Temple and new land would eventually be ruled over by foreign powers. First the Persians, then Greeks, and

then the Romans had control. The peace and blessing promised to Abraham so many years ago felt distant and hard for many of the Israelites to believe. So, some sought political power by getting close to their foreign rulers. Others, however, worshipped and waited.

Many of them waited for a very long time. Roughly 400 years passed from the last prophet in the Old Testament, Malachi, to the first prophet in the New, John the Baptist. Generations of God's people lived and died under the rule of a foreign power. Yet they still hoped for a deliverer, the one greater than Moses who would rule forever from David's throne.

16. Has there ever been a time when you felt like God said, "Wait"?

The student is being asked to reflect on their experience of wanting something, even something good, and understanding that it is important to wait for God's timing.

17. How are you trying to submit to God's timing rather than your own timing?

The student may give a specific example of something, maybe getting out of prison, but understanding that God has a purpose for even the difficult things we are going through.

As they waited for deliverance, God's people looked toward the day when the surrounding nations would be judged. But the arrival of the true King and His kingdom does not come with fire and smoke, like we saw with Moses at Mt. Sinai. This King is better than the Israelites were hoping for. He came to release His people from their greatest enemies of all, not the Greeks or the Romans, but Satan and their own sin. This King is Jesus, and He brings with Him a Kingdom that will have no end and no enemies to stand against it. We will learn more about how He does this in the next lesson.

Action Step

1 Peter 5:6-7 says, *"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."* Write down two or three things you can do to grow in humility like Jesus. Practice those things for at least a week, then write down how the experience went for you.

LESSON 6: The Kingdom Arrives

Lesson Focus:

God had made a promise to Abraham 2,000 years before Jesus' arrival on the earth to establish His Kingdom forever. With the Incarnation (Jesus' birth) God was redeeming humanity and fulfilling that promise.

God's great story, beginning with His creation of the universe and mankind, comes to a high point when He sends His Son Jesus to make good on His plans and promises. The eternal Son of God took on a human nature and claimed His throne through His death on the cross and resurrection from the grave.

1. Complete the following verses: (Galatians 4:3-7)

*So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the **spiritual forces of the world**. But when the set time had fully come, **God sent his Son**, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive **adoption** to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into **our hearts**, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's **child**; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.*

In our last lesson, at the close of the Old Testament, the people of God returned to God's holy city Jerusalem after their exile in Babylon. But instead of living under God's rule, they would live for generations under the rule of foreign powers. First, under the rule of Persia and its king Cyrus. Then under the rule of the Greeks and the Romans. By the time Jesus was born, the Romans had defeated the Greeks and taken control of the land God had given to His people. The Romans allowed the people to have a Jewish leader, but they were merely puppet leaders under the control of Rome. But through His Son Jesus, God was about to unveil the miraculous way He would fulfill His Old Testament promises. We see them all fulfilled in Jesus.

The Kingdom Arrives in a Manger

God's great story, beginning with the creation, has lots of plot twists, intrigue, and drama. But most people, even many Christians, don't know the majority of God's story presented in the Bible. Most people know something about Adam and Eve in the garden, the birth of Jesus, and the crucifixion and resurrection. God's story with humanity is amazing and demonstrates His great love for His creation throughout the Old and New Testaments.

The birth (incarnation*) and ministry of Jesus is, to date, the high point in God's great story. That God would become a man to dwell among us is mind boggling. God's promises, thousands of years prior to Jesus' birth, have once and finally come to pass. God's promise to reconcile humanity to Himself and establish His Kingdom forever will be fulfilled through His Son.

2. Complete the following verse from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah written more than 700 years before Jesus' birth:

*Therefore the Lord himself will **give you** a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to **a son**, and will call him Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)*

God had promised to Adam and Eve, thousands of years before Jesus, that He would send someone to crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). With Jesus' death and resurrection, our sin has been defeated. What the serpent Satan meant for evil, God used for His purposes. We can once again have a relationship with God, through faith in Jesus. This is the best news of all! The word Gospel literally means "good news."

3. If someone were to ask you what the good news of God was, how would you respond?

The student's answer should include something about our sins being forgiven through Jesus, new life in Christ, or God making a way for us to be in relationship with Him.

God's great story continues from the close of the Old Testament to the beginning of the New Testament with four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each of the four Gospels gives an account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection from the point of view of each of their authors. Matthew was one of Jesus' twelve apostles. Matthew was a Jewish tax collector who wrote his Gospel for a Jewish audience that spoke Greek. Greek was the language of business throughout the Roman empire.

The second Gospel, Mark, was also originally written in the Greek language. For many centuries it was believed that the writer of Mark was John Mark, the ministry companion of the apostle Peter. In more recent times, it has been thought that a different Mark was the writer. It was probably written in Rome. It is probably the oldest of the four Gospels and the first time the stories of Jesus' life and ministry had been written down.

The third Gospel, Luke, is historically credited to the apostle Paul's companion Luke, but he does not identify himself in his writing. The author of Luke wrote a two-part history that included the Gospel and the Book of Acts. There are some clues to the purpose and audience that Luke-Acts had in mind.

4. Complete the following verses from Luke 1:1-4:

*Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were **eyewitnesses and servants of the word**. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully **investigated** everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus*, so that you may know **the certainty** of the things you have been taught.*

It is believed that Theophilus was a wealthy convert to Christianity that financially supported the spread of the Gospel. Luke's Gospel was often read aloud at Christian gatherings in house churches and when the Lord's Supper* (communion) was celebrated.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as the synoptic Gospels* because they contain similar stories, sequence of events, and wording.

The fourth Gospel, John, is the most different of the four Gospels. John includes additional events that weren't recorded in the others. In chapters 2-4, John tells of events in Jesus' early Galilean ministry not included in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John also recorded several trips Jesus took to Jerusalem in the time before His arrest that the other Gospels did not include.

Like the three synoptic Gospels, John was written in the Greek language, the primary written language of the Roman empire. But the audience John wrote for was likely more culturally Greek than the Jewish Christians that the synoptic Gospels had in mind. The history of Greek culture was steeped in the philosophy of writers like Plato and Socrates. From the very start of John, it is clear that he is appealing to this Greek mindset.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1, emphasis added)

The Greek word here translated as Word is "logos*." In Greek culture the idea of the "logos" has a long history. For the Greeks, the "logos" was the mind of God or the intelligent force behind the universe. John starts his Gospel by saying essentially, yes, you Greeks are correct, there is a logos or intelligence that created and sustains the universe. That logos is the Jesus that we proclaim and teach.

Together, the four Gospels of the New Testament are the continuation of "God's Great Story" in the Old Testament. Studying the Old Testament helps us to understand the New Testament better. Understanding that the life and ministry of Jesus was the fulfillment of the promises God made to humanity centuries before helps us get a better understanding of the heart and mind of God.

5. What is the Bible verse or Bible story that has been most important for you in understanding who God is? How did that verse or story impact your life?

The student is challenged to reflect on how the Bible has impacted and informed their life. Affirm the student's reflection or share a specific verse that has impacted your own life.

The Kingdom Among Us

In previous Crossroads' courses we learned that the "Kingdom" of God is not an earthly kingdom. Jesus stated many times that He did not come to establish the earthly kingdom that many had hoped for and expected. The Kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom where the presence and rule of God is experienced and lived out. When we enter into a relationship with Jesus we are part of that spiritual kingdom. The Holy Spirit dwells in us. God takes permanent residence in our hearts. In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit would come from time to time onto someone to empower them to speak or act for God's purposes.

Jesus proclaimed that, through Him, the Kingdom of God had come.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. (John 1:14)

John wrote that the Word, the logos, the very intelligence that created and sustains the universe, dwelt among humans in the man Jesus Christ. In Jesus, all the Law of the Old Testament is fulfilled. The Law of Moses was not able to save us because of the weaknesses of our sin nature. God did what the Law could not do by sending His Son in human form. God declared an end to sin's control by giving us His Son as a sacrifice for our sin.

6. Why do you think it is difficult for some people to understand that it is not our good behavior or following rules (the Law) that makes us righteous?

The student may answer something along the lines of:

- **Being good seems like it would please God.**
- **Grace does not seem fair.**
- **Satan tries to convince us that God cannot forgive us.**
- **I have a lot of guilt about my past.**

Luke chapter 17 has an account of some Pharisees (Jewish teachers of the Law) coming to Jesus to inquire about the coming of God's Kingdom. Jesus responded:

Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst." (Luke 17:20-21)

Jesus was not telling the Pharisees that the Kingdom of God was within them, as their hearts were far from God. But if they chose to see and embrace God's truth, they would have recognized that Jesus was the demonstration of God's Kingdom come to dwell among mankind. They could be participants in God's spiritual kingdom.

God's great story in the four Gospels gives us a window into the travels and teaching of Jesus. Jesus chose twelve men to travel with Him as He taught, healed the sick, and demonstrated the power of God.

Once, Philip, a disciple of Jesus, asked Him to show them the Father (God). John recorded this interaction in his Gospel.

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:9)

In his letter to the Colossian church (1:15-20), Paul wrote that Jesus was the image of the invisible God.

7. Complete the following verses from Colossians 1:15-20:

*The Son is the image of the invisible **God**, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were **created**: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created **through** him and **for** him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the **church**; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have **all his fullness** dwell in him, and through him to **reconcile** to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his **blood**, shed on the cross.*

In every "great story" there is a main character that we get to know. A great story gives us a glimpse of what motivates the hero. In the Old Testament we learn much about God the Father, what is important to Him, and how He interacted with His creation and chosen nation. In Jesus we are looking at an exact image of God. As Jesus teaches, heals, forgives sins, and makes righteous judgements about the character of those that said they were followers of God but weren't, we are looking at the person and character of God.

As we read the Gospels, we can feel like we are part of God's story. We are able to put ourselves into each scene. We can be amazed with the disciples when they are amazed at the things Jesus says and does. We can identify with them in the times when their faith was lacking. When Jesus tells people that their sins are forgiven, we can believe that God has forgiven us also. The Gospels are made to be read over and over. Each time we read the Gospels, we pick up more of the story. We might notice something in the scene that we missed before.

The sixth chapter of John is an amazing scene, worthy of the best book or movie ever written. It starts on a grassy mountainside near the Sea of Galilee where 5,000 people had gathered. The actual number may have been even more. They had heard of and seen the great miracles that Jesus had been doing. The disciples were probably very excited that the ministry of Jesus was getting popular. They still believed that Jesus was going to go into Jerusalem to set up His Kingdom. Jesus does one of His most famous miracles by feeding thousands of people with five loaves of bread and two fish. Everyone, including the disciples, marveled at the power of God. Jesus saw that the people wanted to force Him to be their king. Jesus withdraws into the mountains to be alone, away from the crowds. His disciples crossed over the lake in a boat. Jesus appeared to them walking on the water as the waters became rough.

The next day the crowds went by boat to find Jesus.

8. Complete the following verses in John 6:26-33:

*Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but **because you ate the loaves and had your fill**. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."*

Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"

*Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: **to believe in the one he has sent**."*

So they asked him, "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

*Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you **the true bread from heaven**. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."*

As you read John 6, picture yourself as one of the 5,000 people. You might imagine smelling the grass on the hillside. With such a large crowd you would have to strain to hear Jesus' words. Think about the other people in the crowd and their reaction to the miracle done in their midst. Some might have been crying with tears of joy. Some may have been asking, "How could Jesus do such a miracle?" There would have been some people that were anxious to storm Jerusalem and the Temple to place Jesus on a throne. There was probably excitement mixed with confusion. They chased Jesus across the lake, desperate to understand what God was doing.

9. Picture yourself in this scene with Jesus on the mountainside. Write a short paragraph describing what you may have thought and felt as the scene unfolds.

The student is being asked to reflect on how they might have perceived what was happening as Jesus fed the 5000 and saw the responses of the people present. There isn't a correct answer. Possibly reflect on how you may have viewed the scene if you had been there.

The Bible, "God's Great Story," has been given to us to answer the great questions of life. It gives us hope. It shows us the way to know the very God who created, sustains, and redeems humanity. It is our story as well as God's. We have a God who is alive and desires nothing less than having us be part of His great plan. In the final two lessons of this course, we will see how Jesus' work on the cross has made a way for us to be children of God. We will also get a glimpse of how the story ends with all of His children dwelling for eternity in His presence and love.

Action Step

Choose one of the Gospels to read in its entirety in the next week. As you read, try to place yourself in each scene. How might you have felt? What would you have thought witnessing Jesus' ministry?

LESSON 7: The Kingdom and the Cross

Lesson Focus:

The days leading up to Jesus' death and resurrection have been dramatized in films and books. In this lesson we are going to walk with Jesus as He travels to Jerusalem to present himself as the Passover Lamb, the final sacrifice for sin.

God's great story, from Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament, to Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, is one continuous story of God's love and plans for humanity. Jesus' part in the creation is a foundational truth of the Christian faith. The very first verse of the Bible says:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

The New Testament explains Jesus' part in this creation of the heavens and the earth.

Complete the following verses from the New Testament about Jesus' place in the creation:

1. Through **him** [Jesus, the Word] all things were made; without **him** nothing was made that has been made. (John 1:3)
2. For in **him** [The Son, Jesus] **all things were created**: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created **through him and for him**. He is before all things, and in him all things **hold together**. (Colossians 1:16-17)
3. How would you explain, in light of the verses above, to someone who asked you, "Isn't Jesus just a man, not God like Christians say?"

The Bible is clear that Jesus was not just a man. He created all things and all things were created through and for Him. He is God.

Through Jesus, and for Jesus, the creation was made. After the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden, God pronounced judgement on mankind and Satan.

Complete the following verses from Genesis 3:14-15:

4. So the LORD God said to the serpent,
"Because you have done this,
"Cursed are you above all livestock
and all wild animals!
You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust

*all the days of your life.
And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will **crush your head**,
and you will strike his heel.” (Genesis 3:14-15)*

The “enmity*” God is speaking about is the division between humanity and the devil. The devil would be the enemy of humanity in a struggle of good and evil for the generations of Adam and Eve’s descendants. Ultimately, one of these future descendants of Adam and Eve, Jesus, would crush the head of Satan in a total victory over evil. God also said that Satan would bruise the heel of Jesus in this battle. The bruising of the heel would happen as Jesus suffered a painful death on the Cross. What Satan meant for evil would bring about his total defeat.

Old Testament Prophecy

There are over 300 prophecies referenced in the Old Testament that told of the birth, ministry, suffering, and purposes of Jesus, the Messiah. Mathematicians have calculated the odds that one man could fulfill each of these prophecies. The odds that Jesus would fulfill just 8 of these prophecies has been calculated to 1 in 10 followed by 30 zeros. Here are just some of the prophecies that were accurate about Jesus:

- The time of His birth (see the Daniel 8 & 9 Timeline)
- He would be born in Bethlehem. (Micah 5:2)
- He would be born of a virgin. (Isaiah 7:14)
- He would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. (Zechariah 11:12)
- He would be mocked. (Psalm 22:7,8)
- He would be pierced. (Psalms 22:16)
- He would die with the wicked, but He would be buried with the rich. (Isaiah 53:9)

Read each of the following verses about Jesus and answer the question that follows it:

5. Genesis 49:10: Jesus would come from this Jewish tribe:

The tribe of Judah

6. Isaiah 53:5: Because of our own rebelliousness and sin, the Messiah would . . .

Be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. We are healed by His wounds.

7. Zechariah 9:9: Jesus would enter Jerusalem this way to be crucified:

See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Our faith should be strengthened by understanding how the writers of the Gospels and the witnesses to Jesus' ministry confirmed that the details of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah were precisely fulfilled by Jesus.

Jesus and the Jewish Calendar

Let's now look closely at the days leading up to Jesus' death and resurrection and see how the events of those days align with the Jewish feasts and holy days of in the Old Testament. The people of Israel were led out of Egypt during the Jewish month called "Nisan." Nisan is a Persian word that translates as "Spring." This was the perfect time for the Exodus* because it was before the heat of summer and after the cold of winter. Travel would be easiest for them at this time.

Immediately before leaving Egypt the Israelites observed the very first "Passover*." God was going to kill every firstborn offspring of the Egyptian people and their livestock as a punishment for Egypt's idolatry and abuse of His people. The people of God were given instructions on how to protect themselves from this judgement from God.

Read **Exodus 12** and answer the following questions:

8. What were the people very specifically instructed to do? (Exodus 12:1-8)
 - **On the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household.**
 - **If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor.**
 - **Animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats.**
 - **Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight.**
 - **Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs.**
 - **That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast.**
 - **Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it.**
 - **This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD's Passover.**
9. What did God tell Moses and Aaron about the celebration of Passover in Exodus 12:14?

To celebrate the Passover for generations to come.

The New Testament is very clear about Jesus' connection to the Passover. The sacrifice of the Passover lamb not only literally protected the people under Moses leadership, but Jesus would

Himself be the final Passover sacrifice that would once and for all cleanse the sin of humanity forever.

10. What does the apostle Paul say about Jesus in 1 Corinthians 5:7?

Christ is “our” Passover lamb that has been sacrificed.

11. What does 1 Peter 1:18-19 say about our redemption*?

We have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ.

It is not a coincidence that Jesus traveled to Jerusalem in His last days to celebrate the Passover, as He was the fulfillment of God's plan to redeem humanity as the perfect, unblemished Lamb of God. The Passover was a weeklong celebration that began with the preparation of the Passover lamb and continued for seven days with the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In Exodus 12:12-20 Moses explains to the people that they should eat only bread made without yeast as a remembrance that when they left Egypt they had little time to prepare. The bread for their trip didn't have time for the yeast to rise in their bread. It was flat, or unleavened. The Feast of Unleavened Bread is a time for repentance for Jewish people.

12. How long before the Passover celebration did Jesus arrive in Bethany on His way to Jerusalem? (John 12:1)

Six days

13. What did Mary do at the home of His friend Lazarus in Bethany? (John 12:3)

She poured perfume on Jesus' feet and wiped His feet with her hair.

14. What was Judas' reaction to what Mary had done? (John 12:4-6)

He objected to what Mary had done, saying that the money for the perfume could have been given to the poor. But he was a thief, not really caring for poor people.

15. What did Jesus say to Judas? (John 12:7)

Jesus told him to leave her alone because the perfume was meant to be saved for that day.

The anointing of Jesus with perfume was something that was customarily done to prepare a body for burial to cover the smell of decay. Jesus understood Mary's actions and the spiritual significance.

When the chief priest heard that Jesus was at the home of Lazarus, the religious leaders made plans to kill both Lazarus and Jesus. Jesus spent two days in Bethany. The second day was the Sabbath. Travel would not have been lawful on the Sabbath. Jesus rested on this day to prepare

for His entry into Jerusalem. Bethany was about two miles outside of Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, word had reached the crowds in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover that the Messiah was coming to the city.

16. What did the crowds in Jerusalem do to prepare for Jesus' entry and welcome Him? (John 12:13)

They took palm branches and went out to meet Him, shouting, "Hosanna" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the king of Israel!"

Read **Matthew 21:1-17** and answer the following questions:

17. What was the Old Testament prophecy that Jesus fulfilled in Matthew 21:1-5?

"Your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

18. In Matthew 21:12-14 we read that Jesus chased out the money changers when He reached the Temple. What else did Jesus do in verse 21:14 of Matthew?

Jesus healed the blind and lame.

19. Where did Jesus go after leaving the Temple? (Matthew 21:17)

He went back to the town of Bethany.

The 14th day of the month of Nisan was the day that Moses ordered that the Passover would be celebrated (Leviticus 23:5). The Wednesday evening before Passover began was the time that Jesus and His disciples celebrated Passover. Christians now know this meal as the "Last Supper."

After their meal, Jesus and His disciples went to a garden known as Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives on the east side of Jerusalem. At Gethsemane, the final Passover Lamb, Jesus, prepared spiritually for His arrest and crucifixion.

20. What did Jesus say to Peter and the sons of Zebedee, James and John, in the garden in Matthew 26:38?

"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

21. What did Jesus say to His Father in heaven as He prayed in the garden in Matthew 26:39?

"If it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

22. Why do you think Jesus prayed this way?

The student's answer should say something about Jesus being a man and understanding how painful and difficult the Cross would be.

After praying, Jesus was arrested in the garden by a large crowd armed with clubs and swords. When one of His disciples took out his own sword to protect Jesus, Jesus says for him to put his sword away.

23. In Matthew 26:54, what is the reason Jesus gave the disciples that they should not fight the crowd?

“How then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?”

Jesus was taken to the Jewish high priest, Caiaphas. With Caiaphas was a large gathering of religious leaders and teachers of the law. They did not have a legal reason to have Jesus killed despite having false witnesses that made accusations. Caiaphas, questioning Jesus, asks:

“I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.”
(Matthew 26:63)

Jesus responded:

“You have said so,” Jesus replied. “But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”
(Matthew 26:64)

This response was what the religious leaders were looking for. They said this was blasphemy* for Jesus to say He would be seated at God’s right hand. They punched and spit on Jesus. The disciple, Peter, watched this from a distance and became fearful. When questioned, Peter said three times that he did not know Jesus.

The Jewish people did not have the legal right to execute Jesus because they lived under the laws of Rome. They brought Jesus to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. After questioning Jesus, Pilate said he did not see a legal reason to put Jesus to death. Pilate’s wife was warned in a dream that no harm should come to Jesus, an innocent man. But as the crowd of Jewish leaders that had gathered became more agitated, Pilate allowed for Jesus to be crucified to avoid an uprising. Pilate took water, washing his hands to say he was not responsible for what was about to happen. Pilate had Jesus flogged* and handed over to his Roman guards for crucifixion.

On the Cross, Jesus was mocked and spit on. Crucifixion was a cruel way to die. It could take many hours for someone to die from crucifixion. Eventually, they would suffocate to death. For three hours, from noon until 3 in the afternoon, as Jesus hung on the Cross, the sky became dark. Jesus cried out the following before He died:

"Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (Matthew 27:46)

Translated into English, this was, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

Some people thought Jesus was calling out to the prophet Elijah, but He was calling out to God. It is painful to think that Jesus felt that His Father had abandoned Him. As a man, fully human, it is hard to imagine the spiritual battle that Jesus was in on the Cross. He was in intense pain as He suffocated to death. The Son of God, who had never sinned, now had the sin of all humanity placed on Him. But Jesus had not lost faith. In fact, Jesus was reciting one of the Psalms. Psalm 22 is a Psalm of David. David, in a dark moment of his life, felt alone but tells God that he trusts Him even in the darkness.

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish? (Psalm 22:1)*

24. Have you ever had an experience where you were in a hopeless or dark spot in your life and told God you would continue to trust Him? Explain:

Feelings of hopelessness or darkness are part of the human experience. The student is asked to reflect on how they trust God even when things seem hopeless.

Typically, the Romans would break the legs of someone being crucified to speed up their death. Instead, a Roman soldier pierced Jesus' side with a spear. This fulfilled an important requirement for the Passover lamb. God had instructed Moses the following about the Passover lamb:

They must not leave any of it till morning or break any of its bones. When they celebrate the Passover, they must follow all the regulations. (Numbers 9:12)

The Romans broke with the procedures for crucifixion by not breaking Jesus' legs, not knowing that this was God's order for the Passover lamb.

Jesus' last words, recorded in John's Gospel, were:

"It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:30)

The Greek for "it is finished" is *telestai*. John's Gospel was written in Greek. The word "telestai" is an accounting term meaning that a debt was paid in full. The significance of Jesus saying that the debt was paid in full cannot be understated.

25. Knowing Jesus' painful physical and spiritual battle on the Cross, and His proclamation that the debt for sin was paid in full, are you able to accept God's complete forgiveness in your own life? Why or why not?

The student's response reflects their faith and trust in God's grace and forgiveness in their life. Affirm their answer or provide insight if they say that they are not able to fully accept God's forgiveness.

Action Step

Spend time this week reading and meditating on Psalm 22. As you do, consider Jesus on the Cross doing the same. Ask God to increase your faith. Read Psalm 22 again, out loud, or quietly, and direct the words of the Psalm to God as a prayer from your own heart.

LESSON 8: The Forever Kingdom

Lesson Focus:

After Jesus' death and resurrection, He appeared to and spent time with His disciples. There were a number of appearances recorded in the four Gospels that Jesus made after His resurrection and before He finally returned to His Father in heaven.

With Jesus' work on the Cross complete, the spiritual reality in heaven and earth was changed forever. Humanity now had access to God in a way they hadn't since the fall in the garden of Eden. To this day, for anyone that calls on the name of Jesus, salvation is available. All of our sin was nailed on the Cross with Jesus, the final Passover Lamb.

The apostle Paul wrote:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:17-19)

What an amazing truth that God, the creator and sustainer of the universe, would no longer hold our sins against us. It isn't just some sins. All sin has been dealt with through Christ. It can be difficult for us to believe this when we look back at all the things we have done in our past. Our enemy, Satan, tries to convince us that we have not been forgiven. He is called the accuser of the brethren. He stands ready to point his finger at us so that we believe the lie that we cannot be forgiven. Satan wants us to live in guilt, running from God to hide our shame. But Satan's end is coming.

*"For the accuser of our brothers and sisters,
who accuses them before our God day and night,
has been hurled down.
They triumphed over him
by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of their testimony. . . ." (Revelation 12:10b-11a)*

1. Do you ever struggle with believing that all of your sin has been forgiven and paid for by Jesus? Explain why or why not:

The student should be providing the mentor with insight as to where or how they struggle with accepting God's grace and forgiveness. Respond accordingly.

After His death and resurrection, for 40 days Jesus appeared at various times to His disciples. His resurrected body was not a ghost. He had flesh and blood. On one of His appearances, He asked for food. He still bore the wounds of the Cross, instructing Thomas the doubter to feel the wounds so that he would understand it was truly Jesus before him.

Whom did Jesus appear to in each of the following verses from the four Gospels and Paul's 1st letter to the Corinthian church?

2.	Mark 16:9-11	Mary Magdalene
3.	Matthew 28:8-10	Two Marys, Magdalene and another Mary
4.	Mark 16:12-13	Two disciples
5.	Luke 24:33-34	The eleven apostles / disciples
6.	John 20:19-25	The disciples
7.	Mark 16:14	The eleven apostles
8.	John 21:1-14	His disciples / apostles
9.	Matthew 28:16-20	His eleven apostles
10.	1 Corinthians 15:6	500 disciples
11.	1 Corinthians 15:7	James

Jesus' final appearance to His disciples before returning to His Father in heaven is recorded in the Book of Acts, written by Luke:

When he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight. While they were looking intently at the sky as he was going, suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven."

The Great Commission

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:16-20)

Before going back to heaven, Jesus gave His disciples directions. We have come to know this as the "Great Commission*." Being commissioned means officially being put into service. Jesus instructed the disciples to continue the work of making disciples. He told them to "go," and go they did.

Power from the Holy Spirit

Jesus charged the apostles to continue the mission of spreading the Gospel and making disciples. In their own strength, this mission would be impossible. But Jesus promised that

when He returned to heaven He would send the Holy Spirit* to empower them for the task ahead. The Book of Acts records this interaction between Jesus and His apostles after His resurrection and before He returned to heaven:

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1:4-5)

In the second chapter of Acts, the apostles were all together for the feast of Pentecost*. Pentecost was a Jewish holiday that commemorated Moses' receiving the Law from God. Christians recognize Pentecost 50 days after Easter as the day that the apostles were baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit. While gathered together, the Holy Spirit came upon them in a powerful way as Jesus promised. The Holy Spirit, like God the Father and Jesus, is one third of the Trinity and fully God.

Read **Acts 2** and answer the following questions:

12. When the Holy Spirit filled the house where the disciples were gathered, they heard a sound that sounded like what? (Acts 4:4)

It sounded like the blowing of a violent wind.

13. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began doing this: (Acts 4:4)

Speaking in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

14. A crowd gathered, and instead of hearing strange tongues from the disciples, they heard this: (Acts 2:11)

They heard them declaring the wonders of God in their own tongues (languages).

15. Some of the crowd made fun of what was happening and said this about the disciples: (Acts 2:13)

That they must be drunk.

The Gospel Goes to the World

The Book of Acts, sometimes referred to as the Acts of the Apostles, tells the story of the spread of the Gospel to the nations. Christianity started as a movement among the Jewish people, but God's plan was much bigger. Many Jews in the region surrounding Jerusalem rejected the Gospel and began persecuting Christians. This was no surprise to God. Jesus had told His disciples that they would be persecuted. History tells us that, except for John, all of Jesus' apostles would eventually be put to death for the message of the Gospel. This

persecution of Christians worked for the good of the Gospel, as it resulted in their traveling to other nations to share the “good news” of Jesus.

From the Fall in the garden in Genesis, the first book of the Bible, God tells us that His plan for humanity has not changed. God’s intent was always that Jesus would redeem humanity through His death and resurrection. The author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)

The spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles (the nations) was not a new idea. The Old Testament makes references to God’s plan to make Himself known to all nations.

16. What does God tell Abraham in Genesis 12:3 about Abraham’s offspring?

“I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

Jesus’ disciples were slow to understand that God wanted the Gentile nations to know and serve Him. In Acts chapter 10, Peter receives a vision from God about the Gentiles. Peter at first objects to God because the Jewish people considered non-Jews to be unclean. God directs Peter to go to the house of a Centurion, a Roman military officer.

Read **Acts 10:24-48** and answer the following questions:

17. What does Isaiah 49:6 tell us about God’s plan for the Gentiles?

Salvation would be made available to all people throughout the world.

Read **Acts 10:24-48** and answer the following questions:

18. What does Peter tell Cornelius in verse 10:28 of Acts?

He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.”

19. What did the “man in shining clothes” who appeared to Cornelius as he prayed tell him to do? (Verse 10:32)

Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.

20. Peter tells those gathered at Cornelius’ home that he now understood that God does not show favoritism, but accepts whom? (Verse 10:35)

God “. . . accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.”

21. What does Peter order to be done in verse 10:48 for the household of Cornelius?

That they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles

By this time in your study of the Bible you have learned much about the apostle Paul. Paul is known as the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul, before Jesus appeared to him on his travel to Damascus, was known as Saul. Saul was a Jewish Pharisee, a teacher of the Law. Saul was very active in hunting down and killing Christians. The first Christian martyr*, Stephen, was stoned to death. Paul was a witness to his murder. Acts 8:1 says:

And Saul approved of their killing him.

Acts chapter 9 tells the miraculous story of Saul's conversion. Read **Acts 9:1-19** and answer the following questions:

22. What had Saul asked the high priest in verses 9:1-2?

He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

23. In his travel to Damascus, a bright light surrounded Saul. When Saul asked who this great light was, a voice from heaven said what? (Acts 9:5)

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

24. What did God tell Ananias about Saul in Acts 9:15?

This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.

Saul had a radical conversion to faith in Jesus. He went on to start churches in at least nine territories that we know of, including Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, and Ephesus. His letters of instruction, encouragement, and correction have become part of our New Testament.

The Work Continues Through Us

God's Great Story does not end with the spread of the Gospel by the early church. God has chosen us to continue in this great story. When we share our Christian faith with others, we are participating in God's story. If we are Christians, we are called to evangelize, make disciples, and show the love of God to the world. Finding our place in God's Great Story is an amazing adventure. Each of us has a unique part to play in God's story. Writing to the church in Corinth, Paul wrote:

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. (1 Corinthians 12:27-31)

We are not all called to be preachers or teachers, but that one person that we share our faith with might be someone who will preach to millions of people. As we seek to be faithful to even the small things that God calls us to do, we will be right in the middle of a great story that began with the creation of the universe.

The End of the Story

Revelation*, the last book of the Bible, tells us how God intends to establish His will finally and forever for creation. Revelation can be a difficult book to understand. Over the centuries, many people have tried to interpret its mysteries. Revelation was written by the apostle John when he was a prisoner on the island of Patmos. John wrote down all that God showed him in a vision. Every generation has interpreted their times through the lens of this amazing book. It was written with specific instructions for seven churches, but these instructions and corrections are universal. God showed John a vision of the final defeat of Satan. Key points of Revelation are:

- The Second Coming of Jesus Christ to defeat evil and establish God's eternal Kingdom.
- A final judgement for sin and evil.
- A new, perfected creation—a new heaven and earth.
- A heavenly portrayal of worship of God.
- The imprisonment of Satan for 1,000 years prior to a final judgement.

The final chapter of Revelation starts with the following picture of eternity:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

God's Great Story

This course is complete, but God's great story continues with us. Everyone at Crossroads is praying for you as you grow in your faith and love for Jesus. You can have confidence that Jesus died for all of your sin. You can walk in His Spirit now and dwell with Him for eternity.

Action Step

There is no higher calling for Christians than to worship God with a grateful heart for making a way for us to be part of His Kingdom. This week, set time aside each day to be with God, expressing to Him your gratefulness for His grace and mercy.



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