

The ONE  
YEAR<sup>®</sup>  
B I B L E  
for NEW BELIEVERS

Arranged in 365 Daily Readings  
with Notes for New Believers



New Living  
Translation<sup>®</sup>  
SECOND EDITION

Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.  
Carol Stream, Illinois

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# CONTENTS

## The Books of the Bible

Alphabetical Listing of Bible Books . . . . .	A7
How to Use This Bible . . . . .	A9
A Note to Readers. . . . .	A11
Introduction to the New Living Translation . . . . .	A13
NLT Bible Translation Team . . . . .	A19
Tyndale Bible Verse Finder . . . . .	A21
Introduction to the Books of the Bible . . . . .	A53

Genesis / <i>January 1</i> . . . . .	1	Ezekiel / <i>November 1</i> . . . . .	1259
Exodus / <i>January 25</i> . . . . .	98	Daniel / <i>November 25</i> . . . . .	1353
Leviticus / <i>February 16</i> . . . . .	186	Hosea / <i>December 5</i> . . . . .	1389
Numbers / <i>March 3</i> . . . . .	247	Joel / <i>December 9</i> . . . . .	1406
Deuteronomy / <i>March 23</i> . . . . .	331	Amos / <i>December 10</i> . . . . .	1412
Joshua / <i>April 10</i> . . . . .	405	Obadiah / <i>December 13</i> . . . . .	1425
Judges / <i>April 23</i> . . . . .	456	Jonah / <i>December 14</i> . . . . .	1428
Ruth / <i>May 5</i> . . . . .	506	Micah / <i>December 15</i> . . . . .	1431
1 Samuel / <i>May 7</i> . . . . .	514	Nahum / <i>December 17</i> . . . . .	1441
2 Samuel / <i>May 22</i> . . . . .	574	Habakkuk / <i>December 18</i> . . . . .	1446
1 Kings / <i>June 6</i> . . . . .	630	Zephaniah / <i>December 19</i> . . . . .	1450
2 Kings / <i>June 21</i> . . . . .	689	Haggai / <i>December 20</i> . . . . .	1455
1 Chronicles / <i>July 5</i> . . . . .	749	Zechariah / <i>December 21</i> . . . . .	1459
2 Chronicles / <i>July 20</i> . . . . .	808	Malachi / <i>December 30</i> . . . . .	1486
Ezra / <i>August 5</i> . . . . .	874	Matthew / <i>January 1</i> . . . . .	3
Nehemiah / <i>August 11</i> . . . . .	895	Mark / <i>February 15</i> . . . . .	184
Esther / <i>August 18</i> . . . . .	922	Luke / <i>March 13</i> . . . . .	294
Job / <i>August 21</i> . . . . .	935	John / <i>April 30</i> . . . . .	486
Psalms / <i>January 14 and July 3</i> . . . . .	744	Acts / <i>June 3</i> . . . . .	620
Proverbs / <i>January 1</i> . . . . .	5	Romans / <i>July 12</i> . . . . .	780
Ecclesiastes / <i>September 2</i> . . . . .	991	1 Corinthians / <i>August 4</i> . . . . .	873
Song of Songs / <i>September 6</i> . . . . .	1005	2 Corinthians / <i>August 26</i> . . . . .	963
Isaiah / <i>September 8</i> . . . . .	1014	Galatians / <i>September 14</i> . . . . .	1042
Jeremiah / <i>October 3</i> . . . . .	1130	Ephesians / <i>September 22</i> . . . . .	1080
Lamentations / <i>October 29</i> . . . . .	1245	Philippians / <i>September 29</i> . . . . .	1114

Colossians / <i>October 4</i> . . . . .	1138	James / <i>November 17</i> . . . . .	1326
1 Thessalonians / <i>October 9</i> . . . . .	1160	1 Peter / <i>November 22</i> . . . . .	1344
2 Thessalonians / <i>October 13</i> . . . . .	1178	2 Peter / <i>November 27</i> . . . . .	1364
1 Timothy / <i>October 16</i> . . . . .	1190	1 John / <i>November 30</i> . . . . .	1374
2 Timothy / <i>October 22</i> . . . . .	1214	2 John / <i>December 6</i> . . . . .	1394
Titus / <i>October 26</i> . . . . .	1235	3 John / <i>December 7</i> . . . . .	1399
Philemon / <i>October 29</i> . . . . .	1248	Jude / <i>December 8</i> . . . . .	1404
Hebrews / <i>October 30</i> . . . . .	1251	Revelation / <i>December 9</i> . . . . .	1410

## Alphabetical Listing of Bible Books

Acts / <i>June 3</i> . . . . .	620	Judges / <i>April 23</i> . . . . .	456
Amos / <i>December 10</i> . . . . .	1412	1 Kings / <i>June 6</i> . . . . .	630
1 Chronicles / <i>July 5</i> . . . . .	749	2 Kings / <i>June 21</i> . . . . .	689
2 Chronicles / <i>July 20</i> . . . . .	808	Lamentations / <i>October 29</i> . . . . .	1245
Colossians / <i>October 4</i> . . . . .	1138	Leviticus / <i>February 16</i> . . . . .	186
1 Corinthians / <i>August 4</i> . . . . .	873	Luke / <i>March 13</i> . . . . .	294
2 Corinthians / <i>August 26</i> . . . . .	963	Malachi / <i>December 30</i> . . . . .	1486
Daniel / <i>November 25</i> . . . . .	1353	Mark / <i>February 15</i> . . . . .	184
Deuteronomy / <i>March 23</i> . . . . .	331	Matthew / <i>January 1</i> . . . . .	3
Ecclesiastes / <i>September 2</i> . . . . .	991	Micah / <i>December 15</i> . . . . .	1431
Ephesians / <i>September 22</i> . . . . .	1080	Nahum / <i>December 17</i> . . . . .	1441
Esther / <i>August 18</i> . . . . .	922	Nehemiah / <i>August 11</i> . . . . .	895
Exodus / <i>January 25</i> . . . . .	98	Numbers / <i>March 3</i> . . . . .	247
Ezekiel / <i>November 1</i> . . . . .	1259	Obadiah / <i>December 13</i> . . . . .	1425
Ezra / <i>August 5</i> . . . . .	874	1 Peter / <i>November 22</i> . . . . .	1344
Galatians / <i>September 14</i> . . . . .	1042	2 Peter / <i>November 27</i> . . . . .	1364
Genesis / <i>January 1</i> . . . . .	1	Philemon / <i>October 29</i> . . . . .	1248
Habakkuk / <i>December 18</i> . . . . .	1446	Philippians / <i>September 29</i> . . . . .	1114
Haggai / <i>December 20</i> . . . . .	1455	Proverbs / <i>January 1</i> . . . . .	5
Hebrews / <i>October 30</i> . . . . .	1251	Psalms / <i>January 14 and July 3</i> . . . . .	744
Hosea / <i>December 5</i> . . . . .	1389	Revelation / <i>December 9</i> . . . . .	1410
Isaiah / <i>September 8</i> . . . . .	1014	Romans / <i>July 12</i> . . . . .	780
James / <i>November 17</i> . . . . .	1326	Ruth / <i>May 5</i> . . . . .	506
Jeremiah / <i>October 3</i> . . . . .	1130	1 Samuel / <i>May 7</i> . . . . .	514
Job / <i>August 21</i> . . . . .	935	2 Samuel / <i>May 22</i> . . . . .	574
Joel / <i>December 9</i> . . . . .	1406	Song of Songs / <i>September 6</i> . . . . .	1005
John / <i>April 30</i> . . . . .	486	1 Thessalonians / <i>October 9</i> . . . . .	1160
1 John / <i>November 30</i> . . . . .	1374	2 Thessalonians / <i>October 13</i> . . . . .	1178
2 John / <i>December 6</i> . . . . .	1394	1 Timothy / <i>October 16</i> . . . . .	1190
3 John / <i>December 7</i> . . . . .	1399	2 Timothy / <i>October 22</i> . . . . .	1214
Jonah / <i>December 14</i> . . . . .	1428	Titus / <i>October 26</i> . . . . .	1235
Joshua / <i>April 10</i> . . . . .	405	Zechariah / <i>December 21</i> . . . . .	1459
Jude / <i>December 8</i> . . . . .	1404	Zephaniah / <i>December 19</i> . . . . .	1450

## HOW TO USE THIS BIBLE

*Dear new believer in Christ,*

Welcome to the family! Your decision to follow Christ has joined you to a family of believers that stretches around the globe and back through the centuries. It is a decision that will make a difference for the rest of your life on this earth—and then on into eternity.

You hold in your hands the guidebook for your life in Christ—the Bible, God’s Word to us. This book looks a bit different from other Bibles you’ve seen. We’d like to tell you a little about it.

- (1) This Bible features the accurate and easy-to-read New Living Translation. Its clarity and precision will help you to understand God’s Word.
- (2) Because Bible reading needs to become a part of your daily life, this Bible is divided into 365 daily readings. Each day presents a portion of the Old Testament, a portion of the New Testament, a psalm from the book of Psalms, and a proverb from the book of Proverbs. If you follow this format, in one year’s time you will read the entire Bible once and the book of Psalms twice. Many people set aside a short block of time each day to follow this format. However, there is more than one way to utilize the One Year Bible reading plan. Here are some popular variations:

**The Revised One-Year Plan.** Schedule some time in both the morning and evening. Then read the New Testament and Psalms selections in the morning and the Old Testament and Proverbs selections in the evening.

**The Two-Year Plan.** During the first year, just read the Old Testament and Proverbs selections. Then during the second year, read the selections from the New Testament and Psalms.

**The Three-Year Plan.** Read the Old Testament selection the first year, the New Testament selection the second year, and the Psalms and Proverbs selections during the third year.

You need not limit yourself to these suggestions. The arrangement of *The One Year Bible* makes it easy to devise any number of Bible reading plans to meet your particular needs.

- (3) At the beginning of each Old and New Testament reading, you will find a brief introductory paragraph designed to help you understand the context of what you’ll be reading.

- (4) There are 365 study notes in this Bible—one for each day. These notes provide an opportunity for further reflection on a verse or verses from the day's readings. The notes fall into three basic categories:

WHO GOD IS

HOW WE LIVE

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

The notes are designed to help you learn the basics of the Christian life and offer guidance when a particular day's reading contains something that is difficult to understand. You can read one per day or use the index that begins on page 1493 to do a more systematic study of a particular topic.

- (5) As you read the daily selections remember these basic facts:

**Old Testament.** The Old Testament gives much of the history of the Jewish people in ancient times. God is revealed in his interactions with his people. Our need for a Savior is revealed in the people's persistent unfaithfulness to the Lord.

**New Testament.** The New Testament tells the story of Jesus and his first followers. Jesus' death and resurrection is the basis for our salvation from sin and death. Through Jesus' teachings and in letters written by various church leaders, we find guidance for living the Christian life.

**Psalms.** The psalms are songs and poems focusing on praise and adoration, request for help, historical reflection, and lament. Through their powerful language we learn what it means to have a heart that is devoted to God.

**Proverbs.** The proverbs give nuggets of practical wisdom for every day living.

Beginning on page A53 you will find a more detailed introduction to the books of the Bible. There you'll find an overview of each book's content plus information about who wrote it, when it was written, and for what purpose.

- (6) Finally, we've included the Tyndale Bible Verse Finder. This useful tool will help you find out what the Bible says about a variety of important doctrinal (the stuff Christians believe) and practical life issues. It starts on page A21.

Don't let all this overwhelm you. Reading God's Word is a life-long journey of discovery and devotion, and we've given you some tools and some options to get started. Go at your own pace. Dwell longer in some places, move quickly through others. If you miss a day or two, don't get discouraged. Everyone does. Catch up when you can, or jump ahead to the current day. The important thing is that you are reading God's Word daily and allowing him to speak to you through it. This is one of the most important keys to growth as a new believer.

We pray that you find *The One Year Bible for New Believers* helpful as you begin your journey with the Lord Jesus Christ.

## A NOTE TO READERS

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

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

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

*The Publishers, July 2004*



## INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

**GENESIS** As its name implies, Genesis is the book of beginnings. It starts with the creation of the world and every living creature in it. It records the first marriage, the first sin, the first consequences of sin, and the first reference to God's future plan to redeem humanity. After recounting the stories of the Flood and the Tower of Babel, Genesis also tells the story of the birth of a nation—Israel. The story begins as God calls Abraham, the father of the Israelites, to leave his hometown, Ur (located in modern-day Iraq), and move to Canaan—the land God promised his descendants. Eventually, the Redeemer of the world would come from the descendants of Abraham. The story then shifts to the exploits of Isaac, Abraham's son, and then to Jacob, Abraham's grandson. Genesis concludes with the remarkable experiences of Joseph.

**OUTLINE** 1:1–2:25 The creation of the world and humanity  
3:1–3:24 The fall of Adam and Eve  
4:1–9:29 The history of fallen humanity up to the Flood  
10:1–11:32 The spread of people around the world  
12:1–25:18 The life of Abraham  
25:19–26:35 The life of Isaac  
27:1–37:1 The lives of Jacob and Esau  
37:2–50:26 The life of Joseph

**AUTHOR** Moses, according to tradition  
**DATE WRITTEN** 1450–1410 BC  
**PURPOSE** To show how the world and everything in it came about and to show God's desire to have a people set apart to worship him  
**THEMES** Origin of the world, humanity, sin, and the nation of Israel; the sovereignty and trustworthiness of God; obedience and blessing

**EXODUS** Every country has its own national history—a record of the events leading to the nation's independence. The book of Exodus records Israel's national history, recounting the earliest years of the nation and of God's covenant with them. Exodus takes its name from the main event of the book: the Israelites' deliverance from slavery in Egypt. The book begins with a short account of how the Israelites became slaves in Egypt. The focus then shifts to the birth and life of Moses, God's chosen leader for Israel. From a burning bush in the Sinai Desert, God called Moses to return to his homeland of Egypt and lead the Israelites to freedom. But Pharaoh refused to free the Israelites, and so he set in motion God's ten devastating plagues upon Egypt. The final plague not only changed Pharaoh's mind—it became a memorial of God's deliverance, celebrated in the observance of Passover. Once set free, the Israelites traveled to the wilderness of Sinai to worship God. But Pharaoh chased the Israelites to the Red Sea, where God displayed his power by parting the sea for the Israelites to cross and then closing it over the pursuing Egyptians. The Israelites were then free to travel to Mount Sinai. There God established

his covenant with them, giving them the Ten Commandments and plans for the Tabernacle. After the Israelites constructed the Tabernacle, God filled it with his glory, signifying his presence with them.

**OUTLINE** 1:1-22 Israel's bondage in Egypt  
2:1-7:7 The birth and calling of Moses  
7:8-15:21 The plagues, the Passover, and the Exodus  
15:22-24:18 The trip to Sinai and the giving of the law  
25:1-31:18 Instructions for the Tabernacle  
32:1-35:3 Israel's sin and repentance  
35:4-40:38 The building of the Tabernacle

**AUTHOR** Moses, according to tradition  
**DATE WRITTEN** 1450-1410 BC  
**PURPOSE** To record the events of Israel's deliverance from Egypt and development as a nation  
**THEMES** God's sovereignty, guidance, redemption, and covenant with Israel; obedience

**LEVITICUS** Our entire lives should glorify God—from our religious worship to our daily tasks. With this in mind, the book of Leviticus was written as a handbook for the priests and Levites (religious servants) of Israel. Leviticus gives detailed rules concerning the daily lives of the Israelites and special procedures for the worship of the Lord. It provides instructions for offering sacrifices. Leviticus also describes the proper methods for the Israelites to observe major festivals and holidays and for the priests to carry out the duties of their office.

**OUTLINE** 1:1-15:33 The sacrificial system  
16:1-34 The great Day of Atonement  
17:1-20:27 Various regulations  
21:1-22:33 Rules for the priests  
23:1-25:55 Rules concerning the festivals  
26:1-27:34 Obedience, vows, and tithes

**AUTHOR** Moses, according to tradition  
**DATE WRITTEN** 1445-1444 BC  
**PURPOSE** To outline the Levites' duties in worship and to teach the Israelites how to live holy lives  
**THEMES** Sacrifice and offering, proper worship, healthy living, the importance of holiness

**NUMBERS** The discontented whining of a young child can be difficult to ignore. Likewise, the childlike whining of the Israelites in the wilderness characterizes the book of Numbers. This book picks up where Exodus leaves off—with the Israelites camped at the base of Mount Sinai. From here the Israelites journeyed to the wilderness of Paran, south of the Promised Land. Scouts were sent to explore the Promised Land and give a report on its inhabitants. When they returned to the camp, their report was not favorable, and the people began to doubt God's ability to give them their inheritance, and they complained against him. Because of their sin, God condemned them to wander in the wilderness until the generation of complainers died off and a new generation took their place. Forty years later they slowly made their way back to Canaan—this time ready to obey God's commands. After winning some important battles east of the Jordan River, the Israelites prepared to enter the heart of the Promised Land they had waited so long to see.

## GENESIS 1:1-2:25

Plenty of ancient and modern sources try to explain how the world and humanity came to exist. The first chapters of the Bible give the definitive answer: the all-powerful God created the world and made humans to live, work, and have fellowship with him in it.

**I**n the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.\* <sup>2</sup>The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

<sup>3</sup>Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. <sup>4</sup>And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light "day" and the darkness "night."

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

<sup>6</sup>Then God said, "Let there be a space between the waters, to separate the waters of the heavens from the waters of the earth." <sup>7</sup>And that is what happened. God made this space to separate the waters of the earth from the waters of the heavens. <sup>8</sup>God called the space "sky."

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

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

vegetation—all sorts of seed-bearing plants, and trees with seed-bearing fruit. Their seeds produced plants and trees of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>13</sup>And evening passed and morning came, marking the third day.

<sup>14</sup>Then God said, "Let lights appear in the sky to separate the day from the night. Let them mark off the seasons, days, and years. <sup>15</sup>Let these lights in the sky shine down on the earth." And that is what happened. <sup>16</sup>God made two great lights—the larger one to govern the day, and the smaller one to govern the night. He also made the stars. <sup>17</sup>God set these lights in the sky to light the earth, <sup>18</sup>to govern the day and night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>19</sup>And evening passed and morning came, marking the fourth day.

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

<sup>23</sup>And evening passed and morning came, marking the fifth day.

<sup>24</sup>Then God said, "Let the earth produce every sort of animal, each producing offspring of the same kind—livestock, small animals that scurry along the ground, and wild animals." And that is

what happened. <sup>25</sup>God made all sorts of wild animals, livestock, and small animals, each able to produce offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

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

<sup>27</sup> So God created human beings\* in his own image.  
In the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

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

<sup>29</sup>Then God said, "Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. <sup>30</sup>And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life." And that is what happened.

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

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

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

<sup>4</sup>This is the account of the creation of the heavens and the earth.

When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, <sup>5</sup>neither wild plants nor grains were growing on the earth. For the

LORD God had not yet sent rain to water the earth, and there were no people to cultivate the soil. <sup>6</sup>Instead, springs\* came up from the ground and watered all the land. <sup>7</sup>Then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person.

<sup>8</sup>Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he placed the man he had made. <sup>9</sup>The LORD God made all sorts of trees grow up from the ground—trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit. In the middle of the garden he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

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

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

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

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

<sup>23</sup>"At last!" the man exclaimed.

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

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

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

*1:1 Or In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, . . . Or When God began to create the heavens and the earth, . . . 1:26 Or man; Hebrew reads adam. 1:27 Or the man; Hebrew reads ha-adam. 2:2 Or ceased; also in 2:3. 2:6 Or mist. 2:19 Or Adam, and so throughout the chapter. 2:21 Or took a part of the man's side.*

#### MATTHEW 1:1-2:12

In the New Testament we read of the fulfillment of the promises God made in the Old Testament to send the world a Savior. Matthew was a Jew who wrote this book to show that Jesus was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

**This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David\* and of Abraham:**

- <sup>2</sup> Abraham was the father of Isaac.  
Isaac was the father of Jacob.  
Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers.
- <sup>3</sup> Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (whose mother was Tamar).  
Perez was the father of Hezron.  
Hezron was the father of Ram.\*
- <sup>4</sup> Ram was the father of Amminadab.

Amminadab was the father of Nahshon.

Nahshon was the father of Salmon.

<sup>5</sup> Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab).

Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth).

Obed was the father of Jesse.

<sup>6</sup> Jesse was the father of King David.  
David was the father of Solomon (whose mother was Bathsheba, the widow of Uriah).

<sup>7</sup> Solomon was the father of Rehoboam.  
Rehoboam was the father of Abijah.  
Abijah was the father of Asa.\*

<sup>8</sup> Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat.  
Jehoshaphat was the father of Jehoram.\*

Jehoram was the father\* of Uzziah.

<sup>9</sup> Uzziah was the father of Jotham.

Jotham was the father of Ahaz.

Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah.

<sup>10</sup> Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh.  
Manasseh was the father of Amon.\*  
Amon was the father of Josiah.

<sup>11</sup> Josiah was the father of Jehoiachin\* and his brothers (born at the time of the exile to Babylon).

<sup>12</sup> After the Babylonian exile:  
Jehoiachin was the father of Shealtiel.  
Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel.

<sup>13</sup> Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud.  
Abiud was the father of Eliakim.  
Eliakim was the father of Azor.

## WHO GOD IS God is the Creator

**GENESIS 1:1** God is the Creator of all things. Not bound by time or space, God has always existed. That’s difficult for us to grasp because, as creations of God, we are finite (limited), whereas he is infinite (unlimited). Understanding and explaining God fully—for example, how it is possible that he never had a beginning or how he formed the vast universe—is beyond our capacity. However, we can gaze upon the beauty of God’s creation and marvel at his goodness and power in creating all things. He loved us enough to create us and to give us a world, not of black and white, but of vibrant color, sound, smell, and even taste! • You can choose to believe the theory that you came up out of the ooze over billions of years as basically an accident of chance. Or, you can accept the Bible’s statement of fact that all people—including you—are created by a God who made you because he loves you and has a purpose and plan for your life. The choice is yours.

- <sup>14</sup> Azor was the father of Zadok.  
 Zadok was the father of Akim.  
 Akim was the father of Eliud.  
<sup>15</sup> Eliud was the father of Eleazar.  
 Eleazar was the father of Matthan.  
 Matthan was the father of Jacob.  
<sup>16</sup> Jacob was the father of Joseph, the  
 husband of Mary.  
 Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called  
 the Messiah.

<sup>17</sup>All those listed above include fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the Babylonian exile, and fourteen from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah.

<sup>18</sup>This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement\* quietly.

<sup>20</sup>As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus,\* for he will save his people from their sins."

<sup>22</sup>All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet:

- <sup>23</sup> "Look! The virgin will conceive a child!  
 She will give birth to a son,  
 and they will call him Immanuel,\*  
 which means 'God is with us.'"

<sup>24</sup>When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. <sup>25</sup>But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.

<sup>21</sup>JESUS was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men\* from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, <sup>22</sup>"Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose,\* and we have come to worship him."

<sup>3</sup>King Herod was deeply disturbed

when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup>He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?"

<sup>5</sup>"In Bethlehem in Judea," they said, "for this is what the prophet wrote:

- <sup>6</sup> 'And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah,  
 are not least among the ruling cities\* of Judah,  
 for a ruler will come from you  
 who will be the shepherd for my  
 people Israel.\*"

<sup>7</sup>Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. <sup>8</sup>Then he told them, "Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!"

<sup>9</sup>After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup>When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! <sup>11</sup>They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

<sup>12</sup>When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

1:1 Greek *Jesus the Messiah, son of David*. 1:3 Greek *Aram*, a variant spelling of Ram; also in 1:4. See 1 Chr 2:9-10. 1:7 Greek *Asaph*, a variant spelling of Asa; also in 1:8. See 1 Chr 3:10. 1:8a Greek *Joram*, a variant spelling of Jehoram; also in 1:8b. See 1 Kgs 22:50 and note at 1 Chr 3:11. 1:8b Or *ancestor*; also in 1:11. 1:10 Greek *Amos*, a variant spelling of Amon; also in 1:10b. See 1 Chr 3:14. 1:11 Greek *Jeconiah*, a variant spelling of Jehoiachin; also in 1:12. See 2 Kgs 24:6 and note at 1 Chr 3:16. 1:19 Greek *to divorce her*. 1:21 *Jesus* means "The LORD saves." 1:23 Isa 7:14; 8:8, 10 (Greek version). 2:1 Or *royal astrologers*; Greek reads *magi*; also in 2:7, 16. 2:2 Or *star in the east*. 2:6a Greek *the rulers*. 2:6b Mic 5:2; 2 Sam 5:2.

PSALM 1:1-6

Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers.

- <sup>2</sup> But they delight in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night.

- <sup>3</sup> They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do.
- <sup>4</sup> But not the wicked! They are like worthless chaff, scattered by the wind.
- <sup>5</sup> They will be condemned at the time of judgment. Sinners will have no place among the godly.
- <sup>6</sup> For the LORD watches over the path of the godly, but the path of the wicked leads to destruction.

#### GENESIS 3:1-4:26

When God created people, he created them with the ability to choose. He could have made robots, but he didn't. He wanted to create people who would obey him because they loved him and chose to do so. But there was risk involved. Read what Adam and Eve did with their opportunity to choose.

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

<sup>2</sup>"Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden," the woman replied. <sup>3</sup>"It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, 'You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.'"

<sup>4</sup>"You won't die!" the serpent replied to the woman. <sup>5</sup>"God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil."

<sup>6</sup>The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he

#### PROVERBS 1:1-6

**These are the proverbs of Solomon, David's son, king of Israel.** □ Their purpose is to teach people wisdom and discipline, to help them understand the insights of the wise. Their purpose is to teach people to live disciplined and successful lives, to help them do what is right, just, and fair. These proverbs will give insight to the simple, knowledge and discernment to the young. □ Let the wise listen to these proverbs and become even wiser. Let those with understanding receive guidance by exploring the meaning in these proverbs and parables, the words of the wise and their riddles.

## JANUARY 2

ate it, too. <sup>7</sup>At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

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

<sup>10</sup>He replied, "I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked."

<sup>11</sup>"Who told you that you were naked?" the LORD God asked. "Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?"

<sup>12</sup>The man replied, "It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it."

<sup>13</sup>Then the LORD God asked the woman, "What have you done?"

"The serpent deceived me," she replied. "That's why I ate it."

<sup>14</sup>Then the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all animals, domestic and wild. You will crawl on your belly,

groveling in the dust as long as you live.

15 And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring.

He will strike\* your head, and you will strike his heel."

16 Then he said to the woman,

"I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy, and in pain you will give birth. And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you.\*"

17 And to the man he said,

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

18 It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains.

19 By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made.

For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return."

20 Then the man—Adam—named his wife Eve, because she would be the mother of all who live.\* 21 And the LORD God made clothing from animal skins for Adam and his wife.

22 Then the LORD God said, "Look, the human beings\* have become like us, knowing both good and evil. What if they reach out, take fruit from the tree of life, and eat it? Then they will live forever!"

23 So the LORD God banished them from the Garden of Eden, and he sent Adam out to cultivate the ground from which he had been made. 24 After sending them out, the LORD God stationed mighty cherubim to the east of the Garden of Eden. And he placed a flaming sword that flashed back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

4:1 Now Adam\* had sexual relations with his wife, Eve, and she became pregnant. When she gave birth to Cain, she said, "With the LORD's help, I have produced\* a man!" 2 Later she gave birth to his brother and named him Abel.

When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd, while Cain cultivated the ground. 3 When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the LORD. 4 Abel also brought a gift—the best of the firstborn lambs from his flock. The LORD accepted Abel and his gift, 5 but he did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected.

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

8 One day Cain suggested to his brother, "Let's go out into the fields."\* And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother, Abel, and killed him.

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

"I don't know," Cain responded. "Am I my brother's guardian?"

10 But the LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground! 11 Now you are cursed and banished from the ground, which has swallowed your brother's blood. 12 No longer will the ground yield good crops for you, no matter how hard you work! From now on you will be a homeless wanderer on the earth."

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

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

17 Cain had sexual relations with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave



birth to Enoch. Then Cain founded a city, which he named Enoch, after his son.<sup>18</sup> Enoch had a son named Irad. Irad became the father of\* Mehujael. Mehujael became the father of Methushael. Methushael became the father of Lamech.

<sup>19</sup>Lamech married two women. The first was named Adah, and the second was Zillah.<sup>20</sup> Adah gave birth to Jabal, who was the first of those who raise livestock and live in tents.<sup>21</sup> His brother's name was Jubal, the first of all who play the harp and flute.<sup>22</sup> Lamech's other wife, Zillah, gave birth to a son named Tubal-cain. He became an expert in forging tools of bronze and iron. Tubal-cain had a sister named Naamah.<sup>23</sup> One day Lamech said to his wives,

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

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

<sup>25</sup> Adam had sexual relations with his wife again, and she gave birth to another son. She named him Seth,\* for she said, "God has granted me another son in place of Abel, whom Cain killed."<sup>26</sup> When Seth

grew up, he had a son and named him Enosh. At that time people first began to worship the LORD by name.

3:8 Or *Adam*, and so throughout the chapter. 3:15 Or *bruise*; also in 3:15b. 3:16 Or *And though you will have desire for your husband, / he will rule over you.* 3:20 Eve sounds like a Hebrew term that means "to give life." 3:22 Or *the man*; Hebrew reads *ha-adam*. 4:1a Or *the man*; also in 4:25. 4:1b Or *I have acquired*. Cain sounds like a Hebrew term that can mean "produce" or "acquire." 4:8 As in Samaritan Pentateuch, Greek and Syriac versions, and Latin Vulgate; Masoretic Text lacks "*Let's go out into the fields.*" 4:13 Or *My sin*. 4:16 *Nod* means "wandering." 4:18 Or *the ancestor of*, and so throughout the verse. 4:25 *Seth* probably means "granted"; the name may also mean "appointed."

MATTHEW 2:13-3:6

Satan has been making trouble ever since he first tempted Eve in the Garden. You'll find him again in today's reading. This time he tried to get rid of the baby Jesus. Why do you think Satan wanted to get rid of Jesus?

After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother," the angel said. "Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

<sup>14</sup> That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother,<sup>15</sup> and they stayed there until Herod's death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: "I called my Son out of Egypt."\*

## WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS **Is the Bible reliable?**

**GENESIS 3:6** To some it might seem old-fashioned to take seriously stories like Noah's ark, David and Goliath, Jonah and the fish—and even Eve and the serpent. However, as a new believer you need to accept the reliability of God's Word. If you decide not to believe these stories, how can you then believe the Bible when it says you've been saved and that you're going to heaven? You can't pick and choose what parts of the Bible to accept and what parts to set aside. • Why believe the Bible? Because it contains God's very own words. He spoke through human writers, but it was he who was speaking nonetheless. The Bible was written across thousands of years, yet the entire message holds together perfectly. Its overall plot tells us who God is, why the world is the way it is, why we are the way we are, what God did to rescue us, and what the future holds. The story of Eve's encounter with the serpent is a vital part of the plot. It explains how sin came into the world and who our enemy is (Satan). This was the tragic event that ultimately led to God's sending the Savior, Jesus Christ.

<sup>16</sup>Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men's report of the star's first appearance. <sup>17</sup>Herod's brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

<sup>18</sup> "A cry was heard in Ramah—  
weeping and great mourning.  
Rachel weeps for her children,  
refusing to be comforted,  
for they are dead."<sup>\*</sup>

<sup>19</sup>When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. <sup>20</sup>"Get up!" the angel said. "Take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead."

<sup>21</sup>So Joseph got up and returned to the land of Israel with Jesus and his mother. <sup>22</sup>But when he learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod's son Archelaus, he was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee. <sup>23</sup>So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said: "He will be called a Nazarene."

<sup>3:1</sup>IN those days John the Baptist came to the Judean wilderness and began preaching. His message was, <sup>2</sup>"Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near."<sup>\*</sup> <sup>3</sup>The prophet Isaiah was speaking about John when he said,

"He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,  
'Prepare the way for the LORD's coming!  
Clear the road for him!'"<sup>\*</sup>

<sup>4</sup>John's clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup>People from Jerusalem and from all of Judea and all over the Jordan Valley went out to see and hear John. <sup>6</sup>And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.

2:15 Hos 11:1. 2:18 Jer 31:15. 3:2 Or *has come, or is coming soon*. 3:3 Isa 40:3 (Greek version).

PSALM 2:1-12

**Why** are the nations so angry?  
Why do they waste their time with  
futile plans?

<sup>2</sup> The kings of the earth prepare for  
battle;  
the rulers plot together  
against the LORD  
and against his anointed one.

<sup>3</sup> "Let us break their chains," they cry,  
"and free ourselves from slavery  
to God."

<sup>4</sup> But the one who rules in heaven  
laughs.  
The Lord scoffs at them.

<sup>5</sup> Then in anger he rebukes them,  
terrifying them with his fierce  
fury.

<sup>6</sup> For the Lord declares, "I have placed  
my chosen king on the throne  
in Jerusalem,<sup>\*</sup> on my holy  
mountain."

<sup>7</sup> The king proclaims the LORD's  
decree:  
"The LORD said to me, 'You are my  
son.'<sup>\*</sup>

Today I have become your  
Father."<sup>\*</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Only ask, and I will give you the  
nations as your inheritance,  
the whole earth as your  
possession.

<sup>9</sup> You will break<sup>\*</sup> them with an  
iron rod  
and smash them like clay pots."<sup>\*</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Now then, you kings, act wisely!  
Be warned, you rulers of the  
earth!

<sup>11</sup> Serve the LORD with reverent fear,  
and rejoice with trembling.

<sup>12</sup> Submit to God's royal son,<sup>\*</sup> or he  
will become angry,  
and you will be destroyed  
in the midst of all your  
activities—  
for his anger flares up in an  
instant.

But what joy for all who take  
refuge in him!

2:6 Hebrew on Zion. 2:7a Or Son; also in 2:12. 2:7b Or Today I reveal you as my son. 2:9 Greek version reads rule. Compare Rev 2:27. 2:12 The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

## PROVERBS 1:7-9

**Fear of the LORD** is the foundation of true knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. □My child,\* listen when your father corrects you. Don't ne-

glect your mother's instruction. What you learn from them will crown you with grace and be a chain of honor around your neck.

1:8 Hebrew *My son*; also in 1:10, 15.

## JANUARY 3

## GENESIS 5:1-7:24

Yesterday you read how sin entered the human race; today you will begin to see how quickly sin spread and what devastation it caused. It got so bad, in fact, that God decided to basically start over with humanity.

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

- <sup>3</sup>When Adam was 130 years old, he became the father of a son who was just like him—in his very image. He named his son Seth. <sup>4</sup>After the birth of Seth, Adam lived another 800 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>5</sup>Adam lived 930 years, and then he died.
- <sup>6</sup>When Seth was 105 years old, he became the father of\* Enosh. <sup>7</sup>After the birth of\* Enosh, Seth lived another 807 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>8</sup>Seth lived 912 years, and then he died.
- <sup>9</sup>When Enosh was 90 years old, he became the father of Kenan. <sup>10</sup>After the birth of Kenan, Enosh lived another 815 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>11</sup>Enosh lived 905 years, and then he died.
- <sup>12</sup>When Kenan was 70 years old, he became the father of Mahalalel. <sup>13</sup>After the birth of Mahalalel, Kenan lived another 840 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>14</sup>Kenan lived 910 years, and then he died.
- <sup>15</sup>When Mahalalel was 65 years old, he became the father of Jared. <sup>16</sup>After the

birth of Jared, Mahalalel lived another 830 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>17</sup>Mahalalel lived 895 years, and then he died.

- <sup>18</sup>When Jared was 162 years old, he became the father of Enoch. <sup>19</sup>After the birth of Enoch, Jared lived another 800 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>20</sup>Jared lived 962 years, and then he died.
- <sup>21</sup>When Enoch was 65 years old, he became the father of Methuselah. <sup>22</sup>After the birth of Methuselah, Enoch lived in close fellowship with God for another 300 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>23</sup>Enoch lived 365 years, <sup>24</sup>walking in close fellowship with God. Then one day he disappeared, because God took him.
- <sup>25</sup>When Methuselah was 187 years old, he became the father of Lamech. <sup>26</sup>After the birth of Lamech, Methuselah lived another 782 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>27</sup>Methuselah lived 969 years, and then he died.
- <sup>28</sup>When Lamech was 182 years old, he became the father of a son. <sup>29</sup>Lamech named his son Noah, for he said, "May he bring us relief\* from our work and the painful labor of farming this ground that the LORD has cursed." <sup>30</sup>After the birth of Noah, Lamech lived another 595 years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>31</sup>Lamech lived 777 years, and then he died.
- <sup>32</sup>By the time Noah was 500 years old, he was the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

<sup>6:1</sup>THEN the people began to multiply on the earth, and daughters were born to them. <sup>2</sup>The sons of God saw the beautiful women\* and took any they wanted as their wives. <sup>3</sup>Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not put up with\* humans for such a long time, for they are only mortal flesh. In the future, their normal lifespan will be no more than 120 years."

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

<sup>5</sup>The LORD observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. <sup>6</sup>So the LORD was sorry he had ever made them and put them on the earth. It broke his heart. <sup>7</sup>And the LORD said, "I will wipe this human race I have created from the face of the earth. Yes, and I will destroy every living thing—all the people, the large animals, the small animals that scurry along the ground, and even the birds of the sky. I am sorry I ever made them." <sup>8</sup>But Noah found favor with the LORD.

<sup>9</sup>This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, the only blameless person living on earth at the time, and he walked in close fellowship with God. <sup>10</sup>Noah was the father of three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

<sup>11</sup>Now God saw that the earth had become corrupt and was filled with violence. <sup>12</sup>God observed all this corruption in the world, for everyone on earth was corrupt. <sup>13</sup>So God said to Noah, "I have decided to destroy all living creatures, for they have filled the earth with violence. Yes, I will wipe them all out along with the earth!

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

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

<sup>22</sup>So Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him.

<sup>7:1</sup>WHEN everything was ready, the LORD said to Noah, "Go into the boat with all your family, for among all the people of the earth, I can see that you alone are righteous. <sup>2</sup>Take with you seven pairs—male and female—of each animal I have approved for eating and for sacrifice,\* and take one pair of each of the others. <sup>3</sup>Also take seven pairs of every kind of bird. There must be a male and a female in each pair to ensure that all life will survive on the earth after the flood. <sup>4</sup>Seven days from now I will make the rains pour down on the earth. And it will rain for forty days and forty nights, until I have wiped from the earth all the living things I have created."

<sup>5</sup>So Noah did everything as the LORD commanded him.

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

<sup>11</sup>When Noah was 600 years old, on the seventeenth day of the second month, all the underground waters erupted from the earth, and the rain fell in mighty torrents

from the sky. <sup>12</sup>The rain continued to fall for forty days and forty nights.

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

<sup>17</sup>For forty days the floodwaters grew deeper, covering the ground and lifting the boat high above the earth. <sup>18</sup>As the waters rose higher and higher above the ground, the boat floated safely on the surface. <sup>19</sup>Finally, the water covered even the highest mountains on the earth, <sup>20</sup>rising more than twenty-two feet\* above the highest peaks. <sup>21</sup>All the living things on earth died—birds, domestic animals, wild animals, small animals that scurry along the ground, and all the people. <sup>22</sup>Everything that breathed and lived on dry land died. <sup>23</sup>God wiped out every living thing on the earth—people, livestock, small animals that scurry along the ground, and the birds of the sky. All

were destroyed. The only people who survived were Noah and those with him in the boat. <sup>24</sup>And the floodwaters covered the earth for 150 days.

5:1 Or man; Hebrew reads adam; similarly in 5:2. 5:6 Or the ancestor of; also in 5:9, 12, 15, 18, 21, 25. 5:7 Or the birth of this ancestor of; also in 5:10, 13, 16, 19, 22, 26. 5:29 Noah sounds like a Hebrew term that can mean "relief" or "comfort." 6:2 Hebrew daughters of men; also in 6:4. 6:3 Greek version reads will not remain in. 6:14a Traditionally rendered an ark. 6:14b Or gopher wood. 6:15 Hebrew 300 cubits [138 meters] long, 50 cubits [23 meters] wide, and 30 cubits [13.8 meters] high. 6:16 Hebrew an opening of 1 cubit [46 centimeters]. 7:2 Hebrew of each clean animal; similarly in 7:8. 7:20 Hebrew 15 cubits [6.9 meters].

MATTHEW 3:7-4:11

Jesus had John the Baptist baptize him—not in repentance for sin (Jesus was sinless), but in order for Jesus to identify with the people to whom he would be ministering. Before commencing his ministry, however, Jesus faced a period of temptation by Satan. Take note of the ways Satan tempted Jesus and the ways Jesus responded.

**B**ut when he [John] saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize,\* he denounced them. "You brood of snakes!" he exclaimed. "Who warned you to flee God's coming wrath? <sup>8</sup>Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. <sup>9</sup>Don't just say to each other, 'We're safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.' That

HOW WE LIVE

## Resisting temptation

**MATTHEW 4:1-2** The same Satan who tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden and tried to kill the infant Jesus was at it again. Satan arrived after Jesus had not eaten for forty days, waiting until Jesus was the most vulnerable before he slithered in with his temptations. First temptation on the menu: bread. Second temptation: testing God. Third temptation: pride and power. Satan misquoted Scripture in order to back up his temptations! Unfortunately for him, Jesus understood the true intent of those verses and countered by quoting Scripture accurately and effectively. • Now that you are a follower of Jesus Christ, Satan is going to try to draw you away by tempting you to disobey God's Word. He is going to hit you when and where you're most vulnerable. Remember that it's not a sin to be tempted—Jesus was tempted, and Jesus never sinned. The sin happens when you give in to temptation. You can avoid giving in by making up your mind ahead of time to do what you know is right. Keep reading the Bible; underline verses that show you what to do in areas where you are vulnerable. Use those verses to help you the next time Satan slithers your way.

means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. <sup>10</sup>Even now the ax of God's judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.

<sup>11</sup>"I baptize with\* water those who repent of their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I'm not worthy even to be his slave and carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.\* <sup>12</sup>He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire."

<sup>13</sup>Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. <sup>14</sup>But John tried to talk him out of it. "I am the one who needs to be baptized by you," he said, "so why are you coming to me?"

<sup>15</sup>But Jesus said, "It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires.\*" So John agreed to baptize him.

<sup>16</sup>After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened\* and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. <sup>17</sup>And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."

<sup>4:1</sup> THEN Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. <sup>2</sup>For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry.

<sup>3</sup>During that time the devil\* came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread."

<sup>4</sup>But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say,

'People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.\*"

<sup>5</sup>Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, <sup>6</sup>and said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say,

'He will order his angels to protect you.

And they will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.\*"

<sup>7</sup>Jesus responded, "The Scriptures also say, 'You must not test the LORD your God.\*"

<sup>8</sup>Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. <sup>9</sup>"I will give it all to you," he said, "if you will kneel down and worship me."

<sup>10</sup>"Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say,

'You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him.\*"

<sup>11</sup>Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.

*3:7 Or coming to be baptized. 3:11a Or in. 3:11b Or in the Holy Spirit and in fire. 3:15 Or for we must fulfill all righteousness. 3:16 Some manuscripts read opened to him. 4:3 Greek the tempter. 4:4 Deut 8:3. 4:6 Ps 91:11-12. 4:7 Deut 6:16. 4:10 Deut 6:13.*

PSALM 3:1-8

*A psalm of David, regarding the time David fled from his son Absalom.*

<sup>1</sup> **○** LORD, I have so many enemies; so many are against me.

<sup>2</sup> So many are saying, "God will never rescue him!"

*Interlude\**

<sup>3</sup> But you, O LORD, are a shield around me; you are my glory, the one who holds my head high.

<sup>4</sup> I cried out to the LORD, and he answered me from his holy mountain. *Interlude*

<sup>5</sup> I lay down and slept, yet I woke up in safety, for the LORD was watching over me.

<sup>6</sup> I am not afraid of ten thousand enemies who surround me on every side.

<sup>7</sup> Arise, O LORD!  
Rescue me, my God!  
Slap all my enemies in the face!  
Shatter the teeth of the wicked!

<sup>8</sup> Victory comes from you, O LORD.  
May you bless your people.

*Interlude*

3:2 Hebrew *Selah*. The meaning of this word is uncertain, though it is probably a musical or literary term. It is rendered *Interlude* throughout the Psalms.

PROVERBS 1:10-19

**M**y child, if sinners entice you, turn your back on them! They may say, "Come and join us. Let's hide and kill someone! Just for fun, let's ambush the innocent! Let's swallow them alive, like the grave\*<sup>1</sup>; let's swallow them whole, like those who go

down to the pit of death. Think of the great things we'll get! We'll fill our houses with all the stuff we take. Come, throw in your lot with us; we'll all share the loot." □ My child, don't go along with them! Stay far away from their paths. They rush to commit evil deeds. They hurry to commit murder. If a bird sees a trap being set, it knows to stay away. But these people set an ambush for themselves; they are trying to get themselves killed. Such is the fate of all who are greedy for money; it robs them of life.

1:12 Hebrew *like Sheol*.

# JANUARY 4

GENESIS 8:1-10:32

Noah obeyed God, built a boat, and began his year-long voyage. When the flood ended, God made a promise to Noah—and to us. That wonderful promise is in today's reading. Let it remind you that God keeps all of his promises.

**B**ut God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and livestock with him in the boat. He sent a wind to blow across the earth, and the floodwaters began to recede. <sup>2</sup>The underground waters stopped flowing, and the torrential rains from the sky were stopped. <sup>3</sup>So the floodwaters gradually receded from the earth. After 150 days, <sup>4</sup>exactly five months from the time the flood began,\* the boat came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. <sup>5</sup>Two and a half months later,\* as the waters continued to go down, other mountain peaks became visible.

<sup>6</sup>After another forty days, Noah opened the window he had made in the boat <sup>7</sup>and released a raven. The bird flew back and forth until the floodwaters on the earth had dried up. <sup>8</sup>He also released a dove to see if the water had receded and it could find dry ground. <sup>9</sup>But the dove could find no place to land because the water still covered the ground. So it returned to the boat, and Noah held out his hand and drew the dove back inside. <sup>10</sup>After waiting

another seven days, Noah released the dove again. <sup>11</sup>This time the dove returned to him in the evening with a fresh olive leaf in its beak. Then Noah knew that the floodwaters were almost gone. <sup>12</sup>He waited another seven days and then released the dove again. This time it did not come back.

<sup>13</sup>Noah was now 601 years old. On the first day of the new year, ten and a half months after the flood began,\* the floodwaters had almost dried up from the earth. Noah lifted back the covering of the boat and saw that the surface of the ground was drying. <sup>14</sup>Two more months went by,\* and at last the earth was dry!

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

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

<sup>20</sup>Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and there he sacrificed as burnt offerings the animals and birds that had been

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

<sup>9:1</sup>THEN God blessed Noah and his sons and told them, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth. <sup>2</sup>All the animals of the earth, all the birds of the sky, all the small animals that scurry along the ground, and all the fish in the sea will look on you with fear and terror. I have placed them in your power. <sup>3</sup>I have given them to you for food, just as I have given you grain and vegetables. <sup>4</sup>But you must never eat any meat that still has the lifeblood in it.

<sup>5</sup>"And I will require the blood of anyone who takes another person's life. If a wild animal kills a person, it must die. And anyone who murders a fellow human must die. <sup>6</sup>If anyone takes a human life, that person's life will also be taken by human hands. For God made human beings\* in his own image. <sup>7</sup>Now be fruitful and multiply, and repopulate the earth."

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

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

covenant between God and every living creature on earth." <sup>17</sup>Then God said to Noah, "Yes, this rainbow is the sign of the covenant I am confirming with all the creatures on earth."

<sup>18</sup>The sons of Noah who came out of the boat with their father were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham is the father of Canaan.) <sup>19</sup>From these three sons of Noah came all the people who now populate the earth.

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

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

"May Canaan be cursed!

May he be the lowest of servants to his relatives."

<sup>26</sup>Then Noah said,

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

<sup>27</sup> May God expand the territory of Japheth!

May Japheth share the prosperity of Shem,\*  
and may Canaan be his servant."

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup>The descendants of Gomer were Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah.

<sup>4</sup>The descendants of Javan were Elishah,



Tarshish, Kittim, and Rodanim.\*

<sup>5</sup>Their descendants became the seafaring peoples that spread out to various lands, each identified by its own language, clan, and national identity.

<sup>6</sup>The descendants of Ham were Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan.

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

<sup>8</sup>Cush was also the ancestor of Nimrod, who was the first heroic warrior on earth. <sup>9</sup>Since he was the greatest hunter in the world,\* his name became proverbial. People would say, “This man is like Nimrod, the greatest hunter in the world.” <sup>10</sup>He built his kingdom in the land of Babylonia,\* with the cities of Babylon, Erech, Akkad, and Calneh. <sup>11</sup>From there he expanded his territory to Assyria,\* building the cities of Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah, <sup>12</sup>and Resen (the great city located between Nineveh and Calah).

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

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

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

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

<sup>22</sup>The descendants of Shem were Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram.

<sup>23</sup>The descendants of Aram were Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash.

<sup>24</sup>Arphaxad was the father of Shelah,\* and Shelah was the father of Eber.

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

## HOW WE LIVE Obeying God

**MATTHEW 4:18-20** Today’s first two readings include the topic of obedience. Noah obeyed God by building a boat long before rain had ever fallen; he obeyed God when he stayed in the boat; he obeyed God when he got off the boat and built an altar. His radical obedience saved his life and the lives of his family members. • Several hundred years later, fishermen standing beside the Sea of Galilee also acted with radical obedience. Jesus called them to follow him, and they did. For all of them, this was the change of a lifetime. They would never go back. Their radical obedience would change the world. • Obedience is a threatening word in today’s culture, but it need not be that way. Obeying God means that your life is constantly changing for the better. You seek to do what you know God would want you to do. You still have freedom to make choices, and at times you will make the wrong choice—everybody does! But as you get to know God and his Word better, you’ll learn how to live in a way that pleases him. The more you obey him, the more you’ll find that doing so brings deep, long-lasting fulfillment and joy.

<sup>26</sup>Joktan was the ancestor of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, <sup>27</sup>Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, <sup>28</sup>Obal, Abimael, Sheba, <sup>29</sup>Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. All these were descendants of Joktan. <sup>30</sup>The territory they occupied extended from Mesha all the way to Sephar in the eastern mountains.

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

<sup>32</sup>These are the clans that descended from Noah's sons, arranged by nation according to their lines of descent. All the nations of the earth descended from these clans after the great flood.

**8:4** Hebrew *on the seventeenth day of the seventh month*; see 7:11. **8:5** Hebrew *On the first day of the tenth month*; see 7:11 and note on 8:4. **8:13** Hebrew *On the first day of the first month*; see 7:11. **8:14** Hebrew *The twenty-seventh day of the second month arrived*; see note on 8:13. **8:20** Hebrew *every clean animal and every clean bird*. **9:6** Or *man*; Hebrew reads *ha-adam*. **9:27** Hebrew *May he live in the tents of Shem*. **10:4** As in some Hebrew manuscripts and Greek version (see also 1 Chr 1:7); most Hebrew manuscripts read *Dodanim*. **10:9** Hebrew *a great hunter before the LORD*; also in 10:9b. **10:10** Hebrew *Shinar*. **10:11** Or *From that land Assyria went out*. **10:14** Hebrew *Casluhites, from whom the Philistines came, and Caphtorites*. Compare Jer 47:4; Amos 9:7. **10:21** Or *Shem, whose older brother was Japheth*. **10:24** Greek version reads *Arphaxad was the father of Cainan, Cainan was the father of Shelah*. Compare Luke 3:36.

**MATTHEW 4:12-25**

Early in his ministry, Jesus preached the Good News, taught the Scriptures, and healed people all throughout the region of Galilee. In today's reading, Jesus chooses some of the men who would be his closest companions. Into them he would pour his time and teaching.

**When** Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he left Judea and returned to Galilee. <sup>13</sup>He went first to Nazareth, then left there and moved to Capernaum, beside the Sea of Galilee, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. <sup>14</sup>This fulfilled what God said through the prophet Isaiah:

<sup>15</sup> "In the land of Zebulun and of Naphtali, beside the sea, beyond the Jordan River, in Galilee where so many Gentiles live,

<sup>16</sup> the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light.

And for those who lived in the land where death casts its shadow, a light has shined."<sup>\*</sup>

<sup>17</sup>From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near."<sup>\*</sup>

<sup>18</sup>One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. <sup>19</sup>Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!" <sup>20</sup>And they left their nets at once and followed him.

<sup>21</sup>A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, repairing their nets. And he called them to come, too. <sup>22</sup>They immediately followed him, leaving the boat and their father behind.

<sup>23</sup>Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. <sup>24</sup>News about him spread as far as Syria, and people soon began bringing to him all who were sick. And whatever their sickness or disease, or if they were demon possessed or epileptic or paralyzed—he healed them all. <sup>25</sup>Large crowds followed him wherever he went—people from Galilee, the Ten Towns,<sup>\*</sup> Jerusalem, from all over Judea, and from east of the Jordan River.

**4:15-16** Isa 9:1-2 (Greek version). **4:17** Or *has come, or is coming soon*. **4:25** Greek *Decapolis*.

**PSALM 4:1-8**

*For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be accompanied by stringed instruments.*

<sup>1</sup> **A**nswer me when I call to you,  
O God who declares me innocent.  
Free me from my troubles.  
Have mercy on me and hear my prayer.

<sup>2</sup> How long will you people ruin my reputation?  
How long will you make groundless accusations?

How long will you continue your lies? *Interlude*

- <sup>3</sup> You can be sure of this:  
The LORD set apart the godly for himself.  
The LORD will answer when I call to him.
- <sup>4</sup> Don't sin by letting anger control you.  
Think about it overnight and remain silent. *Interlude*
- <sup>5</sup> Offer sacrifices in the right spirit, and trust the LORD.
- <sup>6</sup> Many people say, "Who will show us better times?"  
Let your face smile on us, LORD.
- <sup>7</sup> You have given me greater joy

than those who have abundant harvests of grain and new wine.

- <sup>8</sup> In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O LORD, will keep me safe.

PROVERBS 1:20-23

**Wisdom** shouts in the streets. She cries out in the public square. She calls to the crowds along the main street, to those gathered in front of the city gate: "How long, you simpletons, will you insist on being simpleminded? How long will you mockers relish your mocking? How long will you fools hate knowledge? Come and listen to my counsel. I'll share my heart with you and make you wise."

## JANUARY 5

GENESIS 11:1-13:4

At the outset of today's reading, humanity is still challenging God rather than worshipping him. After the judgment at the tower of Babel—the event which led to the diversity of human languages and cultures—God chose Abram to go to a new land and build a new nation that would worship and follow him alone.

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

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

<sup>5</sup>But the LORD came down to look at the city and the tower the people were building. <sup>6</sup>"Look!" he said. "The people are united, and they all speak the same language. After this, nothing they set out to do will be impossible for them! <sup>7</sup>Come,

let's go down and confuse the people with different languages. Then they won't be able to understand each other."

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

<sup>10</sup>This is the account of Shem's family.

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

<sup>12</sup>When Arphaxad was 35 years old, he became the father of Shelah. <sup>13</sup>After the birth of Shelah, Arphaxad lived another 403 years and had other sons and daughters.\*

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>24</sup>When Nahor was 29 years old, he became the father of Terah. <sup>25</sup>After the birth of Terah, Nahor lived another 119 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>26</sup>When Terah was 70 years old, he had become the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

<sup>27</sup>This is the account of Terah's family. Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran was the father of Lot. <sup>28</sup>But Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, the land of his birth, while his father, Terah, was still living. <sup>29</sup>Meanwhile, Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah. (Milcah and her sister Iscah were daughters of Nahor's brother Haran.) <sup>30</sup>But Sarai was unable to become pregnant and had no children.

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

<sup>12:1</sup>THE LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup>I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you

famous, and you will be a blessing to others. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."

<sup>4</sup>So Abram departed as the LORD had instructed, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. <sup>5</sup>He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all his wealth—his livestock and all the people he had taken into his household at Haran—and headed for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in Canaan, <sup>6</sup>Abram traveled through the land as far as Shechem. There he set up camp beside the oak of Moreh. At that time, the area was inhabited by Canaanites.

<sup>7</sup>Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your descendants.\*" And Abram built an altar there and dedicated it to the LORD, who had appeared to him. <sup>8</sup>After that, Abram traveled south and set up camp in the hill country, with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. There he built another altar and dedicated it to the LORD, and he worshiped the LORD. <sup>9</sup>Then Abram continued traveling south by stages toward the Negev.

<sup>10</sup>At that time a severe famine struck the land of Canaan, forcing Abram to go down to Egypt, where he lived as a foreigner. <sup>11</sup>As he was approaching the border of Egypt, Abram said to his wife, Sarai, "Look, you are a very beautiful woman. <sup>12</sup>When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife. Let's kill him; then we can have her!' <sup>13</sup>So please tell them you are my sister. Then they will spare my life and treat me well because of their interest in you."

<sup>14</sup>And sure enough, when Abram arrived in Egypt, everyone spoke of Sarai's beauty. <sup>15</sup>When the palace officials saw her, they sang her praises to Pharaoh, their king, and Sarai was taken into his palace. <sup>16</sup>Then Pharaoh gave Abram many gifts because of her—sheep, goats, cattle, male and female donkeys, male and female servants, and camels.

<sup>17</sup>But the LORD sent terrible plagues upon Pharaoh and his household because of Sarai, Abram's wife. <sup>18</sup>So Pharaoh summoned Abram and accused him

sharply. “What have you done to me?” he demanded. “Why didn’t you tell me she was your wife? <sup>19</sup>Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ and allow me to take her as my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and get out of here!” <sup>20</sup>Pharaoh ordered some of his men to escort them, and he sent Abram out of the country, along with his wife and all his possessions.

<sup>13:1</sup>So Abram left Egypt and traveled north into the Negev, along with his wife and Lot and all that they owned. <sup>2</sup>(Abram was very rich in livestock, silver, and gold.) <sup>3</sup>From the Negev, they continued traveling by stages toward Bethel, and they pitched their tents between Bethel and Ai, where they had camped before. <sup>4</sup>This was the same place where Abram had built the altar, and there he worshiped the LORD again.

11:2 Hebrew *Shinar*. 11:9 Or *Babylon*. *Babel* sounds like a Hebrew term that means “confusion.” 11:10 Or *the ancestor of*; also in 11:12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24. 11:11 Or *the birth of this ancestor of*; also in 11:13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25. 11:12-13 Greek version reads <sup>13</sup>*When Arphaxad was 135 years old, he became the father of Cainan.* <sup>14</sup>*After the birth of Cainan, Arphaxad lived another 430 years and had other sons and daughters, and then he died. When Cainan was 130 years old, he became the father of Shelah. After the birth of Shelah, Cainan lived another 330 years and had other sons and daughters, and then he died.* Compare Luke 3:35-36. 11:32 Some ancient versions read *145 years*; compare 11:26 and 12:4. 12:7 Hebrew *seed*.

#### MATTHEW 5:1-26

Jesus began his well-known Sermon on the Mount by showing the distinction between God’s values and ours. His words remind us that God holds his people to a higher standard of living—the standard of heart obedience.

One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, <sup>2</sup>and he began to teach them.

- <sup>3</sup> “God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him,\* for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.
- <sup>4</sup> God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- <sup>5</sup> God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth.
- <sup>6</sup> God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice,\* for they will be satisfied.
- <sup>7</sup> God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
- <sup>8</sup> God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God.
- <sup>9</sup> God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God.
- <sup>10</sup> God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

## HOW WE LIVE Following Jesus

**MATTHEW 5:11-12** Every believer is called not only to believe in Jesus but to follow him as a disciple. A disciple is someone who lives in complete devotion to him and his teachings. That level of dedication is within every believer’s reach, but it isn’t necessarily easy. It requires a certain amount of discipline and sacrifice. • In Matthew 5:11-12, Jesus tells his disciples to be happy when others mistreat them because they are his disciples. Why? Because there awaits a great reward in heaven. God does not forget about the hardships we sometimes face in this world because of loving and following him. • The sacrifices you make as a follower of Jesus may be as small as spending more of your time in God’s Word or devoting a greater amount of your income to supporting a ministry. In some places in the world, people give their very lives in order to be Jesus’ disciples. Ask God to show you ways in which you can serve him. What God asks of you may look very different from what he asks of others. In whatever way he calls you, remember that you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. What an awesome privilege!

<sup>11</sup>“God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you\* and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. <sup>12</sup>Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.

<sup>13</sup>“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

<sup>14</sup>“You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup>No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup>In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

<sup>17</sup>“Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. <sup>18</sup>I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God’s law will disappear until its purpose is achieved. <sup>19</sup>So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God’s laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

<sup>20</sup>“But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!

<sup>21</sup>“You have heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.’\* <sup>22</sup>But I say, if you are even angry with someone,\* you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot,\* you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone,\* you are in danger of the fires of hell.\*

<sup>23</sup>“So if you are presenting a sacrifice\* at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to

that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.

<sup>25</sup>“When you are on the way to court with your adversary, settle your differences quickly. Otherwise, your accuser may hand you over to the judge, who will hand you over to an officer, and you will be thrown into prison. <sup>26</sup>And if that happens, you surely won’t be free again until you have paid the last penny.\*”

5:3 Greek poor in spirit. 5:6 Or for righteousness.

5:11 Some manuscripts omit and lie about you. 5:21 Exod

20:13; Deut 5:17. 5:22a Some manuscripts add without

cause. 5:22b Greek uses an Aramaic term of contempt: If you

say to your brother, ‘Raca.’ 5:22c Greek if you say, ‘You fool.’

5:22d Greek Gehenna; also in 5:29, 30. 5:23 Greek gift; also

in 5:24. 5:26 Greek the last kodrantes [i.e., quadrans].

PSALM 5:1-12

*For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be accompanied by the flute.*

- 1 **○** LORD, hear me as I pray;  
pay attention to my groaning.
- 2 Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God,  
for I pray to no one but you.
- 3 Listen to my voice in the morning, LORD.  
Each morning I bring my requests  
to you and wait expectantly.
- 4 O God, you take no pleasure in  
wickedness;  
you cannot tolerate the sins of the  
wicked.
- 5 Therefore, the proud may not stand  
in your presence,  
for you hate all who do evil.
- 6 You will destroy those who tell lies.  
The LORD detests murderers and  
deceivers.
- 7 Because of your unfailing love, I can  
enter your house;  
I will worship at your Temple with  
deepest awe.
- 8 Lead me in the right path, O LORD,  
or my enemies will conquer me.  
Make your way plain for me to follow.
- 9 My enemies cannot speak a truthful  
word.  
Their deepest desire is to destroy  
others.  
Their talk is foul, like the stench from  
an open grave.  
Their tongues are filled with flattery.\*

- <sup>10</sup> O God, declare them guilty.  
Let them be caught in their own traps.  
Drive them away because of their many sins,  
for they have rebelled against you.
- <sup>11</sup> But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;  
let them sing joyful praises forever.  
Spread your protection over them,  
that all who love your name may be filled with joy.
- <sup>12</sup> For you bless the godly, O LORD;  
you surround them with your shield of love.

5:9 Greek version reads *with lies*. Compare Rom 3:12.

PROVERBS 1:24-28

“**¶** [Wisdom] called you so often, but you wouldn’t come. I reached out to you, but you paid no attention. You ignored my advice and rejected the correction I offered. So I will laugh when you are in trouble! I will mock you when disaster overtakes you—when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster engulfs you like a cyclone, and anguish and distress overwhelm you. □ “When they cry for help, I will not answer. Though they anxiously search for me, they will not find me.”

## JANUARY 6

GENESIS 13:5-15:21

Abram and his family arrived in the land God had promised to give to him and his descendants. Abram began to grow in wealth and status, but his wife, Sarai, was still unable to have a child. So God came to Abram again and solidified his promise to give him many descendants.

**Lot**, who was traveling with Abram, had also become very wealthy with flocks of sheep and goats, herds of cattle, and many tents. <sup>6</sup>But the land could not support both Abram and Lot with all their flocks and herds living so close together. <sup>7</sup>So disputes broke out between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot. (At that time Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land.)

<sup>8</sup>Finally Abram said to Lot, “Let’s not allow this conflict to come between us or our herdsmen. After all, we are close relatives! <sup>9</sup>The whole countryside is open to you. Take your choice of any section of the land you want, and we will separate. If you want the land to the left, then I’ll take the land on the right. If you prefer the land on the right, then I’ll go to the left.”

<sup>10</sup>Lot took a long look at the fertile plains of the Jordan Valley in the direc-

tion of Zoar. The whole area was well watered everywhere, like the garden of the LORD or the beautiful land of Egypt. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) <sup>11</sup>Lot chose for himself the whole Jordan Valley to the east of them. He went there with his flocks and servants and parted company with his uncle Abram. <sup>12</sup>So Abram settled in the land of Canaan, and Lot moved his tents to a place near Sodom and settled among the cities of the plain. <sup>13</sup>But the people of this area were extremely wicked and constantly sinned against the LORD.

<sup>14</sup>After Lot had gone, the LORD said to Abram, “Look as far as you can see in every direction—north and south, east and west.

<sup>15</sup>I am giving all this land, as far as you can see, to you and your descendants\* as a permanent possession. <sup>16</sup>And I will give you so many descendants that, like the dust of the earth, they cannot be counted! <sup>17</sup>Go and walk through the land in every direction, for I am giving it to you.”

<sup>18</sup>So Abram moved his camp to Hebron and settled near the oak grove belonging to Mamre. There he built another altar to the LORD.

<sup>14:1</sup>ABOUT this time war broke out in the region. King Amraphel of Babylonia,\* King Arioch of Ellasar, King Kedorlaomer of Elam, and King Tidal of Goiim <sup>2</sup>fought against King Bera of Sodom, King Birsha of Gomorrah, King Shinab of Admah, King Shemeber of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (also called Zoar).

<sup>3</sup>This second group of kings joined forces in Siddim Valley (that is, the valley of the Dead Sea\*). <sup>4</sup>For twelve years they had been subject to King Kedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled against him.

<sup>5</sup>One year later Kedorlaomer and his allies arrived and defeated the Rephaites at Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzites at Ham, the Emites at Shaveh-kiriathaim, <sup>6</sup>and the Horites at Mount Seir, as far as El-paran at the edge of the wilderness. <sup>7</sup>Then they turned back and came to Enmishpat (now called Kadesh) and conquered all the territory of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites living in Hazazon-tamar.

<sup>8</sup>Then the rebel kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela (also called Zoar) prepared for battle in the valley of the Dead Sea.\* <sup>9</sup>They fought against King Kedorlaomer of Elam, King Tidal of Goiim, King Amraphel of Babylonia, and King Arioch of Ellasar—four kings against five. <sup>10</sup>As it happened, the valley of the Dead Sea was filled with tar pits. And as the army of the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into the tar pits, while the rest escaped into the mountains. <sup>11</sup>The victorious invaders then plundered Sodom and Gomorrah and headed for home, taking with them all the spoils of war and the food supplies. <sup>12</sup>They also captured Lot—Abram's nephew who lived in Sodom—and carried off everything he owned.

<sup>13</sup>But one of Lot's men escaped and reported everything to Abram the Hebrew, who was living near the oak grove belonging to Mamre the Amorite. Mamre and his relatives, Eshcol and Aner, were Abram's allies.

<sup>14</sup>When Abram heard that his nephew Lot had been captured, he mobilized the 318 trained men who had been born into his household. Then he pursued

Kedorlaomer's army until he caught up with them at Dan. <sup>15</sup>There he divided his men and attacked during the night. Kedorlaomer's army fled, but Abram chased them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. <sup>16</sup>Abram recovered all the goods that had been taken, and he brought back his nephew Lot with his possessions and all the women and other captives.

<sup>17</sup>After Abram returned from his victory over Kedorlaomer and all his allies, the king of Sodom went out to meet him in the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).

<sup>18</sup>And Melchizedek, the king of Salem and a priest of God Most High,\* brought Abram some bread and wine. <sup>19</sup>Melchizedek blessed Abram with this blessing:

“Blessed be Abram by God  
Most High,  
Creator of heaven and earth.  
<sup>20</sup>And blessed be God Most High,  
who has defeated your enemies  
for you.”

Then Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the goods he had recovered.

<sup>21</sup>The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give back my people who were captured. But you may keep for yourself all the goods you have recovered.”

<sup>22</sup>Abram replied to the king of Sodom, “I solemnly swear to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, <sup>23</sup>that I will not take so much as a single thread or sandal thong from what belongs to you. Otherwise you might say, ‘I am the one who made Abram rich.’ <sup>24</sup>I will accept only what my young warriors have already eaten, and I request that you give a fair share of the goods to my allies—Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre.”

<sup>15:1</sup>SOME time later, the LORD spoke to Abram in a vision and said to him, “Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you, and your reward will be great.”

<sup>2</sup>But Abram replied, “O Sovereign LORD, what good are all your blessings when I don't even have a son? Since you've given me no children, Eliezer of Damascus, a servant in my household, will inherit all my wealth. <sup>3</sup>You have given



me no descendants of my own, so one of my servants will be my heir.”

<sup>4</sup>Then the LORD said to him, “No, your servant will not be your heir, for you will have a son of your own who will be your heir.” <sup>5</sup>Then the LORD took Abram outside and said to him, “Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That’s how many descendants you will have!”

<sup>6</sup>And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith.

<sup>7</sup>Then the LORD told him, “I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as your possession.”

<sup>8</sup>But Abram replied, “O Sovereign LORD, how can I be sure that I will actually possess it?”

<sup>9</sup>The LORD told him, “Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” <sup>10</sup>So Abram presented all these to him and killed them. Then he cut each animal down the middle and laid the halves side by side; he did not, however, cut the birds in half. <sup>11</sup>Some vultures swooped down to eat the carcasses, but Abram chased them away.

<sup>12</sup>As the sun was going down, Abram

fell into a deep sleep, and a terrifying darkness came down over him. <sup>13</sup>Then the LORD said to Abram, “You can be sure that your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, where they will be oppressed as slaves for 400 years. <sup>14</sup>But I will punish the nation that enslaves them, and in the end they will come away with great wealth. <sup>15</sup>(As for you, you will die in peace and be buried at a ripe old age.) <sup>16</sup>After four generations your descendants will return here to this land, for the sins of the Amorites do not yet warrant their destruction.”

<sup>17</sup>After the sun went down and darkness fell, Abram saw a smoking firepot and a flaming torch pass between the halves of the carcasses. <sup>18</sup>So the LORD made a covenant with Abram that day and said, “I have given this land to your descendants, all the way from the border of Egypt\* to the great Euphrates River—<sup>19</sup>the land now occupied by the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup>Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, <sup>21</sup>Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.”

13:15 Hebrew *seed*; also in 13:16. 14:1 Hebrew *Shinar*; also in 14:9. 14:3 Hebrew *Salt Sea*. 14:8 Hebrew *Siddim Valley* (see 14:3); also in 14:10. 14:18 Hebrew *El-Elyon*; also in 14:19, 20, 22. 15:18 Hebrew *the river of Egypt*, referring either to an eastern branch of the Nile River or to the Brook of Egypt in the Sinai (see Num 34:5).

## WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS **Salvation and forgiveness**

**MATTHEW 5:43-45** Jesus teaches that we must love our enemies and pray for them. He’s not talking so much about a feeling as he is about a decision. By praying for your enemies, you are extending to them the same love Christ has for you. That still doesn’t make it easy, however. True forgiveness is impossible without the help of the Holy Spirit. We all fall short in the area of forgiveness in one way or another, but take heart. The Bible is full of examples of the divine nature of forgiveness: God’s Spirit kept David from taking advantage of an opportunity to kill King Saul, a man who sought to murder David (1 Samuel 24, May 19); God’s Spirit allowed Stephen to pray for the very people who were stoning him to death (Acts 7:59-60, June 11). The ultimate act of forgiveness was modeled by Jesus. While nailed to the cross, Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34, April 27). • As a believer, you have God’s Spirit within you. He will enable you to love, pray for, and forgive even those who hate or hurt you.

MATTHEW 5:27-48

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount calls us to go beyond what the world considers normal and right and to love others proactively. By being kind, even to those who are unkind, we manifest God's presence in the world.

"You have heard the commandment that says, 'You must not commit adultery.'<sup>\*</sup> <sup>28</sup>But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup>So if your eye—even your good eye<sup>\*</sup>—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup>And if your hand—even your stronger hand<sup>\*</sup>—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

<sup>31</sup>"You have heard the law that says, 'A man can divorce his wife by merely giving her a written notice of divorce.'<sup>\*</sup> <sup>32</sup>But I say that a man who divorces his wife, unless she has been unfaithful, causes her to commit adultery. And anyone who marries a divorced woman also commits adultery.

<sup>33</sup>"You have also heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not break your vows; you must carry out the vows you make to the LORD.'<sup>\*</sup> <sup>34</sup>But I say, do not make any vows! Do not say, 'By heaven!' because heaven is God's throne. <sup>35</sup>And do not say, 'By the earth!' because the earth is his footstool. And do not say, 'By Jerusalem!' for Jerusalem is the city of the great King. <sup>36</sup>Do not even say, 'By my head!' for you can't turn one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup>Just say a simple, 'Yes, I will,' or 'No, I won't.' Anything beyond this is from the evil one.

<sup>38</sup>"You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.'<sup>\*</sup> <sup>39</sup>But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. <sup>40</sup>If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. <sup>41</sup>If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile,<sup>\*</sup> carry it two miles. <sup>42</sup>Give to those who

ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow.

<sup>43</sup>"You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor'<sup>\*</sup> and hate your enemy. <sup>44</sup>But I say, love your enemies!<sup>\*</sup> Pray for those who persecute you! <sup>45</sup>In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. <sup>46</sup>If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. <sup>47</sup>If you are kind only to your friends,<sup>\*</sup> how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. <sup>48</sup>But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect."

5:27 Exod 20:14; Deut 5:18. 5:29 Greek *your right eye*. 5:30 Greek *your right hand*. 5:31 Deut 24:1. 5:33 Num 30:2. 5:38 Greek *the law that says: 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'* Exod 21:24; Lev 24:20; Deut 19:21. 5:41 Greek *million* [4,854 feet or 1,478 meters]. 5:43 Lev 19:18. 5:44 Some manuscripts add *Bless those who curse you. Do good to those who hate you. Compare Luke 6:27-28.* 5:47 Greek *your brothers*.

PSALM 6:1-10

*For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be accompanied by an eight-stringed instrument.\**

- 1 **○** LORD, don't rebuke me in your anger  
or discipline me in your rage.
- 2 Have compassion on me, LORD, for I am weak.  
Heal me, LORD, for my bones are in agony.
- 3 I am sick at heart.  
How long, O LORD, until you restore me?
- 4 Return, O LORD, and rescue me.  
Save me because of your unfailing love.
- 5 For the dead do not remember you.  
Who can praise you from the grave?\*
- 6 I am worn out from sobbing.  
All night I flood my bed with weeping,  
drenching it with my tears.
- 7 My vision is blurred by grief;  
my eyes are worn out because of all my enemies.

- <sup>8</sup> Go away, all you who do evil,  
for the LORD has heard my  
weeping.
- <sup>9</sup> The LORD has heard my plea;  
the LORD will answer my prayer.
- <sup>10</sup> May all my enemies be disgraced and  
terrified.  
May they suddenly turn back in  
shame.

6:TITLE Hebrew with stringed instruments; according to the *sheminith*. 6:5 Hebrew from *Sheol*?

PROVERBS 1:29-33

**F**or they hated knowledge and chose not to fear the LORD. They rejected my advice and paid no attention when I corrected them. Therefore, they must eat the bitter fruit of living their own way, choking on their own schemes. For simpletons turn away from me—to death. Fools are destroyed by their own complacency. But all who listen to me will live in peace, untroubled by fear of harm.”

## JANUARY 7

GENESIS 16:1-18:15

God had promised Abram and Sarai a son, but they became impatient as the years passed. They tried to meddle with God's promise and ended up with difficult consequences as a result.

**N**ow Sarai, Abram's wife, had not been able to bear children for him. But she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar. <sup>2</sup>So Sarai said to Abram, “The LORD has prevented me from having children. Go and sleep with my servant. Perhaps I can have children through her.” And Abram agreed with Sarai's proposal. <sup>3</sup>So Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian servant and gave her to Abram as a wife. (This happened ten years after Abram had settled in the land of Canaan.)

<sup>4</sup>So Abram had sexual relations with Hagar, and she became pregnant. But when Hagar knew she was pregnant, she began to treat her mistress, Sarai, with contempt. <sup>5</sup>Then Sarai said to Abram, “This is all your fault! I put my servant into your arms, but now that she's pregnant she treats me with contempt. The LORD will show who's wrong—you or me!”

<sup>6</sup>Abram replied, “Look, she is your servant, so deal with her as you see fit.” Then Sarai treated Hagar so harshly that she finally ran away.

<sup>7</sup>The angel of the LORD found Hagar beside a spring of water in the wilderness, along the road to Shur. <sup>8</sup>The angel said to her, “Hagar, Sarai's servant, where have you come from, and where are you going?”

“I'm running away from my mistress, Sarai,” she replied.

<sup>9</sup>The angel of the LORD said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit to her authority.” <sup>10</sup>Then he added, “I will give you more descendants than you can count.”

<sup>11</sup>And the angel also said, “You are now pregnant and will give birth to a son. You are to name him Ishmael (which means ‘God hears’), for the LORD has heard your cry of distress. <sup>12</sup>This son of yours will be a wild man, as untamed as a wild donkey! He will raise his fist against everyone, and everyone will be against him. Yes, he will live in open hostility against all his relatives.”

<sup>13</sup>Thereafter, Hagar used another name to refer to the LORD, who had spoken to her. She said, “You are the God who sees me.”\* She also said, “Have I truly seen the One who sees me?” <sup>14</sup>So that well was named Beer-lahai-roi (which means “well of the Living One who sees me”). It can still be found between Kadesh and Bered.

<sup>15</sup>So Hagar gave Abram a son, and Abram named him Ishmael. <sup>16</sup>Abram was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born.

<sup>17:1</sup>WHEN Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am El-Shaddai—‘God Almighty.’ Serve me faithfully and live a blameless life. <sup>2</sup>I will make a covenant with you, by which

I will guarantee to give you countless descendants."

<sup>3</sup>At this, Abram fell face down on the ground. Then God said to him, <sup>4</sup>"This is my covenant with you: I will make you the father of a multitude of nations! <sup>5</sup>What's more, I am changing your name. It will no longer be Abram. Instead, you will be called Abraham,\* for you will be the father of many nations. <sup>6</sup>I will make you extremely fruitful. Your descendants will become many nations, and kings will be among them!

<sup>7</sup>"I will confirm my covenant with you and your descendants\* after you, from generation to generation. This is the everlasting covenant: I will always be your God and the God of your descendants after you. <sup>8</sup>And I will give the entire land of Canaan, where you now live as a foreigner, to you and your descendants. It will be their possession forever, and I will be their God."

<sup>9</sup>Then God said to Abraham, "Your responsibility is to obey the terms of the covenant. You and all your descendants have this continual responsibility. <sup>10</sup>This is the covenant that you and your descendants must keep: Each male among you must be circumcised. <sup>11</sup>You must cut off the flesh of your foreskin as a sign of the covenant between me and you. <sup>12</sup>From generation to generation, every male child must be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. This applies not only to members of your family but also to the servants born in your household and the foreign-born servants whom you have purchased. <sup>13</sup>All must be circumcised. Your bodies will bear the mark of my everlasting covenant. <sup>14</sup>Any male who fails to be circumcised will be cut off from the covenant family for breaking the covenant."

<sup>15</sup>Then God said to Abraham, "Regarding Sarai, your wife—her name will no longer be Sarai. From now on her name will be Sarah.\* <sup>16</sup>And I will bless her and give you a son from her! Yes, I will bless her richly, and she will become the mother of many nations. Kings of nations will be among her descendants."

<sup>17</sup>Then Abraham bowed down to the ground, but he laughed to himself in disbelief. "How could I become a father at

the age of 100?" he thought. "And how can Sarah have a baby when she is ninety years old?" <sup>18</sup>So Abraham said to God, "May Ishmael live under your special blessing!"

<sup>19</sup>But God replied, "No—Sarah, your wife, will give birth to a son for you. You will name him Isaac,\* and I will confirm my covenant with him and his descendants as an everlasting covenant. <sup>20</sup>As for Ishmael, I will bless him also, just as you have asked. I will make him extremely fruitful and multiply his descendants. He will become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. <sup>21</sup>But my covenant will be confirmed with Isaac, who will be born to you and Sarah about this time next year." <sup>22</sup>When God had finished speaking, he left Abraham.

<sup>23</sup>On that very day Abraham took his son, Ishmael, and every male in his household, including those born there and those he had bought. Then he circumcised them, cutting off their foreskins, just as God had told him. <sup>24</sup>Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, <sup>25</sup>and Ishmael, his son, was thirteen. <sup>26</sup>Both Abraham and his son, Ishmael, were circumcised on that same day, <sup>27</sup>along with all the other men and boys of the household, whether they were born there or bought as servants. All were circumcised with him.

**18:1**THE LORD appeared again to Abraham near the oak grove belonging to Mamre. One day Abraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent during the hottest part of the day. <sup>2</sup>He looked up and noticed three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he ran to meet them and welcomed them, bowing low to the ground.

<sup>3</sup>"My lord," he said, "if it pleases you, stop here for a while. <sup>4</sup>Rest in the shade of this tree while water is brought to wash your feet. <sup>5</sup>And since you've honored your servant with this visit, let me prepare some food to refresh you before you continue on your journey."

"All right," they said. "Do as you have said."

<sup>6</sup>So Abraham ran back to the tent and said to Sarah, "Hurry! Get three large

measures\* of your best flour, knead it into dough, and bake some bread.” <sup>7</sup>Then Abraham ran out to the herd and chose a tender calf and gave it to his servant, who quickly prepared it. <sup>8</sup>When the food was ready, Abraham took some yogurt and milk and the roasted meat, and he served it to the men. As they ate, Abraham waited on them in the shade of the trees.

<sup>9</sup>“Where is Sarah, your wife?” the visitors asked.

“She’s inside the tent,” Abraham replied.

<sup>10</sup>Then one of them said, “I will return to you about this time next year, and your wife, Sarah, will have a son!”

Sarah was listening to this conversation from the tent. <sup>11</sup>Abraham and Sarah were both very old by this time, and Sarah was long past the age of having children. <sup>12</sup>So she laughed silently to herself and said, “How could a worn-out woman like me enjoy such pleasure, especially when my master—my husband—is also so old?”

<sup>13</sup>Then the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh? Why did she say, ‘Can an old woman like me have a baby?’

<sup>14</sup>Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”

<sup>15</sup>Sarah was afraid, so she denied it, saying, “I didn’t laugh.”

But the LORD said, “No, you did laugh.”

**16:13** Hebrew *El-roi*. **17:5** *Abram* means “exalted father”; *Abraham* sounds like a Hebrew term that means “father of many.” **17:7** Hebrew *seed*; also in 17:7b, 8, 9, 10, 19. **17:15** *Sarai* and *Sarah* both mean “princess.” **17:19** *Isaac* means “he laughs.” **18:6** Hebrew *3seahs*, about 15 quarts or 18 liters.

#### MATTHEW 6:1-24

In today’s reading, Jesus exposes the futility of living merely for worldly recognition and wealth. He also gives his disciples a model prayer to guide their own personal praying to God.

“**W**atch out! Don’t do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. <sup>2</sup>When you give to someone in need, don’t do as the hypocrites do—blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get. <sup>3</sup>But when you give to someone in need, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. <sup>4</sup>Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

<sup>5</sup>“When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues

## HOW WE LIVE Prayer

**MATTHEW 6:7-8** Some people repeat the prayer known as the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) over and over, as if it were an incantation that will give them whatever they ask. While Jesus does encourage us to be persistent in our prayers, we must remember that shallow repetition without sincerity will get us nowhere. • In today’s reading, Jesus provides us with a simple prayer as a model for our own prayers. This is why he said, “Pray like this” (Matthew 6:9). His example prayer puts the focus on God first and our own needs second. We begin by honoring God’s name and anticipating his coming Kingdom. Then we ask that his will be done; that is, no matter what our following requests may be, we recognize that his will supercedes our own desires because he knows what is best for us. Next we make our requests known to God, acknowledging him as our provider. We know he will never tempt us, but we must pray for strength not to give in to temptation and to be delivered from evil influences. • While repetition of the Lord’s Prayer can be very meaningful, it is important to use it as a model prayer in which you praise him, pray for his continued work in the world, and pray for your daily needs, both physical and spiritual.

where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. <sup>6</sup>But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

<sup>7</sup>“When you pray, don’t babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. <sup>8</sup>Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! <sup>9</sup>Pray like this:

Our Father in heaven,  
 may your name be kept holy.

<sup>10</sup> May your Kingdom come soon.  
 May your will be done on earth,  
 as it is in heaven.

<sup>11</sup> Give us today the food we need,\*

<sup>12</sup> and forgive us our sins,  
 as we have forgiven those who sin  
 against us.

<sup>13</sup> And don’t let us yield to  
 temptation,\*  
 but rescue us from the evil one.\*

<sup>14</sup>“If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you.

<sup>15</sup>But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

<sup>16</sup>“And when you fast, don’t make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. <sup>17</sup>But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. <sup>18</sup>Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

<sup>19</sup>“Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup>Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup>Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

<sup>22</sup>“Your eye is a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is good, your whole body is filled with light. <sup>23</sup>But when your eye is bad, your whole body is filled with darkness. And if the light you

think you have is actually darkness, how deep that darkness is!

<sup>24</sup>“No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

6:11 Or Give us today our food for the day; or Give us today our food for tomorrow. 6:13a Or And keep us from being tested. 6:13b Or from evil. Some manuscripts add For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

PSALM 7:1-17

*A psalm of David, which he sang to the LORD concerning Cush of the tribe of Benjamin.*

<sup>1</sup> I come to you for protection, O LORD  
 my God.

Save me from my persecutors—  
 rescue me!

<sup>2</sup> If you don’t, they will maul me like  
 a lion,  
 tearing me to pieces with no one  
 to rescue me.

<sup>3</sup> O LORD my God, if I have done wrong  
 or am guilty of injustice,

<sup>4</sup> if I have betrayed a friend  
 or plundered my enemy without  
 cause,

<sup>5</sup> then let my enemies capture me.  
 Let them trample me into the  
 ground  
 and drag my honor in the dust.

*Interlude*

<sup>6</sup> Arise, O LORD, in anger!  
 Stand up against the fury of my  
 enemies!

Wake up, my God, and bring justice!

<sup>7</sup> Gather the nations before you.  
 Rule over them from on high.

<sup>8</sup> The LORD judges the nations.  
 Declare me righteous, O LORD,  
 for I am innocent, O Most High!

<sup>9</sup> End the evil of those who are wicked,  
 and defend the righteous.

For you look deep within the mind  
 and heart,  
 O righteous God.

<sup>10</sup> God is my shield,  
 saving those whose hearts are true  
 and right.

<sup>11</sup> God is an honest judge.  
 He is angry with the wicked every  
 day.

- <sup>12</sup> If a person does not repent,  
God\* will sharpen his sword;  
he will bend and string his bow.  
<sup>13</sup> He will prepare his deadly weapons  
and shoot his flaming arrows.  
<sup>14</sup> The wicked conceive evil;  
they are pregnant with trouble  
and give birth to lies.  
<sup>15</sup> They dig a deep pit to trap others,  
then fall into it themselves.  
<sup>16</sup> The trouble they make for others  
backfires on them.  
The violence they plan falls on  
their own heads.  
<sup>17</sup> I will thank the LORD because he  
is just;

I will sing praise to the name of the  
LORD Most High.

7:12 Hebrew *he*.

PROVERBS 2:1-5

**My child,\*** listen to what I say, and treasure my commands. Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. Cry out for insight, and ask for understanding. Search for them as you would for silver; seek them like hidden treasures. Then you will understand what it means to fear the LORD, and you will gain knowledge of God.

2:1 Hebrew *My son*.

## JANUARY 8

GENESIS 18:16-19:38

God confirmed Abraham's special status when he revealed to Abraham his plans to destroy the hopelessly wicked Sodom and Gomorrah. Through Abraham's intervention, Lot was saved from the destruction.

**Then** the men got up from their meal and looked out toward Sodom. As they left, Abraham went with them to send them on their way.

<sup>17</sup>"Should I hide my plan from Abraham?" the LORD asked. <sup>18</sup>"For Abraham will certainly become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him. <sup>19</sup>I have singled him out so that he will direct his sons and their families to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just. Then I will do for Abraham all that I have promised."

<sup>20</sup>So the LORD told Abraham, "I have heard a great outcry from Sodom and Gomorrah, because their sin is so flagrant. <sup>21</sup>I am going down to see if their actions are as wicked as I have heard. If not, I want to know."

<sup>22</sup>The other men turned and headed toward Sodom, but the LORD remained with Abraham. <sup>23</sup>Abraham approached

him and said, "Will you sweep away both the righteous and the wicked?"

<sup>24</sup>Suppose you find fifty righteous people living there in the city—will you still sweep it away and not spare it for their sakes? <sup>25</sup>Surely you wouldn't do such a thing, destroying the righteous along with the wicked. Why, you would be treating the righteous and the wicked exactly the same! Surely you wouldn't do that! Should not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?"

<sup>26</sup>And the LORD replied, "If I find fifty righteous people in Sodom, I will spare the entire city for their sake."

<sup>27</sup>Then Abraham spoke again. "Since I have begun, let me speak further to my Lord, even though I am but dust and ashes. <sup>28</sup>Suppose there are only forty-five righteous people rather than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?"

And the LORD said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five righteous people there."

<sup>29</sup>Then Abraham pressed his request further. "Suppose there are only forty?"

And the LORD replied, "I will not destroy it for the sake of the forty."

<sup>30</sup>"Please don't be angry, my Lord,"

## INDEX TO STUDY NOTES

- WHO GOD IS** God is all-knowing (October 26)  
God is all-powerful (January 29)  
God is in control (December 18)  
God is the Creator (January 1)  
God is faithful (March 27)  
God is our Father (September 18)  
God is holy (September 10)  
The final judge (December 19)  
God is just (March 18)  
God is loving (May 3, July 19, September 24, November 4)  
God is personal (December 10)  
God keeps his promises (January 14)  
The one true God (March 4)  
Jesus is our advocate (November 6)  
Jesus is God (February 23)  
Jesus is the Good Shepherd (May 18)  
Jesus is our healer (January 13)  
Jesus humbled himself (September 30)  
Jesus is King (January 31, December 28)  
Jesus is Lord (January 17)  
Jesus has power to transform (February 27)  
Jesus fulfilled prophecy (March 20, May 21, September 12)  
Jesus is our sacrifice (September 27, November 9)  
Jesus is our Savior (May 8)  
Jesus is the perfect servant (May 23)  
Jesus is the Son of God (April 30)  
Jesus suffered for us (April 25)  
The Way, the Truth, the Life (May 24)  
The Holy Spirit empowers us (June 4)  
The Holy Spirit is God (February 18)  
The Holy Spirit is our helper (May 25)  
The Holy Spirit helps us grow (August 29)  
The Holy Spirit produces fruit in us (September 20)
- HOW WE LIVE** Accepting others (May 5, June 12, June 16)  
Accountability to others (April 8, April 18, October 18)  
Aging (March 17, June 10)  
Being humble (May 4)  
Blessed by God (July 7)  
Church involvement (July 17, September 25, October 17, November 11)  
Confessing our sins (February 10, September 29, November 30, December 9, December 12)  
Courageous in trials (February 1, March 25, July 28, August 26, October 20, November 22)  
Dealing with differences (July 31)  
Dealing with problems (January 15, February 21, July 1, August 13, September 23, November 2, November 26)



- Experiencing joy (June 25, August 1, August 14, December 7)  
Faith and works (January 9, July 21, October 9, November 18)  
Following Jesus (January 5, January 25, February 7, March 31, April 11,  
May 22, July 11, July 20, August 8, August 18, September 19,  
October 6, October 15, November 1, December 1)  
Our giving (March 6, May 9, July 15, September 7, October 21)  
Growing in faith (May 11, September 11, November 3,  
November 10, November 12)  
Growing in wisdom (January 23, April 21, June 8, August 4)  
Having integrity (April 3, June 27, November 23)  
In the world, not of it (May 28, August 9, October 25)  
Knowing God's peace (January 16, July 6, September 17,  
December 15, December 20)  
Life's ups and downs (April 1, May 6)  
Living responsibly (April 20, April 23, August 16)  
Loving God and others (February 3, March 5, March 26, June 2,  
August 20)  
Our marriages (January 27, February 28, July 9, August 12,  
September 6, November 16, December 30)  
Our money (March 1, March 15, November 21)  
Obeying authority (July 30)  
Obeying God (January 4, March 13, May 10, May 12, May 19,  
June 30, July 4, October 7, December 3)  
Overcoming doubt (August 23, August 28, October 5)  
Persevering in faith (March 28, April 16, November 14,  
November 24, November 27)  
Praise and thanksgiving (March 16, April 15, July 2, August 6,  
August 17, October 28, December 17)  
Prayer (January 7, February 16, May 27, July 27, August 11,  
October 3, October 19, December 8)  
Raising our children (May 29, June 9, August 27, October 10)  
Relying on God's power (January 26, May 13, May 15, June 3, June 17,  
July 23, August 7, September 16, September 22, November 17)  
Our relationships (January 21, May 2, May 16, September 3,  
September 21)  
Remaining pure (February 24, February 25, May 26, August 22,  
October 24)  
Resisting temptation (January 3, January 19, August 15, November 20)  
Responding to God (February 15, February 19, March 23, April 10,  
June 15, July 8, September 1, September 4, October 4)  
Revering God (February 20, April 19, August 2, September 5,  
November 15)  
Seeking God's will (January 8, January 10, March 7, March 9,  
April 26, June 18, June 24, July 29, October 16, December 14)  
Serving others (February 8, March 2)  
Setting priorities (February 22, March 22, April 4, April 17, July 25,  
October 2)  
Sharing our faith (February 14, May 1, May 17, June 11, July 12,  
August 5, November 25)  
Our speech (June 5, August 3, September 26, October 12,  
November 19)  
Standing firm in our beliefs (May 14, June 7, June 13, June 14,  
September 14, September 15)  
Studying God's Word (March 29, April 29, May 31, July 3,  
October 23)  
Trusting God (January 12, February 26, March 10, March 14,  
March 19, May 7, July 24)

Our work (April 7, May 30, October 8, October 27, November 29)  
 Worshipping God (September 2, December 24, December 29)

- WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS** Angels (February 6, October 22, October 30, December 2, December 23)  
 The apostle Paul (June 19)  
 Conquering the Promised Land (March 24)  
 The covenants of the Bible (July 14)  
 Demons (January 11, April 2, April 5, June 29)  
 The devil (August 21, August 30, September 9, November 13, December 21)  
 Does the Bible repeat material? (July 10)  
 The danger of doubt (June 1)  
 The evil of idolatry (April 13)  
 Facing death with hope (August 31)  
 False Prophets (November 5)  
 The future (April 22, August 24, October 1, October 14, December 25, December 26, December 27)  
 The reality of heaven (January 18, February 2, June 21, December 16, December 31)  
 The reality of hell (April 14, October 13, October 31)  
 Hosea and Gomer (December 5)  
 How to discern truth (January 20, January 24, March 30, June 26, November 28, December 4, December 6)  
 Is Jesus the only way to God? (June 6)  
 Is the Bible reliable? (January 2)  
 The Jerusalem Council (June 23)  
 Jesus on the cross (March 11)  
 Jesus' miracles (March 21)  
 Jesus' resurrection (March 12)  
 Jews and Gentiles (July 26)  
 The Kingdom of God (April 9)  
 The kings of Israel and Judah (June 28)  
 The laws of the Old Testament (February 5)  
 The letters of Revelation (December 11)  
 The Lord's Supper (April 24)  
 The old and new covenants (November 7)  
 Old Testament prophets (June 22, September 13)  
 Old Testament sacrifices (January 30, February 17)  
 Old Testament worship (February 9)  
 The purpose of genealogies (July 5)  
 Right and wrong (February 4, August 10)  
 Salvation and forgiveness (January 6, January 22, January 28, February 11, March 3, April 12, April 27, June 20, September 8, October 29)  
 Sin and its consequences (March 8, April 6, April 28, October 11, November 8)  
 Spiritual gifts (February 13, August 19)  
 Spiritual warfare (September 28)  
 The Temple (July 22)  
 Those who never hear about Jesus (July 13)  
 Understanding John's vision (December 13, December 22)  
 Warning against divination (May 20)  
 Why does God allow suffering? (July 18, August 25)  
 Why Jesus had to die (February 12)  
 Why we need a Savior (July 16)