

T H E O N E Y E A R[®]



PRAY *for the*



PERSECUTED



BIBLE



The ONE
YEAR®

PRAY

for the

PERSECUTED

BIBLE

*The entire New Living Translation
arranged in 365 daily readings*



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The One Year Pray for the Persecuted Bible is a tool to help you pray for our Christian brothers and sisters around the world who are persecuted for their faith. The Voice of the Martyrs' (VOM) field leaders meet with persecuted Christians to bless and encourage them as well as to inquire about unmet needs, and the first request of the persecuted is often, "Pray for us!" This Bible will help you fulfill their request.

Before we begin praying for persecuted Christians, let us first consider the meaning of *persecution*. How do we determine whether a Christian is suffering as a result of persecution for righteousness or whether the suffering is simply the result of living in a fallen, sinful world?

Persecution for righteousness follows a pattern: A Christian's faith in Christ results in obedience to God's Word, leading to a bold and faithful witness for Christ. The Christian's faithful witness then encounters a persecutor. In both English and biblical Greek (transliterated *dioko*), the word *persecute* connotes pursuing an adversary in a hostile manner, with the associated image of a hunter tracking prey. Therefore, persecution involves a person or a group hostile to the faith actively pursuing and attacking Christians with the intent of silencing their witness.

Acts 17 relates Paul and Silas's encounter in Thessalonica, which exemplifies this pattern. When the two went to the synagogue, Paul witnessed for Christ, explaining the prophecies and proving that the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead. While many chose to join Paul and Silas, some Jews who heard their message became jealous and conspired to silence their witness. They attacked the home of Jason in search of Paul and Silas, accusing them of "treason against Caesar, for they profess allegiance to another king, named Jesus" (Acts 17:7).

Christians face a similar pattern of persecution today in many nations and regions around the world when they actively obey God's Word and bear witness for Christ. And because of this persecution, they have a variety of needs that we, their worldwide Christian family, are privileged to help fulfill.

The One Year Pray for the Persecuted Bible includes a unique prayer prompt with each daily Scripture reading, covering a wide range of needs facing persecuted Christians today. Those needs may include basic physical provisions like food, shelter, and medical help after being attacked because of their faith; Bibles for Christians in nations where owning one could mean prison or death; and even transportation for front-line workers advancing God's Kingdom on some of the world's most dangerous mission fields.

And then there are the intangible but equally critical spiritual needs: courage for Christians to share the gospel with family members even though they could be disowned for doing so, strength for Christians who are imprisoned for their faith and don't know if they will see their loved ones again, and wisdom for front-line workers seeking ways to get Bibles to Christians who are surrounded by people who are opposed to the gospel.

Where Christians Are Persecuted

VOM serves persecuted Christians in almost seventy countries, most of which are identified as either “restricted nations” or “hostile areas.” These terms will be used repeatedly in the daily prayer prompts. VOM defines them as follows:

Restricted nations: Countries where government-sanctioned circumstances or anti-Christian laws lead to Christians being harassed, imprisoned, killed, or deprived of possessions or liberties because of their witness. Also included are countries where government policy or practice prevents Christians from obtaining Bibles or other Christian literature. Christians in restricted nations often also experience persecution from family, community members, and/or political groups; VOM refers to such acts as “hostile” toward Christian witness. China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Cuba, and North Korea are examples of restricted nations.

Hostile areas: Nations or large areas of nations where governments may attempt to provide protection for the Christian population but Christians are still routinely persecuted by family, friends, neighbors, or political groups because of their witness. India, Nigeria, Colombia, Ethiopia, and Nepal are examples of hostile areas.

Some countries where VOM works are considered “areas of concern.” In these countries, Christian outreach is opposed by extremist activity, intense community pressure, or authoritarian governments or laws. If the frequency and severity of persecution increase in an area of concern, the country’s designation is changed to either a restricted nation or a hostile area.

Why We Pray for the Persecuted

We can grow weary from the suffering in our own lives and the horrors we observe in our fallen world, especially when we consider the ongoing struggles of persecuted Christians. And if unchecked, this weariness can cause us to doubt God and develop the spiritual illness of despair. To overcome despair, we must learn to value and embrace two unlovely things: suffering and shame.

We instinctively avoid suffering. As we maximize our safety and comfort, we are tempted to avoid not only our own suffering but also that of others. Yet suffering and sacrifice are the very pathways to maturity, wellness, and significance. Similarly, nearly all of us say we value humility, yet we avoid experiences that help develop it—shame, reproach, and disgrace.

As Christians, we must make the unnatural decision to embrace suffering and shame. We cannot become like Christ without doing so. Christ Jesus our Lord “*was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief*” (Isaiah 53:3, emphasis added).

We can easily feel overwhelmed by the profound suffering of our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters, who are beaten, imprisoned, or murdered. But this is part of becoming like the “man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief.” As we choose to suffer well for God’s glory and embrace the suffering of the global body of Christ, we become like Christ.

Praying for our persecuted Christian family members is one way to embrace their suffering. And when we embrace their suffering, we enter into fellowship with them.

When John was exiled to the island of Patmos for preaching the word of God and for his testimony about Jesus, he wrote a letter to the seven churches in the province of Asia, saying, “I, John, am *your brother and your partner* in suffering and in God’s Kingdom and in the patient endurance to which Jesus calls us” (Revelation 1:9, emphasis added).

Persecuted Christians are members of our spiritual family in the global body of Christ. As

you read each daily prayer prompt, you will notice that we often refer to the persecuted as our “persecuted Christian family” and our “persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ.” We are not separated into groups of “us” (Christians in the free world) and “them” (Christians in restricted nations and hostile areas); in Christ, we are one united body—one church.

When we pray for the persecuted and read their stories of courage, faithfulness, and obedience, we enter into fellowship with them. In addition to the stories in the daily prayer prompts, *The One Year Pray for the Persecuted Bible* includes six extended stories with color photos of Christians who have been persecuted for their faith. As we allow their stories to inspire us to a deeper commitment to Christ and his Great Commission—no matter the cost and wherever God has placed us—the fellowship becomes mutual.

And such fellowship with our persecuted Christian family members becomes evident when they tell us how our prayers have encouraged them.

Pastor Tashi spent forty-nine days in jail after being accused of accepting payment to spread Christianity in the restricted nation of Bhutan. Christians throughout the world prayed for him while he was in prison. When Tashi learned that Christians were praying for him, he and his wife were greatly encouraged. “We felt somebody was there caring for us and standing behind us,” he said.

And through prayer, we partner with them in proclaiming the gospel.

In Colombia, a hostile area, David and Gloria minister in one of the country’s “red zones”—areas controlled by violent guerrillas and paramilitaries. These groups specifically target Christians because they refuse to support or join the militants, who are funded by narcotics trafficking and other criminal activities. After sharing specific prayer requests for their ministry, Gloria said, “Thank you for going with us to these places. Through your prayers, we go together. We don’t do this alone.”

How We Should Pray for the Persecuted

The persecution of our Christian family members will continue until Christ’s return. And until that time, we should stand with them in prayer. Here are five essential ways to pray for persecuted Christians:

First, pray that they will sense God’s presence. In Hebrews 13:5, God promises that he will never fail us or abandon us. He has promised us his presence. In the Great Commission, Christ promises to be with us *always* as he sends us out as his witnesses, “even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20). For persecuted Christians, God’s presence provides the encouragement and strength that are vital to their witness for Christ on the world’s most dangerous mission fields.

Second, pray they will know that the global body of Christ is praying for them. VOM workers hear firsthand how much persecuted Christians are encouraged when they learn that Christians around the world are praying for them. Our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ need the same assurance that Paul gave Timothy: “Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers” (2 Timothy 1:3).

Third, pray that God will provide them with opportunities to share the gospel. In some of the most restricted nations on earth, where even mentioning Jesus Christ can lead to arrest, Christians need wisdom and help from the Lord in knowing when and how to share the gospel. During one of his imprisonments, the apostle Paul asked the church in Colosse to pray with him for such opportunities (Colossians 4:3).

Fourth, pray that when the Lord provides such opportunities to share the gospel, persecuted

Christians will boldly speak the truth of Christ. After Peter and John were threatened and told not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus, believers prayed to the Lord for “great boldness” in preaching his word (Acts 4:29). Pray that our persecuted Christian family will speak out with courage even in the face of arrest, imprisonment, and possible death.

Finally, pray that they will forgive and love their persecutors. In Matthew 5:44, Jesus gives us this unequivocal directive: “Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!” VOM founders Richard and Sabina Wurmbbrand suffered torture and imprisonment for their Christian witness in Communist Romania; yet while still in prison, they shared the love of Christ with their persecutors. Richard wrote:

I have seen Christians in Communist prisons with fifty pounds of chains on their feet, tortured with red-hot iron pokers, in whose throats spoonfuls of salt had been forced, being kept afterward without water, starving, whipped, suffering from cold—and praying with fervor for the Communists. This is humanly inexplicable! It is the love of Christ, which was poured out in our hearts.¹

An Invitation to Fellowship

Even though you may never travel to meet your persecuted Christian brothers and sisters in the jungles of Colombia, the Central Highlands of Vietnam, or the desert sands of Algeria, you can fellowship with them through prayer. As you study each daily Scripture reading, remember that the Bible—especially the New Testament—was written *by* and *for* persecuted believers. Reading the Bible in this context should spur every believer to follow Christ more faithfully, both individually and corporately.

As we lift up our persecuted brothers and sisters in prayer each day, may the Lord remind us of our own utter and complete dependence on him. The God who sustains our persecuted Christian family members likewise sustains all his children in their time of need. May the examples of courage, boldness, forgiveness, and love that we see among the persecuted inspire us to a deeper commitment to Christ and the Great Commission—no matter the cost!

On behalf of our persecuted Christian family worldwide, thank you for standing with them in prayer every day of the year and fulfilling their number-one request: Pray for us!

The Voice of the Martyrs

vom.org/about

¹ Richard Wurmbbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, 3rd edition (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Book Company, 2013), 63.



The One Year Bible USER'S GUIDE

Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.

PSALM 119:105

The One Year Bible is divided into daily readings designed to guide you through the entire Bible in a year. But the arrangement doesn't take you straight through from Genesis to Revelation. Instead, each day you will find a portion of the Old Testament and the New Testament, plus short readings from Psalms and Proverbs. These four daily readings are grouped on consecutive pages, giving freshness and diversity to each day's reading experience. Many people have tried to read through the entire Bible in a year, but they quickly become frustrated when they get stuck in harder passages. This reading plan has helped millions of readers, including those who tried before but became frustrated, to successfully complete their reading of the entire Bible. And reading through the Bible will ensure that you will spend significant time engaged with God's Word.

Time spent genuinely engaged with God's Word has the potential to change your life. "The word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires" (Hebrews 4:12). The Bible isn't just a book of human wisdom. It comes from God himself, and in it he gives us the wisdom and knowledge needed to live a life of faith. "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Time spent in the Scriptures, in a very real sense, is time spent with God. There is no better place in this world for us to hear from God. The Bible is a special gift, but a gift we often leave on the shelf—unopened and unread. And as we open it and read its pages, we are opening a door to a relationship with the Author. He's waiting there to speak to us, with the help of his ever-present Spirit. He gave us the Scriptures because he wants us to hear from and know him. Approach your reading each day with this knowledge and expectation.

Engaging More Deeply with Scripture

In *The One Year Bible*, you are encouraged to read through the entire Bible in a year, and its structure provides a systematic daily plan for this. Most readers do their daily reading silently, often in a single sitting. However, since many of the readings are fairly long, it is easy to get distracted and to start "reading just to finish." If this is the case for you, you may find it helpful to slow down to engage more fully in the listening process.

Following is a list of concrete practices or tools that should help you engage more deeply

with Scripture. (Since everyone is different, not all of these practices may work for you. And some of the practices work better for longer passages, as opposed to single verses, and vice versa.) Use these tools to help you engage with God's Word more deeply.

Practice 1—Read It Aloud: This practice will slow you down and allow you to focus. Reading aloud takes about twice as long as silent reading. It also allows you to encounter God's Word twice—through both your eyes and ears—leading you to a more nuanced interaction with the text. (This is especially useful as you approach a longer passage.) As you read aloud, you could try to read the text interpretively—add color to your expression to help you more completely take in and express the message. You could even dramatize a scene. And if others are around, don't be afraid to share the experience with them!

Practice 2—Copy It: Take out a pen and paper and copy a verse or passage of particular interest. If you are a visual learner, this should help you focus on the text more intensely. It will also force you to slow down even more and approach it phrase by phrase, helping you savor the text as you would a meal of many courses. If you have some talent with your pen, express the meaning of the text with different kinds of scripts and ink colors. This will help you focus on the meaning in greater detail. Typing the text into your computer and formatting the text creatively could accomplish the same sort of thing. If your rendering turns out really well, frame it or send it to friends to encourage their reflection.

Practice 3—Summarize It: Take a journal or computer and write a summary for each reading in this Bible with just a single sentence. This could be a simple content summary, or perhaps a summary of what God said to you through the passage. Reading with this practice can help you stay focused and also help you create a personal tool for Bible review. As you finish reading a Bible book, summarize the entire book's core message in a sentence or paragraph. Then at the end of the year, try to summarize the message of the whole Bible. From your perspective, what is the Bible's unified message?

Practice 4—Paraphrase It: Take out a pen and paper, or start up your computer, and put some verses into your own words. Try to capture all the important parts of the passage without leaving anything out. This will help you pay attention to the details and to the rich meanings of the words. Drink in the text, digest its meaning, and write it again from the unique perspective God has given you. Don't worry about the word order; focus on the message. You will likely find that this leaves you with nuggets of wisdom to take away and to continue to think about.

Practice 5—Divide It: This practice is somewhat the opposite of summarizing the broad strokes of a passage. To divide a text, choose a particular sentence that is especially meaningful to you, like "The LORD is my shepherd" (Psalm 23:1). Highlight each word of the sentence successively, and read it over and over again. This will allow you to see the verse from varied angles.

THE LORD is my shepherd.

The LORD is my shepherd.

The LORD IS my shepherd.

The LORD is MY shepherd.

The LORD is my SHEPHERD.

As you do this, you will likely see truths in the text that you were blind to before.

Practice 6—Personalize It: Embrace or claim Scripture personally by taking a verse or passage that clearly applies to you and replacing the nouns or pronouns with your own name. This will drive home the truth that God is speaking about you and to you. The verse that

includes the text we just divided in Practice 5 might read, "The LORD is Susan's shepherd. Susan has all that she needs." You might also personalize it this way for a friend, your spouse, or your children.

Practice 7—Pray It: Many passages are helpful for guiding our prayers. They remind us of what is true and what is important to God. We can use these reminders as prayer prompts. Again, take the verse we looked at from Psalm 23. It might inspire a prayer like this: "Lord, you have reminded me that you are my Shepherd and that you can provide all that I need. As one of your sheep, I confess that I often don't follow you very closely. I'm often one of the lost sheep—one of those you need to search for in stormy weather and carry home. I can see that if I followed you more closely, I'd also be much closer to all that you have to offer me. The unmet needs I'm always complaining about would be better met if I just stayed near to my Shepherd. And I suppose sometimes I wander away looking to satisfy my wants rather than my real needs. Dear Shepherd, help me to stay close to your loving care and protection. Forgive my tendency to wander. Amen."

Practice 8—Memorize It: Putting Scripture to memory is the likely result of many of these other practices. For many of us, if we copy or read a verse again and again, we will soon know it by heart. To begin memorizing a text, repeating it is the best place to start. Read or copy a text three times a day for an entire month and then begin to recite it aloud for yourself on a regular basis. Then, if the appropriate opportunity arises, recite it for others. (Remember to learn the reference, too, so you can more easily locate it.) The psalm writer reminds us of why Scripture memorization is so important: "I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11).

Practice 9—Share It: God's Word is good news, whether it comes in a story or parable, an account of one of Jesus' miracles, a psalm of praise, a promise of hope, or a wise proverb. When you've read something helpful, thought provoking, or inspiring, share it. As you do, you'll find that the message becomes more real for you too. If it's a story, retell it to someone in your own words. Try to capture all the details. If it's a short promise or proverb, email it to a friend, post it on an announcement board or refrigerator, carve it into a piece of wood to hang on a wall, bring it up for discussion with friends over coffee, or tweet it for anyone who might be watching. If you've heard from God and it means something to you, take the time to share it.

Practice 10—Live It: It's not just important to read and listen to God's Word. We also need to find ways to put it into practice. (Keeping this in mind as you read will also help you to focus.) We are reminded of this in the book of James: "Don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves" (James 1:22). As you reflect on God's Word, conclude your time by thinking up ways to live it out. What can you put into action today?

Other Ways to Use the One-Year Reading Plan

Though *The One Year Bible* has led millions of readers through the Bible in one year, its arrangement is equally useful for guiding you through the Bible in two years, or even longer. If you feel too rushed or want to spend more time on each day's selections, here are a few other suggestions:

The Split One-Year Plan. Schedule time in both the morning and evening. Read the New Testament and Psalms selections in the morning and the Old Testament and Proverbs selections in the evening.

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

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

The Words of Praise and Wisdom Plan. Read the Psalms and Proverbs selections for each day. This will take you through the Psalms twice and Proverbs once during the year, giving you words of praise and wisdom to live by each day.

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



The One Year Pray for the Persecuted Bible has been prepared especially for Bible readers who wish to read through the entire Bible in one year and to lift up in daily prayer the needs of persecuted Christians all around the world. Millions of readers have enjoyed the convenient daily reading format featuring a passage from the Old Testament, the New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs. In 365 daily readings, you will journey through the entire Bible and read through Psalms twice!

This special edition of *The One Year Bible* includes a daily prayer prompt and short stories from a ministry that serves persecuted Christians around the world. It opens with a clarion call to prayer from The Voice of the Martyrs. We have prepared a user's guide to help you explore a variety of ways to engage with God's Word using *The One Year Pray for the Persecuted Bible*. You can find the user's guide on page A9.

This edition of *The One Year Bible* contains the entire text of the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation. Each revision of the New Living Translation has increased the level of the NLT's precision without sacrificing its easy-to-understand quality. This second-generation text was completed in 2004, with minor changes subsequently introduced in 2007, 2013, and 2015. To see a complete list of the scholars involved in the New Living Translation Bible Translation Committee, please visit Tyndale.com/NLT/scholars.

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

We believe the New Living Translation—which combines the latest biblical scholarship with a clear, dynamic writing style—will communicate God's word powerfully to all who read it. We publish it with the prayer that God will use it to speak his timeless truth to the church and the world in a fresh, new way. May this year and every year be enriched as you enjoy daily portions from God's Word, and may you see God at work as you join the prayer warriors around the world that are true champions of life.



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JANUARY 1

PRAY FOR THE PERSECUTED

WHEN HEROD SLYLY ASKED where to find the new king, he told his visitors he wanted to worship the baby. The wise men seemed willing to share—until God nudged them to keep that dangerous information to themselves. So they defied Herod, quietly slipping away after joyfully honoring the King of kings. • **LORD, GIVE ALL CHRISTIANS** being questioned by authorities the discernment to know when to remain silent and when to boldly share any words you give them to speak. Amen.

GENESIS 1:1–2:25

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.

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.

^{2:1}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.

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. 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.

1:1 Or *In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, . . . Or When God began to create the heavens and the earth, . . .* 1:26a 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*. 2:19 Or *Adam*, and so throughout the chapter. 2:21 Or *took a part of the man's side*.

MATTHEW 1:1–2:12

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

- 2 Abraham was the father of Isaac.
Isaac was the father of Jacob.
Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers.
- 3 Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (whose mother was Tamar).
Perez was the father of Hezron.
Hezron was the father of Ram.*
- 4 Ram was the father of Amminadab.
Amminadab was the father of Nahshon.
Nahshon was the father of Salmon.
- 5 Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab).
Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth).
Obed was the father of Jesse.
- 6 Jesse was the father of King David.
David was the father of Solomon (whose mother was Bathsheba, the widow of Uriah).
- 7 Solomon was the father of Rehoboam.
Rehoboam was the father of Abijah.
Abijah was the father of Asa.*
- 8 Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat.
Jehoshaphat was the father of Jehoram.*
Jehoram was the father* of Uzziah.
- 9 Uzziah was the father of Jotham.
Jotham was the father of Ahaz.
Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah.
- 10 Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh.
Manasseh was the father of Amon.*
Amon was the father of Josiah.
- 11 Josiah was the father of Jehoiachin* and his brothers (born at the time of the exile to Babylon).
- 12 After the Babylonian exile:
Jehoiachin was the father of Shealtiel.
Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel.
- 13 Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud.
Abiud was the father of Eliakim.
Eliakim was the father of Azor.
- 14 Azor was the father of Zadok.
Zadok was the father of Akim.
Akim was the father of Eliud.
- 15 Eliud was the father of Eleazar.

Eleazar was the father of Matthan.
Matthan was the father of Jacob.

- 16 Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary.

Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah.

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

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

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

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

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

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

2:1 Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men* from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, ²"Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose,* and we have come to worship him."

³King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. ⁴He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

PSALM 1:1-6

- ¹ Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers.
- ² But they delight in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night.
- ³ They are like trees planted along the riverbank,

bearing fruit each season.
 Their leaves never wither,
 and they prosper in all they do.

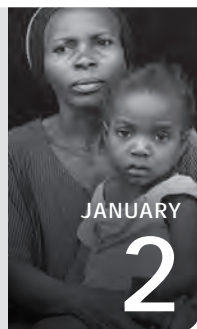
- ⁴ But not the wicked!
 They are like worthless chaff, scattered by the wind.
- ⁵ They will be condemned at the time of judgment.
 Sinners will have no place among the godly.
- ⁶ For the LORD watches over the path of the godly,
 but the path of the wicked leads to destruction.

PROVERBS 1:1-6

These are the proverbs of Solomon, David's son, king of Israel.

- ² Their purpose is to teach people wisdom and discipline,
 to help them understand the insights of the wise.
- ³ Their purpose is to teach people to live disciplined and successful lives,
 to help them do what is right, just, and fair.
- ⁴ These proverbs will give insight to the simple,
 knowledge and discernment to the young.
- ⁵ Let the wise listen to these proverbs and become even wiser.
 Let those with understanding receive guidance
- ⁶ by exploring the meaning in these proverbs and parables,
 the words of the wise and their riddles.

THE KINGS THE PSALMIST SAW plotting against God aren't alone. In nations like Somalia, Syria, and China, leaders today also seek to silence believers through restrictive laws, intimidation, torture, or even death. Those leaders may not realize it, but they're plotting not just against God's people but also against God. • **LORD, GIVE PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS** the grace not only to endure brutal leaders but also to love those who cause their suffering. And may that witness of love soften the hearts of those leaders toward you. Amen.



GENESIS 3:1-4:26

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

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

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, 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?"

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."

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."

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.

^{4:1}Now Adam* had sexual relations with his wife, Eve, and she became pregnant. When she gave birth to Cain, she said, "With the LORD's help, I have produced* a man!" 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, ⁵but 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? ⁷You 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! ¹¹Now you are cursed and banished from the ground, which has swallowed your brother's blood. ¹²No 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! ¹⁴You 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. ¹⁶So Cain left the LORD's presence and settled in the land of Nod,* east of Eden.

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. ¹⁸Enoch 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. ²⁰Adah gave birth to Jabal, who was the first of those who raise livestock and live in tents. ²¹His brother's name was Jubal, the first of all who play the harp and flute. ²²Lamech's other wife, Zillah, gave birth to a son named Tubalcain. He became an expert in forging tools of bronze and iron. Tubalcain had a sister named Naamah. ²³One 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!"

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

3:8 Or Adam, and so throughout the chapter. 3:15 Or bruise; also in 3:15b. 3:16 Or And though you will have desire for your husband, / he will rule over you. 3:20 Eve sounds like a Hebrew term that means "to give life." 3:22 Or the man; Hebrew reads ha-adam. 4:1a Or the man; also in 4:25. 4:1b Or I have acquired. Cain sounds like a Hebrew term that can mean "produce" or "acquire." 4:8 As in Samaritan Pentateuch, Greek and Syriac versions, and Latin Vulgate; Masoretic Text lacks

"Let's go out into the fields." 4:13 Or My sin. 4:16 Nod means "wandering." 4:18 Or the ancestor of, and so throughout the verse. 4:25 Seth probably means "granted"; the name may also mean "appointed."

MATTHEW 2:13–3:6

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴John's clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild

honey. ⁵People from Jerusalem and from all of Judea and all over the Jordan Valley went out to see and hear John. ⁶And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.

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

PSALM 2:1-12

- 1 Why are the nations so angry?
Why do they waste their time with futile plans?
- 2 The kings of the earth prepare for battle;
the rulers plot together
against the LORD
and against his anointed one.
- 3 "Let us break their chains," they cry,
"and free ourselves from slavery to God."
- 4 But the one who rules in heaven laughs.
The Lord scoffs at them.
- 5 Then in anger he rebukes them,
terrifying them with his fierce fury.
- 6 For the Lord declares, "I have placed my
chosen king on the throne
in Jerusalem,* on my holy mountain."
- 7 The king proclaims the LORD's decree:
"The LORD said to me, 'You are my son.*
Today I have become your Father.*"
- 8 Only ask, and I will give you the nations as
your inheritance,

the whole earth as your possession.

- 9 You will break* them with an iron rod
and smash them like clay pots."
- 10 Now then, you kings, act wisely!
Be warned, you rulers of the earth!
- 11 Serve the LORD with reverent fear,
and rejoice with trembling.
- 12 Submit to God's royal son,* or he will
become angry,
and you will be destroyed in the midst
of all your activities—
for his anger flares up in an instant.
But what joy for all who take refuge
in him!

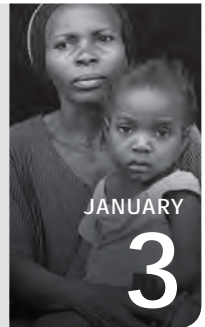
2:6 Hebrew *on Zion*. 2:7a Or *Son*; also in 2:12. 2:7b Or *Today I reveal you as my son*. 2:9 Greek version reads *rule*. Compare Rev 2:27. 2:12 The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

PROVERBS 1:7-9

- 7 Fear of the LORD is the foundation of true
knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and discipline.
- 8 My child,* listen when your father
corrects you.
Don't neglect your mother's instruction.
- 9 What you learn from them will crown you
with grace
and be a chain of honor around your
neck.

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

BUILDING A LARGE BOAT wasn't on Noah's to-do list. But once God handed Noah blueprints, boat building became Noah's top priority. Noah's response to God was one of faithful obedience. He listened to what God said and then did what God asked of him. • **LORD, I PRAY** for my brothers and sisters who suffer for being your witnesses. In the midst of persecution, may they hear your voice and respond with obedience, doing what you call them to do even if obedience comes at a high cost. Amen.



GENESIS 5:1–7:24

This is the written account of the descendants of Adam. When God created human beings,* he made them to be like himself. 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. ^{6:1}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.

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 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.

^{7:1}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.

5:1 Or man; Hebrew reads *adam*; similarly in 5:2. 5:6 Or the ancestor of; also in 5:9, 12, 15, 18, 21, 25. 5:7 Or the birth of this ancestor of; also in 5:10, 13, 16, 19, 22, 26. 5:29 Noah sounds like a Hebrew term that can mean “relief” or “comfort.” 6:2 Hebrew daughters of men; also in 6:4. 6:3 Greek version reads will

not remain in. 6:14a Traditionally rendered an ark. 6:14b Or gopher wood. 6:15 Hebrew 300 cubits [138 meters] long, 50 cubits [23 meters] wide, and 30 cubits [13.8 meters] high. 6:16 Hebrew an opening of 1 cubit [46 centimeters]. 7:2 Hebrew of each clean animal; similarly in 7:8. 7:20 Hebrew 15 cubits [6.9 meters].

MATTHEW 3:7–4:11

But when he [John the Baptist] saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize,* he denounced them. “You brood of snakes!” he exclaimed. “Who warned you to flee the coming wrath? ⁸Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. ⁹Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. ¹⁰Even now the ax of God’s judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.

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

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

¹⁵But Jesus said, “It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires.*” So John agreed to baptize him.

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

^{4:1}Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. ²For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry.

³During that time the devil* came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread.”

⁴But Jesus told him, “No! The Scriptures say,

‘People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’**”

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

'He will order his angels to protect you. And they will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.'**"

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

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

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

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

¹¹Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.

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

PSALM 3:1-8

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

¹ O LORD, I have so many enemies;
so many are against me.
² So many are saying,
"God will never rescue him!" *Interlude**
³ But you, O LORD, are a shield around me;
you are my glory, the one who holds
my head high.
⁴ I cried out to the LORD,
and he answered me from his
holy mountain. *Interlude*

⁵ I lay down and slept,
yet I woke up in safety,
for the LORD was watching over me.
⁶ I am not afraid of ten thousand enemies
who surround me on every side.
⁷ Arise, O LORD!
Rescue me, my God!
Slap all my enemies in the face!
Shatter the teeth of the wicked!
⁸ Victory comes from you, O LORD.
May you bless your people. *Interlude*

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

PROVERBS 1:10-19

¹⁰ My child, if sinners entice you,
turn your back on them!
¹¹ They may say, "Come and join us.
Let's hide and kill someone!
Just for fun, let's ambush the innocent!"
¹² Let's swallow them alive, like the grave*;
let's swallow them whole, like those
who go down to the pit of death.
¹³ Think of the great things we'll get!
We'll fill our houses with all the stuff
we take.
¹⁴ Come, throw in your lot with us;
we'll all share the loot."
¹⁵ My child, don't go along with them!
Stay far away from their paths.
¹⁶ They rush to commit evil deeds.
They hurry to commit murder.
¹⁷ If a bird sees a trap being set,
it knows to stay away.
¹⁸ But these people set an ambush for
themselves;
they are trying to get themselves killed.
¹⁹ Such is the fate of all who are greedy for
money;
it robs them of life.

1:12 Hebrew like *Sheol*.



FEBRUARY 1

FRONT-LINE WORKERS ADVANCING THE KINGDOM—AT ANY COST

FOR MANY CHRISTIANS on the world's most difficult and dangerous mission fields, a prayer for rescue is never far from their lips. They daily face arrest, torture, prison, or even death. Like Moses, they stand boldly and trust God to rescue them. Rescue may come in the moment or may be eternal rescue following a martyr's death. • LORD, I PRAY for these courageous front-line workers serving in dangerous places. You promise you are always with us; help them sense your presence. I thank you for their example of bold faithfulness. Build in me the same spirit of brave obedience. Amen.

EXODUS 13:17–15:18

When Pharaoh finally let the people go, God did not lead them along the main road that runs through Philistine territory, even though that was the shortest route to the Promised Land. God said, "If the people are faced with a battle, they might change their minds and return to Egypt."¹⁸ So God led them in a round-about way through the wilderness toward the Red Sea.* Thus the Israelites left Egypt like an army ready for battle.*

¹⁹Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear to do this. He said, "God will certainly come to help you. When he does, you must take my bones with you from this place."

²⁰The Israelites left Succoth and camped at Etham on the edge of the wilderness.²¹ The LORD went ahead of them. He guided them during the day with a pillar of cloud, and he provided light at night with a pillar of fire. This allowed them to travel by day or by night.²² And the LORD did not remove the pillar of cloud or pillar of fire from its place in front of the people.

^{14:1} Then the LORD gave these instructions to Moses:² "Order the Israelites to turn back and camp by Pi-hahiroth between Migdol and the sea. Camp there along the shore, across from Baal-zephon.³ Then Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are confused. They are trapped in

the wilderness!'⁴ And once again I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will chase after you.* I have planned this in order to display my glory through Pharaoh and his whole army. After this the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD!" So the Israelites camped there as they were told.

⁵ When word reached the king of Egypt that the Israelites had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds. "What have we done, letting all those Israelite slaves get away?" they asked.⁶ So Pharaoh harnessed his chariot and called up his troops.⁷ He took with him 600 of Egypt's best chariots, along with the rest of the chariots of Egypt, each with its commander.⁸ The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, so he chased after the people of Israel, who had left with fists raised in defiance.⁹ The Egyptians chased after them with all the forces in Pharaoh's army—all his horses and chariots, his charioteers, and his troops. The Egyptians caught up with the people of Israel as they were camped beside the shore near Pi-hahiroth, across from Baal-zephon.

¹⁰ As Pharaoh approached, the people of Israel looked up and panicked when they saw the Egyptians overtaking them. They cried out to the LORD,¹¹ and they said to Moses, "Why did you bring us out here to die in the wilderness? Weren't there enough graves for us in Egypt? What have you done to us? Why

did you make us leave Egypt? ¹²Didn't we tell you this would happen while we were still in Egypt? We said, 'Leave us alone! Let us be slaves to the Egyptians. It's better to be a slave in Egypt than a corpse in the wilderness!'"

¹³But Moses told the people, "Don't be afraid. Just stand still and watch the LORD rescue you today. The Egyptians you see today will never be seen again. ¹⁴The LORD himself will fight for you. Just stay calm."

¹⁵Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the people to get moving! ¹⁶Pick up your staff and raise your hand over the sea. Divide the water so the Israelites can walk through the middle of the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they will charge in after the Israelites. My great glory will be displayed through Pharaoh and his troops, his chariots, and his charioteers. ¹⁸When my glory is displayed through them, all Egypt will see my glory and know that I am the LORD!"

¹⁹Then the angel of God, who had been leading the people of Israel, moved to the rear of the camp. The pillar of cloud also moved from the front and stood behind them. ²⁰The cloud settled between the Egyptian and Israelite camps. As darkness fell, the cloud turned to fire, lighting up the night. But the Egyptians and Israelites did not approach each other all night.

²¹Then Moses raised his hand over the sea, and the LORD opened up a path through the water with a strong east wind. The wind blew all that night, turning the seabed into dry land. ²²So the people of Israel walked through the middle of the sea on dry ground, with walls of water on each side!

²³Then the Egyptians—all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and charioteers—chased them into the middle of the sea. ²⁴But just before dawn the LORD looked down on the Egyptian army from the pillar of fire and cloud, and he threw their forces into total confusion. ²⁵He twisted* their chariot wheels, making their chariots difficult to drive. "Let's get out of here—away from these Israelites!" the Egyptians shouted. "The LORD is fighting for them against Egypt!"

²⁶When all the Israelites had reached the other side, the LORD said to Moses, "Raise your hand over the sea again. Then the waters will rush back and cover the Egyptians and their chariots and charioteers." ²⁷So as the sun began to rise, Moses raised his hand over the sea, and the water rushed back into its usual place. The Egyptians tried to escape, but the LORD swept them into the sea. ²⁸Then the

waters returned and covered all the chariots and charioteers—the entire army of Pharaoh. Of all the Egyptians who had chased the Israelites into the sea, not a single one survived.

²⁹But the people of Israel had walked through the middle of the sea on dry ground, as the water stood up like a wall on both sides. ³⁰That is how the LORD rescued Israel from the hand of the Egyptians that day. And the Israelites saw the bodies of the Egyptians washed up on the seashore. ³¹When the people of Israel saw the mighty power that the LORD had unleashed against the Egyptians, they were filled with awe before him. They put their faith in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

^{15:1}Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD:

"I will sing to the LORD,
for he has triumphed gloriously;
he has hurled both horse and rider
into the sea.

²The LORD is my strength and my song;
he has given me victory.
This is my God, and I will praise him—
my father's God, and I will exalt him!

³The LORD is a warrior;
Yahweh* is his name!

⁴Pharaoh's chariots and army
he has hurled into the sea.
The finest of Pharaoh's officers
are drowned in the Red Sea.*

⁵The deep waters gushed over them;
they sank to the bottom like a stone.

⁶"Your right hand, O LORD,
is glorious in power.
Your right hand, O LORD,
smashes the enemy.

⁷In the greatness of your majesty,
you overthrow those who rise against
you.

You unleash your blazing fury;
it consumes them like straw.

⁸At the blast of your breath,
the waters piled up!
The surging waters stood straight like
a wall;
in the heart of the sea the deep waters
became hard.

⁹"The enemy boasted, 'I will chase them
and catch up with them.
I will plunder them
and consume them.
I will flash my sword;
my powerful hand will destroy them.'

- ¹⁰ But you blew with your breath,
and the sea covered them.
They sank like lead
in the mighty waters.
- ¹¹ "Who is like you among the gods,
O LORD—
glorious in holiness,
awesome in splendor,
performing great wonders?"
- ¹² You raised your right hand,
and the earth swallowed our enemies.
- ¹³ "With your unfailing love you lead
the people you have redeemed.
In your might, you guide them
to your sacred home.
- ¹⁴ The peoples hear and tremble;
anguish grips those who live in Philistia.
- ¹⁵ The leaders of Edom are terrified;
the nobles of Moab tremble.
All who live in Canaan melt away;
- ¹⁶ terror and dread fall upon them.
The power of your arm
makes them lifeless as stone
until your people pass by, O LORD,
until the people you purchased pass by.
- ¹⁷ You will bring them in and plant them on
your own mountain—
the place, O LORD, reserved for your own
dwelling,
the sanctuary, O Lord, that your hands
have established.
- ¹⁸ The LORD will reign forever and ever!"

13:18a Hebrew *sea of reeds*. 13:18b Greek version reads *left Egypt in the fifth generation*. 14:4 Hebrew *after them*. 14:25 As in Greek version, Samaritan Pentateuch, and Syriac version; Hebrew reads *He removed*. 15:3 *Yahweh* is a transliteration of the proper name *YHWH* that is sometimes rendered "Jehovah"; in this translation it is usually rendered "the LORD" (note the use of small capitals). 15:4 Hebrew *sea of reeds*; also in 15:22.

MATTHEW 21:23-46

When Jesus returned to the Temple and began teaching, the leading priests and elders came up to him. They demanded, "By what authority are you doing all these things? Who gave you the right?"

²⁴"I'll tell you by what authority I do these things if you answer one question," Jesus replied. ²⁵"Did John's authority to baptize come from heaven, or was it merely human?"

They talked it over among themselves. "If we say it was from heaven, he will ask us why we didn't believe John. ²⁶But if we say it was merely human, we'll be mobbed because the people believe John was a prophet." ²⁷So they finally replied, "We don't know."

And Jesus responded, "Then I won't tell you by what authority I do these things.

²⁸"But what do you think about this? A man

with two sons told the older boy, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' ²⁹The son answered, 'No, I won't go,' but later he changed his mind and went anyway. ³⁰Then the father told the other son, 'You go,' and he said, 'Yes, sir, I will.' But he didn't go.

³¹"Which of the two obeyed his father?"

They replied, "The first."^{*}

Then Jesus explained his meaning: "I tell you the truth, corrupt tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the Kingdom of God before you do. ³²For John the Baptist came and showed you the right way to live, but you didn't believe him, while tax collectors and prostitutes did. And even when you saw this happening, you refused to believe him and repent of your sins.

³³"Now listen to another story. A certain landowner planted a vineyard, built a wall around it, dug a pit for pressing out the grape juice, and built a lookout tower. Then he leased the vineyard to tenant farmers and moved to another country. ³⁴At the time of the grape harvest, he sent his servants to collect his share of the crop. ³⁵But the farmers grabbed his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. ³⁶So the landowner sent a larger group of his servants to collect for him, but the results were the same.

³⁷"Finally, the owner sent his son, thinking, 'Surely they will respect my son.'

³⁸"But when the tenant farmers saw his son coming, they said to one another, 'Here comes the heir to this estate. Come on, let's kill him and get the estate for ourselves!' ³⁹So they grabbed him, dragged him out of the vineyard, and murdered him.

⁴⁰"When the owner of the vineyard returns," Jesus asked, "what do you think he will do to those farmers?"

⁴¹The religious leaders replied, "He will put the wicked men to a horrible death and lease the vineyard to others who will give him his share of the crop after each harvest."

⁴²Then Jesus asked them, "Didn't you ever read this in the Scriptures?"

"The stone that the builders rejected
has now become the cornerstone.
This is the LORD's doing,
and it is wonderful to see."^{*}

⁴³I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation that will produce the proper fruit. ⁴⁴Anyone who stumbles over that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone it falls on."^{*}

⁴⁵When the leading priests and Pharisees heard this parable, they realized he was telling

the story against them—they were the wicked farmers. ⁴⁶They wanted to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowds, who considered Jesus to be a prophet.

21:29-31 Other manuscripts read "The second." In still other manuscripts the first son says "Yes" but does nothing, the second son says "No" but then repents and goes, and the answer to Jesus' question is that the second son obeyed his father.
21:42 Ps 118:22-23. 21:44 This verse is not included in some early manuscripts. Compare Luke 20:18.

PSALM 26:1-12

A psalm of David.

- ¹ Declare me innocent, O LORD,
for I have acted with integrity;
I have trusted in the LORD without
wavering.
- ² Put me on trial, LORD, and
cross-examine me.
Test my motives and my heart.
- ³ For I am always aware of your unfailing
love,
and I have lived according to your truth.
- ⁴ I do not spend time with liars
or go along with hypocrites.
- ⁵ I hate the gatherings of those who do evil,
and I refuse to join in with the wicked.
- ⁶ I wash my hands to declare my innocence.

- I come to your altar, O LORD,
⁷ singing a song of thanksgiving
and telling of all your wonders.
- ⁸ I love your sanctuary, LORD,
the place where your glorious presence
dwells.
- ⁹ Don't let me suffer the fate of sinners.
Don't condemn me along with
murderers.
- ¹⁰ Their hands are dirty with evil schemes,
and they constantly take bribes.
- ¹¹ But I am not like that; I live with integrity.
So redeem me and show me mercy.
- ¹² Now I stand on solid ground,
and I will publicly praise the LORD.

PROVERBS 6:16-19

- ¹⁶ There are six things the LORD hates—
no, seven things he detests:
- ¹⁷ haughty eyes,
a lying tongue,
hands that kill the innocent,
- ¹⁸ a heart that plots evil,
feet that race to do wrong,
- ¹⁹ a false witness who pours out lies,
a person who sows discord in a family.

BELIEVERS IN HOSTILE AREAS and restricted nations are often among the poorest of the poor. Because of their witness, they're often not included in food distributions and are unable to find jobs to sustain their families. They may be driven from their homes and their belongings seized or destroyed. • **LORD, YOU PROVIDED** manna and quail to your people in the wilderness. My persecuted brothers and sisters need your help today. Give them what they require. Thank you for how you will respond to their needs. Amen.



EXODUS 15:19–17:7

When Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and charioteers rushed into the sea, the LORD brought the water crashing down on them. But the people of Israel had walked through the middle of the sea on dry ground!

²⁰Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine and led all the women as they played their tambourines and danced.

²¹And Miriam sang this song:

"Sing to the LORD,
for he has triumphed gloriously;
he has hurled both horse and rider
into the sea."

²²Then Moses led the people of Israel away from the Red Sea, and they moved out into the

desert of Shur. They traveled in this desert for three days without finding any water. ²³When they came to the oasis of Marah, the water was too bitter to drink. So they called the place Marah (which means "bitter").

²⁴Then the people complained and turned against Moses. "What are we going to drink?" they demanded. ²⁵So Moses cried out to the LORD for help, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood. Moses threw it into the water, and this made the water good to drink.

It was there at Marah that the LORD set before them the following decree as a standard to test their faithfulness to him. ²⁶He said, "If you will listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his sight, obeying his commands and keeping all

his decrees, then I will not make you suffer any of the diseases I sent on the Egyptians; for I am the LORD who heals you."

²⁷After leaving Marah, the Israelites traveled on to the oasis of Elim, where they found twelve springs and seventy palm trees. They camped there beside the water.

^{16:1}Then the whole community of Israel set out from Elim and journeyed into the wilderness of Sin,* between Elim and Mount Sinai. They arrived there on the fifteenth day of the second month, one month after leaving the land of Egypt.* ²There, too, the whole community of Israel complained about Moses and Aaron.

³"If only the LORD had killed us back in Egypt," they moaned. "There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted. But now you have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death."

⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, "Look, I'm going to rain down food from heaven for you. Each day the people can go out and pick up as much food as they need for that day. I will test them in this to see whether or not they will follow my instructions. ⁵On the sixth day they will gather food, and when they prepare it, there will be twice as much as usual."

⁶So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, "By evening you will realize it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt. ⁷In the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaints, which are against him, not against us. What have we done that you should complain about us?" ⁸Then Moses added, "The LORD will give you meat to eat in the evening and bread to satisfy you in the morning, for he has heard all your complaints against him. What have we done? Yes, your complaints are against the LORD, not against us."

⁹Then Moses said to Aaron, "Announce this to the entire community of Israel: 'Present yourselves before the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'" ¹⁰And as Aaron spoke to the whole community of Israel, they looked out toward the wilderness. There they could see the awesome glory of the LORD in the cloud.

¹¹Then the LORD said to Moses, ¹²"I have heard the Israelites' complaints. Now tell them, 'In the evening you will have meat to eat, and in the morning you will have all the bread you want. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.'"

¹³That evening vast numbers of quail flew in and covered the camp. And the next morning the area around the camp was wet with dew.

¹⁴When the dew evaporated, a flaky substance

as fine as frost blanketed the ground. ¹⁵The Israelites were puzzled when they saw it. "What is it?" they asked each other. They had no idea what it was.

And Moses told them, "It is the food the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶These are the LORD's instructions: Each household should gather as much as it needs. Pick up two quarts* for each person in your tent."

¹⁷So the people of Israel did as they were told. Some gathered a lot, some only a little. ¹⁸But when they measured it out,* everyone had just enough. Those who gathered a lot had nothing left over, and those who gathered only a little had enough. Each family had just what it needed.

¹⁹Then Moses told them, "Do not keep any of it until morning." ²⁰But some of them didn't listen and kept some of it until morning. But by then it was full of maggots and had a terrible smell. Moses was very angry with them.

²¹After this the people gathered the food morning by morning, each family according to its need. And as the sun became hot, the flakes they had not picked up melted and disappeared. ²²On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much as usual—four quarts* for each person instead of two. Then all the leaders of the community came and asked Moses for an explanation. ²³He told them, "This is what the LORD commanded: Tomorrow will be a day of complete rest, a holy Sabbath day set apart for the LORD. So bake or boil as much as you want today, and set aside what is left for tomorrow."

²⁴So they put some aside until morning, just as Moses had commanded. And in the morning the leftover food was wholesome and good, without maggots or odor. ²⁵Moses said, "Eat this food today, for today is a Sabbath day dedicated to the LORD. There will be no food on the ground today. ²⁶You may gather the food for six days, but the seventh day is the Sabbath. There will be no food on the ground that day."

²⁷Some of the people went out anyway on the seventh day, but they found no food. ²⁸The LORD asked Moses, "How long will these people refuse to obey my commands and instructions? ²⁹They must realize that the Sabbath is the LORD's gift to you. That is why he gives you a two-day supply on the sixth day, so there will be enough for two days. On the Sabbath day you must each stay in your place. Do not go out to pick up food on the seventh day." ³⁰So the people did not gather any food on the seventh day.

³¹The Israelites called the food manna.* It was white like coriander seed, and it tasted like honey wafers.

³²Then Moses said, "This is what the LORD has commanded: Fill a two-quart container with manna to preserve it for your descendants. Then later generations will be able to see the food I gave you in the wilderness when I set you free from Egypt."

³³Moses said to Aaron, "Get a jar and fill it with two quarts of manna. Then put it in a sacred place before the LORD to preserve it for all future generations." ³⁴Aaron did just as the LORD had commanded Moses. He eventually placed it in the Ark of the Covenant—in front of the stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant.* ³⁵So the people of Israel ate manna for forty years until they arrived at the land where they would settle. They ate manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.

³⁶The container used to measure the manna was an omer, which was one-tenth of an ephah; it held about two quarts.*

^{17:1}At the LORD's command, the whole community of Israel left the wilderness of Sin* and moved from place to place. Eventually they camped at Rephidim, but there was no water there for the people to drink. ²So once more the people complained against Moses. "Give us water to drink!" they demanded.

"Quiet!" Moses replied. "Why are you complaining against me? And why are you testing the LORD?"

³But tormented by thirst, they continued to argue with Moses. "Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Are you trying to kill us, our children, and our livestock with thirst?"

⁴Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What should I do with these people? They are ready to stone me!"

⁵The LORD said to Moses, "Walk out in front of the people. Take your staff, the one you used when you struck the water of the Nile, and call some of the elders of Israel to join you. ⁶I will stand before you on the rock at Mount Sinai.* Strike the rock, and water will come gushing out. Then the people will be able to drink." So Moses struck the rock as he was told, and water gushed out as the elders looked on.

⁷Moses named the place Massah (which means "test") and Meribah (which means "arguing") because the people of Israel argued with Moses and tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD here with us or not?"

16:1a The geographical name *Sin* is related to *Sinai* and should not be confused with the English word *sin*. 16:1b The Exodus had occurred on the fifteenth day of the first month (see Num 33:3). 16:16 Hebrew *1 omer* [2.2 liters]; also in 16:32, 33. 16:18 Hebrew *measured it with an omer*. 16:22 Hebrew *2 omers* [4.4 liters]. 16:31 *Manna* means "What is it?" See 16:15. 16:34 Hebrew *He placed it in front of the Testimony*; see

note on 25:16. 16:36 Hebrew *An omer is one-tenth of an ephah*. 17:1 The geographical name *Sin* is related to *Sinai* and should not be confused with the English word *sin*. 17:6 Hebrew *Horeb*, another name for *Sinai*.

MATTHEW 22:1-33

Jesus also told them other parables. He said, ²"The Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a king who prepared a great wedding feast for his son. ³When the banquet was ready, he sent his servants to notify those who were invited. But they all refused to come!

⁴"So he sent other servants to tell them, 'The feast has been prepared. The bulls and fattened cattle have been killed, and everything is ready. Come to the banquet!' ⁵But the guests he had invited ignored them and went their own way, one to his farm, another to his business. ⁶Others seized his messengers and insulted them and killed them.

⁷"The king was furious, and he sent out his army to destroy the murderers and burn their town. ⁸And he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, and the guests I invited aren't worthy of the honor. ⁹Now go out to the street corners and invite everyone you see.' ¹⁰So the servants brought in everyone they could find, good and bad alike, and the banquet hall was filled with guests.

¹¹"But when the king came in to meet the guests, he noticed a man who wasn't wearing the proper clothes for a wedding. ¹²'Friend,' he asked, 'how is it that you are here without wedding clothes?' But the man had no reply. ¹³Then the king said to his aides, 'Bind his hands and feet and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

¹⁴"For many are called, but few are chosen."

¹⁵Then the Pharisees met together to plot how to trap Jesus into saying something for which he could be arrested. ¹⁶They sent some of their disciples, along with the supporters of Herod, to meet with him. "Teacher," they said, "we know how honest you are. You teach the way of God truthfully. You are impartial and don't play favorites. ¹⁷Now tell us what you think about this: Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

¹⁸But Jesus knew their evil motives. "You hypocrites!" he said. "Why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹Here, show me the coin used for the tax." When they handed him a Roman coin,* ²⁰he asked, "Whose picture and title are stamped on it?"

²¹"Caesar's," they replied.

"Well, then," he said, "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God."

²²His reply amazed them, and they went away.

²³That same day Jesus was approached by some Sadducees—religious leaders who say there is no resurrection from the dead. They posed this question: ²⁴“Teacher, Moses said, ‘If a man dies without children, his brother should marry the widow and have a child who will carry on the brother’s name.’” ²⁵Well, suppose there were seven brothers. The oldest one married and then died without children, so his brother married the widow. ²⁶But the second brother also died, and the third brother married her. This continued with all seven of them. ²⁷Last of all, the woman also died. ²⁸So tell us, whose wife will she be in the resurrection? For all seven were married to her.”

²⁹Jesus replied, “Your mistake is that you don’t know the Scriptures, and you don’t know the power of God. ³⁰For when the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage. In this respect they will be like the angels in heaven.

³¹“But now, as to whether there will be a resurrection of the dead—haven’t you ever read about this in the Scriptures? Long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died, God said,* ³²‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’” So he is the God of the living, not the dead.”

³³When the crowds heard him, they were astounded at his teaching.

22:19 Greek a denarius. 22:24 Deut 25:5-6. 22:31 Greek read about this? God said. 22:32 Exod 3:6.

PSALM 27:1-6

A psalm of David.

¹The LORD is my light and my salvation—
so why should I be afraid?

The LORD is my fortress, protecting me
from danger,
so why should I tremble?

²When evil people come to devour me,
when my enemies and foes attack me,
they will stumble and fall.

³Though a mighty army surrounds me,
my heart will not be afraid.
Even if I am attacked,
I will remain confident.

⁴The one thing I ask of the LORD—
the thing I seek most—
is to live in the house of the LORD all the
days of my life,
delighting in the LORD’s perfections
and meditating in his Temple.

⁵For he will conceal me there when
troubles come;
he will hide me in his sanctuary.
He will place me out of reach on a high
rock.

⁶Then I will hold my head high
above my enemies who surround me.
At his sanctuary I will offer sacrifices with
shouts of joy,
singing and praising the LORD with
music.

PROVERBS 6:20-26

²⁰ My son, obey your father’s commands,
and don’t neglect your mother’s
instruction.

²¹ Keep their words always in your heart.
Tie them around your neck.

²² When you walk, their counsel will lead
you.

When you sleep, they will protect you.
When you wake up, they will advise you.

²³ For their command is a lamp
and their instruction a light;
their corrective discipline
is the way to life.

²⁴ It will keep you from the immoral woman,
from the smooth tongue of a
promiscuous woman.

²⁵ Don’t lust for her beauty.
Don’t let her coy glances seduce you.

²⁶ For a prostitute will bring you to poverty,*
but sleeping with another man’s wife
will cost you your life.

6:26 Hebrew to a loaf of bread.



MARCH 1

REMEMBERING THOSE IN PRISON

LIKE MANY MUSLIMS TODAY, the man approaching Jesus wasn't sure he'd done enough. He believed following the rules would please God. Plus *lots* of good works. But reciting a profession of faith, performing ritual prayers, giving alms, fasting during Ramadan, and even a pilgrimage to Mecca can't earn a devout Muslim a spot in heaven. Christians receive their heavenly reward only by God's free gift of grace through his Son, Jesus Christ. • **LORD, FREE FOLLOWERS** of Islam from religious ritual that doesn't lead to you. May they experience your grace and forgiveness, then joyfully become part of my global church family. Amen.

LEVITICUS 24:1–25:46

The LORD said to Moses, ²"Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to keep the lamps burning continually. ³This is the lampstand that stands in the Tabernacle, in front of the inner curtain that shields the Ark of the Covenant.* Aaron must keep the lamps burning in the LORD's presence all night. This is a permanent law for you, and it must be observed from generation to generation. ⁴Aaron and the priests must tend the lamps on the pure gold lampstand continually in the LORD's presence.

⁵"You must bake twelve flat loaves of bread from choice flour, using four quarts* of flour for each loaf. ⁶Place the bread before the LORD on the pure gold table, and arrange the loaves in two stacks, with six loaves in each stack. ⁷Put some pure frankincense near each stack to serve as a representative offering, a special gift presented to the LORD. ⁸Every Sabbath day this bread must be laid out before the LORD as a gift from the Israelites; it is an ongoing expression of the eternal covenant. ⁹The loaves of bread will belong to Aaron and his descendants, who must eat them in a sacred place, for they are most holy. It is the permanent right of the priests to claim this portion of the special gifts presented to the LORD."

¹⁰One day a man who had an Israelite mother and an Egyptian father came out of his tent and got into a fight with one of the

Israelite men. ¹¹During the fight, this son of an Israelite woman blasphemed the Name of the LORD* with a curse. So the man was brought to Moses for judgment. His mother was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri of the tribe of Dan. ¹²They kept the man in custody until the LORD's will in the matter should become clear to them.

¹³Then the LORD said to Moses, ¹⁴"Take the blasphemer outside the camp, and tell all those who heard the curse to lay their hands on his head. Then let the entire community stone him to death. ¹⁵Say to the people of Israel: Those who curse their God will be punished for their sin. ¹⁶Anyone who blasphemes the Name of the LORD must be stoned to death by the whole community of Israel. Any native-born Israelite or foreigner among you who blasphemes the Name of the LORD must be put to death.

¹⁷"Anyone who takes another person's life must be put to death.

¹⁸"Anyone who kills another person's animal must pay for it in full—a live animal for the animal that was killed.

¹⁹"Anyone who injures another person must be dealt with according to the injury inflicted—²⁰a fracture for a fracture, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Whatever anyone does to injure another person must be paid back in kind.

²¹"Whoever kills an animal must pay for it in full, but whoever kills another person must be put to death.

²²"This same standard applies both to native-born Israelites and to the foreigners living among you. I am the LORD your God."

²³After Moses gave all these instructions to the Israelites, they took the blasphemer outside the camp and stoned him to death. The Israelites did just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

^{25:1}While Moses was on Mount Sinai, the LORD said to him, ²"Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. When you have entered the land I am giving you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath rest before the LORD every seventh year. ³For six years you may plant your fields and prune your vineyards and harvest your crops, ⁴but during the seventh year the land must have a Sabbath year of complete rest. It is the LORD's Sabbath. Do not plant your fields or prune your vineyards during that year. ⁵And don't store away the crops that grow on their own or gather the grapes from your unpruned vines. The land must have a year of complete rest. ⁶But you may eat whatever the land produces on its own during its Sabbath. This applies to you, your male and female servants, your hired workers, and the temporary residents who live with you. ⁷Your livestock and the wild animals in your land will also be allowed to eat what the land produces.

⁸"In addition, you must count off seven Sabbath years, seven sets of seven years, adding up to forty-nine years in all. ⁹Then on the Day of Atonement in the fiftieth year,* blow the ram's horn loud and long throughout the land. ¹⁰Set this year apart as holy, a time to proclaim freedom throughout the land for all who live there. It will be a jubilee year for you, when each of you may return to the land that belonged to your ancestors and return to your own clan. ¹¹This fiftieth year will be a jubilee for you. During that year you must not plant your fields or store away any of the crops that grow on their own, and don't gather the grapes from your unpruned vines. ¹²It will be a jubilee year for you, and you must keep it holy. But you may eat whatever the land produces on its own. ¹³In the Year of Jubilee each of you may return to the land that belonged to your ancestors.

¹⁴"When you make an agreement with your neighbor to buy or sell property, you must not take advantage of each other. ¹⁵When you buy land from your neighbor, the price you pay must be based on the number of years since the last jubilee. The seller must set the price by taking into account the number of years

remaining until the next Year of Jubilee. ¹⁶The more years until the next jubilee, the higher the price; the fewer years, the lower the price. After all, the person selling the land is actually selling you a certain number of harvests. ¹⁷Show your fear of God by not taking advantage of each other. I am the LORD your God.

¹⁸"If you want to live securely in the land, follow my decrees and obey my regulations. ¹⁹Then the land will yield large crops, and you will eat your fill and live securely in it. ²⁰But you might ask, 'What will we eat during the seventh year, since we are not allowed to plant or harvest crops that year?' ²¹Be assured that I will send my blessing for you in the sixth year, so the land will produce a crop large enough for three years. ²²When you plant your fields in the eighth year, you will still be eating from the large crop of the sixth year. In fact, you will still be eating from that large crop when the new crop is harvested in the ninth year.

²³"The land must never be sold on a permanent basis, for the land belongs to me. You are only foreigners and tenant farmers working for me.

²⁴"With every purchase of land you must grant the seller the right to buy it back. ²⁵If one of your fellow Israelites falls into poverty and is forced to sell some family land, then a close relative should buy it back for him. ²⁶If there is no close relative to buy the land, but the person who sold it gets enough money to buy it back, ²⁷he then has the right to redeem it from the one who bought it. The price of the land will be discounted according to the number of years until the next Year of Jubilee. In this way the original owner can then return to the land. ²⁸But if the original owner cannot afford to buy back the land, it will remain with the new owner until the next Year of Jubilee. In the jubilee year, the land must be returned to the original owners so they can return to their family land.

²⁹"Anyone who sells a house inside a walled town has the right to buy it back for a full year after its sale. During that year, the seller retains the right to buy it back. ³⁰But if it is not bought back within a year, the sale of the house within the walled town cannot be reversed. It will become the permanent property of the buyer. It will not be returned to the original owner in the Year of Jubilee. ³¹But a house in a village—a settlement without fortified walls—will be treated like property in the countryside. Such a house may be bought back at any time, and it must be returned to the original owner in the Year of Jubilee.

³²“The Levites always have the right to buy back a house they have sold within the towns allotted to them. ³³And any property that is sold by the Levites—all houses within the Levitical towns—must be returned in the Year of Jubilee. After all, the houses in the towns reserved for the Levites are the only property they own in all Israel. ³⁴The open pastureland around the Levitical towns may never be sold. It is their permanent possession.

³⁵“If one of your fellow Israelites falls into poverty and cannot support himself, support him as you would a foreigner or a temporary resident and allow him to live with you. ³⁶Do not charge interest or make a profit at his expense. Instead, show your fear of God by letting him live with you as your relative. ³⁷Remember, do not charge interest on money you lend him or make a profit on food you sell him. ³⁸I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God.

³⁹“If one of your fellow Israelites falls into poverty and is forced to sell himself to you, do not treat him as a slave. ⁴⁰Treat him instead as a hired worker or as a temporary resident who lives with you, and he will serve you only until the Year of Jubilee. ⁴¹At that time he and his children will no longer be obligated to you, and they will return to their clans and go back to the land originally allotted to their ancestors. ⁴²The people of Israel are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt, so they must never be sold as slaves. ⁴³Show your fear of God by not treating them harshly.

⁴⁴“However, you may purchase male and female slaves from among the nations around you. ⁴⁵You may also purchase the children of temporary residents who live among you, including those who have been born in your land. You may treat them as your property, ⁴⁶passing them on to your children as a permanent inheritance. You may treat them as slaves, but you must never treat your fellow Israelites this way.”

24:3 Hebrew in the Tent of Meeting, outside the inner curtain of the Testimony; see note on 16:13. 24:5 Hebrew 2/10 of an ephah [4.4 liters]. 24:11 Hebrew the Name; also in 24:16b. 25:9 Hebrew on the tenth day of the seventh month, on the Day of Atonement; see 23:27a and the note there.

MARK 10:13-31

One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could touch and bless them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him.

¹⁴When Jesus saw what was happening, he was angry with his disciples. He said to them,

“Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. ¹⁵I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn’t receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.” ¹⁶Then he took the children in his arms and placed his hands on their heads and blessed them.

¹⁷As Jesus was starting out on his way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to him, knelt down, and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

¹⁸“Why do you call me good?” Jesus asked. “Only God is truly good. ¹⁹But to answer your question, you know the commandments: ‘You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honor your father and mother.’”

²⁰“Teacher,” the man replied, “I’ve obeyed all these commandments since I was young.”

²¹Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. “There is still one thing you haven’t done,” he told him. “Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

²²At this the man’s face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

²³Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!” ²⁴This amazed them. But Jesus said again, “Dear children, it is very hard* to enter the Kingdom of God. ²⁵In fact, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!”

²⁶The disciples were astounded. “Then who in the world can be saved?” they asked.

²⁷Jesus looked at them intently and said, “Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God.”

²⁸Then Peter began to speak up. “We’ve given up everything to follow you,” he said.

²⁹“Yes,” Jesus replied, “and I assure you that everyone who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property, for my sake and for the Good News, ³⁰will receive now in return a hundred times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property—along with persecution. And in the world to come that person will have eternal life. ³¹But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then.*”

10:19 Exod 20:12-16; Deut 5:16-20. 10:24 Some manuscripts read very hard for those who trust in riches. 10:31 Greek But many who are first will be last; and the last, first.

PSALM 44:9-26

- ⁹ But now you have tossed us aside in dishonor.
You no longer lead our armies to battle.
- ¹⁰ You make us retreat from our enemies and allow those who hate us to plunder our land.
- ¹¹ You have butchered us like sheep and scattered us among the nations.
- ¹² You sold your precious people for a pittance, making nothing on the sale.
- ¹³ You let our neighbors mock us.
We are an object of scorn and derision to those around us.
- ¹⁴ You have made us the butt of their jokes; they shake their heads at us in scorn.
- ¹⁵ We can't escape the constant humiliation; shame is written across our faces.
- ¹⁶ All we hear are the taunts of our mockers.
All we see are our vengeful enemies.
- ¹⁷ All this has happened though we have not forgotten you.
We have not violated your covenant.
- ¹⁸ Our hearts have not deserted you.
We have not strayed from your path.

- ¹⁹ Yet you have crushed us in the jackal's desert home.
You have covered us with darkness and death.
- ²⁰ If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread our hands in prayer to foreign gods,
- ²¹ God would surely have known it, for he knows the secrets of every heart.
- ²² But for your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.
- ²³ Wake up, O Lord! Why do you sleep?
Get up! Do not reject us forever.
- ²⁴ Why do you look the other way?
Why do you ignore our suffering and oppression?
- ²⁵ We collapse in the dust, lying face down in the dirt.
- ²⁶ Rise up! Help us!
Ransom us because of your unfailing love.

PROVERBS 10:20-21

- ²⁰ The words of the godly are like sterling silver;
the heart of a fool is worthless.
- ²¹ The words of the godly encourage many,
but fools are destroyed by their lack of common sense.

WHEN LAOTIAN CHRISTIANS GO PUBLIC with their faith, they expect consequences. Their government views Christianity as a tool of the CIA, and the average citizen believes Christians anger the spirits. Persecution isn't just possible in Laos—it's all but certain. • **LORD, THANK YOU** for the faithful witness of my Laotian brothers and sisters. We in your church are in this together—all loving and serving you. Plant a concern in me about the welfare of my Christian family who suffer persecution and imprisonment. And in whatever way you're calling me to get involved, may I answer that call. Amen.

**LEVITICUS 25:47-27:13**

“Suppose a foreigner or temporary resident becomes rich while living among you. If any of your fellow Israelites fall into poverty and are forced to sell themselves to such a foreigner or to a member of his family,⁴⁸ they still retain the right to be bought back, even after they have been purchased. They may be bought back by a brother,⁴⁹ an uncle, or a cousin. In fact, anyone from the extended family may buy them back. They may also redeem themselves if they have prospered.⁵⁰ They will negotiate the price of their freedom with the person who bought them. The price will be based on the number of years

from the time they were sold until the next Year of Jubilee—whatever it would cost to hire a worker for that period of time.⁵¹ If many years still remain until the jubilee, they will repay the proper proportion of what they received when they sold themselves.⁵² If only a few years remain until the Year of Jubilee, they will repay a small amount for their redemption.⁵³ The foreigner must treat them as workers hired on a yearly basis. You must not allow a foreigner to treat any of your fellow Israelites harshly.⁵⁴ If any Israelites have not been bought back by the time the Year of Jubilee arrives, they and their children must be set free at that time.⁵⁵ For the people of Israel

belong to me. They are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

^{26:1}“Do not make idols or set up carved images, or sacred pillars, or sculptured stones in your land so you may worship them. I am the LORD your God. ²You must keep my Sabbath days of rest and show reverence for my sanctuary. I am the LORD.

³“If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, ⁴I will send you the seasonal rains. The land will then yield its crops, and the trees of the field will produce their fruit. ⁵Your threshing season will overlap with the grape harvest, and your grape harvest will overlap with the season of planting grain. You will eat your fill and live securely in your own land.

⁶“I will give you peace in the land, and you will be able to sleep with no cause for fear. I will rid the land of wild animals and keep your enemies out of your land. ⁷In fact, you will chase down your enemies and slaughter them with your swords. ⁸Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand! All your enemies will fall beneath your sword.

⁹“I will look favorably upon you, making you fertile and multiplying your people. And I will fulfill my covenant with you. ¹⁰You will have such a surplus of crops that you will need to clear out the old grain to make room for the new harvest! ¹¹I will live among you, and I will not despise you. ¹²I will walk among you; I will be your God, and you will be my people. ¹³I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt so you would no longer be their slaves. I broke the yoke of slavery from your neck so you can walk with your heads held high.

¹⁴“However, if you do not listen to me or obey all these commands, ¹⁵and if you break my covenant by rejecting my decrees, treating my regulations with contempt, and refusing to obey my commands, ¹⁶I will punish you. I will bring sudden terrors upon you—wasting diseases and burning fevers that will cause your eyes to fail and your life to ebb away. You will plant your crops in vain because your enemies will eat them. ¹⁷I will turn against you, and you will be defeated by your enemies. Those who hate you will rule over you, and you will run even when no one is chasing you!

¹⁸“And if, in spite of all this, you still disobey me, I will punish you seven times over for your sins. ¹⁹I will break your proud spirit by making the skies as unyielding as iron and the earth

as hard as bronze. ²⁰All your work will be for nothing, for your land will yield no crops, and your trees will bear no fruit.

²¹“If even then you remain hostile toward me and refuse to obey me, I will inflict disaster on you seven times over for your sins. ²²I will send wild animals that will rob you of your children and destroy your livestock. Your numbers will dwindle, and your roads will be deserted.

²³“And if you fail to learn the lesson and continue your hostility toward me, ²⁴then I myself will be hostile toward you. I will personally strike you with calamity seven times over for your sins. ²⁵I will send armies against you to carry out the curse of the covenant you have broken. When you run to your towns for safety, I will send a plague to destroy you there, and you will be handed over to your enemies. ²⁶I will destroy your food supply, so that ten women will need only one oven to bake bread for their families. They will ration your food by weight, and though you have food to eat, you will not be satisfied.

²⁷“If in spite of all this you still refuse to listen and still remain hostile toward me, ²⁸then I will give full vent to my hostility. I myself will punish you seven times over for your sins. ²⁹Then you will eat the flesh of your own sons and daughters. ³⁰I will destroy your pagan shrines and knock down your places of worship. I will leave your lifeless corpses piled on top of your lifeless idols,* and I will despise you. ³¹I will make your cities desolate and destroy your places of pagan worship. I will take no pleasure in your offerings that should be a pleasing aroma to me. ³²Yes, I myself will devastate your land, and your enemies who come to occupy it will be appalled at what they see. ³³I will scatter you among the nations and bring out my sword against you. Your land will become desolate, and your cities will lie in ruins. ³⁴Then at last the land will enjoy its neglected Sabbath years as it lies desolate while you are in exile in the land of your enemies. Then the land will finally rest and enjoy the Sabbaths it missed. ³⁵As long as the land lies in ruins, it will enjoy the rest you never allowed it to take every seventh year while you lived in it.

³⁶“And for those of you who survive, I will demoralize you in the land of your enemies. You will live in such fear that the sound of a leaf driven by the wind will send you fleeing. You will run as though fleeing from a sword, and you will fall even when no one pursues you. ³⁷Though no one is chasing you, you will stumble over each other as though

fleeing from a sword. You will have no power to stand up against your enemies. ³⁸You will die among the foreign nations and be devoured in the land of your enemies. ³⁹Those of you who survive will waste away in your enemies' lands because of their sins and the sins of their ancestors.

⁴⁰"But at last my people will confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors for betraying me and being hostile toward me. ⁴¹When I have turned their hostility back on them and brought them to the land of their enemies, then at last their stubborn hearts will be humbled, and they will pay for their sins. ⁴²Then I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. ⁴³For the land must be abandoned to enjoy its years of Sabbath rest as it lies deserted. At last the people will pay for their sins, for they have continually rejected my regulations and despised my decrees.

⁴⁴"But despite all this, I will not utterly reject or despise them while they are in exile in the land of their enemies. I will not cancel my covenant with them by wiping them out, for I am the LORD their God. ⁴⁵For their sakes I will remember my ancient covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of all the nations, that I might be their God. I am the LORD."

⁴⁶These are the decrees, regulations, and instructions that the LORD gave through Moses on Mount Sinai as evidence of the relationship between himself and the Israelites.

^{27:1}The LORD said to Moses, ²"Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. If anyone makes a special vow to dedicate someone to the LORD by paying the value of that person, ³here is the scale of values to be used. A man between the ages of twenty and sixty is valued at fifty shekels* of silver, as measured by the sanctuary shekel. ⁴A woman of that age is valued at thirty shekels* of silver. ⁵A boy between the ages of five and twenty is valued at twenty shekels of silver; a girl of that age is valued at ten shekels* of silver. ⁶A boy between the ages of one month and five years is valued at five shekels of silver; a girl of that age is valued at three shekels* of silver. ⁷A man older than sixty is valued at fifteen shekels of silver; a woman of that age is valued at ten shekels* of silver. ⁸If you desire to make such a vow but cannot afford to pay the required amount, take the person to the priest. He will determine the amount for you to pay based on what you can afford.

⁹"If your vow involves giving an animal that is acceptable as an offering to the LORD, any gift to the LORD will be considered holy. ¹⁰You may not exchange or substitute it for another animal—neither a good animal for a bad one nor a bad animal for a good one. But if you do exchange one animal for another, then both the original animal and its substitute will be considered holy. ¹¹If your vow involves an unclean animal—one that is not acceptable as an offering to the LORD—then you must bring the animal to the priest. ¹²He will assess its value, and his assessment will be final, whether high or low. ¹³If you want to buy back the animal, you must pay the value set by the priest, plus 20 percent."

26:30 The Hebrew term (literally *round things*) probably alludes to dung. 27:3 Or 20 ounces [570 grams]. 27:4 Or 12 ounces [342 grams]. 27:5 Or A boy . . . 8 ounces [228 grams] of silver; a girl . . . 4 ounces [114 grams]. 27:6 Or A boy . . . 2 ounces [57 grams] of silver; a girl . . . 1.2 ounces [34 grams]. 27:7 Or A man . . . 6 ounces [171 grams] of silver; a woman . . . 4 ounces [114 grams].

MARK 10:32-52

They were now on the way up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. The disciples were filled with awe, and the people following behind were overwhelmed with fear. Taking the twelve disciples aside, Jesus once more began to describe everything that was about to happen to him. ³³"Listen," he said, "we're going up to Jerusalem, where the Son of Man* will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence him to die and hand him over to the Romans.* ³⁴They will mock him, spit on him, flog him with a whip, and kill him, but after three days he will rise again."

³⁵Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came over and spoke to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do us a favor."

³⁶"What is your request?" he asked.

³⁷They replied, "When you sit on your glorious throne, we want to sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left."

³⁸But Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink? Are you able to be baptized with the baptism of suffering I must be baptized with?"

³⁹"Oh yes," they replied, "we are able!"

Then Jesus told them, "You will indeed drink from my bitter cup and be baptized with my baptism of suffering. ⁴⁰But I have no right to say who will sit on my right or my left. God has prepared those places for the ones he has chosen."

⁴¹When the ten other disciples heard what

James and John had asked, they were indignant.⁴² So Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them.⁴³ But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant,⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else.⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."

⁴⁶ Then they reached Jericho, and as Jesus and his disciples left town, a large crowd followed him. A blind beggar named Bartimaeus (son of Timaeus) was sitting beside the road.⁴⁷ When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus of Nazareth was nearby, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁸ "Be quiet!" many of the people yelled at him.

But he only shouted louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁹ When Jesus heard him, he stopped and said, "Tell him to come here."

So they called the blind man. "Cheer up," they said. "Come on, he's calling you!"⁵⁰ Bartimaeus threw aside his coat, jumped up, and came to Jesus.

⁵¹ "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked.

"My Rabbi,*" the blind man said, "I want to see!"

⁵² And Jesus said to him, "Go, for your faith has healed you." Instantly the man could see, and he followed Jesus down the road.*

10:33a "Son of Man" is a title Jesus used for himself. 10:33b Greek the *Gentiles*. 10:51 Greek uses the Hebrew term *Rabboni*. 10:52 Or on the way.

PSALM 45:1-17

For the choir director: A love song to be sung to the tune "Lilies." A psalm of the descendants of Korah.*

- 1 Beautiful words stir my heart.
I will recite a lovely poem about the king,
for my tongue is like the pen of
a skillful poet.
- 2 You are the most handsome of all.
Gracious words stream from your lips.
God himself has blessed you forever.
- 3 Put on your sword, O mighty warrior!
You are so glorious, so majestic!
- 4 In your majesty, ride out to victory,
defending truth, humility, and justice.

Go forth to perform awe-inspiring
deeds!

- 5 Your arrows are sharp, piercing your
enemies' hearts.
The nations fall beneath your feet.
- 6 Your throne, O God,* endures forever
and ever.
You rule with a scepter of justice.
- 7 You love justice and hate evil.
Therefore God, your God, has anointed
you,
pouring out the oil of joy on you more
than on anyone else.
- 8 Myrrh, aloes, and cassia perfume your
robes.
In ivory palaces the music of strings
entertains you.
- 9 Kings' daughters are among your noble
women.
At your right side stands the queen,
wearing jewelry of finest gold from
Ophir!
- 10 Listen to me, O royal daughter; take to
heart what I say.
Forget your people and your family far
away.
- 11 For your royal husband delights in your
beauty;
honor him, for he is your lord.
- 12 The princess of Tyre* will shower you
with gifts.
The wealthy will beg your favor.
- 13 The bride, a princess, looks glorious
in her golden gown.
- 14 In her beautiful robes, she is led to the king,
accompanied by her bridesmaids.
- 15 What a joyful and enthusiastic procession
as they enter the king's palace!
- 16 Your sons will become kings like their
father.
You will make them rulers over many
lands.
- 17 I will bring honor to your name in every
generation.
Therefore, the nations will praise you
forever and ever.

45: TITLE Hebrew *maskil*. This may be a literary or musical term.
45:6 Or Your divine throne. 45:12 Hebrew *The daughter of Tyre*.

PROVERBS 10:22

- 22 The blessing of the LORD makes a person
rich,
and he adds no sorrow with it.



APRIL 1

“WE NEED BIBLES!”

THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS’ FOUNDERS—Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand, imprisoned for years in Communist Romania—saw believers’ unity as essential for advancing the gospel. While the Bible proclaims God’s truth, transformed lives and loving fellowship confirm its power. Persecution often erases denominational and theological differences; it clarifies what really matters: one body knowing, loving, and proclaiming Jesus Christ. • **LORD, YOU AND YOU ALONE** unify your people. Thank you for the example of my persecuted Christian family—they gather around you, setting aside denominational and theological distinctives. I want to be aligned with you. Make us all one in Christ. Amen.

DEUTERONOMY 18:1–20:20

“Remember that the Levitical priests—that is, the whole of the tribe of Levi—will receive no allotment of land among the other tribes in Israel. Instead, the priests and Levites will eat from the special gifts given to the LORD, for that is their share. ²They will have no land of their own among the Israelites. The LORD himself is their special possession, just as he promised them.

³These are the parts the priests may claim as their share from the cattle, sheep, and goats that the people bring as offerings: the shoulder, the cheeks, and the stomach. ⁴You must also give to the priests the first share of the grain, the new wine, the olive oil, and the wool at shearing time. ⁵For the LORD your God chose the tribe of Levi out of all your tribes to minister in the LORD’s name forever.

⁶Suppose a Levite chooses to move from his town in Israel, wherever he is living, to the place the LORD chooses for worship. ⁷He may minister there in the name of the LORD his God, just like all his fellow Levites who are serving the LORD there. ⁸He may eat his share of the sacrifices and offerings, even if he also receives support from his family.

⁹When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, be very careful not to imitate the detestable customs of the nations living there. ¹⁰For example, never sacrifice your son or daughter as a burnt offering.* And do

not let your people practice fortune-telling, or use sorcery, or interpret omens, or engage in witchcraft, ¹¹or cast spells, or function as mediums or psychics, or call forth the spirits of the dead. ¹²Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD. It is because the other nations have done these detestable things that the LORD your God will drive them out ahead of you. ¹³But you must be blameless before the LORD your God. ¹⁴The nations you are about to displace consult sorcerers and fortune-tellers, but the LORD your God forbids you to do such things.”

¹⁵Moses continued, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. ¹⁶For this is what you yourselves requested of the LORD your God when you were assembled at Mount Sinai.* You said, ‘Don’t let us hear the voice of the LORD our God anymore or see this blazing fire, for we will die.’

¹⁷“Then the LORD said to me, ‘What they have said is right. ¹⁸I will raise up a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell the people everything I command him. ¹⁹I will personally deal with anyone who will not listen to the messages the prophet proclaims on my behalf. ²⁰But any prophet who falsely claims to speak in my name or who speaks in the name of another god must die.’

²¹“But you may wonder, ‘How will we know

whether or not a prophecy is from the LORD?

²²If the prophet speaks in the LORD's name but his prediction does not happen or come true, you will know that the LORD did not give that message. That prophet has spoken without my authority and need not be feared.

^{19:1}"When the LORD your God destroys the nations whose land he is giving you, you will take over their land and settle in their towns and homes. ²Then you must set apart three cities of refuge in the land the LORD your God is giving you. ³Survey the territory,* and divide the land the LORD your God is giving you into three districts, with one of these cities in each district. Then anyone who has killed someone can flee to one of the cities of refuge for safety.

⁴"If someone kills another person unintentionally, without previous hostility, the slayer may flee to any of these cities to live in safety. ⁵For example, suppose someone goes into the forest with a neighbor to cut wood. And suppose one of them swings an ax to chop down a tree, and the ax head flies off the handle, killing the other person. In such cases, the slayer may flee to one of the cities of refuge to live in safety.

⁶"If the distance to the nearest city of refuge is too far, an enraged avenger might be able to chase down and kill the person who caused the death. Then the slayer would die unfairly, since he had never shown hostility toward the person who died. ⁷That is why I am commanding you to set aside three cities of refuge.

⁸"And if the LORD your God enlarges your territory, as he swore to your ancestors, and gives you all the land he promised them, ⁹you must designate three additional cities of refuge. (He will give you this land if you are careful to obey all the commands I have given you—if you always love the LORD your God and walk in his ways.) ¹⁰That way you will prevent the death of innocent people in the land the LORD your God is giving you as your special possession. You will not be held responsible for the death of innocent people.

¹¹"But suppose someone is hostile toward a neighbor and deliberately ambushes and murders him and then flees to one of the cities of refuge. ¹²In that case, the elders of the murderer's hometown must send agents to the city of refuge to bring him back and hand him over to the dead person's avenger to be put to death. ¹³Do not feel sorry for that murderer! Purge from Israel the guilt of

murdering innocent people; then all will go well with you.

¹⁴"When you arrive in the land the LORD your God is giving you as your special possession, you must never steal anyone's land by moving the boundary markers your ancestors set up to mark their property.

¹⁵"You must not convict anyone of a crime on the testimony of only one witness. The facts of the case must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

¹⁶"If a malicious witness comes forward and accuses someone of a crime, ¹⁷then both the accuser and accused must appear before the LORD by coming to the priests and judges in office at that time. ¹⁸The judges must investigate the case thoroughly. If the accuser has brought false charges against his fellow Israelite, ¹⁹you must impose on the accuser the sentence he intended for the other person. In this way, you will purge such evil from among you. ²⁰Then the rest of the people will hear about it and be afraid to do such an evil thing. ²¹You must show no pity for the guilty! Your rule should be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

^{20:1}"When you go out to fight your enemies and you face horses and chariots and an army greater than your own, do not be afraid. The LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, is with you! ²When you prepare for battle, the priest must come forward to speak to the troops. ³He will say to them, 'Listen to me, all you men of Israel! Do not be afraid as you go out to fight your enemies today! Do not lose heart or panic or tremble before them. ⁴For the LORD your God is going with you! He will fight for you against your enemies, and he will give you victory!'

⁵"Then the officers of the army must address the troops and say, 'Has anyone here just built a new house but not yet dedicated it? If so, you may go home! You might be killed in the battle, and someone else would dedicate your house. ⁶Has anyone here just planted a vineyard but not yet eaten any of its fruit? If so, you may go home! You might die in battle, and someone else would eat the first fruit. ⁷Has anyone here just become engaged to a woman but not yet married her? Well, you may go home and get married! You might die in the battle, and someone else would marry her.'

⁸"Then the officers will also say, 'Is anyone here afraid or worried? If you are, you may go home before you frighten anyone else.' ⁹When the officers have finished speaking

to their troops, they will appoint the unit commanders.

¹⁰“As you approach a town to attack it, you must first offer its people terms for peace. ¹¹If they accept your terms and open the gates to you, then all the people inside will serve you in forced labor. ¹²But if they refuse to make peace and prepare to fight, you must attack the town. ¹³When the LORD your God hands the town over to you, use your swords to kill every man in the town. ¹⁴But you may keep for yourselves all the women, children, livestock, and other plunder. You may enjoy the plunder from your enemies that the LORD your God has given you.

¹⁵“But these instructions apply only to distant towns, not to the towns of the nations in the land you will enter. ¹⁶In those towns that the LORD your God is giving you as a special possession, destroy every living thing. ¹⁷You must completely destroy* the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, just as the LORD your God has commanded you. ¹⁸This will prevent the people of the land from teaching you to imitate their detestable customs in the worship of their gods, which would cause you to sin deeply against the LORD your God.

¹⁹“When you are attacking a town and the war drags on, you must not cut down the trees with your axes. You may eat the fruit, but do not cut down the trees. Are the trees your enemies, that you should attack them? ²⁰You may only cut down trees that you know are not valuable for food. Use them to make the equipment you need to attack the enemy town until it falls.”

18:10 Or never make your son or daughter pass through the fire.
18:16 Hebrew Horeb, another name for Sinai. 19:3 Or Keep the roads in good repair. 20:17 The Hebrew term used here refers to the complete consecration of things or people to the LORD, either by destroying them or by giving them as an offering.

LUKE 9:28-50

About eight days later Jesus took Peter, John, and James up on a mountain to pray. ²⁹And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was transformed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰Suddenly, two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared and began talking with Jesus. ³¹They were glorious to see. And they were speaking about his exodus from this world, which was about to be fulfilled in Jerusalem.

³²Peter and the others had fallen asleep. When they woke up, they saw Jesus' glory and the two men standing with him. ³³As Moses and Elijah were starting to leave, Peter, not even knowing what he was saying, blurted

out, “Master, it’s wonderful for us to be here! Let’s make three shelters as memorials*—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ³⁴But even as he was saying this, a cloud overshadowed them, and terror gripped them as the cloud covered them.

³⁵Then a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, my Chosen One.* Listen to him.” ³⁶When the voice finished, Jesus was there alone. They didn’t tell anyone at that time what they had seen.

³⁷The next day, after they had come down the mountain, a large crowd met Jesus. ³⁸A man in the crowd called out to him, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, my only child. ³⁹An evil spirit keeps seizing him, making him scream. It throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It batters him and hardly ever leaves him alone. ⁴⁰I begged your disciples to cast out the spirit, but they couldn’t do it.”

⁴¹Jesus said, “You faithless and corrupt people! How long must I be with you and put up with you?” Then he said to the man, “Bring your son here.”

⁴²As the boy came forward, the demon knocked him to the ground and threw him into a violent convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the evil* spirit and healed the boy. Then he gave him back to his father. ⁴³Awe gripped the people as they saw this majestic display of God’s power.

While everyone was marveling at everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples, ⁴⁴“Listen to me and remember what I say. The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of his enemies.” ⁴⁵But they didn’t know what he meant. Its significance was hidden from them, so they couldn’t understand it, and they were afraid to ask him about it.

⁴⁶Then his disciples began arguing about which of them was the greatest. ⁴⁷But Jesus knew their thoughts, so he brought a little child to his side. ⁴⁸Then he said to them, “Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf* welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me also welcomes my Father who sent me. Whoever is the least among you is the greatest.”

⁴⁹John said to Jesus, “Master, we saw someone using your name to cast out demons, but we told him to stop because he isn’t in our group.”

⁵⁰But Jesus said, “Don’t stop him! Anyone who is not against you is for you.”

9:33 Greek three tabernacles. 9:35 Some manuscripts read This is my dearly loved Son. 9:42 Greek unclean. 9:48 Greek in my name.

PSALM 73:1-28*A psalm of Asaph.*

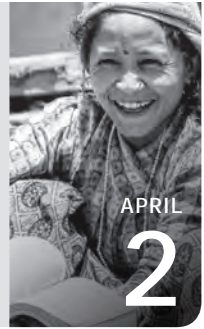
- 1 Truly God is good to Israel,
to those whose hearts are pure.
- 2 But as for me, I almost lost my footing.
My feet were slipping, and I was
almost gone.
- 3 For I envied the proud
when I saw them prosper despite their
wickedness.
- 4 They seem to live such painless lives;
their bodies are so healthy and strong.
- 5 They don't have troubles like other
people;
they're not plagued with problems
like everyone else.
- 6 They wear pride like a jeweled necklace
and clothe themselves with cruelty.
- 7 These fat cats have everything
their hearts could ever wish for!
- 8 They scoff and speak only evil;
in their pride they seek to crush others.
- 9 They boast against the very heavens,
and their words strut throughout
the earth.
- 10 And so the people are dismayed
and confused,
drinking in all their words.
- 11 "What does God know?" they ask.
"Does the Most High even know what's
happening?"
- 12 Look at these wicked people—
enjoying a life of ease while their riches
multiply.
- 13 Did I keep my heart pure for nothing?
Did I keep myself innocent for no
reason?
- 14 I get nothing but trouble all day long;
every morning brings me pain.
- 15 If I had really spoken this way to others,
I would have been a traitor to your
people.

- 16 So I tried to understand why the wicked
prosper.
But what a difficult task it is!
- 17 Then I went into your sanctuary, O God,
and I finally understood the destiny
of the wicked.
- 18 Truly, you put them on a slippery path
and send them sliding over the cliff
to destruction.
- 19 In an instant they are destroyed,
completely swept away by terrors.
- 20 When you arise, O Lord,
you will laugh at their silly ideas
as a person laughs at dreams
in the morning.
- 21 Then I realized that my heart was bitter,
and I was all torn up inside.
- 22 I was so foolish and ignorant—
I must have seemed like a senseless
animal to you.
- 23 Yet I still belong to you;
you hold my right hand.
- 24 You guide me with your counsel,
leading me to a glorious destiny.
- 25 Whom have I in heaven but you?
I desire you more than anything
on earth.
- 26 My health may fail, and my spirit may
grow weak,
but God remains the strength
of my heart;
he is mine forever.
- 27 Those who desert him will perish,
for you destroy those who abandon you.
- 28 But as for me, how good it is to be near God!
I have made the Sovereign LORD my
shelter,
and I will tell everyone about the
wonderful things you do.

PROVERBS 12:10

- 10 The godly care for their animals,
but the wicked are always cruel.

WHEN POONAM QUIETLY LEFT HINDUISM, the Bible she obtained instantly became her most prized possession. The young Indian wife and mother feared her husband would discover her Bible and new faith—and he soon did. He tore her Bible to pieces, beat her, and eventually kicked her out of the house, refusing to let her see her three children. Poonam's faith cost her everything. • **LORD, AS YOU WARNED**, your disciples today experience rejection. Sustain Poonam and heal her heart. Help her stand strong for you as she and so many of my persecuted family choose to follow you no matter the cost. Amen.



DEUTERONOMY 21:1–22:30

“When you are in the land the LORD your God is giving you, someone may be found murdered in a field, and you don't know who committed the murder. ²In such a case, your elders and judges must measure the distance from the site of the crime to the nearby towns. ³When the nearest town has been determined, that town's elders must select from the herd a heifer that has never been trained or yoked to a plow. ⁴They must lead it down to a valley that has not been plowed or planted and that has a stream running through it. There in the valley they must break the heifer's neck. ⁵Then the Levitical priests must step forward, for the LORD your God has chosen them to minister before him and to pronounce blessings in the LORD's name. They are to decide all legal and criminal cases.

⁶The elders of the town must wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken. ⁷Then they must say, 'Our hands did not shed this person's blood, nor did we see it happen. ⁸O LORD, forgive your people Israel whom you have redeemed. Do not charge your people with the guilt of murdering an innocent person.' Then they will be absolved of the guilt of this person's blood. ⁹By following these instructions, you will do what is right in the LORD's sight and will cleanse the guilt of murder from your community.

¹⁰“Suppose you go out to war against your enemies and the LORD your God hands them over to you, and you take some of them as captives. ¹¹And suppose you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and you are attracted to her and want to marry her. ¹²If this happens, you may take her to your home, where she must shave her head, cut her nails, ¹³and change the clothes she was wearing when she was captured. She will stay in your home, but let her mourn for her father and mother for a full month. Then you may marry her, and you will be her husband and she will be your wife.

¹⁴But if you marry her and she does not please you, you must let her go free. You may not sell her or treat her as a slave, for you have humiliated her.

¹⁵“Suppose a man has two wives, but he loves one and not the other, and both have given him sons. And suppose the firstborn son is the son of the wife he does not love. ¹⁶When the man divides his inheritance, he may not give the larger inheritance to his younger son, the son of the wife he loves, as if he were the firstborn son. ¹⁷He must recognize the rights of his oldest son, the son of the wife he does not love, by giving him a double portion. He is the first son of his father's virility, and the rights of the firstborn belong to him.

¹⁸“Suppose a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or mother, even though they discipline him. ¹⁹In such a case, the father and mother must take the son to the elders as they hold court at the town gate. ²⁰The parents must say to the elders, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious and refuses to obey. He is a glutton and a drunkard.' ²¹Then all the men of his town must stone him to death. In this way, you will purge this evil from among you, and all Israel will hear about it and be afraid.

²²“If someone has committed a crime worthy of death and is executed and hung on a tree,* ²³the body must not remain hanging from the tree overnight. You must bury the body that same day, for anyone who is hung* is cursed in the sight of God. In this way, you will prevent the defilement of the land the LORD your God is giving you as your special possession.

^{22:1}“If you see your neighbor's ox or sheep or goat wandering away, don't ignore your responsibility.* Take it back to its owner. ²If its owner does not live nearby or you don't know who the owner is, take it to your place and keep it until the owner comes looking for it. Then you must return it. ³Do the same if you

find your neighbor's donkey, clothing, or anything else your neighbor loses. Don't ignore your responsibility.

⁴"If you see that your neighbor's donkey or ox has collapsed on the road, do not look the other way. Go and help your neighbor get it back on its feet!

⁵"A woman must not put on men's clothing, and a man must not wear women's clothing. Anyone who does this is detestable in the sight of the LORD your God.

⁶"If you happen to find a bird's nest in a tree or on the ground, and there are young ones or eggs in it with the mother sitting in the nest, do not take the mother with the young. ⁷You may take the young, but let the mother go, so that you may prosper and enjoy a long life.

⁸"When you build a new house, you must build a railing around the edge of its flat roof. That way you will not be considered guilty of murder if someone falls from the roof.

⁹"You must not plant any other crop between the rows of your vineyard. If you do, you are forbidden to use either the grapes from the vineyard or the other crop.

¹⁰"You must not plow with an ox and a donkey harnessed together.

¹¹"You must not wear clothing made of wool and linen woven together.

¹²"You must put four tassels on the hem of the cloak with which you cover yourself—on the front, back, and sides.

¹³"Suppose a man marries a woman, but after sleeping with her, he turns against her ¹⁴and publicly accuses her of shameful conduct, saying, 'When I married this woman, I discovered she was not a virgin.' ¹⁵Then the woman's father and mother must bring the proof of her virginity to the elders as they hold court at the town gate. ¹⁶Her father must say to them, 'I gave my daughter to this man to be his wife, and now he has turned against her. ¹⁷He has accused her of shameful conduct, saying, "I discovered that your daughter was not a virgin." But here is the proof of my daughter's virginity.' Then they must spread her bed sheet before the elders. ¹⁸The elders must then take the man and punish him. ¹⁹They must also fine him 100 pieces of silver,* which he must pay to the woman's father because he publicly accused a virgin of Israel of shameful conduct. The woman will then remain the man's wife, and he may never divorce her.

²⁰"But suppose the man's accusations are true, and he can show that she was not a virgin. ²¹The woman must be taken to the door of her father's home, and there the men of the town must stone her to death, for she has

committed a disgraceful crime in Israel by being promiscuous while living in her parents' home. In this way, you will purge this evil from among you.

²²"If a man is discovered committing adultery, both he and the woman must die. In this way, you will purge Israel of such evil.

²³"Suppose a man meets a young woman, a virgin who is engaged to be married, and he has sexual intercourse with her. If this happens within a town, ²⁴you must take both of them to the gates of that town and stone them to death. The woman is guilty because she did not scream for help. The man must die because he violated another man's wife. In this way, you will purge this evil from among you.

²⁵"But if the man meets the engaged woman out in the country, and he rapes her, then only the man must die. ²⁶Do nothing to the young woman; she has committed no crime worthy of death. She is as innocent as a murder victim. ²⁷Since the man raped her out in the country, it must be assumed that she screamed, but there was no one to rescue her.

²⁸"Suppose a man has intercourse with a young woman who is a virgin but is not engaged to be married. If they are discovered, ²⁹he must pay her father fifty pieces of silver.* Then he must marry the young woman because he violated her, and he may never divorce her as long as he lives.

³⁰*"A man must not marry his father's former wife, for this would violate his father."

21:22 Or *impaled on a pole*; similarly in 21:23. 21:23 Greek version reads *for everyone who is hung on a tree*. Compare Gal 3:13. 22:1 Hebrew *don't hide yourself*; similarly in 22:3. 22:19 Hebrew *100 [shekels] of silver*, about 2.5 pounds or 1.1 kilograms in weight. 22:29 Hebrew *50 [shekels] of silver*, about 1.25 pounds or 570 grams in weight. 22:30 Verse 22:30 is numbered 23:1 in Hebrew text.

LUKE 9:51–10:12

As the time drew near for him to ascend to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. ⁵²He sent messengers ahead to a Samaritan village to prepare for his arrival. ⁵³But the people of the village did not welcome Jesus because he was on his way to Jerusalem. ⁵⁴When James and John saw this, they said to Jesus, "Lord, should we call down fire from heaven to burn them up*?" ⁵⁵But Jesus turned and rebuked them.* ⁵⁶So they went on to another village.

⁵⁷As they were walking along, someone said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go."

⁵⁸But Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head."

⁵⁹He said to another person, "Come, follow me."

The man agreed, but he said, "Lord, first let me return home and bury my father."

⁶⁰But Jesus told him, "Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead!* Your duty is to go and preach about the Kingdom of God."

⁶¹Another said, "Yes, Lord, I will follow you, but first let me say good-bye to my family."

⁶²But Jesus told him, "Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God."

^{10:1}The Lord now chose seventy-two* other disciples and sent them ahead in pairs to all the towns and places he planned to visit. ²These were his instructions to them: "The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields. ³Now go, and remember that I am sending you out as lambs among wolves. ⁴Don't take any money with you, nor a traveler's bag, nor an extra pair of sandals. And don't stop to greet anyone on the road.

⁵"Whenever you enter someone's home, first say, 'May God's peace be on this house.' ⁶If those who live there are peaceful, the blessing will stand; if they are not, the blessing will return to you. ⁷Don't move around from home to home. Stay in one place, eating and drinking what they provide. Don't hesitate to accept hospitality, because those who work deserve their pay.

⁸"If you enter a town and it welcomes you, eat whatever is set before you. ⁹Heal the sick, and tell them, 'The Kingdom of God is near you now.' ¹⁰But if a town refuses to welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹'We wipe even the dust of your town from our feet to show that we have abandoned you to your fate. And know this—the Kingdom of God is near!' ¹²I assure you, even wicked Sodom will be better off than such a town on judgment day."

9:54 Some manuscripts add as *Elijah did*. 9:55 Some manuscripts add an expanded conclusion to verse 55 and an additional sentence in verse 56: *And he said, "You don't realize what your hearts are like. ⁵⁶For the Son of Man has not come to destroy people's lives, but to save them."* 9:60 Greek *Let the dead bury their own dead*. 10:1 Some manuscripts read *seventy*; also in 10:17.

PSALM 74:1-23

A psalm of Asaph.*

¹ O God, why have you rejected us so long?

Why is your anger so intense against the sheep of your own pasture?

² Remember that we are the people you chose long ago,

the tribe you redeemed as your own special possession!

And remember Jerusalem,* your home here on earth.

³ Walk through the awful ruins of the city; see how the enemy has destroyed your sanctuary.

⁴ There your enemies shouted their victorious battle cries; there they set up their battle standards.

⁵ They swung their axes like woodcutters in a forest.

⁶ With axes and picks, they smashed the carved paneling.

⁷ They burned your sanctuary to the ground.

They defiled the place that bears your name.

⁸ Then they thought, "Let's destroy everything!"

So they burned down all the places where God was worshiped.

⁹ We no longer see your miraculous signs. All the prophets are gone, and no one can tell us when it will end.

¹⁰ How long, O God, will you allow our enemies to insult you?

Will you let them dishonor your name forever?

¹¹ Why do you hold back your strong right hand?

Unleash your powerful fist and destroy them.

¹² You, O God, are my king from ages past, bringing salvation to the earth.

¹³ You split the sea by your strength and smashed the heads of the sea monsters.

¹⁴ You crushed the heads of Leviathan* and let the desert animals eat him.

¹⁵ You caused the springs and streams to gush forth, and you dried up rivers that never run dry.

¹⁶ Both day and night belong to you; you made the starlight* and the sun.

¹⁷ You set the boundaries of the earth, and you made both summer and winter.

¹⁸ See how these enemies insult you, LORD. A foolish nation has dishonored your name.

¹⁹ Don't let these wild beasts destroy your turtledoves.

Don't forget your suffering people forever.

- ²⁰ Remember your covenant promises,
for the land is full of darkness and
violence!
- ²¹ Don't let the downtrodden be humiliated
again.
Instead, let the poor and needy praise
your name.
- ²² Arise, O God, and defend your cause.
Remember how these fools insult you
all day long.

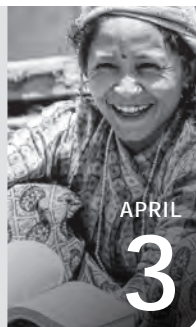
- ²³ Don't overlook what your enemies
have said
or their growing uproar.

74:TITLE Hebrew *maskil*. This may be a literary or musical term.
74:2 Hebrew *Mount Zion*. 74:14 The identification of Leviathan
is disputed, ranging from an earthly creature to a mythical sea
monster in ancient literature. 74:16 Or *moon*; Hebrew reads *light*.

PROVERBS 12:11

- ¹¹ A hard worker has plenty of food,
but a person who chases fantasies has
no sense.

IS BEING A GOOD NEIGHBOR a matter of what you say—or what you do? Most travelers passing by the wounded Jewish man in Jesus' parable would have said they were dutiful neighbors; it was part of their faith. But only one man *did* something about his beliefs, and that made all the difference for the battered victim. • LORD, MY PERSECUTED BROTHERS AND SISTERS are risking everything to give their neighbors what they need most: you. But that comes with a cost. Bless their efforts. Amen.



DEUTERONOMY 23:1–25:19

^{1*}"If a man's testicles are crushed or his penis is cut off, he may not be admitted to the assembly of the LORD.

²"If a person is illegitimate by birth, neither he nor his descendants for ten generations may be admitted to the assembly of the LORD.

³"No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants for ten generations may be admitted to the assembly of the LORD. ⁴These nations did not welcome you with food and water when you came out of Egypt. Instead, they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in distant Aram-naharaim to curse you. ⁵But the LORD your God refused to listen to Balaam. He turned the intended curse into a blessing because the LORD your God loves you. ⁶As long as you live, you must never promote the welfare and prosperity of the Ammonites or Moabites.

⁷"Do not detest the Edomites or the Egyptians, because the Edomites are your relatives and you lived as foreigners among the Egyptians. ⁸The third generation of Edomites and Egyptians may enter the assembly of the LORD.

⁹"When you go to war against your enemies, be sure to stay away from anything that is impure.

¹⁰"Any man who becomes ceremonially defiled because of a nocturnal emission must leave the camp and stay away all day. ¹¹Toward evening he must bathe himself, and at sunset he may return to the camp.

¹²"You must have a designated area outside the camp where you can go to relieve yourself.

¹³Each of you must have a spade as part of your equipment. Whenever you relieve yourself, dig a hole with the spade and cover the excrement. ¹⁴The camp must be holy, for the LORD your God moves around in your camp to protect you and to defeat your enemies. He must not see any shameful thing among you, or he will turn away from you.

¹⁵"If slaves should escape from their masters and take refuge with you, you must not hand them over to their masters. ¹⁶Let them live among you in any town they choose, and do not oppress them.

¹⁷"No Israelite, whether man or woman, may become a temple prostitute. ¹⁸When you are bringing an offering to fulfill a vow, you must not bring to the house of the LORD your God any offering from the earnings of a prostitute, whether a man* or a woman, for both are detestable to the LORD your God.

¹⁹"Do not charge interest on the loans you make to a fellow Israelite, whether you loan money, or food, or anything else. ²⁰You may charge interest to foreigners, but you may not charge interest to Israelites, so that the LORD your God may bless you in everything you do in the land you are about to enter and occupy.

²¹"When you make a vow to the LORD your God, be prompt in fulfilling whatever you promised him. For the LORD your God



ABOUT THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS

The Voice of the Martyrs (VOM) is a nonprofit, interdenominational Christian missions organization dedicated to serving our persecuted family worldwide through practical and spiritual assistance and leading other members of the body of Christ into fellowship with them. VOM was founded in 1967 by Pastor Richard Wurmbbrand and his wife, Sabina. Richard was imprisoned for 14 years in Communist Romania for his faith in Christ, and Sabina was imprisoned for three years. After being ransomed out of Romania in 1965, Richard and Sabina established a global network of missions dedicated to assisting persecuted Christians.

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