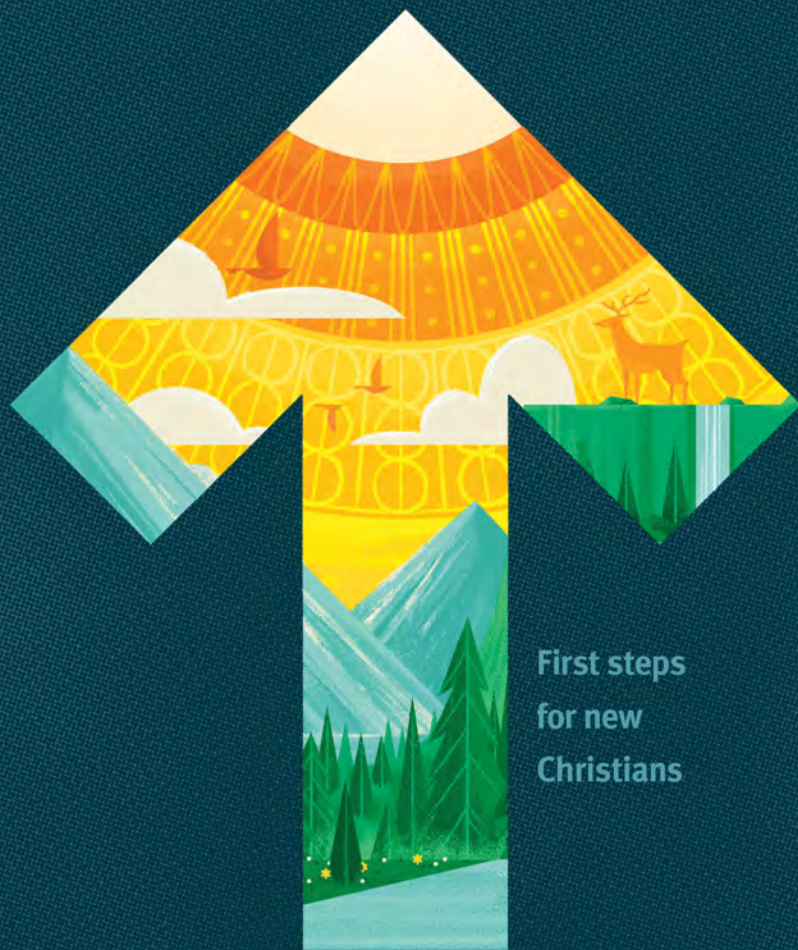


new believer's Bible



First steps
for new
Christians

Greg Laurie

GENERAL EDITOR

NLT



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BY

ON THE OCCASION OF

DATE

*The grass withers and the flowers fade,
but the word of our God stands forever.*

ISAIAH 40:8



new believer's Bible

**First steps
for new Christians**

Greg Laurie



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Welcome!

CONGRATULATIONS! You are holding in your hands the bestselling book in the history of humanity—the Bible. Although the Bible has been around for some time, the wisdom and knowledge contained within are still relevant today. In fact, everything you need to know about God and life is found in the pages of this book. It is the “user’s manual of life” that we have all been searching for.

The Bible does not just teach us about life, though. It also shows us how to come into a *personal* relationship with the very God who inspired this book. This particular Bible contains features that have been specially designed to help you understand, discover, and deepen the relationship that God wants to have with you.

Perhaps you are not yet a believer in Jesus Christ, but you want to know more about Jesus Christ and the Christian faith. You may even want to be a believer, but you just don’t know how to become one. Turn to the section titled “How You Can Know God” (page A10) to learn how to establish a life-changing relationship with Jesus.

Maybe you have just discovered the Christian faith, and you are a new believer. This Bible and its study notes will help you lay a good foundation for your faith and learn how to walk closely with God in the years ahead. You may be a believer who is mature in the faith. You will be refreshed and reminded of the essentials of the Christian faith and life.

Main Features

After the article “How You Can Know God,” you will find a list of Big Questions and the pages where you find answers to them. In the pages of the Bible itself, you will find three different kinds of study notes: Cornerstones, First Steps, and Off & Running. You can follow specific topics through the Bible by starting with the first note in each topic and turning to the next note in that topic by following the page direction at the end of the note. Or you can choose a book of the Bible to read, and consider each study note in that book as you come to it.



BIG QUESTIONS: *What the Bible Says about Troubling Issues*

Life often presents us with difficult situations that cause us to ask hard questions. For instance, you may wonder how a good God could let something bad—even tragic—happen to you. Or you may wonder why Jesus Christ is the only way to God. Aren't other religions just as good? Everything from alternative lifestyles to the second coming of Christ is covered here. *Turn to page A17 for the list of Big Questions.*



CORNERSTONES: *Foundational Truths of the Faith*

Cornerstones—actual blocks of stone—were traditionally used to start a building's foundation. Likewise, the Cornerstones reading track helps you to begin to lay a solid foundation for your faith. Here you will learn about God's character, Jesus' life, and the Holy Spirit's role in the lives of believers. Cornerstones also contains notes on essential Christian character traits that are developed and nurtured by a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Some of those traits are love, forgiveness, purity, honesty, wisdom, peace, and joy. *Turn to page A19 for a description of the Cornerstones topics and where to find these notes.*



FIRST STEPS: *What to Do after You Have Accepted Christ*

The phrase *first steps* brings to mind the image of a young child learning to walk. Like young children, new believers in Christ need to learn how to walk, so to speak. For most people, the Christian life is a completely new way of living. To help you learn to live this new life, the First Steps study notes give you valuable building blocks for growing in faith. Here you will discover the importance and “how to” of studying the Bible, praying, finding the right church, resisting temptation, and seeking God's will for your life. *Turn to page A31 for a description of the First Steps topics and where to find these notes.*



OFF & RUNNING: *How Your Faith Affects the Daily Aspects of Your Life*

“How does God's Word apply to my everyday life?” This is one of the most widely asked questions about the Bible today. The Off & Running study notes answer this question. Here you will discover how to put your faith into action. You will see what the Bible has to say about important topics like marriage, parenting, priorities, conversation, and job performance. By helping you apply biblical principles to these aspects of your life, Off & Running takes you to the next level of the Christian life—living it day to day. *Turn to page A40 for a description of the Off & Running topics and where to find these notes.*

Additional Features

At the back of the *New Believer's Bible*, you will find several features that will help you understand the Bible and your faith better. These features include:

- **How to Study the Bible**—a practical way to read through the Bible and a list of questions to ask yourself as you read
- **The One Year New Testament Reading Plan**—an outline for reading the New Testament in one year, spending just a few minutes each day
- **52 Great Bible Stories**—a list of well-known Bible stories, where you can find them, and the main lesson you can learn from them
- **Memory Verses**—a list of key Bible verses to commit to memory
- **Prophecies about Jesus**—a list of Old Testament passages that contain prophecies about Jesus, and the New Testament references that record his fulfillment of those prophecies
- **Glossary of Christian Terms**—a quick-reference guide to help you understand the meanings of words like *atonement*, *justification*, *redemption*, and *sanctification*
- **Topical Index**—a way to find selected Scripture passages and notes focused on a particular topic that may be of special interest to you

How You Can Know God

FROM THE MOMENT YOU WERE BORN, you have been on a quest. At the beginning, you probably didn't have a clear idea about what you were after, but you knew you wanted your life to have some kind of purpose. You wanted to know the meaning of life . . . and you wanted to be happy.

All of us want exactly the same thing.

A philosopher named Hugh Moorhead once wrote to 250 of the best-known philosophers, scientists, writers, and intellectuals in the world, asking them, "What is the meaning of life?" Some offered their best guesses; some admitted they just made up a purpose for life. Others were honest enough to say they had no clue. Several even asked Moorhead to write back and tell them if *he* had discovered the purpose of life!

Clearly, we all need to know where we are going in life and why. If we have no goals, no purpose, and no guiding principles, we will waste our lives (and many have!). If you're young and looking ahead to life, you *should* be asking these questions, because life goes by more quickly than you can now imagine.

We search for meaning and happiness in relationships, sex, possessions, accomplishments, fame, drugs, drink, and even religion. We are all searching for meaning and purpose in life.

I'd like to relate a famous story that Jesus told some 2,000 years ago on this very topic. His story tells us what God is like. That's important, because some people envision God as an angry, hostile, uptight Supreme Being who is perpetually in a bad mood, just waiting to nail you to the wall when you fail or sin. But nothing could be further from the truth.

Others look at God with a jaded eye because they have seen hypocrites who claimed to be Christians. May I apologize for all those people right now? That is *not* who God is.

So what *is* God like? Is he a smiling God or a frowning one? How does he look at us? Does he approve or disapprove of us?

Because the Bible often refers to the Almighty as "Father," we normally associate God with our earthly fathers—and that can be good or bad, depending on what kind of fathers we had. If your father was distant and aloof, or even harsh and abusive, you may feel that God is, too. If your father was kind and approachable and fun loving, then you may transfer those positive associations to God. But regardless of how good or poor a job our earthly fathers have done with us, we must look at God in an entirely different way. We must look at God through the pages of Scripture, where he reveals himself most clearly.

In fact, we need to go to an expert on the subject. And who is a better expert on this topic than Jesus himself?

In a beloved story, Jesus gave us a clear snapshot of God that shows us he is personally and deeply interested in every aspect of our lives. We can think of this story as a “divine selfie.” It’s called the parable of the Lost Son, but it might better be called the parable of the Loving Father. In this story, Jesus portrays God as a loving heavenly Father who deeply cares for us and greatly misses us when we go astray.

As the story begins, we see a young man deciding to leave home. This boy came from an affluent family with many servants. Despite the love in this home, the young boy wanted nothing to do with it. He grew tired of the rules and regulations and decided his dad had been keeping him back from enjoying the life he wanted. When the boy saw the bright lights of the big city calling his name, he wanted to experience everything this world had to offer. No doubt he thought, *What could Dad know about this sort of thing?*

Perhaps you come from a broken home or you have suffered through a divorce. You feel betrayed and hurt. You are out on your own, trying to find meaning and purpose in life. You feel lonely and isolated. You are looking for someone or something to fill that void in your life. You have probably discovered that this world doesn’t have the answers to life’s deepest questions. Why not? Because the heart of the problem is a problem of the heart.

In fact, the problem is inside us. That’s why it is almost laughable when people say, “The answer is within.” The Bible plainly teaches that the *problem* is within! A lot of people think that if they could just escape their problems, they’d be fine. Then—SURPRISE—they find their problems following them!

That’s because we all have a heart problem, which is part of the lesson Jesus wanted to teach us through his story about the Lost Son. Listen to him tell it:

A man had two sons. The younger son told his father, “I want my share of your estate now before you die.” So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons. A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. (Luke 15:11-15)

This boy thought his father was keeping him back from the good life. Over time a strong curiosity about the outside world grew within him, a restlessness to go out and sample the forbidden. He wanted to break the taboos and see for himself. So he told his father in so many words, “Dad, I figure you’re going to drop dead one day, but I don’t want to wait around before I get my inheritance. So give me my money *now!*”

This kid was a spoiled, selfish brat who couldn’t have cared less about hurting his father’s feelings. That father could have stopped his foolish son, but he did not. The boy had something we all have, namely, free will.

Jesus’ story pictures all of us trying to run from God. God says, “I love you, so you’re free to go.” God will not force salvation on us; it’s our choice. So the father in Jesus’ story did not stop the prodigal, any more than God stopped Adam and Eve from eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. He loves you and me and will allow us to make our own decisions—and face the consequences, whether good or bad. Clearly, he wants us to make the right choice.

But it’s still a choice!

God says to each of us, “I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!” (Deuteronomy 30:19). In Jesus’ story, the prodigal made the wrong choice. No doubt, when he hit town he instantly became one popular guy. But when the prodigal’s money ran out, his “friends” ran out with it. Before long, this foolish young man hit rock bottom.

Maybe you, too, have hit bottom recently. Perhaps you have reaped the results of what you have sowed. At first, the prodigal was living high on the hog, but soon he found himself living *with* the hogs . . . and as he fed them, their food began to look good to him. Even so, he still didn’t come to his senses and go home! Instead, he prolonged his miserable situation and sank even deeper.

That’s sin for you. It promises freedom but brings slavery. It offers success but delivers failure. It pledges life, but “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). It guarantees pleasure but ultimately yields only misery. Oh, it can bring some pleasure for a season, . . . but the seasons change. Sin often begins in the bright days of summer but always ends in the biting cold of winter.

Maybe you are doing everything this world tells you to do in order to be happy. Have you discovered yet that this world does not have what you are looking for? In time, you certainly will; I just hope you don’t wait until the end of your life. Or worse yet, when your life is cut short. None of us has any guarantee of growing old.

Fortunately, in Jesus’ story, one day the boy realized his mistake. Jesus said that “he finally came to his senses” (Luke 15:17). He woke up and smelled the

coffee. While originally he thought he had it tough in his father's house, he came to realize that life outside his father's house was simply insane. Even more, he realized that his own actions had brought on his troubles.

We live in an age when few individuals want to take responsibility for their own actions. There is always someone or something to blame. If it's trouble at home, we say, "The problem is my parents." If it's trouble at school, we say, "The problem is my teachers." Trouble at work? Then it's the fault of a boss or colleagues. We always find someone or something to blame. "I wouldn't have done this if you hadn't done that." "I act like that because it's the way my father (or mother) acted." "Maybe I shouldn't have done it, but you're just as bad!"

But there has to come a point where we own up to what we have done. The Bible says, "The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

It's an amazing thing when we ditch the excuses and stop the blame shifting and admit the problem is us. Sometimes this happens gradually, dawning on us over a period of time. But often it's instantaneous. Like a flash, it comes to you: "It's not these Christians who are crazy. It's *me!*"

It happened that way with the Lost Son. Suddenly, like a flash, it dawned on him that it was not his father who was wrong, but him. He recognized the love and patience of his father and how he had offended him. Once that happened, immediately he saw his old, confining home in a very new light. The lonely boy longed for his family.

You may say, "But I have no family to return to!" Perhaps your parents are divorced, or your dad is abusive, or your mom left you. Maybe you have already lost your parents to death. But I want to assure you: You *do* have a family. It's called the family of God, the church. And you do have a Father, a Father in Heaven who even now is waiting for you.

This boy eventually realized that everything he was looking for he already had in his father's house. In the same way, everything *you* need in life is found in a relationship with God!

How did the father in the story feel when his son left? He was sad. He missed his son. Now remember, this story is a snapshot of God. How does God feel about people like us wasting our lives? He also feels sad. He also misses us.

The boy in the story said, "I will go home to my father." He could have repeated this resolution daily and yet never have done anything about it, but he acted on his plan. In a similar way, a lot of people who have fallen into sin say, "One of these days, I am going to get right with God." But nothing ever changes, and they sink deeper into sin as their hearts grow harder and harder. To get right with God, we need to utter three difficult words: "I have sinned" (Luke 15:21). God cannot forgive the sin we will not confess!

And how does the father in Jesus' story react to his returning prodigal? Listen again to Jesus:

When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, "At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.'"

So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. His son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son."

But his father said to the servants, "Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found." So the party began. (Luke 15:17-24)

Notice that the father accepted his son just as he was. Even without a bath! In the same way, God receives us *as we are*. Jesus said, "Those the Father has given me will come to me, and I will never reject them" (John 6:37) and, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Perhaps you say, "I need to clean up my life before I come to God." God effectively says, "No, you need to come to me, and I will clean up your life."

Notice that Jesus says the father *ran* to the son. Understand that in this ancient culture, it was considered undignified for an older man to run. (It was hard, too!) Yet the father pulled his beautiful robe up above his knees and sprinted to his son.

You may have walked away from God, but he has not walked away from you. In fact, he will run to you if you will turn back to him. Just like the father of the Lost Son, God will see you coming, even if you are still a long way off.

**So, what do you need to do in order to
come into a close relationship with God?**



1. Recognize and confess that you are a sinner.

No more excuses! What is sin? It is to fall short of God's standard, which is perfection itself. It is also to cross a line. All of us have done that and more. We have broken God's commandments and fallen short of his glory. The Bible tells us, "Everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard" (Romans 3:23). It also says, "If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth" (1 John 1:8).

God gave us his law, the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17), not to make us righteous, but to show us how miserably we all fall short of his perfection. His laws are like a moral mirror that shows us our flaws and sin.

2. Recognize that Jesus died on the cross for you.

The Bible tells us,

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. (Romans 5:6-8)

There was simply no other way to satisfy the righteous demands of God. We have no ability to improve ourselves, much less save ourselves, and therefore we faced a future of permanent separation from God because of our sin. But God, in his great love, sent his own Son to come down from Heaven and die on the cross in our place.

I love the way the apostle Paul personalized it when he wrote, "the Son of God, who loved *me* and gave himself for *me*" (Galatians 2:20, emphasis added). God loves *you* and gave himself for *you*, too! There was no other way to resolve this serious sin issue that we all face. Jesus was the only one who could ever accomplish that, which is why he said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Christ is the only way to the Father. He himself said so.

The apostle Peter echoed these words: "There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). It's not about what I did to please God or reach him on my own efforts. In fact, I did everything to *displease* him, and so I failed to reach him. "There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ

Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, willingly laid down his life when he went to the cross to die for our sins. In probably the best-known verse in the Bible, we read, “For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

3. Repent of your sin.

What does it mean to “repent”? It means to turn from all known sin. It’s being sorry for your sin. But not only that! It’s being sorry enough to stop. The Bible says, “The kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation” (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Repentance is like hanging a U-turn in the road of life. You have been running *from* God, like the Lost Son; now it’s time to run *to* him. The Bible says, “Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away” (Acts 3:19).

4. Receive Christ into your life.

Salvation comes not merely by believing that Jesus is the Son of God, but by receiving him into your life. Being a Christian is not just knowing about God; it’s knowing God himself. It’s a relationship, a friendship with Jesus, who will come into your heart and take up permanent residence there. Jesus said, “Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends” (Revelation 3:20).

The Bible says, “To all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). And how do you receive him into your life? Through prayer. If you want to ask him to take up residence in your heart right now, you might offer the following prayer:

Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner. I have broken your commandments and fallen short of your standards. Right now I turn from that sin and ask you to come into my life. Be my Lord, Savior, friend, and God. I put my faith in Jesus Christ, and in him alone, to save me from my sins. Thank you for loving me and calling me. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

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What the Bible Says about Troubling Issues



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Accountability

Once you receive Jesus Christ into your life as your personal Lord and Savior, not only do you obtain the privileged gift of eternal life, but you also immediately acquire a great responsibility. You have been entrusted with the message of the gospel and are responsible for what you do with it in your life. In the end, we know that what we have done on this earth for Christ will be examined before the almighty God and displayed before the rest of the world. The question we must all ask is this: Will what I am doing for Christ and his Kingdom stand the test of time? Those who have done much with what God has given them will be greatly rewarded. Take some time to see what God’s Word has to say on this subject.

- **We are responsible for our own sins and mistakes** *see Jeremiah 31:30, page 721*
- **The more we know, the greater our responsibility will be** *see Luke 12:47-48, page 978*
- **We need to invest our abilities and resources in God’s Kingdom** *see Luke 19:11-26, page 986*
- **The value of our work on earth will be tested** *see 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, page 1092*

Discernment

An inspector who worked for England’s Scotland Yard in the counterfeit department was once asked if he spent a lot of time handling counterfeit money. He said no, and then he explained that he spent so much time handling the real thing that he could immediately detect the counterfeit. In the same way, as we become knowledgeable about God’s Word, we, too, will be able to detect teachings and concepts that are contrary to Scripture. Make no mistake—counterfeit “truth” is out there in force. Look at the following Scripture passages to find out how you can keep from falling prey to false teachings.

- **Making appropriate judgments** *see Exodus 18:13-16, page 72*
- **How to recognize a true prophet** *see Deuteronomy 18:20-22, page 187*
- **Beware of Satan’s clever imitations** *see Matthew 13:24-30, page 910*
- **How to evaluate someone’s teachings** *see Acts 17:11, page 1051*
- **How to recognize Satan’s strategies** *see 1 Timothy 4:1-2, page 1163*
- **How can I tell the difference between true and false teachings?**
see Jude 1:8-11, page 1220

First Steps:

What to Do after You Have Accepted Christ



Attend Church

One of the essential building blocks of spiritual growth is fellowship with other believers by becoming an active part of a local church. The church (meaning the entire body of Christians) is not really an organization so much as an organism. It thrives by keeping its members spiritually active and well fed. The church provides you with spiritual instruction from God's Word, allows you to worship God with other believers, enables you to use your God-given gifts and abilities as God intended, and makes you accountable to spiritual leadership.

Some people think they can get enough spiritual input from Christian television, radio programs, and books. While those things do have value, nothing can replace the need to become an active participant in a local church. Think about it—if joining in fellowship with other believers were not important, why did Jesus establish the church (see Matthew 16:18)? The Bible has plenty to say about the characteristics of a healthy, vibrant church and the necessity of Christian fellowship. Here are a few helpful insights from God's Word on looking for and attending the right church.

- **What to look for in a church** *see Acts 2:42-47, page 1030*
- **You have a place in the church** *see 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, page 1104*
- **Why we need fellowship with other believers** *see Hebrews 10:25, page 1186*

Experience New Life in Christ

I love the way everything looks after it rains. The streets are clean, the birds start singing again, and dirty cars have been washed. You may even see a rainbow! This is a picture of what happens when people come to faith in Christ. They “turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18). You literally become a new person on the inside, as Scripture reminds us: “Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

But what does this mean for day-to-day living? It means you have begun a lifelong adventure with Jesus Christ. The Bible has a lot to say about what it means to be a new person in Christ. Here are some key passages and notes to help you learn more.

- **God counts us as righteous because of our faith** *see Genesis 15:6, page 17*
- **All believers are called to be priests** *see Exodus 19:6, page 74*



Off & Running:

How Your Faith Affects the Daily Aspects of Your Life

Attitude toward Self

Many are on a quest today to find personal happiness. They will do whatever is necessary to “find themselves.” They are told that the answer is “within,” so they search in all the wrong places trying to find meaning and purpose in life. The Bible, however, does not teach that the answer is within us. Rather, it teaches that the *problem* is within us. Jeremiah 17:9 tells us, “The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?” For that reason, all attempts to reform or improve ourselves will meet with failure. We do not need self-esteem as much as we need a realistic view of who we are and who God is. Once we honestly assess our own sinful condition and come to grips with our built-in weakness and vulnerability to sin, then we will be able to appreciate God’s solution. In a nutshell, the way to true happiness comes not from seeking happiness itself, but from seeking God. Here’s what God’s Word has to say about how we can be happy, fulfilled people.

- **Don’t trust only in yourself** *see Jeremiah 17:5-8, page 706*
- **We need to recognize our true condition** *see Matthew 5:3-5, page 896*
- **We must surrender our dreams and seek God’s will** *see Matthew 16:24-26, page 914*
- **We will find happiness in loving God and others** *see Matthew 22:37-40, page 922*
- **We need times to rest and recharge** *see Mark 6:31, page 939*
- **Our needs must come last** *see Hebrews 13:11-13, page 1191*

Choices

A common question that many new Christians have is, “Can I be a Christian and still do . . . ?” Some questions of Christian liberty can be answered easily because the Bible directly addresses these questions. For instance, say someone asks, “Is it okay, as a Christian, to get drunk?” The answer is clearly no. The Bible says, “Don’t be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). However, questions like, “Can I be a Christian and still drink alcoholic beverages?” or “Can I listen to any kind of music?” or “Can I go to any movie?” are not answered so easily. They are among the many gray areas of the Christian life that do not necessarily have a chapter-and-verse answer.



OLD TESTAMENT

GENESIS IS THE GROUND FLOOR and foundation of the entire Bible. Without it, the rest of the Bible would be incomprehensible. The book of Genesis gives vital information concerning the origin of all things and therefore the meaning of all things. It answers the great, fundamental questions of life's purpose and meaning: Where did we come from? Why are we here? What is the purpose of life? Where are we going?

Genesis reveals God to us. So the book of Genesis is the foundation of all true history, as well as of true science and true philosophy. Above all else, it's the foundation of God's revelation, as given in the Bible. This book covers about 2,500 years of human history, from the creation of Adam to the death of Joseph. G. Campbell Morgan divides it like this: *generation*—chapters 1 and 2; *degeneration*—chapters 3–11; *regeneration*—chapters 12–50.

The word *genesis* means “the origin or coming into being of something.” Tradition says that Moses wrote Genesis. The book records important beginnings, including the Creation, the fall of man, and the formation of the nation of Israel. It also gives us the very first prophecy about the Messiah (Genesis 3:15). Familiar stories about key figures such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph are all found in this book. Through these stories, we learn about the nature of God and the nature of our relationship with him. All of the great individuals whose stories we read here started out as ordinary people; they learned to entrust themselves and everything they had to a faithful God. We can follow their example.

The Account of Creation

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

³Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light “day” and the darkness “night.”

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

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

⁸God called the space “sky.”

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

⁹Then God said, “Let the waters beneath the sky flow together into one place, so dry ground may appear.” And that is what happened. ¹⁰God called the dry ground “land” and the waters “seas.” And God saw that it was good. ¹¹Then God said,

“Let the land sprout with vegetation—every sort of seed-bearing plant, and trees that grow seed-bearing fruit. These seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came.” And that is what happened. ¹²The land produced vegetation—all sorts of seed-bearing plants, and trees with seed-bearing fruit. Their seeds produced plants and trees of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

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

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

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

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, . . .*

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁸Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth

and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”

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

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

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

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

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

The Man and Woman in Eden

When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, ⁵neither wild plants nor grains were growing on the earth. For the LORD God had not yet sent rain to water the earth, and there were no people to cultivate the soil. ⁶Instead, springs* came up from the ground and watered all the land. ⁷Then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground.

1:26a Or man; Hebrew reads adam. 1:26b As in Syriac version; Hebrew reads all the earth. 1:27 Or the man; Hebrew reads ha-adam. 2:2 Or ceased; also in 2:3. 2:6 Or mist.

God exists and is the creator of the universe read GENESIS 1:1

If we can believe Genesis 1:1 (and we should), the rest of the Bible will be easy for us to accept. God has always existed. God has no beginning, nor does he have an end. It is worth noting that biblical writers never try to prove the existence of God. We simply read, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). We can’t go back any further than that!

Many so-called experts tell us that the earth came into being due to an accidental compression of gases and explosions that cooled off and formed a particular planet with special atmospheric conditions just right for life—the planet Earth. It just happened that way. It would be ridiculous if I were to suggest to you that an Airbus A380 was built not by a crew of engineers and technicians, but by a tornado sweeping through a junkyard, which created this magnificent aircraft. Similarly, the universe is not here by accident, but by design.

“In the beginning God . . .” The Bible doesn’t tell us when the beginning was; it just says God was there to begin it all.

For the next note on “Who Is God?” turn to page 52.



God created marriage read GENESIS 2:18-25

When Jesus was asked about the issue of divorce, he replied, “[Divorce] was not what God had originally intended” (Matthew 19:8). So what is God’s original intent for marriage?

God created Eve because he knew that it wasn’t “good for [Adam] to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). Adam immediately recognized Eve as “bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh!” (Genesis 2:23). God created Eve from one of Adam’s ribs, showing us his design for marriage: that the husband and wife become one. Achieving oneness in marriage requires couples to do two things:

- 1. LEAVE.** As Genesis 2:24 states, marriage begins when “a man leaves his father and mother.” You will still love and honor your parents. You will still have other friends. But your closest relationship should be with your spouse. And no other person or thing—including hobbies, business, and even church activities—should get in the way of that relationship.
- 2. JOIN.** Genesis 2:24 goes on to explain that a man “is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.” In the original Hebrew, the word used for “joined to” implies a strong action, meaning that a husband holds tightly to his relationship with his wife. The Greek translation of this same word means “to cement together, to stick like glue, or to be welded together so the two cannot be separated without serious damage to both.” Those of us who are married must periodically take stock of our lives and ask ourselves whether our current relationships or pursuits are drawing us closer to our spouse or driving us apart.

For the next note on “Marriage” turn to page 595.

He breathed the breath of life into the man’s nostrils, and the man became a living person.

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

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

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

¹⁸Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper

who is just right for him.” ¹⁹So the LORD God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man* to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one. ²⁰He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him.

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

²³“At last!” the man exclaimed.

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

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

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

The Man and Woman Sin

3 The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the LORD God had made. One day he asked the woman, “Did God really

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

say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?"

²"Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden," the woman replied. ³"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.'"

⁴"You won't die!" the serpent replied to the woman. ⁵"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."

⁶The 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,

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

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

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

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

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

How does Satan attack people? read GENESIS 3:1-7

CORNERSTONES

This passage records Satan's first tempting of humans, and it provides us with a wealth of information concerning his tactics. Here are the four strategies Satan used effectively in his attack in the garden:

- 1. HE QUESTIONED GOD'S WORD.** Satan did not deny that God had spoken. He simply questioned whether Eve understood what God meant. He wanted her to think that perhaps she had misunderstood God's command. Today Satan still twists the truth to try to alienate people from God.
- 2. HE QUESTIONED GOD'S LOVE.** Satan wanted to make Eve think that God was holding something back. In reality, God had placed those restrictions in Adam and Eve's life to keep them from sinning and destroying themselves. Likewise, the barriers God places in our lives are there because he loves us.
- 3. HE DENIED GOD'S WORD.** First Satan questioned God's word, and then he denied God's word. He went from "Did God really say this?" to "That's a lie!" It is a short step from questioning God's word to denying it. If Eve had not listened to Satan's questioning, she might never have fallen into his trap.
- 4. HE SUBSTITUTED HIS OWN LIE.** Satan led Eve to believe that if she ate the fruit she would become like God. At that point Eve had a choice: She could take God at his word or believe Satan's lie.

Jesus called Satan "the father of lies" (John 8:44), and Paul warned that in the last days Satan will resort to deceiving people through a grand, counterfeit scheme (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10). The best defense against Satan's attack is to fill our minds with the truth found in God's Word.

Satan knows that our minds are the origin of our thoughts—where we reason, fantasize, and imagine. He will attempt to make us second-guess what God has said in his Word and get us to dwell on the what-ifs in life. Our counterattack is found in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5: "We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ."

For the next note on "Who Is the Devil?" turn to page 463.

Being tempted means you're probably doing something right

read GENESIS 3:5-6

Regardless of what some believers think, it is no sin to be tempted. The sin is not in the bait; it is in the bite. Just because Satan dangles bait before you, it doesn't mean you have done anything wrong. The very fact that we're moving forward spiritually means we will get tempted because the devil wants to bring us down. It's actually more of a concern if someone *never* gets tempted. I'd have to wonder whether that person is focused on following Jesus.

The devil will come to us with all kinds of things that seem enticing. He'll offer appealing options . . . that will ultimately destroy us. Remember that Eve thought "the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious" (Genesis 3:6). That fruit looked good; it probably smelled good too.

Just being tempted isn't a sin. It probably means that you're doing something right. The key is to resist the temptation before it leads us into sin.

For the next note on "Resist Temptation" turn to page 40.

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

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

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

¹⁴Then the LORD God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this, you are cursed
more than all animals, domestic
and wild.

You will crawl on your belly,
groveling in the dust as long as
you live.

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."

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."

¹⁶Then he said to the woman,

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

¹⁷And to the man he said,

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

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."

Paradise Lost: God's Judgment

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

²²Then the LORD God said, "Look, the human 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!" ²³So the LORD God banished them from the Garden of Eden, and he sent Adam out to cultivate the ground from which he had been made. ²⁴After sending them out, the LORD God stationed mighty cherubim to the east of the Garden of Eden. And he placed a flaming sword that flashed back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Cain and Abel

4 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!" ²Later she gave birth to his brother and named him Abel.

When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd, while Cain cultivated the ground.

³When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the LORD.

⁴Abel also brought a gift—the best portions 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.”

⁸One 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.

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

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

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

¹³Cain 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!”

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

The Descendants of Cain

¹⁷Cain 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.¹⁸ Enoch had a son named Irad. Irad became the father of* Mehujael. Mehujael became the father of Methushael. Methushael became the father of Lamech.

¹⁹Lamech married two women. The first was named Adah, and the second was Zillah.²⁰ Adah gave birth to Jabal, who was the first of those who raise livestock and live in tents.²¹ His brother’s name was Jubal, the first of all who play the harp and flute.²² 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.²³ 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.

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

The Birth of Seth

²⁵Adam 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.”²⁶ When Seth grew up, he had a son and named him Enosh. At that time people first began to worship the LORD by name.

The Descendants of Adam

5 This is the written account of the descendants of Adam. When God created human beings,* he made them to be like himself.

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.” 5:1 Or *man*; Hebrew reads *adam*; similarly in 5:2.

Sin crouches at the door, eager to control us read GENESIS 4:7

God knew very well where Cain’s contemplated sin could lead, and so he gave Cain a stern warning: “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” (Genesis 4:7).

God could see sin, like a crouching beast, ready and waiting to tear Cain and his family apart. But Cain couldn’t see it in that moment—or didn’t want to see it. Clearly, Cain had not been doing well up to this point. But God, who “does not want anyone to be destroyed” (2 Peter 3:9), placed a stop sign, a red light, right in front of Cain. The Lord told Cain that if he didn’t heed this warning, he was flirting with disaster. The same is true for us.

For the next note on “Sin” turn to page 56.

²He created them male and female, and he blessed them and called them “human.”

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

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

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

¹²When Kenan was 70 years old, he became the father of Mahalalel. ¹³After the birth of Mahalalel, Kenan lived another 840 years, and he had other sons and daughters.

¹⁴Kenan lived 910 years, and then he died.

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

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

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

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

²⁸When Lamech was 182 years old, he became the father of a son. ²⁹Lamech named his son Noah, for he said, “May he bring us relief* from our work and the painful labor of farming this ground that

the LORD has cursed.” ³⁰After the birth of Noah, Lamech lived another 595 years, and he had other sons and daughters.

³¹Lamech lived 777 years, and then he died.

³²After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

A World Gone Wrong

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

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

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

The Story of Noah

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

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

¹⁴“Build a large boat* from cypress wood* and waterproof it with tar, inside and out. Then construct decks and stalls throughout

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.

its interior. ¹⁵Make the boat 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high.* ¹⁶Leave an 18-inch opening* below the roof all the way around the boat. Put the door on the side, and build three decks inside the boat—lower, middle, and upper.

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

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

The Flood Covers the Earth

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

⁵So Noah did everything as the LORD commanded him.

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

¹¹When Noah was 600 years old, on the seventeenth day of the second month, all the underground waters erupted from the earth,

and the rain fell in mighty torrents from the sky. ¹²The rain continued to fall for forty days and forty nights.

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

¹⁷For forty days the floodwaters grew deeper, covering the ground and lifting the boat high above the earth. ¹⁸As the waters rose higher and higher above the ground, the boat floated safely on the surface. ¹⁹Finally, the water covered even the highest mountains on the earth, ²⁰rising more than twenty-two feet* above the highest peaks. ²¹All the living things on earth died—birds, domestic animals, wild animals, small animals that scurry along the ground, and all the people. ²²Everything that breathed and lived on dry land died. ²³God wiped out every living thing on the earth—people, livestock, small animals that scurry along the ground, and the birds of the sky. All were destroyed. The only people who survived were Noah and those with him in the boat. ²⁴And the floodwaters covered the earth for 150 days.

The Flood Recedes

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

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

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]. 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.

returned to the boat, and Noah held out his hand and drew the dove back inside. ¹⁰After waiting another seven days, Noah released the dove again. ¹¹This time the dove returned to him in the evening with a fresh olive leaf in its beak. Then Noah knew that the floodwaters were almost gone. ¹²He waited another seven days and then released the dove again. This time it did not come back.

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

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

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

²⁰Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and there he sacrificed as burnt offerings the animals and birds that had been approved for that purpose.* ²¹And the LORD was pleased with the aroma of the sacrifice and said to himself, “I will never again curse the ground because of the human race, even though everything they think or imagine is bent toward evil from childhood. I will never again destroy all living things. ²²As long as the earth remains, there will be planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night.”

God Confirms His Covenant

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

⁵“And I will require the blood of anyone who takes another person’s life. If a wild animal kills a person, it must die. And anyone

who murders a fellow human must die. ⁶If anyone takes a human life, that person’s life will also be taken by human hands. For God made human beings* in his own image. ⁷Now be fruitful and multiply, and repopulate the earth.”

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

¹²Then God said, “I am giving you a sign of my covenant with you and with all living creatures, for all generations to come. ¹³I have placed my rainbow in the clouds. It is the sign of my covenant with you and with all the earth. ¹⁴When I send clouds over the earth, the rainbow will appear in the clouds, ¹⁵and I will remember my covenant with you and with all living creatures. Never again will the floodwaters destroy all life. ¹⁶When I see the rainbow in the clouds, I will remember the eternal covenant between God and every living creature on earth.” ¹⁷Then God said to Noah, “Yes, this rainbow is the sign of the covenant I am confirming with all the creatures on earth.”

Noah’s Sons

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

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

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

“May Canaan be cursed!

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

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*.

²⁶Then Noah said,

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

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

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

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

Descendants of Japheth

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

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

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

Descendants of Ham

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

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

⁸Cush was also the ancestor of Nimrod, who was the first heroic warrior on earth.

⁹Since he was the greatest hunter in the world,* his name became proverbial.

People would say, “This man is like Nimrod, the greatest hunter in the world.” ¹⁰He built his kingdom in the land of Babylonia,* with the cities of Babylon, Erech, Akkad, and Calneh. ¹¹From there he expanded his territory to Assyria,* building the cities of Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah, ¹²and Resen (the great city located between Nineveh and Calah).

¹³Mizraim was the ancestor of the Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naphtuhites,

¹⁴Pathrusites, Casluhites, and the Caphtorites, from whom the Philistines came.*

9:2-7 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. 10:15 Hebrew *ancestor of Heth.* 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. 11:2 Hebrew *Shinar*.

¹⁵Canaan’s oldest son was Sidon, the ancestor of the Sidonians. Canaan was also the ancestor of the Hittites,*

¹⁶Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites,

¹⁷Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, ¹⁸Arvadites, Zemarites, and Hamathites. The

Canaanite clans eventually spread out, ¹⁹and the territory of Canaan extended

from Sidon in the north to Gerar and Gaza in the south, and east as far as Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, near Lasha.

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

Descendants of Shem

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

³²These 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.

The Tower of Babel

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

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

⁵But the LORD came down to look at the city and the tower the people were building. ⁶“Look!” he said. “The people are united, and they all speak the same language. After this, nothing they set out to do will be impossible for them! ⁷Come, let’s go down and confuse the people with different languages. Then they won’t be able to understand each other.”

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

The Line of Descent from Shem to Abram

¹⁰This is the account of Shem’s family.

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

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

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

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

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

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

²²When Serug was 30 years old, he became the father of Nahor. ²³After the birth of

Nahor, Serug lived another 200 years and had other sons and daughters.

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

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

The Family of Terah

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

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

The Call of Abram

12 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. ²I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. ³I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.”

⁴So Abram departed as the LORD had instructed, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. ⁵He 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, ⁶Abram 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.

⁷Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “I will give this land to your descendants.*” And Abram built an altar there and

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 ¹²When Arphaxad was 35 years old, he became the father of Cainan. ¹³After the birth of Cainan, Arphaxad lived another 430 years and had other sons and daughters, and then he died. When Cainan was 130 years old, he became the father of Shelah. After the birth of Shelah, Cainan lived another 330 years and had other sons and daughters, and then he died. Compare Luke 3:35-36. 11:32 Some ancient versions read 145 years; compare 11:26 and 12:4. 12:7 Hebrew *seed*.

dedicated it to the LORD, who had appeared to him.⁸ 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.⁹ Then Abram continued traveling south by stages toward the Negev.

Abram and Sarai in Egypt

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

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

¹⁷But the LORD sent terrible plagues upon Pharaoh and his household because of Sarai, Abram’s wife.¹⁸ 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?¹⁹ 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!”²⁰ 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.

Abram and Lot Separate

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

⁵Lot, who was traveling with Abram, had also become very wealthy with flocks of sheep and goats, herds of cattle, and many tents.⁶ But the land could not support both Abram

and Lot with all their flocks and herds living so close together.⁷ So disputes broke out between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot. (At that time Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land.)

⁸Finally Abram said to Lot, “Let’s not allow this conflict to come between us or our herdsmen. After all, we are close relatives!⁹ 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.”

¹⁰Lot took a long look at the fertile plains of the Jordan Valley in the direction 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.)¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³ But the people of this area were extremely wicked and constantly sinned against the LORD.

¹⁴After Lot had gone, the LORD said to Abram, “Look as far as you can see in every direction—north and south, east and west.¹⁵ I am giving all this land, as far as you can see, to you and your descendants* as a permanent possession.¹⁶ And I will give you so many descendants that, like the dust of the earth, they cannot be counted!¹⁷ Go and walk through the land in every direction, for I am giving it to you.”

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

Abram Rescues Lot

14 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 Goiim² 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).

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

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

⁸Then the rebel kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela (also called Zoar) prepared for battle in the valley of the Dead Sea. ⁹They fought against King Kedorlaomer of Elam, King Tidal of Goiim, King Amraphel of Babylonia, and King Arioch of Ellasar—four kings against five. ¹⁰As 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. ¹¹The victorious invaders then plundered Sodom and Gomorrah and headed for home, taking with them all the spoils of war and the food supplies. ¹²They also captured Lot—Abram’s nephew who lived in Sodom—and carried off everything he owned.

¹³But 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.

¹⁴When 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. ¹⁵There he divided his men and attacked during the night. Kedorlaomer’s army fled, but Abram chased them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. ¹⁶Abram 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.

Melchizedek Blesses Abram

¹⁷After 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).

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

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth.

²⁰ 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.

²¹The 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.”

²²Abram replied to the king of Sodom, “I solemnly swear to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, ²³that 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.’ ²⁴I 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.”

The Lord’s Covenant Promise to Abram

15 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.”

²But 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. ³You have given me no descendants of my own, so one of my servants will be my heir.”

⁴Then 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.” ⁵Then 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!”

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

⁷Then 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.”

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

⁹The 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.” ¹⁰So 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. ¹¹Some vultures swooped down to eat the carcasses, but Abram chased them away.

¹²As the sun was going down, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a terrifying darkness

God promises protection to those who follow him

read GENESIS 15:1

Many years had passed since Abram first followed God's call to the land of Canaan (Genesis 12). Many things had happened to him, including getting caught up in a war during which his nephew Lot was captured by the victors, led by King Kedorlaomer of Elam (Genesis 14). Now God speaks again to Abram, telling him not to be afraid (Genesis 15:1).

There are so many things we can be afraid of in life. We can be afraid to go to a concert or sporting event or to send our kids to school. We can be afraid to board a plane or drive a car. We can be filled with fear over just about everything. But just as he told Abram, God says to us, "Do not be afraid . . . I will protect you, and your reward will be great" (Genesis 15:1).

In Psalm 91, we find this promise for believers: "Though a thousand fall at your side, though ten thousand are dying around you, these evils will not touch you" (Psalm 91:7). Isn't that great to know? It isn't over until it's over. We can go out into the world with boldness, knowing that God is in control of our lives.

We don't have to live in constant fear for our lives because until the day we die, we will be safe in his protective care. And what about the day when our purpose on this earth has been fulfilled? As Paul said, "living means living for Christ, and dying is even better" (Philippians 1:21). That's a great outlook to have while we live in a dangerous world. We can thank God because we are under his protection. Like Abram, even in difficult and overwhelming circumstances, let us make the choice to believe God's promises.

For the next note on "Have Courage in Trials" turn to page 180.

came down over him. ¹³Then 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. ¹⁴But I will punish the nation that enslaves them, and in the end they will come away with great wealth. ¹⁵(As for you, you will die in peace and be buried at a ripe old age.)

¹⁶After four generations your descendants will return here to this land, for the sins of the Amorites do not yet warrant their destruction."

¹⁷After the sun went down and darkness fell, Abram saw a smoking firepot and a flaming torch pass between the halves of the carcasses. ¹⁸So 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—¹⁹the land now occupied by the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, ²¹Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites."

The Birth of Ishmael

16 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had not been able to bear children for him. But she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar. ²So 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. ³So 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.)

⁴So 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. ⁵Then 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!"

⁶Abram 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.

⁷The angel of the LORD found Hagar beside a spring of water in the wilderness, along the road to Shur. ⁸The 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.

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

¹¹And the angel also said, "You are now pregnant and will give birth to a son. You are to name him Ishmael (which means 'God

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).

God counts us as righteous because of our faith

read GENESIS 15:6

Abram is a forerunner of all who put their faith in Jesus Christ as part of the new covenant, made possible by Jesus' death on the cross. We read here that "Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith" (Genesis 15:6).

Being counted as righteous means that God's righteousness is placed in our spiritual bank account, and we are forgiven of all sin. Let that idea sink in. On the day we put our faith in God, all our sins are instantaneously forgiven!

Have you done things you're ashamed of? Things you wish you'd never done? If you have repented of that sin and placed your faith in Christ, then you are forgiven.

For the next note on "Experience New Life in Christ" turn to page 74.

hears'), for the LORD has heard your cry of distress. ¹²This 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."

¹³Thereafter, 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?" ¹⁴So 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.

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

Abram Is Named Abraham

17 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. ²I will make a covenant with you, by which I will guarantee to give you countless descendants."

³At this, Abram fell face down on the ground. Then God said to him, ⁴"This is my covenant with you: I will make you the father

of a multitude of nations! ⁵What'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. ⁶I will make you extremely fruitful. Your descendants will become many nations, and kings will be among them!

⁷"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. ⁸And 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."

The Mark of the Covenant

⁹Then God said to Abraham, "Your responsibility is to obey the terms of the covenant. You and all your descendants have this continual responsibility. ¹⁰This is the covenant that you and your descendants must keep: Each male among you must be circumcised. ¹¹You must cut off the flesh of your foreskin as a sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹²From 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. ¹³All must be circumcised. Your bodies will bear the mark of my everlasting covenant. ¹⁴Any male who fails to be circumcised will be cut off from the covenant family for breaking the covenant."

Sarai Is Named Sarah

¹⁵Then God said to Abraham, "Regarding Sarai, your wife—her name will no longer be Sarai. From now on her name will be Sarah.* ¹⁶And 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."

¹⁷Then 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?" ¹⁸So Abraham said to God, "May Ishmael live under your special blessing!"

¹⁹But 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

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"; the change in spelling may reflect the difference in dialect between Ur and Canaan. 17:19 *Isaac* means "he laughs."

everlasting covenant. ²⁰As 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. ²¹But my covenant will be confirmed with Isaac, who will be born to you and Sarah about this time next year.” ²²When God had finished speaking, he left Abraham.

²³On 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. ²⁴Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, ²⁵and Ishmael, his son, was thirteen. ²⁶Both Abraham and his son, Ishmael, were circumcised on that same day, ²⁷along with all the other men and boys of the household, whether they were born there or bought as servants. All were circumcised with him.

A Son Is Promised to Sarah

18 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. ²He 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.

³“My lord,” he said, “if it pleases you, stop here for a while. ⁴Rest in the shade of this tree while water is brought to wash your feet. ⁵And 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.”

⁶So 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.” ⁷Then Abraham ran out to the herd and chose a tender calf and gave it to his servant, who quickly prepared it. ⁸When 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.

⁹“Where is Sarah, your wife?” the visitors asked.

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

¹⁰Then 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. ¹¹Abraham and Sarah were both

very old by this time, and Sarah was long past the age of having children. ¹²So 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?”

¹³Then the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh? Why did she say, ‘Can an old woman like me have a baby?’ ¹⁴Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”

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

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

Abraham Intercedes for Sodom

¹⁶Then 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.

¹⁷“Should I hide my plan from Abraham?” the LORD asked. ¹⁸“For Abraham will certainly become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him. ¹⁹I 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.”

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

²²The other men turned and headed toward Sodom, but the LORD remained with Abraham. ²³Abraham approached him and said, “Will you sweep away both the righteous and the wicked? ²⁴Suppose you find fifty righteous people living there in the city—will you still sweep it away and not spare it for their sakes? ²⁵Surely 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?”

²⁶And the LORD replied, “If I find fifty righteous people in Sodom, I will spare the entire city for their sake.”

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

18:6 Hebrew 3 seahs, about half a bushel or 22 liters.

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

²⁹Then 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.”

³⁰“Please don’t be angry, my Lord,” Abraham pleaded. “Let me speak—suppose only thirty righteous people are found?”

And the LORD replied, “I will not destroy it if I find thirty.”

³¹Then Abraham said, “Since I have dared to speak to the Lord, let me continue—suppose there are only twenty?”

And the LORD replied, “Then I will not destroy it for the sake of the twenty.”

³²Finally, Abraham said, “Lord, please don’t be angry with me if I speak one more time. Suppose only ten are found there?”

And the LORD replied, “Then I will not destroy it for the sake of the ten.”

³³When the LORD had finished his conversation with Abraham, he went on his way, and Abraham returned to his tent.

Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed

19 That evening the two angels came to the entrance of the city of Sodom. Lot was sitting there, and when he saw them, he stood up to meet them. Then he welcomed them and bowed with his face to the ground. ²⁴“My lords,” he said, “come to my home to wash your feet, and be my guests for the night. You may then get up early in the morning and be on your way again.”

“Oh no,” they replied. “We’ll just spend the night out here in the city square.”

19:10 Hebrew *men*; also in 19:12, 16.

³But Lot insisted, so at last they went home with him. Lot prepared a feast for them, complete with fresh bread made without yeast, and they ate. ⁴But before they retired for the night, all the men of Sodom, young and old, came from all over the city and surrounded the house. ⁵They shouted to Lot, “Where are the men who came to spend the night with you? Bring them out to us so we can have sex with them!”

⁶So Lot stepped outside to talk to them, shutting the door behind him. ⁷“Please, my brothers,” he begged, “don’t do such a wicked thing. ⁸Look, I have two virgin daughters. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do with them as you wish. But please, leave these men alone, for they are my guests and are under my protection.”

⁹“Stand back!” they shouted. “This fellow came to town as an outsider, and now he’s acting like our judge! We’ll treat you far worse than those other men!” And they lunged toward Lot to break down the door.

¹⁰But the two angels* reached out, pulled Lot into the house, and bolted the door. ¹¹Then they blinded all the men, young and old, who were at the door of the house, so they gave up trying to get inside.

¹²Meanwhile, the angels questioned Lot. “Do you have any other relatives here in the city?” they asked. “Get them out of this place—your sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone else. ¹³For we are about to destroy this city completely. The outcry against this place is so great it has reached the LORD, and he has sent us to destroy it.”

¹⁴So Lot rushed out to tell his daughters’

Sometimes angels take on human form read GENESIS 19:1

Although we know that angels are “spirits sent to care for people who will inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14), sometimes they take on human form, like the two angels who visited Lot in Sodom (Genesis 19:1).

Whenever we read about angels taking human form in Scripture, they always appear as men. It may surprise you to learn that there is no instance in the Bible of an angel appearing as a woman. It’s odd, because usually we use the expression *angel* in a feminine sense. We say, “She’s as pretty as an angel,” but we never say, “He’s as handsome as an angel.” Yet in the Bible, angels always appear as males.

Angels are constantly at work, often behind the scenes. They are very involved in the life of the believer, but rarely draw attention to themselves. As the psalmist wrote, “The angel of the LORD is a guard; he surrounds and defends all who fear him” (Psalm 34:7). You may even have met one without knowing it: “Don’t forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!” (Hebrews 13:2).

For the next note on “What Are Angels?” turn to page 347.

fiancés, “Quick, get out of the city! The LORD is about to destroy it.” But the young men thought he was only joking.

¹⁵At dawn the next morning the angels became insistent. “Hurry,” they said to Lot. “Take your wife and your two daughters who are here. Get out right now, or you will be swept away in the destruction of the city!”

¹⁶When Lot still hesitated, the angels seized his hand and the hands of his wife and two daughters and rushed them to safety outside the city, for the LORD was merciful. ¹⁷When they were safely out of the city, one of the angels ordered, “Run for your lives! And don’t look back or stop anywhere in the valley! Escape to the mountains, or you will be swept away!”

¹⁸“Oh no, my lord!” Lot begged. ¹⁹“You have been so gracious to me and saved my life, and you have shown such great kindness. But I cannot go to the mountains. Disaster would catch up to me there, and I would soon die. ²⁰See, there is a small village nearby. Please let me go there instead; don’t you see how small it is? Then my life will be saved.”

²¹“All right,” the angel said, “I will grant your request. I will not destroy the little village. ²²But hurry! Escape to it, for I can do nothing until you arrive there.” (This explains why that village was known as Zoar, which means “little place.”)

²³Lot reached the village just as the sun was rising over the horizon. ²⁴Then the LORD rained down fire and burning sulfur from the sky on Sodom and Gomorrah. ²⁵He utterly destroyed them, along with the other cities and villages of the plain, wiping out all the people and every bit of vegetation. ²⁶But Lot’s wife looked back as she was following behind him, and she turned into a pillar of salt.

²⁷Abraham got up early that morning and hurried out to the place where he had stood in the LORD’s presence. ²⁸He looked out across the plain toward Sodom and Gomorrah and watched as columns of smoke rose from the cities like smoke from a furnace.

²⁹But God had listened to Abraham’s request and kept Lot safe, removing him from the disaster that engulfed the cities on the plain.

Lot and His Daughters

³⁰Afterward Lot left Zoar because he was afraid of the people there, and he went to live in a cave in the mountains with his two daughters. ³¹One day the older daughter said to her sister, “There are no men left anywhere

in this entire area, so we can’t get married like everyone else. And our father will soon be too old to have children. ³²Come, let’s get him drunk with wine, and then we will have sex with him. That way we will preserve our family line through our father.”

³³So that night they got him drunk with wine, and the older daughter went in and had intercourse with her father. He was unaware of her lying down or getting up again.

³⁴The next morning the older daughter said to her younger sister, “I had sex with our father last night. Let’s get him drunk with wine again tonight, and you go in and have sex with him. That way we will preserve our family line through our father.” ³⁵So that night they got him drunk with wine again, and the younger daughter went in and had intercourse with him. As before, he was unaware of her lying down or getting up again.

³⁶As a result, both of Lot’s daughters became pregnant by their own father. ³⁷When the older daughter gave birth to a son, she named him Moab.* He became the ancestor of the nation now known as the Moabites.

³⁸When the younger daughter gave birth to a son, she named him Ben-ammi.* He became the ancestor of the nation now known as the Ammonites.

Abraham Deceives Abimelech

20 Abraham moved south to the Negev and lived for a while between Kadesh and Shur, and then he moved on to Gerar. While living there as a foreigner, ²Abraham introduced his wife, Sarah, by saying, “She is my sister.” So King Abimelech of Gerar sent for Sarah and had her brought to him at his palace.

³But that night God came to Abimelech in a dream and told him, “You are a dead man, for that woman you have taken is already married!”

⁴But Abimelech had not slept with her yet, so he said, “Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? ⁵Didn’t Abraham tell me, ‘She is my sister’? And she herself said, ‘Yes, he is my brother.’ I acted in complete innocence! My hands are clean.”

⁶In the dream God responded, “Yes, I know you are innocent. That’s why I kept you from sinning against me, and why I did not let you touch her. ⁷Now return the woman to her husband, and he will pray for you, for he is a prophet. Then you will live. But if you don’t return her to him, you can be sure that you and all your people will die.”

19:37 *Moab* sounds like a Hebrew term that means “from father.”

19:38 *Ben-ammi* means “son of my kinsman.”

⁸Abimelech got up early the next morning and quickly called all his servants together. When he told them what had happened, his men were terrified. ⁹Then Abimelech called for Abraham. “What have you done to us?” he demanded. “What crime have I committed that deserves treatment like this, making me and my kingdom guilty of this great sin? No one should ever do what you have done! ¹⁰Whatever possessed you to do such a thing?”

¹¹Abraham replied, “I thought, ‘This is a godless place. They will want my wife and will kill me to get her.’ ¹²And she really is my sister, for we both have the same father, but different mothers. And I married her. ¹³When God called me to leave my father’s home and to travel from place to place, I told her, ‘Do me a favor. Wherever we go, tell the people that I am your brother.’”

¹⁴Then Abimelech took some of his sheep and goats, cattle, and male and female servants, and he presented them to Abraham. He also returned his wife, Sarah, to him. ¹⁵Then Abimelech said, “Look over my land and choose any place where you would like to live.” ¹⁶And he said to Sarah, “Look, I am giving your ‘brother’ 1,000 pieces of silver* in the presence of all these witnesses. This is to compensate you for any wrong I may have done to you. This will settle any claim against me, and your reputation is cleared.”

¹⁷Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female servants, so they could have children. ¹⁸For the LORD had caused all the women to be infertile because of what happened with Abraham’s wife, Sarah.

The Birth of Isaac

21 The LORD kept his word and did for Sarah exactly what he had promised. ²She became pregnant, and she gave birth to a son for Abraham in his old age. This happened at just the time God had said it would. ³And Abraham named their son Isaac. ⁴Eight days after Isaac was born, Abraham circumcised him as God had commanded. ⁵Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born.

⁶And Sarah declared, “God has brought me laughter.* All who hear about this will laugh with me. ⁷Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse a baby? Yet I have given Abraham a son in his old age!”

Hagar and Ishmael Are Sent Away

⁸When Isaac grew up and was about to be weaned, Abraham prepared a huge feast to

celebrate the occasion. ⁹But Sarah saw Ishmael—the son of Abraham and her Egyptian servant Hagar—making fun of her son, Isaac.* ¹⁰So she turned to Abraham and demanded, “Get rid of that slave woman and her son. He is not going to share the inheritance with my son, Isaac. I won’t have it!”

¹¹This upset Abraham very much because Ishmael was his son. ¹²But God told Abraham, “Do not be upset over the boy and your servant. Do whatever Sarah tells you, for Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted. ¹³But I will also make a nation of the descendants of Hagar’s son because he is your son, too.”

¹⁴So Abraham got up early the next morning, prepared food and a container of water, and strapped them on Hagar’s shoulders. Then he sent her away with their son, and she wandered aimlessly in the wilderness of Beersheba.

¹⁵When the water was gone, she put the boy in the shade of a bush. ¹⁶Then she went and sat down by herself about a hundred yards* away. “I don’t want to watch the boy die,” she said, as she burst into tears.

¹⁷But God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, “Hagar, what’s wrong? Do not be afraid! God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. ¹⁸Go to him and comfort him, for I will make a great nation from his descendants.”

¹⁹Then God opened Hagar’s eyes, and she saw a well full of water. She quickly filled her water container and gave the boy a drink.

²⁰And God was with the boy as he grew up in the wilderness. He became a skillful archer, ²¹and he settled in the wilderness of Paran. His mother arranged for him to marry a woman from the land of Egypt.

Abraham’s Covenant with Abimelech

²²About this time, Abimelech came with Phicol, his army commander, to visit Abraham. “God is obviously with you, helping you in everything you do,” Abimelech said. ²³“Swear to me in God’s name that you will never deceive me, my children, or any of my descendants. I have been loyal to you, so now swear that you will be loyal to me and to this country where you are living as a foreigner.”

²⁴Abraham replied, “Yes, I swear to it!” ²⁵Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well that Abimelech’s servants had taken by force from Abraham’s servants.

²⁶“This is the first I’ve heard of it,” Abimelech answered. “I have no idea who is

20:16 Hebrew 1,000 [shekels] of silver, about 25 pounds or 11.4 kilograms in weight. 21:6 The name *Isaac* means “he laughs.” 21:9 As in Greek version and Latin Vulgate; Hebrew lacks of her son, *Isaac*. 21:16 Hebrew a bowshot.

responsible. You have never complained about this before.”

²⁷Abraham then gave some of his sheep, goats, and cattle to Abimelech, and they made a treaty. ²⁸But Abraham also took seven additional female lambs and set them off by themselves. ²⁹Abimelech asked, “Why have you set these seven apart from the others?”

³⁰Abraham replied, “Please accept these seven lambs to show your agreement that I dug this well.” ³¹Then he named the place Beersheba (which means “well of the oath”), because that was where they had sworn the oath.

³²After making their covenant at Beersheba, Abimelech left with Phicol, the commander of his army, and they returned home to the land of the Philistines. ³³Then Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he worshiped the LORD, the Eternal God.* ³⁴And Abraham lived as a foreigner in Philistine country for a long time.

Abraham's Faith Tested

22 Some time later, God tested Abraham's faith. “Abraham!” God called.

“Yes,” he replied. “Here I am.”

²“Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you.”

³The next morning Abraham got up early. He saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, along with his son, Isaac. Then he chopped wood for a fire for a burnt offering and set out for the place God had told him about. ⁴On the third day of their journey, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵“Stay here with the donkey,” Abraham told the servants. “The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back.”

⁶So Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac's shoulders, while he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them walked on together, ⁷Isaac turned to Abraham and said, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“We have the fire and the wood,” the boy said, “but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?”

⁸“God will provide a sheep for the burnt offering, my son,” Abraham answered. And they both walked on together.

⁹When they arrived at the place where God had told him to go, Abraham built an altar

and arranged the wood on it. Then he tied his son, Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. ¹⁰And Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice. ¹¹At that moment the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Yes,” Abraham replied. “Here I am!”

¹²“Don't lay a hand on the boy!” the angel said. “Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son.”

¹³Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son. ¹⁴Abraham named the place Yahweh-Yireh (which means “the LORD will provide”). To this day, people still use that name as a proverb: “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”

¹⁵Then the angel of the LORD called again to Abraham from heaven. ¹⁶“This is what the LORD says: Because you have obeyed me and have not withheld even your son, your only son, I swear by my own name that ¹⁷I will certainly bless you. I will multiply your descendants* beyond number, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will conquer the cities of their enemies. ¹⁸And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed—all because you have obeyed me.”

¹⁹Then they returned to the servants and traveled back to Beersheba, where Abraham continued to live.

²⁰Soon after this, Abraham heard that Milcah, his brother Nahor's wife, had borne Nahor eight sons. ²¹The oldest was named Uz, the next oldest was Buz, followed by Kemuel (the ancestor of the Arameans), ²²Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlap, and Bethuel. ²³(Bethuel became the father of Rebekah.) In addition to these eight sons from Milcah, ²⁴Nahor had four other children from his concubine Reumah. Their names were Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

The Burial of Sarah

23 When Sarah was 127 years old, ²she died at Kiriath-arba (now called Hebron) in the land of Canaan. There Abraham mourned and wept for her.

³Then, leaving her body, he said to the Hittite elders, ⁴“Here I am, a stranger and a foreigner among you. Please sell me a piece of land so I can give my wife a proper burial.”

⁵The Hittites replied to Abraham, ⁶“Listen,

my lord, you are an honored prince among us. Choose the finest of our tombs and bury her there. No one here will refuse to help you in this way.”

⁷Then Abraham bowed low before the Hittites ⁸and said, “Since you are willing to help me in this way, be so kind as to ask Ephron son of Zohar ⁹to let me buy his cave at Machpelah, down at the end of his field. I will pay the full price in the presence of witnesses, so I will have a permanent burial place for my family.”

¹⁰Ephron was sitting there among the others, and he answered Abraham as the others listened, speaking publicly before all the Hittite elders of the town. ¹¹“No, my lord,” he said to Abraham, “please listen to me. I will give you the field and the cave. Here in the presence of my people, I give it to you. Go and bury your dead.”

¹²Abraham again bowed low before the citizens of the land, ¹³and he replied to Ephron as everyone listened. “No, listen to me. I will buy it from you. Let me pay the full price for the field so I can bury my dead there.”

¹⁴Ephron answered Abraham, ¹⁵“My lord, please listen to me. The land is worth 400 pieces* of silver, but what is that between friends? Go ahead and bury your dead.”

¹⁶So Abraham agreed to Ephron’s price and paid the amount he had suggested—400 pieces of silver, weighed according to the market standard. The Hittite elders witnessed the transaction.

¹⁷So Abraham bought the plot of land belonging to Ephron at Machpelah, near Mamre. This included the field itself, the cave that was in it, and all the surrounding trees. ¹⁸It was transferred to Abraham as his permanent

possession in the presence of the Hittite elders at the city gate. ¹⁹Then Abraham buried his wife, Sarah, there in Canaan, in the cave of Machpelah, near Mamre (also called Hebron). ²⁰So the field and the cave were transferred from the Hittites to Abraham for use as a permanent burial place.

A Wife for Isaac

24 Abraham was now a very old man, and the LORD had blessed him in every way. ²One day Abraham said to his oldest servant, the man in charge of his household, “Take an oath by putting your hand under my thigh. ³Swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and earth, that you will not allow my son to marry one of these local Canaanite women. ⁴Go instead to my homeland, to my relatives, and find a wife there for my son Isaac.”

⁵The servant asked, “But what if I can’t find a young woman who is willing to travel so far from home? Should I then take Isaac there to live among your relatives in the land you came from?”

⁶“No!” Abraham responded. “Be careful never to take my son there. ⁷For the LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and my native land, solemnly promised to give this land to my descendants.* He will send his angel ahead of you, and he will see to it that you find a wife there for my son. ⁸If she is unwilling to come back with you, then you are free from this oath of mine. But under no circumstances are you to take my son there.”

⁹So the servant took an oath by putting his hand under the thigh of his master, Abraham. He swore to follow Abraham’s instructions.

23:15 Hebrew 400 shekels, about 10 pounds or 4.6 kilograms in weight; also in 23:16. 24:7 Hebrew seed; also in 24:60.

Heaven is God’s dwelling place read GENESIS 24:7

Abraham knew and spoke of God as “the God of heaven” (Genesis 24:7). In a broad sense, God is everywhere. He is omnipresent. But in another sense, God dwells in Heaven in all of his glory. And so we long for Heaven, which is really a longing for God. We long to be with God and see God.

If God were to show himself to us today in all his glory, we would disintegrate on the spot. Why? Because God is perfect and flawless and holy. And we are imperfect and flawed and unholy. But the day is coming when you and I will see God, which will be like seeing everything else for the first time. Not only will we see God, but he will also be the lens through which we will see everything: people, ourselves, and the events of this life. The apostle Paul wrote, “Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

For the next note on “What Is Heaven?” turn to page 483.

¹⁰Then he loaded ten of Abraham's camels with all kinds of expensive gifts from his master, and he traveled to distant Aram-naharaim. There he went to the town where Abraham's brother Nahor had settled. ¹¹He made the camels kneel beside a well just outside the town. It was evening, and the women were coming out to draw water.

¹²"O LORD, God of my master, Abraham," he prayed. "Please give me success today, and show unfaithful love to my master, Abraham. ¹³See, I am standing here beside this spring, and the young women of the town are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴This is my request. I will ask one of them, 'Please give me a drink from your jug.' If she says, 'Yes, have a drink, and I will water your camels, too!'—let her be the one you have selected as Isaac's wife. This is how I will know that you have shown unfaithful love to my master."

¹⁵Before he had finished praying, he saw a young woman named Rebekah coming out with her water jug on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel, who was the son of Abraham's brother Nahor and his wife, Milcah. ¹⁶Rebekah was very beautiful and old enough to be married, but she was still a virgin. She went down to the spring, filled her jug, and came up again. ¹⁷Running over to her, the servant said, "Please give me a little drink of water from your jug."

¹⁸"Yes, my lord," she answered, "have a drink." And she quickly lowered her jug from her shoulder and gave him a drink. ¹⁹When she had given him a drink, she said, "I'll draw water for your camels, too, until they have had enough to drink." ²⁰So she quickly emptied her jug into the watering trough and ran back to the well to draw water for all his camels.

²¹The servant watched her in silence, wondering whether or not the LORD had given him success in his mission. ²²Then at last, when the camels had finished drinking, he took out a gold ring for her nose and two large gold bracelets* for her wrists.

²³"Whose daughter are you?" he asked. "And please tell me, would your father have any room to put us up for the night?"

²⁴"I am the daughter of Bethuel," she replied. "My grandparents are Nahor and Milcah. ²⁵Yes, we have plenty of straw and feed for the camels, and we have room for guests."

²⁶The man bowed low and worshiped the LORD. ²⁷"Praise the LORD, the God of my master, Abraham," he said. "The LORD has shown

unfailing love and faithfulness to my master, for he has led me straight to my master's relatives."

²⁸The young woman ran home to tell her family everything that had happened. ²⁹Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban, who ran out to meet the man at the spring. ³⁰He had seen the nose-ring and the bracelets on his sister's wrists, and had heard Rebekah tell what the man had said. So he rushed out to the spring, where the man was still standing beside his camels. ³¹Laban said to him, "Come and stay with us, you who are blessed by the LORD! Why are you standing here outside the town when I have a room all ready for you and a place prepared for the camels?"

³²So the man went home with Laban, and Laban unloaded the camels, gave him straw for their bedding, fed them, and provided water for the man and the camel drivers to wash their feet. ³³Then food was served. But Abraham's servant said, "I don't want to eat until I have told you why I have come."

"All right," Laban said, "tell us."

³⁴"I am Abraham's servant," he explained. ³⁵"And the LORD has greatly blessed my master; he has become a wealthy man. The LORD has given him flocks of sheep and goats, herds of cattle, a fortune in silver and gold, and many male and female servants and camels and donkeys.

³⁶"When Sarah, my master's wife, was very old, she gave birth to my master's son, and my master has given him everything he owns. ³⁷And my master made me take an oath. He said, 'Do not allow my son to marry one of these local Canaanite women. ³⁸Go instead to my father's house, to my relatives, and find a wife there for my son.'

³⁹"But I said to my master, 'What if I can't find a young woman who is willing to go back with me?' ⁴⁰He responded, 'The LORD, in whose presence I have lived, will send his angel with you and will make your mission successful. Yes, you must find a wife for my son from among my relatives, from my father's family. ⁴¹Then you will have fulfilled your obligation. But if you go to my relatives and they refuse to let her go with you, you will be free from my oath.'

⁴²"So today when I came to the spring, I prayed this prayer: 'O LORD, God of my master, Abraham, please give me success on this mission. ⁴³See, I am standing here beside this spring. This is my request. When a young woman comes to draw water, I will say to her,

24:22 Hebrew a gold nose-ring weighing a beka [0.2 ounces or 6 grams] and two gold bracelets weighing 10 [shekels] [4 ounces or 114 grams].

“Please give me a little drink of water from your jug.” ⁴⁴If she says, “Yes, have a drink, and I will draw water for your camels, too,” let her be the one you have selected to be the wife of my master’s son.’

⁴⁵“Before I had finished praying in my heart, I saw Rebekah coming out with her water jug on her shoulder. She went down to the spring and drew water. So I said to her, ‘Please give me a drink.’ ⁴⁶She quickly lowered her jug from her shoulder and said, ‘Yes, have a drink, and I will water your camels, too!’ So I drank, and then she watered the camels.

⁴⁷“Then I asked, ‘Whose daughter are you?’ She replied, ‘I am the daughter of Bethuel, and my grandparents are Nahor and Milcah.’ So I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her wrists.

⁴⁸“Then I bowed low and worshiped the LORD. I praised the LORD, the God of my master, Abraham, because he had led me straight to my master’s niece to be his son’s wife. ⁴⁹So tell me—will you or won’t you show unfailing love and faithfulness to my master? Please tell me yes or no, and then I’ll know what to do next.”

⁵⁰Then Laban and Bethuel replied, “The LORD has obviously brought you here, so there is nothing we can say. ⁵¹Here is Rebekah; take her and go. Yes, let her be the wife of your master’s son, as the LORD has directed.”

⁵²When Abraham’s servant heard their answer, he bowed down to the ground and worshiped the LORD. ⁵³Then he brought out silver and gold jewelry and clothing and presented them to Rebekah. He also gave expensive presents to her brother and mother. ⁵⁴Then they ate their meal, and the servant and the men with him stayed there overnight.

But early the next morning, Abraham’s servant said, “Send me back to my master.”

⁵⁵“But we want Rebekah to stay with us at least ten days,” her brother and mother said. “Then she can go.”

⁵⁶But he said, “Don’t delay me. The LORD has made my mission successful; now send me back so I can return to my master.”

⁵⁷“Well,” they said, “we’ll call Rebekah and ask her what she thinks.” ⁵⁸So they called Rebekah. “Are you willing to go with this man?” they asked her.

And she replied, “Yes, I will go.”

⁵⁹So they said good-bye to Rebekah and sent her away with Abraham’s servant and his men. The woman who had been Rebekah’s childhood nurse went along with her. ⁶⁰They gave her this blessing as she parted:

“Our sister, may you become the mother of many millions! May your descendants be strong and conquer the cities of their enemies.”

⁶¹Then Rebekah and her servant girls mounted the camels and followed the man. So Abraham’s servant took Rebekah and went on his way.

⁶²Meanwhile, Isaac, whose home was in the Negev, had returned from Beer-lahai-roi. ⁶³One evening as he was walking and meditating in the fields, he looked up and saw the camels coming. ⁶⁴When Rebekah looked up and saw Isaac, she quickly dismounted from her camel. ⁶⁵“Who is that man walking through the fields to meet us?” she asked the servant.

And he replied, “It is my master.” So Rebekah covered her face with her veil. ⁶⁶Then the servant told Isaac everything he had done.

⁶⁷And Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah’s tent, and she became his wife. He loved her deeply, and she was a special comfort to him after the death of his mother.

The Death of Abraham

25 Abraham married another wife, whose name was Keturah. ²She gave birth to Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. ³Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan. Dedan’s descendants were the Asshurites, Letushites, and Leummites. ⁴Midian’s sons were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. These were all descendants of Abraham through Keturah.

⁵Abraham gave everything he owned to his son Isaac. ⁶But before he died, he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines and sent them off to a land in the east, away from Isaac.

⁷Abraham lived for 175 years, ⁸and he died at a ripe old age, having lived a long and satisfying life. He breathed his last and joined his ancestors in death. ⁹His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, near Mamre, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite. ¹⁰This was the field Abraham had purchased from the Hittites and where he had buried his wife Sarah. ¹¹After Abraham’s death, God blessed his son Isaac, who settled near Beer-lahai-roi in the Negev.

Ishmael’s Descendants

¹²This is the account of the family of Ishmael, the son of Abraham through Hagar, Sarah’s Egyptian servant. ¹³Here is a list, by their names and clans, of Ishmael’s descendants: The oldest was Nebaioth, followed by Kedar,

Adbeel, Mibsam, ¹⁴Mishma, Dumah, Massa, ¹⁵Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. ¹⁶These twelve sons of Ishmael became the founders of twelve tribes named after them, listed according to the places they settled and camped. ¹⁷Ishmael lived for 137 years. Then he breathed his last and joined his ancestors in death. ¹⁸Ishmael's descendants occupied the region from Havilah to Shur, which is east of Egypt in the direction of Asshur. There they lived in open hostility toward all their relatives.*

The Births of Esau and Jacob

¹⁹This is the account of the family of Isaac, the son of Abraham. ²⁰When Isaac was forty years old, he married Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan-aram and the sister of Laban the Aramean.

²¹Isaac pleaded with the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was unable to have children. The LORD answered Isaac's prayer, and Rebekah became pregnant with twins. ²²But the two children struggled with each other in her womb. So she went to ask the LORD about it. "Why is this happening to me?" she asked.

²³And the LORD told her, "The sons in your womb will become two nations. From the very beginning, the two nations will be rivals. One nation will be stronger than the other; and your older son will serve your younger son."

²⁴And when the time came to give birth, Rebekah discovered that she did indeed have twins! ²⁵The first one was very red at birth and covered with thick hair like a fur coat. So they named him Esau.* ²⁶Then the other twin was born with his hand grasping Esau's heel. So they named him Jacob.* Isaac was sixty years old when the twins were born.

Esau Sells His Birthright

²⁷As the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter. He was an outdoorsman, but Jacob had a quiet temperament, preferring to stay at home. ²⁸Isaac loved Esau because he enjoyed eating the wild game Esau brought home, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

²⁹One day when Jacob was cooking some stew, Isaac arrived home from the wilderness exhausted and hungry. ³⁰Esau said to Jacob, "I'm starved! Give me some of that red stew!" (This is how Esau got his other name, Edom, which means "red.")

³¹"All right," Jacob replied, "but trade me your rights as the firstborn son."

³²"Look, I'm dying of starvation!" said Esau. "What good is my birthright to me now?"

³³But Jacob said, "First you must swear that your birthright is mine." So Esau swore an oath, thereby selling all his rights as the firstborn to his brother, Jacob.

³⁴Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and lentil stew. Esau ate the meal, then got up and left. He showed contempt for his rights as the firstborn.

Isaac Deceives Abimelech

26 A severe famine now struck the land, as had happened before in Abraham's time. So Isaac moved to Gerar, where Abimelech, king of the Philistines, lived.

²The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go down to Egypt, but do as I tell you. ³Live here as a foreigner in this land, and I will be with you and bless you. I hereby confirm that I will give all these lands to you and your descendants,* just as I solemnly promised Abraham, your father. ⁴I will cause your descendants to become as numerous as the stars of the sky, and I will give them all these lands. And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed. ⁵I will do this because Abraham listened to me and obeyed all my requirements, commands, decrees, and instructions." ⁶So Isaac stayed in Gerar.

⁷When the men who lived there asked Isaac about his wife, Rebekah, he said, "She is my sister." He was afraid to say, "She is my wife." He thought, "They will kill me to get her, because she is so beautiful." ⁸But some time later, Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looked out his window and saw Isaac caressing Rebekah.

⁹Immediately, Abimelech called for Isaac and exclaimed, "She is obviously your wife! Why did you say, 'She is my sister'?"

"Because I was afraid someone would kill me to get her from me," Isaac replied.

¹⁰"How could you do this to us?" Abimelech exclaimed. "One of my people might easily have taken your wife and slept with her, and you would have made us guilty of great sin."

¹¹Then Abimelech issued a public proclamation: "Anyone who touches this man or his wife will be put to death!"

Conflict over Water Rights

¹²When Isaac planted his crops that year, he harvested a hundred times more grain than he planted, for the LORD blessed him. ¹³He

25:18 The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. 25:25 *Esau* sounds like a Hebrew term that means "hair." 25:26 *Jacob* sounds like the Hebrew words for "heel" and "deceiver." 26:3 Hebrew *seed*; also in 26:4, 24.

became a very rich man, and his wealth continued to grow. ¹⁴He acquired so many flocks of sheep and goats, herds of cattle, and servants that the Philistines became jealous of him. ¹⁵So the Philistines filled up all of Isaac's wells with dirt. These were the wells that had been dug by the servants of his father, Abraham.

¹⁶Finally, Abimelech ordered Isaac to leave the country. "Go somewhere else," he said, "for you have become too powerful for us."

¹⁷So Isaac moved away to the Gerar Valley, where he set up their tents and settled down. ¹⁸He reopened the wells his father had dug, which the Philistines had filled in after Abraham's death. Isaac also restored the names Abraham had given them.

¹⁹Isaac's servants also dug in the Gerar Valley and discovered a well of fresh water. ²⁰But then the shepherds from Gerar came and claimed the spring. "This is our water," they said, and they argued over it with Isaac's herdsmen. So Isaac named the well Esek (which means "argument"). ²¹Isaac's men then dug another well, but again there was a dispute over it. So Isaac named it Sitnah (which means "hostility"). ²²Abandoning that one, Isaac moved on and dug another well. This time there was no dispute over it, so Isaac named the place Rehoboth (which means "open space"), for he said, "At last the LORD has created enough space for us to prosper in this land."

²³From there Isaac moved to Beersheba, ²⁴where the LORD appeared to him on the night of his arrival. "I am the God of your father, Abraham," he said. "Do not be afraid, for I am with you and will bless you. I will multiply your descendants, and they will become a great nation. I will do this because of my promise to Abraham, my servant." ²⁵Then Isaac built an altar there and worshiped the LORD. He set up his camp at that place, and his servants dug another well.

Isaac's Covenant with Abimelech

²⁶One day King Abimelech came from Gerar with his adviser, Ahuzzath, and also Phicol, his army commander. ²⁷"Why have you come here?" Isaac asked. "You obviously hate me, since you kicked me off your land."

²⁸They replied, "We can plainly see that the LORD is with you. So we want to enter into a sworn treaty with you. Let's make a covenant. ²⁹Swear that you will not harm us, just as we have never troubled you. We have always treated you well, and we sent you away from us in peace. And now look how the LORD has blessed you!"

³⁰So Isaac prepared a covenant feast to celebrate the treaty, and they ate and drank together. ³¹Early the next morning, they each took a solemn oath not to interfere with each other. Then Isaac sent them home again, and they left him in peace.

³²That very day Isaac's servants came and told him about a new well they had dug. "We've found water!" they exclaimed. ³³So Isaac named the well Shibah (which means "oath"). And to this day the town that grew up there is called Beersheba (which means "well of the oath").

³⁴At the age of forty, Esau married two Hittite wives: Judith, the daughter of Beeri, and Basemath, the daughter of Elon. ³⁵But Esau's wives made life miserable for Isaac and Rebekah.

Jacob Steals Esau's Blessing

27 One day when Isaac was old and turning blind, he called for Esau, his older son, and said, "My son."

"Yes, Father?" Esau replied.

²"I am an old man now," Isaac said, "and I don't know when I may die. ³Take your bow and a quiver full of arrows, and go out into the open country to hunt some wild game for me. ⁴Prepare my favorite dish, and bring it here for me to eat. Then I will pronounce the blessing that belongs to you, my firstborn son, before I die."

⁵But Rebekah overheard what Isaac had said to his son Esau. So when Esau left to hunt for the wild game, ⁶she said to her son Jacob, "Listen. I overheard your father say to Esau, ⁷'Bring me some wild game and prepare me a delicious meal. Then I will bless you in the LORD's presence before I die.' ⁸Now, my son, listen to me. Do exactly as I tell you. ⁹Go out to the flocks, and bring me two fine young goats. I'll use them to prepare your father's favorite dish. ¹⁰Then take the food to your father so he can eat it and bless you before he dies."

¹¹"But look," Jacob replied to Rebekah, "my brother, Esau, is a hairy man, and my skin is smooth. ¹²What if my father touches me? He'll see that I'm trying to trick him, and then he'll curse me instead of blessing me."

¹³But his mother replied, "Then let the curse fall on me, my son! Just do what I tell you. Go out and get the goats for me!"

¹⁴So Jacob went out and got the young goats for his mother. Rebekah took them and prepared a delicious meal, just the way Isaac liked it. ¹⁵Then she took Esau's favorite clothes, which were there in the house, and gave them to her younger son, Jacob. ¹⁶She

covered his arms and the smooth part of his neck with the skin of the young goats. ¹⁷Then she gave Jacob the delicious meal, including freshly baked bread.

¹⁸So Jacob took the food to his father. “My father?” he said.

“Yes, my son,” Isaac answered. “Who are you—Esau or Jacob?”

¹⁹Jacob replied, “It’s Esau, your firstborn son. I’ve done as you told me. Here is the wild game. Now sit up and eat it so you can give me your blessing.”

²⁰Isaac asked, “How did you find it so quickly, my son?”

“The LORD your God put it in my path!” Jacob replied.

²¹Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Come closer so I can touch you and make sure that you really are Esau.” ²²So Jacob went closer to his father, and Isaac touched him. “The voice is Jacob’s, but the hands are Esau’s,” Isaac said. ²³But he did not recognize Jacob, because Jacob’s hands felt hairy just like Esau’s. So Isaac prepared to bless Jacob. ²⁴“But are you really my son Esau?” he asked.

“Yes, I am,” Jacob replied.

²⁵Then Isaac said, “Now, my son, bring me the wild game. Let me eat it, and then I will give you my blessing.” So Jacob took the food to his father, and Isaac ate it. He also drank the wine that Jacob served him. ²⁶Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Please come a little closer and kiss me, my son.”

²⁷So Jacob went over and kissed him. And when Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he was finally convinced, and he blessed his son. He said, “Ah! The smell of my son is like the smell of the outdoors, which the LORD has blessed!

²⁸ “From the dew of heaven
and the richness of the earth,
may God always give you abundant
harvests of grain
and bountiful new wine.

²⁹ May many nations become your servants,
and may they bow down to you.
May you be the master over your brothers,
and may your mother’s sons bow down
to you.
All who curse you will be cursed,
and all who bless you will be blessed.”

³⁰As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and almost before Jacob had left his father, Esau returned from his hunt. ³¹Esau prepared a delicious meal and brought it to his father. Then he said, “Sit up, my father,

and eat my wild game so you can give me your blessing.”

³²But Isaac asked him, “Who are you?”

Esau replied, “It’s your son, your firstborn son, Esau.”

³³Isaac began to tremble uncontrollably and said, “Then who just served me wild game? I have already eaten it, and I blessed him just before you came. And yes, that blessing must stand!”

³⁴When Esau heard his father’s words, he let out a loud and bitter cry. “Oh my father, what about me? Bless me, too!” he begged.

³⁵But Isaac said, “Your brother was here, and he tricked me. He has taken away your blessing.”

³⁶Esau exclaimed, “No wonder his name is Jacob, for now he has cheated me twice. * First he took my rights as the firstborn, and now he has stolen my blessing. Oh, haven’t you saved even one blessing for me?”

³⁷Isaac said to Esau, “I have made Jacob your master and have declared that all his brothers will be his servants. I have guaranteed him an abundance of grain and wine—what is left for me to give you, my son?”

³⁸Esau pleaded, “But do you have only one blessing? Oh my father, bless me, too!” Then Esau broke down and wept.

³⁹Finally, his father, Isaac, said to him,

“You will live away from the richness of
the earth,
and away from the dew of the heaven
above.

⁴⁰ You will live by your sword,
and you will serve your brother.
But when you decide to break free,
you will shake his yoke from your
neck.”

Jacob Flees to Paddan-Aram

⁴¹From that time on, Esau hated Jacob because their father had given Jacob the blessing. And Esau began to scheme: “I will soon be mourning my father’s death. Then I will kill my brother, Jacob.”

⁴²But Rebekah heard about Esau’s plans. So she sent for Jacob and told him, “Listen, Esau is consoling himself by plotting to kill you. ⁴³So listen carefully, my son. Get ready and flee to my brother, Laban, in Haran. ⁴⁴Stay there with him until your brother cools off. ⁴⁵When he calms down and forgets what you have done to him, I will send for you to come back. Why should I lose both of you in one day?”

⁴⁶Then Rebekah said to Isaac, “I’m sick and

tired of these local Hittite women! I would rather die than see Jacob marry one of them.”

28 So Isaac called for Jacob, blessed him, and said, “You must not marry any of these Canaanite women. ²Instead, go at once to Paddan-aram, to the house of your grandfather Bethuel, and marry one of your uncle Laban’s daughters. ³May God Almighty* bless you and give you many children. And may your descendants multiply and become many nations! ⁴May God pass on to you and your descendants* the blessings he promised to Abraham. May you own this land where you are now living as a foreigner, for God gave this land to Abraham.”

⁵So Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Paddan-aram to stay with his uncle Laban, his mother’s brother, the son of Bethuel the Aramean.

⁶Esau knew that his father, Isaac, had blessed Jacob and sent him to Paddan-aram to find a wife, and that he had warned Jacob, “You must not marry a Canaanite woman.” ⁷He also knew that Jacob had obeyed his parents and gone to Paddan-aram. ⁸It was now very clear to Esau that his father did not like the local Canaanite women. ⁹So Esau visited his uncle Ishmael’s family and married one of Ishmael’s daughters, in addition to the wives he already had. His new wife’s name was Mahalath. She was the sister of Nebaioth and the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham’s son.

Jacob’s Dream at Bethel

¹⁰Meanwhile, Jacob left Beersheba and traveled toward Haran. ¹¹At sundown he arrived at a good place to set up camp and stopped there for the night. Jacob found a stone to rest his head against and lay down to sleep. ¹²As he slept, he dreamed of a stairway that reached from the earth up to heaven. And he saw the angels of God going up and down the stairway.

¹³At the top of the stairway stood the LORD, and he said, “I am the LORD, the God of your grandfather Abraham, and the God of your father, Isaac. The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I am giving it to you and your descendants. ¹⁴Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth! They will spread out in all directions—to the west and the east, to the north and the south. And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants. ¹⁵What’s more, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go. One day I will bring you

back to this land. I will not leave you until I have finished giving you everything I have promised you.”

¹⁶Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I wasn’t even aware of it!” ¹⁷But he was also afraid and said, “What an awesome place this is! It is none other than the house of God, the very gateway to heaven!”

¹⁸The next morning Jacob got up very early. He took the stone he had rested his head against, and he set it upright as a memorial pillar. Then he poured olive oil over it. ¹⁹He named that place Bethel (which means “house of God”), although it was previously called Luz.

²⁰Then Jacob made this vow: “If God will indeed be with me and protect me on this journey, and if he will provide me with food and clothing, ²¹and if I return safely to my father’s home, then the LORD will certainly be my God. ²²And this memorial pillar I have set up will become a place for worshiping God, and I will present to God a tenth of everything he gives me.”

Jacob Arrives at Paddan-Aram

29 Then Jacob hurried on, finally arriving in the land of the east. ²He saw a well in the distance. Three flocks of sheep and goats lay in an open field beside it, waiting to be watered. But a heavy stone covered the mouth of the well.

³It was the custom there to wait for all the flocks to arrive before removing the stone and watering the animals. Afterward the stone would be placed back over the mouth of the well. ⁴Jacob went over to the shepherds and asked, “Where are you from, my friends?”

“We are from Haran,” they answered.

⁵“Do you know a man there named Laban, the grandson of Nahor?” he asked.

“Yes, we do,” they replied.

⁶“Is he doing well?” Jacob asked.

“Yes, he’s well,” they answered. “Look, here comes his daughter Rachel with the flock now.”

⁷Jacob said, “Look, it’s still broad daylight—too early to round up the animals. Why don’t you water the sheep and goats so they can get back out to pasture?”

⁸“We can’t water the animals until all the flocks have arrived,” they replied. “Then the shepherds move the stone from the mouth of the well, and we water all the sheep and goats.”

⁹Jacob was still talking with them when

Rachel arrived with her father's flock, for she was a shepherd. ¹⁰And because Rachel was his cousin—the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother—and because the sheep and goats belonged to his uncle Laban, Jacob went over to the well and moved the stone from its mouth and watered his uncle's flock. ¹¹Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and he wept aloud. ¹²He explained to Rachel that he was her cousin on her father's side—the son of her aunt Rebekah. So Rachel quickly ran and told her father, Laban.

¹³As soon as Laban heard that his nephew Jacob had arrived, he ran out to meet him. He embraced and kissed him and brought him home. When Jacob had told him his story, ¹⁴Laban exclaimed, "You really are my own flesh and blood!"

Jacob Marries Leah and Rachel

After Jacob had stayed with Laban for about a month, ¹⁵Laban said to him, "You shouldn't work for me without pay just because we are relatives. Tell me how much your wages should be."

¹⁶Now Laban had two daughters. The older daughter was named Leah, and the younger one was Rachel. ¹⁷There was no sparkle in Leah's eyes,* but Rachel had a beautiful figure and a lovely face. ¹⁸Since Jacob was in love with Rachel, he told her father, "I'll work for you for seven years if you'll give me Rachel, your younger daughter, as my wife."

¹⁹"Agreed!" Laban replied. "I'd rather give her to you than to anyone else. Stay and work with me." ²⁰So Jacob worked seven years to pay for Rachel. But his love for her was so strong that it seemed to him but a few days.

²¹Finally, the time came for him to marry her. "I have fulfilled my agreement," Jacob said to Laban. "Now give me my wife so I can sleep with her."

²²So Laban invited everyone in the neighborhood and prepared a wedding feast. ²³But that night, when it was dark, Laban took Leah to Jacob, and he slept with her. ²⁴(Laban had given Leah a servant, Zilpah, to be her maid.)

²⁵But when Jacob woke up in the morning—it was Leah! "What have you done to me?" Jacob raged at Laban. "I worked seven years for Rachel! Why have you tricked me?"

²⁶"It's not our custom here to marry off a younger daughter ahead of the firstborn," Laban replied. ²⁷"But wait until the bridal week

is over; then we'll give you Rachel, too—provided you promise to work another seven years for me."

²⁸So Jacob agreed to work seven more years. A week after Jacob had married Leah, Laban gave him Rachel, too. ²⁹(Laban gave Rachel a servant, Bilhah, to be her maid.) ³⁰So Jacob slept with Rachel, too, and he loved her much more than Leah. He then stayed and worked for Laban the additional seven years.

Jacob's Many Children

³¹When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, he enabled her to have children, but Rachel could not conceive. ³²So Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben,* for she said, "The LORD has noticed my misery, and now my husband will love me."

³³She soon became pregnant again and gave birth to another son. She named him Simeon,* for she said, "The LORD heard that I was unloved and has given me another son."

³⁴Then she became pregnant a third time and gave birth to another son. He was named Levi,* for she said, "Surely this time my husband will feel affection for me, since I have given him three sons!"

³⁵Once again Leah became pregnant and gave birth to another son. She named him Judah,* for she said, "Now I will praise the LORD!" And then she stopped having children.

30 When Rachel saw that she wasn't having any children for Jacob, she became jealous of her sister. She pleaded with Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!"

²Then Jacob became furious with Rachel. "Am I God?" he asked. "He's the one who has kept you from having children!"

³Then Rachel told him, "Take my maid, Bilhah, and sleep with her. She will bear children for me,* and through her I can have a family, too." ⁴So Rachel gave her servant, Bilhah, to Jacob as a wife, and he slept with her. ⁵Bilhah became pregnant and presented him with a son. ⁶Rachel named him Dan,* for she said, "God has vindicated me! He has heard my request and given me a son." ⁷Then Bilhah became pregnant again and gave Jacob a second son. ⁸Rachel named him Naphtali,* for she said, "I have struggled hard with my sister, and I'm winning!"

⁹Meanwhile, Leah realized that she wasn't getting pregnant anymore, so she took her servant, Zilpah, and gave her to Jacob as a

29:17 Or Leah had dull eyes, or Leah had soft eyes. The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. 29:32 Reuben means "Look, a son!" It also sounds like the Hebrew for "He has seen my misery." 29:33 Simeon probably means "one who hears." 29:34 Levi sounds like a Hebrew term that means "being attached" or "feeling affection for." 29:35 Judah is related to the Hebrew term for "praise." 30:3 Hebrew bear children on my knees. 30:6 Dan means "he judged" or "he vindicated." 30:8 Naphtali means "my struggle."

wife.¹⁰ Soon Zilpah presented him with a son.¹¹ Leah named him Gad,* for she said, “How fortunate I am!”¹² Then Zilpah gave Jacob a second son.¹³ And Leah named him Asher,* for she said, “What joy is mine! Now the other women will celebrate with me.”

¹⁴One day during the wheat harvest, Reuben found some mandrakes growing in a field and brought them to his mother, Leah. Rachel begged Leah, “Please give me some of your son’s mandrakes.”

¹⁵But Leah angrily replied, “Wasn’t it enough that you stole my husband? Now will you steal my son’s mandrakes, too?”

Rachel answered, “I will let Jacob sleep with you tonight if you give me some of the mandrakes.”

¹⁶So that evening, as Jacob was coming home from the fields, Leah went out to meet him. “You must come and sleep with me tonight!” she said. “I have paid for you with some mandrakes that my son found.” So that night he slept with Leah.¹⁷ And God answered Leah’s prayers. She became pregnant again and gave birth to a fifth son for Jacob.¹⁸ She named him Issachar,* for she said, “God has rewarded me for giving my servant to my husband as a wife.”¹⁹ Then Leah became pregnant again and gave birth to a sixth son for Jacob.²⁰ She named him Zebulun,* for she said, “God has given me a good reward. Now my husband will treat me with respect, for I have given him six sons.”²¹ Later she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah.

²²Then God remembered Rachel’s plight and answered her prayers by enabling her to have children.²³ She became pregnant and gave birth to a son. “God has removed my disgrace,” she said.²⁴ And she named him Joseph,* for she said, “May the LORD add yet another son to my family.”

Jacob’s Wealth Increases

²⁵Soon after Rachel had given birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, “Please release me so I can go home to my own country.²⁶ Let me take my wives and children, for I have earned them by serving you, and let me be on my way. You certainly know how hard I have worked for you.”

²⁷“Please listen to me,” Laban replied. “I have become wealthy, for* the LORD has blessed me because of you.²⁸ Tell me how much I owe you. Whatever it is, I’ll pay it.”

²⁹Jacob replied, “You know how hard I’ve worked for you, and how your flocks and

herds have grown under my care.³⁰ You had little indeed before I came, but your wealth has increased enormously. The LORD has blessed you through everything I’ve done. But now, what about me? When can I start providing for my own family?”

³¹“What wages do you want?” Laban asked again.

Jacob replied, “Don’t give me anything. Just do this one thing, and I’ll continue to tend and watch over your flocks.³² Let me inspect your flocks today and remove all the sheep and goats that are speckled or spotted, along with all the black sheep. Give these to me as my wages.³³ In the future, when you check on the animals you have given me as my wages, you’ll see that I have been honest. If you find in my flock any goats without speckles or spots, or any sheep that are not black, you will know that I have stolen them from you.”

³⁴“All right,” Laban replied. “It will be as you say.”³⁵ But that very day Laban went out and removed the male goats that were streaked and spotted, all the female goats that were speckled and spotted or had white patches, and all the black sheep. He placed them in the care of his own sons,³⁶ who took them a three-days’ journey from where Jacob was. Meanwhile, Jacob stayed and cared for the rest of Laban’s flock.

³⁷Then Jacob took some fresh branches from poplar, almond, and plane trees and peeled off strips of bark, making white streaks on them.³⁸ Then he placed these peeled branches in the watering troughs where the flocks came to drink, for that was where they mated.³⁹ And when they mated in front of the white-streaked branches, they gave birth to young that were streaked, speckled, and spotted.⁴⁰ Jacob separated those lambs from Laban’s flock. And at mating time he turned the flock to face Laban’s animals that were streaked or black. This is how he built his own flock instead of increasing Laban’s.

⁴¹Whenever the stronger females were ready to mate, Jacob would place the peeled branches in the watering troughs in front of them. Then they would mate in front of the branches.⁴² But he didn’t do this with the weaker ones, so the weaker lambs belonged to Laban, and the stronger ones were Jacob’s.⁴³ As a result, Jacob became very wealthy, with large flocks of sheep and goats, female and male servants, and many camels and donkeys.

^{30:11} *Gad* means “good fortune.” ^{30:13} *Asher* means “happy.” ^{30:18} *Issachar* sounds like a Hebrew term that means “reward.” ^{30:20} *Zebulun* probably means “honor.” ^{30:24} *Joseph* means “may he add.” ^{30:27} Or *I have learned by divination that*.

THE APOSTLE JOHN WROTE the fourth Gospel sometime between AD 85–90, in order that “you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name” (John 20:31). Although John’s Gospel is a very personal, eyewitness account of who Jesus is and what he came to do, John does not identify himself by name. Instead, he describes himself by using some form of the phrase “the disciple Jesus loved” (see John 13:23; 19:26; 21:7, 20).

John uses very simple language to convey his message, but the truth he presents is as rich and deep as anything in the Bible. The Gospel of John is an excellent place to start when first reading the Bible. While the other three Gospels center on key events in Jesus’ life, John often focuses upon the *meaning* of those events. Consider the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, which all four Gospels record (Matthew 14:15–21; Mark 6:31–44; Luke 9:11–17; John 6:1–13). Only John gives us Jesus’ message on the “bread of life,” which follows that miracle. Here, as elsewhere, John puts special emphasis on the deity of Jesus, reporting Jesus’ words, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35).

John does not always record the events of his Gospel chronologically; instead, he highlights seven miracles that Jesus performed and seven “I am” statements that the Savior made. In following this plan, John gives us a unique perspective; in fact, 90 percent of the material found in his Gospel appears nowhere else. John made these selections to lead his readers to put their faith in Jesus Christ the Messiah, the Savior of the world. For this reason, the word *believe* plays a critical role in the Gospel of John.

Prologue: Christ, the Eternal Word

1 ¹ In the beginning the Word already existed.

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

² He existed in the beginning with God.

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

⁴ The Word gave life to everything that was
created,*
and his life brought light to everyone.

⁵ The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness can never
extinguish it.*

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

¹⁰ He came into the very world he created,
but the world didn’t recognize him. ¹¹ He came

to his own people, and even they rejected him.

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

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

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

¹⁶ From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another.*

¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses, but God’s unending love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God,* is near to the Father’s heart. He has revealed God to us.

1:3–4 Or and nothing that was created was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything. 1:5 Or and the darkness has not understood it. 1:6 Greek a man named John. 1:14a Greek became flesh. 1:14b Or grace and truth; also in 1:17. 1:16 Or received the grace of Christ rather than the grace of the law; Greek reads received grace upon grace. 1:18 Some manuscripts read But the one and only Son.

The Testimony of John the Baptist

¹⁹This was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders sent priests and Temple assistants* from Jerusalem to ask John, "Who are you?"
²⁰He came right out and said, "I am not the Messiah."

²¹"Well then, who are you?" they asked. "Are you Elijah?"

"No," he replied.

"Are you the Prophet we are expecting?"*

"No."

²²"Then who are you? We need an answer for those who sent us. What do you have to say about yourself?"

²³John replied in the words of the prophet Isaiah:

"I am a voice shouting in the wilderness,
 'Clear the way for the LORD's coming!'"*

²⁴Then the Pharisees who had been sent
²⁵asked him, "If you aren't the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet, what right do you have to baptize?"

²⁶John told them, "I baptize with* water,

1:19 Greek and Levites. 1:21 Greek Are you the Prophet? See Deut 18:15, 18; Mal 4:5-6. 1:23 Isa 40:3. 1:26 Or in; also in 1:31, 33.

but right here in the crowd is someone you do not recognize. ²⁷Though his ministry follows mine, I'm not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandal."

²⁸This encounter took place in Bethany, an area east of the Jordan River, where John was baptizing.

Jesus, the Lamb of God

²⁹The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰He is the one I was talking about when I said, 'A man is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.' ³¹I did not recognize him as the Messiah, but I have been baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel."

³²Then John testified, "I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him. ³³I didn't know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, 'The one on whom you see the

The beginning of it all *read JOHN 1:1-5*

Eventually every child gets around to asking the question, "Where did God come from?" And there is no easy answer for that, except to say, God has always existed. He is self-existent. He already existed in the beginning. God has no beginning, nor does he have an end.

It is worth noting that the Bible never tries to prove the existence of God. It just says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). You can't go back any further than that! Now, certain people would like to eliminate the major player here. They'd rather the verse read, "In the beginning, the heavens and the earth . . ." But if we eliminate God, then we have a big problem. In the beginning . . . what?

Some would say, "In the beginning, a mass of gases was floating in space." But that's not the beginning. Where did the mass of gases come from? Where did space come from? The Bible simply says, "In the beginning God."

The Bible doesn't tell us when the beginning was; it just says God was already there. And here, John tells us that the Word, Jesus Christ, already existed in the beginning with God (John 1:2). He was *with* God, he *was* God, and God created everything through him (John 1:1, 3).

Sometimes we speak of God by describing his attributes: omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, sovereignty, truth, righteousness, holiness, and love. While these descriptions can help, if you really want to know what God is like, then look at Jesus—God in human form. Jesus did not represent God as a glorified man; he was God himself among us, the Messiah in human flesh, God with skin on. God has a face. Jesus, who embodied all of God's attributes, walked our planet as a man and breathed our air and felt our pain. He was so knowledgeable he could predict future events, so humble he could get on his knees and wash a friend's dirty feet, so powerful he could calm the wind and waves with just a word, so approachable that children laughingly climbed into his arms. In Jesus, God spelled himself out in language that every one of us can understand.

For the next note on "Who Is God?" turn to page 1052.

We can come to faith in different ways

read JOHN 1:40-46

Just as all of us have differing personalities and temperaments, so we all come to faith in different ways. Andrew and John found Jesus through a preacher's message. Simon Peter and Nathanael came to Jesus as the result of the personal efforts of a believer. In the case of Philip, God spoke directly to him—which, by the way, is the exception rather than the rule.

Jesus Christ stands at the door of the human heart and knocks. We each must open that door and ask him to come into our lives. "God," you may say, "I know I am a sinner. But I believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for my sin. I am sorry for my sin, and I turn and repent of it. Come into my life and be my Savior and Lord. I choose to follow you from this moment forward."

Some have a tremendous emotional experience at conversion, while others may not. I didn't. When I asked the Lord to come into my life, I didn't feel a thing; so I wrongly concluded that perhaps I wasn't even converted. Emotions are not bad, of course; when you come to faith in Christ, you may experience God in a very real and profound way. But this does not happen with everyone. God wants us to live not by feeling, but by faith (see Romans 1:17).

For the next note on "Experience New Life in Christ" turn to page 998.

Spirit descend and rest is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.³⁴ I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Chosen One of God.*"

The First Disciples

³⁵The following day John was again standing with two of his disciples. ³⁶As Jesus walked by, John looked at him and declared, "Look! There is the Lamb of God!" ³⁷When John's two disciples heard this, they followed Jesus.

³⁸Jesus looked around and saw them following. "What do you want?" he asked them.

1:34 Some manuscripts read *the Son of God*. 1:41 *Messiah* (a Hebrew term) and *Christ* (a Greek term) both mean "anointed one." 1:42 The names *Cephas* (from Aramaic) and *Peter* (from Greek) both mean "rock." 1:45 Greek *Moses in the law*. 1:51 Greek *going up and down on the Son of Man*; see Gen 28:10-17. "Son of Man" is a title Jesus used for himself. 2:1 Greek *On the third day*; see 1:35, 43.

They replied, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?"

³⁹"Come and see," he said. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place where he was staying, and they remained with him the rest of the day.

⁴⁰Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of these men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus. ⁴¹Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means "Christ"*).

⁴²Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus. Looking intently at Simon, Jesus said, "Your name is Simon, son of John—but you will be called Cephas" (which means "Peter"*).

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Come, follow me." ⁴⁴Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter's hometown.

⁴⁵Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, "We have found the very person Moses* and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth."

⁴⁶"Nazareth!" exclaimed Nathanael. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"

"Come and see for yourself," Philip replied.

⁴⁷As they approached, Jesus said, "Now here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity."

⁴⁸"How do you know about me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus replied, "I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you."

⁴⁹Then Nathanael exclaimed, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God—the King of Israel!"

⁵⁰Jesus asked him, "Do you believe this just because I told you I had seen you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this."

⁵¹Then he said, "I tell you the truth, you will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth.*"

The Wedding at Cana

2 The next day¹ there was a wedding celebration in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there,² and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. ³The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus' mother told him, "They have no more wine."

⁴"Dear woman, that's not our problem," Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come."

⁵But his mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

We must be born again

read JOHN 3:3

Many people today do not understand what it means to be *born again*, a term Jesus himself originated. Today, the term has been pirated, emptied of meaning, dragged through the gutter, and then given back to us, minus its power. Some people say, “I am a Christian, but I am not one of those ‘born agains.’”

Listen! There is no such thing as a Christian who is not born again. We need a spiritual rebirth because, according to Jesus, unless we are born again, we cannot see the Kingdom of God.

For the next note on “Experience New Life in Christ” turn to page 1022.

⁶Standing nearby were six stone water jars, used for Jewish ceremonial washing. Each could hold twenty to thirty gallons.* ⁷Jesus told the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” When the jars had been filled, ⁸he said, “Now dip some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies.” So the servants followed his instructions.

⁹When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over. ¹⁰“A host always serves the best wine first,” he said. “Then, when everyone has had a lot to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine. But you have kept the best until now!”

¹¹This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

¹²After the wedding he went to Capernaum for a few days with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples.

Jesus Clears the Temple

¹³It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the Temple area he saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices; he also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money. ¹⁵Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep and cattle, scattered the money changers’ coins over the floor, and turned over their tables. ¹⁶Then, going over to the people who sold doves, he told them,

“Get these things out of here. Stop turning my Father’s house into a marketplace!”

¹⁷Then his disciples remembered this prophecy from the Scriptures: “Passion for God’s house will consume me.”*

¹⁸But the Jewish leaders demanded, “What are you doing? If God gave you authority to do this, show us a miraculous sign to prove it.”

¹⁹“All right,” Jesus replied. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

²⁰“What!” they exclaimed. “It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you can rebuild it in three days?” ²¹But when Jesus said “this temple,” he meant his own body. ²²After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered he had said this, and they believed both the Scriptures and what Jesus had said.

Jesus and Nicodemus

²³Because of the miraculous signs Jesus did in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration, many began to trust in him. ²⁴But Jesus didn’t trust them, because he knew all about people. ²⁵No one needed to tell him about human nature, for he knew what was in each person’s heart.

3 There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. ²After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. “Rabbi,” he said, “we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.”

³Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again,* you cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

⁴“What do you mean?” exclaimed Nicodemus. “How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?”

⁵Jesus replied, “I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit.* ⁶Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life.* ⁷So don’t be surprised when I say, ‘You* must be born again.’ ⁸The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can’t tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can’t explain how people are born of the Spirit.”

⁹“How are these things possible?” Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰Jesus replied, “You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don’t understand these things? ¹¹I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won’t

2:6 Greek 2 or 3 measures [75 to 113 liters]. 2:17 Or “Concern for God’s house will be my undoing.” Ps 69:9. 3:3 Or born from above; also in 3:7. 3:5 Or and spirit. The Greek word for Spirit can also be translated wind; see 3:8. 3:6 Greek what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 3:7 The Greek word for you is plural; also in 3:12.

believe our testimony. ¹²But if you don't believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man* has come down from heaven. ¹⁴And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.*

¹⁶“For this is how God loved the world: He gave* his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

¹⁸“There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. ¹⁹And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. ²⁰All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.*”

John the Baptist Exalts Jesus

²²Then Jesus and his disciples left Jerusalem and went into the Judean countryside. Jesus spent some time with them there, baptizing people.

²³At this time John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon, near Salim, because there was plenty of water there; and people kept coming to him for baptism. ²⁴(This was before John

was thrown into prison.) ²⁵A debate broke out between John's disciples and a certain Jew* over ceremonial cleansing. ²⁶So John's disciples came to him and said, “Rabbi, the man you met on the other side of the Jordan River, the one you identified as the Messiah, is also baptizing people. And everybody is going to him instead of coming to us.”

²⁷John replied, “No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven. ²⁸You yourselves know how plainly I told you, ‘I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare the way for him.’ ²⁹It is the bridegroom who marries the bride, and the bridegroom's friend is simply glad to stand with him and hear his vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at his success. ³⁰He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.

³¹“He has come from above and is greater than anyone else. We are of the earth, and we speak of earthly things, but he has come from heaven and is greater than anyone else.* ³²He testifies about what he has seen and heard, but how few believe what he tells them! ³³Anyone who accepts his testimony can affirm that God is true. ³⁴For he is sent by God. He speaks God's words, for God gives him the Spirit without limit. ³⁵The Father loves his Son and has put everything into his hands. ³⁶And anyone who believes in God's Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn't obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment.”

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

4 Jesus* knew the Pharisees had heard that he was baptizing and making more disciples than John ²(though Jesus himself didn't

3:13 Some manuscripts add *who lives in heaven*. “Son of Man” is a title Jesus used for himself. 3:15 Or *everyone who believes will have eternal life in him*. 3:16 Or *For God loved the world so much that he gave*. 3:21 Or *can see God at work in what he is doing*. 3:25 Some manuscripts read *some Jews*. 3:31 Some manuscripts do not include *and is greater than anyone else*. 4:1 Some manuscripts read *The Lord*.

Christians have been born of the Spirit read JOHN 3:5-8

How did you become a Christian? Yes, you chose to believe in Jesus—but did you realize that something happened even before you made your decision? When you placed your faith in Christ, you did so in response to the moving of the Holy Spirit, not merely by an act of your will. The Spirit of God alone brings about the work of conversion! The Holy Spirit convinced you of your sin and showed you your need for Jesus.

None of us can save ourselves any more than people who are drowning can save themselves. A person about to slip under the waves has no choice but to call for help—and we must do the same. As the Holy Spirit moves in our hearts, revealing our desperate spiritual need and offering to us the forgiveness that comes from Jesus Christ, we cry out to the Lord for salvation. And he rescues us.

For the next note on “Who Is the Holy Spirit?” turn to page 1016.

How to Study the Bible

NOW THAT YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN, one thing you will want to do on a daily basis is study the Bible. You may, however, have some questions about this. For example, you may ask yourself, *How do I study the Bible?* Or, *Where do I begin reading?* This feature will answer those questions and give you the information you need to develop the basic techniques necessary for effective Bible study.

Pray for Wisdom and Understanding. The most often overlooked and undervalued aspect of Bible study is prayer. Yet prayer is essential to gaining wisdom and understanding when you read God's Word. Through prayer, you can approach God and acknowledge your incomplete knowledge of his Word, as well as your need for him to open your heart to his instruction. Therefore, determine to begin each study with prayer. Only God can give you the wisdom to understand his Word.

Read in an Orderly Manner. If you received a letter and read only a few sentences here and there, the letter would not make much sense to you. But if you read the letter in order, you would understand it. The same holds true when you read the Bible.

Sadly, many Christians do not realize the shallowness of this approach when applied to reading the Bible. They read a portion of Matthew, a story from Daniel, a verse or two from Exodus, and then a chapter or so from Revelation and wonder why they do not have a good understanding of God's Word. Furthermore, they end up misinterpreting the meaning of these passages because they have failed to grasp the context from which they came.

To avoid developing this poor habit, you need to discipline yourself to read the Bible in an orderly manner. One way to do this is to use an established reading plan. A reading plan lists Scripture passages to be read in a certain order. Many of the existing plans were created with a goal in mind. Some plans break the whole Bible down into 365 daily readings. Others help you read through the Bible in the order that the events actually happened. For now, you may want to use the following plan as your reading guide. Start with the Gospel of John. This Gospel was written so that we might believe that Jesus is the Son of God (John 20:31). Then, after you have finished reading John, read the rest of the New Testament. Once you have finished the New Testament, you should read the books of the Old Testament. There you will see the coming of Jesus foreshadowed and learn all about God's people, the Israelites.

If you prefer a more structured approach, a one-year New Testament reading plan has been included on page 1245 to help you get started.

Finish What You Start. In life, the benefits of doing anything are often not realized until the task is completed. The same is true when reading a book from the Bible. Once you choose a book to read, read it from beginning to end. Although you may benefit spiritually by reading a verse from one book or a story from another, you will benefit more by reading the entire book from which the verse or story came. Reading the entire book puts each verse and story in its proper context. Thus, you will have a better understanding of what each verse and story means. In addition, by reading books from beginning to end you will become more familiar with the Bible as a whole. You may even discover passages that will one day become your favorites.

Meditate on God's Word and Ask Questions. Thinking about what you have read cannot be overemphasized. Meditating on what you have read helps you to discover the importance of the passage. It also helps you to examine your life in light of what God reveals in his Word.

One of the best ways to begin meditating on God's Word is to ask questions. Here are a few questions to help you get started:

- What is the main subject of the passage?
- To whom is this passage addressed?
- Who is speaking?
- About what or whom is the person speaking?
- What is the key verse?
- What does this passage teach me about God?

To see how the text might apply to you personally, ask yourself these questions:

- Is there any sin mentioned in the passage that I need to confess or stop doing?
- Is there a command given that I should obey?
- Is there a promise made that I can apply to my current circumstances?
- Is there a prayer given that I could pray?

Invest in a Few Good Resource Books. The Bible mentions or assumes that you know about many ancient customs that are completely unfamiliar to us today. Much of the subtle meaning behind these references that would give us greater insight into and appreciation for God's Word is therefore lost to us. To understand the culture in which the Bible was written, you may want to purchase a few good biblical resource books.

There are two types of resource books you should look into purchasing: (1) a one- or two-volume commentary on the whole Bible and (2) a Bible dictionary.

Most one- or two-volume commentaries are concise. They give you the necessary information on important words, phrases, and verses from the Bible. They will not give you commentary on each verse, and they will not go into detailed explanations on any one verse. But they are good resources to help you begin to understand God's Word. The price for such a commentary can range from twenty-five to forty dollars per volume.

Bible dictionaries contain short articles (in alphabetical order) on people, places, events, and objects found in the Bible. Some Bible dictionaries also contain maps, diagrams, and pictures of biblical cities, regions, and artifacts. Bible dictionaries cost between twenty-five and thirty-five dollars. You can find these resources wherever Christian books are sold.

If you apply these practices to your daily personal Bible study, you are bound to develop habits that will help you grow in your faith.

The One Year New Testament Reading Plan

JANUARY

- January 1**
Matthew 1:1-17
Romans 1:1-7
- January 2**
Matthew 1:18-25
Romans 1:8-15
- January 3**
Matthew 2:1-12
Romans 1:16-17
- January 4**
Matthew 2:13-23
Romans 1:18-32
- January 5**
Matthew 3:1-12
Romans 2:1-16
- January 6**
Matthew 3:13-17
Romans 2:17-29
- January 7**
Matthew 4:1-11
Romans 3:1-8
- January 8**
Matthew 4:12-25
Romans 3:9-20
- January 9**
Matthew 5:1-16
Romans 3:21-31
- January 10**
Matthew 5:17-48
Romans 4:1-12
- January 11**
Matthew 6:1-18
Romans 4:13-17
- January 12**
Matthew 6:19-34
Romans 4:18-25
- January 13**
Matthew 7:1-6
Romans 5:1-5
- January 14**
Matthew 7:7-12
Romans 5:6-11
- January 15**
Matthew 7:13-29
Romans 5:12-21
- January 16**
Matthew 8:1-17
Romans 6:1-14
- January 17**
Matthew 8:18-22
Romans 6:15-23
- January 18**
Matthew 8:23-34
Romans 7:1-6
- January 19**
Matthew 9:1-8
Romans 7:7-13
- January 20**
Matthew 9:9-13
Romans 7:14-25
- January 21**
Matthew 9:14-17
Romans 8:1-8
- January 22**
Matthew 9:18-26
Romans 8:9-17
- January 23**
Matthew 9:27-38
Romans 8:18-27
- January 24**
Matthew 10:1-18
Romans 8:28-39
- January 25**
Matthew 10:19-11:1
Romans 9:1-5
- January 26**
Matthew 11:2-19
Romans 9:6-18
- January 27**
Matthew 11:20-30
Romans 9:19-26
- January 28**
Matthew 12:1-21
Romans 9:27-33
- January 29**
Matthew 12:22-37
Romans 10:1-13

- January 30**
Matthew 12:38-50
Romans 10:14-21
- January 31**
Matthew 13:1-23
Romans 11:1-6

FEBRUARY

- February 1**
Matthew 13:24-35
Romans 11:7-12
- February 2**
Matthew 13:36-43
Romans 11:13-21
- February 3**
Matthew 13:44-58
Romans 11:22-27
- February 4**
Matthew 14:1-12
Romans 11:28-36
- February 5**
Matthew 14:13-21
Romans 12:1-5
- February 6**
Matthew 14:22-36
Romans 12:6-13
- February 7**
Matthew 15:1-20
Romans 12:14-21
- February 8**
Matthew 15:21-28
Romans 13:1-7
- February 9**
Matthew 15:29-39
Romans 13:8-14
- February 10**
Matthew 16:1-12
Romans 14:1-4
- February 11**
Matthew 16:13-28
Romans 14:5-9
- February 12**
Matthew 17:1-13
Romans 14:10-16

52 Great Bible Stories

This list not only gives you fifty-two Bible stories you should be familiar with as a Christian, but it also provides an interesting reading plan. Using the list below, you can read one great Bible story a week for a whole year.

1. In the Beginning

Genesis 1:1–2:3, page 3

In an incredible display of majesty and power, God creates the heavens and the earth and everything in them.

2. The First Sin

Genesis 2:4–3:24, page 4

God's original plan for humankind is spoiled in one small but deliberate act of disobedience that enables sin to enter the human race.

3. Noah and the Ark

Genesis 6:1–9:17, page 9

One man's faith in and obedience to God spares his family from certain death in the greatest flood ever experienced by humankind.

4. Sodom and Gomorrah

Genesis 18:16–19:29, page 18

Lot, a God-fearing man, allows outside influences and selfish pursuits to cloud his thinking. Though he escapes the destruction of his evil hometown, his compromising decisions leave a devastating mark on his life and family.

5. Abraham and Isaac

Genesis 22:1-18, page 22

Abraham learns that complete obedience can mean great sacrifice—but also great blessing.

Memory Verses

MEMORIZING SCRIPTURE is not really a difficult thing to do. You already have quite a bit in your memory bank: a few important passwords, your address, a relative's birthday, and many more essential pieces of information. So you do have the ability to memorize. The good news is that Scripture memorization is a refreshing exercise that the Lord will use to bless your life. As his Word says, "But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will *bless you for doing it*" (James 1:25, emphasis added).

Below are a few suggestions that may make memorizing God's Word easier for you:

1. When you pick a passage to memorize, take time to read the verses surrounding the text so you can better understand the context of the verse. This will help you determine what the verse means.
2. Read the verse(s) several times aloud, and be sure to include the verse reference.
3. Think about the main idea of the verse and how it applies to you personally.
4. You may want to write down the verse several times. You may even choose to write the verse on little cards you can place on your bathroom mirror, in your car, on your refrigerator door, or any other place you frequently find yourself.
5. Review the verse frequently. As many people have said, you can only master a new skill by practicing, Practicing, PRACTICING. You can memorize Scripture by reviewing, Reviewing, REVIEWING!
6. Finally, pray over the selected text throughout the day, asking God to help you comprehend its meaning as well as its significance in your own life.

As the verse in James attests, the more you memorize God's Word, the more you will find yourself doing what it says. In effect, filling your mind with Scripture is one of the strongest deterrents for temptation. That is because the more God's Word fills your heart and mind, the less likely you are to want to disregard his commands and displease him. In addition, making the Bible such a central focus of your day will "fill your lives" (Colossians 3:16).

Considering the benefits of Scripture memorization, here are some key verses to help you get started in this practice. The following verses have been selected to help you understand the message of salvation, encourage your spiritual growth, and remind you of God's promises as you journey through life.

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

We must acknowledge that we are sinners.

ROMANS 3:23. Every person is guilty of sin and has fallen short of God's standard, page 1068.

ISAIAH 53:6. We all have a basic instinct to follow our own way instead of God's, page 672.

JAMES 2:10. Breaking one of God's laws makes us as guilty as someone who has broken all of God's laws, page 1195.

ROMANS 3:10. No one can claim innocence before God, page 1068.

We must understand the penalty for our sins.

ROMANS 6:23. The wages of sin is death, page 1071.

We must confess and repent of our sins.

1 JOHN 1:9. God promises to forgive our sins when we confess them, page 1209.

ACTS 20:21. We must turn from our sin and turn to God, page 1056.

We must believe that Christ is the only way of salvation.

JOHN 14:6. Jesus Christ alone leads you to God, page 1015.

ACTS 4:12. Salvation can be found through no one other than Christ, page 1032.

ROMANS 5:8. Christ's death demonstrates God's unconditional love, page 1070.

1 PETER 3:18. Christ, who never sinned, took the punishment for our sins on the cross of Calvary to bring us to God, page 1203.

ROMANS 10:9-10. Belief in Jesus' death and resurrection is essential to salvation, page 1077.

We must receive Christ into our lives to obtain forgiveness and eternal life.

JOHN 3:3. We must be spiritually "reborn," page 998.

JOHN 3:16. We are promised salvation by believing in Jesus Christ, God's Son, page 999.

JOHN 10:9. Christ is the gate to salvation, page 1009.

REVELATION 3:20. Jesus waits for an invitation into our lives, page 1226.

EPHESIANS 2:8-9. We can only receive salvation through faith in Christ, not through our good works, page 1132.

TITUS 3:5. The salvation God extends washes away our sins and brings true joy, page 1173.

We have the assurance of our salvation.

JOHN 1:12. We become children of God by receiving his free gift of salvation, page 995.

GALATIANS 2:20. We have been given a new life in Jesus Christ, page 1125.

ROMANS 8:1. We no longer have to fear condemnation, page 1073.

1 PETER 1:3-4. God has reserved for us the priceless gift of eternal life, page 1199.

1 PETER 1:23. Our new life comes from the living God, not human beings, page 1200.

JOHN 10:27-28. The Lord personally guards our salvation, page 1009.

1 JOHN 5:13. Our assurance is based upon faith, not feeling, page 1214.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:22. God has placed the Holy Spirit in our hearts as proof that we belong to him, page 1110.

GALATIANS 4:6-7. We have all the privileges and rights that come from being God's children, page 1126.

Prophecies about Jesus

FOR THE GOSPEL WRITERS, one of the main reasons for believing in Jesus was the way his life fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. Following is a list of some of the main prophecies and their fulfillments.

PROPHECY	OLD TESTAMENT <i>Reference</i>	NEW TESTAMENT <i>Fulfillment</i>
Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:1-6; Luke 2:1-20
Messiah was to be born of a virgin	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38
Messiah was to be a prophet like Moses	Deuteronomy 18:15, 18-19	John 7:40
Messiah was to enter Jerusalem in triumph	Zechariah 9:9	Matthew 21:1-9; John 12:12-16
Messiah was to be rejected by his own people	Psalms 118:22; Isaiah 53:1-3	Matthew 26:3-4; John 12:37-43; Acts 4:1-12
Messiah was to be betrayed by one of his followers	Psalms 41:9	Matthew 26:14-16, 47-50; Luke 22:16, 47-48
Messiah was to be tried and condemned	Isaiah 53:8	Matthew 27:1-2; Luke 23:1-25
Messiah was to be silent before his accusers	Isaiah 53:7	Matthew 26:62-63; 27:12-14; Mark 15:3-5; Luke 23:8-10
Messiah was to be struck and spit upon by his enemies	Isaiah 50:6	Matthew 26:67; 27:30; Mark 14:65
Messiah was to be mocked and taunted	Psalms 22:7-8	Matthew 27:39-44; Luke 23:11, 35-36
Messiah was to die by crucifixion	Psalms 22:14, 16-17	Matthew 27:31; Mark 15:20, 25
Messiah was to suffer with criminals and pray for his enemies	Isaiah 53:12	Matthew 27:38; Mark 15:27-28; Luke 23:32-34
Messiah was to be given sour wine	Psalms 69:21	Matthew 27:34; John 19:28-30
Others were to cast lots for Messiah's garments	Psalms 22:18	Matthew 27:35; John 19:23-24
Messiah's bones were not to be broken	Exodus 12:46	John 19:31-36

Glossary of Christian Terms

WHAT DOES IT MEAN when someone refers to “the flesh”? What is the significance of the phrase “the blood”? And why is it important to “disciple” others? Whether you have just become a Christian or are simply interested in learning more about Christianity, you will soon discover that Christians sometimes seem to speak their own language. This basic glossary of commonly used Christian terms and phrases will help you uncover some of the mystery behind the Christian vocabulary. In addition, some entries will point you to areas of further study so that you can see how these expressions apply to your life. If for some reason you still have trouble comprehending what a Christian term means (or if it is not listed here), do not hesitate to ask a more mature Christian, a Bible study leader, or your pastor. As the saying goes, “There is only one bad question: the question you never ask.” The more you learn about your Christian faith and the God you now serve, the deeper and more meaningful your spiritual walk will be.

Abide: To remain consistently in fellowship with God by maintaining a close relationship with Jesus Christ. Most commonly used in the phrase “abide in Christ.” (For further study, turn to “Live as a Disciple,” page A33.)

Accepting Christ: To receive God’s gift of salvation by believing in Jesus Christ, asking God to forgive you of your sin that you have repented of, inviting Christ to take up residence in your heart, and allowing the Holy Spirit to change your life. (For further study, turn to “How You Can Know God,” page A10.) See also *Repent*.

Accountability: To be held responsible for your actions. For example, we are accountable to God for what we do with the talents and abilities he gives us. (For further study, turn to “Accountability,” page A19.)

Altar Call: See *Invitation*.

Angels: Supernatural creatures who worship God and care for believers. (For further study, turn to “What Are Angels?” page A25.)

Antichrist: Literally means “false Christ” or “instead of Christ.” The Bible says that one great Antichrist, or “false Christ,” will appear in the final days before Christ’s return to earth

and will deceive many (see Revelation 13:1-7). This term is also used to describe anyone who opposes Jesus Christ and his teachings (see 1 John 2:18; 4:3; 2 John 1:7).

Atonement: The removal of God’s punishment for sin through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ (see Romans 3:25).

Backslide: To stop moving forward in the Christian walk; to spiritually regress.

Baptism: 1. *Water baptism* is an outward display of what has happened in the life of the believer: the death of the old nature (when one is placed under the water), and the birth of a new nature (when one is raised up) (see Colossians 2:12). While it is not necessary for salvation, it demonstrates a person’s submission to Christ. Baptism is also a demonstration of that person’s willingness to live God’s way. Jesus himself stressed its importance (see Matthew 28:19). 2. *Spirit baptism* occurs when the Holy Spirit enters a person’s life. This baptism only occurs after someone has received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. See also *Filling of the Holy Spirit*.

Bearing Burdens: Refers to helping other believers by sharing in their trials, sorrows, and

concerns so that they will not feel alone (see Galatians 6:1-3).

Believer: Someone who has accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Blood (the): Refers to the blood Christ shed on the cross of Calvary, where he essentially became the sacrifice for our sins.

Body of Christ (the): Another term for the church—all those who call Jesus Christ their Lord. Throughout the New Testament Jesus Christ is often referred to as the “head” of this body (see Ephesians 1:22-23). See also *Church*.

Book of Life (the): A record found in Heaven that lists the names of all those who have committed their lives to Jesus Christ and can be called followers of God (see Daniel 12:1; Luke 10:20; Revelation 3:5; 21:27).

Born Again: Describes what takes place when people accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Essentially, one becomes spiritually “reborn” at that point, escaping spiritual death and receiving eternal life (see John 3:3-7).

Bride of Christ (the): Another term for the church or Christian believers as a whole (see 2 Corinthians 11:2). See also *Church*.

Calling: 1. (noun) God’s invitation to all people to receive the gift and benefits of salvation (see Ephesians 1:18; 1 Thessalonians 2:12, 14). 2. (noun) God’s divinely appointed plan or purpose for a believer, as in, “He believes that God’s calling is for him to . . .” (see Ephesians 4:1; 2 Timothy 1:9). 3. (verb) When God directs an individual toward a particular vocation or area of service (e.g., “He believes that God is calling him to be a pastor”).

Carnal: See *Worldly*.

Christ: Greek for “anointed one,” which was often used in the description of Jewish kings and high priests. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, and as such we often refer to him as “Jesus Christ.”

Church (the): 1. (proper noun) The collective body of Christian believers around the world and throughout the ages. 2. (noun) A place where people come together to fellowship with other believers, study the Bible together, worship, pray, and discover and develop their spiritual

gifts. A church also has a pastor—or a team of pastors—to lead the congregation. (For further study, turn to “Attend Church,” page A31.)

Commitment: 1. The decision to accept Jesus Christ as one’s Savior and Lord (e.g., “The young woman made a commitment to Christ after the pastor’s message”). 2. A person’s willingness to stay true to Christ regardless of the cost.

Communion: 1. A time when fellow believers come together to remember the purpose of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross for them by receiving and eating the elements Jesus used in the Lord’s Supper (also known as the “Last Supper”). The bread symbolizes Jesus’ body, broken for us on the cross, while the wine (or juice) represents Jesus’ blood, shed on the cross for our sins (see 1 Corinthians 10:16-17). See also *Lord’s Supper*. 2. The deep closeness and fellowship a person can experience with God as a result of entering into a personal relationship with him (see 1 Corinthians 1:9).

Confess: 1. To agree with, as in agreeing with God about our sins and sinful condition. To admit your sins to God and ask for his forgiveness (see 1 John 1:9). 2. To publicly acknowledge your relationship with and commitment to Jesus Christ (see Romans 10:9-10).

Consecration: A dedication to serve God wholeheartedly and to be used for his glory (see 1 Chronicles 29:5; Romans 12:1; 2 Corinthians 8:5).

Conversion: When a person makes a decision to receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, turning from the darkness and futility of this world to the light and hope found in Christ (see Acts 26:18).

Conviction: 1. To feel guilt and remorse after committing some wrongdoing. 2. To feel genuine sorrow and concern over one’s sinful condition and unworthiness before God. The Holy Spirit is responsible for this conviction in the life of the unbeliever (see John 16:8).

Cross: 1. Reference to Jesus’ death on the cross of Calvary and to what his death represents. 2. Reference to our identification with Jesus Christ; setting aside our personal ambition to follow and serve God (see Matthew 16:24). See also *Denying Self*.

Demons: Spirit beings who serve Satan. They are essentially fallen angels (one-third of the

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Accountability

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Luke 12:47-48 (Cornerstones), page 977
Luke 19:11-26 (Cornerstones), page 986
1 Corinthians 3:10-15 (Cornerstones), page 1092
To continue studying, see Sin

Attend Church

Acts 2:42-47 (First Steps), page 1030
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To continue studying, see Love

Attitude toward Self

Jeremiah 17:5-8 (Off & Running), page 706
Matthew 5:3-5 (Off & Running), page 896
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